Adaptive Action and the HSD Institute

Getting Started; Getting Unstuck

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This final chapter in this final section serves many purposes, but the main purpose is to convince you that there is no final chapter. We have moved into a world with no permanent boundaries. We expect an infinite number of differences that can make a difference. We know that every effect is potentially a cause, and every cause an effect. At the moment we accept this paradigm, we recognize that every boundary can be a doorway, every difference an opportunity, and every ending a new beginning. When we live in this paradigm, we may get stuck, but we cannot stay stuck for long. All we have to do is open the door, capture the opportunity, and see the new beginning.

The eight-year journey of Adaptive Action at the Human Systems Dynamics Institute is our own story of engaging with this new paradigm. As we tell our story in this chapter, we will summarize and include ideas, models, methods, and lessons you've learned in other parts of the book, describing for you how we used them to contribute to our own ongoing inquiry. You will share the journey that led to development of ourselves as scholar/practitioners, our body of knowledge about human systems dynamics, our 501(c)3 institution, and our network of diverse and creative Associates. You will see how we got stuck when we slipped back into our old-world paradigms, and how the rigors of Adaptive Action moved us through waves upon waves of dynamical change. This rigorous and flexible practice gave us the power to move beyond the barriers we created for ourselves when we had closed, low dimension, and linear expectations of ourselves, our colleagues, and our institution.

We hope you will see how the emergent nature of complex adaptive human systems has informed our commercial and research decisions. We hope you will see what is has meant for us to set conditions for self-organizing in a real institution, with real clients, working in a real world. We hope you will recognize that this is a story without end, and that you will accept the invitation to join us in this self-organizing dance to build adaptive capacity for people, teams, organizations, and communities as they continue to unfold into the future.

Without This, Nothing

Like any complex adaptive system, the beginning was not an empty slate. The journey began with a few, fundamental principles. In old mathematics these might be called axioms or common notions. For us, they are the initial conditions from which the rest of the action emerges.

First, from the beginning we established a container. The HSD Institute was designed to be a laboratory for the study of human systems dynamics. Like a petri dish, it was the primary container for our extended experiment in complex human systems dynamics. We tried to be conscious of our theory as we made the pragmatic decisions that ran the business that is HSD Institute. We also tried to be conscious of our emerging practice as we developed the theoretical foundations of the field of study that is HSD. We did not always succeed, and we continue to learn from our failures.

Second, we assumed some fundamental differences. We wanted to create a pattern of adaptive capacity that could accommodate open, high dimension, and nonlinear environments. To encourage this pattern, we created the HSD short list of simple rules and invited many agents (students, clients, staff, friends) to engage with us in integrating the rules into practice to

generate adaptive patterns. Those rules—our shorts and simples—set the conditions for the self-organizing processes that we hoped would foster the pattern.

As you read our story, please keep in mind our shorts and simples. The original set from these early days is shown below. Consider how the story might have been different if any of these were missing or substantially altered.   Over the years, we have made slight variations as our story and the patterns unfolded, but at all scales, in all contexts, and in every way, the HSD Institute and its stakeholders strive to:

- Teach and learn in every interaction

- Search for the true and the useful

- Give and get value for value

- Reinforce strengths of self and other

- Attend to the whole, the part, and the greater whole

- Make expectations explicit

Third, our intent was to establish exchanges with our colleagues across the spectrum of theoretical and practical applications of complexity to human systems. We were not initially conscious of essential differences between HSD and other theories and practices that dealt with complexity, human systems, or complexity and human systems. We still find profound resonance between our work and other paths to successful practice, but we also are aware of four conditions that are essential to HSD and not shared by many other approaches.

We work at all levels of human organization. Our containers are scale-free. Our theory and practice work equally well for individuals, couples, teams, organizations, and communities of all sizes.

We work across a wide range of differences, searching for models and methods that function in any human system, regardless of where it lies on the continuum between open and closed, high dimension and low, and linear and nonlinear. We work prospectively as well as retrospectively, even when we cannot predict or control the future we are stepping into. We use lessons from chaos and complexity to explain dynamics of change in ways that inform options for action.

We work from a stance of inquiry. Our exchanges shape and are shaped by the practice of Adaptive Action. We offer powerful, generalizable questions, but our answers are limited to context. They fit only specific places and times.

In the same way that these fundamental principles have shaped this book, they inform our emerging theory and practice, and they set the conditions for the continuing story of the Human Systems Dynamics Institute.

Before the Beginning

We began thinking and talking about the precursors to human systems dynamics in 1986, and founded the HSD Institute in 2003. During the intervening seventeen years, our inquiries led to learning from others, as well as to creating our own innovations in thought and action. Over the years, old patterns of understanding broke down, new ones emerged, and those in turn disintegrated to be replaced with others that were more fit. By late 2001, tensions were accumulating, and a breakthrough was waiting to happen.

What?

In the early days of exploration, there was only a small community of inquirers applying chaos theory and complexity science to human systems. Though disciplines and perspectives

were diverse, it was clear that we were all struggling together with important questions. Over the years, the circle got larger, until there was hardly a recognizable community at all. Some people had found and begun to exploit answers in the form of products or consulting services. Others lost patience with the interdisciplinary path of complexity and wandered into other pursuits. Still others realized that university tenure depended on certain kinds of inquiry about certain kinds of questions, and they turned their efforts to more traditional research. As the numbers and differences grew, there was not a strong enough container to hold the emerging discipline in any coherent way.

