

Constellations: A Hellinger Lens for Viewing Organisational Relationships and Change

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Abstract

This paper draws insights from the family systems therapy of Bert Hellinger and develops this framework for enhancing our understanding of what is required for effective relationships within organisations. The organisational constellation is the tool used in a one-on-one consultation situation as a method to reveal the hidden dynamics that operate within the organisation. This method is applied to a case study of a company embarking on change.

The paper has two related aims: the first is to see and locate some of the essential features of Hellinger's model as applied to organisations and thereby show the significance of his thinking for organisational analysis; the second is to show how adapting and applying his model can help us witness and begin to address certain dynamics within organisational change initiatives: marginalism, exclusion, and a failure to honour the past.

The paper concludes that a Hellinger model offers two possibilities: -

- A different lens through which to view what is happening relationally in organisations, and
- A movement towards more effective organisational structuring, process and change.

Relationship

At the centre of many organisational change initiatives are the related problems of how to overcome resistance to change, and how to enhance working relationships and commitment to the organisation. The nexus of social relationships is thrown into sharp relief at such times and we see that the hidden dynamics of existing relationships all too often have the capacity to act as a serious drain on energy, time and organisational resources. The analysis of social relationships has been a central theme within organisation theory and behaviour since the emergence of these disciplines in the 1920s and '30s. Organisation theorists have traditionally looked to a broad range of 'outside' disciplines: sociology, anthropology, folklore, psychology, economics and politics to provide alternative lenses through which to view, understand and develop models for enhancing social relationships within organisations. More recently, we see the development of the psychoanalytic perspective on organisations (e.g. Gabriel, 2000; Gabriel, 1997; Czander, 2001; Morgan, 1986), and the setting up of an international society for the psychoanalytic study of organisations.

In this paper we consider an approach derived from family systems therapy and the work of the German psychotherapist Bert Hellinger. Working in the main with families facing difficult problems, Hellinger asserted that: "...the family system, just like any other system, has its own natural order and when that order is disrupted, the effects are felt by subsequent generations as the system tries to right itself. There appear to be certain natural laws operating to maintain that order and permit the free flow of love between family members" (Beaumont, 1998). The principles, or orders, which Hellinger has formulated on the basis of the patterns he has observed in this work, are different to those required for other systems. There are elements, however, which can be reframed for other relational systems where we frequently see versions of the personal entanglements, enmeshments, and lack of energy that are the hallmark of

families in crisis. Not surprisingly, therefore, psychotherapists and organisational consultants following his principles have begun to work with organisations, taking care to acknowledge the distinctive system characteristics and context of organisational relations.

The Constellation

Central to Hellinger's approach is the constellation, a potentially powerful method for enhancing our ability to become aware of, perceive, and recognise the impact of systemic relationships on organisational structure and process. Hellinger and others working in this tradition maintain that we need to become more sensitive to the phenomenon of the energy field, created and sustained by relational systems, and to the hidden dynamics therein. The constellation helps us to: "Amplify our powers of perception in order to study these hidden relationship dynamics and the systemic forces which underpin them....Bert Hellinger did not invent the method of the constellation, but he did discover how it could be extended beyond making destructive dynamics visible. He found out how the same method can be used to help people identify what can be done and how to use the representatives' reactions to modify the family dynamic so that the hidden, systemic orders that support love... can be re-established" (Beaumont, 1998: xii).

In embarking on constellation work, the therapist or consultant - the constellator - identifies with a client a 'burning issue', which the client has a strong desire to explore. The client then sets up a constellation of people representing the primary relational system central to the issue. The client moves the representatives in a space within the group until their positions relative to one another 'feel' like they felt in the original system and become a living model of it.

The constellator needs to have developed an openness to the energy field created by the constellation, a sensing presence which can both clarify the hidden dynamics and begin to balance the system. The constellator works phenomenologically, looking at the events that might have disturbed the integrity of the system, sapped people's energies, and damaged their relationships. The constellation "...brings to light that which was previously not known or seen, and leads us therefore, on different paths to good resolutions" (Weber, 2000.6).

