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The Enneagram of Process: A Theory of Change

Order in Chaos

They say making organizational change is like performing an appendectomy on a man carrying a piano upstairs. It's a complex process, involving a lot of people at many different hierarchical levels. And it has to be done while keeping the enterprise running. Making changes in a family business is even more complex, because the interests and dynamics of the family need to be integrated as well.

This article illustrates how an ancient geometric figure guides the design of organizational change programs. The Enneagram, or nine pointed star diagram, is popularly associated with human personality type and leadership style. In those applications, the diagram is used to organize contemporary psychological knowledge and spiritual insight. Here, the diagram is used to organize the energies unleashed in human organizations undergoing dramatic realignment and change. It turns out the Enneagram identifies underlying patterns or "attractors" in apparently chaotic turbulence, allowing leaders and their consultants to predict, guide and channel the underlying energies to get good results, reliably, time after time.

All of this is of revolutionary importance in the field of organizational development. Made up as it is of fuzzy concepts and sometimes feel-good imperatives, the field suffers from lack of rigor and discipline. The Enneagram offers both rigor and discipline, providing more reliable progress, more complete communication and understanding up and down an organization and precise control over the pacing of change. These are of great value to the Chief Executive Officer.

The Enneagram is a template for coordinating and sequencing proven methods of organizational change and development. Exhibit 1 shows how an organization change program is mapped on the Ennea-

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Family Business

Walker Industries

Walker Industries is a diversified Aggregates, Construction and Environmental Services company located near Niagara Falls Ontario. Founded in 1879 by stonecutter John Walker, the company has prospered under four generations of family leadership.

In 1996, looking ahead to eventual retirement and the passing of the company to the fifth generation of seven cousins, co-owners John and Norris Walker initiated a bold reorganization of the businesses. The organizational realignment program took place over a period of a year and involved family, senior management and middle management. A new four part business-unit structure was designed and put in place to support the growth of the various components of the company. This replaced a traditional functional organization of operating, marketing and finance executives. A new corporate governance structure was designed for implementation in a staged way over future years. This structure brought the next generation together in a formal way to consider ownership issues, provided for an Advisory Board and ultimately a formal Board of Directors for the group of companies.

The organizational realignment program was planned and managed using the participative change model described in this issue.

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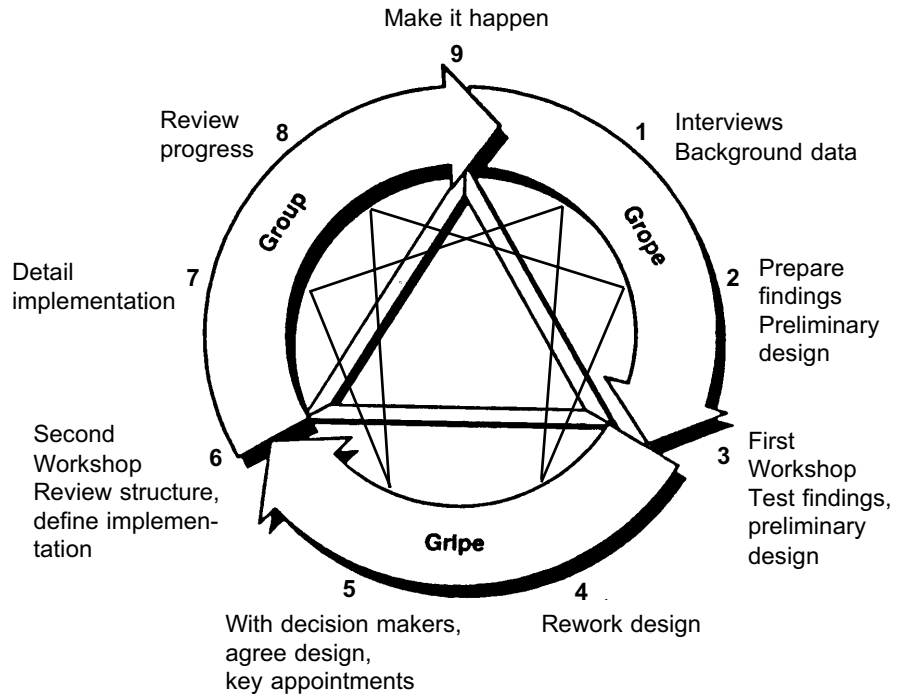
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gram diagram. The sequence of events is laid out around the outside of the circle on points 1 through 9. The circle implies bringing the process to completion—that what is opened up and set in motion comes together in the end. The central triangle in the diagram suggests that the process needs three parts—at the simplest level: a beginning, a middle and an end.

Enneagram theory has it that points 3 and 6 on the diagram are “shock points” where some external energy is needed to jolt the system to a higher level, higher octave or for the old patterns to be broken by a quantum shift. We use workshops as shock points at points 3 and 6 on the cycle which shift the attention of all levels of management from “grope” through “gripe” and into “group”. Exhibit 2 lays out the workshop at point 3 using the Enneagram as a template. For the workshop, the shock at points 3 and 6 are delivered by breakout groups, and for point 6 the added assist of “sleeping on it” to make the turn into the groove where common ground is found. All of this is suggestive of cycles within cycles, which is how irreversible progress is made, by bringing segments to completion as people move along through the process of change.

The Enneagram diagram is content free, it holds no knowledge in and of itself. The diagram does have the power of organizing what you already know. The Enneagram structure is informed by experience in other fields related to complex change. Hegel claimed, for example, that all history is a series of thesis-

Exhibit 1: Project Cycle



antithesis-synthesis. Personal change follows the path of challenge-quest-return of the Hero's Journey. Gestalt practice articulates awareness-contact-integration. Will Schutz describes the group dynamics of change as inclusion-control-openness. Ken Blanchard talks of forming-storming-norming as processes in group development. These triads are the central triangle of the Enneagram. We separate the process into grope, gripe and group. The Gestalt cycle of experience describes raising a figure and resolving it. These dynamics are aspects of synchronizing the buildup of energy and understanding in the various groups of an organization around a common understanding of the problem to be solved, and a commitment to a common approach to solving it. It is the essence of communication in a complex environment.

