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Flow beyond Systems: Development through Somatic Intelligence

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COS is the first journal to be dedicated to the rapidly growing requirements of reflective hybrids in our complex 21st-century organisations and society. Its international and multidisciplinary approaches balance theory and practice and show a wide range of perspectives in and between organisations and society. Being global and diverse in thinking and acting outside the box are the targets for its authors and readers in management, consulting and science.

Michael Sonntag

Flow with Purpose. The Foundation and Principles of a New Evolutionary Paradigm

Based on the theory of living systems and the GAAIB case – prototyping towards a new paradigm in health care

Abstract

The aim of this article is nothing less than to close the gap between creating a maximum of value and wealth while building a sustainably vital, "healthy" and resilient economic system. Using the case of a self-owned and radically self-organizing group, running the anesthesiology and the intensive care of a medical clinic in Switzerland, we will take a look at how this goal can be achieved within a highly unpredictable environment. Learning from natural science we will then see how living systems manage to proactively cope with the given natural reality (unpredictability, interdependency, limited resources, emergence and dynamical disequilibrium) while following a very clear and distinctive purpose: to direct all free energy into the sustainable creation of shared value. Contrasting the still dominant traditional mechanistic paradigm, I am calling this framework, which is based on the science of living systems, the "Evolutionary Paradigm". Evolutionary systems operate with a small set of five generic principles – the operational fractal of any sustainably vital, living organism. This provides a comprehensive theory and practice, enabling us to move together into a truly sustainable, and at the same time, highly performing and purposeful future. An in-depth understanding of the principles of evolutionary systems will give us the authority to make the necessary management, economic and political decisions on strategic and leadership levels which must urgently be taken in our world.

1 Introduction

Many thought leaders have stated that the traditional understanding of management is doomed and that we need a radical new way of understanding and organizing our enterprises. Many attempts have since been made to emphasize the need to "work from the future backwards" (Hamel 2012) and many books had been written about agile and dynamic (Bogsnes 2016; Hope 2003, 2011, 2012; Röösli 2015), or teal management models (Laloux 2014), radical management (Denning 2010), Management 3.0 (Appelo 2011), and attempts towards innovation fostering leadership (Christensen 2003, Navi 2016, Schein 2017).

These new insights and methods are important and helpful approaches, most of them aiming towards a more adaptable and dynamic understanding of management. To my personal understanding, lacking of a comprehensive understanding and scientific framework of open, constantly flowing, highly creative, living – "evolutionary" – systems, they are incomplete and might be in danger to fail.

2 The Natural Reality Confronting Us

Our current economic and management teaching, as well as our consulting practices, are still based on principles established by Frederic W. Taylors' "The Principles of Scientific Management", published in 1911. The scientific assumption behind this approach is the conviction that analyzing every single process in detail allows us to gain control over all processes. Extrapolating to a linear "if-then" algorithm would then even enable us to predict and manipulate the future. This traditional, mechanistic, reductionist and uncertainty-neglecting mindset is deeply embedded in Western culture. We built our scientific systems, our economic theories, our management models, our culture, our pedagogical approach, and our social and political systems on this assumption. This has proven to be fatal; not only has the reduction of

our natural environment to virtually closed systems given us only minimal additional insight; even worse, we know today that every statement we make within a virtually closed system is fundamentally wrong!

Our everyday experience, as well as modern science, teaches us that our natural environment or "natural reality" is built on five fundamental features (for greater detail see Grandpierre 2013 & 2014, Haken 2006, Novak 2006, Panksepp 2012, Röösli 2015, Sabelli 2012, Sonntag 2017, Vannini 2006):

Unpredictability
In living systems, elements interact with one another in non-linear, non-deterministic, non-trivial ways.

Interdependency
In living systems, all elements and processes are interdependent, continuously adapting to each other.

Limited resources
In living systems, the energy available is limited.

Emergence
In living systems, all systems interact actively, undergoing order transformations, while radically new constellations and dynamics emerge.

Dynamical disequilibrium
Living systems search for dynamical disequilibrium, with a minimum of stability within a maximum of instability.

