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EVERY MONTH ATTRACTORS SHARES TIPS AND TOOLS FROM HUMAN SYSTEMS DYNAMICS. IN THIS MONTH'S EDITION, GLENDA EOYANG TALKS ABOUT PRACTICAL WAYS TO RESPOND TO WICKED CHALLENGES.

What are your most wicked issues? Many factors affect the productivity of our clients. It is never easy to deliver the right product or service at the right time and lowest cost! Sometimes the challenges are simple to see and understand because they deal with known causes, short timeframes, or a limited number of players. In other situations, causes are unknown (sometimes even unknowable), timeframes extend beyond the current view, and players are too numerous to count. In times like those, human systems dynamics (HSD) insights, tools, and techniques make the difference between adaptation and failure.

Over the past year, Associates at HSD have identified five critical challenges that require the adaptive power of HSD. At the Institute, we are currently collecting our insights, experiences, and practices to help clients address these difficult and emergent issues. Here is a preview of our findings.

Is our organizational culture getting in the way of our productivity and success? In HSD, we think about culture as “how things get done around here.” As an organizational culture evolves, it helps individuals and teams respond effectively to changes in the market. Sometimes, though, a culture fails to adapt to changing circumstances. It can get locked in so that energy and attention are diverted from constructive work. In the midst of an acquisition, one of our clients recognized the need to assess and shift their culture to continue to be productive. HSD is developing tools and techniques to help other organizations assess their cultures and take adaptive action to ensure a productive fit between what is inside and what is outside the organizational boundaries.

How can we have more creative and productive relationships? No one is an island in this time of massive interdependencies and collaborations. Everyone must work with others to produce innovation and fast-paced adaptation. The problem is that many people don't have the basic skills for collective work. HSD helps set the conditions for people to come together to learn from differences and create new opportunities. We are currently working with a foundation to bring people together across regions and disciplines to explore collaborative ways to support children and youth.

How can we transform conflict into creative tension? Conflict is a fact of organizational life, and it isn't always bad. Multiple perspectives often generate conflict, but they can be used to open new possibilities and options for action. HSD helps our clients focus on differences that make a difference, so energy and ideas are generated. Over time and with practice, groups build strong, productive relationships in place of personal and institutional conflict. A municipal government client was plagued with “personality conflicts” and “negativity.” We helped them realign their relationships toward more collaborative action.

How can we prepare for a future we cannot predict? The “long range” plan is virtually a thing of the past. Today decision makers have to be agile as they collect data, consider response, and take effective action. Because HSD focuses on dynamical and emergent patterns, it helps to shape adaptive action. HSD provides support for adaptive strategy and praxis (theory in action) to build the capacity to prepare for the unexpected. We worked with leaders in the water and waste water industry to design and implement an adaptive planning process.

How can we make sense of the chaos around us? In times of rapid change, old patterns and expectations lose their power. Until new patterns emerge, the world can seem random and out of control. HSD uses the insights of nonlinear dynamics to describe patterns that emerge out of chaos. Butterfly effects, attractors, coupling relationships, and fractals (among others) help make sense in the midst of roiling change.

On April 1 and 2, the HSD Institute will sponsor a two-day session: ***Introduction to Human Systems Dynamics: Seeing and Influencing Patterns***. We'll explore a variety of tools and techniques, to help you and your organization respond to these urgent and challenging questions. For more information about the class, contact Julia Wolter at jwolter@hsdinstitute.org or register online at http://www.hsdinstitute.org/events_learning.asp

I hope to see you there!

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