"Could it be that, in seeing the positive/problem differential as an either/or choice, we are blinded to the possibility of a "third way"; another avenue for drawing forth intelligence, for exploring difference, and for eliciting energy for change?"

Mindful OD Practice and the Obreau Tripod

Beyond Positive/Problem Polarities

By Don Dunoon

Introduction

An emerging theme in OD and related literatures is a contrast between positive/possibility-centered approaches and conventional, problem/deficit-based orientations. But is this a limiting dichotomy? Is there a danger of creating and perpetuating a restricting, binary view? In this paper I propose that if we can recognize and think beyond this duality, we might discover a largely untapped potential in the space between the two formulations of OD work. Operating in this space entails opening up and exploring contentious issues but without seeking either to problem-solve or focus exclusively on the positive.

A necessary condition is that we acknowledge and counterbalance default behavior patterns that tend to propel problem-oriented responses in dealing with issues. These defaults include tendencies to react to new information and experience, to make negative attributions about others, and to communicate defensively. We can achieve counterbalancing of these patterns through an emphasis on working from observation before judgment, presuming that others are capable of being reasonable in the particular instance, and intentionally seeking to communicate authentically.

The elements to support exploration of challenging issues can be imagined as three legs of a tripod; each must be in place to keep the structure standing (*Figure 1*). The Obreau Tripod—with Obreau comprised of the first two letters each of Observation, Reasonableness, and Authenticity—is a means to help OD practitioners and others ground their work in the present moment and tap into emerging possibilities. The potential is to support efforts to build shared meaning on issues through drawing forth additional intelligence, insight, and energy for change beyond that accessed through other means.

What I am terming "mindful OD practice," then, has a number of strands:

- Recognizing and imagining a form of OD work that is neither positive/strengths-based nor problem/deficit-based in orientation
- Giving attention to the mindful exploration of contentious issues, with the aim of creating shared understandings of present realities and preferred futures to enable change
- Being alert to default behavior patterns

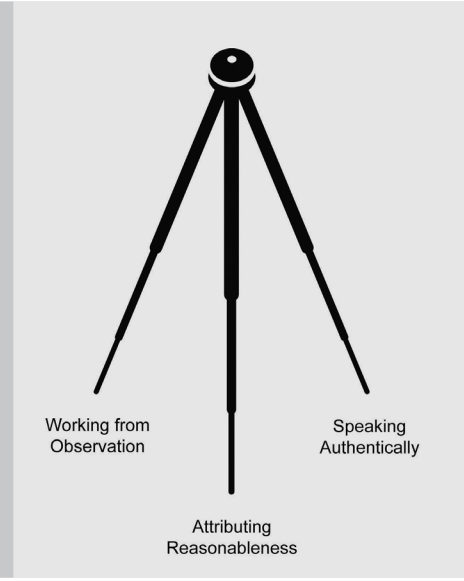

Figure 1. The Obreau Tripod

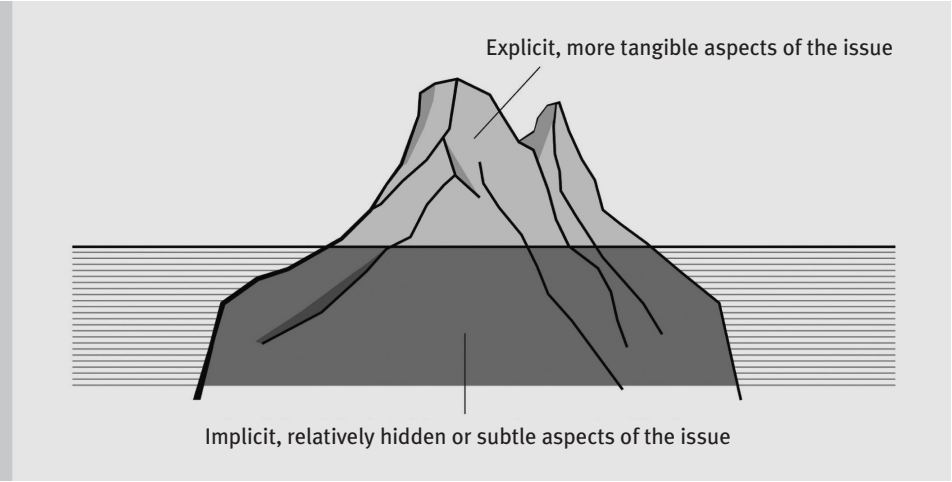

Figure 2. Contentious Issues as Icebergs

that render largely invisible the potential space between positive and problem-based approaches

