The interactions of people in organizations around certain types of problems and issues can be seen as analogous to a complex adaptive system. Traditional approaches to management of these problems, whereby it is attempted to establish order and control through the actions of a few at the top has been shown repeatedly to fail. Many persist with this pattern of behavior, ironically often moving problems closer to the edge of chaos than closer towards certainty.

The first step in changing this pattern is to recognize that the style of engagement needs to shift to that more like a set of complex responsive processes. The methodology outlined in this paper is one such approach, a dialogue and discernment that invariably handles complexity well and leads to positive outcomes. It has been widely used in a variety of settings and sectors and it is highly adaptable to a range of purposes.

Introduction And Context

It is important, we believe, to set the context for what is to be described. We are consultants, not currently academics (although one of us was in a former life), and the people we work with tend to be Board members, senior executives and middle management in large companies in the resources sector, steel-making, healthcare systems, the financial services sector, the environmental sector and government generally.

We do this work in many different countries and contexts. Through good luck and circumstance we have had the privilege of working closely with Dick Knowles\(^1\) who introduced us to the Process Enneagram as a tool, some 15 years ago. We owe a great debt to pre-eminent among these is Steven Zuieback to whom we owe a great debt in helping us find new, different and practical ways to use it. Moreover, Ralph Stacey has been extremely formative of our thinking for the last 15 years or so.

\(^1\) It is hard to over-estimate the contribution that Dr. Richard Knowles has made to our thinking on this model that he created. His book, *The Leadership Dance* (2002) outlines the origins of the model and its application to the field of self-organizing leadership. The work outlined in this paper builds squarely on his original work, but has also comes from the active involvement of literally thousands of people in exploring, using and refining it in many different settings and countries.
ago. This model intrigued us and we have made contributions to its development along the way. We soon began to realize that the model seemed particularly applicable to settings where there was a disconnect between the formal organizational system and the hidden informal network of relationships, where there was disagreement about the nature of the problem at hand and uncertainty as to the best solution set.

The premise on which this paper is based is that most executives with whom we work experience a mismatch (at some level) between the mental models they use to direct activity or discourse within the groups for which they are responsible and the way the system of which they are a part actually works. They lack language often to articulate this difference and it is expressed sometimes as a search for a tool or approach that will somehow reconcile these differences.

Whilst there are many conceptual traps in responding to this need, we believe that over the last 15 years or so, the approach outlined in this paper provides a pathway that will engender cohesion, allow for emergence, embrace paradox, permit surprise and foster outcomes that simultaneously foster rational achievement, emotional commitment and social cohesion. This paper relates the approach to current themes from complexity and complex responsive processes and then describes its characteristics, use and deployment.

**Perspectives From Complexity**

It is not our intention to canvas in detail the field of systems theory, complex adaptive systems theory or the emerging field known as complex responsive processes. That work has been done by others far more qualified and experienced than us to do so, except to say that we are polytheists around the models which arise from these endeavors, choosing whatever framework will both help us best understand the work we do and will lead to practical application.

We happen to hold to a view of organizations as constantly emerging spaces where real individuals converse with one another as they struggle to adapt to challenges and dilemmas, becoming all that they are innately capable of becoming as individuals, as cohorts and as organizations (Neville & Dalmau, 2008). We expect that such spaces allow for both positive emergent solutions as well as fragmentation; for alignment as well as for alienation, but especially for surprise and temporary coherence as the actors involved build new meanings and actions therefrom. What is important to note, however, is that we often encoun-

2. In reviewing the writing of Ralph Stacey from about 1995 to the present, we find conceptual comfort in using insights from complex adaptive systems theory as analogues for understanding the issues and challenges we face. His concept of organizations as spaces in which complex responsive processes occur, describes (often quite accurately) the nature of the emergent conversations in which we find ourselves. particularly grateful to Bob Dick for critical comment.
ter a tension between the drive to solve problems at the altar of the ‘quick fix’ on the one hand and the realization that the problem is far more complicated than first thought. Indeed there are often cohorts with varying interests around the problem, quite different interpretations as to its nature and a growing awareness that there is no easy way of resolving these tensions.

Stacey (1996) posits a way of distinguishing alternatives regarding both the context in which decisions are made and the degree of certainty surrounding them, as illustrated in Figure 1. We have used this as a simple means for distinguishing between those problems around which the dominant discourse of linear, top-down, leader directed decision-making is appropriate (what Hazy et al, 2007, describe as administrative or convergent leadership) and those problems where a more enabling or emergent disposition is called for. We have come to call this the “middle ground”. In the top right area of Figure 1 are those issues around which there is little agreement and little certainty. Stacey suggests this is an area for avoidance, anarchy and randomness.

It is our contention that the social environments and problem types that many executives and managers face are not in the bottom left hand corner of convergent thinking and cohesive social networks at all, but rather in the middle ground. They are problems and issues around which reasonable levels of uncertainty exist as to the likely efficacy of any known strategy and reasonable levels of disagreement arise from the hidden informal social networks of the organiza-

---

4. Easily accessible as a distinction to all in organizations from board members operators.

**Figure 1 Problem Types**

Stacey (1996) posits a way of distinguishing alternatives regarding both the context in which decisions are made and the degree of certainty surrounding them, as illustrated in Figure 1. We have used this as a simple means for distinguishing between those problems around which the dominant discourse of linear, top-down, leader directed decision-making is appropriate (what Hazy et al, 2007, describe as administrative or convergent leadership) and those problems where a more enabling or emergent disposition is called for. We have come to call this the “middle ground”. In the top right area of Figure 1 are those issues around which there is little agreement and little certainty. Stacey suggests this is an area for avoidance, anarchy and randomness.

