Musings: 
*On Dynamic Engagement*

Mike Jay, Developmentalist

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Detour from Dynamic Engagement
BY MIKE R. JAY, DEVELOPMENTALIST

A few issues ago, I promised you an installment on Dynamic Engagement. For most of you, this may seem like an exercise in futility because of its complexity. Yet, Dynamic Engagement actually allows you to function on the other side of complexity and that, as we know from Oliver Wendell Holmes, is “worth giving your life for.”

When we cannot talk, we must act out our thoughts. When we cannot engage or be engaged, we will act irrationally and unreasonably. Unexamined projections, both active and passive, damage engagement with the other and prevent civilization. Engagement is the field of freedom’s exercise. Wholehearted engagement is the encounter, the essential part of Transformation.

The choice to engage, the refusal to exclude...is heroism. Engagement’s reward is life and richness, though not without conflict and pain. Exclusion’s price is isolation and constant awareness of difference...an impoverishment paid for a false sense of security.

- Stan De Loach

As I’ve stated many times, in the end is the beginning. A recent film by Mel Gibson called Apocalypto demonstrates that in order for there to be a beginning, there must be an end.
Dynamic Engagement signals the end of the chase after complexity—the reason I put forward for getting off the merry-go-round of spiraling complexity.

You can’t catch complexity. Remember the Red Queen Effect!

All of those pundits who are advocating that we change on the inside to match outside change need to be retired. It’s become a silly notion to think that the evolution of our nature via nurture can possibly match the exponential growth of change. Soon, the only constant will be change and then what? How many of us are prepared for the onslaught of that kind of change in the manner so great that no one minute of a day resembles any other minute? Interesting thought to ponder, don’t you think?

Well, when confronted with that situation, most of us aren’t going to check out and become 24-hour-a-day meditators and most people can’t, so what next?

How do we get to simplicity on the other side of complexity?

One way I’ve designed into my own practice as an executive coach and leader—yes, I have to do both at times—don’t we all?—is a way to be in the world, without trying to ‘be’ the world, and search everything that is happening to know who I am.

I said to myself, what if everybody’s right and the world, the planet, civilization may be careening out of our control? And I suspect it is for most. All of the underground work being done off the leadership radar these days is in complexity theory and how leadership is actually an emergent phenomenon—it’s not happening because we do it, but in spite of what we do.

“As twenty-first-century management continues to emphasize decentralized organizing structures and co-evolutionary ecologies of firms, institutions, and markets, there is a growing recognition that traditional top-down theories of leadership are at best overly simplistic (Osborn et al., 2002). That is, leading-edge theorists and the leaders they inform are questioning the assumption that the essence of leadership rests within the character or the characteristic behaviors of effective supervisors (Seers, 2004). Worse, the notion that a leader exogenously ‘acts on’ organizations in order to achieve the leader's objectives may be misguided in the presence of the insight that organizations are highly complex and nonlinear (Meyer et al., 2005). There is also a growing realization that effective leadership does not necessarily reside within the leader’s symbolic, motivational, or charismatic actions.

If leadership is not “in” a leader or “done by” a leader, however, how are we to insightfully conceive exactly what constitutes leadership and from where it originates? A novel approach for answering these questions is grounded in complexity science, namely the notion that leadership is an emergent event, an outcome of relational interactions among agents. In this view, leadership is more than a skill, an exchange, or a symbol: leadership emerges through dynamic interactions (Bradbury and Lichtenstein, 2000). “Complexity leadership theory” investigates the role of leadership in expediting these processes in organizations through which interdependent actions among many individuals combine into a collective venture (Drath, 2001; Meyer et al., 2005).”

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I said to myself, what if everybody’s right and the world, the planet, civilization may be careening out of our control? And I suspect it is for most. All of the underground work being done off the leadership radar these days is in complexity theory and how leadership is actually an emergent phenomenon—it’s not happening because we do it, but in spite of what we do.

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Well, this musing is not to take you there, or completely unfold this for you, but let me set the stage, so that you have at least a set of tools to take into the game. First off, I need to show you one more “simple” idea. Dynamic Engagement lays the ground for the figure of leadership to emerge. In this framework, we examine the agents, rules, tensions and conditions (emergenics, I call them) of intra- and inter-relational events.