» Consciously helping clients and others productively explore issues through attention to observation, attributions of reasonableness, and efforts to speak authentically.

The concepts of mindful action presented here are grounded in the work of Langer (1989). Langer emphasizes elements of mindful action, including creating new categories, welcoming new information, more than one view, control over context, and process before outcome. And while Langer uses the term "mindfulness," I prefer to use mindful as an adjective, to avoid confusion with meditation-oriented methods.

Beyond Positive/Problem Polarities

The field of OD is increasingly taking on a positive hue as reflected in Appreciative Inquiry (AI) (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005), positively-oriented "solution-focused" approaches to coaching (Grant, 2006), strengths-based models of leadership development (Rath & Conchie, 2009), and research under the banner of "positive organizational scholarship" (Cameron, Dutton, & Quinn, 2003). While there are different theories and models, the common currency is a focus on building on strengths.

Here I shall use "positive OD" as a short-hand for strengths-based approaches but with particular reference to Appreciative Inquiry. AI and other positive OD methods seek to reframe interactions away from diagnosis and problem solving toward clarifying goals, identifying strengths and things that are working well, and building momentum for goal achievement. As described by Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, AI "aims to discover and bring forth existing strengths, hopes, and dreams; to identify and amplify the positive core of the organization" (2003, p.15).

A contrast is sometimes drawn between AI and established OD approaches grounded in diagnosis and problem solving. In the words of Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, "We are not saying to deny or ignore problems. What we are saying is that if you want to transform a situation, a relationship, an organization, or community, focusing on strengths is much more effective than focusing on problems" (2003, p.18).

One consequence of such thinking can be a polarity. OD action is seen to be either manifestly positive or to reflect an unproductive concern with what is not working, with "deficit thinking." It is as if not to be patently positive is to acquiesce to the forces of negativity.

Is an emphasis on the positive the only way to tap insight, generative thinking, and the more desirable aspects of human behavior in groups and organizations? Could it be that, in seeing the positive/problem differential as an either/or choice, we are blinded to the possibility of a "third way"; another avenue for drawing forth intelligence, for exploring difference, and for eliciting energy for change?

As noted, one of Langer's (1989) core elements of being mindful is the generation of new categories. In connection with OD, we can be more mindful in our practice if we recognize the range of choices open to us at particular times: whether to take on a conventional analysis, diagnosis, and feedback approach; a positive frame building upon perceived strengths; or a stance based more in discovering and learning about different realities as they are experienced in the present moment.

It is true that concepts of mindful thinking and action are already incorporated in many strengths-based approaches. For instance, some practitioners teach their clients that, when things seem not to be going well, it is mindful to look for, and build upon, positives in the situation. It is one thing, however, to incorporate mindfulness related concepts and tools within OD interventions. I want to see mindful thinking and action placed "at the front door" of OD; so that practitioners think about the full range of options in any situation and transcend the binary thinking associated with the positive and problem-centered categorization.

Mindful Exploration of Contentious Issues

Escaping the limiting effects of seeing OD action as either positive or problem-centered requires that we recognize the pervasiveness of contentious—messy, not primarily technical—issues in organizational life. Such issues have no independent, objective reality; are interpreted differently by stakeholders; and tend to be associated with a degree of emotional intensity. To practice OD mindfully suggests helping others: notice what can be directly perceived about such issues; contemplate the issues from different standpoints; and speak to them in ways likely to spark exploration, inquiry, and generative thinking and action.