Theoretical Perspectives

Hellinger cites the important influences on his life and work as his parents, whose faith immunized him against accepting Hitler's national socialism; his own experience as a prisoner of war; his twenty years as a priest, particularly as a missionary to the Zulu; and his participation in interracial ecumenical training in group dynamics led by the Anglican clergy. After leaving the priesthood Hellinger studied psychoanalysis in Vienna and eventually developed an interest in Gestalt therapy, family therapy and transactional analysis where he first encountered family constellations, which have become the hallmark of his therapeutic work. He works in a way that is simultaneously intimate and separate, scanning the horizon for resolutions that set free possibilities for attaining unrealised good (Weber, 1998). The old, which must be left behind, and the new, which is yet to come, meet and are one. He has an unwavering loyalty and trust in the soul, and this is the heartbeat of this work. The language he uses is that of archetypal psychology which speaks of the heart, the soul and the greater soul (Hillman, 1983).

Hellinger's approach is inductive in that we start with what we observe and what works – what 'relaxes the system'. From this we can often infer a pattern, which over time is borne out by subsequent observations. These patterns can be formalised (but not reduced) into Orders or Principles with prescriptive implications of a form more akin to heuristics or rules of thumb rather than algorithms or recipes (Richard Wallstein, 2002). Notwithstanding their inter-subjective, experiential, problematic and interpretive status, (the hallmarks of a constructivist phenomenology), there is an implication that these rules are relatively enduring structures (the hallmarks of a realist ontology) which unless adhered to, generate – but don't determine - ambiguity and pathology.

Within social theory, Hellinger's work (notwithstanding his philosophical affinity to Heidegger) floats between at least three different social theories: phenomenology, critical realism, and neo functionalist/systems theory. The latter becomes apparent in the integrating, stabilising and ordering influence emerging out of the norm of reciprocity, the dominant transactional mode underpinning the orders that Hellinger observes in constellations. Moreover, divergence from the orders or from a relatively limited number of fixed, engulfing family roles generally has 'dire consequences' (Wynne et al in Boszormenyi-Nagy & Spark, 1984). The mix of the subjective with the objective, the voluntarist with the determinist, and the descriptive with the normative, creates a paradox for those trying to categorise Hellinger's work. Not surprisingly, Hellinger resists such categorisation, a point to which we return below when we consider the psychotherapeutic basis of his approach.

We can also recognise influences from the three major therapeutic schools: -

- The psychodynamic perspectives where interest is focused on unconscious processes, where a current predicament is seen as a repetition of early experience.
- The cognitive behavioural models where interest lies in conscious processes with a focus on replacing old maladaptive thoughts, beliefs and actions with new adaptive ones.
- The humanistic existential schools wherein we create and construct our own worlds and are in constant search for meaning and self-fulfilment.

If one were to ask Hellinger what the differences/similarities are, he might reply that there is a basic misunderstanding of phenomenology implied in the question and that one is not thinking systemically. "When you immediately place your experience here in the context of something you already know, you can't observe anything new...As soon as you say 'Oedipus complex' the phenomenology of the systemic dynamic disappears and you are left with the psychodynamic construct you already know...I'm not talking about how one thing causes another, nor am I trying to describe unconscious processes...no causality is implied, just systemic association...A different level of abstraction than psychoanalytic theory. If you are interested in observing the systemic dynamics of human relationships, you need to focus your attention on what people actually do. That is the phenomenological method. Otherwise, all you have are the words and concepts dissociated from experience" (Hellinger in Hellinger, et al 1998: p41-2).

Hellinger has woven a rich and colourful tapestry using threads of old and new wisdom, but the loom on which he weaves is his own unique creation carved from the wood of his own being and his observations.

He emphasises the view of the individual in 'context'. Our individuality is unique whilst at the same time we participate in the greater whole soul. Personal identity is bound up with social rules and obligations depending on the groups to which we belong, or from which we are excluded. The first place of belonging is in the family. The consequential nature of relationship is ontological - relationships draw their significance from 'being' itself. The relationship between mother and foetus best demonstrates this point (Boszormenyi-Nagy & Krasner, 1986). Hellinger finds that too much theory interferes with practice and guards against his thoughts and observations being poured into specific moulds. "What is written loses its connection to real life so easily, loses its vitality and becomes oversimplified, uncritically generalised and rendered into fixed patterns and empty sentences" (Hellinger in Hellinger et al, 1998: p41-42).

