

REFLECTIONS ON COMPLEXITY AND HUMAN LIFE

Corporation as a network of communities

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A corporation can be viewed as a network of communities with interlocking membership and fuzzy boundaries or edges. A community is clearly identifiable at its core or centre but, as members become more peripheral, it becomes less clear if they are included or not.

The communities of a corporation are communities of practice, of interest, of proximity, etc. These communities tend to be forces of preservation and persistence of what is.

Corporate change occurs when a community of intent emerges which is focused on and forms around an intention to change.

No single individual and no number of individuals intent on a change have sufficient energy and information to move a corporation. While a change effort may begin from a single individual, more usually it will emerge from a dialogue (of speaking and action) between a number who see greater possibility and begin to focus attention on that.

Until a community of intent emerges from such dialogue, no significant and sustained change effort will occur. A community of intent requires that its members' attention and intention be primarily on of change (of becoming).

It is the interlocking, overlapping, fuzzy-edged nature of communities which allows continual expansion throughout a corporation. Individuals need not give up membership in other communities - except communities of complaint - to participate and become members of a community of intent. In fact, to be a successful new community, members need to retain active, visible membership in their old communities.

When the community of intent predominates in the other existing communities, then corporate transformation is merely a matter of time - and probably not much time compared to the expectations of the society in which it is occurring.

(A Koch chemical plant increased throughput by 50% in two years by change effort alone. Customers and suppliers asked why they hadn't announced such a major planned expansion - as though it had been a capital investment programme.)

Emergence and historical connection

The universe that we observe has emerged. That is, while it is integrated, interactive, ecological - organised - it is the result of a continuous process of core energy-information configurations

plus accidents of interplay in the spaces of the core. The "accidents" which remain and alter the core by increasing its complexity become part of the new level of organization.

What persists is structurally coupled in this way to its environment. What exists as the current "core" is organised or integrated. Structurally coupled is a way of talking about the relationship between the organization of an entity and how it fits with the larger organization of its environment. For an entity to survive, this coupling must exist. That is, it must become part of a larger - and likely looser - organization.

We can begin to see the universe as connected by a history. A unique and important feature of that history is that it developed a structural coupling that may have evolved to something else over time but which existed from the beginning of its existence. We are connected by current structural coupling and by the historical basis for that coupling.

Alexander Pope and William Blake wrote exquisite poetry about this nature. Religions of the world and what we consider primitive belief systems provide rich ways of representing this phenomenon. The science of the day is discovering ways of speaking of the same phenomenon.

For an intelligence to exist, intelligence must already be there or co-emerge in the whole at the same time that it emerges in an individual or species. An intelligence with nothing intelligible doesn't make sense. The universe is intelligent - or organised in ways that an intelligence can comprehend - or intelligence would not emerge.

Intelligence as an individual phenomenon is also a matter of organization. It is not until the cells, neurons, etc. connect in ways which are beyond threshold points of linear control and simple processing that what we call intelligence appears. The organization of intelligence in a particular instance and the organization of the universe are structurally coupled.

[Designing for Emergence: Reflections](#)

The future is not "out there waiting to happen"

Most people live as though there is a future "out there" waiting to happen. But there is no future "out there". We are not living into a future, we are living into a space of possibility which is present now.

All possibility is present now - as possibility.

This does not imply "anything is possible". It is not. However, what is possible is far beyond our ability to imagine let alone explore.

The problem we have is not the actual limits of possibility. The problem is that we are unaware of the existence and nature of possibility. We live largely as though things must happen in the future pretty much as they are now happening and that we have little to say about it.

But that is our mistake. We have everything to say about it because the future exists in our speaking. To the extent that we speak unaware that the past is "speaking us", we are unable to create the future and destined to live into the past.

The deepest sleep of all is not to know that the future is being created by our current practices of speaking and action. We repeat what came from our past without awareness. We are unaware that we are creating our future in that automatic behaviour.

To be awake is to realise that, like compounding interest, each moment builds increasing possibility and each word and each action is the future as it exists in the present moment. It is the relationships, connection, "fit" with what is that provides the vast space of possibility.

Anything is not possible because only that which can create a fit to the whole can persist. Each increase in the whole increases the richness, complexity and intelligence of the universe and increases the space of possibility. The possibilities of contribution are so great that the future is far beyond our imagination.

