PRESENCE-IN-ACTION

CONFERENCE SPEAKER
24th International Annual
Coaching, Mentoring
and Supervision Conference
Amsterdam, Netherlands, 11 –13 April 2018

TAKING ORGANISATIONS INTO THE FUTURE
A CUT ABOVE THE REST

potent 6

PORTALS TO THE COLLECTIVE MIND

Setting the scene for a workshop hosted by: Louie Gardiner, Sam Pringle, Karen Beveridge, Ro Lavender

What is, is not

Buddhism holds that all is in all and everything is connected to everything. These, and other seemingly universal wisdoms, pertain to many ancient spiritual traditions. Such principles also hold true within a complexity thinking paradigm. This suggests that 'science' has caught up with deep knowing accessed by our ancestors several thousand years ago. Not quite so, because our so-called 'natural sciences' - and academic disciplines more generally - remain under the influence of mechanistic, linear thinking (sometimes referred to as 'Cartesian' or 'Newtonian' thinking) which favours the tangible and disregards the intangible. In reality, the truth of our deep interconnectivity does not manifest in the ways in which many of us in the western world conduct ourselves.

So much of what we do is based on the belief that we can bring nature under our control, and that we can predict and manage the future into being we want, on command. The way in our built and social environment trains and planes do not always havoc with our predictions of it; members do things we do not against the polls. When things do would rather not feel and think with anyone else for fear of what

Illogical Wholes

Logical Left is
left illogical when
illogically separated
from Illogical Right,
which is illogically, right;
but only when illogical bits
borne of Logical Left are
drawn in to the hole of
Illogical Right, whose right
is to make illogical wholes –
the notion of which is
wholly illogical, for both
are intrinsically fluid and holey.

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– that we can make happen what which we organise and construct affirms this illusion… Yet buses, run on time; the weather plays our colleagues, friends and family expect; and political voting goes not go our way, we feel… 'stuff' we 'things' we might not want to share they might think about us.

The assumptions underpinning engagement with the world, affect everything – what we notice, what we do, the way we do what we do. is nonlinear i.e. **not** linear. What I a falling series of dominoes that order. We cannot say with total comes first' which then triggers Because **what** I notice, is affected

our understanding of and and are affected by just about we think, the way we think, what The relationship between all these notice, think, feel and do, is not like plays out in a neat, sequential assuredness that 'what I notice the ensuing chain of events. Why? also by my assumptions of the

world, my own history and personal experience and what I make of it all (Kahneman, 2011). I will not necessarily notice what you notice because I am already on alert to notice what matters 'to me'. In other words, without realising it, I create my own frames/lenses to look for what is familiar or known to me; and in so doing, I discover what I am looking for, thereby proving 'it to be so.' This is no more or less true in our personal lives than it is in our professional lives. We cannot escape our frames of reference, but we can, through reflective practice, increasingly reveal them to ourselves and others… and to see them for what they are, and for how they impact our own lives and the lives of others we encounter in the wider world.

Spotting paradigms

In the Coaching, Mentoring and Coaching Supervision industry - and no doubt, in almost every other professional realm - people might see us referring to '**evidence-based practice**' or '**research-based evidence**'. What do these terms mean and why does it matter to even consider this question? Because, in my view, they point to what lies at the core of the strapline of this Conference: "*A cut above the rest*". There are embedded assumptions and implications worth exploring – which is what our workshop session is about. In this paper, I set the scene and lay out the territory with guide-lines for inviting reflections after-the-fact.

I am not venturing into a deep philosophical exploration. Let me attempt to put this simplistically - which means my making rather large generalisations, so forgive me for the caricature. When people use these terms (in **bold** above), they generally mean that a methodological approach has been taken, driven (perhaps unconsciously) by assumptions held within traditional scientific (objective/rational) research: that we can deduce or demonstrate

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causality i.e. we did this… and these outcomes arose; or people said that… which means this… so we can conclude such-and-such. To make these claims, we necessarily assume that a whole range of factors or variables can be ignored or isolated from context 'making it possible to test or identify 'cause-effect' correlations (deductive) and/or develop an hypothesis, model or theory/explanation (inductive) which will help us predict or influence future responses, outputs or outcomes.

The research format generally includes some kind of primary research, inquiry or intervention, the data from which will be collected and analysed; and then, finally, conclusions and recommendations will be drawn. Often, so-called 'objective', evidence-based practice/research is a numbers/probability game seeking proof, 'predict-ability' and replicability of results. Even in psycho/social sciences and change management practices (where what goes on for individuals and between/amongst people may be the focus of research) many practitioners/researchers still find themselves unwittingly shackled to the assumptions that dominate and shape traditional scientific research. Where this is evident, typically we may see some or all the following:

- Linear, cause-effect thinking – 'if we do X then Y will happen'.
- Reductionist tendencies which involve seeking to understand something by reducing it into parts and examining those 'parts' in isolation from their contextual whole.
- Processes or heuristic (rule of thumb) practices that may also employ metaphors that imply that nature and human beings can be treated/researched as if they are machine-like e.g. the 'resilience engine'.
- Seeking to improve 'prediction and control' which is tied to linear thinking.
- 'Promise-to-deliver' claims attached to goal/outcome-oriented planning/interventions.
- Methods and processes that follow step-by-step sequences like 'brainstorming or qualitative data-collection, categorising, analysing, prioritising, concluding, recommending'.
- Suggesting that it is possible to translocate 'best practice' from one context to another.
- Claims that natural selection i.e. competition, is the way of the world and that being 'a cut above the rest' is the goal to chase because it is the way we will surely win.

