

fluid

transformation

from

within

Organizational Constellations

A key aspect of business performance is the quality of relationships and collaboration among employees, customers, vendors, business partners, etc. Creating quality relationships at work is also one of the most challenging and confusing aspects of organizational life. Most of us devote a lot of time to the transactional aspects of work such as developing, maintaining, and adjusting effective work processes; information sharing; and creating and following rules; all of which we believe are the key to great performance. And yet, we all know on a gut level that it is the quality of interaction between people that is most critical to getting things done well.

People are able to accomplish astonishing results through collaboration and a shared focus. In the best of times, we surprise ourselves and the people around us by what is possible when we work well together. However, we also know how difficult working together can sometimes be. In fact, we may share the belief that we're not collaborating well and that we would like to go about the process differently, yet feel stuck in finding a solution that produces different outcomes.

One of the reasons organizational behavior is so vexing derives from the complex interplay between social context and personal motivation that influences all decision-making and behavior. When we interpret the behavior of others, we tend to over-emphasize the role of personal motivation and self-interest. In part because we often don't know much about the social context we resort to developing our interpretations based on self-interest and "political maneuvering." Yet, for ourselves, we know all too well how many compromises we make based on social context and how we're often not truly aligned with end results. For example, our choices are influenced by how a meeting went or what mood a colleague was in. The more people are involved, the more difficult it becomes to make sense of a situation.

What if there were ways to observe and explore the underlying dynamics that influence collaboration, organizational behavior, and the ability of teams to focus on business results? What if we could experience how to approach key individuals and groups of people so that they are truly heard and thus able to move beyond an impasse? What needs to be seen and acknowledged in order to shift the situation so that alignment, great collaboration, and team spirit can emerge?

Through a neutral and non-judgmental process, Organizational Constellations uncover underlying dynamics that operate like hidden, unspoken contracts that members of a group are usually unaware of. For example, a new leader who fills the role of someone who was fired unfairly often has a difficult time commanding the attention of the people reporting to them. Allegiance continues toward the person who was fired in an expression of loyalty, including people who don't even know the history of the situation or new hires, who have never met the former leader. These unspoken, sub-conscious 'contracts' occur in many situations across the workplace and can impact organizational behavior for long periods of time.

Organizational Constellations allow us to create a temporary space reflecting the existing organizational system and to experience first-hand what it is like to interact in this system with key individuals. Participants get a true sense of the influence of social dynamics and context on

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choices and behavior across time. It is often surprising how readily people respond to each other and how seemingly minor changes in one person can have a big impact on the social dynamic, choices, and behavior of a group.

We are able to tell from observation that every social system - formal and informal - creates an informational field that keeps track of the relationships and group dynamics within it. This field is invisible much like a magnetic field that only becomes visible when we spread iron filings and watch the filings align themselves to the force field. During Organizational Constellations, the underlying dynamics of the social field of a particular organization become similarly visible when we use individuals (rather than iron filings) to find their place within the social field. These individuals can then share their experience of what it is like to be in this particular place and within this social context.

To make the organizational field visible, one person offers their situation as a case study. Other participants are asked to represent aspects or key individuals in the dynamic for that situation. The person will then position the representatives in the room in relationship to each other. The representatives are able to report what it feels like to be in that particular place with those particular people in simple emotional and/or physical terms. For example, "I like this person," or "I want to move over there," or "My shoulders feel really heavy." Through simple sentences and changes in position it becomes possible to make the underlying dynamics visible and affect changes in attitude and stance. During the course of a Constellation, representatives find places and make connections with each other that give them strength and simply "feel right."

Through this process, participants are able to identify the root causes that lead to challenges and dysfunction. They get reference experiences for what it feels like to disrupt the hidden 'contracts' and are able to move into a place of congruence and inner strength that can be used as guidance later. When participants can hold the larger social context in their awareness as they interact with people in the organization - and trust their felt sense - they are able to communicate much more effectively and navigate difficult situations with inner clarity.

Past participants report that they look at organizational and group dynamics very differently after observing Constellations and serving as representatives. They have a much more keen awareness of how connected we are and how influential their own intentions and attitudes are on the way conversations unfold and broader communications are received. They are now able to trust their physical reactions and emotions more when they step into unfamiliar territory and have a more open mind for the larger social context as they approach challenging situations.

Organizational Constellations have helped business owners, executives, and consultants with resolving difficult group dynamics and providing guidance in the following situations:

- Building teams, defining processes and roles/functions
- Strategic planning for projects and businesses
- Succession planning
- Performance and competence evaluations
- Decision making in family businesses
- Merging organizations and businesses