

Organising and managing across boundaries



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The sweet bitter of 'No'

Louie Gardiner



In our summer edition, anticipating the Scottish Independence Referendum, Louie examined the complex network of issues lying behind the simplistic, binary choice, Yes or No. Here she reflects on the outcome and wonders, what now?

That Germany lost the war has made it arguably the most socially and politically advanced nation in Europe. A ridiculously grand claim from someone who has absolutely zero credentials to comment. My conclusion is however, drawn from those who know much more – researchers of the exhibition *'Made in Germany'* in the British Museum from which it's Director, Neil MacGregor has pulled together his article (Review section of *The Guardian*, 27 September 2014); and his current radio series *'Germany: Memories of a Nation'*. I was humbled to read how the German people have consciously chosen to use history and monuments as a reminder and warning to act differently in the future. According to MacGregor, this is in stark contrast to Britain and France where most monuments 'honour valour and heroism' with scant public acknowledgment of each nation's own wrongdoings.

In particular, I was struck by MacGregor's description of the Reichstag which was restored following the reunification of East and West Germany 25 years ago. The restoration retained marks of the 1933 fire and

'...graffiti made by Soviet Soldiers were left untouched as a reminder to legislators that if you get things as wrong as Germany did, then the consequences are unimaginably terrible'.

En route to the Reichstag, MPs pass memorials to the killing of Jewish people, homosexuals, disabled people and Roma. Even more striking is the huge glass dome atop the building to which the public have access. Not only does this represent an emblem of transparent legislature but the public can

'literally exercise oversight over their government – a direct reversal of the situation under both the Nazis and the Stasi'.

MacGregor comments:

'I can't think of another country in the world that lives so closely with the acutely uncomfortable reminders of its past in order to help it act more wisely in the future'.

I found myself reflecting on my many tours inside the Scottish Parliament and how the building was designed to make it a place that is run for and by the people of Scotland. I began pondering (once again) on the result of the Scottish Referendum and wondered about the current and potential impact and unfolding consequences.

As I continued to read MacGregor's piece I was stopped in my tracks by a striking fact that brought my attention to something else – that in the following quote at least, he was comparing Germany with England:

'the regional identity of Germany is still flourishing in a way that has probably never been the case in England, where there has been a centralised government in a dominant London for 1,000 years'.

I'm not sure I agree with his conclusions regarding regional identity in England. However, I was shocked by his statement *'a centralised government in a dominant London for 1,000 years'*. One thousand years! A Millennium. This brings a whole new dimension to my understanding of the result of the Scottish Referendum. The 'YES/NO' vote was not simply threatening the break-up of a 300 year Union between England and Scotland; it was potentially heralding the next stage of disintegration of a 1,000 year socio-political force that has come to rest within Westminster - centralised power in the hands of the few, who are disconnected from the reality and diversity of the many.

Germany of the past and Germany of today has much to teach us about the dangers of centralised forces that seek to manipulate the very people they pretend to serve. The Scottish Referendum was a call from part of the system for change and for powers to come closer to its people. The question beguiling me is: Can we effect a civil and just socio-political change without violent revolution or disintegration in the UK?



The dome of the German Reichstag, Berlin.
Photo from: [lukelukeluke](#), [Creative Commons](#)

According to Nobel Prize-winner Ilya Prigogine, when a complex adaptive system (such as a human system) is near to the point of bifurcation i.e. when it is far from equilibrium, 'chance' comes into play. We cannot predict if it will tip into disintegration (chaos) or leap into a new, more differentiated, higher level order or 'organisation' i.e. a 'dissipative structure'. Neither can we predict when the tip might occur. Why? Because there are simply too many unknown and unknowable factors at play in the system to afford any certainty. However, despite all that is unknown and uncertain, we can equip ourselves to anticipate and influence better by increasing our understanding of what is playing out – seeking to notice shifting systemic patterns and what might be shaping those patterns. This gives us clues as to what action we **could** take that **might** nudge the system in the ways we **hope** will be more helpful – holding all the while that **every intervention is an experiment with uncertain consequences**.

