

# SYSTEMIC ORGANISATIONAL CONSTELLATION AS METHOD TO PREDICT THE FUTURE

- AS THE SEEDS OF THE FUTURE ARE ALREADY  
PRESENT IN OUR CURRENT PATTERNS

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FARADAY RIPPLES OR WAVE DYNAMICS OF NONLINEAR IMMISCIBLE SYSTEMS IN FINITE CELLS

HOW TO WORK WITH THE EMERGENT FUTURE THROUGH THE EVOLUTIONARY FORCE

*"Seeing into the future starts with knowing how to interpret signs that are present today but go unrecognised by those without a systems perspective."* Senge, P: Fifth Discipline, p 343

If you use the traditional problem-solving approach and divide the system into a linear analytical process describing the individual key elements, you will exclude the relations between them, as they are often invisible. A system is more than its individual elements due to their interconnections. If you take a moving mobile as an example, you cannot change one element in the mobile, without affecting the whole system. It is the same with an organization. Therefore, we

have to understand and work with the system as one identity, just like the word “constellate” means to unite in a cluster. A constellation gives a possibility to create an externalization of an inner image and tune into a *knowing field*.

In organizations we work with two kinds of future: The planned future and the emerging future. The planned future is the easier part, as we have an influence upon the future we would like to see unfold. The emerging future that hits us through the evolutionary force is different, as it is like a tsunami coming towards us without any warning and possibility to plan ahead. The information already exists in the field, but it is not visible. This emerging future could, according to Jan Jacob Stam from the Dutch Hellinger Institute, both be positive, and negative. It is beyond good and bad, and forces us to change our reality, beliefs and operating systems. It has a direction, it moves all systems, it cannot be changed, it is unavoidable, it moves from you and it is life energy. Therefore, we need methods that enable us to tune into the invisible field of possibilities that have not yet manifested themselves, and work with these scenarios in a creative way.

The *Global Consciousness Project* created in the Princeton Engineering Anomalies Research Lab at Princeton University, shows us that the collective consciousness of all the emotional or psychological energy of people focused on a chosen event affects the random number generators. When human consciousness becomes coherent, it is collectively impacting the system in which it is present. A random number generator (RNG) based on quantum tunnelling produces completely unpredictable sequences of zeroes and ones. But when a great event synchronizes the feelings of millions of people, like when 9/11 happened, the network of 70 globally placed RNGs becomes subtly structured. The odds are one in a trillion that the effect is due to chance. The evidence from the Global Consciousness Project suggests an emerging noosphere or a unifying field of consciousness, that can even be registered before the event unfolds. The researchers do not presume to have any hypothesis for how or why this might be possible, or what the mechanism might be. They simply put forth their findings, and they urge us to look at their results and conclude, that this is something to consider. The eminent physicist John Wheeler said the same that according to the rules of quantum mechanics a conscious observer can change the results of quantum particles of light – photons.

Looking at our future and the landscape of potential future scenarios and conflicts, systemic constellation work gives us a unique possibility here and now to tune into the emerging future, as it is already in the field, as the Global Consciousness Project shows.

By taking systemic constellation methods onboard, we are able to enhance our existing model of anticipating the future in the widest sense, in the same way physics were enhanced by the introduction of quantum physics. This said, even though we only have a relational understanding of the underlying phenomenon, and not an instrumental or causal understanding of why it works the way it does. Like the Nobel Prize winner in physics Richard Feynman said: "If you think you understand quantum mechanics, you don't understand quantum mechanics". God is beyond our understanding. Therefore, we have to be humble, observe without judging and use our lack of understanding as an advantage - a call to all of us to experience and operate like nature in a trial-and-error process seeing what is functioning and what is not functioning.

