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Changing change management

What if we don't mind change but being changed? Goran Carstedt

In my last blog, I described a December 2022 social action research study of the Japan Society for Organizational Learning (SoL). The social action research study grew from a group Heidi Sparks Guber and I have been inviting to reflect on changing the internal structures of institutions so they conserve post WWII values, a call to action Global SoL founder Arie de Geus made at a SoL meeting in Paris in 2014.

I described Japan SoL members as forming a self-organizing social system, where people are free to come and go, are open, support each other, and celebrate their accomplishments. They have no hierarchy. It is the freedom in the relations of the SoL members that creates the self-organizing and it is the social network structure that constitutes the social system.

There are two other learnings from this social action research to reflect upon. First, there are three Japan SoL's *stewards* - Ms. Kaori Nakamura, Mr. Daisuke Tominaga, and Mr. Riichiro Oda. I've included the social system map and you can see how the collaborative relations connect the three stewards with everyone else in the Japan SoL network. The second learning comes from listening to the organizational coherences of freedom, support, and openness. The Japan SoL members have changed the internal structure found in most institutions and are in harmony with post WWII values. This is not trivial.

Aim

This brings me to the aim of this blog, which is to propose changing change management from a linear sequential hierarchical process to a social action research process conserving living and working well together by learning about the role of stewards and how they do what they do in conserving the relational dynamics of living and working well together.

History

The Society for Organizational Learning has a interesting history when it comes to change management. SoL's first publication of Reflections tells the transformation story - from Lewin's classic change management process of Unfreeze-Change-Refreeze to Humberto Maturana's transformation through conservation.

Let's begin with Humberto's presentation at the first annual SoL meeting in Amherst. His lecture was transcribed and published in the first Reflections journal [1].

In describing the fundamentals of our daily living, he explains how history occurs in the present.

“Everything that we do occurs now. Although we speak about the past and the future and live in the ideas of past and future, we exist in the present. We belong to a history that runs in a continuous changing present. Thus, history is something that happens in the present, so what we call *history* has to do with how we live in the present.

Two prevailing value streams for organizational consultants and researchers are 1) pathological, solving a organizational problems through behavior change and 2) theory of change management models [2]. Humberto had such charming allure. He illuminated a new path that focuses our reflections on *conservation*, not change.

Whenever we want to explain the origin of something, we make a computation according to the coherences of the present. We propose what happened such that this is so. We propose a history. And what is history? History is a process of transformation through conservation: History is a process of transformation based on what is being conserved. Noticing this is interesting because usually we do not pay attention to what is conserved, only to what changes.

Yes, Humberto was well known as a biologist and scientific philosopher but his experimentation, and its own unique history, required him to observe the behavior of animals with an emphasis on their development. What we conserve in our daily living becomes our own history that begins with our molecular autopoiesis and leads to our living in the ever changing present.

If you think about your personal history, you will discover that everything in your life has happened so that you are here, right where you are in this moment, reading this article. Everything—where you were born, who your parents and friends are, where you went to school, what language you speak—everything leads to this moment.

Our logic theory of organization change seldomly reveals how it feels to create a theory of change for the organization. Humberto taught us that, even when we are creating a logic model, framework and road map, we are doing so as emotional living systems fulfilling our preferences for living and working well.

Human history does not follow the path of resources or opportunities; rather, it follows the path of desires or, in more general terms, the path of emotions. In the history of living, every moment, every change, whether it resulted in survival or extinction, has arisen along a path of preferences.

All that Humberto taught, he taught with an invitation to reflect upon and validate his teaching in our own daily living. At that first SoL meeting in Amherst, he presented the notion that we live and work in a network of networks.

Whenever we identify a system of some kind, it is embedded in another system. If we think of ourselves as a system, we see that we are embedded in a community or a family or an organization in which we work. This system then is embedded in another system. That outcome does not mean that each system acts as a passive container for those inside it but that the smaller system is embedded in a flow of interactions and modulations between itself and the larger systems. The larger system determines what can and what cannot happen in the embedded system.” [1]

What Humberto’s lecture brought to me was a new way of thinking, reminding me of Carl Jung’s comments on satori.

“It is not that something different is seen, but that one sees differently. It is as though the spatial act of seeing were changed by a new dimension.” [3]

We do not have access to an independent reality.