At the same time, our individual and collective learning was gaining momentum. Though they were delightful, individual conversations or one-off consulting opportunities were not consistent or continuous enough to sustain real development for ourselves and our work.

Much of the communal work that moved the field forward was connected to periodic or ad hoc meetings. We could come together in conferences to test ideas and learn from each other. While these gatherings were helpful, they failed us in two ways. First, the face-to-face engagement would excite and inspire, then we would all return to our "normal" lives and lose the momentum and emerging insight. Second, these gatherings drew both serious, experienced scholar practitioners as well as those who were either new to or not seriously committed to the field of inquiry. It seemed like we discovered the same things over and over and over again.

If we were going to continue to participate in a healthy community of inquiry, something had to give. The conditions for self-organizing were generating tensions and the energy for change.

Our container was large and leaky: The community of scholars and practitioners who were exploring applications of chaos and complexity to social systems.

Our differences were many and deep: Scholar and practitioner; business and academy; multiple disciplines generating various models, methods, and expectations for rigor and evidence; math and science; social and physical science.

Our exchanges were unreliable: Episodic collaborations; periodic conferences; occasional books and papers; seminal conversations interrupted by long silences; emerging competition among rival theories and practices.

We were stuck. It felt to us like the field was on a perpetual on-ramp, and it would be a very long time before more mature and rigorous manifestation of complexity-inspired theory and practice would emerge. It seemed a typical static change. Our goals were to get more people interested in the field, to set the conditions for shared inquiry, and to establish recognition for people who were doing good theoretical and practical work.

So What?

The dynamics of this potentially exciting and emergent field were getting locked in. What had once been a vibrant and unstable search for meaning (far from agreement and far from certainty on the Landscape Diagram) was quickly closing down with disciplinary focus, simple rewrites of traditional models, untouchable gurus, and answers galore. The exploration of emergence threatened to stop emerging, and to lose the innovation and excitement that had been characteristic of the early days.

As we considered what we might do to influence the pattern toward more generative and collaborative work, we considered our own Decision Map. We had an emerging world view of open, high dimension, nonlinear relationships. Our world view leveraged the new science of complexity to solve the biggest challenges of the age, including sustainability, economic stability, conflict, education, and health care. We believed that inquiry and community were the

keys to continued productivity in pursuit of complex dynamics. We believed that we, as

individuals, could make a difference, but that an institutional player could make more of a

difference faster.

We were stuck between two sets of rules, and a third set of rules was evolving. One of

our inherited rules sets grew out of academe. It involved rigorous research, publishing, and

commitment to deep work in a single discipline. The other set of rules grew out of the

commercial world. It involved ownership of intellectual property, marketing hype, and

competition for customers. While our everyday worlds shifted us from one of these rule sets to

another, our world view was fostering a new set of simple rules to guide our work.

Our reality was that our curiosity and contribution lay at the intersection of research and

practical application. Clients recognized the power of our work, even if they didn't want to hear

about the theoretical grounding. Researchers in many fields engaged us in inquiry as we all dug

at the roots of an emerging science. Writing, teaching, research, consulting all absorbed time

and energy and gave great rewards. The problem was there were not resources to sustain all the

paths we wanted to follow.

We had two decisions to make. First was whether or not to try to influence the field as a

whole. Given our persistent world view, rules, and reality, "yes," was the resounding answer to

this question. Then we had to decide how we would try to influence the field.

Our world view moved us toward a coherent community of research and practice that

embraced many disciplines, welcomed scholars and practitioners, had credibility in the academy

and business, acknowledged ownership but didn't have the rigid legalistic constraints of

intellectual property practice. Our short list of simple rules was emerging from our practice.

Our reality was that such a community of inquiry did not exist, and no one else seemed ready to

create one. We had the breadth of interest and standing in the field to establish such a community, but we would need an institutional platform to hold the diversity in a sustainable way.

We began to see an organization that would provide the conditions—containers, differences, and exchanges—that might encourage emergence of a coherent field of theory and practice at the intersection of complexity and social sciences.

Now What?

The Human Systems Dynamics Institute emerged as a way to resolve these tensions and establish the conditions for a new pattern. The Institute would:

- Be a non-profit entity to avoid accumulating assets and the closed-system challenges of ownership
- Welcome any theory or practice that fit the world view of an open, high dimension, nonlinear environment
- Follow an open-source policy on the use of intellectual property

The real challenge was how to establish an institution without falling into the traps of the old, closed system paradigm. Some aspects of the old paradigm were inescapable. We had to have a bank account and contracts to sign, a place to be, and some clarity around who was going to do what. All of these required traditional, lower-left of the landscape, closed, low dimension, and linear patterns. At the same time, we didn't want these factors to constrain the emergent nature of our vision or the inherent instability of an institution based on inquiry and emerging community. We also acknowledged that, if we were to continue emerging, there would be unknown and unknowable factors to keep our dynamics unstable. We had to learn to live in all parts of the Landscape Diagram at the same time.

Through this time we navigated the narrows between old-style and revolutionary business models. Innovative approaches in two key business functions were particularly helpful for us during this stage of our development: Planning and ethics.