Some FACTS: The governing powers in Scotland called for a referendum which took place on 18 September 2014. Change was promised. A vow was made. 45% of all votes cast voted YES for separation from the Union. 55% voted NO. We do not know all the reasons why people voted YES or NO. The polls showed a shift of YES voters from less than a third to nearly 50% in a little over two years. One day after the result, 5,000 Scots became signed up members of the SNP; two days after, 10,000 had signed up; five days after the vote this had risen to 26,000. Other YES parties have also had increased membership. NO Parties in Scotland lost members. Northern cities in England have raised the issue of greater powers. UKIP has secured more votes in recent elections than it has ever had before. The British Government has just agreed to take Britain into another armed conflict.

It seems that our UK socio-political landscape/ system IS shifting. Parts of the system are far from equilibrium. It is not hard to imagine that if the vows made by Westminster party leaders are broken, the perturbation in the system will amplify generating even greater disequilibrium. Perhaps if the vows to Scotland are kept, this will give rise to greater perturbation in other parts of the system elsewhere in the UK? Leonard Cohen's lyrics come to mind:

'Ring, ring the bells that still can ring.

There is a crack, a crack in everything.

That's how the light gets in'.

There is a crack. Perhaps the tsunami of bifurcation is already upon us? If we think we can predict and control what is happening - believing we can block the tipping wave - we will be sitting in denial of reality; we will risk getting lost IN the boiling and roiling of the turmoil. Alternatively, we can choose to become surf-riders and community bridge-builders ready to enter into the turbulence to make something out of what might otherwise become wholesale destruction.



A few years ago at the Edinburgh Book Festival, Richard Holloway, former Bishop of Edinburgh, said that when people hold fundamentalist views, dialogue is impossible. So consider this: just as domestic violence does not begin but ends with broken bones and bodies, neither does fundamentalism begin with shocking violence by extremist forces.

Chamber of the Scottish Parliament, Edinburgh
Photo from: [pschemp](#), [Wikimedia Commons](#)

The seeds of both are sown somewhere far closer to home. They grow in our living rooms, bedrooms, community spaces, organisations and adversarial debating chambers. They begin when we hold a fixed point of view from which we refuse to entertain the possibility that 'the other' might have something valid and worthy of consideration. They begin when we disregard, disrespect and debase the other - in the ways we talk about and behave towards them.

The derivation of the words 'debate' and 'discuss' mean 'to beat or break down'. These words are about winning so as not to lose. In contrast, 'dialogue' is about 'meaning flowing through' and this can only happen when we open ourselves up to the possibility that we and/or our views might be changed through our exchange with 'the other'. Consider how improbable it would have been for politicians in both the YES and NO camps to say:

'Hang on a minute! This is crazy! What is it you are really trying to say? How are your needs not being met? What are you afraid of? What are your hopes and dreams? How could we address all our fears and needs and hopes and dreams; and take care of each other at the same time?'

Fundamentalism begins with taking a position on something and continually gathering more and more data to substantiate that position – to the exclusion of all other data and possible perspectives. I witnessed 'Yes' voters going to Yes' meetings, listening to people who think like them, thereby reinforcing their views and their positions. I witnessed 'No' voters going to 'No' meetings listening to people who think like them, thereby reinforcing their views and their positions. I witnessed a 'No' voter getting agitated when a 'Yes' voter contributed to proceedings by trying to call Gordon Brown to account for his part in the Iraq war. The No' voter shouted out '*what are YOU doing here? This is a No' rally!*' Fundamentalism begins with getting stuck in binary debate: yes/ no; this or that; either/ or; with us/ agin us. There HAS to be another way. Surely we are better than this? More advanced than this? And so I come back to where this article began. What does Germany have to teach us? What does Prigogine have to help us?

