

Transformative Framework for Generative Change

Introduction

Today's mission-driven and sustainability-focused organizations face adaptive challenges—ill-structured and “messy” situations that are value-based and cannot be solved using conventional problem-solving techniques. Meeting these challenges requires different stakeholders to examine their assumptions and engage in a process of deep learning and discovery. The process is ultimately transformative because it enables the participants to generate new ways of interpreting reality and of developing strategies.

Soma Integral Consulting has developed a simple and elegant framework to guide this process. The framework is grounded in complexity and systems science—more specifically the application of living systems theory to organizational change and development—and draws on organizational behavior theory, psychology, and deep creativity.

Three Organizational Responses to the Need for Change

Faced with various pressures (political, societal, cultural, demographic, economic, and environmental) an organization may be required to change its strategy and innovate. Typically, the organization's response to the drivers of change will be one of three different options:

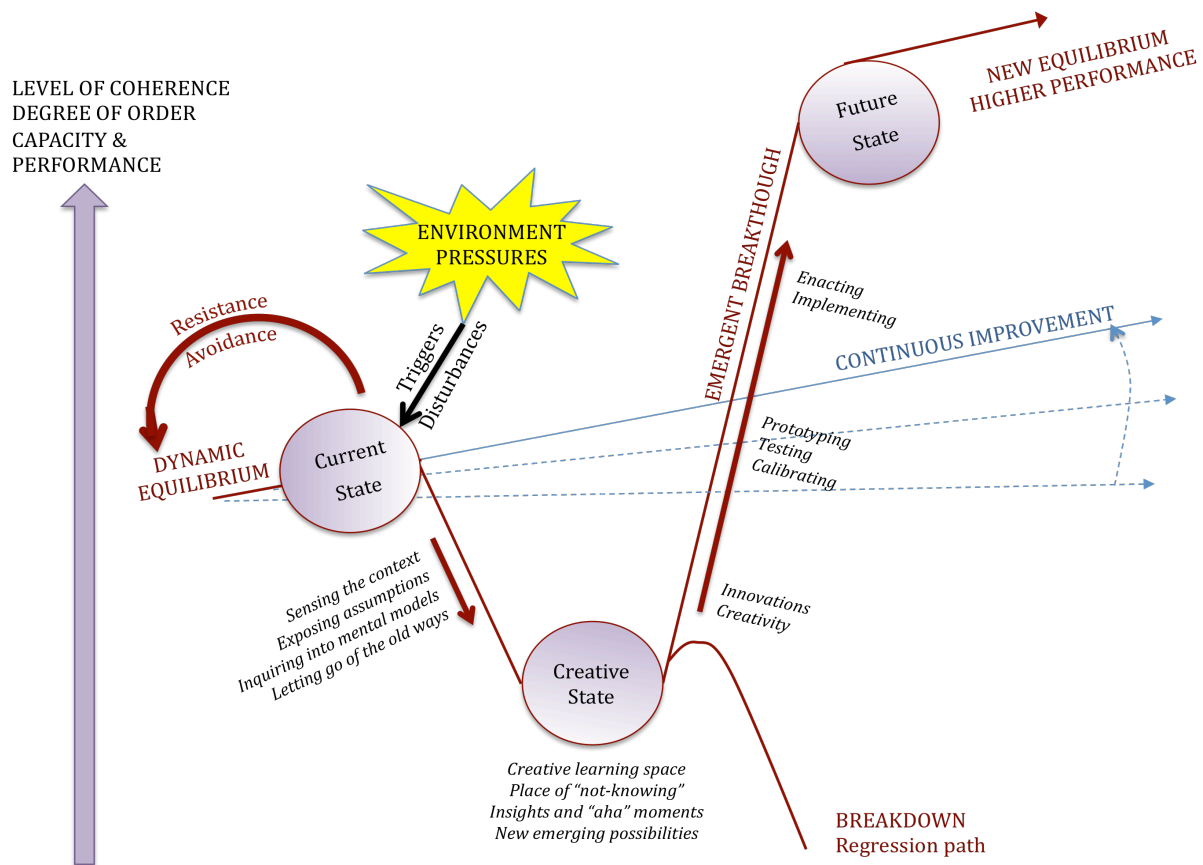
- 1) The organization resists, choosing to follow its current course of action over a journey of change. The organization remains in denial, asserting that the change is outside its purview.
- 2) More productively, the organization engages in problem-solving and continuous performance improvement, tweaking its mode of operation and strategy to better achieve its desired outcomes. This approach might raise the organization's performance minimally. Unfortunately, in situations where fundamental change is a necessity, traditional linear problem-solving approaches often act as mere bandages, rarely addressing the root causes of problems. To escape this dynamic, an organization must choose the third option.
- 3) To open a new path toward much higher performance, the organization embarks in a transformative journey — a process of creative destruction followed by a generative phase — potentially slowing down some of its activities for a while, taking the time to reflect on the situation and creatively engaging in uncovering new opportunities.