HSD and Planning

While some of our complexity colleagues spurned the idea of planning altogether, our penchant for the practical would not let us off this question so easily. We knew our best performance would require planning, and we knew a plan could distort our commitment to emergence. We began a dialogue about planning that continues to this very day. Over the years, we have recognized Adaptive Action as our planning practice. Here are some of the particulars of the adaptive planning practice we use for ourselves and share with clients.

- Plan to replan. From the beginning, HSD Institute had a business plan. We reviewed it quarterly and revised it annually. It included lots of questions and made frequent references to our Simple Rules.

- Plan for many horizons. Staff members plan their days. Teams plan by the week. Financial status and marketing activities are reviewed monthly. The board considers policy quarterly, and the staff meets annually to plan strategy.

- Plan for surprise. Adaptive Action serves to make us opportunistic. This is not the same as being reactive. In the first, you have a picture of where you're going and the pattern you want to create, then when something comes along that could fill in a bit of the pattern, you follow it. In the second, there is no plan, no intentional pattern. A reactive group will follow any shiny object. An opportunistic group is prepared to be surprised.

- Stack Adaptive Actions. At any given moment our little organization is participating in more Adaptive Action cycles than we can count. Projects, communities, client relationships, instructional designs, writing feedback, emails, wrong numbers all represent an opportunity for Adaptive Action.

HSD and Ethics

As we considered the many decisions that established the HSD Institute, we were confronted with questions of ethics and responsible practice. Decisions we made during those days have shaped our on-going patterns of ethical decision making and actions.

The fundamental ethical consideration that influences our work in HSD derives from the three kinds of change—static, dynamic, and dynamical. In the same way that there are more and less effective actions in each of these kinds of change, there are also distinct ways to think about ethics and to choose ethical actions.

In static change, an object moves from one stable place to another stable place. Ethical actions in static change situations look like the simple distinction between good and evil. The line is clear, the path is straight. A person can choose one or the other, but a choice must be made. Some of our individual and institutional decisions fall into this category, including tax accounting, legal requirements, and contractual agreements.

Dynamic change is like the path of a thrown ball. The beginning situation is really clear, and the path and endpoint are perfectly predictable. Ethical decisions in dynamic change rely on logical argument and consideration of alternatives. When a choice is made, the future will unfold in ways that are destined by the choice and the systemic factors that influenced the choice. In the HSD Institute, we see this kind of planning in cash flow management, product development, and managing projects for clients.

Dynamical change, however, emerges from the accumulated tensions of patterns in the moment. Unlike static change, the beginning is ambiguous, and the end is unknown. Unlike dynamic change, the initial state and the systemic forces are unknowable. In such a situation, neither absolute good and evil nor rational planning will lead to ethical action.

Ethics in dynamical change depends on transparent and rapid Adaptive Action cycles to find the most harmonious fit with a complex environment. Ethics in the midst of dynamical change is not a decision, but a stance of inquiry in which the questions are about coherence, fit, and what brings the greatest good to the greatest number.

Adaptive Action is looking for fit with the system to build coherence. Of course, too much fit or coherence with an unlawful or unwise pattern could destroy an ethical foundation. Relativism and loss of an ethical center are always risks of adaptation, but they are not inherent in HSD's version of inquiry and Adaptive Action. The reason is simple, We are working in a complex reality. Fit is not just fit to one thing or one level of a pattern, but fit with patterns in many different containers, including the part, the whole, and the greater whole. Any action should be judged in relation to personal beliefs and values, group expectations and relationships, institutional mores and policies, public regulations and laws, and spiritual or religious expectations for behavior. If an action adapts and resolves key tensions in all these levels at the same time, or if it intentionally balances the tensions among them, then it will serve as an ethical action. For the Institute, our short list of simple rules provided a clear guide for what it meant to fit into the pattern of human systems dynamics.

Next What?

These early Adaptive Action cycles led to the founding of the Human Systems Dynamics Institute in January of 2003.

The institutional pattern was designed to allow for an active community of inquiry. The initial organizational design included a publishing function to disseminate innovations, a network to build connections and encourage dialogue, a foundation to support research, and a consulting arm to generate the resources to support all the other activities.   The intention was to welcome all facets of research and practice at the intersection of complexity and social sciences, so that we could be a gathering place for ongoing conversation, research, and practice. We would convene the conversation and lend our voices, but ours would be only a few among many.

Full of questions and possibilities, we launched into the next cycle of our Adaptive Action.

The Structure and Its Cracks

The next stage of our growth established our institutional foundation and began to challenge our assumptions about the field and our role in it. As our organization got stronger, the larger community of inquiry receded into the background. We will never know whether that was a change in our perspective, the growing maturity of the field, or others' uncertainty about whether or not our intentions were honorable. Again, tensions grew and, by 2006, conditions were set for another shift in the pattern.

What?

Our first three years, from 2003 to 2006, were focused on building an identity and an infrastructure to support the community of practice. In addition to our contracted training and consulting business, we offered courses, wrote articles, and published books. We continued to hold onto the idea of HSD Institute as a gathering place of diverse ideas. We saw ourselves in service to the field as a whole. Toward that end, we published others' books, invested in others'

research, incorporated others' theories and practices into our training programs, and collaborated with diverse partners on a variety of projects and products.