Such work involves consciously grounding our work in the present and drawing on the fullest possible range of mental (and other) resources. These resources, potentially largely untapped otherwise, include unspoken assumptions, undeclared interests, unnamed feelings, and knowledge and expertise which have not been made explicit.

An image I find helpful in thinking

about contentious issues is the iceberg (*Figure 2*). While the iceberg is widely used in differentiating the overt and covert sides of organization (see, for instance, French & Bell, 1984, pp.18-19), the usage suggested here is different. Virtually any specific contentious issue or challenge in an organizational context can be thought of as having an explicit side and an implicit, hidden side (Dunoon, 2008).

Think of a group observing an iceberg from a boat. The explicit side is what they see above the waterline, relatively tangible and observable. Depending on where people are positioned on the boat and where they direct their attention, they will see different facets of the iceberg. There is a degree of subjectivity involved here, of course; the explicit side of an issue is not just the province of "hard facts."

The implicit side—below the waterline—refers to what people think, assume, believe, feel, and know in connection with an issue but have not stated openly. While we cannot observe the hidden side directly, we can make and test inferences about it. The implicit side represents potentially an enormous source of intelligence regarding an issue, if only we can access some of it.

Tapping into the implicit side is challenging, though it can be done. Doing so requires, first, that we are not captive to the binary that equates discussion of contentious issues with deficit thinking. However, awareness of the possibility of exploring contentious issues in ways that release insight and energy for change is not sufficient. We need also to be able to recognize and counterbalance common behavior patterns that can "tip" an otherwise productive conversation into one beset with complaint, judgment, and negativity.

Recognizing Default Behavior Patterns with Contentious Issues

Below I briefly sketch three patterns of behavior that can easily derail conversations and push us into unproductive interactions. Here I draw particularly on the work of Argyris (1990, 1993) as well as Langer (1989).The patterns—common default attitudes and behaviors—are:

» Reacting with rapid conclusions about contentious issues
» Making negative judgments of others and their motivations/intentions
» Dancing around difficult topics and interactions.

Reacting with rapid conclusions

When faced with new information people often move, as Argyris (1993, p.57) says, "in milliseconds" from observing something, such as a snippet of conversation, to analysis, inference, and conclusions. Such rapid movement tends to reflect an assumption that an issue is an essentially technical matter, one that can be viewed adequately through a single lens. If we then act from our narrow assessment of the challenge, we might unintentionally reinforce the original concern.

A challenge, then, for OD practitioners is to be able to perceive more clearly; to avoid the rush to conclusion—and to assist those they work with do the same. As we shall see, this is the function of the first "leg" of the Obreau Tripod, *Working from Observation*.

Making negative judgments about others

We might recognize in general terms that "there are two sides to every story" but this can be hard to do in practice in specific instances. We tend to see only our own reality and to downplay or dismiss other views, as well as apportion fault or blame for things gone wrong. Allowing only a single viewpoint—our own—limits the possibilities we perceive. Langer puts it this way: "By not actively considering alternatives, however, we keep ourselves blind to choices we might otherwise accept or incorporate into our existing views. We remain mindless and oblivious to being so" (Dunoon & Langer, 2011, np).

A challenge here for OD practitioners is to recognize and help people appreciate different vantage points on issues of concern. A key is to develop hypotheses that can be tested with others as to what might be real for them, a theme I shall return to with the *Attributing Reasonableness* leg of the Obreau Tripod structure.

Dancing around difficult topics and interactions

Many organizations espouse values such as openness, trust, respect, and collaboration. Yet, as Argyris (1990, p.13) argues, our actual behavior tends to be driven by other values such as being in control, winning, and saving face. Disconnects, Argyris says, between espoused and enacted values are common in organizations. For instance, it is not possible to set about saving face for yourself or others and be open about your intention. People engage in a range of dancing around maneuvers including defensive reasoning in order to deny such inconsistencies and avoid responsibility for doing so.