Working with the Constellation

It is important to recognise at the outset the important differences between the dynamics of family systems and those of organisation systems. The structuring of all relationships is extremely complex and context specific. Boszormenyi-Nagy and Spark (1984:xiii) introduce their work on *Invisible Loyalties in Family Relationships* with a caution that applies equally in reverse to organisation systems: "We have learned that family relationships cannot be understood from the laws that apply to social or incidental relationships such as those between fellow workers. The meaning of relationships depends on the subjective impact

emerging between *You and I...* We can terminate any relationship except the one based on parenting; in reality we cannot select our parents or children.”

Yet the work within family systems provides pointers to what is important within organisation systems and the method for setting up the constellation is similar.

Step 1: In a group setting, the client with a burning issue is invited to describe his or her problem, to choose people to represent his or her organisation members, and to place them in relation to each other in a constellation. Constellations are always done with representatives rather than with the actual people involved. This is as important for organisations as it is for families although the reasons are different. In organisations, if actual colleagues were to be involved, then there is the real danger of people clamming up through fear of being exposed, of being heretical, or making matters worse; or of subordinates trying to impress senior management and vice versa. As Weber cogently suggests: “Everyone is wary of bringing up taboo topics or exposing secrets. In these situations, the art of concealing the truth and the fear of getting serious flak from co-workers or triggering further arguments by showing precisely what is happening in the system causes team members to set up harmonious, but less than truthful, pictures of the system, and representatives to make non-committal or vague statements.”

Step 2: The constellator then listens with the client as an underlying story reveals itself. By observing where the representatives have been positioned and what they report from that position within the constellation the dynamics become visible. This brings to awareness the hidden rules within the system, the preconditions for belonging and what causes exclusion. We observe how people adapt in chameleon type ways to support their involvement in certain situations.

Step 3: From the partial stories, which are told in *Steps 1 and 2*, the constellator now facilitates a third story, which emerges as s/he works with movement in space and language with the representatives to the orders/laws which Hellinger has discovered through his work with families. The focus of the movement is on relationship dynamics and the systemic forces that underpin them.

Hunter Beaumont explains well the different levels at which stories operate in this work: “When I say my father is an alcoholic there is another voice saying: I am a victim, I am justified in not loving. The story that my father is an alcoholic is accompanied by a silent story, and it is the silent story that limits our lives. The story my father is an alcoholic may carry powerful assumptions about men. The stories we tell blend out other pieces of truth that don’t fit the storyline. We need these stories to know who we are. This work is designed to fill in the missing parts, to tell stories that let the heart relax. We start with a small story but as the work progresses the story is amplified... Stories remind us of the complexity of life – as we complete the story we include people who are forgotten” (Beaumont Workshop, 2002. Cork).

The constellation work helps us see the whole context (Framo, 1992). It does this by utilising a symbolic format that opens a path to the deeper, partly constructive, partly destructive underlying forces (Boszormenyi-Nagy & Krasner, 1986). The aim is not only descriptive; it is also to enable movement towards resolution of systemic imbalance. The story that unfolds in the family constellation speaks to deep human emotions and powerful meanings. It speaks of loyalties, misguided blind love and sacrifice. It speaks of unfinished business (Perls et al, 1951) and it deals with the sacred and the profane, honouring the light and the dark (Jung, C J, 1964). So what scope is there here for directed change? Umberto Eco (1986) reminds us that every attempt at shaping powerful meanings such as these is inevitably a ‘tentative and hazardous process’. How can one intentionally shape others’ deeply felt beliefs and assumptions without resorting to manipulation, or assuming a greater degree of power or control than the problematic nature of social life would suggest? Yet directed change is sometimes possible. As Morgan writes: “I believe that people do make and shape their world and have the ability to do so anew. As the power theorists suggest, people often do get trapped by the cultural beliefs and the social practices through which they make their

reality 'real'. But, despite this, they always have the potential to break into new modes of consciousness and understanding. This, I believe can be a fundamental source of individual and social change..."