## A VIEW OF FUTURE THROUGH THE APPROACH OF SYSTEMIC CONSTELLATION

*“The system thinking lens allows us to reclaim our intuition about whole systems.”* Donella Meadows

The German psychotherapist Bert Hellinger introduced systemic constellation, and Jan Jacob Stam has provided us with many of the tools to implement organisational constellation work. We can examine an organization in such a way that we are able to discover, accept and embrace ‘what is’ in the system as a whole phenomenological being. We can hereafter choose the proper interventions to repair the systems imbalances and thereby influence our future.

As a living system defines itself, not only by its individual parts, but also by the relationship between the parts, we must be able to identify the current state of these relationships before making any interventions. We can transform an unhealthy system into a healthy one.

*Systemic constellation* is able to reveal embedded patterns that would otherwise be very challenging to understand and change, or simply impossible to access. Even if we intellectually recognize the patterns of negative behaviours and destructive relationships, it is in practice extremely difficult to transform these patterns. Through systemic constellations, we see the complex web of interconnection reaching into our society, organizations and individual life. Experiencing this interconnectedness can have a powerful effect in our organizations and gives the possibility to transform unhealthy systems.

We contend that systemic constellations offer us a way of working with the future from a different angle than we would otherwise do. Rather than analysing and extrapolating events or considering scenarios, we seek to discern patterns in the interconnections within and around the organisation. By putting these distilled maps of relationships in the foreground, we can have stakeholder dialogues about anticipated responses to different kinds of stress to the system.

This way of working adds an entirely new perspective to how we make predictions about the future, helping us focus on the seeds of the future that are already present in our current patterns.

## WORKING ASSUMPTIONS OF THE SYSTEM CONSTELLATION APPROACH

*“Computers can help you be smarter, faster and more analytical. Humans have intuition and leaps of understanding which computers cannot copy.”* Eric Schmidt, Google founder, in conversation with Carl Bildt, former Swedish Prime Minister, on Google Day, Stockholm, Oct 10 2017

Some of the underpinning principles in constellation work are:

- We understand that the whole is more and behave differently than the sum of its parts,
- We observe without judging the system’s elements, interconnections and purpose
- We see problems as reactions from the system and therefore gateways to solutions
- We look for relationship patterns rather than individual events or outcomes in the organisation

- We consider relationships as more defining and predictive of organisational patterns than individual contributions, achieved results or agreed structures
- We see that individuals easily and unconsciously take on roles and tasks in a way that the organisational system demands of them
- We use the fact that human beings have an inherent and seemingly universal capacity to tune in to the established relationship patterns in a given system even if they are not conscious of it
- Finally, our awareness of relationship patterns in a given system guides us to a new level of understanding of the already present signs of the organisation's future and destiny
  - Once this awareness emerges, we seek to address what the whole system needs in order to become complete, autonomous and healthy

## TUNING INTO OUR PERCEPTION AND INTUITION WORKING FROM THE HERE AND NOW

*"If your mind carries a heavy burden of past, you will experience more of the same. The past perpetuates itself through lack of presence. The quality of your consciousness at this moment is what shapes the future."* Eckhart Tolle, "The Power of Now"

We do not believe that the systems way of seeing is better than the reductionist way of thinking. It is just two different ways of working. One is in the details – the other is in the whole – and none of them needs to belittle or exclude the other, but they are rather complementary. What we firmly believe is that intuition is needed as the way of tuning into the whole field and working through a system lens to understand parts, see interconnections and relate them to the system's purpose. Intuition in this regard is seen as timeless. The past, now and future no longer exist and all there is, is the *here and now* to work from in the constellation. Both the past and the future is already present in our system, if we look deeper. As the author to *The Power of Now*, Eckhart Tolle said: "Nothing has happened in the past; it happened in the Now. Nothing will ever happen in the future; it will happen in the Now."

The system thinker Donella Meadows also calls for the use of our intuition to work with the whole field. She puts it in the following way in her book *Thinking in Systems*: "No one deliberately creates ... problems, no one wants them to persist, but they persist nonetheless. That is because they are intrinsically systems problems – undesirable behaviors characteristic of the system structures that produces them. They will yield only as we reclaim our intuition, stop casting blame, see the system as the source of its own problems, and find the courage and wisdom to restructure it." Doing constellation work, calls us to tune into this intuition muscle, and to connect with the *knowing field*, where the future also is embedded. In this regard, perception is part of our intuition.

