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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 NATURE OF THE NETWORK*

In 2003, when I founded the Human Systems Dynamics Institute, I imagined a full-scale laboratory for the study of self-organizing phenomena.

Before that, as a consultant I had helped clients influence the dynamics of employees, teams, leaders, departments, and stakeholder groups. As a teacher and facilitator, I had set conditions for emergent learning and action for groups from 2 to 200. The Institute was to be different in a number of ways. I would be leader for the long term, not just a one-time thing. The scope would be global and interdisciplinary. No external boundary would define who or what it was to be or who we were. The mission was to be at the center of my life's work. I conceived of the HSD Institute as a living, breathing experiment in self-organizing systems, and it has taught me priceless lessons.

**Change is certain—timing is not.** We've been just as surprised when things moved slowly as when they moved faster than we expected.

**The most important things may be the ones you don't hear about.** Many times we hear months later and in passing about events that have long-lasting implications for the growth and health of HSD and the HSD Institute.

**A door always opens.** Each disappointment or delayed opportunity has opened a new door for learning and growth. Perhaps it is just a self-fulfilling prophecy, but it has certainly been an effective one.

**A scale-free network requires more than 50 nodes.** In the summer of 2007, when the Network welcomed its 55<sup>th</sup> Associate, things shifted. Individuals rose to leadership in their own domains and established networks within networks—just like a scale-free network should.

**The poem is powerful in any translation.** My native tongue, based on Western philosophy and the physical sciences, shaped the early theory and practice of HSD. Each Associate has brought his or her own insights and perspectives to translate the HSD poem into a unique work of art and praxis.

**Each experience is a prerequisite to the next.** Bumble along as we might, each thing that happens to us or for us shapes our capacity for adaptive action in each of the situations to come.

**People want answers, but the future is in the questions.** I have been tempted to respond to questions with answers. Dogma can be so reassuring, at times. Each time I've succumbed, however, I've soon regretted it. Our ability to learn and adapt lies in our questions and the answers that emerge in a specific place and time.

**Every threat becomes an opportunity.** I have learned to recognize "dangerous ground." One questions basic assumptions; another voices disregard; yet another holds a bias or attachment to old ways of thinking. Initially, such challenges brought fear. Now, I see them as openings for new learning, shared action, and increasing clarity about who we are and what this work entails.

**Sometimes you just have to let go.** When I thought I had to do it all, I inadvertently thwarted others' enthusiasm. When I let go, others stepped into the spot, did the things that needed to be done, or decided they weren't so important after all.

**Different is often better.** One of the sheer joys of working with our 87 Associates is observing how each one takes HSD and makes it his or her own. The delight is magnified when Associates meet together to share their emerging learnings with each other. Their unique views inform a rich tapestry of shared theory and practice, so that . . .

**. . . We accelerate each others' learning.**

**HSD is same as and different from the past.** As the theory and practice of HSD have evolved, we have seen many new ways in which the work is old, and many ways in which it is radically new. This balance—old and new—makes it both reliable and innovative.

**Body, mind, and heart sing better together.** This was not an easy lesson for one who depended (depends?) on the rational, objective ways of knowing. My friends and colleagues continue to teach me the power of the myriad subjective and normative ways of knowing.

**Generosity is the greatest gift.** Associates share many things with each other and with the Institute: advice, tools, clients, money, time, laughs, books, questions. The list goes on and on, into things I can't even know.

The greatest gift, the one that promises a long and healthy life for this self-organizing system, is the generosity itself. We give to each other and receive from each other in sustainable individual and collective relationships.

**Coherence makes me cry.** This started as a joke in one of the HSDP courses. Someone labeled a box of tissues “First Aid for Coherence.” I have found over the years that it is true. When I see or hear some demonstration of self-organized coherence, I am touched, deeply touched. It is like the ringing of a bell or the smile of a child. The world converges into a moment of intense beauty. And I weep.

These five years have generated many lessons of shared inquiry and practice. They have also set the stage for many years and lessons to come. We’ve begun to think about the 10-day HSDP training as *initiation* rather than *certification*. When Associates complete the training, they join a life-long learning community—a full-scale laboratory for the study of self-organizing phenomena. If you want to learn more about this journey, please be in touch.

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