

## **A brief overview of Organisational Constellations**

*"No problem can be solved from the same consciousness that created it"*

*Albert Einstein*

### **Hidden resistance to change**

It is clear that most change initiatives in the field of personal and organisational development provide temporary improvements in situations, but the underlying dynamics of the organisation remain the same.

There are underlying patterns of behaviour and thinking, as well as circumstantial and contextual issues, which reduce the agility of an organisation to change and which consume considerable effort and energy that could be better used to innovate or transform.

Organisations have an immense amount of energy, but potentially could release a lot more. They are often caught in knotted patterns or "entanglements" that prevent the healthy flow of a collective energy. Despite years of conventional interventions, the sum of the collective is not always more than the sum of its individual parts. There are usually pockets of excellence, individual heroes and moments of peak performance, but usually there is a collective sub-optimal performance.

### **A new way of seeing organisations**

Adopting a view of organisations as a system of relationships, Organisational Constellations provide the means to ensure that the performance of one aspect of the system (be it a particular person, department or function) is not maximised at the expense of others. Nor does it move the problem from one part of the system to another in the guise of making progress. Radical and sustainable transformation means re-constructing organisations in a way that makes it easier to deal with the contradictions, opposites and multiple systems of thinking which organisations face in today's economic and political environment.

Constellating is an approach to whole systems working which looks at the issues and dynamics of an organisation (or other systems such as a family or community) using people as live representatives to provide feedback on the system. Importantly, it looks at and works with the consequences and hidden loyalties from the past as well as revealing the dynamics in the present. By addressing current situations, it can also work with the future and point to resolving energies, as well as bringing insights about the deep underlying, difficult issues that are holding a team or organisation back.

### **Insight: kick-starting the transformation process**

A key principle when working with organisational transformation and innovation is that original beginnings lead to original results. Constellations provides such a beginning by providing fresh insights that can help point the way to the resolution of a burning issue.

*Working with issues* - the issue is held by the client. They are often an executive within an organisation, or someone who has the power and authority to take action. Typical organisational issues might be difficult team dynamics, clarity of roles within a strategic partnership, the redesign of a business process, the strength of organisational purpose, the place of values or the relationship of the organisation to its clients/ customers/ community.

*Mapping the present* - a constellation is set up using people to represent specific elements of the system whether they are people, parts of the organisation or concepts. The arrangement, called a constellation, enables the client to externalise three dimensionally the inner image they have of their present system. Using feedback from the representatives the relationships between the elements and the underlying dynamics that are shaping a system, are revealed stripped of the details and points of view that lead to opinions and judgements...and lack of clarity.

*Testing hypotheses* - the representatives in the constellated system are helped to change their positions and voice what they are sensing and feeling. The constellator interprets this information using it to test hypotheses about what is causing the strains, who or what seems to be holding tensions for the system or appears weighted down inappropriately and where the hidden energies for change are.

To draw on a more familiar experience, a constellation is rather like using a computer spreadsheet, where it is possible to see how changing one value will affect all others. You can move things in the system and see how the rest of the system responds to the change.

*Finding right place* - the constellator is guided by the feedback the representatives give, using it to form the most appropriate configuration within the system, taking into account marginalised or excluded members as well as existing hierarchies. The movement within the constellation helps to establish a better flow of energy through the system by assisting everyone to find their right place for the function they serve. The expression of senses and feelings (phenomenological data) is used to reveal the hidden realities of the system and to resolve hidden dynamics.

The resolved constellation provides insight in the form of a new internal image and a new felt experience for the issue holder. It offers new meanings that can continue to work long after the completion of the constellation.

By working with the unconscious assumptions, naming the taboos, acknowledging what isn't being said or looking at unspoken tensions, the system is relaxed and energy for change is released. This deeper more subtle transformation then supports the more traditional change processes, enabling systems to be re-connected where they have previously been treated as separate parts.

### **Questing: building on insight**

The insights from the initial constellation can provide new ways of engaging in a wider change process. This second phase of questing supports the development of a deeper understanding of the insights. People use it to seek new meaning in their work; new ways of thinking, acting and behaving. In short it supports the shift in both the viewing and the doing. This is particularly important in organisations because there are such strong pulls to the habits deeply embedded in the culture.

At this stage people are able to face into the realities of situations. They can discover what actions are possible and what are not; they can take steps to put right aspects of the system that are out of place. And, in a more creative vein, they can develop and try out ideas as well as test them for soundness.

*Systemic coaching* - a simple way of questing is through the use of systemic coaching. It can be used to support, in an informal but very powerful way, the follow up work to the constellation. Working on a one to one basis, the client is encouraged to work with the constellating insights exploring their organisational potential as well as personally developing a deeper understanding of systemic thinking in their organisation.

This usually takes the form of a number of two-hour sessions with a systemic coach, who witnessed, but didn't necessarily run the constellation. The coach notes the key issues that were presented, the key systemic elements of the issue and the turning points in the constellation that led to its eventual resolution. This forms the basis of the coaching work and helps clients to stay more open to the new possibilities that were generated.

*Or part of a transformation programme* - alternatively the initial constellation can also be used as one of a number of techniques in the diagnosis, design and delivery of wider organisational change or transformation programmes.

## **Conclusion**

Organisational constellations are being used more and more widely to help leaders in commercial, government, education and public sector organisations to gain insights into and deeper understanding of the hidden dynamics of their organisations and to interpret and use them to achieve transformation.

The **nowhere** foundation is pioneering the development and delivery of Organisational Constellations in the UK. It provides and facilitates scheduled workshops at which individual leaders have their most pressing issues examined in a confidential and safe environment. It also arranges bespoke constellations workshops, which are tailored to the needs of single organisations.

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