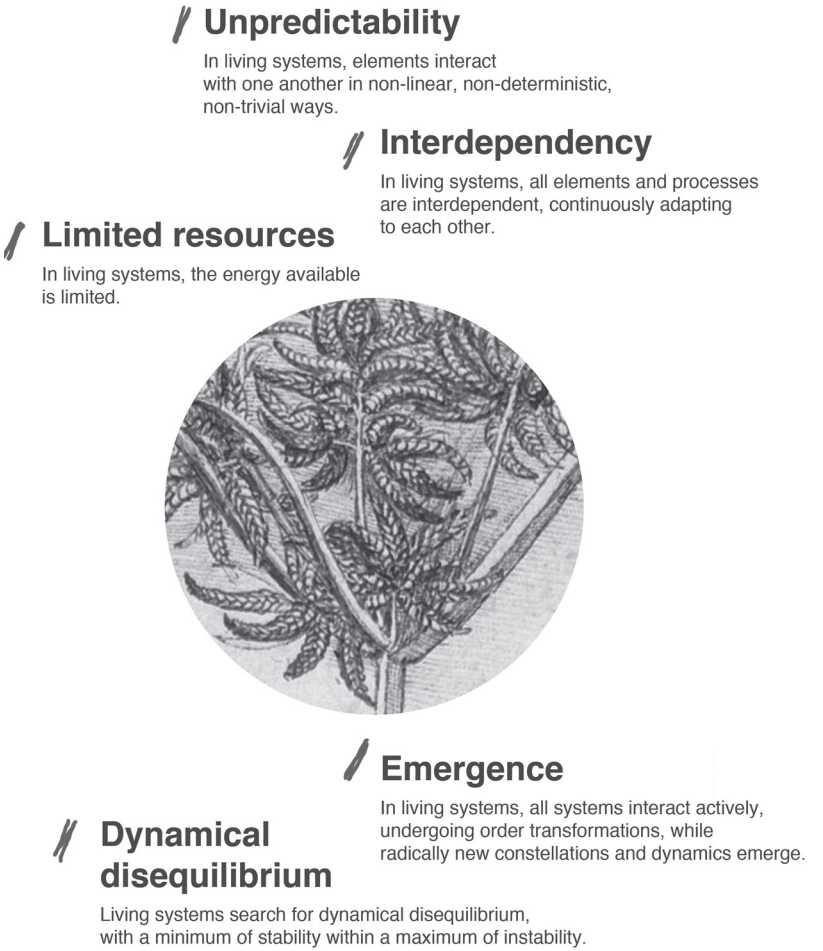

Figure 1: The characteristics of our natural reality

When faced with this given natural reality while still being trapped in the traditional mindset, we normally develop a subtle sense of panic: if everything is unpredictable and if there is nothing that can be controlled, what shall we do? Will we become completely helpless and lose all our power? If everything is interdependent, will we go insane trying to manage all processes? Will we be forced to redefine all our scientific, economic, management, leadership and political theories? The answer is: yes, we will have to redefine all our theories; and: no, we will not become helpless nor go insane and we will not have to adopt fatalistic behavior.

Before learning HOW living systems manage to cope with the given natural reality, we must understand which general laws they follow.

First, let us take a look at a practical case, from which we can see how an organization that was created on strong 'gut feelings' and a courageous entrepreneurial mindset manages to cope highly efficiently with the given natural reality within a hospital setting.

CASE
Prototyping towards a new paradigm in health care

In November 2015, about half a year after I began working as an independent medical doctor and counseling psychiatrist at the Klinik Beau-Site in Bern, I was asked by the anesthesiologist and intensive care colleagues to join them at their upcoming annual team meeting. They felt that they would need some support to bolster their conceptual coherence. Knowing that I was engaged in developing and supporting modern management models, they felt that I could help them, especially the newer team members, in deepening their awareness and understanding of the uniqueness and coherence of their way of working.

The following case is based on my daily experience in working together with the GAAIB team (Gesellschaft der Ärzte für Anästhesiologie und

Intensivmedizin der Klinik Beau-Site, Bern) in the ICU and interviews with Dr. Roland Knöpfli, one of the founders of the GAAIB Association 26 years ago, who still works there. It is also based on my personal experience as a medical doctor working in the Klinik Beau-Site.