It is our contention that the social environments and problem types that many executives and managers face are not in the bottom left hand corner of convergent thinking and cohesive social networks at all, but rather in the middle ground. They are problems and issues around which reasonable levels of uncertainty exist as to the likely efficacy of any known strategy and reasonable levels of disagreement arise from the hidden informal social networks of the organiza-

---

4. Easily accessible as a distinction to all in organizations from board members operators.
tion as to the nature of the problem. It is also our contention that the pervasive and dominant model of change management that drives so much modification to structure, strategy and process in the corporate world largely fails to achieve its desired outcomes because:

1. It is often conceived and executed within the frames of thinking that sit in the bottom left hand corner rather than the middle ground, and;
2. It lacks the appropriate style of leadership to support what emerges.

It is not that such thinking about change is inappropriate. It is appropriate for those problems and issues that sit in this bottom left hand corner and are susceptible to resolution by linear, mechanistic modes—the dominant discourse as Stacey calls it. Rather, this approach is often based on a failure to comprehend that so much change is large, complex and engenders a range of reactions among stakeholders that squarely define it as a middle ground phenomenon.

A few recent examples illustrate the type of problems we often find ourselves considering,

- The total re-working of the mining program at a bauxite mine near the end of its life, hampered by a low grade ore body and close to a community that has low tolerance for noise pollution from heavy machinery;
- The engagement of over 150 medical, nursing and allied health professionals to influence over 3000 health professionals regarding patients who require early and radical secondary intervention for early stage renal failure;
- The integration of 17 different country practices into one firm in the professional services sector;
- The reformulation of a global marketing strategy for a global financial services firm;
- The re-development of a close knit team of health professionals working with the medical staff and families of organ donors as they struggle to avoid introjecting into their own relationships the existential angst, confusion, anger, loss and dread that is naturally part of this type of work;
- The establishment of guiding principles and actions that generate a step change improvement in safety performance and an unplanned increase in the robustness of relationships among the leadership cohort of a steel manufacturing company;
- The re-constitution of a Board and the leadership of a multi-national company after about half of the Board members had been indicted for criminal offences;

5. The dominant model of change management in many of the organizations where we work is usually a derivative of John Kotter’s work
• The re-patterning of engagement with households in a neighborhood of a large Australian city to stimulate behavioral change and transport choices that reduce greenhouse emissions.

Organizations and their leaders can find themselves facing such problems arising from a variety of situations, including neglect, a crisis, persistent conflict, cycles of failure, persistent disconnects between what is espoused and what is practiced (Dick & Dalmau, 1990), or something that is outside the current know-how of the group (Heifetz, 2009).

It is further proposed that such problems or issues and the semantic space in which they are created can be informed by the models of both complex adaptive systems theory and an understanding of complex responsive processes Stacey (2001). By system we mean a conceptual framework or entity that sees organizations as collections of individuals, that at times seem analogous to living entities and where complicated interactions among human beings in the “ordinariness” of their day to day communication seem to produce a level of self-organization at a larger level.

It is our experience that such problems and the social spaces in which they arise often have the following characteristics:

• The issue at hand is complex: there are many enmeshed and interacting parts some of which have either amplifying (positive feedback) or dampening (negative feedback) effects;

• The future is under construction in the minds of the players involved; often it is either wholly or partially unknowable in real and pragmatic ways;

• The drive to convergent thinking is balanced by an awareness of the very different (and often quite emotionally invested) interests that stakeholder groups have around the issue;

• It is beginning to dawn on the executives and managers involved that they actually can’t control for the future and that there are real limits to their drive for efficiency;

• Establishing the boundary of the system is often fraught because of the various hidden and informal interests around the issue;

• Social strange attractors (Stacey, 2010) are at play in the form of established cultures, i.e., sets of assumptions, beliefs and perspectives that, in turn, guide action.

Snowden and Boone (2007) describe a complex system as one that:

• Involves interacting elements;

• That are non-linear;

---

6. Ronald Heifetz: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QfLLDvn0pI8,
• With emergent properties;
• Arising from a history of internal engagement of the parts and with the environment, and;
• Where what happens next cannot be predicted.

We contend that the situations we often face and that are the subjects of this paper tend to look like complex systems and we take from Stacey (2010) the thought that complex adaptive systems theory, in particular, provides us with some useful analogues.

The forces described above are being played out in the very local and personal interactions between the players involved over time. The following characteristics are typical of the situations susceptible to the approach we describe:

• More often than not problems get to be resolved by ordinary people in organizations sitting down together and communicating in real time face to face7.
• Their interaction (arising from their diversity) produces new forms of knowledge and a coherence to their shared understanding of the problem.
• The focus of conversation is the current actual activity in which the players are engaged and the emerging future they desire to resolve tensions between reality and desire.
• It is in the conversation about these tensions that the players come to see new forms and patterns emerge, surprise often occurs, and the result is a shared will to act in some new manner. Mostly this produces new and more effective forms and processes, but it can also occasionally lead to less effective ones. In other forums, we have suggested this can be stated as creating rational, emotional and social outcomes for those involved.
• They are conversations in which their success depends on two critical variables, having the right people in the room and having a real and strong diversity of views among those voices.
• Among these right people in the room are a broad spectrum of both overt and covert power potential.
• Although the conversation is loosely directed, nevertheless self-organization and the emergence of both stable and novel patterns occur at the boundary of order and disorder in the interaction (Suchman, 2002). Making the diversity public is a key feature of the conversation and one which thereby fosters the emergence of new meaning and surprise.