A challenge for OD practitioners here is help others speak on issues in ways that are more oriented to joint exploration and learning than to sidestepping difficulties and smoothing over discomforting realities. I shall take up this theme with the third leg of the Obreau Tripod, *Speaking Authentically*.

I have suggested that these behavior patterns, reacting, making negative judgments, and dancing around, tend to pull us away from productive conversations. When we react hastily, when we attach problems to others, and when we talk in ways that step around the underlying issues, we minimize the prospects for discovering and learning with others about present realities and emerging possibilities.

One option for dealing with these challenges is to focus on the positive and use AI. Another option—and they are not mutually exclusive—is to use the Obreau Tripod.

The Obreau Tripod: Three Essential Legs to Support Mindful Exploration

The Obreau Tripod (for Observation, Reasonableness, and Authenticity) is a structure to support OD practitioners, their clients, and others in changing how they converse on contentious issues. The Tripod is designed as an aid in preparing for and engaging in conversations that bring to bear the greatest possible range and depth of intelligence on an issue, and specifically

to prevent the slide into the default patterns of reactive thinking, negative judgment, and dancing around.

While the Tripod structure necessarily imposes some limits on the kinds of things people can say (such as not expressing immediate judgment on complex issues), they are not confined to speaking in positive terms. There is scope, however, within the Tripod structure and processes to incorporate AI-style questions.

Examples of how the Tripod can be used include:

» A facilitator assists members of an intact group sort through a specific matter involving a stakeholder external to the group.
» In a leadership development program, the presenter has participants work in threes to support one person in each trio in making sense of an issue that matters to the person.
» A coach introduces the tool to an individual client as an aid to making headway on an issue the client has experienced as intractable.

As with tripods generally, the strength of the structure comes from all three legs being in place together. It is when we attend to each of the three practices that the Tripod's power can be realized. In those instances people tend to show a greater willingness to suspend judgment, a more empathic appreciation of other views, and an increased capacity to engage others on difficult topics.

Working from Observation

With this first leg, we seek to pull back and ask: What is directly noticeable with this issue? What are we observing, perceiving directly, that is of potential significance or interest? Of course there is judgment involved in deciding what to notice. But, as far as possible, we need to challenge ourselves and others to work with data that we can declare, and check interpretations.

What we notice is also conditioned by the perspective we adopt. When we are caught up in the action, we tend to see the detail directly in front of us but lose sight of the larger perspective, including how our own behavior contributes to what is going on. Ronald Heifetz uses the metaphor of being at a dance and then "getting on the balcony" to overlook the action on the dance floor below (Heifetz, Grashow, & Linsky, 2009, pp.7–8).

Noticing—including both the detail and the larger, "balcony" perspective—is at the heart of a mindful orientation. As OD practitioners, the more we can practice noticing without immediately reacting, the more we will bring a mindful quality to our work, and foster this quality of being and acting in others.

People sometimes struggle with the idea of focusing on observation. The issue of concern can seem so broad and complex that grappling with it in anything but analytic terms appears too difficult. In such cases, my advice is to focus on a specific manifestation; an incident or episode in which some of the issue's features were evident. Examples might include a meeting that ended badly, or with an unexpected outcome. Such micro-level issues are likely to contain within them expressions of many of the larger behavior patterns and dynamics. These incidents and episodes can provide a window onto bigger issues.

Some tips for working from observation are suggested below. The suggestions assume that an OD practitioner is helping an individual or group prepare for a challenging conversation. The participants are at a whiteboard or flipchart with a drawing of the Obreau Tripod displayed and the legs labeled.

Tips for applying the Working from Observation Tripod leg:

» Ask what is directly discernible—as distinct from inference and conclusion with this issue/instance.
» Scribe responses next to the Observation leg of the Tripod.
» If what is presented sounds more like an inference or conclusion, ask, "Could this really be directly perceived?" Or, "What observations support this interpretation?"
» Put brackets around—or in some other way mark—those contributions that reflect inference or conclusion.
» For the observations you have recorded, invite the group to consider different possible inferences/interpretations.