History

In 1991, a group of three anesthesiologists and five nurses decided to start a radical new way of providing anesthesiologists services for the Klinik Beau-Site in Bern. They felt that breaking out of the traditional management structures and organizing themselves radically differently would not only allow them to work more efficiently and with higher medical quality and thereby give them greater job satisfaction, but would also allow them to grow financial profit for themselves and the clinic's owners. Collectively organized, they agreed with the owners of the clinic to run the operating rooms and the intensive care unit as a self-organized and self-owned group (GAAIB). The revenues would be shared equally between the medical doctors once costs were paid, including the nurses' salaries. They would organize themselves without a hierarchy, with the sole purpose of providing the best possible medical service to patients in the most efficient way. They would assume full responsibility for the medical treatment and the patients' experience within the value chain, in cooperation with the surgeons and the other treating doctors. Since then, the group has grown to a team of 12 anesthesiologists and 15 nurses, running a 12-bed intensive care unit (the second largest in the region of Bern after the University Hospital), five operating rooms, an anesthetic recovery room and an intermediate care unit, each with five beds, providing services for the clinic's emergency unit and the acute service for the meanwhile 111-bed hospital – while still maintaining their principles of financial and decision-making autonomy, self-organization and collective ownership: this, despite having gone through major changes in the framework conditions (insurance models, four directors, three different owners)

and huge shifts in the hospital's specialization from orthopedics and gynecology to urology and neurosurgery to now major abdominal, vascular and heart surgery. In an internal Hirslanden survey, they were recently rated as the most efficient and profitable anesthesiology team within the Hirslanden Group, which owns 17 private clinics in Switzerland. Since then, interest has grown among the hospital's owners to understand the GAAIB's model and to perhaps spread it to other Hirslanden Clinics.

Handling unpredictability with great efficiency

Medical professionals are generally confronted with constantly changing and unpredictable situations – each patient is different and his or her health situation can change rapidly. This of course is especially the case in anesthesiology and intensive care medicine: you must be able to immediately adapt to changing medical conditions including the ability to change your entire planned schedule for the day. While planning in the GAAIB is done a day in advance by the anesthesiologist on duty, plans will be adapted quickly if necessary. Each of the GAAIB team members, the nurses as well as the medical doctors, are fully autonomous when it comes to choosing whatever measures need to be taken, including having the freedom to directly mobilize any necessary medical or staff resources. Working in consistent, small groups in direct contact with the other treating medical doctors, not having any hierarchies or formal departments, organizing themselves as a dynamic, continuously changing network around the patients' needs, makes them extremely quick and cost-efficient, while assuring that the maximum treatment quality is the only relevant decisive focus. However, it is not only about organizing themselves differently: for the GAAIB team, it includes a strong emphasis on establishing trust and an individual emotional relationship with the patients, within the team and with the co-treating surgeons and other medical doctors. They see this as the most important factor for reducing stress among patients and within the treatment environment and for

providing long-term, high quality. This entails complete, personal and team "end-to-end" responsibility, which basically cannot be delegated or passed over to the next shift. This requires, provides and enhances high personal emotional engagement and commitment.

Multi-professional teams and the flow of complex information

The constant and rapid flow of complex information concerning patient treatment is provided within a small, highly interacting, multi-professional team that meets physically. All relevant information is transmitted actively through the greatest possible personal contact with a minimum of formalized or digitalized procedures. There are no formal meeting rooms in the Klinik Beau-Site. Communication occurs in a small office just opposite the (even smaller) dressing room, but most frequently simply in doorways. Although being highly adaptable, during the hospitalization the treating team strives to remain as consistent as possible while adapting to the patient's changing medical, psychological and social needs.

Part of a coherent system

The success of the GAAIB's business and management model strongly depends on the optimal conditions provided within the Klinik Beau-Site: the clinic's structure is based on an organically grown, self-organizing culture with high self-confidence. Nearly all the medical doctors are self-employed, fully autonomous, independent and organized as a network with no hierarchical structures. All decisions and actions follow the common purpose of sustainably creating maximum value for patients and other stakeholders in the most efficient way while building on long-lasting patient / customer relationships, which is seen as the main driver for growing profit. The inner coherence is built through constant and growing awareness of the principles

upon which the working method depends. Because this functions so radically differently than any traditional management and working environment, the relentless aim to strengthen the model and to constantly defend it against attempts to squeeze the GAAIB model into traditional management systems is an ongoing and often very energy-consuming struggle.

Outcome

When talking with the members of the GAAIB, it becomes clear that they consistently see the advantages of the self-organizational principles with high autonomy and full personal, end-to-end responsibility as the important driver for their work enjoyment and satisfaction, as well as for the sustainable high performance of the Klinik Beau-Site as a whole. They appreciate and are proud to be able to quickly adapt to changing medical developments without having to follow complicated budgeting processes – they simply decide and implement whenever it is necessary. This also enables them to stay technically ahead of many colleagues who are working within traditional management structures. The teams, including the nurses, have remained constant over many years and they have absolutely no problem in recruiting highly qualified and motivated members, while patient satisfaction is consistently rated as exceptional. No one would ever be willing to go back into a traditionally managed hospital. The GAAIB's model now is recognized by the clinic's owners as a very powerful and economically attractive system, which could make it the starting point for growth into a new area.

