



Why Things Work – The Merlin Navigator

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The world is littered with examples where once promising opportunities became a source of ongoing disappointment and loss. Key projects, partnerships, mergers, new technology and programs - we launch these things with fanfare and an enthusiastic press release, only to suffer as a helpless spectator as conflict erupts, innovation fizzles and profits disappear. What once seemed like a bold step forward only yields pain, embarrassment, waste, lost profit, employee rebellion and investor rage.

Sound Familiar?

While these frustrations are avoidable, the obstacles and solutions that were obscure at inception seem all too clear during the debrief. What organizations want (and what they need) is a better way to anticipate and address impending challenges BEFORE they create disaster. With this in hand, they have the tools to minimize gaps, achieve breakthroughs, sustain momentum and create success.

To achieve this, organizations need to recognize that key players may view the endeavor from a radically different perspective. These differences can exist when the players are members of a common team or organization; the differences are magnified when players from different organizations must work together. In business, government and communities, we have become so specialized that we can't easily talk and influence each others' approaches to our jobs and lives without a very special effort to do so. This special effort doesn't happen often because people are locked up in their fundamental points of view - the mental paradigms that shape what they are able to see and listen to, and which stop the possibility of collective action dead in its tracks.

The paradigm for some is the necessity for sound engineering, scientific analysis or financial justification before constructive conversation is allowed. For others, spiritual consciousness and a bottom line of caring for people is pivotal. Other principles may only see the world through a lens of profit, policy or political alliances.

The outcome of all this paradigm paralysis is that key players may be pulling in different directions, not realizing until it's too late. The lack of cohesion means the group is never able to



align its collective energy and brilliance to yield success or focus its collective energy in alignment with success. What happens instead is endless, unproductive conversation trying to satisfy individual paradigm interests.

Unchecked, this impedes the development of constructive, collaborative processes. They also may lead to all-out warfare between principles.

The symptom and the causes of paradigm paralysis are often the same:

- People feeling like they have no power to act
- Personal, professional and organizational identities that stop change
- Ignorance of what works
- Resignation and compliance
- Absence of dialogue
- Bureaucracy stopping progress
- Having to be right
- People behaving like victims
- Moving to solutions before agreeing on problems
- Losing commitment to goals in the face of events
- Control more important than winning
- Unwillingness to commit to performance aspirations beyond normal
- Avoiding each other's domination

Alone or in concert, these characteristics can derail any chance of success. In some cases, participants may wish they had never opened the project or participated in its processes.

The Alternatives

Typically, the symptoms and causes of paradigm paralysis are easily identifiable in hindsight. Is it possible to recognize them in advance? As a project begins, organizations have employed several alternative approaches to this challenge.

Some will choose to simply "wing it" and gamble that things will turn out okay. Others choose a more proactive approach. Over the past fifty years, business leaders and social scientists have developed many methods, processes and systems that usually are effective when sponsored by enthusiastic leaders. Sadly, almost all fall out of use when the original problem goes away, the leader leaves, or when some people resist and the rest give in to the resistance.

Well-known methods include:

- Organizational Development
- Team Building
- The Blake Grid
- Personal Power and Influence
- Process Reengineering
- Total Quality
- Commitment based Management
- Strategic Management
- Socio-Technical Systems
-and dozens of others designed for special situations.

While each approach has merits, the persistent problem has been that people continue to see the world the way they did in the first place. As a result, the new development method is like a car wash - while it cleans the car in the moment, it quickly gets dirty again. In some cases, these approaches have yielded insights with no associated agenda - differences and difficulties are

identified, but there is no prescription to address them. As participants from different disciplines review the results, they can reach radically different conclusions on how to solve the problem. This creates a renewed opportunity for conflict and paradigm paralysis. Despite good intentions and substantial investment, organizations often struggle to accurately identify root issues, anticipate challenges and achieve lasting change.

Why Things Work & Why They Don't

In forty years of change management consulting, it appeared to me that the vast majority of the obstacles are not technical or financial. Rather they are behavioral and organizational. This is a truth that is too often avoided.

After these years working with engineers, scientists, performance consultants, financial experts, and others whose livelihood comes from manipulating physical realities, I've found that most are addicted to technical solutions and don't pay enough attention to relationship and alignment based solutions. These are some of the brightest and best-intentioned people in the world. Yet they are functionally blind to what is going on in these areas. While many speak of the social reality, most refuse to consider it seriously when pursuing solutions.

These blind spots are often the source of disaster. As organizations and agendas collide, the crucial cooperation needed for success falls apart. In the meantime, individuals attempting to resolve issues may fail to recognize and address root causes early in the process. The resulting delays create a wedge that can split the initiative apart.

My observation is that other things being equal, success in organizations is a matter of integrity. Of course, other things are often not equal. Leaders may be inexperienced for the job or may lack character. Products may be poorly conceived and deadly competition can be ignored. Skills may be inadequate or finances missing. Still, given that a base line of these hard resources is in place, some efforts succeed and some don't.

Consider this:

- Four distinct expressions of Integrity determine success in any organized effort
- The four expressions of Integrity include:
 - Integrity in performance
 - Integrity in relationship
 - Integrity in inventions and creative thinking
 - Integrity in honoring principles and values
- The combination of these four elements creates a whole that can be aesthetically and functionally 'right' for its intended purpose.
- When this combination is "fit for purpose", energy in focus is high.
- When energy in focus is high, goals are far more likely to be achieved.
- Organizations with the most energy in focus will prevail.