The next section describes the Transformative Framework for Generative Change.



Transformative Framework for Generative Change

As shown in the figure below, the transformative generative process has three main phases—each phase facilitating an organization’s journey from its current state to a highly creative state where change and transformation occur to, finally, a future state where the organization has gained a higher-level performance.



Transformative Generative Framework © 2012 Soma Integral Consulting

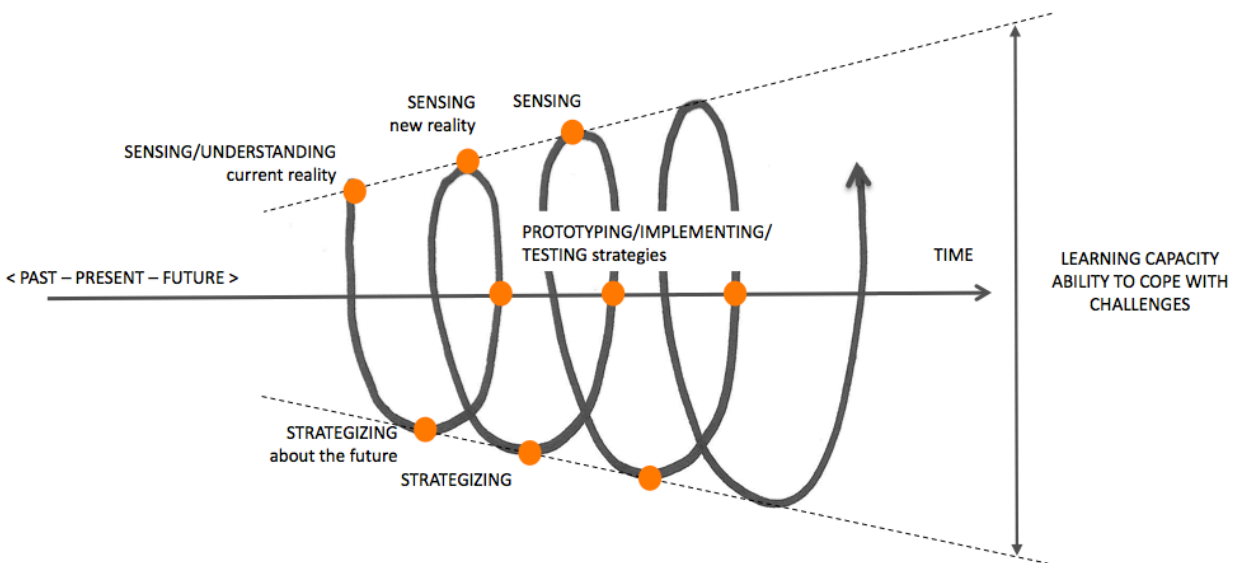
In the first phase, stakeholders *sense the context* and *observe* what is happening in their environment. Because everyone’s observations arise directly from — and are limited by — individually-held beliefs, surfacing any implicit assumptions and presuppositions as quickly as possible creates an opportunity for inquiry into their origins. This way, one gains a heightened awareness of the drivers for past decisions and actions and of the influence these decisions and actions have on the present situation.

The second phase is facilitation in *letting go of and suspending one's beliefs and mental models* to enter a state of “not-knowing” in which creativity and possibility exist. This state is typically quite uncomfortable for any of us because, through formal education and work, we are thoroughly steeped in the importance of ‘knowing the answer’ and being the ‘expert’. The facilitator must provide a safe space – a container – in which each individual can experience these feelings and transform them into creative energy. A critical personal and group capacity in the transformative process is the ability to hold, through the discomfort, at the place of not knowing. In this state, when we have abandoned the idea that the answer is “out there,” waiting to be known, insights and new possibilities emerge which can be co-creatively explored.

Gradually, as our minds’ eyes open to new possibilities and a new reality unfolds in front of us, alternative strategies emerge. The final phase is *generative* and focuses on iteratively prototyping, designing, testing, calibrating, implementing, observing and learning by doing. This is a spiral that leads us closer and closer to the desired future state, recognizing of course that our conception of that state is dynamic as well. The organization then enters its “digestive” phase, deepening and integrating the learning until the time for the next transformative process presents itself.

Evolutionary Learning Process

The process described above is iterative and may occur multiple times throughout a journey of change. As an organization moves through each phase, its learning and creative capacity increases over time while stakeholders become better equipped to engage in future change process in an on-going evolutionary learning journey such as the one represented in the figure below.



Evolutionary Learning Process © 2012 Soma Integral Consulting

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