Anarchies, Adhocracies and Learning
Cohesion in the Midst of Chaos
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There are a number of organizational types that have no specific goals or agreed upon plans of action to reach them. These organizational classes can barely be called organizations and are outside the realm of those which fit the generally accepted organizational definitions and theories.

The matrix constructed by Thompson and Tuden (1959) is designed to investigate these organizations which stretch the definition thereof (Scott p. 197):

		Preferences About Outcomes	
		Agreement	Disagreement
Beliefs about Causation	Agreement	Computation [bureaucracy]	Compromise [legislature]
	Disagreement	Judgment [collegiums]	Inspiration [charismatic leader]

Computation is essentially a bureaucratic decision-making process, where objectives are specified (Scott p. 297). This is applicable when there is complete agreement of causation and outcomes.

Judgment is applied when goals are common but the avenue to reach them isn't. This most likely function where there is a framework for open debate or employment of a subject matter expert.

Compromise comes into play when there is a difference in which potential output is preferred though the cognizant parties are in concurrence as to the means to achieve the required end. This is what politics is all about. Thus the situation in a congress,

parliament or other legislative bodies would fall into this category; hence the bracketed term.

And finally when there is absolutely no agreement somebody has to take charge. In such cases, Thompson and Tuden (1959) say that a charismatic leader must step in. But a ruthless dictator could just as easily fill the bill. Some might be swayed by grandiloquent speeches but others must be coerces by threat of bodily harm. And it is always possible for an individual to start as the former and become the latter.

The condition of organized anarchies is a curious creature fraught about with inconsistencies and instabilities. Yet, perhaps it could also be known as a cohesive chaos. According to Cohen, March and Olsen (1972) these situations are marked by three peculiarities, as follows: problematic preferences, unclear technology, and fluid participation. What is most striking is that the realm of higher education falls into this paradigm. What's more they consider this domain "a collection of choices looking for problems, issues and feelings looking for issues to which they might be an answer, and decision makers looking for work". This statement seems to belittle the scholar; but it would be extreme hyperbole to say that it applies to the whole community. The truth is that there are certainly some who would fit that description.

Cohen, March and Olsen (1972) developed the concept known as the "Garbage Can" Model to interpret and explain organizational behavior which seem to go against the grain of the traditional elements of organizational theory. The garbage can model is one in which issues, resolutions, and cognizant parties shift between the prospective alternative options in such a manner that the consistency of the choice, the duration of completion, and even the problems that are solved all hinge upon a syzygy like

alignment of the varying attributes. Problems are approached in the circumstance where they arise. This could consist of a flux of the aforementioned variables. Since issues generally do not manifest in an orderly fashion, much less "on schedule", this can lead to no decision being made and therefore no action. Each new issue flaring up and drawing the attention of leadership and pushing the least of problems to the "back burner" until such time as it is deemed a significant threat or presents a glaring vulnerability.

In the field of military science it is said that no battle plan survives the first contact with the enemy. And yet, this saying is attributed to one of the greatest military tacticians of the nineteenth century, Helmuth von Moltke the Elder. Sherman's maxim, that war is hell, is not just about the horrors of human carnage but about the chaos; that chaos which causes what used to be called "shell-shock" but is now diagnosed as post traumatic stress disorder.

The bedlam that is present in a shooting war is an accurate depiction of many organizational situations. A Marine Corps infantry squad receives significant training and then practices the various scenarios which they might encounter like a ballet company preparing for the Nutcracker. They have protocols and processes which are drilled into them until they are like a second nature. However, though camaraderie might engender the semper fidelis mindset there is still a bit of the every-man-for-himself at work. When that first shot is fired in their direction there is an instant of indecision before the training kicks in. Without that training the squad would probable resort to a form of organized anarchy. Each marine has their own little problem; staying alive. But as the exact situation is assessed by the team potential solutions are proposed. Small arms

fire might be heavily directed at the SAW (squad automatic weapon) gunner (usually the

most junior member) which merits a specific action. But then a satchel charge might

suddenly land in front of a member who is directed to concentrate fire at the vicinity

where enemy fire is predominantly issuing from. Mortar rounds then might start to fall;

all this would drastically change to potential solution and reduce the prospect for

survival. Loss of an individual team member would alter the equation further since not

only would there be a loss of firepower but there would be the need to render aid to the

fallen marine. The squad leader has a minimal level of power to direct the actions of

other but the prospect of dying can leave a team member frozen with fright. Problematic

preferences, unclear technology and fluid participation of human assets make an

infantry fire-fight very much a picture of the garbage can model. And in spite of all the

training and semper fidelis, an organized anarchic situation. But in the end, assuming

they survive, they engineer a cohesion in the midst of chaos.

