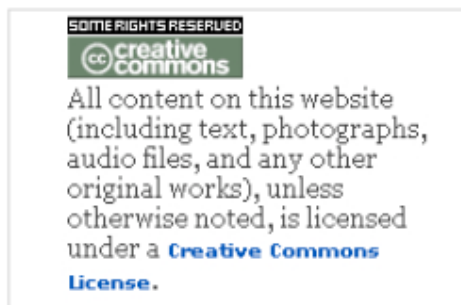


Systemic Complexity for human development in the 21st century
Systemic Complexity : new prospects to complex system theory
7th Congress of the UES **Systems Science European Union** Lisbon, Dec. 17-19, 2008



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Space of liberty at the meeting point of systemics

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Abstract

Any human activity involves a certain amount of intellectual work, whether at the level of a craftsman who integrates some angles output or at the level of a research worker more interested in the twists and turns of the thought. Our Intellectual patrimony keeps growing steadily in a big variety of fields, one could easily feel excluded from when not a specialist in these topics.

On the other hand, people are often afraid of on-site experience and of complexity (or sophistication) It prevents them from succeeding when implementing and using work methods that have been tested satisfactorily by many; let's for instance quote some of them: "six sigma", "consensus meeting", "experience return", "action plan", etc. They avoid a possible underlying uncertainty but they definitely miss a convincing result.

The thesis of thinkers often shows some non-structured spaces and a combination of emergence and immergence. We refer for instance to the "design" by Philippe Starck, "mental management" by Antoine de la Garanderie, "non-model" by Elie Bernard-Weill, "intuition" by different authors. These spaces compensate for and even legitimate their thesis. Somehow, "thinking" cannot exist without an equal creative and generating "non thinking".

There are however some common points between researchers and practitioners: this space of liberty, which acts like the "breathing in" of the thought. This new breath enables the emergence of a new knowledge, based on both method and intuition, created by the "friction" between the project and the field, and which generates a thought in a thoughtless world, (or a world that tends not to think)

There are several examples among practitioners and thinkers showing the ways to develop this new knowledge. We could hence be at a kind of crossroad of systemics, the source of thought and ideas which, with the help of intuition, give life to projects and action. Perhaps it is a way to talk about life, to establish a confidence climate leading to a positive perception and understanding of the future?

Keywords: Work situation, thought, human dynamic, freedom zone, new knowledge, disruption.

1 - The job of consultant

This document aims to show how possible it is to reconcile theory and actual practices in terms of systemic. In fact, my job of Organisation and Management consultant consists of playing a part with the concerned persons for their "change of organisation project" success. This definition of consulting shows by itself how vital it is to start from the "reading" of the actual situations.

Human activity is always partly made of intellectual work. Craftsmen will take into account different aspects of the production while researchers will obviously work within all intricacies of thought. As a consequence, intellectual assets is being enriched everyday in diversified subjects: if one is unable to update his own knowledge on a regular basis, he may feel excluded or not concerned.

Organisations today are looking for new "scopes" because of the increasing pressure coming from globalisation. The management is upgrading the objectives, searching for new grounds to break and engineering new clever financial arrangements in order to increase results and excellence. To achieve this goal, they will have access to efficient tools thanks to new technologies and rely on seducing management models based on internal methods or external consulting advices.

2 - Limits

My experience has put me through methods or approaches that failed in reaching the expected results. In the following examples, we'll see that projects often fail, partly or fully. Many approaches are based on action plans as logical step forward to audit recommendations. These approaches (or methods) are usually attractive because they seem easy to control. Besides, it is tempting to implement action plans by putting in place a whole battery of tools: procedures, reports, dashboards, specially designed software...

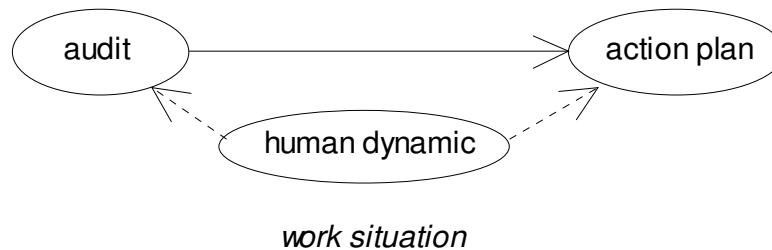


Figure 1: Human dynamic role.

Let's go through examples of "Re-engineering", "Six Sigma" or "Total Quality Management". Six Sigma method consists of increasing quality management by statistical control of processes. Re-engineering is based on reviewing the existing processes following a rigorous analysis. Total Quality Management relies on leading the management to develop quality dimension in every workings of the organisation.

All these methods are unfortunately not using the human link in the "feedback loop", that eventually will lead to technical or social dysfunctions (figure 1). The promoters of these methods are arguing on great ideas like confidence, responsibility, motivation or good working within a team. Consequently, organisation will often ask for additional experts in these fields, but still, the results are partial or disappointing.

