“The world we have created today as a result of our thinking thus far has problems which cannot be solved by thinking the way we thought when we created them.”
—Albert Einstein, The Price of Excellence

Whether in a Petri dish or in the global economy, things happen because culture is the fundamental medium. Organizations, communities and societies are realizing that ideas and efforts grow, contend and thrive only when nurtured by the culture.

In the real world, there are problems that refuse to be solved with current best practices. In private sector organizations, how can mergers, turnarounds, reengineering and rollouts yield the payoffs promised in sales brochures, project proposals and planning binders? In public sector organizations, why do bureaucracies stymie needed reforms while political squabbling prevents identification of threats and opportunities until it is too late? Writing off intractable problems like this to “cultural conflicts” might not be just an excuse.

The problem with intractable problems is not that existing structures and methods are wrong, but that we fail to recognize boundaries beyond which these approaches are ineffective or counter-productive. Designed for the clockwork demands of the Industrial Age, traditional “scientific management” attempts to dissect, analyze and discretely measure even those things that are inherently pervasive, organic, fluid and mutable.

In particular, solutions are blocked by the fallacy that three assumptions are universal: that we always choose rationally; that we always act deliberately; and that cause and effect can always be discovered, predicted and controlled. Maintaining these presumptions without discretion can constrain an organization’s ability to bring all of its resources to bear on a problem or opportunity. In the real world, organizations will always find culture to be an invisible barrier until leaders are equally comfortable with both the rational, linear certainty of Newton and the irrational, non-linear uncertainty of Heisenberg.

Beginning this autumn, the Paradox of Culture will be the flagship Discovery Programme of IBM’s Cynefin Centre for Organisational Complexity. Drawing on eclectic influences such as complexity, narrative, philosophy and anthropology, the Cynefin Centre focuses on the intractable problems that organizations must find ways to solve. By catalyzing new perspectives, new insights and new approaches to breakthrough results and sustained innovation, answers emerge from participant’s specific problems, not from standardized solutions. Participants get specific answers that work, rather than standardized methods that don’t.

The Paradox of Culture

**Catalytic Event:** Sept. 29-Oct. 4, 2003 Victoria, British Columbia

**Patterning Event:** Late March, 2004 Cardiff, Wales
The Problem of Culture

“Whenever we look at organizations as machines and deny the great self-organizing capacity in our midst, we as leaders attempt to change these systems from the outside in.”
—Frances Hesselbein & Paul M. Cohen, Leader to Leader

Why is change so difficult?

Culture is frequently at the heart of an organization’s most intractable problems, whether trying to get alignment behind corporate value statements, removing barriers to innovation, adapting to changing market conditions, or maintaining communications across the ethnic and functional subdivisions of a global enterprise.

It is increasingly obvious that inattention to cultural issues is a leading cause of failed transformation. According to statistics such as those from Standish Group International, as many as 75 percent of projects are either abandoned before completion or rated as disappointments after; how often is culture to blame?

Recent research demonstrates that inadequate attention to issues of culture not only mires an organization in ongoing stagnation, but can lead to actual value destruction. One organization planned to triple shareholder value within three years through the realization of ongoing projects. But poor alignment of the top team lost the company billions in delays. A lack of customer focus in business processes lost billions more in sales. Resistance to change and refusal to collaborate across internal and external boundaries removed any remaining opportunity to grow. The company still was incapable of seeing its problems or adapting to new realities. In the end the business was worth barely half its original value.

Any strategic or operational business transformation must be considered within the constraints of the cultural environment. But mechanistic approaches to cultural change fail to accomplish the cultural evolution required to insure improvement of process or performance.

The Cynefin Centre’s research into the application of complexity science suggests that best practices, process reengineering and scenario planning are effective within the boundaries of an ordered world. But in complex and chaotic situations, such as social settings involving large numbers of people, neither prediction nor control is possible. Patterns emerge through the interaction of many entities and careful interventions can only reinforce or disrupt those patterns. For example, attempts to control ethics nearly always fail. But because culture is such a strong determinant of values and behaviours, it can foster an ideation system that is more powerful than rules.

