Organising Activities

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The purpose of this article is to try to re-define organising activities on points along a continuum of 'power held over' and 'power given and taken', in organisations. My contention is that the terms we use to describe the varieties of organising activities can be exact, but are hardly ever used exactly, so for example, how does supervision relate to leadership? Can a manager be a facilitator?

My second point is to focus on a definition of 'facilitation' as a set of activities which allow a transfer of power from those who traditionally lead, managed and supervised in organisations to those who traditionally, followed, were managed and/or supervised.

My third point is that the form of the organising activity should follow the function of the task that needs to be performed. There is always a choice of organising activity and where this is not optimally tied to the function of the task there will be less elegance of effort and long term systems' harm. So someone 'supervising' a highly ambiguous complex change programme is likely to become exhausted quickly, in the same way someone 'facilitating' three people in a simple two or three step process is likely to appear patronising, and become frustrated.
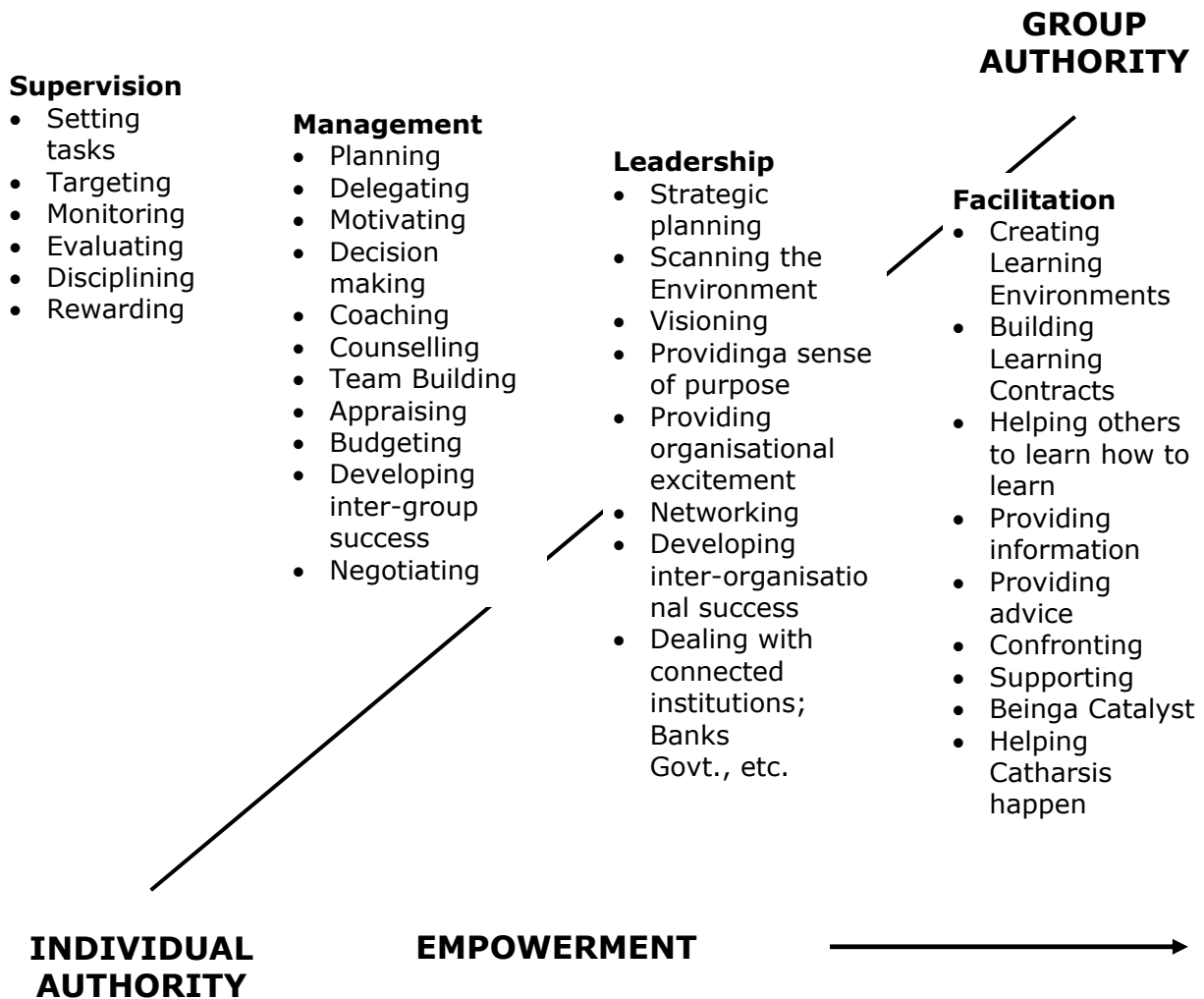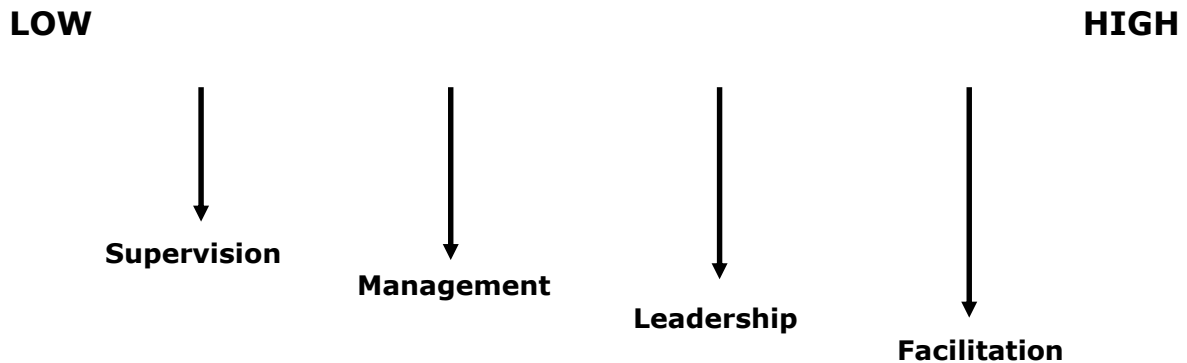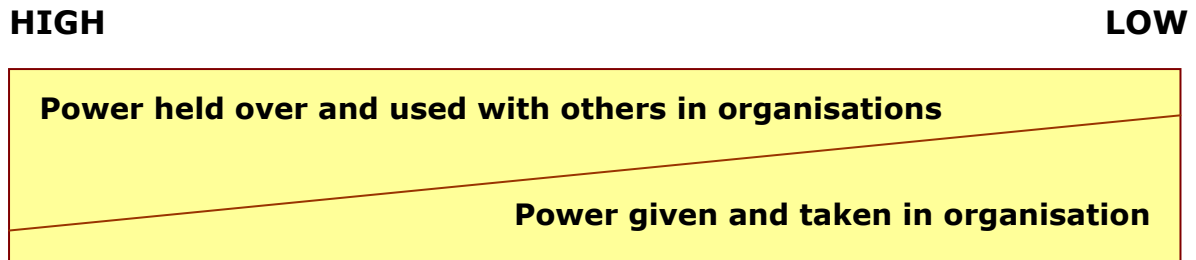

