An Explorer’s View

BUSINESS PROCESS & COMPLEXITY
Does Business Process Complexity matter?

Complexity is a problem. It can obstruct organisation progress

➤ Business Processes
  - Activities, events or outcomes
  - Related by rules, information and control flows
  - Live in or across organisations
  - Shaped by organisation structures

➤ Complexity …
  - Can add to cost
  - Takes management mind-space
  - Can reduce agility
  - Increases risk
  - Can become self justifying
  - Can be hard to control
  - Impedes process excellence
What do we know about complexity?

Everyday descriptions lack sufficient precision. Complexity needs to be explored!

Random House
Webster College Dictionary

**Complex**: Composed of many interconnecting parts

**Complicated**: Composed of many *elaborate* interconnecting parts
Preparing to Explore Complexity

Now that we have direction, principles of engagement and some guidance, we can set off …

“Betwixt the troubled seas Of Discord and Perplexity Lies the land of the demon The Beast they call Complexity”

“Take thee the Explorer’s Oath: Describe not analyse Perceive not judge Observe not prove”

“Explore at thy peril but Harken the wisdom of the sages Upon the hilltops through the ages”
The Land of Complexity

*Complexity is both fascinating and treacherous. Explore carefully!*

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The Hill of Complexity Sciences

There are many scientific lenses. Choose your glasses carefully!


Complex Adaptive Systems and Organisations

- Open, Ambiguous boundaries, Nested, Intricate, dynamic networks, Emergent behaviours, Non-linear relationships, Remember, learn & modify their structure and behaviour
- Respond to stimuli
- Pulled towards preferred states
- Seek stability within parameter range

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The Hill of Organisation Metaphors

The metaphor influences the attitude. To understand complexity understand the mind!

- Machines
- Organisms
- Brains
- Cultures
- Political systems
- Psychic prisons
- Flux and transformation
- Instruments of domination
The Hill of Anatomical Perspective
The Hill of Anatomical Perspective
The Hill of Anatomical Perspective
The Hill of Anatomical Perspective
The Hill of Anatomical Perspective

Complexity is structurally different. We must understand its flesh and bones!

- It is complex when …
  - The pattern is “discernable” but not “definable”
  - There is a sense of “surprise” or “emergence”
  - Relationships between parts begin to have a disproportionate influence
Mapping the Wilds of Organisation – The Terrain

Different terrains call for different approaches. We must adapt to survive!

1. Direct
2. Manage - Agree approach / Restructure to implement
3. Manage - Agree structure to implement / Redefine objective to suit structure
4. Flee - Seek patterns, survive, escape
5. Navigate – Keep moving, Respond to demand, Focus on outcomes, Guide, Delegate, Triage

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Wilds of Organisation

Tribes In the Wilds of Organisation

The Denyii

- Deny that complexity exists
- Believe the organisation is a machine
- Complexity is a flaw due to someone’s incompetence

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Tribes In the Wilds of Organisation

The Sufferii

- Understand complexity as a condition of existence.
- Believe the organisation is a psychic prison or an instrument for domination.
Tribes In the Wilds of Organisation

The Ignorii

- Know it exists but ignore it if they possibly can
- Believe the organisation is an organism which will adapt to eliminate complexity by itself
Tribes In the Wilds of Organisation

The Controlii

- See complexity as a temporary state
- Their mission to tame it to simplicity or at least complicatedness
- They believe the organisations is flux and transformation
Tribes In the Wilds of Organisation

The Avoidii

- Recognise complexity well but find a way to survive without getting in its way
- Believe the organisation is an information processing brain which can think its way out of complexity
Tribes In the Wilds of Organisation

The Exploitii

- Build a bridge over complexity and charge you to cross it safely.
- In the swamp of complexity they provide a valuable service.
- They believe organisations are cultures and pick and choose their opportunities.
Tribes In the Wilds of Organisation

*Tribes address complexity in different ways. To communicate understand them first!*

[Diagram showing tribes in the Wilds of Organisation with axes for Increasing Ownership and Increasing Recognition, labeled Avoidii, Denyii, Ignorii, Controlii, Exploitii, and Sufferii.]
Looking Back on the Exploration

*Complexity is fascinating but there is still so much to discover… Another exploration?*

► We have seen that
  - Complexity can be a problem
  - Descriptions lack precision
  - There are many scientific lenses
    - The metaphor influences the attitude
  - Complexity is structurally different
  - Different approaches for different terrains
  - Different tribes react to complexity in different ways

► We haven’t seen:
  - Examples, solutions and paradoxes
  - If it makes sense to measure
  - If it’s a Friend to Favour or Foe to Fear
  - Its many disguises: Problem, Solution or Implementation
  - Strategies to deal with complexity
  - Navigation & Navigators
  - What makes them effective
  - If there is a tipping point
Jabberwocky

... “Beware the Jabberwock, my son!
The jaws that bite, the claws that catch!
Beware the Jujub bird, and shun
The frumious Bandersnatch!” ...
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