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*Every month **Attractors** shares tips and tools from human systems dynamics.
In this month's edition, Royce Holladay reflects on*

***SIMPLE RULES FOR YOUR
COMPLEX SYSTEM***

In last month's *Attractors*, Glenda talked about simple rules and their role in contributing to coherence across a human system. In this month's edition, we'll address how simple rules might work in your own organization.

Look around at patterns of behavior and interaction that happen in your organization everyday—those patterns that characterize the overall “feeling” or culture of your organization. Do people work in teams or are they individually competitive and isolationist? Do they provide excellent customer care or do they focus more on production and internal concerns? Are people formal with each other or are they more relaxed? These are examples of patterns that can emerge in systems, and they are dictated by a set of simple rules that inform individual and group decisions at all levels. Those rules may be unspoken and operate beneath the surface, or they may be articulated across the system so that everyone can use them to make coherent, focused decisions about their interactions and work.

How can you, as a leader, use simple rules to establish a culture to move your system toward the best fit in your environment? The following steps will help you map out a process for developing simple rules in your organization. Because simple rules have to be “owned” by everyone across the organization, engage as many people as possible. In large organizations, it might be wise to start with a smaller, representative group to draft a list of rules, then take them to the broader audience for feedback and refinement.

Step 1 – Establish the context by discussing the meaning and importance of simple rules. Use examples from family life, community life, and your organizational patterns. Describe effective simple rules.

Step 2 – Talk about the current patterns that exist in your system and identify the simple rules that generate those patterns.

Step 3 – Define the culture you want to have in your organization. Who are you and what do you value? What's important? How do you want to share information and interact with each other? Describe the patterns that you want to characterize your organization.

Step 4 – Brainstorm a list of simple rules that might generate patterns you would like to establish. Keep what is currently working and identify new simple rules that will move you

toward the culture you want. At this point don't worry about the form or number you generate. Just get all the ideas out on the table.

Step 5 – Refine the list by asking the following questions:

- Which of these are redundant and can be eliminated?
- Which of these are really subsets of others?
- Which of these will be done anyway? For instance, if people do show each other respect already, you don't need a simple rule to address that.
- Which of these are so specific that they become norms or instructions rather than simple rules?

Step 6 – Check the refined list to be sure they each adhere to the following "rules" about simple rules:

- Use the rules to amplify what you want to see.
- Keep rules to the "Minimum Specifications." (Remember that these should be generalizable to any area of the organization.)
- Keep the list short—5 to 7 rules would be the maximum number.
- Include at least 1 rule about each of the questions:
 - Who are we and what do we value?
 - What's important around here?
 - How do we want to share information and interact with each other?
- Start each rule with an action verb. (Give, Engage, Offer...)
- State them as positives (What you will do, rather than what you won't do.)
- Remember that simple rules are different from values – they tell you what to do, rather than what you value. Also simple rules are different from norms, as they are not tied to time or place.

Step 7 – Identify steps to implement the simple rules across the organization. Post them, talk about them, agree to what they mean to different activities, and incorporate them into feedback systems and policies. The most important step, however, is the use of the simple rules by leaders across the system. Simple rules are about behavior, and modeling those behaviors at the management level increases the chances that the simple rules will be used in all areas at all levels of the organization.

For your simple rules to be most effective, you need to take steps to assure that the simple rules you have chosen do, in fact, inform all activities, decisions, and interactions across the landscape of your organization.

For examples of how the simple rules are used to guide behavior in an organization, visit the HSD Institute website at <http://www.hsdinstitute.org/hsd-institute/evolution/simple-rules.html>. Share your own simple rules and how you are using them on the public HSD Community on NING <http://humansystemsdynamicsinstitute.ning.com/>. In the mean time, stay in touch and let us hear from you.

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