It was a fertile and exciting time, but it was also resource intensive. By the end of the first year, we were breaking even, kind of. We were not repaying the original personal investment in start-up costs, and we were depending on volunteer or very low-cost labor to accomplish basic tasks. Still, we were able to limp along financially while running a marathon of relationship building, theory development, and practical applications.

We continued to invest in the larger community of scholar practitioners, but we also concentrated our investment on our own network of certified Associates. In 2003 we offered our first ten-day certification program. The intention was to present a wide range of theories and practices from across the complexity field and to establish a network of shared inquiry among the life-long learners who were our Associates. The pattern was stimulating, but not very sustainable.

Our containers were multiple and massively entangled: HSD Institute; Network of Associates; Glenda as keeper of the flame; staff and close friends as caretakers and cheerleaders.

Our differences were many, but they were ones we defined: Glenda's work and others' work; certified Associates and clients and other interested parties; inside and outside our little community.

Our exchanges were focused on building relationships and building value: Teaching and learning; giving and getting value for value; publishing and writing; working for pay and volunteering; getting the word out.

Looking back on it, we can see that this was a time of incubation for Glenda, as a theory leader; staff and close friends as a sustainable institutional core; and the Network, as a

community of practice. At the time, those patterns were not at all clear. The field we wanted to

bring together in dialogue was not responding to us as a convener but as a competitor. The

Associates we trained were more interested in their own careers and work than in the larger HSD

Network of inquiry, much less the wider world of related theory and practice. We continued to

invest, but we were not seeing the return in the places and ways we expected.

So What?

By late 2006, the Institute was established, we had 25 Associates, and our consulting

work was moving along. Though finances were tight, they were well within acceptable margins

for a newly-formed, unendowed non-profit.

There was a tremendous tension building, though, within the Institute. Two differences

were putting pressure on lots of patterns for the team, the Institute, and the Network.

First, Glenda saw herself as a representative of the larger field—an integrator who

brought together others' ideas in meaningful ways. Sure, she had some ideas of her own, but

they were embedded as one voice among many in the emerging dialogue. Clients, students, and

Associates asked for more clarity about Glenda's work, and Glenda continued to talk about the

whole and her work as a subset. The distinction between Glenda's personal body of work and

the field of human systems dynamics became more and more problematic.

Second, evidence accumulated that the world-wide, coherent community of inquiry

around complexity and social science existed only in our world view. Individuals and groups,

institutions and working communities emerged around the world. Each one carried its own

pattern of similarities, differences, and connections to define its work. As far as we could see, no

one else was particularly interested in seeing the work of the whole. Even our own Associates

were not particularly interested in the larger world or whole-scale paradigm shift that (we thought) had the potential to change society as we knew it.

We carried these conflicting containers around for a couple of years. What was same as and different from? Where did the boundaries lie between Glenda's work and HSD and between HSD and the larger community of inquiry? These questions manifested in a variety of ways. We invested too much in a "common good," and underinvested in branding and clarity. We de-emphasized the CDE Model and over-emphasized models and methods of others. Associates continued to be confused about what was and what was not HSD.

At some point during this time, an Associate volunteered to help us with branding and developing a marketing message. It was clear to all of us that we needed to be more concrete about who we were and what we did for the benefit of our clients, our students, and ourselves. The process was enlightening, but not very successful. The two underlying paradoxes, Glenda's role as integrator and innovator and HSD as the whole or the part, established an instability that even the best marketing consultant could not tame.

It was clear that these tensions needed to be resolved. It was also pretty obvious (to everyone but Glenda) that the resolution had to take place first in the container of personal expectation and intention.

Now What?

Glenda got a coach, and the coach made her create a vision. This process was not just personally difficult, it was also a challenge to HSD theory and practice. Of what value is a vision of the future if you cannot predict or control what will happen? A many-layered Adaptive Action process broke through both the personal and the theoretical challenges to vision, and set

the conditions for a new pattern to emerge for Glenda, the HSD Institute, and the field of human systems dynamics.

HSD and Vision

In a traditional paradigm, the imagined end is a kind of cause. A dynamic change process, moving in a smooth path from a known beginning to known end, can appear to be driven as much by the target as it is by the initial conditions. Very literally, one might say that the target is what caused the arrow to fly in such and so a way. From this dynamic perspective, a vision becomes a magnet that draws decisions and actions to it, expecting a sure and predictable path.

There is no such certainty in dynamical change. The conditions in the moment motivate changes that appear in the evolution of a pattern. It is the tension in the present that sets the conditions for the emergent future. So, why do you need a vision?

George Johnson opened an opportunity for Glenda to create a vision video. The idea, initially discovered by Malcolm Cohan, invites you to create a series of statements about the world as it will be in your best future. The statements, called a poem, are put into a video format with pictures and music. The idea is that you watch the video each morning and evening to embed the images into your perception, feeling, thought, and action. You can see Glenda's first vision video at http://tinyurl.com/gkheoyang.

Much to her surprise, Glenda found the visioning process to be an exercise in Adaptive Action, rather than an exercise in target creation. Writing the poem challenged her to see patterns today and imagine patterns in the future. Similarities, differences, and connections became clear. The significant ones found their way into the vision, the less significant ones faded away. Searching for images and finding music developed resonance around key patterns

as they were reflected in visual and auditory patterns, too.   Watching the video and sharing it with others reinforced the pattern with each cycle. Over time, the pattern became a standard part of every *So what?* step of her Adaptive Action. *So what* are the connections between the pattern in the vision and a current opportunity for action? *Now what* can be done make the similarities, more compelling, the significant differences more distinct, and the connections stronger?

