

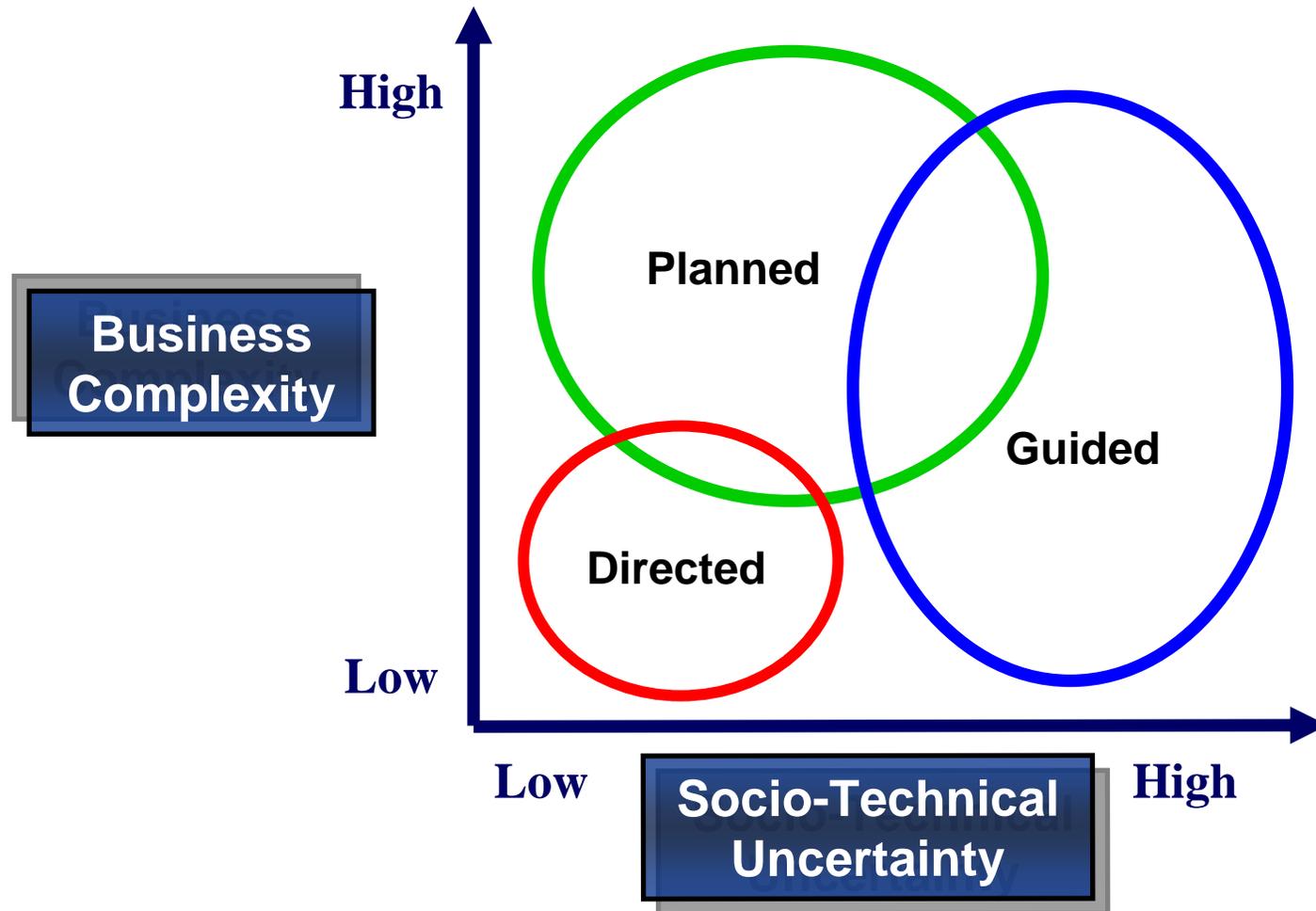
Building Organizational Change Capacity in Self-organizing Systems: A Classroom Exercise

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Goals

- ↳ Challenge students to operate in a self-organizing system
- ↳ Create opportunity for students to experience guided changing
- ↳ Provide opportunity for class to take ownership of an organizational (classroom-based) change
- ↳ Analyze ways to build greater change capacity

Conceptualizing Change Processes



Process

- ↳ Create an open-ended assignment with only a vague/general sense of the desired direction/anticipated outcome
- ↳ Provide 30 – 45 minutes of “leaderless” time to complete the assignment
- ↳ Inform class that they are to use this time to complete the task, to be shared with the instructor when he/she comes to class
- ↳ No further direction is provided

Assignment

**E-mail sent out afternoon of evening class (5:00)
& posted on classroom door:**

“I won’t arrive in class tonight until roughly 5:45 pm. Please begin class on time – and use the time until I arrive to develop a set of guidelines that will be shared with MG645 guest speakers to (1) facilitate their preparation for the class and (2) maximize the opportunity for transforming exchanges. Let’s plan to review the guidelines when I arrive in class. See you at 5:45.”