The power of the constellation is that it constitutes a vertiginous break into 'a new mode of consciousness and understanding'. It offers another image of how things might be, or might have been, if those involved were free from the innocence or guilt of the systemic conscience and the invisible loyalties to which they adhere in order to belong (Hellinger et al, 1998:p27). Representatives access this image more easily and can make the necessary movements, as they are not bound by the original systemic rules and dynamics. The client can see the images more clearly if they can observe at this stage. The constellation shows what needs to be accepted before change can occur; it indicates what is required to conform to the orders promoting systemic balance; and it allows the representatives (or the person setting up the constellation through symbols) spontaneously, or with the help of the constellator, to find a movement that feels authentic.

This is not social engineering. As Barbara Stones (2002) points out: "Paradoxically, although this work is solution focused, the principle of non-intentionality is paramount." Solutions are not forced or imposed upon people whose relationships are out of kilter. The constellation is used to hear the underlying messages, the loyalties and entanglements, the inclusions and exclusions which may be out of people's awareness; to see who is present and who has left, physically or energetically; and to sense where the system is out of balance. Herein lies the potential for change and resolution. Herein lies the potential for disengagement from the past, which may allow life to be lived more fully in the present moment. What happens from then is up to the people themselves. It may be enough for this family/organisation to just see clearly 'what is', or they may wish to move within the constellation to address who is too close; who is too far away; what is overlooked; who or what is missing; who needs to be honoured and who needs to be released; what favours the flow of energy and what stifles it. These movements are neither manipulative nor inauthentic; rather the movements are suggested, which the representatives may or may not embrace. As Philippa Lubbock (2002) says: "*Sometimes it is enough just to see what is.*"

The Orders of Love

So what is it that guides these movements? Hellinger's core insight is "that there exists a natural order of things", which he refers to as the orders of love, which prescribes what is required to allow healthy relationships to flourish, as well as what inhibits them. According to Hellinger in Hellinger et al. (1998:p3): "Love flourishes in human relationships when the systemic contingencies which it demands are met...In family systems workshops it has been possible to observe and describe some important systemic preconditions which allow love to thrive. Together, these constitute the Orders of Love."

The Orders of Love in relation to family systems are many but Barbara Stones has summarised some of the most crucial:

Figure 1: **Family System Orders**

- 1 Everybody in the system needs to belong.
 - 2 Everybody needs honouring and to be in their right place.
 - 3 Those who come later take from those who came earlier (whatever the price). This order of precedence must be honoured.
 - 4 Parents give; children take.
 - 5 In a relationship between parents, the giving and taking needs to be in equilibrium.
 - 6 Guilt and merit belong with whoever earned them.
- Barbara Stones (2002)

Hellinger recognises that the hidden orders that constrain relationships and make them possible, differ according to the type of relationship. The orders within families are different to the orders within organisations and the circumstances they address are generally quite different. Yet there are also similarities. For example, 'everybody needs honouring and to be in their right place' is as applicable to hierarchy in organisations as it is to hierarchy in families. What creates resonance between different systemic orders is that they address universal themes: the need to belong; the need to honour the past; the need to maintain a balance of giving and taking and the need for safety of social convention and predictability, i.e. order. "These needs constrain our relationships, and also make them possible" (Hellinger in Hellinger et al, 1998:p5).

When applied to organisations, these orders suggest a set of loaded questions that allow us to see the hidden dynamics and relationships. They are 'loaded' because they also point to the changes required to enhance the potential for resolution and reconciliation. It may seem strange for those steeped in Western empiricism to move outside the impersonal, unemotional, essentially plain (in the Aristotelian sense) objective language of social science to consider a discourse which talks about Orders of Love, or movements of the soul, and which refuses to separate off the spiritual from the scientific. Yet as Geertz (1975:p62) reminds us: "The strange idea that reality has an idiom in which it prefers to be described, that its very nature demands that we talk about it without fuss...on pain of illusion, trumpery and self-bewitchment, leads to the stranger idea that, if literalism is lost, so is fact."

Some modification of terms is required to account for the inherent systemic differences between family relationships and organisational ones. In Table 1, we have listed the key organisational questions, with appropriately modified language, which we see as emanating from the Family System Orders.