So, rather than pulling toward some pre-destined point, the vision captured a coherent pattern than could inform choices in the moment. We have come to think and talk about vision in this way with our students and clients. Building a vision video has become a natural part of our Human Systems Dynamics Professional certification process. Not only does this view of vision open a kind of freedom in the conversation, but it invigorates observation, decision making, and choice taking over time.

This difficult time also taught us lessons about how to share our messages, products, and services with the world.

HSD and Marketing

Marketing was also a *Now what?* that informed our Adaptive Action during this time All too often, marketing and sales are seen as one-way exchanges. The pitch goes out, and the value exchange ensues. In our earliest days of sharing our work with the world, marketing was an on-going challenge. When we tried to sell HSD, we got lots of blank looks. On the other hand, when we talked with people about their challenges and needs and shared our insights, models, and methods with them, we always got interest and frequently made a deal. Still, when we consulted with marketing folks and tried to build a marketing message, strategies, and plans, it never worked very well.

At one point we confronted this question to ask what it meant to "market" HSD as a body of work, including concepts, models, and methods. We were drawn to think about our simple rules in the context of the question. We realized that our most powerful sales connection was when we, "Teach and learn in every interaction." In a rich exchange of information, we are able to test a fit between a potential client and our potential solution. In a complex relationship, we and the client co-evolve in dialogue to discover whether or not we will be generative partners. Sometimes we discover that there is no fit, and we go our separate ways having learned something from the exchange. Often, though, and when it is right, we find a fit and establish a relationship that meets their needs and ours over time.

So, we have come to recognize a vision as a self-generating pattern and marketing as an act of teaching and learning. Both transform the ways we think about business and business development, and both serve us well in the *Now what?* steps of our Adaptive Action.

Next What?

The new vision, born from the solid institutional foundation and reaching beyond it, embraced two new concepts. First, Glenda's work is the center of HSD, but we can still leave the field open to embrace anything from anyone else that seems both true and useful. Second, the HSD Institute is a node in the larger Associate Network rather than the container within which the Network exists. Both the field of human systems dynamics and the Network of certified Associates extend beyond the boundaries of the HSD Institute. They all support each other, but they are not bound in identity or expectations. Not only did these two insights relieve the tensions that had accumulated, they set the conditions for the next stage of development for the HSD Institute.

We also reflected on the stress we had experienced as this tension emerged and was identified. We had followed the simple rules, we had supported each other and continued to learn, but individually and collectively we had paid an emotional price. Royce decided, and convinced us with humor, that we needed a new simple rule. "Engage in joyful practice" was added to the list and became a clear determinant of the HSD patterns that emerged in the future.

Reaching Out

The focus of Institute work from 2006 to 2010 was to build a Network of Associates who could stand on their own, applying the principles, models, and methods of HSD to their own personal and professional challenges. While they could always be connected to the larger group and to the Institute staff, the goal was to build individual adaptive capacity, so that each Associate became an anchor for the on-going development of HSD at the levels of individual, institution, Network, and the field as a whole.

What?

One by one, Associates were certified and came into the Network. Julia Herzing, our Director of Operations, built relationships and managed infrastructure to ensure that the people who wanted to could connect with HSD. Royce continued to build connections and provide resources to build the capacity of individual Associates, communities in conversation, and teams in projects. The numbers grew, the diversity of the applications multiplied, and the variety of relationships flourished at all levels of the HSD ecology.

During this time, we began to hold quarterly webinars where Associates got to know each other and shared what they were learning and doing. In October of 2009, the presentations were

particularly diverse and powerful. At that point, it was clear that Associates had found their own stable platforms for building HSD theory and practice. Though we would continue to build the size and strength of the Network, we had reached our goal of a community of insightful and independent scholar practitioners who would continue to move the field of HSD forward, with or without the continuing support of the HSD Institute.

After a big sigh of relief, we began to look with new eyes at the patterns that were emerging across the HSD community. Where, we asked ourselves, were new differences emerging? Where were containers being created? Where were exchanges being initated or destroyed. In short, where was the potential for the next dynamical evolution of this laboratory for human systems dynamics?

This is what we saw:

- Focus on fine-tuning HSD models and methods, but little reference outside the HSD portfolio
- Mailing list that had grown consistently, then stabilized for several months
- New marketing opportunities, but always from old clients and long-term client relationships
- Certification classes filled with close friends, business partners, and sometimes even family members of current Associates
- No bright, new strategic partnerships or collaborations in several months
- Declining participation in instructional webinars and on-line conversations

In short, we seemed to talking to ourselves. We were doing it effectively, and it was clearly a pattern that emerged from our focus on building internal adaptive capacity. Still, perhaps it was time to open the boundaries and reach out more effectively to the world at large.

So What?

The realization didn't come quickly, and a response was even slower to emerge. Our resources were committed to Associates and to sustaining the Network. We had little time, energy, or money for active marketing and outreach. Our commitment to inquiry and evolution of specific answers for specific places were not very appealing to a marketplace starved for answers and searching for gurus. We looked to our Associates to spread the word about HSD, but we had not provided them with tools, incentives, or even clear expectations for doing so. The consulting business was quite successful, but it drew focus away from advancement of the field and business development.