Each possibility realised opens more space. Each repetition of the past based in unawareness decreases the space of possibility.

The choice is ours at every moment.

Identity is grounded in community

One's identity is grounded in community. A sense of fit, of competence, of belonging comes from being "of community". A developed adult will be part of numerous communities and have the ability to join new communities with little difficulty.

The measure of this competence - and possibly the prime source of self-esteem - is one's ability to join new communities and retain effective participation in previous communities. The challenge is to join a community without losing connection with earlier communities of which one was a part.

The sense of belonging is an experience which is sought by the individual. Some are searching for identity in this belonging. Others are developing, expanding, generating their identity by increasing the variety and quality of their participation in communities. These latter have gone beyond belonging issues. (The "price" of expanding participation is contribution.)

Corporations generally provide little in the way of satisfaction for what is sought in community.

Communities provide practices which are more or less congruent and conducive to human expression within the pursuit of enjoyment of their "attractors of interest". (Again: distinguish from tribes, sects, cults, etc.) Communities allow for expression and varying degrees of active membership in other communities. Communities are in and of life - the whole of life. Like an individual can be visualised as a point where conversational threads "cluster" within a vast network of conversations, a community can be visualised as a cluster of interactions between a vast network of other communities with individual (as well as energy-information) the dynamic connection between them.

While a corporation can be seen this way as well, most will also exhibit significant barriers to such natural flows. This alone will inhibit the experience of belonging and of community.

Corporations deny the full human life of those who constitute their "body/mind" and thus limit their potential for community. As David Whyte has so aptly said, "There is no corporation large enough for a single human soul."

Corporations, besides their inhibitory practices and structures, fail to provide practices and structures of community. These are not merely a list but an integrated, interacting set of language, communication, justice, respect, common interest, relationship, and similar [Designing for Emergence: Reflections](#)

Individual emerges from relationship

We see the world from the perspective of our own identities which occur for us as individual, unique and separate and see that separation everywhere. We see ourselves as individual first and part of a group, community or organization second. It's the view of an individual. What if it is the other way around? What if we are deeply related and then become individuals distinguished from others? What is if the differences, boundaries and separations are created after and we start from a being of deep relationship? Our corporations reflect the fundamental error in thinking which sees individuals, specialities and departments as separate. From that perspective, we might see the possibilities of sharing, of co-operating, of synergy but the possibility of the value of these has to be proved. We look from at the surface condition from this individuated and separate perspective and do not see the profound potential of our deep relationship. What

if we see that we are part of a whole first and separated into specialities only later for specific, focused development - but that separated development is of greatest value when integrated back into the whole? Consider that there is no place for computer specialists, for a human resource department, for research or engineering, for IT specialists, for production lines or marketing except in the context of the whole. These on their own are largely useless.

It is trivial to agree and then to consider that they are just parts that somehow need each other. The meaning of each is given by their relationship to each other and the whole. For an organization of specialists to realise their potential, they need to see that it is the combinations

that are possible at deep levels of relationship that provide the unique and productive advantage that is possible in a corporation. IT will be powerful when it begins from a deep relationship to the whole business and then develops with other specialities the potential for its contribution. This is also true of HR, accounting, research and strategy. Beginning from separateness we trivialise individual difference and specialisation because we remove it from the context that gives it meaning and provides the possibility of realising the contribution that wants to be made. Beginning from deep relationship, we do not trivialise difference but provide the basis for its unique development and application.

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Innovation emerges from recombination of information and energy

Innovation occurs when energy and information combine in ways that haven't occurred before in a particular environment and find a place in the ecology of that environment.

New combinations are encouraged by an environment which creates the maximum opportunity for non-linear interaction. When these interactions pass a threshold point of energy and information exchange, positive returns begin to occur and risk/reward moves in the intended direction. Energy-information exists in smaller "chunks" or "packets" than our logical categories and requires interaction at this level for maximum recombination opportunity.

The environment in which the recombinations occur is equally important. An old idea in a new environment (time and place) is new. It is as likely to find a niche as any first occurrence of recombination. An environment which is friendly to new combination of energy-information is one which is not too full nor too empty. Too full means that there is no excess of resources to nurture the new and likely little space in which to establish a "fit" to the environment. Too empty suggests a lack of opportunity for contact and nourishment and too much space to explore connection possibilities.