7. We have consistently found that successful resolution of these complaints invariably involves people sitting down together and interacting with one another to create shared meaning, i.e., engaging with one another. Often this is all that is required to get a first approximation of a good answer which can than be further built upon.
The interaction often starts with expression of affect and exploration of relationships. In other words feelings and emotions, meanings and personal constructs, beliefs and personal perspectives become part of the interaction: both the rational and the non-rational are grist for the mill.

The end result is that the participants move more “towards” the issue, the problem or dilemma than away from it—they tend to personalize it more, attach some personal investment of their own to it and are far less likely to objectify it, i.e., remove themselves from it.

It is our contention that the previous lists seem to suggest the following: firstly, that the situations and issues we often find ourselves addressing with client personnel seem analogous in their characteristics to complex adaptive systems, and secondly that the nature of the process which emerges when we apply this process seems to bear many of the hallmarks of complex responsive processes. We do not say this is what occurs every time, but it does so more often than not. If not approached with both alertness and sensitivity it can quickly “degenerate” into either another variation of mediocre critical systems thinking. Worse still, if applied “mechanistically” then it is little more than another form of convergent thinking and management.

In the context of the distinctions outlined so far, we now describe a practical approach to embracing complexity in the real world.

**The Process Enneagram**

The Process Enneagram is, in our experience, a powerful conversation model, a planning framework and a diagnostic tool that has been used extensively in a range of organizational settings internationally over the last 10-15 years. It is particularly well suited to engage with those types of problems and situations that are analogous to the complex problem spaces described above.

It has been used in diagnosis, planning, facilitation or engagement, conversation mapping, coaching, integrating and clarifying issues, and galvanizing and coalescing shared will. It has been used in hostile union-management conflict resolution, safety assessments, client diagnosis, project planning and review, facilitating mergers and acquisitions, roll outs of enterprise resource planning systems (e.g., SAP, JDE), re-aligning world-wide marketing strategies, team building, and change processes including the re-configuration of whole industries within and across countries. People from accountants to coal miners, health workers, steel makers, corporate executives, marketing professionals, IT professionals, social workers, administrators, politicians and community workers have used the Process Enneagram with success and satisfaction. In almost all cases of its use, it produces results in the social space of the conversation similar to those described in the previous section of this paper.
A Whole Of System View

At the most fundamental level the Process Enneagram enables either those engaged in the dialogue or those using it to generate a picture of the whole system that is their focus or interest, whether it be a bauxite mine, a metropolitan health service, a work team or a neighborhood. The significance of this should not be under-estimated as many organizational and management practices (what Stacey calls the dominant discourse) start out by breaking problems down into their constituent elements, believing that if they are re-constructed in some new manner then the “problem” will be solved—the focus is on the parts not the whole.

There is a place for this mindset, but mostly where there is both high social cohesion and stability of power relationships combined with high predictability as to the efficacy of a solution set—what we might call the bottom left hand corner of Figure 1. This approach however, often fails to acknowledge or understand the powerful and hidden human, cultural and social forces at work in organizations. It is these forces where there is less agreement and cohesion that tend to undo well-intentioned mechanistic approaches.

The use of Process Enneagram model as an approach to middle ground problems helps those involved to see “the system” with all its rational and non-rational elements as one, in a simple and visual manner. And when it is supported with appropriate leadership from power figures in the organization, it tends to produce coherent, surprising and engaging solutions.

A Way Of Engaging With Complex ‘Middle Ground’ Problems

As already outlined we contest that the Process Enneagram is a practical process framework and methodology for addressing complex or “middle ground” problems, especially those where there is reasonable uncertainty and reasonable to high disagreement among those involved as to the nature of the problem. This approach is not to be confused with the more conceptual distinctions found in some of the literature in the field, e.g., Snowden and Boone (2007), Olson and Eoyang (2001), or even more prescriptive approaches such as those described by Macdonald, Burke and Stewart (2008). It is operational and hands-on in its engagement of the players. Most of the people with whom we work seek for simplicity in any distinctions they are given, and are usually time poor. Consequently, we try to lead or guide their thinking using devices that make distinctions simply and quickly for them.

In real life, we suggest to personnel in client organizations that problems, issues or dilemmas that satisfy one or more of the following simplified criteria can be thought of as “middle ground” problems. We suggest that whenever:

8. A perilous activity on some occasions.
• The situation is complicated and enmeshed, and/or;
• The change sought is complicated, and/or;
• The outcomes are vague or unclear, and/or;
• There are unknown or unpredictable forces at work that can influence or interfere, and/or;
• People’s feelings or reactions are likely to be triggered significantly, and/or;
• There is a need to equip, educate or train others to implement and sustain change, and/or;
• There are politics involved or likely, and/or;
• Individuals or groups have the potential to feel disenfranchised as a result of change.