Such is the plight of many, if not most, in the education community. Some are

building resumes, while others are selling books. It falls to the leadership (provost,

president, dean, et al) to bring some semblance of reason to the madness. To refer to

the object of these sergeants of scholars as moving targets would be an

understatement in the extreme. Three dimensions to deal with would be a cake walk

compared to the situation facing these poor souls; with the growing number of

departments in a university the dimensions to be determined, assessed and dealt with

are innumerable.

Cohen, March and Olsen (1972) encourage us not to expect something like a

knight in shining armor to come to the rescue of this type of situation. On the contrary

they forecast what comes across as a status quo where the leadership only do enough to keep the institution from falling completely apart. Clearly defined goals are difficult to specify when there is a general lack of stability. In the midst of the turbulence their only purpose is to encourage the staff and students to continue baling out the boat.

Other contemporary entities where this environment is evident would include business consultancies. These abound in extremely talented and well credentialed staff. But there is also the egos that go with each along with ulterior career motives of each. This is on top of a fluctuating work load which is based on mostly fixed term contracts. This can lead to a revolving door effect as individuals see greener pastures or fear for their financial stability.

Leadership in both of the previous examples of an organized anarchy would benefit greatly from the ability to tell the future. Absent that gift it is imperative to be a student of human nature, learning to read people and client organizations as well as the general state of the economy. An intimate familiarity with the specific community

Of course, all of the effort described in the previous paragraph should be part of the regimen of every person in a position of leadership. Thus any recruiting and hiring effort for management positions should always include specifying both adequate professional coursework and credentials as well as a breadth of experience that can be brought to bear on the issues at hand. Nepotism or a good old boy/gal club is certain to bring in a person who will get along well but does not guarantee that the job will be done.

Adhocracy, like organized anarchy, is more of a behavioral mode rather than a organizational structure. But this is mostly true of each organizational system type. This

modus operandi of an organization is basically what the definition of adhoc would indicate. Making decisions, not based upon some graven in stone set of rules, but an agile response to changing realities of operating environment. A good example of these two modes were evident in the contrast between the actions of Netflix and Blockbuster. Blockbuster had a process that was working for the then-present environment and invested in the way things were. Conversely Netflix adjusted to the changing seascape by investing in evolving infrastructure. Today, on any given evening, many people (perhaps most?) will just log on to netflix.com and peruse the hundreds of thousands of TV shows and movies to determine what they will be entertained by. But if there is a Blockbuster company in existence, I am not aware of it. Gone are the royal blue and gold signs and motif.

Adhocracy would seem to be a much more effective mode when employed in a relatively small entity. Larger companies, such as those which make up the bulk of the US "military industrial complex" are behemoth like dreadnaughts. The ship analogy is a most appropriate metaphor. Water craft the size of tankers, container ships and aircraft carriers, when steaming along at a measly fifteen knots (less then seventeen miles per hour) require significant elbow room to turn and several miles to stop. An organization like Lockheed Martin, Northrop Grumman, General Dynamics, et al, is not likely to change overnight without significant collateral damage. My experience serving on US aircraft carriers informs me that when an abrupt change in course in implemented anything that is not tied down becomes a missile hazard. When an organization, such as the aforementioned, makes a drastic change usually the consequence is in the form of a negative impact on the employee. This is usually followed by reduced value in the

product produced and/or the service provided, as worker attitudes decline. Rarely is there any negative effect on management or the owner. This is the opposite of situations of prosperity; in that case the owner and management benefit, sometimes to the point of obscene opulence, while the employee gets bread crumbs.

The remedy for this is a mode of operation that is learning and applying holistic practices, balancing value to the customer with equitable distribution of the fruits of labor and industry. Although it has been said that the purpose for the existence of a commercial entity is not so that an employee can have a job, yet it is in the company's best interest to treat employees as partners. This has been the practice in a few companies, most notably Ben and Jerry's Ice Cream. Ben and Jerry's also operates in an ad hoc mode, changing flavors as time and circumstances drive attitudes of customers. This is a very simple process for an ice cream making entity but it would obviously be a much more difficult process to change the product or service of some "on the fly". But in the end any flexibility added to the DNA of an organization will provide a benefit to operations in the chaos of our turbulent world.

References:

Scott, W. Richard, Gerald Davis. 2006. Organizations and Organizing: Rational, Natural

and Open Systems Perspectives. 1st Edition. Pearson