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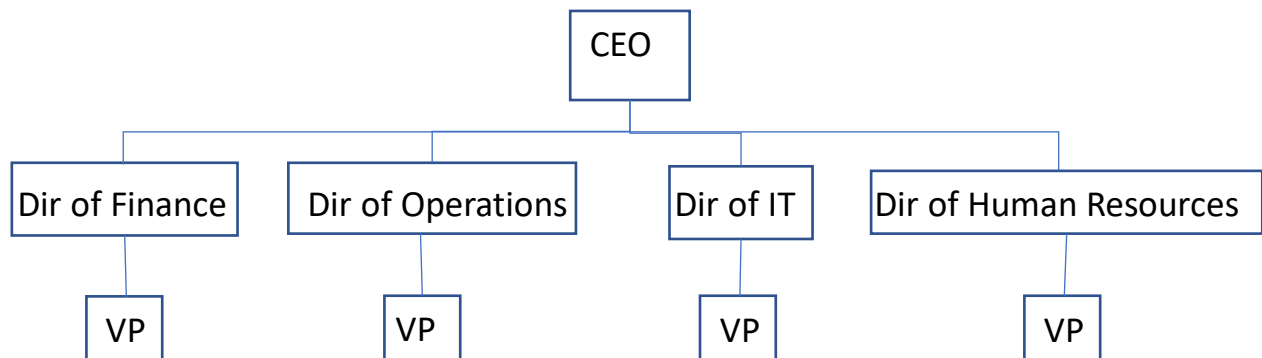
The Nature of Teams

Aim of blog

Society for Organizational Learning members became students of living systems as part of their developmental history going back to SoL's first annual meeting in Amherst, Ma [1]. Chilean biologist Humberto Maturana describes living systems as consisting of *structure* and *organization*. This blog will discuss the nature of teams not as proprietary subunits of organizations, but as living self-organizing social systems.

Business teams

Business teams consists of an aligned group of people sharing a common goal who are working for a private, or public institution. The *structure* of business teams is hierarchical and divided by rank and function.



The *organization* of business teams consists of relations of domination and obedience in command-control management practices invented during the Industrial Era. This relational network can minimize job control and increase the likelihood of coronary heart disease [2]. The same relational behaviors can arise when models, frameworks, roadmaps and other deductive theories consist of similar relational behaviors.

The nature of teams

Humberto studied vision in newts, octopus, frogs, and pigeons. Replicating Roger Sperry's research, Humberto observed the animal's behavior in their natural setting, surgically altered their vision, and returned to observing the animal after the surgery. In all cases, he found that once vision was altered the animals could not feed on prey. The world outside the animals did not exist independent of the animal but through the structure of the nervous system. This led to a breakthrough. We do not have access to an independent reality. This has me wonder. If we are all living in multisensorial worlds determined by our nervous system how to we come to live together in one shared world?

I think the answer here is *language*. I did my student teaching at the University of Idaho's Child Development Lab in 1975, the same year the Bill of Rights Act for people with developmental disabilities was signed into law. From 1918 – 1975 young children with developmental disabilities were separated from society and sent to state institutions where they suffered tremendous abuse and neglect. Inside the Child Development Lab, we evoked language development through play and as language skills grew so did social, emotional, physical and cognitive skills resulting in each pupils independence as required by the Bill of Rights Act. The teaching strategy worked beautifully and children with developmental disabilities are no longer sent away to institutions.

We live in language.

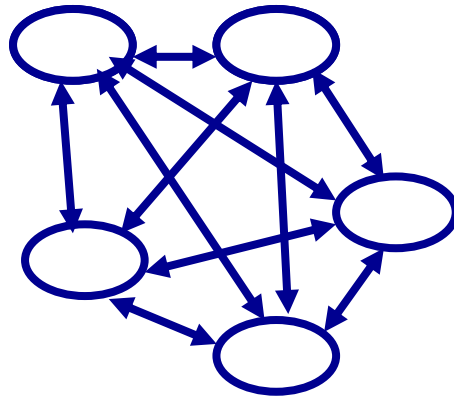
Language occurs in the recursive consensual coordinations of behavior. This guided our teaching strategy for children [3]. Conversations are the braiding of language and our emotions, and relationships arise in the history of our conversations and the conservation of our collective desires to live and work well together. Our relationships arise in a network of networks of conversations and follow our feelings and desires. These relational dynamics occur in the present, become history as they occur, and constantly change while conserving how we do what we do when we are living and working well together.

Natural teaming.