It is highly likely that a different mindset and methodology is required to engage for resolution—a mindset informed analogously from complex adaptive systems theory and a methodology consistent with the nature of human interaction in such circumstances, i.e., complex responsive processes of interaction.

With the Process Enneagram forming our approach, we seek to ensure the conversation or thought process covers nine different domains of inquiry. These nine domains and the diagram on which they rest were developed by Dick Knowles as early as 1992 when he started to connect the work of Margaret Wheatley (2006) with that of the English philosopher J.G Bennett. He also formed his views as to the practicalities of the model in the crucible of running a manufacturing plant for the DuPont company where he led an extraordinary and sustainable improvement in safety and performance across many dimensions.

When Dick Knowles first presented the enneagram to us in the mid-90s in Australia it contained the elements of identity, vision, tensions, principles and standards, work, information, learning and structures. The term process was added before the term enneagram in the late 90s to distinguish it and separate it entirely from the work done by others using the enneagram related to typing personality. There is no connection between the two. Tim Dalmau suggested that the word vision was too limiting and that intention was a better term that could encompass not only vision, but in the corporate world also ideas such as high level values, value add, strategic intent and customer value—concepts and ideas that tend to often drive human energy and action, as much as or sometimes more than vision. For a variety of linguistic and national-cultural reasons Tim Dalmau expanded the terminology on the nine points to cover:

10. This paper, our use of the model outlined, and its efficacy do not depend in any way on its connections to the work of J. G. Bennett. Rather, as is described later, it is the nine points of focus combined with the order of engagement that makes the approach so useful.
• Identity and current state;
• Intention;
• Tensions and issues;
• Relationships and connections\textsuperscript{11};
• Principles, ground rules and standards;
• The work;
• Information and will;
• Learning and sustainability, and;
• New context, structures and approach.

Now we have asserted that there are a class of problems often found in organizations in which the dominant reductionist mindset is not only ill-suited but will tend to drive them towards entropy. We have suggested that the nature of these problems can be informed analogously from complex adaptive systems theory. Moreover, we suggest the methodology or approach outlined in this paper is, of its nature, both complex and responsive in the manner described by Stacey (2001).

Olson and Eoyang (2001) suggest that a complex adaptive system does not admit to any order or sequence of steps in a process or predictable, staged outcomes. Goldstein (2005) suggests otherwise when he states:

\textit{Self-organization (is) a term that suggests spontaneity and the inner-driven onset of new order. [A] careful inspection of research in complexity theory reveals the emergence of new order is more appropriately constructed than self-organized as such.}

We tend to agree with this point of view, and contend that conversations by real people in real settings, sensitively stimulated around these nine dimensions, allow for emergence, paradox and surprise to come forth. Paradox and surprise are important elements of deep learning—the contradictions, inconsistencies and absurdities to which they are attendant foster new perceptions, different perspectives and a level of disassociation that allow a group to move forward.

The nine dimensions tend to bring clarity to those in the conversation, stimulate commitment or a “drawing to” new aligned action, and enhance the functionality of the relationships of those involved. This result seems to result from, at a process level, the order of the conversation as represented in Figure 2. The order tends to produce these three types of outcomes: rational, emotional and

\textsuperscript{11} For some unknown reason, common usage of the term “relationships” in Australia does not allow for encompassing connections between non-human elements in a system and for this reason the original term was expanded to relationships and connections, to include such things as company to company, department to department, function to function interactions.
social and as such, the Process Enneagram shares this space with very few other processes, e.g., the process of dialogue fostered by Bill Isaacs (1999) and his colleagues and the early work in the 1950s of the Institute of Cultural Affairs. Put another way, the order of a conversation or engagement seems to profoundly influence the outcomes of the engagement in terms of the emergent clarity of direction or purpose, the sense of commitment or attachment that a group feels towards the issue or problem at hand, and the willingness of the individuals to be part of the action going forward. A note of caution: using this model and approach to address problems in the bottom left hand corner of Figure 1 tends to over-complicate and confuse what should be routine rational problem solving.

![Figure 2: A Process Enneagram](image)

**Nine Points Of Inquiry**

In its simplest representation the Process Enneagram can be viewed as nine areas of inquiry and conversation, which are as follows:

*Identity and Current State:* Sense of purpose and meaning—the area of focus that unleashes energy and commitment. The description of the present state in which the players find themselves and the historical forces and factors that have shaped them.

---


*Relationships and Connections*: Description of the nature of relationships that the players have with other individuals, groups in and across organizations as a whole, both among people but also among units, functions, groups, and processes. This area includes both ideal and actual relationships.

*Information and Will*: Understandings about the importance of information, the relationship of information to individual and organizational effectiveness, and its impact in coalescing shared meaning to marshal concerted action.

*Intention*: What is it that the players want to create and achieve with people, within their areas of responsibility, around the problem or issue under consideration, or the organization as a whole?

*Principles, Ground Rules and Standards*: The priorities they hold, the principles they work to, the ground rules they seek to abide by and the standards that model their beliefs and aspirations within the organization, i.e., the underlying ground rules and priorities that guide (or should guide) behavior, strategies and tactics—both espoused and in-use (Dick & Dalmau, 1990).

*Tensions and Issues*: The existing dilemmas, constraints, contradictions and behavioral patterns that are currently keeping individuals, teams and the organization from realizing the desired outcomes.