Things were not bad, but our change process was stuck.

One day, while we were chatting about the current state of our HSD world, we began to explore patterns that would characterize an HSD that reached out to a wider community. Our conversation wandered a bit, and at a critical juncture, Royce suggested that we use her Radical Inquiry model to define our essential patterns and consider conditions for those patterns to emerge.

Our ultimate vision was to "change the world by changing how people think about the world." We quickly saw that such a pattern would require very specific conditions.

A container that would support effective action in dynamical situations and help people thrive in uncertainty. We called that container Adaptive Capacity.

A set of differences that were simple and scalable to work for individuals in local times and places as well as for communities over long periods of time. We called that difference Coherence.

An approach to exchange that would support Adaptive Action and open the possibilities of open, high dimension, and nonlinear challenges. We called that exchange Inquiry and Meaning Making.

We also recognized that these patterns would cause and be caused by HSD's shared identity, clarity and credibility of our insights, and explicit connections that attracted others and expanded the Network as well as the field of HSD.

This conversation established for us the key patterns we wanted to move toward. Our *What?* step had made it clear the tensions and potentials in the current state. All we had to do was figure out what actions we could take to shift the current conditions to generate the new ones.

At this point, Glenda was feeling particularly vulnerable. The first goal to build a structure had worked, but left us with another set of challenges. The second goal to establish strong and independent Network nodes and worked, but left us with another set of challenges. Would the third goal to reach out to the larger world just generate more and different challenges? Yes. Innovations in two practices helped move us through this period.

HSD and Timing

Sometimes self-organizing processes can be faster than you can imagine. A flash mob or a two-year-old's tantrum can attest to that. On the other hand, self-organizing can be excruciatingly slow, like the adoption of policies and practices that ensure civil rights in South Africa, the United States, and Israel. The only certainty is that you cannot predict the amount of time a self-organizing process will take. You can set the conditions you control to hurry it along, but other conditions may hold it at a standstill. It is not the length of time but the uncertainty of time that make change in dynamical systems such a challenge.

Adaptive Action solves this problem, as well as all the others we've discussed throughout the book. If you don't know when change will come, the best you can do is to check for change frequently, make sense of what you see, and be prepared to take action when the time is right.

HSD and Leadership

Perhaps the greatest lessons we have learned since 2003 are about leadership in a complex adaptive system, but we hesitate to talk about them for several reasons. First, most current ideas of leadership are saturated with assumptions about closed systems, small numbers of indicators, and direct cause and effect. It is difficult even to say the word without images of "powerful men," popping into view. Second, we believe that the nature of a CAS gives every agent the capacity to make decisions and take courageous and effective action. Third, the literature on leadership is full of bias toward Western culture and masculine ways of being. Fourth, much of the theory and practice of leadership is useful, but the effort to sort the one from the other isn't very fruitful or interesting. Fifth, we don't choose to disagree with others unless it is absolutely necessary.

Still, we have learned a great deal about leadership over the past eight years.

Leadership is about the containers as conditions for change. At any level, the person who establishes the boundaries has a tremendous power over conditions for self-organizing. A parent defines curfews; a President sets policy for military and foreign relations; a CEO determines strategy. In every case, the person who defines the size and permeability of the container has a privileged role in the system. At every point of transition in the HSD Institute, Glenda has listened to others and worked with others, but it has been her role to set the boundaries about what is and is not HSD.

Leadership is about differences as a condition for change. The differences that make a difference define the patterns of culture and set the tensions that motivate action, so they are key to the self-organizing processes in human systems. Parents teach values; the President sets priorities; a CEO determines metrics. The person who has standing to determine the differences that make a difference is the person who has power over the self-organizing processes of a system. When we set the simple rules of HSD to distinguish our patterns from others, we stepped into leadership that has, and will continue, to shape the self-organizing processes at all levels and in all parts of the HSD community.

Leadership is about exchanges as a condition for change. No one is surprised that Twitter fueled the Arab Spring of 2010 and hobbled the formal leadership in nation after nation. Those leaders—tyrants or not—were accustomed to controlling who was able to talk to whom about what. They used exchanges to stifle change they didn't want and to encourage the changes they did. Over the years, Glenda set the standard for the ways Associates talk with each other and with others outside the Network. Her inquiry stance sets the conditions for a pattern of inquiry to emerge across the HSD community.

Now What?

Naming the essential patterns was a great relief. Just seeing the words and capturing the relationships made sense of many patterns that had, a moment before, seemed random and unstable. But, naming the patterns was just the first step in setting conditions for them to come to be.

The first thing we did was to consider our simple rules. Since simple rules set conditions for patterns to emerge, there must have been something in our original rules to encourage the

patterns of insularity we were observing. You will remember that our original short list of simple rules was

- Teach and learn in every interaction
- Search for the true and the useful
- Give and get value for value
- Reinforce strengths of self and other
- Attend to the whole, the part, and the greater whole
- Make expectations explicit

Which of these rules do you think might have contributed to an inward-looking pattern? "Reinforce strength of self and other" looked like the culprit to us. Not only did this rule tend to build self-congratulations into our culture, it was also constraining efforts at quality improvement in products and services. We were not ready to say that this had been a bad rule. Given the hypercritical nature of some professional organizations we had observed, this had been an important rule to set the initial appreciative patterns of HSD. Over time, though, we had established strong habits of reinforcing each other, and we had begun to reap some negatives from the rule, so it was time to change it.