Attributing Reasonableness

Here we reflect on what construction of events might make sense to particular stakeholders; what the issue might "look like" from where they sit. A presumption is needed that they are able, in this instance at least, to act as reasonable people who have a way of interpreting events that seems reasonable to them (Dunoon, 2008, pp.101–103; Dunoon & Langer, 2011). Only if we attribute reasonableness can we test our interpretations.

As a structure for considering different perspectives, we can think of four dimensions of potentially hidden (undeclared, unspoken) mental content (*Table 1*); if you will, four "zones" under the waterline of the metaphorical iceberg (Dunoon 2008, pp.133–134).

This structure is used to imagine possible hidden assumptions, interests, feelings, and knowledge of particular

Table 1. *Four Dimensions of Possible Hidden (Unspoken) Mental Content*

Hidden assumptions	What the stakeholder takes as given and true at this point.
Hidden interests	What the stakeholder values, holds as important, and wants to advance or protect.
Hidden feelings	The unnamed emotions the stakeholder is experiencing at this time.
Hidden knowledge	What the stakeholder knows or has experience of but has not revealed.

stakeholders while allowing that they are capable of reasonableness. The need here is to stretch our own narrative; to move beyond the default story we tell ourselves about others. As we gain a broader, more textured, range of possible meanings, we become better placed to explore with others the realities they see.

This work does not require we make unduly positive judgments about those people or groups. It is not about being nice, seeing the best in people. Rather, it is a case of relaxing the assumption that, in this particular instance, we know what is driving them.

The person or group who is concerned about this issue (the "case owner") should also do this analysis as a self-assessment. This reflects that we all bring our own mindsets and filters to our consideration of issues, even if unconsciously.

One trap to avoid is evaluating the reasonableness of others' viewpoints in our own terms; in effect, asking, "Does this action seem reasonable to me?" Instead, we should be asking what reasonableness looks like from the standpoint of the stakeholders concerned. Of course, we cannot know what constitutes reasonableness to others—but we can work at developing hypotheses and making these testable.

Applying this approach requires intentional effort. We need to consciously imagine our way into others' perspectives; and to hold our own favored assessments lightly. Learning to see from other standpoints is not always possible. Yet when we succeed in viewing others in a different light, we may be surprised at the fresh perspectives revealed.

Tips for applying the Attributing Reasonableness leg:

» Think about who are the key stakeholders with an interest in the issue.
» Focus first on the stakeholder you most want to engage with and—holding open that the stakeholder can be reasonable, at least in this instance—ask:
  - What might this stakeholder be assuming, taking as given?
  - What interests might they hold, value, and want to protect or advance?
  - What feelings might they be experiencing now, in connection with this issue?
  - What knowledge or experience might they have that has not as yet been shared?
» The person/group who owns the case should also consider their own hidden/unspoken assumptions, interests, feelings and knowledge.
» Review each of the attributions generated in terms of whether/how they could be tested.

Speaking Authentically

Ordinarily, to speak authentically implies that what we say is in keeping with our deeper values and beliefs; that we are being genuine, saying what we mean. In our context, authenticity has a slightly qualified character. To speak authentically is to say what is true for us while also being connected with our observations and consistent with attributions of reasonableness.

Authenticity here is necessarily tempered rather than raw. It is not a matter of putting forward darker but genuinely-held beliefs or pushing one's truth strongly onto other people. Such actions would likely antagonize them, not foster openness and joint exploration—which is the point of the Tripod process.

At one level, this leg of the Tripod can enable any question or statement as long as it satisfies three criteria:

» The content is true for the speaker. At least they declare it so.
» It is not at odds with observable data. Or if it is, the relationship with the data should be made explicit.
» It is consistent with attributions of reasonableness.