What will it take to make possible a 'higher level order'; a 'more differentiated dissipative' governance structure? It starts and ends with individual agents in the system. Us. More of us engaging in ways that break ancient, adversarial patterns. More of us learning to create opportunities and structures for working with distributed power that engender greater accountability by the many not the few. This will take effort. Huge effort because we will be calling on ourselves to do what we are unused to doing. Dissipative structures are more differentiated and therefore more complex so they take more energy to sustain them. True dialogue takes more energy in the 'coming to solutions', yet in the longer run, it means our solutions are likely to be more successful; more generative; more enduring. To succeed, *more* of us need to be engaged *more* of the time on *more* issues that affect our lives. Are we ready? Are we up for the complexity of the challenge and the commitment to stay engaged in the process wherever it takes us?

Coherence and equilibrium in a complex adaptive system - a human system - comes not through external controls but through local interactions amongst individuals wherever they are in the system. We continually self-organise in relation to each other and the shifting conditions in the system. So shifting patterns starts with us. No. In this, it starts with me. In writing and in knowing what I know from the complexity science world, I call myself to account. What will I do? How will I change? I choose to follow these behaviours in the

hope that I may play a part in seeding the conditions for creating a new governing order in the UK. And perhaps in the future, I might, with humble pride, be amongst many who are able to say: we led the way, we did this ourselves and we did it well without war:

1. Engage with curiosity and caritas
2. Safeguard my own trustworthiness
3. Act for the wellbeing of the whole, part and greater whole
4. Make more of what we've got
5. Celebrate and share the best of ourselves
6. Follow through on promises

Tweet me @Potent6 and share these Seed Behaviours with others if you feel like joining in the experiment!

About the author

Louie Gardiner is the founding partner of [Potent 6](#) and creator of [The Potent 6 Constellation](#). She is a PhD Researcher in Systems Sciences, master-accredited coach, facilitator and Human Systems Dynamics Consultant. Louie has a passion for illuminating, connecting and liberating flow in human systems - enabling people to take action and work collaboratively through complex, challenging situations with, within and across organisations and communities. She is hungry to learn, and demonstrates her commitment to being curious, courageous, authentic and constantly questioning how we make and manage meaning in the world.

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Working across boundaries

David has a dream

David McAra



To make some cross-boundary working happen, the editorial team planned a 'Gathering' for September, so I thought it would be interesting to try to join up some of the LinkedIn groups I follow. I posted a question in the AMED group ("How should we describe the radical re-think we need about organising?") and 'shared' it across a number of other groups under the heading: "... wondering about synergy." There were a number of interesting responses though I can't really claim they amounted to much in the way of synergy.

Louie Gardiner was kind enough to review my draft and I found her comments helpful so have included them in the blue panels.

It's a bit presumptuous of me, I know, to reference Dr King in my title but I believe that the transformation of society is necessary and possible.

- *Necessary ... because our existing models of organising are not sustainable and cause too much suffering*
- *Possible ... if we can unlock the synergy between the many wonderful and creative ideas which are currently on the loose.*

The problems of society are profound and complex. How shall we learn to adopt sustainable lifestyles? How shall we educate the young? How shall we take care of our elderly? How shall we reconcile strident adversarial ideologies? ... or even moderately conflicting short term interests?

No central body, however wise and well-intentioned, will ever be able to sort it out. We must learn new ways of working together, or slide into chaos.

According to Complex Adaptive Systems theory, change happens through local to local interactions i.e. local to us as individuals rather than thinking about local in terms of geographical place. We create patterns through our exchanges with those in our realms. Like Glenda Eoyang, I suggest that we need to find new ways of seeing to shift our understanding what is going on – when this happens, the next 'now what?' becomes self-evident.... So in essence, it is always about emergence and awareness of emergence; integrating and adapting what we do as each new moment arises. In a complex, uncertain, world and an unknowable future, we can never know what we will need to know to cope, ahead of time. We only come to know it in retrospect!!! So – in agreement with Eoyang – I believe that all we can do is grow our Adaptive Capacity.