We also realized that "make expectations explicit" was no longer necessary. It wasn't setting up any negative patterns we were aware of, but our policies, procedures, and practices had emerged to make this separate rule unnecessary.

So, the question then was, "What new rule will help us reach out and establish our essential patterns without disrupting the positive patterns that characterized HSD?" We played around with some possibilities, and ended up with, "Tell your HSD story." We realized that if each Associate told their own story about what HSD is and how they use it, then the theory and

practice will very naturally be disseminated. So, this is our current short list of simple rules—the ones that shape the habitual patterns of action and interaction for human systems dynamics.

- Teach and learn in every interaction

- Search for the true and the useful

- Give and get value for value

- Attend to the whole, the part, and the greater whole

- Engage in joyful practice

- Tell your HSD story

Scale-Free Network

We recognized the Network as reaching beyond the Institute at the same time that the size and structure of the Network was reaching a critical point. Research with simulation models indicates that when there are over fifty nodes in a network, it tends to shift its structure and become scale-free. A scale-free network has a particular structure that makes it resilient and efficient. No single hub is the center, and each node has the opportunity to connect with other nodes, even distant ones across the network. So, as we released our Network from the constraints of the institutional container, it also experienced a self-organized transformation.

What?

Royce supported a continually-expanding network. Sub-networks emerged. Some of them had products and timelines, and we called them projects. Others were simply conversation groups that emerged and disappeared. We called those communities. Individuals asked for coaching; small groups wanted a writing partner; and we started a blog and a social networking site. The demand was growing quickly, but our resources were not.

At the same time, our consulting opportunities began to multiply. Long-time client relationships continued, and new ones emerged. As we spread the word about HSD, more potential clients were interested. As clients were satisfied, relationships with them expanded and the word spread even farther. The demand was growing quickly, but our resources were not.

So what?

Over the years we had several "brilliant" ideas to resolve this emerging tension.

First, we thought we might charge for services provided to Associates. Coaching, shadow consulting, writing, facilitation, and so on were valuable services that we provided to Associates as part of their relationship to the Network. We thought they might be willing to pay. Some were willing, and it did cut down on the demand for unpaid support, but we never reached a balance.

Second, we thought we could bring in Associates as partners in consulting contracts. This, too, proved more than a little challenging. By the time we brought others onto the team, clients had already established a primary relationship with core HSD staff. They weren't eager to shift their loyalty to someone else. We also discovered that a ten-day certification training was not enough to initiate others into the style of HSD consulting. We did not know what such an initiation might require. We had never articulated an HSD consulting approach, partly because we were unaware that it was so radically different from others'. Our clients, though, could certainly tell the difference.

While we were experimenting with these approaches, and finding they didn't work, the number of Associates and the demand for consulting time continued to grow. As the Network expanded, we began to see individual Associates taking on new leadership roles with their own

clients and with groups of Associates. Perhaps, we thought, a new pattern might arise to resolve the mounting tension.

We decided to establish functional hubs in the Network to 1) make local, face-to-face connections possible in other locales, 2) provide specialized consulting support to clients and 3) support other like-minded Associates in shared projects or conversations. By recognizing emergent hubs and by connecting them to each other and to other nodes, we could strengthen the scale-free nature of the Network, increase its resilience, and redistribute some of the work across other parts of the Network.

This period at the HSD Institute caused us to develop and articulate innovative approaches to collaboration and consulting. We have found that both of these practices are in high demand from our clients, and our approaches have served them and us well over the past few years.

HSD and Collaboration

Whether you call it public/private partnership or community engagement, collaboration has become a way of life in the 21st century. Sustainability, resources conservation, systemic change, and global reach are all factors that push institutions of all kinds into collaborative relationships. As we have observed in many complex phenomena, however, the habits that supported the finite game of collaboration in the past are of little use in the emerging infinite game of the future. In our practice, we have noted the following lessons for successful collaboration in dynamical change in open, high dimension, nonlinear relationships.

Don't talk about it too much. Our institutional and cultural languages tend to mark strong distinctions that may not serve us well in practice. By focusing on shared work, collaborative relationships may bypass some of the barriers of past expectations.

Don't compromise identity. No collaboration should ask either partner to sacrifice who they are or what they consider their core mission. Shared work should draw out the complementary natures of partners, rather than erasing one or the other. On the other hand, not all relationships are collaborations. There will be situations when the identity of one organization will be subsumed by another. Such relationships result in mergers or acquisitions. They, too, can serve a purpose in a complex environment, but they are different in kind from health collaborations.

Begin small. We have seen lots of resources invested in establishing the groundwork for a collaboration, and resources ultimately wasted when the relationship failed to function as designed. The conditions of a healthy collaboration will evolve over time, and they can never be predicted. It is a much cheaper and lower risk path to begin with a small project and repeat Adaptive Action cycles together as trust, understanding, and shared vision glow. At some point, a formal document may be required, but at least it will describe a reality that exists, rather than one that is just imagined.

Begin with an exit strategy. Sustainable complex systems assume and accommodate change, even when they may not know particulars of when and how the change will occur. No collaboration is likely to be of value in perpetuity. When both parties acknowledge this and have plans for a graceful exit, then the pressure to stay together at all costs will not distort their shared work.