Table 1: **Assessing Hidden Organisational Dynamics**

Family System Principles	Organisational Questions
<p>1 Everybody in the system needs to belong.</p>	<p>1 Who is missing, marginalised, or excluded? Have people been dismissed unfairly? Are people who have 'energetically' left still present in the system? Do we know of and respect our predecessors and their achievements?</p>
<p>2 Everybody needs honouring and to be in their right place.</p>	<p>2 Is the past honoured and acknowledged? Are people treated as objects or with dignity? Are we stuck in the past or can we separate from it and move forward?</p>
<p>3 Those who come later take from those who came earlier. This order of precedence must be honoured.</p>	<p>3 Is the hierarchy of power acknowledged? Do those with privilege and power accept their responsibility to those they serve?</p>
<p>4 Hierarchy between parents and children; parents give; children take.</p>	<p>4 Do the senior staff work in the service of the company and its stakeholders?</p>
<p>5 In a relationship between parents, the giving and taking needs to be in equilibrium.</p>	<p>5 At senior levels: Are there respectful exchanges? Is there balanced reciprocity? Is power exercised in the service of the system?</p>
<p>6 Guilt and merit belong with whoever earned them.</p>	<p>6 Do people take responsibility for their actions? Who gets the cream? Who gets the blame?</p>

Many, if not all of these questions have been suggested within disparate parts of the organisation design literature. Putting them together like this emphasises the linkages between them and provides an holistic order for viewing the underlying dynamic revealed in the constellation. And indeed, those who have worked with organisational constellations have begun to suggest how balance can be enhanced through respect for human dignity, for hierarchy, leadership, original founders, length of service and the need for membership, belonging and attachment (Stones and ten Herkel 2000,p16). Energy that has been sapped, or diverted into destructive action, can be restored and redirected (with the help of the Orders) towards supporting action that enables the organisation to flourish (Judith Hemming 2002).

It is predominantly Weber who has adapted and clarified and written about the Hellinger method within organisations. He says that when working towards creating differences and searching for solutions, there are fundamental attitudes and orientations in constellation work with organisations that we need to be aware of Weber (2000):

- Acknowledging what is.
- Respect and esteem.
- Orientation towards resources.
- Orientation towards solution.
- Lack of intention. Restraint.

As we journey towards solution or resolution Weber also talks about some basic patterns and possibilities in the re-positioning phase of the work which are also relevant in the one-on-one constellation. These include:

- Expressing or enhancing existing tendencies.
- The inclusion of missing or excluded members of a system.
- Carrying out/enacting the missing or needed inner movements that lead to solution.
- Taking the opposite position.
- Creating order.
- The constellation of the customers, the task or goals.
- Trying out alternatives.
- Persons who are supportive and have a strengthening effect.
- Including the dynamics of the family and elements from family constellations.
- Allowing movements of the soul.

These patterns and possibilities represent part of the 'how' of seeing during the process of constellation work, the emergence of answers to the 'what' implied in the Organisational Questions in Table 1, or Weber's 'fundamental attitudes and orientations' as mentioned above. As such they set the agenda for the organisational constellation although each constellator will bring their own individual style to the work. "A facilitator can only acquire knowledge of the procedures and steps most likely to be effective after he or she has facilitated an increasing number of constellations, and even then he or she might be groping in the dark and approaching the solution in a tangential direction. Every facilitator in the long run develops a personal, specific, idiomatic style of proceeding in creating differences and searching for solutions" (Weber, 2000).

At the same time, however, Weber recommends: "...respect, acknowledgement and renouncing the urge to know better than your client is the basis for creating a good working relationship when using organisational constellations" (Weber, 2000).

In the following example, we bring together the various threads of the discussion thus far and apply them to the case in question. We attempt to show how they help reveal the hidden relational dynamics within an organisation and steer it towards effective change. We have used a variation on Hellinger's constellation methodology that suited the circumstances of the client. This procedure, termed the one-on-one constellation, uses inanimate objects –stones, pebbles, shells, figures - in place of human representatives. The procedure has been extensively used within family systems (Schneider, 1998; Franke, 1998; Lenk, 1998; Asslander, 2000; Baitinger, 2000) and is directly transferable to organisations.