1. INTEGRITY IN PERFORMANCE

When integrity in performance exists, people make and keep commitments and honor their word. They have a craft attitude and care about the quality of what they do. They are genuine in their purpose and care about results, not only about the process they are involved with. Every physical detail matters. Time commitments are kept. Problems in performance are acknowledged and personal responsibility is taken in service of constructive next steps. When they do not keep their word, they admit what happened and make a new commitment.

2. INTEGRITY IN RELATIONSHIP

When integrity in relationship exists, people take responsibility for the quality of their relationships and for repairing them when there are problems. Their communication is usually direct and straightforward. They often appreciate the feelings and experience of people around them. They find creative outlets within their relationships and do not simply use them as instruments for their own ends. They are willing to be uncomfortable and allow discomfort in themselves or in others if it seems necessary to solve a problem or improve a relationship.

3. INTEGRITY IN INVENTION AND CREATIVE THINKING

When integrity in thinking prevails, people respect questions and inquiries as much as answers and certainties. They pay attention to what they don't know before attending to that of which they are certain. They are especially interested in learning more about their blind spots. They seek out unfamiliar systems of thought and study them with an open mind. They engage in inquiries into topics and work towards getting beyond their existing assumptions and point of view. They are especially interested in contradictions and paradox as avenues to new ideas and discoveries.

4. INTEGRITY IN HONORING PRINCIPLES AND VALUES

When integrity in honoring principles and values is dominant, people are outspoken about their most important principles. They consider that higher meaning and higher purpose are the proper focus for group and individual activity. They are clear about what they value most and work to organize their time and commitments consistently. Principles are an important part of their public conversations and activities are discussed in terms of the preservation of transcendent values. Principles may be ethical or financial, personal or social, service based or technical. Principles are a genuine statement of someone's higher purposes.

Integrity and energy, the power to act, go hand in hand. It may be high in one of the four areas and low in another. Each has its own character and way of being expressed. If effectiveness were seen as a wheel, each aspect of integrity would be a spoke. When all of the spokes are in appropriate balance the wheel can roll. When one or more is weak, the wheel will wobble or not roll at all.

Each form of integrity and energy is always being demonstrated in some fashion – even though its presence may be very weak. Relationships are always there. Neither can one eliminate the physical universe and the measurability of results. The question is, however, whether people are dealing with each other in a committed way, or whether they simply mean well.

Thinking and innovating occurs all the time – whether people engage issues in an open and inquisitive way or think they already know the answers. Finally, amoral exceptions, people have values and in every situation, they either choose to honor them or they don't.

Which kind of integrity dominates? The strength of any of these forms of integrity is determined by what people pay attention to. Energy flows where attention goes. Energy can be shifted to strengthen any form of integrity simply by altering the direction of one's attention.

The problem is that everyone has their own entrenched way of measuring success, with an accompanying language and logic that support it. Each viewpoint carries its own set of realities, conversations and rules. Each provides a decisive context, a set of fundamental commitments and basic meanings held in the background which brings certain coherence. And in normal affairs, a pure case of any one kind of integrity suppresses the others.

A New Distinction for Organization

A radical shift in perspective accompanies this discussion. It is a shift to the view that organizations consist completely of interacting energy fields, represented in people's power to act collectively. Through this insight, we can now develop processes and tools that put one's hands on the steering wheel of performance and success as never before. Being able to measure peoples' collective power to act is also predictive of current chances of success in any project with an important goal. With this approach, you can assess and plan actions based on increasing the amount of available energy in the system...not simply what people think.

Each year, corporations and governments spend hundreds of millions of dollars on initiatives such as growth, innovation, post-merger integration, product development, and culture change that are destined to fail because the people involved don't change the fundamental way they actually see and measure their effectiveness.

As I worked with hundreds of organizations over the past 40 years, I came to see that what's needed is a way of thinking and a process where people begin to change what they see - to see more clearly what makes things work and what is stopping progress. This results in accessible processes that let people get their hands on the social as well as the technical barriers and opportunities for success.

Further, organizations need a process that helps them quickly and collectively assess issues and develop a cohesive solution. Too often, this has been a missing piece that compounds the problem. Organizations attempt to identify and address obstructions to project success, but quickly get sidetracked into arguments about what the obstructions are and how they should be addressed. Shifting the paradigm of an organization from object-based and linear to energetic permits a degree of quantitative and qualitative measurement, not previously possible. This type of measurement can be done over the internet as well as face to face; it can predict current chances of success based on a group's collective power to act on an important goal.

The resulting insights and direction can be applied in scenarios such as start-ups, turnarounds, complex change activities, mergers, acquisitions and "business as usual".

Conclusion

Organizations face significant obstacles to the success of key projects, partnerships, mergers, technology implementations and other programs. In many cases, these challenges stem from discord in the perspectives and interrelationships of key participants. While most organizations have the will and ability to address these challenges, they often fail to identify them before damage occurs.

Tools and processes recognizing that systems with the most available "energy in focus" will prevail, now offer a unique performance management technology that let us predict the likelihood of project success. It also offers solutions and tools to help organizations achieve their full potential and profile the predictive power to act among key participants.

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