

Constellations for Organisations

By Robert Kirby

An emerging field of opportunity has been building momentum in Europe for more than ten years. It has since spread to America and now Australia is ready to benefit from its subtle power and insights. The field is known as organisational constellations. It is based on the family constellations therapy created by German psychotherapist, Bert Hellinger, more than twenty years ago. Its godfather is Gunthard Weber, also German. He was anointed by Hellinger to head down the path of business, corporations, family businesses, entrepreneurs and organisations in general.

Historical Roots of Constellations

Bert Hellinger developed his theories upon the systemic thinking of Gregory Bateson, which took the family system into consideration when assessing clients for psychotherapy. The influence of American psychiatrist, Jakob Moreno, in psychodrama exposed the deeper disturbance of the human's social connection related to their surroundings and environment. Virginia Satir's family systems approach acknowledged that all family members were linked to generations of behavioural influences and patterns, which can be released and made whole again. In other words, when one family member heals an issue, the entire family benefits.

Hellinger observed that the connecting link between family members and historical patterns that deeply affected each soul was similar to morphogenic fields discovered by English biologist, Rupert Sheldrake. This is aligned with the theories of quantum physics. Einstein describes a quantum field of energy that interconnects the entire universe and all of life, including human beings. The underlying subatomic component of all matter and space is waves and particles.

Since theoretical physics maintains that time is curved and not linear, then the infinite possibilities that exist in the universe (waves) could possibly be the key to the success of family constellations. In other words, our observation of family phenomena helps create a new potential reality instead of our habitual choice and pattern of re-creating painful dynamics (particles).

Benefits of Constellations

While the family constellation process can reveal hidden dynamics contained below the surface of most families that brings enormous relief to the client – it is difficult to comprehend that just revealing 'what is' or what went down in your family can take the lid off of decades of torment. The above explanation of a 'knowing field' that permeates all of life may very well be a solid scientific

explanation of how families hold onto their historical and generational pain. The scriptures state, "The sins of fathers will be passed on for five generations".

What about the practical aspects of revealing family secrets? Since none of us shares the same reality then how can other family member's unique perspective take away our heartache? The answer may simply be that experiences and beliefs are created not by reality, but by our perception of reality.

Accordingly, knowing the perception of family members and that of our ancestors may transform elements of our realities that are distorted. It gives us a clearer picture and a bigger perspective of what truly happened to us as children. It frees us up to live our lives in the present moment and not be worried or anxious so much about how unloved or neglected we were back then or how unfair the more rejecting parent was to us. This is important to each soul no matter what your age or life circumstances happen to be now. This brings us relief from old guilt and regrets.

Hellinger observed in hundreds of family systems that the recognition of whatever love existed in your family deeply affects people and changes their lives! Conversely, interrupted love in previous generations and in your own childhood causes suffering in the present time including to one's children. The constellation process demands that this truth be remembered and put into a new and healthier perspective. This is simple and powerful.

How Constellations Flow From Family to Business

Since organisational constellations are based on family constellations it is essential to understand its basic principles. The main benefit of family constellations is also its ideal outcome: to determine our level of entanglement with our family of origin and how it creates ongoing pain and dysfunction in our present lives. Steps are then taken to permanently disentangle ourselves from the system. This is the ideal outcome.

Every family has a set of unconscious rules that everyone knows about, but is rarely spoken about. This system, although distorted and sometimes unfair, serves to maintain the status quo of the family and is related to giving and taking. You might say it is your family's conscience that constitutes a hidden dynamic. When the giving and taking is out of harmony there will be compensation in the next generation.

The fundamental principle is the right to belong to the family system. For example, if one of your siblings was the black sheep of the family and was a major disappointment to your parents, their exclusion will have a long-term negative effect on all family members. The reason for this is that your sibling is probably 'acting out' the family's shame and pain. This person needs to be embraced and accepted in a constellation to restore their birthright to belong.

Another basic rule is the Right of Order. In Hellinger's model, it usually follows the order of: father, mother, first born, second born, third born, etc.; then first grandchild, second grandchild, etc. Previous family members will always have precedence. The outcomes of restoring the balance while disentangling from your family's system creates freedom from guilt and from the unconscious recreation of these patterns in your adult family.

Organisational Constellations

The idea for applying family constellations principles to organisations and business began in Austria in 1995. The innovators realised that there were hidden dynamics in organisations that eluded sophisticated consultants, trainers and coaches. You might say that when the unconscious conscience of the organisation is revealed, its leaders are better informed and deeply in touch with the roots of their problems.

Under the best of circumstances, the challenges of leaders include a delicate political dance, internal resistance to change and competitive postures that frequently take precedence over collaborative team efforts.

Is it possible to obtain an objective snapshot of unconscious organisational issues through a subjective lens? This is the aim and most powerful application of a constellation. They have become a valuable tool to enhance the decision-making and assessment process for leaders and consultants.

