



BREAKING OLD PATTERNS TO CATALYSE TRANSFORMATIONAL CHANGE

Nothing about a caterpillar tells you that it will become a butterfly. All that it is, all that it was gives birth to a creature of such delicate nature that one could barely have imagined it into being. It has the potential in its raw constituents but it is a fundamentally different being. The formless, tube-like beast eats and then 'sleeps' its way into a new state of being. It creates a context (a chrysalis) in which everything that was configured in one way can separate into fragments that then reform into a new whole. There is no going back with transformational change because the reconfiguration is complete.

This is the nature of transformation. Change is not change if it is not different from how it was before. Change is not change if it is reversible. Change is not change if it amounts to merely changing places. We kid ourselves that a new job, a new house, a new girlfriend amount to change. They don't. They are merely subtracting or adding an extra piece into an existing pattern that is you and your life. It is still the same life and while you think of change in such simplistic terms nothing truly will be different.

So what does it really take? It takes letting go of control – letting go of imagining you can control what the change will be like in its end state. If you can control the outcome then you have merely managed to delude yourself that you are omnipotent. In the world of complexity sciences we know we cannot control nor predict – the best we can do is anticipate and influence and stay open to the surprise of what actually transpires. This is accepting complexity with its infinite number of unknowable factors at play.

When a leaf falls from a tree in autumn we might dare to predict that it will begin to curl up and crumple as it dries out. We anticipate this will be its unfolding scenario. But there is no way to absolutely predict how it will crumple or indeed if it will because we cannot know if it will rain and be turned to mulch before it ever gets a chance to dry out. We might dare to predict it will fall on the ground once it leaves the tree but we cannot know exactly where it will land because of wind, traffic, creatures and other factors that might disturb its pathway from the tree. Neither can we predict its actual pathway from tree to ground (other than generally 'down' because of what we know about gravity) because there are too many variables within the leaf and around it to be able to determine its specific route and landing point. Knowing something about wind speed, weight, power in the arm of a thrower and gravity might enable us to predict the pathway of a ball being thrown into the air. But even this is unpredictable because we cannot take account of all other variables that might affect the quality of a person's throw, the unevenness of the ground and anything else that might show up in the moment the thrower releases the ball.

Defining Change¹

When something moves from position 'A' – the tree; to position 'B' – the ground we call this 'static change'. 'Dynamic change' (predicting the actual pathway of the leaf falling or the ball flying through the air) is as much of a convenient delusion of power and control as is the notion of 'static change'. Devising long range strategic plans with detailed action plans and milestones is an example of both static and dynamic change thinking. Such plans do not work unless the system in which they are operating is sufficiently closed to outside forces and constrained by the number of variables – like in laboratory conditions – that some degree of predictability becomes possible (as with a production line). The thinking surrounding goals, targets and linking these to performance related pay is also founded on false assumptions. The notion that individuals have sufficient power to manipulate and control their particular marketplace in a vast global economy is frankly absurd. One global company I work for has operations in Greece. The country is in total economic meltdown and yet leaders of this company continue to set expansion targets for its sales force. Come on! Where is the reality check? In denying reality, we find people panicking and ignoring important signals that might otherwise guide them to useful action. In a target driven world people begin to embrace perverse behaviours that can end up throwing the system into more and more chaos. Out of fear, individuals lose access to good judgement and the system begins to lose integrity and coherence until at some unpredictable moment in time, it collapses in on itself. In essence the entire economic crash can be seen as a consequence of the delusions of grandeur associated with static and dynamic change thinking and consequent perverse behaviours associated with greed and fear-driven reactions to