A historical power perspective.

In organisations there are likely to be a range of organising activities; what these are and how they blend and/or are differentiated will depend on the history of the organisation, the tasks the organisation has to perform, and the personal style preferences of the individuals and groups within the organisations. A major determinate of what organising activities are available to a system is to what degree the <u>power</u> ....

- the <u>power</u> of choosing the <u>inputs</u> to the system, and

- the <u>power</u> of creating and maintaining the <u>transformational processes</u> of the system, and

- the <u>power</u> of creating and maintaining the <u>feedback processes</u> of the system, and

- the <u>power</u> of creating and maintaining the <u>quantity</u> and <u>quality</u> of <u>outputs</u> from the system

.... is held by those not engaged in the actual completion of the task rather than power being given to and taken by the majority involved in the task. To do this, the information needed, the expertise required, the decisions to be taken, the reward and the public recognition for making things happen needs to be devolved to the point where it will meet the need of the system to sustain itself and grow appropriately in its environment.

Organising Activities may be matched against power in the following way:

HIGH   **LOW**

Power held over and used with others in organisations
Power given and taken in organisation

LOW   **HIGH**

Supervision

Management

Leadership

Facilitation

GROUP AUTHORITY

Supervision
- Setting tasks
- Targeting
- Monitoring
- Evaluating
- Disciplining
- Rewarding

Management
- Planning
- Delegating
- Motivating
- Decision making
- Coaching
- Counselling
- Team Building
- Appraising
- Budgeting
- Developing inter-group success
- Negotiating

Leadership
- Strategic planning
- Scanning the Environment
- Visioning
- Providing a sense of purpose
- Providing organisational excitement
- Networking
- Developing inter-organisational success
- Dealing with connected institutions; Banks Govt., etc.

Facilitation
- Creating Learning Environments
- Building Learning Contracts
- Helping others to learn how to learn
- Providing information
- Providing advice
- Confronting
- Supporting
- Being a Catalyst
- Helping Catharsis happen

INDIVIDUAL AUTHORITY   **EMPOWERMENT**

None of the categories or activities are exclusive of each other, and it is likely that a good facilitator would have to be at least proficient at a large number of the approaches in other categories. The activities are not reliant on role and position. In a hierarchy, it is possible that someone given the role of supervisor at a relatively low level within a hierarchy will be utilising organising activities involved in leadership or facilitation, however, it would probably help organisational success if there was some congruence between the named role and the organising activities needed for success in that role.

There is also, I believe, a historical continuum of the focus of organising activity with regard to power. When the manufacture of goods and the provision of services was a fairly straightforward set of processes in a slowly changing world, where the differentiation of what was offered was relatively simple, it was possible to have an organising focus mostly consisting of management and supervision. As goods and services have become instantly replicable by competitors; workers aspirations about the quality of their contribution and their life have increased; and change in a turbulent world has become the only stable state - some form of empowerment and therefore the need for a focus on organising activities such as leadership and facilitation, which foster empowerment, have become essential. Another major indicator of the need for the activities which allow potential empowerment is that customers have become more discerning and demanding, the moan that 'customers are becoming more assertive' is heard at all levels in organisations, and the appropriate response is to allow those at the boundary with the customer, more power to satisfy the customer at first contact or to recover the relationship after a mistake has occurred.

Paradoxically as organisations have become more aware of the turbulence that is endemic in their ever changing world, many have felt a need to become more controlling rather than more empowering. There is value in keeping task definition, standard procedures and costs 'tight', but also to allow for 'loose' forms of response, therefore making sure that the discretion to get things done sits where it is <u>useful</u>, e.g. at the boundary with the customer, rather than where it sits most <u>comfortably</u> e.g. at the top of a hierarchy. This ability to have 'tight' and 'loose' control at the same time is becoming critical for organisational success.

Facilitation as an organising activity.

Facilitation is distinct from the other forms of organising activity in that its primary intent is to enable others to become more competent, efficient, creative and powerful. These states may be an outcome of good leadership, management or supervision but is not their primary intent. This is not to say that facilitation is not concerned with more effective task completion, it is, but it is also concerned with the more effective completion of the next task and the task after that, by the people whose job it is, rather than dependent on the ongoing energy of a supervisor, manager or leader.