Stronger contributions, however, will help to elicit assumptions, interests, feelings, and knowledge that otherwise might stay in the implicit, unspoken domain (below the waterline of the iceberg). Such contributions might include, for instance:

» Questions to explore the relevant assumptions, interests, feelings, or knowledge of others. Example: "Please tell me more about what's most important to you here?"
» Questions to test inferences and interpretations, allowing reasonableness. Example: "I've noticed (x) and I interpret this to mean (y). Please tell me how this sounds to you?"
» Questions to explore desired or possible futures. Example: "Please tell me your future vision for this issue."
» Statements to disclose content that you have not previously voiced. Example: "I've been assuming that…"
» Statements to reframe or integrate the issue or aspects of it. Example: "Could we look at it this way?"

Speaking authentically as framed here can be inclusive of positive OD-style questioning. A question such as, "What can we build on from the work done so far to get a good outcome?" could be quite pertinent. Yet, as I have indicated, the kinds of mindful exploration being discussed do not require that people be positive, and this work is not defined in positive terms. More important is that people speak to what is true for them, as long as they can provide some link to observable data and they do not set about diminishing others.

Authenticity matters because if others perceive us as working from hidden agendas, trying to manipulate them, or otherwise acting disingenuously, they are likely to be guarded in what they share with us. If so, the essence of a mindful stance on joint exploration of meanings is lost.

Tips for applying the Speaking Authentically leg:

» Think of a neutral way to introduce the topic to the relevant stakeholder.
» Consider what questions might usefully be put to that stakeholder. To avert danger, keep a focus on the other Tripod legs as well—what is directly observable and what might be real at this point for the stakeholder acting reasonably.
» Think about what else might be said, especially "I" statements that disclose otherwise hidden content (such as "I have assumed," "I've been feeling," or "Something I've been aware of but not said is…").
» Try to frame an open way to invite the

stakeholder's participation in further joint thinking and action.
» Record the questions and statements on the whiteboard or flip chart next to the Speaking Authentically leg.
» Invite revisions of the contributions offered to better satisfy the tests: the statement is true for the speaker, connected to observation, consistent with attributions of reasonableness, and helpful in surfacing hidden intelligence.

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In putting the Tripod to work, the accent is on fostering openness, receptivity, testing of interpretations, inquiry, and shared sense-making. These desired results could be largely captured in the term "cognitive agility" (Good & Yeganeh, 2012). While these authors are referring to contexts of dynamic decision making—rather than joint exploration to support shared understanding and change on contentious issues—their construct of cognitive agility as meaning "flexible shuttling between openness and focus" is highly relevant here. Openness, in the sense of alertness to new and different signals and being willing to reappraise our existing mindsets, has been a theme throughout this paper. Yet mindful OD practice requires focus, too. An example is when we notice a small detail that suggests difference that might or might not prove to be significant. Being able to focus on and hold that detail, and then return almost instantly to survey the larger picture, is emblematic of the kind of thinking the Tripod is designed to encourage. Stepping back, if we wanted a crisp statement of what mindful OD practice is all about, the notion of *developing the cognitive agility of individuals, groups, and organizations in working through contentious issues* has much to recommend it.

The Tripod in Action: The School of Land and Food Sciences Case Example

The School of Land and Food Sciences at a public university was going through a major reorientation. This reflected a need to redirect research efforts into emerging fields, reductions in state government funding, and university expectations to reduce overhead by consolidating academic programs and departments. The School's top executive group (the Dean's group) had an external consulting firm run an extensive and consultative visioning and planning process.

Decisions were taken on a restructure and the Dean and colleagues were meeting with various stakeholders to work through the changes. One element was that the previous departments of crop sciences and horticulture as well as other specialist research groups, including in soil sciences, were to be amalgamated into a new department of plant sciences. However, the changes were not well received by local farming and agricultural organizations. Heads of these organizations were reported as saying the university was "walking away from one of the state's key industry sectors" and "undermining the future prosperity of the state." The acting head of plant sciences had also gone public, describing the statements by industry figures as a "deliberate campaign of misinformation."

I was assisting the Dean's group work through leadership and communications aspects of the changes. Our focus was on describing present circumstances and emerging possibilities from different perspectives, rather than diagnosing or problem solving. The purpose was to help the Dean's group prepare for further conversations with the industry groups.