Ah! Chaos!

I'm not very optimistic about our capacity to learn as individuals, never mind as a society. So perhaps the slide into chaos is inevitable. Now ... the concept of chaos (in my layman's understanding) offers the possibility of the emergence of a new order.

Perhaps we can slide through - or with - chaos. I understand that the prospect of emergence is enhanced by optimising three aspects of the chaotic brew:

- The **diversity** of the ingredients – because an understanding of the challenges and the opportunities is not accessible to any one person or group, but is scattered through many minds in our infinitely varied ways of seeing the world

Eoyang would call this condition 'Container' – i.e. similarities that bring and hold agents or agencies together. These can be physical, perceptual, metaphysical etc and are often overlapping and massively entangled.

Eoyang in her PhD research identified 3 pattern-influencing conditions CDE: Differences – that hold the potential for change to occur

- The **connectedness** of the ingredients. For emergence to occur, the scattered pieces of knowledge must be able to find each other, to cohere – if momentarily, to form a new picture which we will only be able to see when we can all see it

- The **quality** of the connections – so insights can be perceived through the noise.

Again Eoyang would speak of 'Exchanges' – which is more about the channel across which 'differences' can pass

“... synergy between the many wonderful and creative ideas ...”

For something productive to arise, the three conditions CDE need to be 'coherent'. A great HSD (Human Systems Dynamics) model that conveys this without needing to understand the underpinning science is the STAR

*S = balance of **similarities** and differences - Diversity*

*T = effective balance and quality of **talking** and listening (Exchanges)*

*A = **Authentic** work = **action** i.e. a needed, useful task / focus of activity (container)*

*R = **Reason** for being – intention/ purpose (Container)*

If these are not in place / balance / coherent then the group of people (agents) will not be generative. This can help to understand why stuff simply does not start, continue or regenerate.

To try and make some cross-boundary working happen, the e-O&P editorial team planned a 'Gathering' for

11 September, so I thought it would be interesting to try to join up some of the LinkedIn groups I follow. I posted a question in the AMED group (“How should we describe the radical re-think we need about organising?”) and ‘shared’ it across a number of other groups under the heading: “... wondering about synergy.”

A reasonable number of responses appeared in four of the groups (see table below) but there seemed to be more speaking than listening and more energy for introducing solutions to cross-boundary working than inquiry and open sharing of experience and triumphs and disappointments.

Perhaps I am naive to hope for anything else from a networking social media site. It felt like a party with everyone constantly scanning for someone more interesting to speak to. It is an incredibly crowded party, after all. Social media has infinite diversity and connectedness. How can we improve the signal quality and enable more fruitful dialogue?

Looking at Eoyang’s criteria, presented by Louie, above, I think we need to be building a container.

The responsive groups

The blue link in the group name will take you to the relevant LinkedIn pages.

Link to group discussion topics	AMED	Great Insiders	Unreasonable Learners	Lancaster University MAMLL,	Totals
Group’s area of interest	Management education and development	Mutual support for internal consultants	New thinking about gov’t and business	Management learning and leadership	Connections across boundaries
Comments	23	13	15	10	61
Contributors	9	5	6	4	24

All these groups share some appreciation for the problems with hierarchies and the value of cross-boundary working. While agendas are subtly different, I feel we are all pulling in more or less the same direction.

I left out a group which didn’t seem to recognise the collaborative spirit of inquiry I was hoping for. There was only one response: “the <group> virtually always has 'Joined up Thinking' as a way of life, with masses of accredited positive outcomes and not the average 70% failure rates that plague all the non-joined up thinking projects”.

Any suggestions for further experimentation or exploration will be greatly appreciated. Please post your thoughts [here](#), or contact me directly: david.mcara@petrotechnics.com.

About the author

David McAra is a member of AMED Council and of the e-O&P editorial board.