The one-on-one constellation may not have the richness of working with representatives. In particular, it favours the reflective over the experiential; it does not allow us to witness the movements of the representatives in the constellation that may enhance and inform relationships. However, what the one-on-one constellation does have is the ability to engage us in the first stage of constellation work. It allows the individual client to see the hidden dynamics and implicit assumptions. It also encourages the client to move symbolically around the organisation and explore the possibilities of solution. Weber says that in organisation work: "When a good degree of enlightening information is generated it is a good place to stop" (Weber, 2000). An incomplete gestalt can stimulate an intensive search by the client to find a solution.

Case Study

We begin with a description of a Company and the issues its Managing Director was seeking to address.

COMX (not the real name) is a small, not-for profit organisation, founded in 1992 with Governmental and EU funds, a Board of political appointees and a mandate to provide various professional services to local companies and public sector organisations. The Board appointed a managing director, Michael, who in turn appointed the rest of the staff. Over the first ten years, the company grew to twelve full-time staff and a senior management team, consisting of Michael, two 'key account' executives Tim and Catherine, and a financial controller, Mary. In 2001, Michael became increasingly concerned that the core business of COMX was in danger of disappearing within a few years, due to new entrants, and a declining demand for the services it had been set up to provide. Michael decided they needed to diversify. He favoured setting up a new, for-profit business providing professional services to local firms. His hope was to run this as a separate legal business entity within the existing organisation structure. He wanted to provide continuing employment for all the people in the firm, something that looked to be under threat from the change in market circumstances, and he wanted the senior management team to be able to share in the profits made in the new business as a supplement to their current salaried contractual employment.

Michael approached the authors for help in honing the business strategy and new organisational structure. During the initial strategy facilitation, it became clear that COMX needed to address a number of organisational issues if it were to successfully negotiate change. The story of COMX was of a relatively static organisation with a quasi civil service mentality unsuited to Michael's proposed, new business model. There was resistance by some of the staff to new work practices, a reluctance to enter a competitive market, and a sense of uncertainty as to where the company was heading. Michael felt he needed to get people to buy into the new strategy and to become more entrepreneurial. Old habits had created a certain stability but also a certain staleness, and he believed that in order to survive, the company needed to accept new challenges. The issue was how to get this to happen.

Step 1: The One-on-One Constellation

Michael was reluctant to work with representatives – for reasons of confidentiality – so he chose to set up his organisational system with a one-on-one constellation.

We gave Michael a tray of various small objects. He chose a shell for himself and positioned it facing a line of stones and beads, one for each person in COMX.

Step 2: Seeing What Is

Adopting the rubric of Table 1, we then asked Michael to reflect on the following questions in relation to Fig 2:

Question 1(a): In the constellation you have set up, who is missing?

Michael responded that the Board of Directors was not present and nor was a new person who was about to join the senior management team. In response to a further question about how supportive the Board was, he said he wasn't sure the Board supported him. He felt he had to convince them that a new approach was needed and could be viable. He also felt that the Board would be naturally predisposed towards continuing the status quo.

Question 1 (b): Are there people who have left your company, physically or energetically?

Looking at the constellation Michael replied that those people at the end of each line did look a bit isolated. He also suggested that the uncertainty about the future was a negative factor in the company at the present time. We asked him about the two larger stones in the centre. He said that they were women who were not part of the senior management team.

Question 2 (a): Is the past acknowledged and respected?

Michael said that it was - and it wasn't. The company had done a good job in the past but perhaps now it was a bit taken for granted. People felt comfortable with their old work practices but were unclear about the values of the company.

Question 2 (b): Is seniority respected?

Michael answered that there was a hierarchy but he hoped that staff were respected, or in the future would be respected, for what they achieved rather than because of their positional power or because they had been in ComX the longest. He felt that they all operated as a team.

Question 2(c): Is COMX stuck in the past, how could it move forward?

Michael said the company was absolutely stuck in the past and that was why he had approached external consultants.

Question 3: Is the hierarchy of power acknowledged? Do those with privilege and power accept their responsibility to those they serve?

Michael felt very responsible for all his staff. He felt that people would lose their jobs if the company did not change the way they operated.

Question 4: Do the senior staff work in the service of the company and its stakeholders?