*New Contexts, Structures and Approaches*: The creative perspectives, strategies, structures and approaches that model the espoused principles, ground rules and standards, resolve the tensions, and thus move the “system” toward the intended outcomes.

*Work*: The actions associated with the strategies that need to be implemented.

*Deep Learning and Sustainability*: This describes a process of ongoing reflection whereby individuals, groups and organizations can learn what is working relative to their outcomes and make course corrections based on the learning, combined with mechanisms for adjustment and regeneration to ensure sustainability.

**The Green Triangle**

The three points of the green triangle that underpin this model are identity/current state, relationships/connections and information/will. First developed by Meg Wheatley (1992), she originally called them relationships, information and vision.

Within organizations, there is a continuous shaping and re-shaping of the identity of the system itself, an evolving of connections and relationships and incessant flows of information. These intangible aspects of any social system have a profound influence on all other aspects of the system. Unfortunately in many organizations where the dominant discourse is that of a reductionist mentality (bottom left hand corner Figure 1) the leaders regularly seek to improve perfor-
mance without paying attention to these three key variables. The first recourse seems to be to re-structure the hierarchy, re-engineer the procedures or re-vitalize the strategic plan, and often all three. This is done without attention to the impact of how relationships, identity and information interact together to create a dominant mindset that will often undo the best efforts and good intentions at organizational improvement.

These three factors need to be functional (at a minimum) in the group of players brought together to address a middle ground issue or problem. If not, they need attention first. In reality when we have players come together to address a middle ground issue, the degree of coherence among these three can vary enormously and it is usual to devote significant energy to these three elements first. Indeed, the green triangle in the diagram underpins the other six elements and, we suggest, should be focus of constant attention and energy for leaders. It seems common sense to us that if a group of people have re-asserted some current identity, opened up the information flow, and enhanced their relationships with one another they will be in a far better place to discover a shared intention, priorities, address issues and resolve how to move forward together.

The Conversation

In reality, a group comes together to address an issue, resolve a problem or create some new outcome that exists in the “middle ground”. Depending on the issue the conversation could take anywhere from two hours to a few days. The conversation works through these nine points of inquiry more or less in the order indicated by the arrows—the ordering of the conversation is not prescriptive: common sense, surprise, paradox and emergent contradictions may dictate varying either the order or the amount of time spent on any given point. That said, the most powerful clarity and/or attachment seems to emerge when the order indicated in the diagram is followed.

In using the Process Enneagram to guide or map a conversation the normal starting point produces a shared and explicit understanding of the identity, history and current state of the group, the relationships and connections in the system that exist or are desired, and the access to and flow of information throughout the system along with the extent to which this information flow does or does not promote shared will to act. The conversation then moves on to the intention (or vision, objectives, aim or purpose) or possible intent that can emerge or is required about the issue. Kellner-Rogers\textsuperscript{13} stated that too often we ask the question “What is the problem and how do we fix it?” when we should be asking the question “What’s possible here and who cares enough to make it happen?” This simple shift in questioning at this point seems to move the conversation, from the bottom left hand corner to the middle ground, and starts to build an emer-

\textsuperscript{13} Myron Kellner-Rogers in presentation at Berkana Institute Dialogue, Sundance Center, Provo, Utah. October 2, 1997.
gent coherence. In other words, it tends to pre-empt the drive to reductionist, mechanistic, linear models of thinking.

The conversation then moves on to two highly related but distinct foci: the principles, ground rules and standards the players espouse and those they actually use (Dick & Dalmau, 1990). Next tensions, issues and dilemmas are explored. It is important to note that by the time these come to the fore the players have already considered the following:

1. The current state and how it came to be;
2. The nature and functionality of their relationships and connections;
3. The availability or otherwise of all the information that flows around the issue;
4. What they want to achieve, and;
5. The ground rules/principles they use and espouse.

In our experience the fact that they start examining “the problem” only after these previous five foci have been examined plays a very large role in both fostering a willingness to act in concert to create something different and in preventing deficiency and reductionist models of thought from taking hold in the group.

It seems to set the stage for emergence and novelty to come forth as the players consider the next part of their dialogue, viz: what new context is being called for, what approaches are needed and what strategy shall follow? The quality and efficacy of this part of the conversation depends on all previous six elements being covered thoroughly. It seems normal that groups then move to the phase of who is going to do what and this part of the conversation may look and familiar to those who take comfort in the bottom left hand corner of Figure 1, i.e., action planning. It is a natural result of all the steps that have preceded it. The conversation then moves to a deeper reflective phase. The players are invited to reflect on their own experience in the conversation, to assign meaning to it, to signify it in terms of other experiences that come to mind, and to examine how they will sustain the work that has started.

These conversations involve ordinary people sitting down together in real time. Providing that the right people are in the room—representing those who can affect outcomes or are affected by the outcomes and a diversity of mind set and interest groups. Then focussing on these nine domains of inquiry combined with the order in which they are addressed seems to produce new forms of knowledge, surfaces paradox and contradiction, and allows coherence to emerge at all three levels of rational, emotional and social outcomes. In our view this seems to be at a local level not unlike what Stacey (2001) describes as a complex responsive process. In saying this we are mindful that Stacey presents such processes as occurring naturally in the daily intercourse of the hidden informal
system in organizations. We agree, and believe it is also possible to create social spaces that trigger and foster such processes.