3 Flow with Purpose – Learning from Quantum Physics and Natural Science

Interestingly, the first attempts to rethink the current scientific assumptions arose from physics. The traditional assumption and paradigm was that all

details of physical processes are determined within a given physical condition. In quantum physics, it was discovered that within each action lies a variable principle that continuously adjusts and changes trajectories towards a final configuration. This "least action principle" is viewed as the quantum revolution and provides the scientific basis of a non-deterministic type of spontaneity existing in the physical world (Grandpierre et al 2014). It introduces a fundamental uncertainty to the scientific world.

According to Grandpierre and Kafatos, living systems use all their "biologically governable form of energy" or "free energy" to increase the organism's capacity to do "biologically useful work": in living systems, the energy always flows towards a common purpose! Grandpierre and Kafatos call this the "greatest action principle" in biology and define it as the "first principle" of natural science (Grandpierre et al 2013). This brings goal-orientation and purpose back into natural science, from which they were exiled for the last four centuries. Today we see that this flow of the energy into purposeful action occurs not only in biological systems, but also in chemical processes or even in astrophysics, for example (Sabelli 2012, Vannini 2006).

We also see that living systems proactively and creatively influence their environment with the aim of performing their "biologically useful work" in the energetically most efficient way. This means that living systems are not merely passive adaptive systems; they are highly creative, "evolutionary systems" pursuing the aim of co-creating a maximum of shared value in the most energy efficient manner, while optimizing their own evolutionary capacity through continuously generating diversity, novelty and complexity (Sabelli 2012, Sonntag 2017).

In summary, we can state that in *healthy living systems every action flows towards the purpose of actively contributing to an evolutionary process, sustainably co-creating shared value for all involved stakeholders with the minimum energy invested, while reaching an optimal evolvability through continuously generating diversity, novelty and complexity.*

This is what I call the 1st Law of Evolutionary Systems.

The ultimate purpose is to enhance and govern all free energy in the system to maximize its capacity to co-create shared value for all involved stakeholders by: **1. Organizing all functional activities towards serving this purpose in the most energy efficient way;** **2. Expanding its potential to transform itself and its environment while reaching an optimal evolvability through continuously generating diversity, novelty and complexity.**

Table 2: The 1st Law of Evolutionary Systems

Depending on your set focus, "all involved stakeholders" includes local, co-local and sometimes global economic and ecosystems with their social, cultural and governance issues and, of course, local, co-local and global partners and customers.

4 Coping with Natural Reality – the Operating Principles of Evolutionary Systems

After having understood that in living systems all actions follow a distinct purpose, we now want to see HOW they manage to achieve this purpose within the given natural reality described above.

Studying living systems and learning how they manage to proactively and creatively cope with the given natural reality enables us to design a set of five operational principles. These five principles are essential, irreducible conditions "sine qua non", meaning that they are all interrelated and one cannot

be implemented without the others. That is why I call them "generic principles". They define the operational fractal of any vital, healthy evolutionary system (for greater detail, see Sonntag 2017).

Natural reality	Generic principles
Unpredictability	Self-organization
Interdependency	Connectivity
Limited resources	Co-location
Emergence	Co-creativity
Dynamic disequilibrium	Coherence

Table 3: The generic principles of living systems

Some of the designed generic principles are already being discussed and applied on organizational and economic levels, but mostly in a limited and incremental manner, not providing a deeply understood, coherent management or economic model. Well-developed examples on a business level include the Swedish Handelsbanken, Morning Star, W.L. Gore, Semco Partners, Valve Software, Buurtzorg or Gangplank (www.whatisgangplank) and the GAAIB case described here. Further good examples and an international network of companies starting implementing these principles can be found at BBRT.org.

5 Strategic Decision and Leadership First - Governing towards Sustainable High Performance

It is important to understand that the defined new operating system based on the five generic principles is purely on a technical, operational and process level. Understanding the "greatest action principle", we know that healthy living systems always follow a very clear und unbiased purpose: to govern

all free energy in the system towards maximizing its capacity to co-create shared value for all involved stakeholders. Simply implementing a new operating system on a technical and management level does not suffice to make it sustainably vibrant and healthy. This is the case on an organizational and, even more so, on an economic level.