Explosions of new ideas as well as life forms occur when there is space in the ecology for survival without immediate need to provide immediate value or in some way outperform what exists already. Disasters and isolation occurrences like tidepools provide this in nature. Living things provide this as parents for the young.

The other major environment required is one which is constantly looking for new sources of growth, improvement, nourishment and increasing efficiency. A welcoming environment for the new to test and discover its fit into the environment is provided by opportunity with increasing threshold points for future growth. Failure to pass the threshold increases the energy required on the new and provided increasing threats to its survival. Success provides a reduction in energy required to continue.

The integrity of leadership

Quote from the Gnostic Gospels (approx.) "When you fail to express what is within you, it will kill you. When you express what is within you, it will save you."

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The old Scottish definition of leadership "To show the way by going first" captures the courage expressed in action which is essential to leadership. It is a definition which includes integrity by including public action.

There is a deeper integrity to leadership. Like the Scottish definition, this leadership is not a reference to authority or formal position but is available to everyone. It is a leadership which is best distributed throughout a community.

What is implied but not explicit in "to show the way" is that one knows the way. This is not a position of arrogance. To know the way is the human condition. We are all given to know the way and we all have individual interpretations of that way.

There is no "the" way if by that we mean right, correct, true, "one and only". But each of us has a way. It is the only way individually because it is ours - our expression, our creation, our destiny. In this sense, destiny is not fixed nor completely outside our influence yet it is historical and meaningful in the context of our lives. It's development was emergent rather than arbitrary or random.

The way that each of us has is an integrated view of what is possible, what is desirable, what is "right" based in our unique lives and being as they have integrated with society and the universe.

Leadership is the authentic expression of the integrated whole that our lives are. Effective leadership which has strong influence on others occurs when that integration has extended beyond our personal boundaries and concerns to integrate with a much larger extension of the universe.

Leaders are able to show the way for many - in principles rather than in detail - by a consistent and creative interpretation of meaning in the flows of energy and information that constitute current social conditions.

The leader as an attractor for a community

A community creates its own leaders and the nature of leadership that will occur within it. These will emerge from the community intelligence as expressions of larger social intelligence. It will, therefore, reflect the dysfunctions in the intelligence of the community and society as well as the greater expressions of possibility.

A leader is an attractor in a community. The function of a leader is to "pull by attraction" the attention and intention of a community towards a possibility that is not automatic in the future (becoming) of that community. The possibility, while unrealised and not automatically going to occur, must yet be inherent in the realisation/development of the existing intelligence of the community within the society in which it operates.

A leader operates by being an integrator of what is so, what is possible and what is unseen or unexpressed in a community. This capacity requires contact, awareness, sensitivity and courage. It is not a matter of personal "will to impose" nor of isolated creativity. While the leaders may come from the outside, they must interpret for the culture, language and practices of the community.

Leadership is created by speaking declarations and establishing the practices - mainly linguistic - of maintaining the existence of declarations until they are real in the universe independent of the leader.

The nature of continuing the existence of declarations is a function of the integrity, practices, distinctions of the community. Many communities have very weak structures of persistence for the new. These communities emerge only dominating leaders or no sustained leadership at all.

Like a cell in a body, you are connected to the whole organization

You are at the centre of the corporation you are in. That is, you can see it only from yourself as the centre. Considering it as though it were separate from you, even as though you were just a bit on the edge, will not enable you to experience the whole.

As an intelligent being who is part of an organization (corporation, community, etc.), you are connected to the whole and, from your own perspective (which is the only one you have), you are at the centre. Begin to think from this position and discover what it gives you. Inquire into the meaning, significance, implications of this position and explore the new interpretations and insights that you gain.

>From this position, which is akin to being a "cell within a body", find your own voice, your own poem, your own expression. What is it that you have to contribute? What is it that you have to say? What is your unique form of participation? What richness is the whole missing by your not expressing this fully?

>From this position, say what the organization (or any part of it) is organised for? How many ways can you be organised at once? How many organizations can you be part of at once? How fast can you change? Begin to see organization as a matter of relationships which have different timings, different connections, different purposes. One corporation has many, many of these and each individual is related to all in some way.

In a corporation, what is being organised? We immediately see people, plant and equipment, physical stuff. We rapidly see physical flows of materials and people's work being co-ordinated. Begin to see organization as relating to flows of energy and information in patterns. Organization is the relationship of energy and information flows that makes patterns.