In developing Emergenics, the practice of coaching in non-linear environments—and believe me, I think I’m alone on this one so far (Smile)—I have found 10 paradigms whose elements are expanding geometrically on their own. I saw that I could use these to depict the ground of effective emergent leadership. Rather than try to synthesize these into a new theory and create yet another new paradigm, I reasoned that I could keep these fractals in place and holograph them into a field called Dynamic Engagement. My experience over the past ten years has confirmed my hypothesis.

With all the discussion about “engagement” these days, it is emerging as a topic in executive and organizational coaching. Engagement was a term popularized by the Gallup folks in the late 90s utilizing broad research on twelve questions, called the Gallup 12™, and with a new book from Gallup called 12. The Elements of Great Managing.

Here are the Gallup questions:

Q1. I know what is expected of me at work.
Q2. I have the materials and equipment I need to do my work right.
Q3. At work, I have the opportunity to do what I do best every day.
Q4. In the last 7 days, I got recognition or praise for doing good work.
Q5. My supervisor, or someone at work, cares about me as a person.
Q6. There is someone at work who encourages my development.
Q7. At work, my opinions seem to count.
Q8. The purpose of my company makes me feel my job is important.
Q9. My associates/fellow employees are committed to doing quality work.
Q10. I have a best friend at work.
Q11. Recently, someone at work has talked to me about my progress.
Q12. This last year, I have had opportunities at work to learn and grow.

Yet, in my opinion, engagement only begins here. The real value of engagement to a coach, manager or leader, or, in the case of complexity, in leadership, is when engagement becomes dynamic. This means moving out of the static form, where engagement is only the ticket to the game, to a place where it is the game itself. At this point, let me define dynamic engagement by sharing with you these paradigmatic ideas or “stand-alone systems.” Since reality is becoming more complex, our solution-sets require greater complexity, and simplicity.

First, however, let me say that the list that I have compiled is not necessarily the final word. It is the closest facsimile I can create at this time to balance adequately differentiated paradigms and compact structure for practical use. It is the simplest way I have found with which to explain a very complex set of agents, rules, tensions and conditionals. Most coaches use only one of these paradigms in surfacing and structuring meaning making, and it may be that getting good at only one or two of these will provide the optimum benefits for most people who come to us for coaching really need. Yet, for leadership to emerge over time with as much robustness as is necessary to create personal and institutional resilience, we probably would need to examine many more than one, if not all, perspectives
to produce the greatest opportunity for success in surfacing “right action” [right people, doing right things, in right ways, with right timing, in right spaces, for right reasons, to get right results] in a world where change is, or has become, the only constant.

10 Dynamics of Engagement:
- Motivation
- Development
- Function
- Instrumentation
- Reciprocation
- Integration
- Differentiation
- Experience
- Emergence
- Energy

At this time, there is no simple acronym and the only modeling I’ve done of the entire system is in this graphical approach:

Simply put, Dynamic Engagement is the capability to create sustainable resilience in a design, system or network through the co-evolution of robust agents, rules, tensions and conditionals that match or exceed life conditions.

After 20 years of professional coaching, I’ve identified these ten dynamics, enabling us to create a cross-paradigmatic approach to the exponential complexity required to design in sustainability. The reason that a new field is required is in large part due to the inability to distill each individual paradigm any farther without losing the integrity of their systems. Each paradigm (either static or dynamic) is evolving itself while at the same time lending a world-view from its perspective.
Combining these world-views creates an increasingly robust design. This cross-paradigmatic design (or structure, form and process as we might call them when we add meaning) encompasses all life forms going backward in time, and, I would suggest, going forward in time. Therefore this ‘complex design platform’ has the potential to remain resilient enough to address otherwise unsolvable problems as it enhances robustness in the face of increasing complexity.

Now, before the whole monologue gets out of hand, I want to define each dynamic briefly and leave you with a set of engaging questions which I might call ‘engagement 2.0’.

**Motivational Dynamics**

Those are dynamics which emerge out of the ideas, research and models formed when we speak about the essence of the creative forces deemed motives. They are at the very root of all life, usually unconscious in the end, often seen through means.

**Developmental Dynamics**

These are quite possibly the most difficult of all the dynamics to capture holistically because of the elusive nature and nurture of how life, organisms or designs change over time. They clearly link all art and science of maturation, shifts in subject-object relationships, and the co-evolution of neuroscientific exploration.