It also needs to be noted that there are often issues and problems, which of their nature, cannot be addressed in one sitting, so to speak, no matter how long it goes for. This model allows for groups to iterate their conversation on a number of occasions, “spiralling” if you will, coming back to it with new insights, fresh understandings, and more divergent thought that enriches the conversation next time. In our experience these become extremely significant and powerful conversations, and we are reminded of one such conversation of which we were part with a US-based steel company senior executive cohort that continued over 11 years!

The Process Enneagram In Use

The Process Enneagram is, at one level, a guide to a type of conversation that, we believe, has some key similarities to what Stacey (2001) describes as a complex responsive process. As such it can be as simple or complicated as is needed by the group and the issue/problem. Simple generic questions for the nine points of the Process Enneagram that can guide conversations is shown below in Figure 3. These questions can be tailored for the specific situation and setting.

Figure 3 A Simple Process Enneagram.

14. Dick Knowles first mentioned this notion of a spiral, or corkscrew model of development to us in the mid 1990s. He said Charles Krone gave it to him as an image.
In addition the Process Enneagram can also be used as a way to record a conversation.

In our experience the starting point is often placing a small version of the diagram at the centre of a large canvas of flip chart paper (4 sheets taped together), and then over the course of the conversation, recording key points at the appropriate location on the Process Enneagram. Figure 4 shows a Process Enneagram that was created to guide and stimulate a conversation with 3 different coal mine leadership teams from a company in Queensland, Australia. Figure 5 is the summary created following a day-long conversation with each of the 3 coal mine leadership teams. It was collated from 3 similar one-page records to share with the corporate office and help them gain some insight into the challenges facing these teams and the next steps required to improve their performance.

A collection of templates, like those in Figure 4 has been collated into what we refer to as an Enclave of Enneagrams. These have been developed over the years by a range of people as a resource for practitioners or others in organizations to use. They cover the following types of situations, inter alia:

- Diagnosing and clarifying the problem;
- After action reviews;
- Company interviews;
- Strategic planning;
- Business planning;
- Organizational design;
- Facilitation design;
- Positioning an organization for sustainability;
- Reviewing change;
- Analysis of self as a leader;
- Project development;
- Coaching;
- Community development;
- Team development, and;
- Inter-group conflict.\footnote{15. The Enclave of Enneagrams can be viewed at www.dalmau.com/resources.}

In many instances using the Process Enneagram approach may require us to first have a one-on-one conversation with a range of people in an organization, such as members of a leadership team. These inquiries seek to establish the context of the interaction to come and who needs to be part of it, seeking always to involve key stakeholders and ensuring there will be dissonant and diverse voices present. They also seek to evaluate the type and style of leadership thinking in
What is the current state of the mine?
History, owner, safety, relationships internal & external, style of leadership, management, size, complexity, life of mine, resources, reserves.

What are they trying to achieve?
What are the targets? How well do they meet the? What do they wish to do with the mine, with the contract? How do they add value to the mine owner? What are the core values of the mine?

What are the issues they face?
What are the dilemmas, contradictions, constraints, and problems they need solved?

What are relationships like?
Between the PM and his direct reports, among the team, with supervisors? What are the political dynamics at work? Where & how does the OM fit in? Functionality, support, openness, honesty? Style and manner of leadership of people? What parts of the bigger system are well connected—people, process, client? Which not? Consequences?

What operational principles or ground rules seem to guide their behavior, strategies and actions?
If you didn’t know any better what rules do they seem to live by? What are their values-in-use and how do they shape behavior? What seem to be the real rules of the game for managing, leading, deciding, planning, guiding, justifying?

PM = Project Manager. OM = Operations Manager.

Figure 4 Process Enneagram To Guide Conversations With Coal Mine Leadership Teams.
LEADERSHIP & MANAGEMENT - 3 COAL PROJECTS, QLD

Has been little stability in leadership teams; PMs relatively new/inexperienced/unskilled (team members too). Until this work started no whole leadership team meetings, and no leadership team identity. Clients are challenging and demanding, and uncertain contract situation is a real challenge for some sites. Safety – in last 6 months safety record trending wrong way; leadership is challenged to engage staff effectively. Facing problems with productivity due to rain. All challenged by gaps and lack of experience in workforce, exacerbated by turnover. ABC, DE starting to make good progress now with team; FG, less progress and some different issues. Working excessive hours, and still ‘drowning’. Demands from offsite management always urgent. Interpret this as inappropriate interference / lack of appropriate support

Continue to build l/ship team; get our teams working better together. Improve our ability to work at the right level. Develop more collaborative and consistent processes for interacting with Client. Think, work and plan with a more long term view. Develop / implement innovative recruitment strategies

All creating discipline of regular l/ship meetings and work together. Socializing more as team and with their people

Lack of whole team sharing of information / decision making – awareness now, and being addressed. Getting good consistent information out to crews a constant, widespread challenge (harder with constant turn-over). Information / requests flow both ways between site and Brisbane, but is anyone ‘listening’?