Applying the Tripod structure, we began with the Working from Observation leg, looking particularly to what was discernible directly that was potentially significant and capable of different interpretations. We noted that the reference to a "deliberate campaign of misinformation" was an interpretation, not an observation. However, one of the Dean's group members struggled with the idea that this might not be an objective truth. We reframed the statement as an observation, using more descriptive, less judgmental language: "industry groups have been circulating information critical of the amalgamation." We were working together via web-conference, and as participants spoke, I was capturing their contributions in a document we could all view on screen.

We eventually settled on about 8 observations – including that "university policies require departmental amalgamations," "an external consultant's report points to synergies from combining these two departments," and various others, which were written out under the heading "observation."

Moving to the Reasonableness leg, I explained that the challenge here was to shift perspectives and look at the issue through the eyes of other stakeholders, allowing they are reasonable. Here, we imagined what the industry groups might have assumed, had interests in, felt, and had knowledge about in connection with this issue, but had not articulated. We began with assumptions they could hold.

An associate dean, Luis, said the industry organizations were simply unwilling to look at anything that involved change. I suggested there were a couple of difficulties with this statement. First, it was the associate dean's assumption rather than one the industry organizations were likely to be making. Second, the assumption was not consistent with reasonableness (reasonable people are not necessarily unwilling to entertain change).

Progressively, the group identified possible industry assumptions including: as a critical driver of the regional economy the cropping industries should be supported by the university as a public institution; and that without a dedicated crop sciences

department, the industries would be disadvantaged economically.

Discussion moved to possible interests for the industry organizations: what mattered to them, what they valued, or wanted to protect. Luis said with a laugh, "You won't like this, but I think their interest is to keep extracting as much value as they can from state subsidized programs." I invited the group to reframe this statement, to better reflect reasonableness and so make it testable. The group reshaped Luis' contribution as including:

» Ensuring that academic (teaching and research) support for the industries continues and gets stronger, and
» Ensuring a continued supply of qualified graduates to advance the industries in the state.

We then turned to feelings. The Dean's group found it difficult to imagine what emotions the industry representatives were going through. I prompted by asking, "What might you feel if you were in their shoes?" Two we arrived at were: puzzlement—"the School doesn't seem to get the critical importance of the industries and the relationship"; and anger, frustration, and resentment—"the School hasn't sufficiently taken industry views into account."

In relation to relevant but unspoken knowledge, one of the associate deans suggested that the industry groups might have undeclared contingency plans to partner with other institutions in the event of the School's withdrawal from crop sciences.

We then gave some thought to unspoken assumptions, interests, feelings, and knowledge for the Dean's group. Most of them saw the point of the exercise, but Luis said, "It's them we need to focus on, not us, isn't it? Do we really need to do this part?" Fortunately, the Dean explained that they would be better able to engage with the industries if they had some awareness of the mindsets they brought to the issue.

The group recognized that their own assumptions included: the School could still support the cropping industries without a dedicated crop sciences department; that there would be benefits to the industries in bringing different specializations together in the new plant sciences department; and that in time the industry groups would see value in the new arrangements, without getting everything they wanted.

Interests for the Dean's group were seen to include:

» Creating a financially viable, sustainable future for the School.
» Complying with the university's expectations regarding numbers of programs and the size of academic groupings.
» Maintaining a good relationship with the industries.

Feelings "owned" by the Dean's group included frustration that the industry groups could not see the sense in the planned changes and discomfort at having to engage with external parties' strongly expressed opposition to the changes.

One piece of knowledge the Dean's group had not shared with the industry groups had to do with threats by the university administration of financial penalties for those schools that did not achieve targets for rationalizing academic programs and structures.

Having attempted to imagine the issues from the industry's standpoint and reflected on the Dean's group's own deeper thoughts and feelings, we turned to the Authenticity leg. I suggested we focus on how they might introduce the topic in neutral terms, questions they might ask—especially deep-reaching questions—and what else they might say that's true for them and connected with observation and reasonableness.