Michael was unsure as to whether others in the company had the best interests of the company at heart, rather than their own personal interests. He felt that they had to keep the Board happy although this was not always possible or feasible. Customers received a good service, as did the community at large.

Question 5(a): At senior levels, are there respectful exchanges?

Michael answered that the senior management team operated well together. However he felt it was sometimes taken for granted that he alone carried the can.

Question 5(b): Is power exercised in the service of the system?

Michael felt that at least by him, it was. He was very concerned that people should not lose their jobs and avoiding this was his major priority.

Question 6: Do people take responsibility for their actions? Who gets the cream; who takes the blame?

Michael replied that when things went wrong, he was blamed. Some people did more than others and a couple of people did not pull their weight, and he felt he needed to do more to relate pay to performance. He was considering an employee stock option scheme in the future but felt that some staff were more interested in whether they would be recompensed or given additional allowances if they took on extra work. He didn't feel there was a lot of cream around which was a major reason for starting up the new business.

Observations

The constellation appeared to us to be reminiscent of a military formation. There was a line of people facing the person in charge. We had an image of an officer facing his troops, distant, unsupported, isolated and alone. The troops were undifferentiated among themselves with the exception of the two women represented in the constellation by large stones, who were not members of the senior management team. We wondered if the size, the placing, and positions of the symbols he had chosen to represent them were significant. We wondered if there was a challenge between Michael and the person represented by the stone in front him, what was happening between them, and what this might mean for other members of the team.

The senior management team was somewhat invisible, set up interspersed among the line of employees with no particular order, and no readily visible hierarchy. There was a gulf between Michael and the rest of the company and it was unclear who reported to whom and how decisions were made. Neither seniority nor the hierarchy of power appeared to have been acknowledged in the organisation. We were struck by a certain isolation and omnipotence - the positioning of the stones might suggest that Michael could do it all himself. We wondered about his isolation and whether the employees felt adequately recognised for their input. In addition, none of the 'outside' stakeholders were represented.

Step 3: Looking for a Solution

We asked Michael to reflect on his answers and our observations in order to see what he felt needed to be added or changed in the constellation. Unprompted, Michael chose some new objects to represent some of the team members and in so doing made the senior management team more visible. Michael had moved the senior management team to a position between himself and the rest of the team and had chosen more distinctive symbols for them. At the same time he changed the two larger stones for smaller ones.

It seemed to us that while the senior management team was now acknowledged, they were still not in their right place. The Board was still missing, people were obscured from Michael, the team came between him and the rest of the staff, and there was no one supporting him. The senior management was facing the staff and they had their backs to Michael. But a movement had begun to make the management team visible and create a hierarchy in the organisation.

We moved the stones to new positions) and introduced the Board, represented by a single stone. We asked Michael what he thought of this. He said it would be a great relief to have someone at his side. Now he had a team and felt connected to the other members of staff. This was what he was hoping for. He was able to acknowledge the people on whom he depended, and the support of the Board. In the new order decision-making, responsibility and accountability were more equitable, Michael was not so exposed, and the others were more valued.

Step 4: Designing the Organisation Structure

Building on the above, we then experimented with what a new organisation structure would look like. We were guided by three principles: -

- The past needed to be honoured before the company could move forward.
- The management team and the Board needed to become visible.
- The balance of giving and taking needed to be addressed.

Following a number of attempts at moving the stones around, we were still stuck. Something seemed to be missing. No new organisational structure was emerging and the representations of the new structure did not feel right to Michael. We were about to stop the work at the level of making the dynamics and hierarchies visible, but decided to ask the first question again: *"Was there something/someone else missing that was preventing a resolution?"* We suggested introducing the customers, and ended up with three new symbols, one stone for existing customers, and two for new customers. Placing these stones first, the other stones fell into place showing a unique pattern, which seemed right to Michael for the company at this point in time.

Viewing this arrangement through a Hellinger lens, we saw the significance of the senior management team being located at each apex. In this formation they faced outwards towards the customers and the rest of the staff were in the centre in a supporting role. Michael aligned himself with the existing customers, thus acknowledging the importance of what had been achieved in the past and asserting his place of seniority. This freed up Tim and Catherine to explore the new horizons. We also suggested that the fact that the three senior managers were all facing outwards might imply a splitting up of the company into separate units. A new legal framework might be introduced to run the new business.

