Educating for the New Normal

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Abstract

While we may not be able to forecast the new normal with accuracy, we can design organizations and strategic approaches that will enable us to successfully achieve goals in the new normal. As an example, and as a goal that affects the structure of such an organization, we look at the goal of 'shalom' a Hebrew word usually translated simply as 'peace' that stands for our longing for peace and fulfillment.

Keywords: Cynefin, learning organization, shalom, community-centered learning

Educating for the New Normal

The title of this keynote address has two parts: educating and the new normal. First, we will look at the new normal and then we will look at a philosophy of education that I call community-centered learning.

The new normal: Four possibilities

We cannot be certain what the new normal will look like, but we know it will fit into one of the quadrants of the Cynefin framework. For this talk we will use a modified framework in which the second quadrant draws heavily on the work of Atul Gawande, MD. Based on the quadrants, strategic plans for achieving goals will rely on more complicated and adaptive solutions as one goes up the ladder of complexity. Figure 1 shows the Cynefin framework for categorizing situations which provide relative degrees of challenge due to their complexity. This framework has been modified to include insights from Gawande (2010) on plan execution.

Figure 1

Cynefin Framework of Complexity with Appropriate Strategies for Goal Achievement

Complex	Complicated
System may achieve homeostasis by constant interaction of variables. A model is needed to describe the system which specifies important variables that affect goals. Adjusting one variable may have unforeseen consequences. Plan must follow a checklist of 1) variables to monitor and 2) communication procedures to address unforeseen situations. A team is needed to adapt and implement successfully.	*Static conditions (no complex interactions), but several steps needed to achieve the goal.* Plan must follow a checklist due to memory and processing limitations of the implementer. Work can be distributed with little or no interaction among workers.
Chaotic	**Simple**
Homeostasis is not possible, but there may be a strange attractor. Highly nonlinear and unpredictable. Similar to complex, but involves continual trial and error due to the ever-changing situation.	*Static conditions. One (or a few steps) needed to achieve goal.* Plan follows a rule (or best practice)

A new normal that is unpredictable requires constant monitoring of meaningful variables. That is, there must be a clear connection between what is measured and desired outcomes (Doerr, 2018). To prepare for the likely scenario of a complex new-normal, a learning organization is needed (Senge, et al., 2012). A learning organization is based on five disciplines developed by Peter Senge and associates. These are: systems thinking, personal mastery, working with mental

models, building shared vision, and team learning (Senge, et al., 2012, p. 5). The vision of this organization might be many things, but in the next section we will consider the vision of shalom.

Education: Community-centered learning

Education is empowering learners to achieve goals. This can be done with fixed goals such as achieving a 7.0 on the IELTS examination or at the meta level of clarifying goals and strategies to achieve them. For this talk we will look at the meta level. At the most general level we all have a goal of a better life. The exact definition of a better life may vary, but I would like to draw your attention to an ancient concept called 'shalom' in the Hebrew Bible. In English, it is usually translated 'peace,' but it encompasses a more general sense of wellbeing. When a blessing was pronounced, the aim was a state of 'shalom.'[1]

So far, it is not a very controversial statement to say that people want peace or a better life, but if we continue to look at the concept in the Bible, we will see that there are many references to being blessed to be a blessing. That is, our goal as educators should be not just to enable our students to be successful, but to be agents of bringing about shalom to others as well, to be community centered. An example whom, I am sure, many of us respect is Abraham. In Genesis, God tells Abraham,

I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. [3] I will   bless those who bless you, and him w ho dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of t

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[1] For example, in Numbers 6:26 the priest is to pronounce a blessing with the words: "the LORD lift up his countenance and give you peace [shalom]."

he earth shall be blessed. (The Holy Bible, English Standard Version, 2001, Gen. 12:2b-3)

Thus I would propose that our education should not be teacher-centered, or learner-centered, but community-centered, that our goal of shalom should be inclusive of all people. Throughout history we find many aspirational statements that seem to set the goal of shalom for a nation or a community of nations.

For example:

> The US Declaration of Independence: life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness (Jefferson, 1776);
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> The French revolution: Liberty Equality Fraternity;
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> Maslow's hierarchy of needs (Maslow, 1943); and,
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> Franklin Roosevelt's Four freedoms: freedom of speech and religion; freedom from fear and want which are enshrined in the United Nations' Universal Declaration of Human Rights (United Nations, 2015).