Humberto replicated Roger Sperry’s research method for studying the visual nervous system of newts. Sperry replicated the research method of zoologist Matthey who first discovered that he could surgically sever the optical nerve of the newt and that nerve would regenerate itself, even down to the same bundles of nerve fibers. In his own research, Sperry surgically detached the eye of the newt, rotated it 180 degrees and allowed it to heal in the new position. Observing the newt’s post-operative behavior, Sperry discovered that when presented with prey, the newt would throw its tongue in the opposite direction of its prey. If this surgery was not corrected and the newt’s eyes placed back in its original orientation the newt would starve [4].

Humberto studied the visual nervous system of newts, frogs [5], octopus [6], and pigeons [7]. Through the history of his research studies Humberto discovered that we see a unique world - as unique as the structure of our own nervous system. Humberto’s discovery that we do not have access to an independent reality opens a new psychic space for us to explore. No longer do the fundamentals of logic theory and mathematics obstruct our vision as we begin to discover the nature of our human social nature. We live our own history conserving living and working well together and worry less about change. We begin to hear coherences as recursive regularities from reflective practices such as satori, or in my case, social action research.

Change management as a linear social control.

The American Society for Quality describes the implementation of change management in six steps.

1. Define the change.
2. Select the change management team.
3. Identify management sponsorship and secure commitment.
4. Develop implementation plan including metrics.
5. Implement the change—in stages, if possible.
6. Collect and analyze data.
7. Quantify gaps and understand resistance.
8. Modify the plan as needed and loop back to the implementation step.

What is organizational culture?

The Society for Human Resource Management regards organizational culture as a nebulous concept and despite extensive academic descriptions, culture remains undefined. If this is so, we cannot understand how the practice of change management impacts the culture of an organization from the perspective of human resource management.

The etymology of culture comes from the latin word *cultura* – to cultivate or care for.

Humberto has described culture as a network of conversations interlacing our emotions and language. Organizational culture then is a network of conversations that coordinate our collective actions in a manner that conserves the network of conversations that cares for the organization's growth.

Organization and development

Humberto described systems as consisting of component parts (in social systems this refers to people), and organization or the relations amongst the component parts (in social systems this refers to dynamic relationships connecting two or more people). In my social action research of Japan SoL I used social network mapping to understand the structure of the social system and open-ended interviews to understand the relations connecting Japan SoL members.

At SoL's first annual meeting, Humberto described ontogenesis as a process of development in living systems and history a process of transformation through conservation. From this living systems perspective organizational development is a network of conversations that care for the development of relations in the social system.

Institutional cultures consist of networks of conversations within which a variety of networks of conversations are embedded. Organizational culture then arises in networks of networks of

social systems that care for the wellbeing of all those in the organization's development by conserving how we live and work well together.

Understanding stewardship using social action research

A social system is a human network where everyone in the network sees everyone else in the network as someone who is free to live their preferences for living and working well together. Social system structure can be understood by asking each person in the network to list all those they collaborate with in living and working well together. Social network mapping is not the same as social network analysis. First because its quality criteria is validity, whereby everyone in the network claim the network is a valid abstraction of their daily living. Second, analysis is defined as a detailed examination of the structure's components using analysis to deconstruct the system. Social network mapping is used to understand the whole systems structure and our network of networks.



As Humberto points out one cannot know a system by studying its structure or parts, but only by studying the relations between the parts. A steward is one who through their actions care for the social system that spontaneously forms connecting their network of networks and this stewardship can be understood by studying the relations within the social system by listening to each person in the system and observing the coherences, or regularities arising from the listening. Historically, qualitative research methods such as naturalistic inquiry [8] and grounded theory [9] have been practiced in the development of social action research [10].



Social action research begins with an invitation to others to participate in social action research to understand *how we do what we do when we are living and working well together*. Once the invitation is accepted this is the open-ended question asked of each person in an interview like setting. Once the interviews are complete, everyone is asked *with whom they collaborate with in living and working well together*.

The social action research findings including the social network map and the coherences from the interviews are presented to those who participated and those they have invited to learn with them.