In this structure the Board was no longer represented - it was enough that it had been recognised in the earlier constellation. Perhaps Michael had been so concerned with getting the backing of the Board that he had neglected the internal dynamics of the company and the need to prioritise the customers. Once he had a clear idea of how to organise the company and separate off the different parts of the business, recognising the old and privileging the new, the new hierarchy could now take precedence over the old. Michael was delighted and this was as far as he wanted to go at this point.

Conclusion

In the case presented, the constellation work showed some of the hidden dynamics in relationships in COMX. It surfaced assumptions and beliefs, and identified areas that had been overlooked. Managers needed to use symbolic means to encourage innovation and change so that existing structural arrangements could be dissolved without their occupants being degraded (Trice & Beyer, 1984). We found that three things needed to occur for this to happen and for COMX to flourish. Although all our interpretations were contestable, nonetheless they allowed us to see how the Hellinger lens gives us a distinctive and different agenda through which to view organisational change initiatives.

Firstly, Hellinger states that in order to move forwards, we need to honour and acknowledge the past. All too often in the managerial literature on change, the discourse focuses on abandoning the past, uprooting old skills, breaking out of the mould, killing sacred cows. The past is seen as bondage, a constraint, old-fashioned, disposable, limiting, worthless. Those who do not adopt the new ways are conservative traditionalists who resist change, and will not embrace it. This modernist bias ignores that which needs to be valued and celebrated from the past before we can move on.

Was the past valued in COMX? The company wanted to break out from its quasi public service past. The senior management felt stuck and bound to it, and at all costs they wanted to discard it, off-load it and to be rid of it. But it kept hounding them, demanding to be acknowledged. Hence, COMX suffered both from a lack of clarity about its values and culture and from a resistance to change. This surfaced in terms of unease about new working practices, an ambivalent attitude to the Board, and difficulties in establishing a new organisation structure and systems that would reconcile both the needs of the existing business and the new one. The commitment and energy that staff and the Board had shown in the past needed to be valued before the old could be symbolically laid to rest. Then energy would be freed up and could be redirected towards the new business.

Secondly, the management team needed to become visible, with their place in the hierarchy and their responsibility for decision-making more clearly acknowledged. The Board and the customers, new and old, also needed to be more visible. The Board was marginalised, seen as an external burden to be managed rather than as a resource to be used. Indeed, a prime motive for change was to bypass the Board and the company's original mandate.

Thirdly, the balance of giving and taking in the organisation needed to be addressed, with those at the top working in the service of the company and its employees. Certainly there was a concern for the survival of the company and the continuing employment of all staff. Yet this had not filtered down through the system and people were not rewarded according to their relative contribution. The Managing Director also needs to be supported. The norm of reciprocity requires both contribution and reward. Not only did the constellation surface these requirements, but it also began the opening movement towards the image of a new and more effective organisation structure.

This was not a prescription for action. It was important for the client to remind himself of the movements and the process that occurred, in order for him to arrive at what felt like a solution. Recalling Weber's words: "When a good degree of enlightening information is generated, it is a good place to stop" (Weber, 2000). It was wise to leave it at the point we did. But what has changed, of course, is that the flame of

possibility has been lit and the client was free to embrace a new perspective. If you change the way you look at the world, you begin to change that world.

In this paper we have begun to translate the principles and knowledge that have evolved from Bert Hellinger's work into a form relevant to organisational case analysis. We have done this by developing a set of questions, which show the hidden dynamics of relationships within organisations, and which allow us to delve below the surface to reveal hidden values, beliefs and assumptions, which speak to a deeper truth about what actually transpires in practice. Such knowledge helps point the way to how relationships might be improved, while explaining why people might be avoiding solutions. Bert Hellinger's work emphasises a veritable panoply of values: respect, honour, authority, seniority, acknowledgement, belonging, bonding, gratitude, balance, conscience, reciprocity, and it brings them together in a set of orders which provide a normative framework for supporting energy, strengthening relationships and fostering personal growth. It presents a new map for organisations, a new way of travelling for organisational consultants and theorists and a new way of viewing the territory.

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