## A STORY ABOUT THE KNOWING FIELD

*Even before a lion is seen, smelled or heard by a system of antelopes, the 10% highly sensitive of the antelopes have a feeling that a danger is approaching. The sensitives use their ability to stay in*

*tune with their collective system and sense any ripple effects or disturbance in their system. They start to look around for danger not knowing, where it will come from, showing the rest of the herd that a new future is emerging. By including and honouring this ability of sensitivity and intuition, the rest of the antelope herd receives vital information and a wake-up call also to be on guard ready to flee and thereby save their lives. We use this intuitive ability in a similar way in constellation to tune into the knowing field, sharing our findings with the rest of the herd.*

## HOW TO WORK WITH SYSTEMIC ORGANISATIONAL CONSTELLATIONS

*“We are the seed carriers of the whole in the sense that we carry the mental models that pervade the larger system. We are all actors within the global energy system, the global food system and the global industrialisation process.”* Senge, P: Fifth Discipline, p 348

There are different ways to work with a constellation.

1. One way is to use people as representatives for the different elements.
2. A second way is to use a table top set and use these elements in the constellation.
3. A third way is to use floor anchors as elements, where you will need an empty floor.

An issue holder describes an organisational dilemma and with the help of the facilitator identifies which question to ask and which key elements to choose to represent the dilemma. These elements could be employees, management, governments, other stakeholders, nations or ethnic groups, or more conceptual elements like purpose, resources, obstacles or the planned and emerging future.

These elements are constellated in relation to each other either by the issue holder or by the representatives, when using people as elements. We will see the invisible interconnections, not only by working with the parts, but looking at the system as a whole. As human beings, we have an inborn ability to tune into a field and constellate a system, like neurons in a big brain working in a systemic unified field consciousness. Cambridge University PhD Rupert Sheldrake calls this ability the *morphic resonance field*. The constellation reveals hidden dynamics to explore new and deep insights that go beyond conventional awareness to reveal profound resolutions.

Dr. Albrecht Mahr calls this field of energy *the knowing field*, and describes it the following way; “The constantly surprising findings particularly in quantum physics brings science ever closer to spirituality, i.e. the consciousness of our deep interconnectedness and of love being our original quality and our essence. Quantum physics and spirituality are teaching us that we are deeply connected, "entangled" in quantum language, to all and everything: what happens to others happens equally to us in a very concrete and by six times even measurable way.”

## THE 4 PRINCIPAL KEYS AT WORK IN A SYSTEM

*“A constellation shifts people's perception of where problems come from and suggests ways to move forward differently, that strengthen and build. The new perspectives allow issue-holders*

*fresh insights, a renewed sense of possibility and a strong focus on action. In addition, a synchronous shift sometimes takes place in the real organization or community that has been represented.*“ Constellator Judith Hemming

Through the development of this approach, some key learnings have been made about how systems behave. Furthermore, four key principles keep resurfacing when we study systemic dynamics. Bert Hellinger and Jan Jacob Stam from the Dutch Hellinger Institute have described these as follows:

*1. Bonding – everyone deserves a place in the system and have a need to belong*

Overall, systems seek to be complete. This means that when a part of a system is being excluded, for example if a key stakeholder is denied, the system tends to produce symptoms of the missing element elsewhere. Signs of ill health in an organisation are therefore seen as potential symptoms of unconscious exclusions in the larger system. For this reason, we tend to be attentive to people who are considered rebels or rogues in a system, since they often carry the burden of standing in for something that is being denied.

*2. Order – there is a specific order in the system and a need for predictability*

The most classic order principle is that of age, but organisational systems can also have orders around seniority, expertise, level of contribution to the overall success of the organisation, etc. The point is that orders can be felt in organisations, and can give information about what still needs to be recognised for the system to be functioning well.