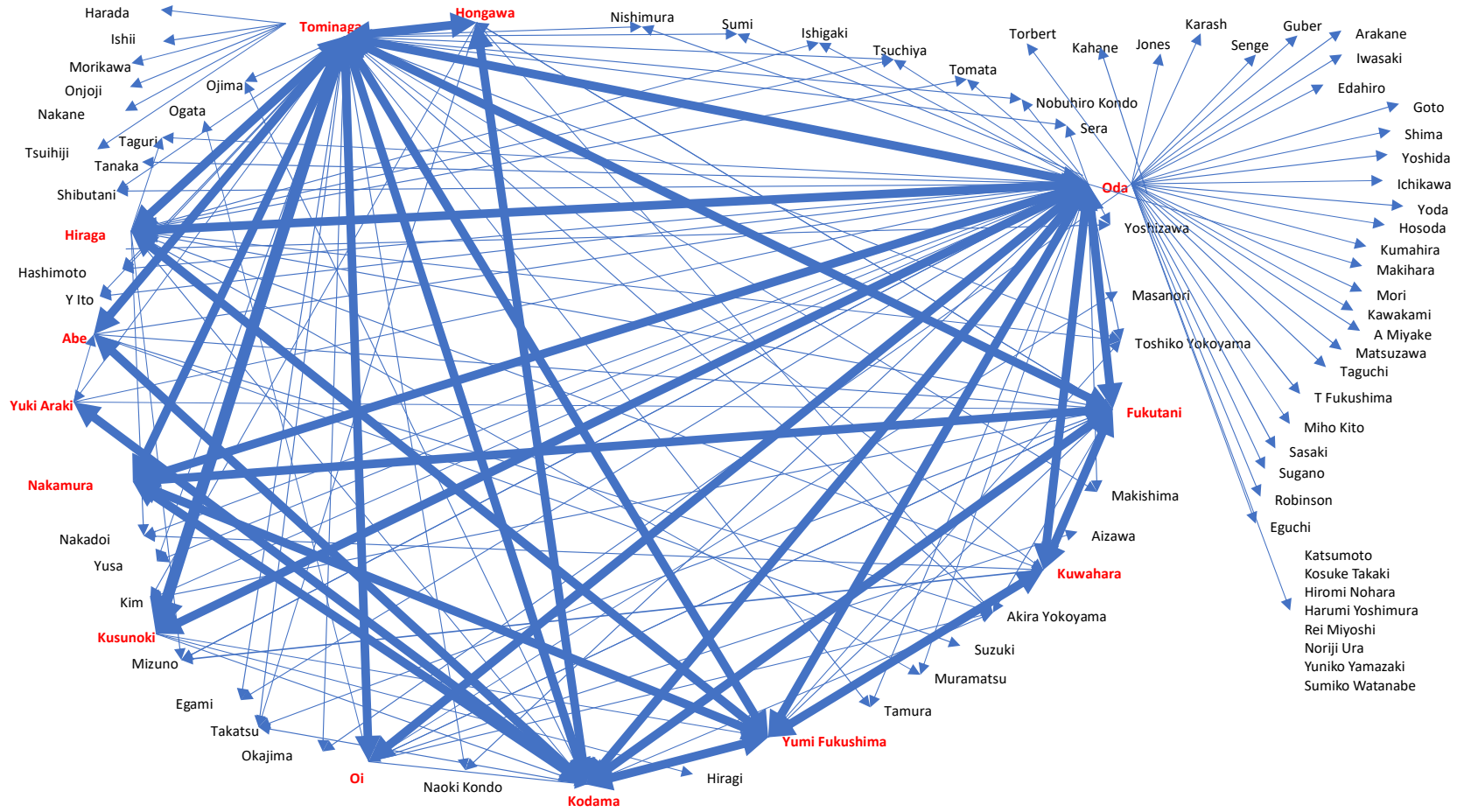


In the social action research findings, we discover how stewards care for the social system they interact with and learn the nature of our human nature arising from our individual and collective preferences to live and work well together.

Because the purpose of social action research is to learn about how we do what we do when we are living and working well together, it improves group productivity and social health. It feels good, because one preference we all share is to be understood, and when we are recognized for creating value at work, we feel rewarded, happy, and cared for. It is these and other feelings from social action research that improve our individual and collective productivity.

Nowadays, we see change masters leading change makers using theory of change models, frameworks, road maps and tools. Stewardship, as envisioned by the designers of Global SoL, and practiced by Japan SoL members, conserves our human nature and our preferences for living and working well together in networks of networks that intertwine our collective coordination of actions with our desires to collaborate, be free, and care for each other in a culture that is open to others to join. Using social action research to study and understand how we do what we do when we are living and working well together, we can learn from our stewards and collaborate in a history of transformation that harmonizes our institutional systems and post WWII values and that high performance arises from the conservation and expansion of wellbeing in the social system .

Structure 2022



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