Consider your organization chart - formal and informal - from this point of view.

The nature and power of declaration

When an individual declares something to be so, that becomes possible. When a community declares something to be so, that becomes so.

A declaration is a speech act which brings into existence that which didn't exist. That is, it brings something out of the intelligence (unidentified) of the universe into a distinction which is both of, and in increase in, intelligence.

As a speech act, a declaration is a social act. To have meaning, influence, power it must integrate with the larger language structures, the larger conversations, of the community in which it is made. It must emerge from that structure as it interplay's with the unique expression of the individual.

A declaration which has power or influence will emerge from a dialogue in a community where the individual expressions enrich and enhance each other until some new possibility has been created. Particular individual declarations will emerge from this. One formulation which best captures the intent of the community will become the focal point. A person who regularly formulates such statements - and lives by them - will become a leader.

When a threshold point of individual mutually supportive declarations has been passed, the community can be said to have declared. At that point, the declaration becomes so whether or not the full accomplishment is yet complete.

The threshold point will be related to the social standing (reputations) of those making the declarations, to the integrity between word and action of the culture and to the awareness of the community of the nature and power of specific speech acts.

The source and nature of intelligence

Our Western heritage has given us a view of the world where our language describes the physical, material or real world and intelligence is the ability to figure those relationships out. A contemporary view is that the universe and ourselves are structurally coupled and intelligence refers to the nature of that coupling.

Consider the idea that each successive stage of evolution of the universe is an increase in complexity of organization and, thereby, an increase in intelligence. In early forms where there is nothing living, only a physical universe, chemical and energetic forces continued to interact and recombine and make new matter and forces. These arose from a common source and, if they survived, fit into that same universe. It is this emergent nature of the universe that makes intelligence possible.

Eventually, some living entities emerge and complexity takes a leap forward. The evolution of living forms continually increases the complexity of the universe. Later still, language and individual intelligence emerges. The individual intelligence is emergent from the existing design, patterns, energy-information of the universe.

Each is an evolution of organization. The universe is an organization of energy and information. Each stage of evolution is a different stage of organization. Complexity refers to this kind of organization. Intelligence refers to an advanced state of organization. When the universe and our nature are structurally coupled - as they must be - then intelligence exists.

Have you ever wondered how a human mind can comprehend any part of a universe? It cannot be directly by sensory comprehension of what exactly is "out there". If it were, then how could a bat, a fish, a bee and the myriad of other entities which have totally different sensory apparatus and nervous systems operation be able to comprehend and survive in the world? Each can make sense of the world because it is structurally coupled to a universe which is patterns of energy-information that can be experienced and constructed in many ways. It is the organization and integration of the universe that makes this intelligence possible.

Intelligence refers to the nature of the coupling between living beings and the universe. The phenomenon of organization in the universe exists independently of our understanding of it. It exists independently of our intelligence. And our intelligence influences the way that organization evolves.

Intelligence refers to the existence of an implicate order and the nature of structural coupling. It does not refer to the degree of our ability to understand. Our ability to understand is called wisdom. Wisdom is the ability to comprehend the implicate order, the deep patterns, the organization or design of the universe. Wisdom refers to our use of intelligence.

The source of what we value is non-material

The source of happiness, love, satisfaction and those other things we value highly is non-material. This is not surprising since those phenomena are also non-material. The source of wealth, property, commercial success - the material - is also non-material.

We have mistaken the material forms as the source of what we want and the focus of our wants. We were born into a culture which was focused on what is available to our basic sensory

capacities. Our society focused on the material is a result of classical and modern science which dealt with what could be measured.

In early Greek philosophy, science was a matter of thinking - not measure - and saw that the source of everything was non-material. Eastern philosophies recognise the non-material as the source of everything. Contemporary science has also come to see that everything material has non-material sources, energy-information at its base and is constantly in flux.

Our corporations have not made the leap to this way of thinking but maintain a focus stuck in the material world. The non-material lives in disrepute between scorn (as mystical) and the rather dismissive term "soft" issues. We live for what we can measure and fail to see the source of that universe. Even when we approach the so-called soft issues, we use methods of logic, measure and approach designed for a physical, material universe.

Try this: Examine your success in the marketplace and list the main elements which provide that success. Divide the list into material and non-material. Now look at which elements get most of the attention, energy, focus, measurement.