Methods such as "experience feedback" or "consensus meeting" have more subtle limits. "Experience feedback" is often used in organisations: it is natural to seek for the results of an action. Some methods have been developed, re-enforced by IT tools, but in practice, many limits appeared. First, a strong objective will influence and reduce the scope of observations which will become too "specialised". Second difficulty is the discrepancy between the "operation" culture prevailing in the collection of experience versus the "quality" culture which intends to improve the whole process, including upstream and downstream operations.

"Consensus meetings" are used to solve staff' participation issue. The frequently faced difficulty is how to make up and lead these meetings, especially when you want "to have everyone around the table". It seems then that the only way is to multiply meetings! The most structured organisations spend a lot of energy in putting in place meetings, and even get equipped with sophisticated tools to prepare and debrief the numerous meetings.

3 - Freedom zone

Could we say that there is a natural trend to push one type of logic in order to develop capacity of action? The problem comes from the distrust we have at practical experience and complexity, which prevent from any success in implementing methods however well promoted. The main requirement is to fight against complexity that everyone complains about, and to implement simple solutions thanks to strong technical improvements, appropriate procedures or software. But a threat exists coming from the usual drifts like "tool obsession", "fascination" or "bureaucratization". "Tool obsession" happens when the objective becomes less important than the tool. "Fascination" will paralyse action by leaving dreamt solutions eternally remaining to input. "Bureaucratization" intends to make solutions

more complex because of procedures. Finally, consultants are led in methods which exclude the human factor and bring them to difficulties they don't know to overcome. Their "(fake) freedom zone" stands only in exploring the technical or organisational dimensions, which agree to the financial injunctions.

4 - Researchers or thinkers' job

In parallel, researchers and thinkers are busy seeking and thinking of new concepts and theories. They sometimes consider that systemic should be replaced by the "complex thought". Their work is inspired by several books and reports, data collections and compiled observations. While they go forward in their search, they leave the scientific approach behind to enter a "freedom zone". Examples below illustrate this remark.

A designer like Philippe Starck tries to develop the conception of new products out of the common approaches. He considers that the object is not only a mean to do something (usage program) but also an aim in itself (a life program). He says: "an hotel is primarily the quality of the pillow". His work consists of amplifying the perception of the product value to increase its economical value by acting on the exchange value.

Antoine de la Garanderie, a teacher in Philosophy and general culture, has worked on pedagogy in secondary schools. His remarks and searches made him look at the "mental management". Starting from the need to use the brain capacity, he studied what we had to mentally do to succeed, and he promoted a pedagogy of mental development project. About memory and understanding, he points out how important "evocation" and confrontation of evocated ideas are, in the emergence of sense intuition. Some people will need to see differences to understand, but other, on the contrary, will need similarities.

Pierre-Gilles de Gennes, Nobel price in Chemistry, has lead numerous researches on soft matters, superconductors, liquid crystals, the mystery of sticking glue, etc.. He made a religion to him and his team to always question their conclusions. He declared: "The only thing I think I've been a bit useful, is to have made up groups and generated a dialogue with them". According to him, "whichever change in the direction should lead to a strong update in the new subject, the main objective being to bring every time an added value to human knowledge".

Bertrand Schwartz, former director of "Ecole des Mines" of Nancy, France, studied low qualifications. He stated that "the only way to analyse a problem is to hear it from the people who live it". He found solutions by analysing the problems from a different angle, showing that in certain matter the solution had been solved only by adequate training. Through his studies, he discovered numerous ideas in terms of pedagogy to non-qualified persons. "Having young people doing things beyond their qualifications is the only way to make them do and learn". In particular, he enlightened the "short-circuit" phenomenon, where an operator is able to drive a complex machine without any training. He validated that "learning to manage the un-expected is a necessary capacity for autonomy".

Elie Bernard-Weil, a teacher at the Pitié Salpêtrière Hospital College, is the promoter of the "ago-antagonistic" systems and the paradoxical strategies. After he realised that "the source of rationality is out of rationality", he went forward on the idea of a "non-model", where the source of the model could be attributed.

Michele Guillaume-Hofnung develops the notion of mediation, not to be mixed up with "conciliation". Mediation is fundamental in re-initialising the communication. It aims to extract the situation from a usual binary scheme "victim-aggressor".

The notions of intuition, responsibility and confidence generate spaces out of the frame where things can improve and researcher's thought may develop themselves. When it's difficult to clearly explain a method to reach a result, we talk about intuition. The notion of responsibility was studied by Alain Etchegoyen: "the responsibility consists of foreseeing, but to foresee you must look hard first". At last, when a manager takes the responsibility of a declining company, we talk about confidence: talking to the staff he would say: "I don't know what to do, but you will help me" ...

5 - Freedom zone

Through these examples, we see that researchers/teachers develop their thinking capacities and navigate within a multitude of non structured spaces. These spaces are the counterpart and even the justification of their workings. Should we say that thought exists only because there is a generative and creative “non-thought”?

But between the consultant, who gives up entering the human dimension because he fears he cannot handle it, and the researcher, who creates its own zone of thinking, there is a territory. This no man’s land is detrimental because consultants and researchers are avoiding each other, refusing to work together. In this territory, one loses a huge intellectual matter.