Have established regular l/ship meetings, and forward agendas. ABC, DE moving forward with role clarification and shared team values discussion. ‘Greenskins’ recruitment strategy DE. Developing improved site communication strategies. CV – need more support, other issues being resolved may assist

Meet production, HSE targets. Keep Client happy/Make a profit for Company. Make site a good place to work. Step up to changes resulting from restructure. Limited focus on positioning the project for the future

How to step up to more complex role of PM, arising from re-structure (flow on). Client relations & contract management. Workload – lack of work/life balance (rosters). Recruitment, skills and capabilities. Management not leadership. Lack of accountability / understanding of role and expectations. Poor working conditions at ABC. Worker morale, loyalty

All sites need to improve connections in l/ship team – this has started. Relationship with Client varies (good CV, poor and improving at ABC, DE). Relationships with offsite management could be improved. Little connection between Site PMs. Connection with workforce need improvement everywhere – struggle to know how to do best

Principles in use v. desired principles
In use – work harder, will solve problems, actions rather than thinking/planning, management not l/ship, no follow through, train for compliance not development etc
Desired – plan, lead, follow through, use our peoples potential, develop our people etc

**Figure 5** Process Enneagram Summarizing The Record Of The Conversations With The Coal Mine Leadership Teams.
the system. We have learned in the university of experience that some mental models around leadership are inimical to this type of work, others are neutral and some are quite supportive.

The Process Enneagram is used either explicitly, but usually implicitly, to guide an interaction. The questions put to the players are simply triggers to stimulate the conversation at deeper levels. The next step is to reflect back to the players a view of the system in focus that they have created from the various conversations. A diagram such as the one in Figure 5 makes it easy to tell the story of what has been uncovered. Often the reaction when the players see the whole picture is one of instant recognition, but also of surprise, shock, relief and sometimes denial.

Typically this whole of system view has not been visible to them before, and elements that were part of the hidden left hand conversation (Argyris & Schon, 1974) suddenly appear arising from, what players experience as, an authentic dialogue with little defensive routines evident. As a visual representation, this map on the wall allows for further group engagement and discussion.

In many circumstances the group decides that, although this paints an accurate picture of the current state of their system or problem or issue, it is not what they desire. A second dialogue is facilitated with the whole group to create a picture of a desired state and the strategies and actions that they need to put in place to achieve their intention and address the concerns. Some of these actions will, rightly, address aspects of the problem that lie within the bottom left hand corner of Figure 1. What is distinctive and different, is that the visual representation of this interaction for the players inevitably triggers a deeper conversation about the “system” as a whole and fosters shared meaning attribution, thus promoting rational, emotional and social outcomes.

The guidance or facilitation of this interaction is a sensitive task, balancing open-ended questioning with more pointed exploration, combined at times with unstructured dialogue. It has been our experience that this is best left to run its way to completion before the visual representation of the interaction is put to the group. These conversations can be tough at times, but if the facilitator can maintain a disassociated state then the diversity of voices in the room will tend to ensure that

- Paradox and confusion are embraced;
- Surprise and new mental models emerge;
- A detached whole of system viewpoint is painted and;
- Actions around which the players can align are produced.

At a deeper level, however, we also tend to see more functional relationships and a higher willingness to act (at least around the issue concerned) with greater shared alignment. Dee Hock (1999) asserts that real change is not about re-
engineering or re-organizing but about re-conceiving and it is our consistent experience that this approach inevitably leads to a re-conception of the issue or problem at hand, and thereby releases new possibilities and ways for the players involved to be and work together.

**Accessing This Approach And Methodology**

In response to demand by clients and our own desire to equip people to solve their own problems, we have found we can teach people to use the Process Enneagram without them having to understand in detail complex adaptive systems theory or the underlying science and mathematics on which it is based.

It is true that we thereby run the risk that the theoretical integrity and/or approach is simplified in such a way as to compromise the quality and success of the outcomes. Insurance against this is hard to find with any model once it leaves its creator’s hands. Stacey (2001, 2010) identifies a similar concern when he describes the use of complexity theory in various guises as simply the historical dominant discourse of the bottom left hand corner dressed in new linguistic clothes. There is no doubt that having a working grasp of complex adaptive systems frameworks is required for the use of this framework—what Stacey (1996) describes as “extraordinary management”. Along with this goes the style of guidance/facilitation described above and a willingness to embrace emergence, surprise and paradox at a very basic level as it arises from fierce conversation and dialogue.

Prior to teaching this model and its process to potential practitioners it is useful for them to have had the prior experience of being part of a dialogue that has been guided by the Process Enneagram. More than one experience under different circumstances is even more beneficial. Debriefing the process and providing some context in terms of systems thinking and Stacey’s model should follow. A critical point is to help them to identify how they know if they have a complex ‘middle ground’ problem. Hence we recommend the use of a checklist similar to that referred to earlier in this paper.

There are four types of situations in an organization that a person may routinely find that the application of Process Enneagram would be useful. These include:

- Leading a dialogue (such as a strategic conversation in a workgroup);
- Leading a short working session around a specific complex issue;
- When tackling a complex issue alone or with a few others other, or when;
- Using the Process Enneagram with people who have fewer years schooling (e.g., engaging shop-floor operators around safety).
In addition to teaching the associated process facilitation skills we have created a guide around these four scenarios. The guide is a mixture of facilitation and process tips (for example, how to decide who needs to be involved, reminders to set explicit rational, social and emotional outcomes for the dialogue, what needs to be done in preparation, language to use) and the Process Enneagram questions (plus alternatives) for all nine points, in the correct order.