Running parallel to the ideas of empowerment through facilitation, is the movement away from individual responsibility, action and reward toward team responsibility, action and reward. This is made most evident by the move toward some sort of project based matrix management system in even the most traditional organisations. Teamworking is where facilitation as an organising focus really comes into its own. When the group moves from being led; to being facilitated by its leader or to being facilitated by the person most appropriate to the circumstances that the team is meeting in, then it is possible to flatten hierarchies, build useful long-term relationships with customers, and release more creativity into the organisation. Using facilitation, people feel more able to personally contribute to problem solving, error reduction and the generation of novel processes and solutions. Therefore, helping organisations move toward total quality and real cost reductions
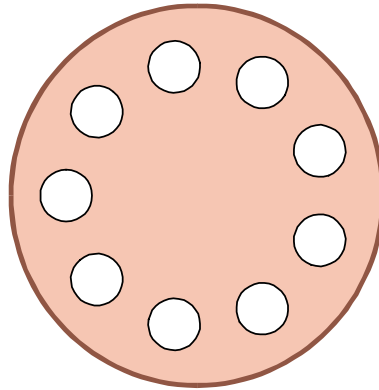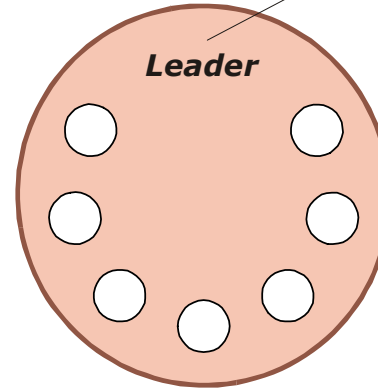
Supervision
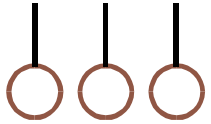
Individual
Orientation

Management
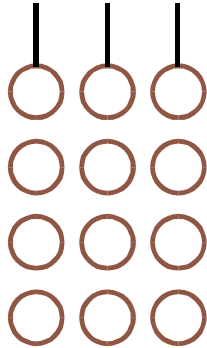
Functional
Orientation
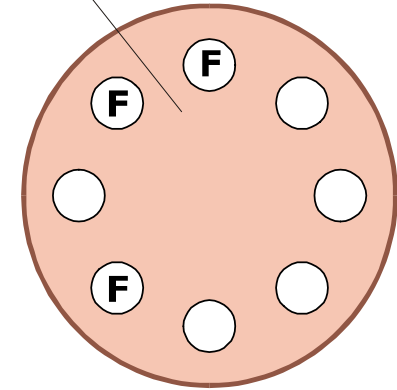
Leadership