6 - Method for a systemic conciliation

At this stage, we can feel there is an interest for an approach that would intend to have both groups of people (craftsmen / thinkers and researchers). This global method works backwards, starting from practical experience back to process, and would aim to involve all participants. The work situation is considered as representative of “the practical experience” and is analysed through 5 criteria. The systemic analysis and synthesis will follow this initial work situation. It is also stated that there is a real systemic aspect when you take into account several dimensions, with interaction within and between the chosen criteria.

This method might enrich existing ones and take advantage of freedom zones. It’s been developed from a work on practical experience and first class teachers/researchers’ thoughts and it allows deeper thoughts and better “art of thinking”, which we are missing most. If we ask questions such as: “what is it about? What is this for? Who is this for? What am I going to do tomorrow?”, we should always have enough ideas to answer. Looking for answer to simple question will allow to re-position in front of the specialist and go to further questions.

A sort of new knowledge (figure 2) is emerging from the “friction” of experience to the project. This new knowledge gives a starting point to innovation (ideas coming from experience), training (dysfunction is formative), mediation (everyone knows where they stand), solution finding (with its implementation process); all of these directions will meet at one crossing point and generate added value. Instead of considering difficulties in the organisation as “resistance to change” or saying definitive sentences like “zero default does not exist” or “we have no choice”, it would be better to consider these difficulties as many opportunities to learn from them. Finally, the job I am representing is paradoxically thinking the future in positive way while taking into account problems and complexity of practical experience.

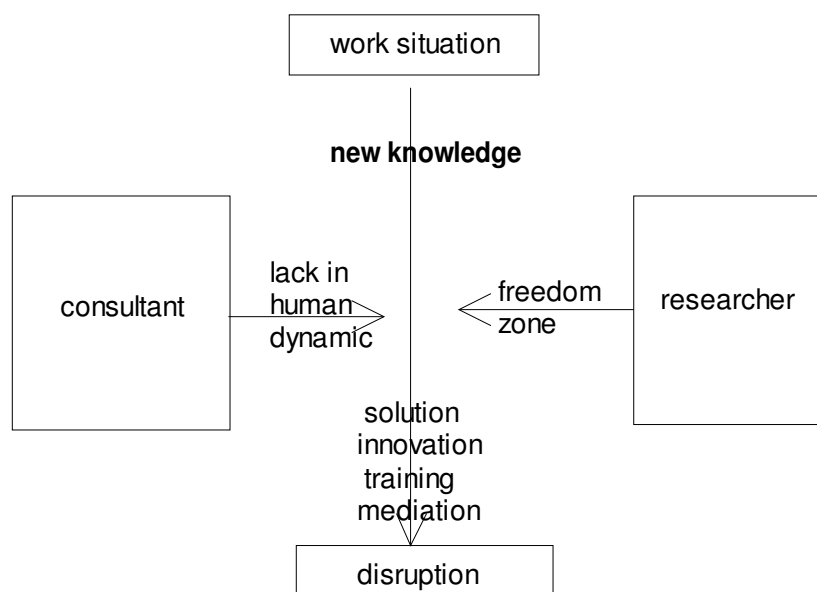


Figure 2 : Meeting point of systemics.

7 - Temporary conclusion and perspectives

This paper is aiming to materialize a practical systemic method based on experience and where the power of human dynamic is combined with a subtle systemic method. This integration has been one of the goal in the approach in the following two examples: a gerontology health network and the case of an internal “change consultant position”.

The aged people may find assistance in “health network”. The nurses and auxiliary staff are working in the practical field and even in a “seamless” field. The objective of the approach was to avoid problems due to the multitude of staff. On their side, teachers and researchers were studying the deep causes and consequences of ageing. By building an health network, the assistance to people was optimized (communication between staff and nurses, better management of cases) and also allowed new areas of knowledge and searches to emerge (like “recollection” or “becoming”) with actual consequence in every day’s care and also on theory and ideas.

The second example comes from a company who wanted to move a “quality method staff” to an “internal change consultant position”, to be an actor of a modernisation process. Normally, a job description should have been done in order to evaluate candidates. But, in this case, the most important thing was to evaluate the dynamic of the candidate put into another position: so he was interviewed on his extra work life!

The consequences of this method are important: it creates a more active state of mind where any thought or project may grow. Analysing work situations create a discovery and immersion state that will erase previous conditioning and amplify intelligence. The idea is that the proposed method will favour precious capacities. Systemic approach at the starting point of practical experience is really a considerable advantage. If it is not integrated at this stage, the problem is analysed the wrong way and solutions may be uncertain or inaccessible.

Things remain to be improved in the way to provoke a “disruption” where immersion would lead to the will of stopping with old conventional practices. Another way to improve is also to work on notions such as “the magic of the team”, solidarity, “bandwidth”. One could also explore transversally the gaps from the consultants and symmetrically the freedom zones of researchers. These studies should be done in the spirit of systemic reconciliation work. They are giving added value to the work of a consultant, coming with a scientific or engineer culture and completing communication and marketing cultures in the organisation. This approach would not only be innovating services but also a real improvement.

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