Cynefin Centre Discovery Programmes create a space in which things happen differently and then study the outcomes. The phases of the Paradox of Culture Programme are: Preparation, Deep Immersion, the Catalytic Event, Emergent Learning and the Patterning Event. It is anticipated that the programme will lead to further research initiatives and the production of new emergent methods and techniques.

Preparation

During the month leading up to the first live event, participants will identify and collect major issues and practical problems associated with culture, using a pioneering collaborative software environment created by IBM’s Watson Labs. The result will be a “narrative database,” which will later be used to create new patterns of meaning during face-to-face exercises.

Deep Immersion

In September 2003, participants will meet at Vancouver airport and fly to Canada’s Yukon Territory for an overnight cultural immersion experience hosted by First Nation peoples. The journey is designed to disrupt entrained thinking and “modern” perceptions about culture and intractable problems.

Royal Roads University

PARADOX OF CULTURE PROGRAMME TIMELINE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PREPARATION</th>
<th>IMMERSION</th>
<th>CATALYTIC</th>
<th>EMERGENT LEARNING</th>
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<td>SEPTEMBER 2003</td>
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<td>2-3 OCT</td>
<td>OCT 2003 – MARCH 2004</td>
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Catalytic Event

Immediately following the Deep Immersion event, participants will convene at Royal Roads University’s, 565-acre seaside campus on Vancouver Island, overlooking the Juan de Fuca Strait and the Olympic Mountains in a stunning region of natural beauty (www.royalroads.ca).

In this setting, removed from day-to-day sensibilities, participants will collectively use the narrative database prepared earlier to cluster, merge, refine, define and describe the culture-related problems they need to solve. This will be done using patented complex facilitation techniques pioneered by the Cynefin team over the past five years. At the event, participants will be joined by “naïve intelligences” in the form of advanced practitioners in fields unrelated to business and organizational development, such as moral theologians and cultural anthropologists who have not previously considered the application of their discipline to the modern organisation. Separately, these naïve assets will use the same process to distil from their disparate disciplines a variety of core concepts that can be applied to members’ problems. Then the groups will come together in a highly interactive process that looks for matches between available problems and available solutions until new possibilities and perspectives become apparent. Out of this iterative recombination, eight or nine of the most promising projects will be selected and structured for the Emergent Learning phase.

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<tr>
<th>CATALYTIC EVENT SCHEDULE DETAILS</th>
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<td><strong>Sept. 29</strong></td>
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Emergent Learning

For the six months following the Catalytic Event, participants will collaborate on emergent research projects to develop, test and refine new methods and ideas in the contexts of their own organizations, assisted by the Cynefin team.

To imagine how this process works, consider the intense cynicism present in so many organizations that previously—perhaps repeatedly—attempted to change how they operate. For example, the Cynefin Centre once approached the problem of communicating corporate values and mission by using anthropological insights about the persistence of ritual in the absence of belief in Jainist tribes of Northern India.

The actual details of the Emergent Learning projects will emerge during the Catalytic Event, but areas for investigation are expected to include mergers & acquisitions, sustaining value, fostering trust and communication.

Participants will need to allocate sufficient time during this period to integrate emergent learning activities into their normal work schedules.

Patterning Event

In late March 2004, the Patterning Event will be held in Wales at award-winning Cardiff University Business School (www.cf.ac.uk), where the Cynefin Centre now has its international headquarters.

After another cultural immersion experience, this time in post-industrial Celtic culture, discussions will now reframe the question of culture. Participants will report on the results of their own efforts and review what other participants have learned in their own organizations. Emergent methods—new approaches discovered during the Catalytic Event and contextualized to real-world situations during the Emergent Learning phase—will now be added to the available toolkits, while traditional approaches will be legitimised within boundaries and remaining “white spaces” will be identified and explored.