¹ shared by Dr Glenda Eoyang, Human Systems Dynamics Institute



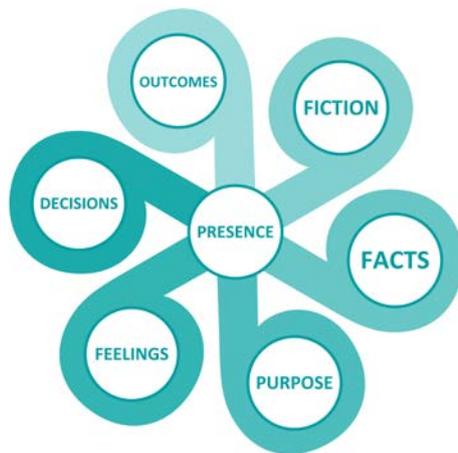
unrealistic goal and target-setting. Whilst some people have clearly benefitted from the ways in which business has been conducted, millions have been negatively impacted. But if such long-established planning practices, are so flawed what can we actually rely on going forwards?

Dynamical change

The concept of dynamical change is closest to our understanding of transformational change. It is change that is unpredictable in nature, time and ultimate outcome. How can we prepare for and cope with something that is so uncertain? Our best chance to thrive in volatile unpredictable contexts is to become infinitely better at noticing what is really going on in the world around us and in noticing how we are making meaning and reacting to it all. We need to reduce our unconscious reactivity and hone our capacity to respond with clarity and thoughtfulness. Some people do this through mindfulness practice. In the field of Human Systems Dynamics, our core approach is called Adaptive Action. It is a simple yet profound practice that involves three simple questions: What? So what? Now what? In engaging with these questions, we are seeking a deeper inquiry and engagement that takes us beyond the superficial. This is not as easy as it appears because our minds are used to being somewhat lazy so we tend to follow the thinking paths of least resistance. Daniel Kahneman (2012) refers to this automatic pathway as System 1 thinking. It is helpful when we need to move fast but often it can lead us to deeply flawed thinking and choices – thinking what we always think leading to doing what we always do; getting more of the same. To get out of ingrained thinking patterns we need to engage our minds more effortfully; we need to slow down our usual associative activation patterns long enough to expose inconsistencies and reveal new possibilities. Kahneman calls this System 2 thinking.

The ©Potent 6 Constellation

Over my years of coaching and facilitating individuals and groups, I came to recognise that fundamental and lasting change only becomes possible when there is an interruption in people’s patterns of thinking, feeling and behaving – the patterns have to be broken strongly enough for breakthrough insights to emerge; these then become the anchor points to new patterns and transformed lives.



In the absence of any models that honoured the complexity I experienced in my work with others, I began to develop my own. The Potent 6 Constellation is the culmination of my learning and sense-making. Most coaching models tend to be linear and simplistic which means that they shut down explorations, locking people into their default System 1 thinking rather than opening them up to more incisive scrutiny. By contrast, the Potent 6 Constellation supports the slowing down of System 1 thinking so that System 2 can get to work to unlock the keys to lasting change. It provides an inquiry framework that makes it possible to work with people, starting with whatever is present for them rather than forcing them to follow a formula that is neatly convenient to the coach. This makes it unique as a coaching framework

and with practice, it actually passes on the power for change into the hands, heart and mind of the coachee rather than them having to rely on the coach.

Underpinned by principles of neuroscience, psychology and human systems dynamics, yet borne out of years of proven practice, the Potent 6 Constellation has an elegant simplicity that belies the inherent complex interconnectedness between its elements. It exposes a client’s stuck patterns and helps to create the conditions for transformation. It can be used with individuals, groups and also to support transformation in organisations.

To get a flavour of its potential, have a look at this prezi: http://prezi.com/pubzfh9ym4h1/potent-6-constellation-for-organisations/?auth_key=b3d14629b27738affd4757c67bb9d56db50951d4&kw=view-pubzfh9ym4h1&rc=ref-27174761

Coaches wishing to be trained in this methodology can contact me to find out about future practitioner training opportunities. I also have some openings for people seeking coaching and coaches seeking supervision – contact me for a conversation if you wish to find out more.

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