Now look at the material list and see what is the source of each item. At some earlier or more distant time, didn't their creation depend on non-material phenomena such as knowledge, intelligence, human energy, co-ordinated action, teamwork, communication, organization, commitment, intention, distinguishing, etc., etc., etc.?

Do you expect your future success to come from the material stuff you currently control - capital, property, plant, equipment, tools, patterns and recipes, etc.? Or is your future success going to come from the non-material generation and application of energy and information?

We have mis-identified the source of success and are now working very hard trying to succeed by focusing on the wrong things. We are organised for the material and not the non-material and apply mechanistic thinking to emergent (non-mechanistic) phenomena. No wonder we are working so hard for so little.

Space/time: the medium of it all

Space and time constitute the medium in which the universe occurs for us. Energy and information constitute the specific occurrence of that universe for us. While we distinguish them in our speaking, in science space and time do not exist independently. While we have distinguished them in our Western experiential models, space/time are a single phenomenon in contemporary physics. Energy/information is also a single phenomenon in the same way.

Space/time has shape. Energy/information has pattern. It is with patterns that we make sense of our universe. This is generally incompatible with our accepted way of thinking of the universe. We have come to see the universe as though it were amenable to our direct sensory

experience. But that universe is mediated by a Western language that can only "see" this particular way.

The source of all material is non-material. If we look at a solid (say a table) we see the material as a whole and solid. If we look closer with special aids, we see that the surface is not as smooth as we thought. As we continue to look in more refined ways, we see there are spaces between the elements but that each of these has a surface.

As we continue to look, every surface gives ways to spaces and new surfaces until we get so small that we can no longer say that there is any material or surface. We are left with space, energy and information. But none of these makes sense without the other. As we go deeper into something, it leads us out again. As we move away from the centre, we find it leads us back in. In the case of material you continually move between solid, space, solid, space no matter which direction you go.

We can grasp this phenomenon if we do a thought experiment. Imagine something solid in an absolute sense, that is, something that has no spaces whatsoever within it. Now see if there would be any change or any action within that thing. See if there would be any interaction with the environment that changed that thing. Try and imagine it happening. It can't happen because, without space, there is no interaction, no motion, no possibility. Even for some passive change like rusting, there must be spaces which allow for penetration, interaction, change.

The sensory, material, physical approach equates "structure" with the physical and from there "organization" is physical and rigid even when it exists only on paper. When this is the case, then changing an organization or its "structures" will not make a difference. Why would we ever consider such changes important (to change or not to change) if they can't be the source of more profound change?

Organization, considered as energy/information and patterns becomes infinitely flexible and a powerful source of transformation. Here, organization is "that which makes patterns which are robust and lasting while not rigid." Organization is regularity in communication, information flows, practices, conversations, attractors, etc.

Intelligence, organization and structure are interrelated phenomena. They do not exist independently of each other. They are the energy/information patterns that form more patterns. One way they manifest is as a corporation including all its formal and material "stuff". These are patterns which persist by creating ever more complex patterns.

Vision as emergent from an unspeakable centre

There is a place in each of us which is the source, the wellspring, of our highest values and greatest vision. This place is not a physical location. It is the space which exists between our experiences, our thoughts and our connection to our communities and our universe.

This place is the point of emergence. Our deepest values and visions cannot be said, cannot be fully expressed. When we put them into words, we are formulating an expression that, at best, captures the essence but never the full richness of the source. The greatest challenge of a leader is to connect their personal expression of vision and values to an organizational expression and a larger social expression which captures what is emergent and emerging. Such a powerful expression engages others and assists them in developing more powerful expressions for themselves. This leadership expression provides a structure of interpretation for the leader as well as others. It is a living, emerging structure of interpretation - both emotive and cognitive - for constant becoming. It calls forth the full possibilities of expression in life in the moment. We become trapped (by our inherited Western cosmology) into particular expressions, call them "the corporate vision", and lose the emergent, living, becoming source of our vision and values. We turn vision into outcome and goal - into direction of moving towards. In doing so, we lose the living power and beauty - and the adaptability and richness - of a coming from.

We stop listening for what wants to happen and start doing-with-force to make something no longer alive come into existence. We become alive again when we reclaim the living nature of vision, of emergence, of becoming as a wellspring, a source, a coming from which has both stability and mystery in it.