

From Complianting to Alliancing

creating a culture of collaborative maturity ©

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Alpha and Gamma Change

We often think that how 'things' change is the same as how people change. In other words objects have the same change properties as people. In some respects this is true (people after all are subject to the same laws of physics) but in very important ways there are differences – this is the difference between Alpha and Gamma change (Golembiewski, 1976).

Put as simply as possible Alpha change is where the extent of something changes but not the thing itself. Take your humble bath scales. Bath scales are often used to measure the weight of someone and have relatively low 'measurement error'. Unless you have doctored your scales for other 'secondary purposes', bath scales are pretty accurate in measuring your weight in kilo or pounds etc... If you weigh yourself before and after the festive season you may not be too surprised that your weight changes in favour of a higher (ie., heavier) score. What has changed despite your protestations is your weight and not the bath scales! This is not how people change psychologically.

People don't act like bath scales

People don't act like bath scales because psychological conditions are 'constructs' and not things and so are subject to much greater measurement error. This is because human appraisal of psychological or social states are 'self referential' in nature and so the instrument itself (the mind) changes along with the extent of what is changing – the bath scales so to speak (us) are 'self conscious' and so subject to Gammic change. How do we know this? Let's go back to the bath scales – we know in empirical studies that men often underestimate their weight compared to woman. This is possibly due to the different 'social expectations' on body image. In extreme cases people can develop body dysmorphia where there is virtually no objective appraisal of body shape, weight or size. I know this because in a previously life as a research psychologist I

published a paper on this very phenomena with colleagues (Castle, 2007).

Complex systems like human beings often are subject to gamma change and so need constant re-examination as we learn more about the issue and the conditions. In these situations we may need to move our organisations from a compliance to an alliance culture. Before we go to alliancing we need to know what a compliance culture is.

On compliance cultures – post hoc ergo propter hoc

Compliance cultures are heavily transactional and risk adverse by nature. The compliance model is based upon a system to attribute 'accurate blame' when things go wrong. Legalistic in tone, compliance cultures make explicit assumptions about human nature and how we work. The focus is often to attribute blame through rigorous 'checks and balances' where 'who is to blame' is as important as 'how did it happen'. In fact the who and the how are inextricably linked within highly compliance cultures. Whole industries are set up to monitor the compliance of entire systems that in the end may stifle the very system it monitors. One of the great tricks of over compliant cultures is they use Latin – really? *Post hoc ergo propter hoc* simply means "after this, therefore because of this". Put in another way, I put a rock here to keep the tigers away, since the tigers don't come therefore the rock keeps the tigers away. Now who would argue with this? This form of logical fallacy often happens in overly compliant cultures. It is because of our monitoring that things have not gotten worse. The truth is, we can't always attribute cause to a single system but nonetheless we pile on more compliant systems with the same logical fallacy, attributing the same success to our forms and processes without any real causal evidence. The most common complaint you will hear in any system and most acutely in human services is the paper work. However, no one wants to take the paper work away less this particular rock does keep the tigers away. If we freed up the compliant culture to an alliance culture maybe we could achieve more meaningful change – what are the conditions for an effective alliance culture?

From complianting to alliancing

All good alliancing cultures have strong compliance mechanisms. This is not to say one throws the baby out with the bathwater. Complianting is needed but relegated below the needs of creating a strong

collaborative culture. Complex self organising systems operate through cooperation. Anyone who has been to an Asian or Sub-continental mega-city would know that if everyone complied to the road rules the city would grind to a halt. The rules or principles are few but iterated multiple times to allow for greater self-organisation; in other words cooperation and collaboration emerge out of meeting the ever increasing complexity of the system itself.



Self-organised traffic in an Indian mega-city

Alliance cultures are best adopted when the change process is more gamma than alpha – agility is needed. For example you may need to measure such constructs as 'community engagement', 'personal resilience' or 'sustainable action'. These human constructs are difficult to measure and maybe best tackled by an alliance of multiple stakeholders. It is possible that the construct changes as you come to learn more about the very thing you are trying to tackle. Alliance cultures are best suited for these types of problems. Where *things* are involved like a physical product then compliance cultures are best suited.

Fundamental Characteristics of an Alliance

Weller's Law states 'that when you are not responsible for the change anything is possible'. This speaks to the old business parable that at a breakfast of bacon and eggs the chicken is interested but the pig is committed. One of the characteristics of an alliance is equal 'painshare/gainshare' for each member in the alliance. That is, all parties win or fail together. In this manner this reduces a blame culture where the '*who*' question is more important than the '*what*'. A no blame culture is required so the alliance focuses on solving problems rather than proportioning blame. In a sense

every party in the alliance has to be a pig with skin in the game.

In addition, clearly defined goals and objectives have to be determined by all parties rather than just one. The classical design and construct model does not operate in these forms of business relationships – both the designers and the doers must define objectives and scope. In essence goal alignment is achieved by *shared commitment through shared understanding*. To do this a collaborative culture must be created not just a compliant one. Each organisation and person needs to move from a transactional model of working to a relational model. This it seems does not come naturally in a world view steeped in competition as the only legitimate method of relationship in business. An equitable risk/reward regime that is determined by all parties prior to delivery of any good or service is critical for success in an alliance (Taplin, 2013)– this is because when mistakes are made (and they will) the conditions of the alliance pulls the parties together and not apart.

As much as possible, open book accounting is needed between the parties in order to encourage the conditions for an alliance. In this manner every member gets to see where the money is spent and how it is trending. The alliance then determines the flow of capital best into areas that meet the overall shared goals and objectives. This requires a great amount of trust and openness in relationship between the participants in an alliance – without it, the shadow organisation is likely to flourish (see Paper 8 in confronting and taming the organisational shadow).

The essential element of any alliance is to know when to move from alpha to gamma change. In complex projects and programs, people and organisations learn more about the problems they face as they go along. Not every problem is as tame as measuring weight on a bath scale – the trick is to know when to fundamentally change your view of seeing things when the data changes through robust dialogue and collaborative decision making.

References:

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