All are signs of traditional scientific thinking and practice which, **depending on the scope, focus and purpose** of the intervention/research, **may** be appropriate. Sadly, linear thinking and practice also finds its way into VUCA (volatile, uncertain, complex, ambiguous) realms or unbounded 'systems' fraught with many variables and massively entangled, nonlinear interdependencies. In complex living systems – such as individuals, groups, organisations, ecosystems and the wider world – traditional, linear thinking approaches/interventions on their own, are either insufficient and/or inappropriate for addressing or influencing wider systemic change.

Working with and making sense of VUCA human systems calls for new ways of seeing and understanding what is going on – a new paradigm – which requires different capacities and new ways of being and engaging. We cannot enter a new paradigm on demand (our desire and belief that we can is of the dominant paradigm); rather it comes upon us and into us before we know we have it and certainly before we can talk about it. This ties in to adult developmental approaches (Torbert, 1991; Fisher et al., 2003; Torbert et al., 2004; Rooke & Torbert, 2005). We need to immerse ourselves in that which may be deeply uncomfortable and confronting in order to shake us out of our current frames and paradigms. We need to enter and reside in the places of not-knowing long enough for new knowing to arise in and manifest through us.

Knowledge of Systems Thinking and complexity sciences has the potential to offer new lenses, perspectives and ways of handling inordinate complexity as evidence in our modern-day, cyber-connected world. What human beings of today can do and make is far beyond the imagination of our forebears. We appear to be able to manipulate our world and bend much to our command. However, even in these seemingly advanced, associated disciplines – including the systems thinking and complexity science domains (Morin, 2006; Hodgson, 2016; Rajagopalan, 2016) – there is a propensity to fall back into some of the traditional science tendencies mentioned above (particularly the belief in and 'holy grail' pursuit of 'one unified theory', which 'when' found will enable 'even

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greater mastery, prediction and control of our world'). That this thinking persists amongst some complexity scientists is an indication that having access to theoretical knowledge does not de facto translate into embodied knowing (Polanyi, 1966). It was Wang Yangming (1472-1529) whose insights on this matter translated into the oft quoted "to know and not act is yet not to know" (Shou-Jen, 2018).

Arguably one of the reasons impeding our embodiment is that in both the traditional and systems thinking / complexity science realms, the human, first-person dimension is either completely ignored, absent, subsumed in the whole or isolated/abstracted from it. We may appear to have greater mastery over our external dominion but cannot (yet) claim this about ourselves nor each other. If we had this mastery, surely all our problems would be resolved and we would be eternally happy souls!

Beyond the limitations of these linear and complexity thinking paradigms, what else is there? How can we engage in ways that help us re-incorporate our Selves into ourselves, our communities, neighbourhoods, nations and the world, rather than do what western humanity is accustomed to doing - which results in splitting ourselves off as if we are separate, independent, competing entities all scrabbling to be **the** cut above the rest?

Inclusionality
The space between defines the place of immateriality
The thing you see is no such thing, as no such thing can be.
That which we see in time in space is concentrating energy
that flows in form in place through space, informing receptivity.
For space imbues; embraces all without exclusivity.
This grace-ful flow is nature's way, it's called Inclusionality[1].

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Returning home
Informed by nature's principle of Natural Inclusion (Rayner, 2004; 2017; Gardiner, 2018b; Rayner, 2018) we can re-discover and re-incorporate our Selves. The praxis and practice deployed with the P6 Constellation helps us find our way back into loving presence-ful relationship with ourselves, each other and life. It does this, paradoxically, by helping us to centre in on ourselves using all our faculties and modalities of learning. Like the cosmos that centres in on itself and expands (Swimme & Tucker, 2011), so can we. Through this approach we are enabled to engage in the inclusional dance that is nature's sway between receptive-responses presences – a dance I call Presence-in-action which seeds Symmathesic Agency (Gardiner, 1999; 2013; 2014; 2015; 2016; 2017; Gardiner, 2018a). It reconnects us and extends our abilities to come upon integrative solutions (Follett, 1918; 1919; 1924; 1942) in a coherent, wholehearted, fully human way. **This cannot be the only way.** However, it is a **new way that is metalogically[1] coherent with the complexity of reality and the principle of Natural Inclusion**. And it is proving to be efficacious with adults and children across generations, cultures and professional contexts.

Closing caveat
Our session will afford glimpses of what is embedded and embodied in, and accessible through, the P6 Constellation. The references included here offer a tiny taste of what I have covered in my PhD*****, the latter of which significantly informs our P6 Constellation and Presence-in-Action praxis. We hope our session intrigues and invites you to find out more.

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[1] A metalogue is a conversation in which the content is reflected in the form and process of the conversation. The P6 Constellation is metalogically coherent because it deals with complex reality on its own terms and through a representational form and way of processing that are consistent with nature's principle.

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*Post-script: About my PhD research

My research involves academic and practice contributions at five different levels of analysis. Most PhDs in Systems Science involve only the first three of these. I have:

1. Undertaken a substantial systemic action research case study with an external organisation and its employees/volunteers to build their capacity in systemic inquiry;
2. Developed six new systems frameworks/methods and applied them in the context of the case study;
3. Evaluated those frameworks and methods through participant feedback and self-reflection on my practice;
4. Experimented with new forms of narrative construction and the use of multiple media in the writing up of the thesis; and
5. Developed a new methodological approach called 'subjective empiricism' to underpin and justify all of the above.

These five different levels of analysis are inextricably interrelated, adding layers of exploration and dimensions of depth and complexity not ordinarily faced in most academic theses. My day-to-day practice with the P6 Constellation has helped make my doctoral journey not only possible but transformational – both for me and those on the journey with me.

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