Within this guide a workbook approach is provided for when there are a very few people who wish to “think/talk” together through a complex middle ground issue, such as one that lies at the heart of an improvement they wish to make. The workbook is set out in such a way that it steps the user through the Process Enneagram. This approach has been particularly useful when equipping a range of people in an organization to sit down with a few others in a dialogue around a major organizational change that fits the criteria of being a middle ground issue. Finally some suggestions are made for working with less well-educated people. It seems that the number of years a person spends at school statistically improves two things: number of words in their vocabulary and their capacity to make finer internal visual distinctions as a form of thought. It has little to do with intelligence. The guide again provides tips for adapting the facilitation and wording for groups such as this.

**Beyond The Conversation**

This paper focuses largely on the use of a methodology and approach to foster interaction and emergent responses. It asserts consistency with complex adaptive systems theory and has some of the characteristics of complex responsive processes. It is essentially about a conversational tool for a form of dialogue.

However, this is not the only use of the underlying framework. Whilst each of these other uses could require another paper similar to this, it is worth noting that the Process Enneagram can also be used as a basis for:

1. A framework of thought consistent with complex adaptive systems theory;
2. An approach to planning large and complicated changes;
3. A way of diagnosing a complicated and extensive problem;
4. An approach to designing and guiding the process facilitation of many different workshop formats, and;
5. A framework for leadership.

It is this last use that is worthy of further brief comment in this paper as the type and style of leadership in the client organization can radically affect the efficacy of this approach.

16. Available at www.dalmau.com/resources.
A review of leadership theory will quickly reveal a progression over time through models of transactional leadership (Berne, 1963), situational leadership (Blake & Mouton, 1972), transformational leadership (Burns, 2009), to servant leadership (Greenleaf, 1977). Derived mostly from the individualistic psychology of the thinkers in the north-eastern regions of the US, these models tend to presume that the individual leader lies at fulcrum of change and improvement, and is capable of making the required change.

Alongside this trend there appeared the neo-emergent theorists who propose a fundamental dynamic between the leader and the system for which s/he is responsible. These are founded on concepts of stewardship (Block, 2002), systems dynamics (Senge, 2006), and adaptive leadership (Heifetz et al., 2009). The dynamic to which they point is far more than that addressed with the technical techniques of transactional and transformational leadership, but this group of thinkers seem to stop short of the largely European and UK tradition of seeing the system as worthy of as much, or more, consideration than the individual. In essence they are still caught in the “psychology of the individual” of North America.

When one steps across this metaphoric Atlantic gap a very different form of leadership starts to emerge and is represented in the work of Capra (2004), Stacey (1996, 2010), Wheatley (1998), Knowles (2002) and Snowden and Boone (2007). For these thinkers, leadership is something that resides in the “system”. It is the role of the leader to foster, stimulate and entice this from the system. For example, Wheatley talks of leaderful organizations. It is not possible to work in this frame without a high level of disassociation that evokes in the leader a whole-of-system viewpoint, a tolerance of ambiguity, surprise and contradiction and a recognition that one is not in control.

It is our contention that leaders who operate in the first of these three paradigms will not usually be able to capture the potential that lies within the methodology and approach outlined in this paper. Whilst it is possible for an outside facilitator or consultant to approach a middle ground problem with the methodology outlined herein it is likely the work will be either unsupported or unwittingly undermined by the leader involved.

Those who operate from the second group of mental models can quickly grasp the nature of a middle ground problem and are likely to at least be neutral in their impact on the resolution of the issues or problems involved. In our experience, however, it is those operate from the third group of mental models, i.e., who see leadership as residing in a living system and waiting to be evoked that better understand and actively embrace this approach and the theoretical frameworks on which it is based. They are therefore more likely to be able to capture the very best of working with a complex adaptive system.
Reprise

As we have been at pains to emphasize, the value of the Process Enneagram lies in its usefulness for addressing complex problems in organizations and groups. In our experience it reliably delivers rational, social and emotional outcomes. Its distinctiveness lies in its applicability to what we call middle ground problems—those about which there is limited agreement and limited predictability or certainty as to outcome. As such it is an approach that, in our experience, lies within the domain of complexity theory, and tends to foster and embrace complex responsive interactions and conversations in organizations. Its success relies on both the appropriate leadership style and mindset and on sensitive, flexible and disassociated facilitation.

References


**Tim Dalmau** has worked in a variety of positions in private enterprise and higher education. In the last 30 years he has worked primarily as a consultant to public and private sectors in many different countries. He is regarded as one of Australia’s foremost management consultants. He is the author or coauthor of an extensive selection of books, handbooks, and other publications widely used by senior executives and change practitioners. His practice covers the world, and he spends much of his time advising leaders of global corporations, working with Boards and senior executive teams of these organizations and designing systems for change and improvement. He holds a B. Sc., B.A., Grad. Dip Ed. and MBA.

**Jill Tideman** has 25 years experience in facilitating sustainable change in human systems in the both private and public sectors. She has worked in the engineering, infrastructure and resource sector, and consulting in sustainability, safety and transport policy in Australia and the U.K. She has been a senior executive in the SA Department of Transport Energy and Infrastructure for 20 years in areas of strategic change, environmental policy and strategy, and community programs. Jill has also worked in the Cabinet Office of the Department of Premier and Cabinet. Her consulting career has seen her contribute to the life and success of companies and individuals in the resources sector, steel industry, sugar production, environmental and fauna/flora conservation, engineering, mining, education and road transport in Australia, the USA and the UK. She holds a B.A. (Hons).