Organisational
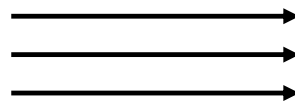Direction

Facilitation

Leader

Leader as facilitator

Team & Organisation
Focus

Aligning organisational
effort with environmental
need

F

F

F

Facilitator appropriate
to circumstances may
rotate

Connecting success to
long-term satisfaction
of environmental needs

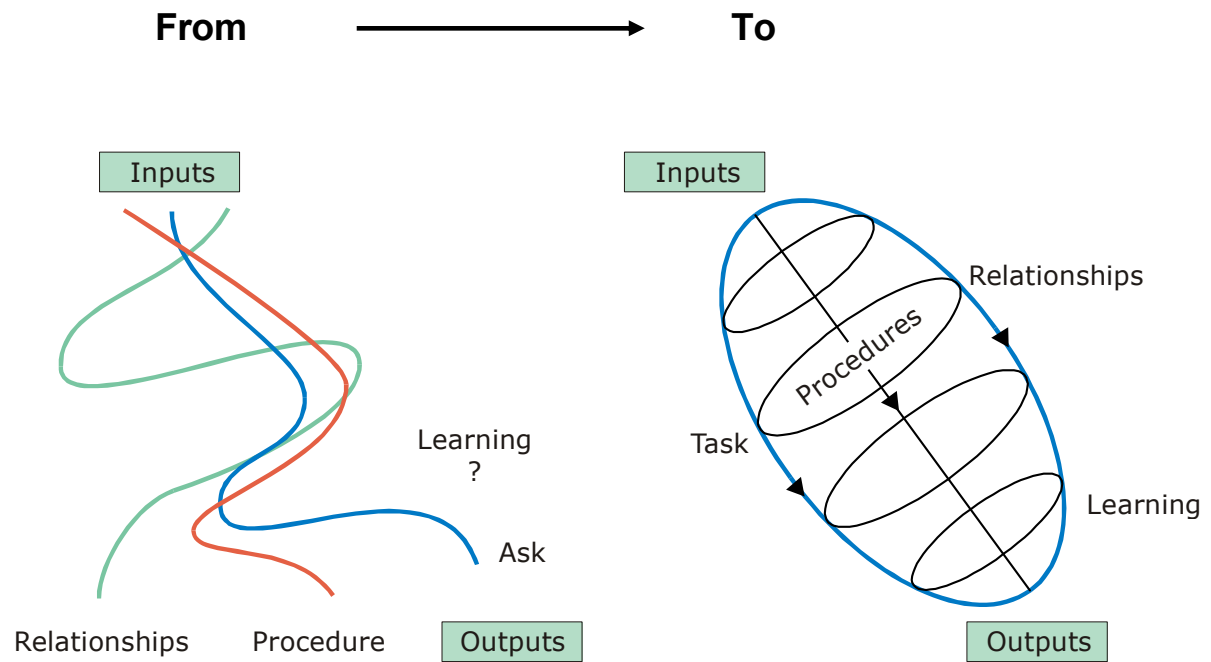|		
Compliance	→	**Commitment**
Doing	→	**Doing and learning**
Single Loop Learning	→	**Double Loop Learning**

Treating outputs for customers as:

Commodities → **Products** → **Brands** → **Relationships**
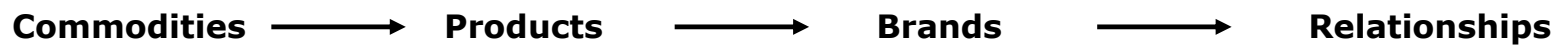
The facilitator helps the team, the individuals in the team and therefore the organisation towards optimum outcomes, by allowing them to learn as they go; e.g. learning to identify and coalesce around the right task at the right time, choosing the appropriate procedure for completing the task, building on productive relationships, and disentangling and resolving more difficult relationships.

From → **To**

From	To
Inputs	Inputs
Learning ?	Relationships
Ask	Procedures
	Task
	Learning
Relationships Procedure Outputs	Outputs

(After E Shein Process Consultation: Lessons for Managers and Consultants 1987. Addison-Wesley.)

The facilitators role is to enable learning by:

- Adding and helping refine knowledge

- Adding and helping refine skills

- Helping create and re-align values, attitudes, norms and assumptions.

- Helping develop emotional resilience

- Helping resolve redundant patterns or blocks to/in the individual, team or organisation.

To enable this to happen, the facilitator will use a range of behaviours with the intent of doing one or more of the following:

- Giving information

- Providing advice

- Confronting

- Providing support

- Being a catalyst, helping others to new and more useful thought

- Helping catharsis happen, allowing others to release blocked energy and move to more
- useful feelings states.

(John Heron, 6 Category Intervention Analysis in 'Helping the Client', 1990)

These interventions which intend to elicit different forms of learning, can be directed at differing levels i.e. the individual, group or organisation. For example:

Levels of intervention	Example of potential intervention
Inter Organisational	Giving information about your Bank's stance on funding a new project.
	Helping two organisations think through a plan for collaboration/ merger.
Organisational	Providing advice on how to introduce a new I.T strategy.
	Using a questionnaire to allow a workforce to express its feelings about the state of the organisation.
Inter Group	Confronting two functions on their inability to collaborate with each other.
	Supporting another department by recognising and celebrating their successes.

