Ready to Change? Social Networks and Sustainable Organizations

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Sustained life is a property of an ecological system rather than a single organism or species. Traditional biology has tended to concentrate attention on individual organisms rather than on the biological continuum… Life is a property of planets rather than of individual organisms…

Harold Morowitz
Sustained work life is a property of an organization and not a single individual or profession. Traditional organizational theory has focused change models for individuals or organizations, not on the organizational continuum.

Change is a property of the organizational continuum…

Hammond and Madsen

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Organizational Continuum

- The ecology of the organization
- Organizing in non-reversible
- Organizing is emergent
- Organizing as autopoiesis
What are the characteristics of self-organizing systems that are networked for sustainability?

Our project is to redefining change theory for the organizational continuum and direct theory towards a more sustainable view of change.
Capra

- “The theory of autopoiesis identifies the pattern of self-generating networks as a defining characteristic of life…(p. 11)”

Progogine

- A dissipative structure is an open system that maintains itself in a state of disequilibrium
- Spontaneous emergence of new order
Rummler and Brache

- Change happens in the white space in the organizational chart.
- “The greatest opportunities for performance improvement often lie in the functional interfaces…those points in which the baton is being passed…”

Characteristics of the Organizational Continuum

- Change
- Information
- Holism
- Network
- Fields
Characteristic: Change

The organizational continuum is emergent
(You make the path by walking)

The speed of change varies, but change in the organizational continuum is a constant.

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Characteristic: Information

- Organizational Continuum is always moving towards order or disorder. Systems with high capacity for sustainability are moving towards order.

- Learning is a critical part of the organizational continuum. Information flow is the antidote to ignorance.
Characteristic: Holistic

- Organizational continuum can only be seen with a wide angle lens.
- Sensitive dependence on initial condition.
- Change is an individual activity involving agency, but has global impact.

Characteristic: Interaction

- The organizational continuum depends on information flow.
- Learning organizations are more likely to be sustainable because they adapt.
Characteristic: Fields

- Organizational continuums are characterized by boundary conditions and attraction.
- Change must be realistic.
- Sustainable change requires outside support.

Conclusion: Change is internal simplistic external complexity