*3. Equilibrium and reciprocity – the need to maintain a balance of giving and taking*

The healthier an organisational system, the more exchanges tend to happen within it. This is a sign of flow within the different relationships of the system. And generally, a system requires a reasonable balance in its exchanges to be healthy. Individuals who experience severe imbalances are likely to leave, and if imbalances are prolonged in a system overall, it may indicate risk of fatigue, breakdown or other signs of ill health.

*4. Destiny – systems dissolve once their purpose is fulfilled*

Any organisational system is formed on the premise of a shared purpose, whether or not consciously expressed. When the purpose of a system is fulfilled, or another system can deliver that purpose more effectively, the system’s destiny is reached. This will be the point at which it disintegrates, and its parts may be reused in other systems. Sometimes, organisations try to outstay their purposes, like for example the makers of old phone books still try to survive in the digital era. Usually, this only works for a period of time, and often at a high cost for those involved. When dissolution is delayed, it has often to do with individual fears of recognising that the purpose is fulfilled.

According to the systemic thinker Donella Meadows, a purpose creates our relationships and interconnections, this attracts the particular elements that will be in the system, that hereafter decides the behaviour, and all this end with visible events in the system. Often, we try to predict the future from the shown events and the behaviour, but we are only working with the systemic symptoms, not the cause or the purpose. By the time a problem becomes apparent in

a complex system, it may be very difficult to solve. Constellation gives us a unique pre-possibility to test, if the purpose is still alive and is able to align itself with the emerging future.

## MAPS OF INTERACTIVE DYNAMICS - THE 3 SPHERES

*"If we are not aware, systems try to lead us. The more we are aware, the more we can dance with them."* Jan Jacob Stam

We work with the premise that conscience exists at every systemic level, even though we are only aware of our personal one.

### **1. Personal or unit conscience**

At the personal level, conscience is close to our conscious will. We may individually have an intention about how we want to act in a given situation. When our actions damage our personal relationships, we feel guilt, and we feel innocence, when our actions serve them. As we are bonding with a group for our personal survival, our feelings of guilt and innocence often blind us, to what is functioning for the system as a whole, just like a department minimise its own needs on the behalf of the needs of the whole organisation.

### **2. System conscience**

We contend that also a larger system such as an organisation has its conscience – the system conscience. It acts like a force on its parts, for example individuals, and keeps repeating patterns in this way. For example, an organisation can have a pattern of not making money, or having a continuous high churn of employees, or continuously underperforming in a market although it's not clear why. As individuals, we cannot be conscious of these forces but we can note their effects on the system and our place in it.

### **3. Evolutionary force or emerging future**

Beyond the system conscience, we note what we call an evolutionary force or emerging future, which is a transformative force affecting the system as a whole, against which the system has no choice but to adapt. Here is where the planned future – the system's intentional attempt to evolve – meets the emerging future that brings change beyond the system's own control. In our era, it seems that this evolutionary force is acquiring strength and forces organisations to adapt at a faster rate. When larger societal structures change, this implicitly brings change to the systems within it and demands of systems to turn more of their attention to what they cannot fully know or predict. This ability to show flexibility is a strong sign of resilience, not being stuck to ones planned future. Here constellation work gives a unique chance to revisit the planned future and see in a constellation how it unfolds with the emergent future coming towards you and the organisation and make the necessary adjustments.

With the help of constellations, we can make interventions at these three levels of systemic consciousness.

- 1<sup>st</sup> order intervention – Find a solution to the problem and release context overlap by doing a direct adjustment of the system accepted by the client. Staying in the area of personal conscience. Solutions are not bound, but show up.
- 2<sup>nd</sup> order intervention – Working with the symptoms and dynamics behind the problem, that will often reveal themselves as patterns in the system. Looking into to whom or what this behaviour or symptom is a solution and why the system is doing as it is.
- 3<sup>rd</sup> order intervention – Creating a transformative state securing the relation and alignment to the whole field, not only society. The constellation can reveal something, that already is in the field, but not yet visible, as one pixel of the whole is represented in the part – like in the hologram. Holding space for the whole and thereafter making the intervention, creates a possibility to transform and change. When the transformation has happened, you cannot go back to the former system.