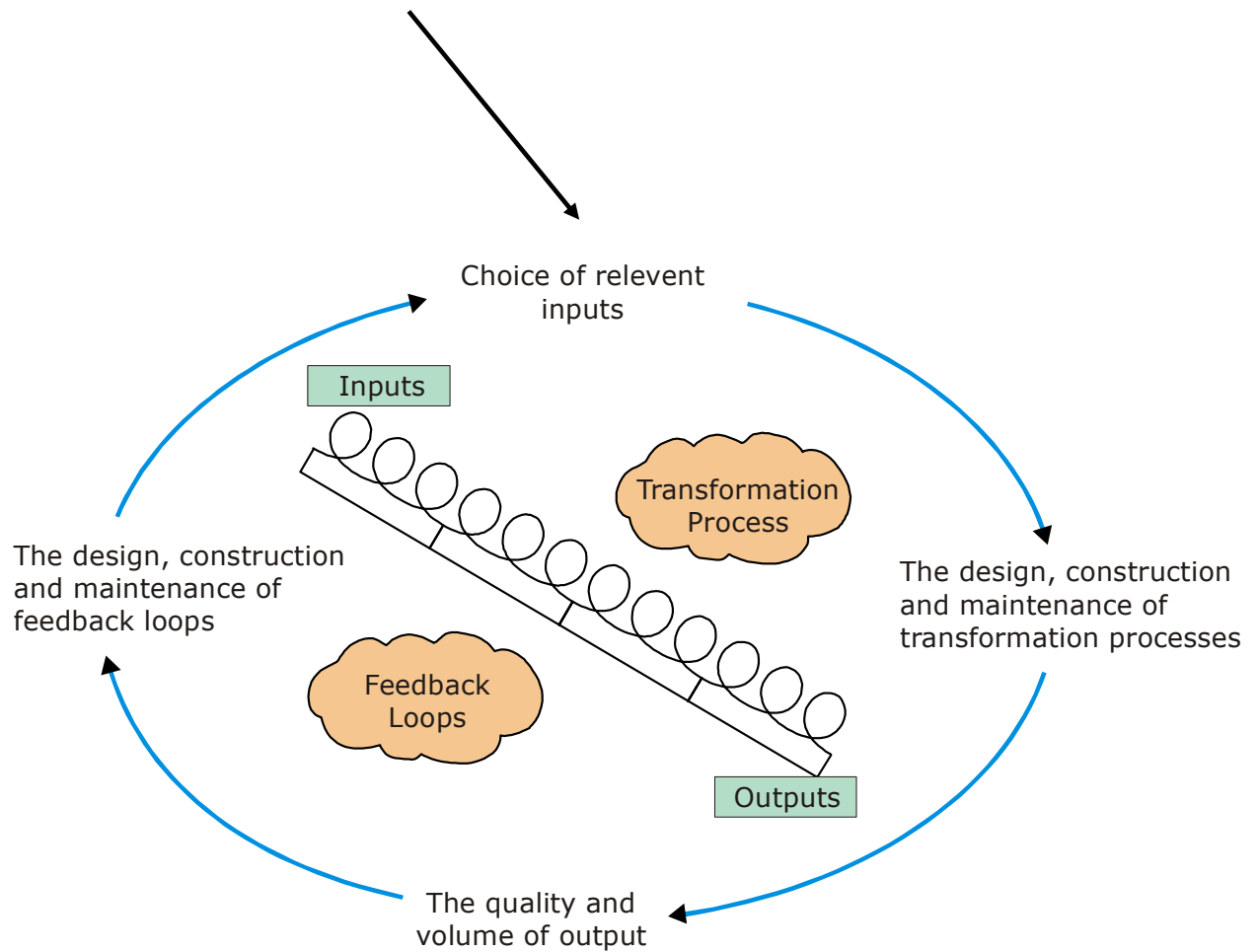|	
Group	Helping the group <u>think through</u> and develop a new model for working together.
	Providing <u>advice</u> on how a group can define its vision and purpose.
Interpersonal	<u>Providing support</u> to individuals who want to repair their damaged relationship.
	<u>Confronting</u> two people on their inability to listen to each other.
Personal	Facilitating an individual to <u>release his/her anger</u>, usefully.
	<u>Providing information</u> about the available pension top-up schemes.