Process ~ 2

- When the instructor enters the classroom, discussion focuses initially on the guidelines the students developed (task outcome)
- Discussion gradually shifts to the *process* through which the guidelines were developed.
- Debriefing focus should be placed on the *change context* (e.g., ambiguity, role of leadership) and how *change capacity* (willingness and ability of organizational members to assume responsibility for the change, creation of a supportive infrastructure, sufficient resources appropriate for the change) for such self-organized change can be developed.
- Caution: Since some degree of deception is involved, it is important to carefully debrief the exercise.

Illustrative Results

GUIDELINES FOR GUEST SPEAKERS

PREPARATION FOR CLASS

1. Peruse syllabus and Kerber/Buono article on types of change
2. Provide speaker with access to Blackboard site to look through course materials and discussion boards to provide him/her with context
3. Give speaker key questions to incorporate into presentation
4. Identify case(s) or frameworks relevant to speaker and have them focus on those topics
5. Encourage speakers to share their own change experiences: what worked, what didn't work, what they might have done differently

MAXIMIZE TRANSFORMING EXCHANGES

6. Actively engage the class (e.g., ask about our personal experiences with the topic, ask us about our expectations prior to beginning presentation, bring food)
7. Provide email address to allow us to ask follow-up questions

Debriefing

What happened?

- ↪ A student was “volunteered” to facilitate the discussion by a few people just before class started and as most students were arriving.
 - He accepted the nomination somewhat reluctantly.
 - No one objected.
- ↪ After most of the students had arrived, another read the email describing the task.
- ↪ Students “brainstormed” ideas, although the classic rules of brainstorming were not followed. Ideas were evaluated as they were expressed.
- ↪ The Discussion Facilitator was described as a “participant facilitator” – but he was also critiqued as being opinionated, exercising his own judgment in capturing ideas on the blackboard.

Debriefing ~ 2

- ↪ Once ideas from the group were exhausted, the list on the blackboard was re-evaluated and the listed ideas were clarified.
 - People relied on their past experiences with other guest speakers and on other courses as the basis for generating ideas.
 - The Discussion Facilitator captured ideas on the blackboard that appeared to gain consensus from the group – not all ideas were captured.
- ↪ The “brainstorming” process was done twice, once for Point 1 in the assignment and once for Point 2
- ↪ Another student captured the list on a PowerPoint slide and uploaded it to the course Digital Drop Box (Blackboard Site).

Debriefing ~ 3

How would you describe what happened?

- Free-flowing
- Comfortable
- Casual
- Constructive
- Open
- Unleashed
- Honest
- Cooperative
- Collaborative
- Funny
- Scattered
- Random
- Effective
- Surprising
- Purposeful
- Voluntary
- Unstructured
- Non-discriminatory
- Not afraid to disagree
- Accepting
- Participative
- Even playing field – everyone had the same knowledge about the topic
- Laid back

Debriefing ~ 4

How effective was the class in accomplishing the task?

<u>Rating</u>	<u># of Students (30)</u>
Highly Effective 10	9
9	5
8	5
7	4
6	
5	2
4	
3	
2	
Highly Ineffective 1	1
(No Shows)	4

Debriefing ~ 5

LEARNINGS/REFLECTIONS

- ⇒ If you change the container of the self-organizing system (e.g., no authority figure), then you change the nature of the exchanges (e.g., less centralized, less interaction going through the leader).
- ⇒ The system needed a leader, albeit one who was informal and engaging.
- ⇒ The system took on a personality of its own, influenced by the personality of the leader.
- ⇒ A self-organizing system is a breeding ground for leaders, who may be self-appointed or promoted by group members.
- ⇒ There was very little judgment in the self-organizing system; there was openness to people's contributions.

Debriefing ~ 6

LEARNINGS/REFLECTIONS (2)

- ⇒ Participants self-censored less in the self-organizing system – there were more “true” opinions expressed.
- ⇒ Some people participated differently than when the course instructor was present. Some people, who participated a lot when the instructor was present, participated less when the group self-organized. Some people, who did not participate a lot when the instructor was present, participated more when the group self-organized.
- ⇒ Everyone was engaged in the process, even if they did not speak, though the entire class wasn't as engaged as they should be.
- ⇒ Interaction in the self-organizing system was more collective rather than occurring through the leader...**BUT** ... Leaders still have a disproportionate effect on the system.

Debriefing ~ 7

LEARNINGS/REFLECTIONS:

Preparing people to participate in a self-organizing system

- ⇒ In general, create an environment where everyone's ideas are valued.
- ⇒ Create an environment that constantly engages and involves people so that they are familiar with involvement, exchanges, and collaboration – in other words, allow people to practice collaboration.
- ⇒ Provide some direction, some starting point, and some common experience with the topic or task at hand.
- ⇒ Create a diverse environment in which people become familiar dealing with differences.
- ⇒ Build relationships among the people in the system, i.e., help people get to know each other better.

Debriefing ~ 8

LEARNINGS/REFLECTIONS:

Preparing people to participate in a self-organizing system (2)

- ⇒ Select a meaningful task from the perspective of the people in the system.
- ⇒ Educate people about the value of collaboration and self-organization.
- ⇒ Familiarize people with the physical (e.g., available tools such as computer, chalk board) and interpersonal environment in which the self-organization will happen.
- ⇒ Make sure that people are able to communicate with each other (e.g., common language, common understanding)