It is well and good to have a clear goal, but one needs a strategy, in educational terms a curriculum that accomplishes the goal[2]. In his book *Good Strategy, Bad Strategy*, noted business professor, Richard Rumelt states that a good strategy honestly acknowledges challenges and provides an approach to solving them (Rumelt, 2011, p. 4). Let us look at one approach to achieving shalom. In the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus, using words reminiscent of the blessing of Abraham (Wright, 2006), commands his disciples to go to all nations and make disciples by teaching them to follow his commands (The Holy Bible, English Standard Version, 2001, Mat.

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[2] Politically, we see that the U.S. Constitution is a strategy for reaching the goals of the Declaration of Independence; however, upon inspection it is clear that the majority of African Americans and Native Americans were not included. For the four freedoms, we have the organization of the United Nations.

28:19,20). Thus, we see, that Jesus' strategy for achieving shalom is through education (and, crucially, a spiritual change of character connected with baptism[3]). Let us look at how education can achieve shalom. Shalom can be defined as a state in which one's needs are fully met. This is, of course, an ideal which can only partially be obtained at present. Maslow's famous hierarchy of needs can help us to think of the various needs we have (Maslow, 1943).

The challenges to achieving shalom are physical, psychological and relational, and basic to these issues are the problems of necessary character and skills which can, at least partially, be solved with education. Continuing with the example of Jesus' teachings as explicated by Paul, we see that character issues are predominant and a focus on relationships. These concerns can be grouped into the categories of transformation, reconciliation and service. As an example of each, consider these instructions:
Do not be conformed to this world,3 but be transformed by the renewal of your mind (The Holy Bible, English Standard Version, 2001, Rom. 12:2a);

> But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have b
> een brought near
> by the blood of Christ. [14] For he himself is our peace,
> who has made us both
> one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of
> hostility [15] by abolishing the law of commandments expre
> ssed in ordinances, that he might create in himself one ne
> w man in place of the two, so making peace, [16] and might
> reconcile us both   to God in one body through the cross, t

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[3] As I will note in the next section, part of shalom, a large part, and the reason why it is translated peace is the concept that reconciliation with God is the foundation. For Christians this means that the sinful character which causes us to have conflict with God and others is replaced by a new character which puts others ahead of oneself.

> hereby killing the hostility. (The Holy Bible, English Standard Version, 2001, Eph. 2:13-16)
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> …
> and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; [6] and there are varie-
> ties of activities, but it is the same God who empowers th em all in every-
> one. [7] To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for t he common good. (The Holy Bible, English Standard Version, 2001, Rom 12:5-7)

Jesus summed this up in the word love, directed vertically and horizontally:

> And he said to him, "You shall love the Lord your God wi th all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.[38] This is the great and first command-
> ment. [39] And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself.[40] On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets." (The Holy Bible, English Standard Version, 2001, Mat. 22:37-40)

So then, in terms of the Cynefin model, we have a simple command which is always true because there is always a need for love. Paul offers us a checklist because knowing what is love in every situation is complicated but stable. Finally, we see the organization of the church (similar to that of a learning organization) which is able to adapt to complex changes due to its team structure.[4]

Some may say, that is fine for Christians, but what about other approaches (strategic plans)? One that we have previously mentioned is the United Nations. It would be interesting to compare the church and the UN. This question

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[4] While the church structure in the New Testament can be described as a team, historical implementations have often been more hierarchical and resistant to adapting to change. However, in each era we see organizational changes to deal with changing circumstances, such as the monastery for the Dark Ages.

of approaches or strategies is an important question since one obstacle to achieving shalom, is agreeing on an approach. Therefore, we need an approach to deciding on an approach. This approach is respectful dialogue (Bohm, 1996). Any approach adopted will also need to be frequently modified as the new normal becomes the new, new normal. Thus, a learning organization is needed to maintain the dialogue, perhaps an organization like the London International Conferences.

To implement a strategy we need an organization, we need to bring resources to bear on the challenges in an orderly manner. Since the challenges are not constant, we need a learning organization (Senge, et al., 2012); we need to hear multiple perspectives (Bohm, 1996; Hoffman, 2017); and, we need an adaptive, team structure (Blanchard, Carew & Parisi-Carew, 2000; McChrystal, 2015).

Conclusion

With the right strategic approach and the right organization, we can empower our students to achieve shalom for the community while navigating the new normal.

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