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*EVERY MONTH **ATTRACTORS** SHARES TIPS AND TOOLS FROM HUMAN SYSTEMS DYNAMICS. IN THIS MONTH'S EDITION, GLENDA EOYANG REFLECTS ON THE INTELLECTUAL ROLLERCOASTER OF LEARNING.*

THE ROLLERCOASTER

When faced with chaos, what are your options?

- Reduce the complexity?
- Absorb the complexity?
- Ride the rollercoaster to simplicity on the other side?

Roffey Park's OD Conference was a carnival of teaching and learning. People from diverse locales, industries, roles, and experiences came together for two days in a lovely retreat setting south of London. Together, we explored how complexity science might help us understand the craziness around us and how new understanding might lead us to more effective action.

Over and over again through the conference I remembered an image that Kim Burnes birthed at the Certification Training last summer. At the end of a particularly interesting day, she said, "I didn't know an intellectual rollercoaster could be such fun!"

Intellectual rollercoaster.

You know that feeling. One minute you understand and know what to expect. Your world is well-known and orderly. Then something happens. You talk to a colleague; go to a class; hear complaints from a customer; realize a change in the environment; see, feel, or hear something utterly surprising.

Suddenly you shift out of your comfort zone and into a place of not knowing. What's happening? What does it mean? How can I respond? You recognize that your old way of making meaning is obsolete, or at least that it needs a serious upgrade. The technical name for this state is "far from equilibrium." The old balance of knowing and seeing has been replaced with a sense of overwhelm and imbalance.

In the midst of the mess, you begin to see a pattern. Perhaps a colleague sees something familiar in the chaos. Perhaps you remember some "irrelevant" something you learned long ago. Perhaps you tell a story and, in telling, see emergent meaning. Over time, with exploration, reflection, and conversation, you begin to make sense of the new developments. As you build confidence in your new explanation, you return to that comfortable place of a well-known and orderly world.

Then something happens . . .

This cycle that moves from equilibrium to far-from-equilibrium and back again is the experience Kim so aptly named “the intellectual rollercoaster.” It animated our time at Roffey Park as we:

- Shared our sticky issues and discovered that others’ were more like ours than different.
- Heard case studies of complex organizational change processes that incorporated many voices into coherent training designs.
- Pushed ourselves into the unknown and came out with many lessons learned.
- Considered organizations struggling with cultural diversity, accelerating markets, political and Political unrest.
- Encountered personal connections and irritations among good hearted friends and friends-to-be.

Over the course of the conference, we became a laboratory for the complex dynamics of human systems. Individually we shifted from knowing to wondering and back again. As a collective we saw and responded to models and stories and styles of interaction. Our context was set by Roffey Park, which will be celebrating its 60th anniversary as an institution. It stood for us as proof of the resiliency of learning, growth, and change that comes from cycles of knowing and asking.

As we work with clients of HSD Institute, we observe the same evolutionary cycles. Sometimes clients and their organizations are too firmly locked into their own expectations, and it is our job to help them move out of equilibrium and toward discovery. Other times, clients are lost in the depths of confusion and need our help to make sense of the emerging unknown. In either case, we go with them on the rollercoaster ride.

As consultants and teachers, we know that the inquiry and learning of one become the learning and inquiry of the other. When we ask insightful questions, we can help swing clients out of their complacency. When we share the patterns that we see, we can help clients ask pertinent questions about their own situations and their options for action. Together, we ride the rollercoaster to develop shared understanding. And, shared understanding leads to coordinated action.

This is the one place that the rollercoaster analogy falls short. You ride the ride because it is fun. You expect nothing else. It is an end in itself. The intellectual rollercoaster, on the other hand, produces options for action. It is a means toward better choices and more effective and efficient action. It moves you to the rich simplicity on the other side of chaos. It serves to improve your fitness and success in the marketplace.

The Society for Chaos Theory in Psychology and the Life Sciences (SCTPLS) will hold its annual conference in Baltimore on August 4 – 6. Consider joining the conversation. It promises to be a whole carnival of learning! For more information, check out the conference website at: <http://www.societyforchaostheory.org/> . I look forward to seeing you there.

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