



### MORE THAN TEAMS: WE NEED SYSTEM-SEERS AND SYSTEM-INFLUENCERS

We are hardwired – born to categorise. They say it is to support our survival – to help us differentiate from those who are like us (assumed to be safe) and not like us (assumed to be unsafe). And so what we see all around us is the unwanted consequences of our default patterns of differentiation – of amplifying otherness rather than seeking to reveal what unifies us. Polarising differences as better or worse rather than discovering the complementarity that makes shared endeavour possible. So we get conflict. Violence. War. Genocide. Instead, what we could have - if we rise beyond the labelling and categorising that judges and separates - is wholeness. Synergy. Togetherness. Co-creation.

Blessings come in strange packets. Recently I found myself in a foursome, organising and delivering a learning event in Holland. I had never delivered with any of these people before. I knew the lead organiser moderately well; one less well than that and the other, not at all. Two had known each other for some 15 years and their families had a strong bond held together by mutual love and respect. Three of us were in a supporting role. Two men; two women. One British born in Africa; one Israeli born in Hungary; two Dutch – one mixed race of African ancestry, born in Holland; one simply Dutch born and raised. Our differences heritage, life-experience, expertise and life pathways were equally diverse: one started out as a chef; one became a professor of mathematics; one started working in the world of public sector sports management and the other in corporate life; all converging to this point: a learning experience in human systems dynamics (HSD).

The month it took to make this happen had a momentum driven by one, with the others following the flow. Bumps and rapids along the way were opened up, laid on the table to be spoken about; each person adapting to what was revealed – making their own decisions about whether or not to stay engaged. We practised what we were about ‘teach’ – adaptive action within complex adaptive systems. We had climbed aboard and aboard we remained not knowing if the event would actually take place.

It was billed as ‘HSD Live!’ And in this title the pattern was set. The plan set the intention and had an assumed trajectory and a defined end point. Beyond that, the wider human system that ultimately gathered in the room took over and played itself out, following an overarching single arc from late start to early end; and embedded within that arc, were multiple pathways hurtling towards stuttering differential points of equifinality. People came; people played; people left - not at a single closure but at many of their own choosing. The gathering ended and the learning continues to unfold with future gatherings to be arranged. WE were the human system dynamic aLIVE! We were it and in it and no single one of us had overall control of what played out. A room full of facilitators and consultants each exerting influence – a complex adaptive system in full unstoppable flow.

Tensions rose and fell; confusions abounded and insights sparked and fizzed as we surrendered to a potent, explosive, exciting exposé of what it means to be truly alive in a human system. This is magic. This is the alchemy of reality. To me there is nothing more amazing, astounding and fulfilling to be a human system in one’s own right, and simultaneously in one, amongst others. Glorious complexity at play. And far from easy to be at ease within it.

The four of us held the whole – each tending to smaller clusters which formed around shared questions and experiences. Smaller containers/ groups opened up the space for deeper questions, different paces and more intimate exchanges. And as each cluster reached its point of resolution, they moved on and out.

Through the shared endeavour, we four came to be a team. We took responsibility. We did not know this path and pattern would unfold. Had we allowed ourselves to fall headlong into our hard-wired human tendency for unconscious categorising, we would doubtless have defaulted into patterns of blame and accusation. We would not have been able to hold the complex manifestation that emerged in this group experience. It was because of our differences that we could meet what arose; it was because of our similarities that we had a shared language for framing and understanding the human system dynamics unfolding around us; it was because of the respect, trust and love that had imperceptibly grown between us that rather than separate, we were able to stand together and pull together; sharing, holding and caring for each other, everyone in the group – and the group as a whole. The intensity of the experience needed us to be more than a functioning Team. And we rose to the call: becoming system-seers and system-influencers, truth-tellers, co-creators, accountable peers. We forged friendship and familial-like bonds – foundations for so much more to come. Blessings do indeed come in strange packets.