Thus, facilitation as an organising activity is designed to empower individuals, teams and organisations by intervening with the appropriate behavioural intent and at the appropriate level, so that learning takes place. This learning is used to maximise the:

Choice of relevent inputs

Inputs

Transformation Process

The design, construction and maintenance of feedback loops

Feedback Loops

The design, construction and maintenance of transformation processes

Outputs

The quality and volume of output

Form and Function

Unfortunately the <u>form</u> of work processes has not only been designed to follow the <u>function</u> of the work to be undertaken, but has been constrained by other issues usually expressed as one side of a bi-polar construct. This produces what is seen to be either/or choices about what form the organising activity should take.

Thus traditionally: one end of the bi-polar construct was deemed to be 'correct' and when this 'correctness' was challenged, a jump toward the other end of the continuum was deemed to be 'correct' or how the 'Japanese/Asians/Americans/Europeans did it better than us', - us, of course, being Japanese/Asians/Americans/Europeans'.

These are the constructs that seem to have an effect on the choice of organising activity.

Planning   Short term - Long term.

Decision Making   Centralised - De-centralised.

Information Flow   Cards close to chest - Tell everybody everything.

Action Orientation Compliance is enough - Commitment is essential.

Reward   Individual focus - Teams or group focus.

Structure   Hierarchy - Chaotic group formation.

Outputs   Quantity - Quality.

Customer   The Chief Executive/ Management -   People who spend money on
                                                          what we sell.

Culture   Culture as a description of 'what is' - Culture as an adaptive process.

Learning   Reduction to principal - Emergence from continuous learning.

Working at one end of these continuums is not as useful as the capacity to be able to use organising principals in such a way as to be at the point on the continuum that <u>fits</u> what you are doing, and also to be able to be at <u>both</u> ends at the same time. The capacity to choose, gets rid of the core construct.

   Bi-polar Understanding   -   Complex co-adaptive system understanding

Both are useful and both are necessary for choosing the most appropriate organising principal. So it is appropriate that for one task a group is supervised, whilst for another they may facilitate each other. It is appropriate that the CEO of one organisation at a particular time uses managerial activities, and at another time uses leadership activities. Looking at activities in this way allows individuals and teams more freedom to focus on what is needed rather than trying to act out a role, where the activities may be inappropriate to successful task completion.

What is needed in terms of focus of organising activity, for form to follow function, will depend on whether a number of optional conditions are met, or not met.

These include:

Supervision

- The work is new/novel to the person doing it.
- The work can be observed by the supervisor.
- The required outputs are reasonably predictable and uniform.
- The number of people interactions needed to get the work done are minimal.
- The tasks are concrete and measurable, rather than ambiguous.
- Compliance is really all that is needed to ensure some success.
- There is some legal or ethical need to assess competence and integrity for the wider good.
- What is being traded is a differentiated commodity.

Management

- Work can only be successfully completed through others efforts.
- A set of tactics is needed to move from inputs to outputs.
- Work can be done in more than one way.
- People need to understand and accept a common set of objectives.
- It is recognised that people need to be motivated to perform well in their work.
- There is a high reliance on information systems
- and procedures.
- There needs to be individual responsibility for costs, revenue and profit.
- Tasks exist within agreed and measurable parameters.
- What is being bought is a differentiated product.

Leadership

- A strategy aligning organisational effort with the environmental need, is necessary.
- It is not possible to be aware of everything that is being done in the system.
- A shared vision of the future is essential to system success.
- A clear understanding of what the system exists to do, will bind people together and focus them on their markets.
- A high degree of commitment to the system's vision is necessary for success.
- Tasks are ambiguous, changeable and hard to measure.
- What is being bought is a differentiated brand.

Facilitation

- A strategy connecting the organisation to the long-term satisfaction of environmental needs, is necessary.
- Shortening learning times, Is necessary to meet complex demands and changes in the environment.
- Creativity and innovation are necessary for long-term success.
- Long chains of commands are seen as detrimental.
- People demand to be fully involved in most aspects of what they do.
- What is being bought is a differentiated relationship.