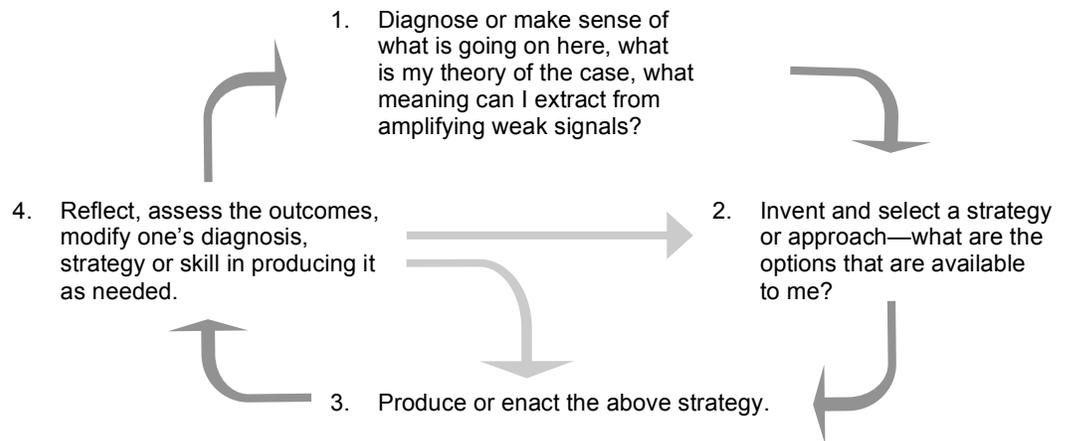


Briefing Notes:
Enactments in Crafting Change Strategies

Cynicism in organizations is rampant (Kanter and Mervis, 1989). Middle managers and front-line workers talk often about their bosses’ failure to ‘walk the talk’ with little awareness that they are often seen the same way by their own subordinates. It is difficult to see oneself from the outside-in. Credibility that one will follow talk with action requires us to get into the heads and hearts of significant others to explore how others will make sense of various initiatives we as leaders may be driving. The take up of the proposed changes by critical stakeholders is critical to their success.

A change cycle can be simplified into four stages (Argyris and Schon, 1978):



Under the current conditions of overload, as we are diagnosing and inventing our approaches, we often fail to go the next step and enact how they might play out in the actual encounter. Then in the real exchange, we are often surprised when the other does not behave as imagined in the first two stages of thinking, hence the military saying that no strategy survives the first encounter with the enemy.

Even when we produce our invented strategy to perfection, it often does not have the effect we anticipated

In sum, leaders' and team's strategy deliberations often suffer from the following:

- Confusing the selection of the strategy as the end point and not exploring the dilemmas of actually producing it under real world conditions (Sutton and Pfeiffer, 1999).
- Being too ethnocentric and seeing the issues through their eyes versus exploring the perspective of others.
- Being too cognitive and not exploring emotional aspects both in themselves and in others that might be fate making to the success of the intervention.

The Power of Enactments

Enactments of even a small part of the strategy can increase significantly the resilience of change agent implementing the strategy. War gaming, or 'murder boards' before testifying on the Capitol Hill, or simulated juries, or rehearsing a complex surgery, all increase one's understanding of the likely dynamics and decrease one's anxiety so that one is more present to signals of ineffectiveness and open to shifting strategies.

Enactments offer learning from both sides of the encounter. It is a powerful way to get in the skin of the other. For example, we often attribute to the other 'resistance to change' when inventing our strategy. But when we enact their role as someone tries out our strategy, we discover specific arguments why we (in the role of the influence target) are opposed to the change and we can even experience empathy with their point of view. In negotiation preparation, it is far more powerful to enact the dynamic rather than only talk about it (Shell, 1999). One often gets in touch with how the issues look from the other's point of view, especially emotionally.

The Process

- Diagnose the context of a proposed initiative, identifying especially some of the early stakeholders whom you need to engage to get them 'on board' for the proposed changes.
- Pick one stakeholder whom you think is important and that you are not paying enough attention to, and think through your approach/strategy for engaging this individual: what would be the frame of the meeting? Where do you want to have it? What are some of the key points that might resonate with this individual? What might be some of their concerns?
- Have a colleague assume the role of this stakeholder, or if in a team setting, you might have half of the team be the stakeholder, and half take up your challenge to engage/influence this stakeholder.

- Enact the encounter as realistically as you can on both sides, trying to keep the conversation going for 5-8 minutes at least, so that you get a feel for the tone, dynamic, and some of the issues that might arise in this meeting.

Extracting the Learnings

- Was the person leaning in, out, or neutral? Any shifts and at what points in the dialog?
- What were interesting transitions in the exchange, shifts in who was asking questions, the focus of the exchange, etc?
- How might the frame of the encounter be characterized? Collaborating, selling, listening, data collecting, spinning, manipulating, debating, fencing, etc.
- What were each thinking and feeling but not saying at key moments in the exchange?
- What appeared to be the most telling points on each side, what felt like the most resistant moment and what was the approach to dealing with it? Were there moments of genuine inquiry and how did the other respond?
- What might have been alternative ways to frame the meeting, different approaches that might have shaped the dynamic significantly?
- What was the implied relationship (one up, one down, symmetric?)

Conclusion

When most people use enactments to stimulate their thinking and feeling about a complex situation, it is powerful. It helps one get in touch with how the other sees the situation. It gives you more resilience in coping with in the moment shifts in the dynamic. It increases the likelihood of the encounter being effective.

Why then is it so infrequently used? The dominant reason is the reverse side of why they are effective: even in playing a role, there are real risks; one is acting, doing, not just talking, and thinking. We fear looking foolish in front of colleagues whose opinions we value. At a deeper level, each of us often disappoints ourselves in many encounters because we enter with a vague image of how we hope the exchange will go and walk out with a sense of disappointment in how it actually went. The French have a phrase “l’esprit de l’escalier” which roughly translated is ‘stair case wit’—capturing the brilliant ideas we wished we had said in the meeting that we just left.

Enactments invite us to take the risk of rehearsing the meeting, not in a scripted fashion, but improvisational, at the risk of disappointing ourselves and being vulnerable in the eyes of our colleagues. A key skill in using enactments is containing those feelings in setting a context that supports the individual and collective learning. The payoffs in learning and effectiveness are worth the risks.

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