Luis spoke up again. He suggested a possible introduction could be along the lines of, "Let's talk about why you're so opposed to the amalgamation?" His colleagues immediately saw the bias in this framing. We settled on inviting the industry groups to a conversation on the future of the School's teaching and research programs in the areas most relevant to the industry groups and the future of the industry/School relationship.

We identified some questions the Dean's group could ask the industry organizations. Even though the Dean's group had met with them and explained the changes, an initial question would seek to check their interpretation: "Please tell us what you understand about the proposed School reorientation as it impacts the cropping industries?"

We kept the Tripod "standing" so that our questions connected with observation and reflected reasonableness. Sample questions included: "We notice that you have circulated some information critical of the School's plans. We take it this reflects your concerns about losses you envisage with the planned amalgamation of the crop sciences department into plant sciences. Is this correct? If so, please tell us about what losses you foresee?" A simpler question along similar lines was: "What concerns you most about the proposed restructure?"

Other questions were related to future possibilities. Examples:

» With the planned amalgamation, what are the most important things the School needs to protect and take forward that matter to the industries?
» How would you like to see the relationship between the industries and the School in, say, twelve months?

Still on the Speaking Authentically leg, I asked the Dean's group about what else they wanted to say to the industry groups—focusing particularly on giving voice to what otherwise might remain unsaid. They nominated talking about the factors that prompted the School to initiate the changes and about the difficult choices they faced, including balancing the School's desire to continue supporting the industries with the need for sustainability. The Dean said they should, as far as possible:

» Make explicit the reasoning behind the direction adopted and the implications flowing from it.
» Disclose the difficulties in trying to reconcile the tensions between sustainability and support for the industries, and in talking about these tensions.
» Acknowledge the long-term and generally mutually supportive relationship between the School and the industries.
» Create an opening for the industry groups to contribute their views particularly if they think the School has missed something, while also making

it clear that the School was not about to reverse the changes.

The group identified two other areas in which input from the industry groups would be helpful. One was to invite suggestions for specific initiatives the School might take to add value to the cropping industries that would be sustainable; i.e., that would enable significant revenue generation and/or cost reduction. A second area was to invite – without denying the difficulties the industry groups had seen with the restructure – input on ways in which the industry groups and the School could best build on the tradition of mutual support and collaboration between them.

Once we completed this analysis, the Dean said he had found it "truly helpful, perhaps in unexpected ways," a comment echoed in different forms by his colleagues. They appreciated that the Tripod provided a structure to help bring a degree of order and clarity when contemplating the implicit, unspoken side of change. The process helped them make explicit and test analyses they might have run in their own minds over an extended period. In the absence of such a process, the idea of delving into the complexities of change might have seemed overwhelming and easily avoided. The Tripod opened a new window on the way others experienced change, in order to reframe challenges and enliven conversations about what is real now and what might be.

Conclusion

I began with a proposition that some OD related literature tends to present a dichotomy between positively-oriented and problem-based approaches. One element of practicing OD mindfully is to recognize and hold open the space between these orientations. We need to allow the possibility that additional mental resources—stemming largely from people's otherwise unspoken assumptions, interests, feelings, and knowledge—can be discovered in this space and utilized beneficially. Gaining access to these otherwise latent resources requires that we recognize common default patterns of interaction that can easily pull us back into judgment, blame, justification, and the pursuit of technically-oriented solutions.

I introduced a structure, the Obreau Tripod, as an antidote to these behavior patterns and as an aid to approaching difficult conversations on challenging issues. Prospective benefits include the prospect of bringing out and activating additional sources of insight and intelligence, being able to productively reframe contentious issues, and eliciting energy to enable change. The benefits, however, do not come without disciplined attention to all three legs concurrently. In the absence of such attention, the default behaviors are likely to reemerge, and along with them the difficulties of a problem-centered approach. The space between the positive and problem-oriented approaches is not easy to see. Conscious effort is required. For those who mindfully take this step, the possibilities on offer might make the effort well worthwhile.

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