The 3<sup>rd</sup> order intervention gives us a unique possibility to work with the emerging future through the evolutionary force, as the future will be seen in the field.

#### A CASE STUDY IN APPLICATION – EXPLORING THE LOSS OF FAITH IN DEMOCRACY

*“When the future cannot be predicted by the trends and trajectories of the past, we must deal with situations as they evolve. (...) Emerging complexity is characterized by disruptive change.*

*Challenges of this type can usually be recognised by these three characteristics:*

*1. The solution to the problem is unknown. 2. The problem statement itself is still unfolding. 3. Who the key stakeholders are is not clear.”* Otto Scharmer, Theory U, p 61

We would like to present a case study to show the dynamics in a constellation and how it unfolds. The chosen case is a constellation around a societal issue that concerns us all: *Exploring the loss of faith in democracy*. The constellation showed what needs to be addressed and transformed to meet the emergent future.

Doing a societal constellation will pull everyone in the room into the presented issue – whether they want it or not, as the forces are very strong. This puts a high demand on the facilitator’s ability to hold space. In this constellation 18 people from six or seven countries were present and all were part of the constellation.

As the constellation unfolded, participants had insights about the difficulties for a democracy to face strong anger and fear, and channel it effectively.

The issue-holder or voice-giver started the constellation by choosing the following initial elements to represent the system:

1. Society
2. Democracy
3. People

By asking these three elements to find their own place on the floor, this pattern was shown: People were giving up hope, standing on the periphery looking away. Democracy tried from a distance to get contact with the people, while society tried to get contact with democracy. No one was looking at each other at the same time or established any interrelations. The system was fragmented.

These additional elements or people felt called into representing in the constellation:

4. Government/Politicians
5. Media
6. Anger-Fear
7. An outsider coming from the emergent future

It became clear that Democracy was not able to deal with anger or fear and became frozen and tuned out of the constellation.

Media was fuelling fear into the system and made the elements go further away not relating to each other at all.

The outsider lying on the floor in the middle of it all, felt invisible and showed itself as love.

The following sentences was spoken by these elements:

Element of outsider/love: "I am invisible, and being invisible I can't do anything. I am willing to sacrifice myself or to be a potential for something new, if anyone wants to look at me."

Element Government/politicians: "I can use hate, if I understand it."

The harvest from the constellation was:

- Society and democracy are holding each other hostage
- The people have given up
- The model of democracy is not able to understand and contain feelings such as fear and anger
- The system is ready to sacrifice democracy to continue
- The potential to transform the system is not seen or listen to
- We are close to civil war

In the debriefing, participants had a rich conversation about facing strong fragmenting forces in a way that can protect emerging ideas. A big part of the value of societal constellations is the quick deepening in sharing that can occur thanks to the shared experience of the active relationship maps. This constellation showed how the future is embedded in the here and now, as the present already holds the pattern. It showed us what from the future we need to face, that the future may be challenging us with, and what the larger systemic conscience in a way asks us to review.

## SUMMARY AND CALL TO ACTION

*“The innovations that will have the biggest impact will be the ones that integrate complete value chains around securing long-term viability for social and ecological as well as economic systems.”*

Darcy Winslow, Nike

In this article, the authors show a systemic way to work with the invisible interconnections using constellation work to align us or redirect the future. There exist two futures – the planned future and the emergent future. The first one is easy to create, but the latter we only become aware of, when it has created visible impacts in our life, and it is often too late to navigate. The authors contend that through constellation work it is possible to tune into the emergent future through the evolutionary force, align your planned future with what is seen and adjust the field. The article describes constellation method through the terminology, interventions and principles, and urges readers consciously to use systemic awareness through constellation work.

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