Enneagram process theory has been articulated by George Gurjieff¹, J. G. Bennett² and Tony Blake³, and this body of knowledge provides important insights into the management of change at its various points. The theory tells us, for example, there are two places where we need a stable, shared image. These are at point 4, where we need a clear definition of the problem we're trying to solve, and point 7 where we need a clear map of how we are going to make it happen. This insight defines what needs to happen during the shock points. To use the Gestalt terminology, to raise a figure at point 3 and resolve it at point 6.

The Enneagram is a template for coordinating and sequencing proven methods of organizational change and development.

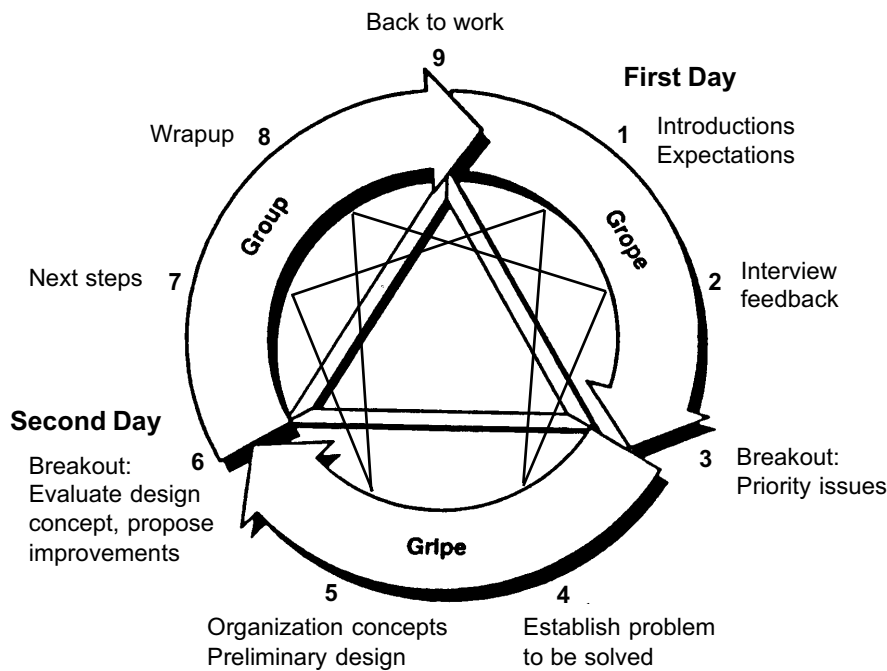
Another aspect of Enneagram theory highlights the critical nature of the decisions where appointments are made to new management positions. The theory alerts us to the chasm between point 4 and point 5, the most difficult stage, when it seems that it is a chasm that can never be crossed. Understanding allows these decisions to be made in awareness of the “hazard point” at point 5 and timed so that the momentum of the cycle carries the people through it. The internal lines of the Enneagram also act as control circuits guiding the work at any point. For example, when getting started at point 1, the focus of attention needs to be on the outcomes of previous cycles as described by them at point 7, and by what sort of stable image of the problem to be solved do we need to anticipate at point 4. These control details are efficient in directing attention to the most important aspects of process at each point in time.

***An integrating theory ...
to see the overall order
in the chaos.***

A lot of very good progress has been made by the field of organizational development in the last three decades increasing our knowledge of human nature in the stress of change and defining good practices for helping leaders bring organizations through perilous passages. What has been missing is an integrating theory of process which allows managers and their consultants to see the overall order in the chaos. The Enneagram provides a macro structure for understanding the inherent order lurking in the chaos of change.

- ¹ See P. D. Ouspensky, *In Search of the Miraculous*, New York, Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1949.
- ² J. G. Bennett, *Enneagram Studies*, New York, Samuel Weiser, 1983.
- ³ A. G. E. Blake, *The Intelligent Enneagram*, Boston, Shambhala, 1996.

Exhibit 2: Workshop Cycle



Electric Utility

Chelan County PUD

The Chelan County Public Utilities District owns and operates two hydro-electric dams on the Columbia River in Washington State, serves local county electricity customers, exports power to major cities, and trades services and power contracts from its strategic position on the mid-Columbia Bus.

Faced with the on-rush of deregulation in the US electricity industry, Chelan PUD embarked upon a major reorganization of its operations in 1997. Under the leadership of newly appointed General Manager and CEO, Roger Bradon, senior and mid-management were engaged in a comprehensive process of organization design and realignment. A major goal of the project is to become more business-oriented and entrepreneurial, to shake off the bureaucratic traditions of the industry, to compete effectively in electricity generation, local customer service, and regional power trading.

Results of the program feature two sharply focused operating business units, realigned corporate services and finance functions, and an integrated approach to corporate affairs to support legislative and relicensing activities at state and national levels. Entrepreneurial zest is assured by strategic appointment of individuals with business skills and acumen.

The reorganization program was implemented using the process concepts described in this issue.

The New Management Network

We support executives to act quickly, directly and profitably, on what needs to be done for success.

The New Management Network is a distinctive peer group of independent management consultants who share common professional ideas, understand creative innovation and are dedicated to releasing the human spirit in organizations.

Members of the network serve clients on issues of corporate purpose, strategic clarity, company-wide alignment with direction, teamwork and organizational culture.

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