We consider our consulting practice to be a special case of collaboration. During this period of our history, while we were renegotiating the relationship with key Associates, it became necessary to articulate some principles of HSD consulting practice.

HSD and Consulting

The most radical assumption of HSD consulting is that all change is self-organizing. No system, no client, no team will change until the tensions within it set conditions for a new pattern to emerge. This principle manifests in a variety of consulting practices.

Work where you are. If a project manager contracts with us, we work with the project. When it is the CEO, we work with the CEO. Our radical belief in self-organizing means that change can happen anywhere, so we don't have to engage leadership before we can move a system along.

Bring questions, not answers. We noted earlier that answers have short shelf lives in complex systems, but good questions last forever. As consultants and coaches, our job is to support clients in their Adaptive Action processes by reflecting what we see and asking provocative questions. The only valid and sustainable answers will come from clients and their systems.

Offer, but don't force, theory. Sometimes we share the underlying theory with clients and sometimes we don't. HSD models and methods work because they are based on rigorous and reliable explanations of complex dynamics, not because clients know the explanations or understand the dynamics. We use whatever language is alive in the client's environment to name patterns we observe, and we let clients use whatever language they choose to capture the patterns that are significant to them. Of course we don't hide the theory. If someone wants to know, we are more than willing to share.

Surface and challenge patterns. Whether we do it explicitly or implicitly, our primary job is to help clients see for themselves the conditions they have set for self-organizing and become conscious of shifting those conditions to encourage new patterns to form.

Pay attention to details. Sometimes the most important change work lies in the most mundane tasks. Note taking, meeting making, room arrangement, who knows what when—all these things can produce butterfly effects that mean the difference between transformation and staying stuck.

Attend to the part, the whole, and the greater whole. We are constantly stretching to see patterns at multiple scales. We work at the scale where the client invites us, but we look for patterns above and below that level that may influence the system at the level where we work.

We continue to expand and advance our understanding of service delivery and our consulting practice as we adapt to emerging patterns in health care, education, prevention, peace, governing, finance, and agriculture. On the one hand, every organization and every project is unique. On the other hand, they all depend on the conditions for their own self-organizing change to emerge.

Now what?

We decided to take two paths to build strong, resilient hubs in the extended Associate Network. We established HSD hubs to fulfill Institute goals and objectives, and we acknowledged hubs that had spontaneously emerged to fulfill Associates' goals and objectives.

In 2009 we founded an HSD Institute at the University of St. Thomas in Minneapolis, Minnesota. We hoped that this hub would bear some of the weight of marketing and logistics for open courses as well as pave the way for academic courses, certificates, and (ultimately) degrees in the field of human systems dynamics.

In 2010 we established HSD Centers (Centres) in the United Kingdom and in Israel. The purpose of these hubs was to host certification training in those locations, support an emerging local Network of Associates, and provide training and consulting services to clients in the region.

We have harvested lots of learning from the diversity of our international hubs. Sally Gritten, our hub in London, has broad and deep experience in business. She is a coach by training and practice, so the UK Network's products, services, and activities tend to support coaches. They also draw from Sally's diverse professional network of business associates. Judy Tal, our hub in Tel Aviv, is an applied mathematician and teacher, so our work in Israel tends toward theory building, teaching, and writing. We also find that that adapting to language and cultural patterns has enriched our own experience in the field and influenced our options for actions in other parts of the Network.

These three hubs were established from the center out, as the Institute sought opportunities to expand its structure. Other hubs emerge as individuals or groups of Associates reach toward the center of HSD to strengthen their own business models, personal learnings, or contributions to their respective professions. The Associate stories in section 2 introduced some of the emergent HSD hubs. From their experiences you can see the diversity of their work as well as their creativity and commitment to theory and practice of human systems dynamics.

Next What?

Today, the Associate Network includes more than 250 scholar practitioners. Some of them are loosely connected to the work of HSD or to the HSD Institute. Many are engaged in interactions with the Institute and their peers in the Network. Some of them, a total of 26, have demonstrated deep commitment to moving HSD forward through their own engagements. They have spontaneously emerged as key hubs in the Network of HSD Associates.

In 2011, the staff and board of HSD Institute launched a conversation about long-term viability and sustainability of the field, the Network, and the Institute. It is clear that all three of

these containers constitute an ecology in which each one is stable and growing as it co-evolves with the others. We recognize the Network as the system that mediates between the other two—it is the whole of which the field is the greater whole and the Institute the part. If human systems dynamics and the Institute are be resilient and sustainable, the Network must be resilient and sustainable. And a resilient Network depends on the sustainability of these emergent hubs and their relationships to each other.

So, in February of 2012, the HSD Institute steps into another emergent stage. We have invited 26 emergent hub Associates to join us in Scottsdale, Arizona for the weekend. We invite them to set the conditions for a new pattern to emerge that will set the stage for the next evolution of human systems dynamics and its various partners and beneficiaries. As we have throughout the history of the HSD Institute, we will engage in Adaptive Action and delight in the patterns that emerge—whatever they turn out to be. The one thing we know for sure is that we will not be stuck because the inquiry will continue. And, we will continue to invite others into this world of self-organizing theory and practice, where complexity is more than just a description, and adaptation turns the potential of the present into thriving in the future.