As we have learned from the GAAIB case, all decisions and actions follow the purpose of creating the best possible medical quality in the most efficient way by:

- working on radical self-organizational principles, having the personal autonomy to make any decision, while assuming full personal end-to-end responsibility;
- actively sharing complex information and striving for the greatest possible physical contact;
- organizing in flexible network structures;
- building on strong, long-lasting emotional relationships, and
- constantly being aware of the necessary coherence within the system.

The GAAIB team not only applies the five generic principles on a daily operational basis, but maintains a clear focus on and awareness of the overall purpose. This enables them to give themselves the needed strategic and leadership boundaries to channel all "free energy" towards the sustainable co-creation of shared value.

Learning form nature, we know that living systems operating on "the edge of chaos" are extremely dependent on the boundaries created (Haken 2006). This makes the organizational culture extremely important: in evolutionary systems the organizational culture is THE governing system! This applies even more on the strategic and investors level: The strategic, investors' and leadership's task is to create the right conditions and culture for the core

process: autonomous, self-organizing, sustainable value creation together with all involved stakeholders.

Therefore, to follow the 1st Law of an Evolutionary Systems, the five generic principles need to be framed into two governing principles:

1. Strategy
The unbiased decision to govern all free energy in the system to increase its capacity of evolutionary cooperation while sustainably co-creating shared value for all stakeholders.
2. Leadership
The ability and willingness to proactively, co-responsibly and continuously build the right conditions within which the co-creation of shared value is enabled and enhanced.

Table 4: The governing principles of evolutionary systems

Only when the generic principles are embedded in the two governing principles will there be not only a well-functioning living system, but a sustainably flourishing, self-reinforcing, resilient and even self-healing and, at the same time, highly performing evolutionary economic system. The five generic principles together with the governing principles of evolutionary systems provide a radical new and comprehensive framework and paradigm – the "Evolutionary Paradigm". The Evolutionary Paradigm is established on the natural science of living systems. It leaves far behind the old gap between creating shared value and wealth on one hand, and sustainable development on the other, which was virtually created by the traditional, mechanic and reductionist assumptions.

6 Conclusion

When the GAAIB began their journey in 1991, they had a very strong gut feeling and were fortunate that the hospital's owners at that time were willing to take the entrepreneurial risk of trying a new system. They took advantage of the given window of opportunity. In living systems, these windows of opportunity open spontaneously once in a while. Even more importantly, living systems proactively and creatively influence their environment to grow their evolutionary capacity – windows of opportunity are actively created!

To do this, we need to have a deep understanding and awareness of the Evolutionary Paradigm – only then will we have the knowledge and authority to take the necessary courageous and often brutal strategic decisions to transform our current management and economic system.

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The future is an unknown garment that invites us to weave our lives into it. How these garments will fit, cover, colour, connect and suit us lies in our (collective) hands. Many garments from the past have become too tight, too grey, too something…and the call for new shapes and textures is acknowledged by many. Yet changing clothes leaves one naked, half dressed in between. Let's connect in this creative, vulnerable space and cut, weave and stitch together.

Our target group is reflective hybrids – leaders, scientists, consultants, and researchers from all over the world who dare to be and act complex. Multilayered topics require multidimensional approaches that are, on the one hand, interdisciplinary and, on the other hand, linked to theory and practice, making the various truths and perspectives mutually useful.

If you feel you are a reflective hybrid you are very welcome to join our COS movement, for instance by:

- Visiting our website: www.cos-collective.com
- Getting in touch with COS-Creations. A space for personal & collective development, transformation and learning. Visit our website: www.cos-collective.com
- Following our COS-Conference online: www.cos-collective.com
- Subscribing to our newsletter: see www.cos-collective.com
- Subscribing to the COS Journal: see www.cos-collective.com
- Ordering single articles from the COS Journal: www.cos-collective.com
- Becoming a member of our LinkedIn group: go to www.linkedin.com and type in "Challenging Organisations and Society.reflective hybrids" or contact Tonnie van der Zouwen: office@cos-collective.com

SAVE THE DATE
4th COS Conference
19. – 21. September 2019
in Venice, Italy

The Journal with Impact

The Journal "Challenging Organisations and Society . reflective hybrids® (COS)" is the first journal to be dedicated to the rapidly growing requirements of reflective hybrids in our complex 21st-century organisations and society. Its international and multidisciplinary approaches balance theory and practice and show a wide range of perspectives in and between organisations and society.
Being global and diverse in thinking and acting outside the box are the targets for its authors and readers in management, consulting and science.

www.cos-collective.com
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