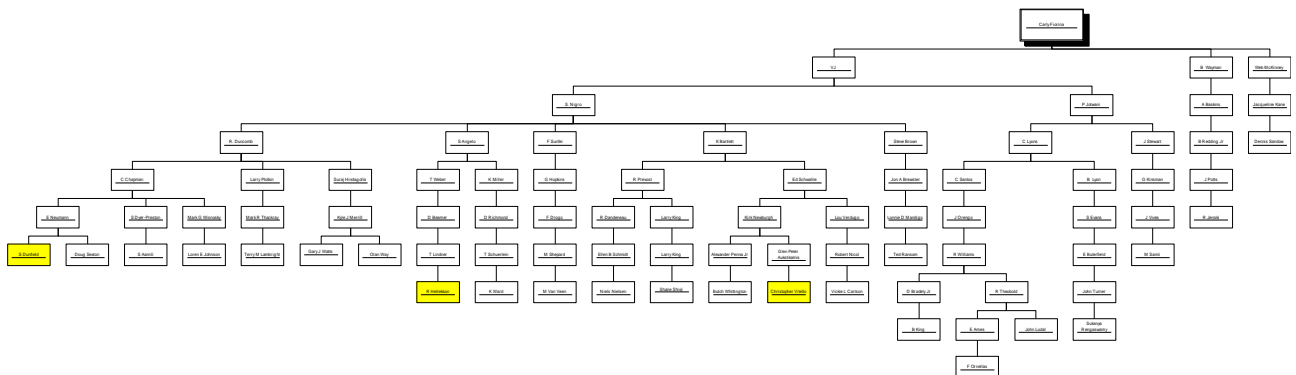
For the past twenty years I have been studying our human social nature studying *structure*, by mapping social networks, and *organization*, by listening to two or more people and discovering coherences, or regularities in their reflections. The criteria for my social action research is validity, meaning that everyone in the social network study is invited to review, edit and amend my social action research data. With Heidi Sparkes Guber, I have been inviting others to join us in reflecting upon how we do what we do when we live and work well together and over the past two years, I have completed three social action research studies including the Cascade Medical Center in Idaho, Hyphn in Oregon and the Society for Organizational Learning in Japan.

Structure

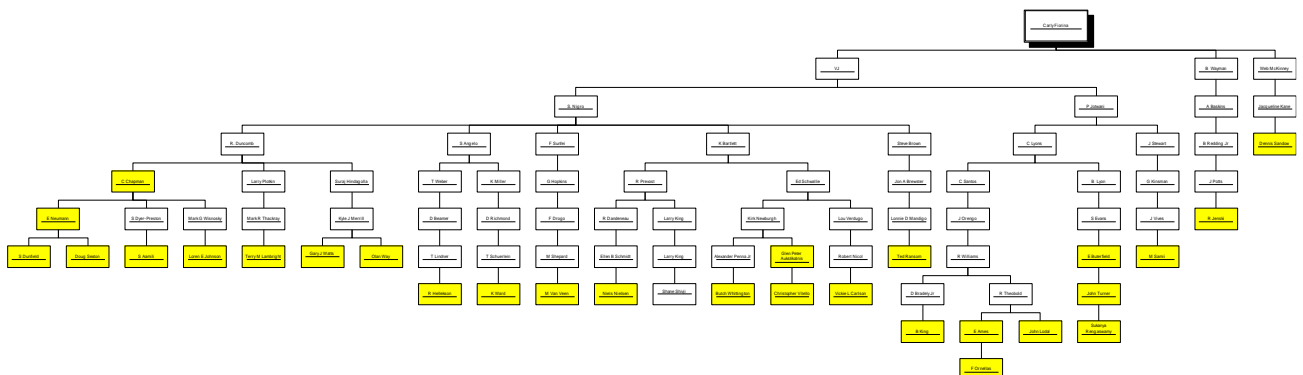
The social network structure in all three cases was collaborative and socially cohesive with everyone in the network seeing everyone else in the network as a collaborator in living and working well together. This is a social system.



When I've mapped this social system upon a company organizational chart I discover two fascinating insights into natural teams – they span the horizontal and vertical divisions of a company and they are constantly changing over time.



New product invention Day 1



New product invention nine months later

Organization

Organization is what gives a system its identity [4]. For example, a rugby team might have a structure of collaboration and an organization evoking playing rugby. In the social action research studies of Cascade Medical Center, Hyphn and the Society for Organizational Learning in Japan these coherent relational dynamics of our humanness were discovered.

Freedom.

Caring and support.

Family and intimacy.

Openness and transparency.

It is in our nature to live well together and when we are free to do so we live well together at work. When we are free to live well together at work we care for and support each other and openly share our knowledge bringing forth a feeling of intimacy and family.

So we can see how an institutional team and our human social nature intertwine. This is how we produce high performance through living and working well together. In the case of Cascade Medical Center, Hyphn and SoL Japan we can see the integration of social systems arising from our preferences to live and work well together in proprietary teams, or social systems under the influence of owners, managers, and stewards of institutions.

Industrial Era command-control, hierarchical management practices continue today despite evidence that these practices create unnecessary stress and physical and mental illbeing [2, 5-7].

We can detoxify the workplace by using social action research as an assessment to understand the value natural teams forming from our human nature and preferences to live well together. This is not trivial. The future of humans may very well depend upon this transformation.

| | <i>Industrial organization</i> | <i>Knowledge organization</i> |
|----------------------------------|--------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| <i>Source of capital</i> | Physical | Knowledge |
| <i>Source of productivity</i> | Command and control | Collaborative-cohesive |
| <i>Organizational structure</i> | Static | Dynamic |
| <i>Method of organizing</i> | Re-organization | Self-organization |
| <i>Organizational functions</i> | Segregated | Integrated |
| <i>Job control at low levels</i> | Low | High |
| <i>Operating processes</i> | Linear sequential | Circular recursive |
| <i>How mistakes are treated</i> | Hidden and punished | Acknowledged and corrected |

References:

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7. Landisbergis, P., P. Schnall, and M. Dobson, *The workplace and cardiovascular disease*, in *Unhealthy work: causes, consequences, cures*, P. Schnall, M. Dobson, and E. Roskam, Editors. 2009, Baywood Publishing Company: Amityville, NY.