What Happens Next?

Based on the insights to emerge from the patterning event, the Cynefin Centre will create a variety of new tools and methods that participants can continue to exploit in their organizations. The programme will lead to further research initiatives and the production of new emergent methods and techniques.

Cynefin Centre consultants and researchers do not analyse or prescribe solutions for programme participants. Instead they create the conditions under which a community develops descriptive self-awareness.

“*The real voyage of discovery consists not in seeking new landscapes, but in having new eyes.*” —Marcel Proust
The Cynefin Centre
IBM Global Services

About the Cynefin Centre

The IBM Cynefin Centre for Organisational Complexity (pronounced kun-ev'in) is at the forefront of an emerging management discipline and practice based on the science of complex adaptive systems. Moving beyond the very traditional, process-bound ways of doing things that stifle creativity and out-of-the-box thinking, it is creating a rich, diverse environment for people to reconsider intractable problems in new ways.

Cynefin has been able to achieve radical breakthroughs through methods that bound the basic assumptions of scientific management. The Cynefin sense-making framework is used to gain a deeper understanding of intractable problems, clearly showing where false assumptions have been made about underlying cause and effect. Instead, complexity theory reveals that often there is order in which no director or designer is in control but which emerges through the interaction of many entities. Cynefin creates an experience that disrupts entrained thinking to engender personal insights and find breakthrough solutions.

The Cynefin Centre focuses on high participation action research projects seeking fresh, practical insights into the nature of organisations and markets using models derived from sciences—such as biology, philosophy, anthropology and cognitive psychology—that recognise the inherent uncertainties of social systems. The basis of all programmes is creating focused interactions between many sources of knowledge to enable the emergence of new meaning and insight. The Centre itself is based on a model of networked intelligence, creating a broad loosely structured coalition of academics, industrial and governmental organisations to create a dynamic learning ecology for its members.

The Cynefin Centre is led by Dave Snowden. He was formerly a Director in the Institute for Knowledge Management where he led the Institute’s programmes on complexity and narrative as well as taking geographic responsibility for the Institute’s activities outside the Americas. His subsequent work has taken him into the integration of learning and knowledge using models derived from complexity science and the development of advanced techniques for the management of informal communities and the simulation of social networks.

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**REGISTRATION & ENQUIRY**

Registration should be made by e-mail to:

**Tony.Mobbs@uk.ibm.com**

Your registration e-mail should include:

- Name of Organisation
- Name(s), or number of delegates
- The country in which each delegate is based
- Contact address, telephone number to which formal documents including invoices should be sent
- The number of delegates who might be interested in the optional “wildlife trip”.

We welcome provisional registrations and expressions of interest. Places will be allocated on a first come first served basis, but organisations registering an interest will have their place in the queue reserved for a period of time. All e-mails will be acknowledged and additional details, as well as information requests relating to dietary requirements etc will be sent at that time.

Consortia and other associations are welcome to apply for participation as a “single entity” although places for this option are limited.

If you would like to talk about the programme and your involvement in it please e-mail Tony or phone him on +44 (0) 125 255 8404 or +44 (0) 771 105 9200

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**Costs**

Fees for the entire programme are:

- US$25,000 for one participant
- US$20,000 each for two participants
- US$15,000 each for three participants

Fees include local transportation and meals but participants are responsible for travel to/from Vancouver and Cardiff and accommodation costs (other than the overnight in the Yukon), as well as any meetings during emergent learning phase (where possible virtual collaboration will be facilitated)

A range of accommodation from student residences to five star hotels will be offered to delegates at each venue for direct booking. “Spouse and Children” accommodation can also be made available at discounted rates.

**Early Booking Discount**

Bookings finalised by 25 July receive a 10% discount on published fees for two or more persons per organization.

**Optional Wildlife Trip**

Organised by our hosts at the end of the Catalytic event, this will include several options, such as whale watching, sea kayaking and other activities.