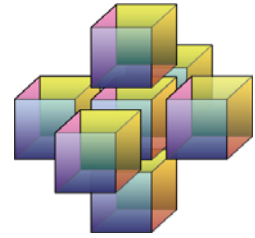


**Complex Adaptive Learning: A New Paradigm for Organizational Learning**



Traditional learning models are based on a deep-seated and often unquestioned assumption – that individuals, teams, departments and, organizations function in linear ways. As a result, we plan a learning event, conduct it, and expect our desired outcome to emerge. If – and more often, when – it doesn't, we look for the "defect" in the training materials, the instructor, or the students. Once we know the "cause" of the failed learning, we change it and try it again -- often with the same results.

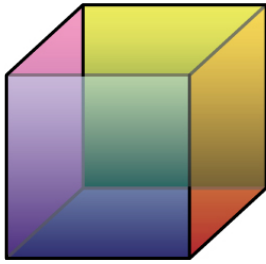
Complex Adaptive Learning is based on the premise that complex systems – *human* systems – are non-linear; that is, they don't operate in strict "cause and effect," "do *this* and *that* is guaranteed to happen" ways. Rather they operate in larger patterns -- patterns that can be identified, analyzed, and influenced – though not necessarily with the results we anticipate.

Complex Adaptive Learning (CAL) is a concept that integrates Human Systems Dynamics (HSD), adult learning theory, brain science, and contemporary change management to offer a different way to learn. CAL focuses on the learning process itself – the patterns of learning -- as much as the subject being taught. This isn't to say that content doesn't matter – it does – but CAL's point of view is that the *pattern* of learning ("learning how to fish") is ultimately more useful in this age of rapidly expanding knowledge and technology than the subject matter ("the fish") being taught.

The table below summarizes many of the differences:

| <b>Traditional Training and Development</b>                 | <b>Complex Adaptive Learning</b>   |
|---|--|
| Focuses on "end result."                                    | Focuses on the process of learning.  |
| Assumes linear "cause and effect."                          | Assumes non-linear patterns.   |
| More effective when high levels of consistency are desired. | More effective when the ability to adapt and synthesize is desired.                          |
| Assumes content is known and reasonably stable over time.   | Assumes content is always changing relative to context and conditions.                       |
| Structured around "start → learn → end"                     | Structured in ongoing cycle of adaptation – "Acquire" → "Adapt" → "Apply" → Reflect → Repeat |
| With sufficient knowledge, success is virtually assured.    | Supports a need to act without known knowledge   |

Complex Adaptive Learning focuses on identifying and influencing patterns within and between the dimensions of what we call an Adaptive Learning Framework (ALF). Each of the four dimensions represents a pattern which can be influenced in its own right. The ALF also provides a means for understanding and influencing the interactions between those dimensions.

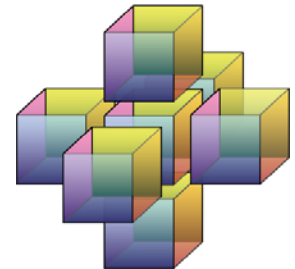


The four dimensions of the Adaptive Learning Framework are:

- 1. Time**– identifies the time frame in which learning needs to occur
- 2. Amount of knowledge** – identifies the amount of knowledge available.
- 3. Scope**– identifies the level of precision and focus applicable
- 4. Desired outcomes**– identifies the type of learning outcome

There are a number of significant implications embedded in this view of learning. One example:

Complex systems operate simultaneously at multiple levels. Individual actions collectively generate team behaviors. The behavior of teams impacts the patterns of the department. Departmental policies and procedures impact individual behavior. While we know all of these dynamics are occurring, it is not possible to predict and control them in perfectly linear ways. Complex Adaptive Learning acknowledges this reality and offers insights for assessing and influencing the patterns that emerge and self-organize between system levels as well as those within them. CAL has coined a phrase to capture this phenomenon, “**transactive relationships.**”



In summary, Complex Adaptive Learning provides a fundamentally new paradigm for assessing and influencing learning and change in today's complex systems. Breaking from the current, “*If we do these x steps correctly, they will learn and do what they're supposed to,*” CAL focuses on an adaptive cycle of learning that identifies and shifts the patterns of learning within and between the multiple levels of today's complex organizations.

***Adaptive Patterns Consulting helps organizations manage the power of adapting.***

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