**Functional Dynamics**

In the realm of the ego, these patterns of function, the dynamics of self-formation, are guided in large part by the psychodynamics of the organism’s intradynamics. Type Dynamics, as illustrated in Jung’s work, belong here.

**Instrumental Dynamics**

These dynamics serve essentially as the lynch-pin for the ideas at the center of choice: the lack, as well as the sophistication, of how all paradigms are valued and played out in the design and flux between life-conditions, and the choices used in coping with those life-conditions—the valuing function.

**Reciprocal Dynamics**

These point to interrelationships among what may be simply called agents, rules, tensions and conditionals. For example, they include how thoughts become action, how beliefs manifest in relationship to experience, how antecedents become behavior, and how behavior emerges as consequences in a dance of inter-competition.

**Integral Dynamics**

These are characterized by the requirements for balance, aesthetics and harmony within the design and among the constituent parts. They touch on reason for being, the ideas of creating stability, or equality, justice or cooperation where all things are equal.

**Differential Dynamics**

These dynamics reflect the notion of dissipative equilibrium where balance doesn’t exist and what’s different has as much or more value than sameness. Emergents include capability arising out of the differences and the application of non-equality to create robustness through a valuing of specialized ability where all things are not equal.
Experiential Dynamics

These are led by experience and the nature of the sublime; observation as reality emerges from the unreal and back again. To notice the unfolding of synergistic pathways that arise out of the intention of the unintended—to manifest reality through observation—imaginal.

Emergent Dynamics

These are non-linear agents, rules, tensions and conditionals which form new properties completely distinct from the properties of those agents, rules, tensions and conditionals that were present before emergence. The realization of synergy, where the whole is much different than the sum of the parts.

Energy Dynamics

These occur at the quantum level, what the bleep do we know? If existence is the interplay between energy and information, and the intention becomes attention, the invisible manifest, then can leadership actually be about energy and information simply on the far side of complexity?

There you have it, my definitions in 2006 of Dynamics of Engagement.

What does it all mean?

In some cases, nothing, in some cases everything. But in the discussion and the confusion of what is and what is not, I offer you below some simple ideas about how to see through the complexity of engagement into the simplicity of dynamics and judge for yourself whether or not to see the world—leadership—as I do.

In viewing engagement, or for that matter what is clearly the dynamics of engagement, we have to go beyond just the engagement of employees. If employee engagement is a leading indicator of organizational success, then leadership engagement becomes an upstream indicator of employee engagement. Executive coaches, more particularly organizational coaches, have to see these upstream leverage points clearly and formulate inquiry that promotes consideration at all levels.

In my final words, I’ll leave you with some ideas about the dynamics of leadership engagement through twelve questions postulated using the Dynamic Engagement model I’ve briefly described. You will see that they are closely linked with the array of perspectives that combine to form Dynamic Engagement and probe leadership at a deeper and more comprehensive level than most frameworks of leadership coaching allow.

Here is a sampling of questions that engage leaders, not just followers:

**LE1:** Who Am I? What are my end goals in life, work and leadership?
**LE2:** What is my developmental skill level and what does it mean?
**LE3:** How do I make and solve problems and is this bandwidth wide enough?
**LE4:** What has me and how do I engage others effectively in that light?
**LE5:** How do I instrument my means and ends goals through my value system?
**LE6:** What do I do to engage others to create teachable points of view?
**LE7:** Is my perspective-taking and decision-making integrally-informed?
**LE8:** Do I take action on several levels geared to each level’s specific need?
**LE9:** What is my experience supporting in my leadership engagement?
**LE10:** Can I juggle innovation and adaptability with sustainable resilience?
**LE11:** What resources do I need to keep myself energized?
**LE12:** Why is my thinking and feeling different now than it was last year?

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Dynamic Engagement is a tool for the onset of complexity in our lives, work and relationships. It gives us the necessary bandwidth to view more of the organization and its network. It provides insight into the complexity—invisible and visible—that can turn an organization on its ear in no time at all.

As the tsunami of globalization strikes the shores of organizational life, we have no choice but to examine our roles in the bio, psycho, social and economic networks connected by these realities. Robustness, resilience and sustainability are all keys to creating what the richest man in the world, Warren Buffet, says is essential for success: “durable, competitive advantage.”

Mike Jay
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