Revealing Hidden Dynamics

The way organisational constellations work is similar in format to a family constellation. In a group setting, a leader or managing director chooses representatives for the managers and key employees within an organisation. He/she then places them somewhere in the room that feels like the organisational dynamic he experiences from day to day.

As soon as the representative stands in the assigned position they feel like the person they are representing without knowing the person and without that person's presence. The interaction that then emerges is frighteningly accurate. The representatives honestly and innocently reveal invisible dynamics never spoken about within the organisation. The leader initiating the constellation also selects a representative for him or herself. He or she can now observe a clear and objective snapshot of how his or her interpersonal dynamics effects the organisation. He or she can see how the managers relate to each other and to him/her from an objective lens. This unique vantage point allows the executive to reassess his organisation without the hindrance of his own distortions, projections and blind spots. He can truly see how he continuously and unconsciously makes decisions that block the organisation from moving forward

towards its greater potential. Armed with a greater perception of truth, he/she becomes confident in his leadership with a clearer intention and humble willingness to make changes in his/her communication style. It also equips them with information otherwise not revealed.

The greatest benefit of organisational constellations is that the secret political culture is exposed in a way that neither threatens or confronts the staff. Once exposed previously undisclosed problems that usually eludes sophisticated strategists can be resolved quickly or it will generate a new direction for the organisation.

What Creates A Secret Political Culture?

Hellinger discovered through trial and error, that certain orders must be present in every organisation, large or small for it to grow and flourish. In other words, if an organisation is floundering the constellation will reveal what is out of order. Representatives in a constellation may look away from its leaders, boss or manager. This means they are not satisfied or committed to its cause or vision. They may not feel supported by the bosses so they are not secure enough to give their best effort. Competent key employees may look away because they are considering other positions or opportunities in other organisations. The reasons for their dissatisfaction frequently have to do with a lack of respect. If the founders of the company are not acknowledged and respected by the present leaders or senior staff have a cynical attitude toward the owner, then mistrust will permeate the organisation. In addition, if former employees are blamed for current problems and not spoken of in a respectful manner, then the foundations of the organisation will be shaky because it is not built on truth.

Each organisation must become conscious of the need for order within the hierarchy. People have a right to belong and know their rightful place within the organisation. They also need to honour the past contributions of those who preceded them, and to experience and maintain a balance of giving and taking between the organisation, its leaders and the staff. Without these values solidly cemented in the organisation's framework, disharmony will prevail.

Cellular biologist Bruce Lipton PhD confirms the basis of human or organisational survival as a choice between growth vs protection. The equation that depicts this research is:

$$\text{Survival} = \frac{\text{Growth}}{\text{Protection}}$$

This means that every individual will do whatever it takes to survive. Organisations need to grow to survive. Therefore, if in any given moment the environment causes people to feel unsafe (survival focused) they will not be as

creative or productive (growth focused) as the organisation requires for its expansion. Accordingly, constellations address and expose these issues first.

The representatives for the staff members and the organisations owner/leader will reveal deeply imbedded concerns that even the senior staff will not raise due to political correctness. The constellations will begin with these foundational integrity issues and teach the leaders at the top how to take corrective action first.

Practical Applications

The widespread international use of constellations for multi-dimensional purposes for businesses is growing rapidly. For a group or an organisation, the systemic approach is typically used to diagnose the source of the problem and necessary changes needed to produce a more positive result.

Alternatives can be analysed and possibilities studied in order to help the client discover better strategies to implement the recommended solutions.

In many cases, it has been found that even when a solution is not exposed through a constellation immediately, surprising positive effects emerge for the organisation and its team members afterwards. Things becomes clearer and the way forward is recognised.

The application includes strategic planning, family business dynamics, employee recruitment, recognition and development, branding and product service evaluations, conflict resolution, project assessments, mergers and acquisitions, structuring negotiation outcomes, evaluations and leadership/organisational development and challenges.

In spite of the complex hidden dynamics involved in the above applications, the constellations create enormous benefits and reveal amazing opportunities without breaching confidentiality. In other words, the representatives do not need to know names, places, positions or politics. They may stand in for past, present or future employees. They may represent the consensus opinions of a department, division, individual, board of directors, customers, former customers or potential customers. The opinions or expertise of any of the above may be directed by the facilitator to assess products, services, market potential or strategic alternatives.

The applications of constellations are infinite and practical. They of course are used to augment other means of consulting, coaching and training. They provide deep insights quickly and efficiently.

APPLICATIONS FOR INDIVIDUALS

Organisational constellations for individuals are also practical and inspiring. They may provide insights into complex relationships and conflicts that stem from habitual behaviour patterns that have not been revealed through normal communication or coaching.

The expansion of one's consciousness through constellations sometimes improves access to one's own resources by providing or revealing new images and creative solutions to difficult challenges.

In practical issues such as – should one accept a promotion or accept an offer from another company or division; also to clarify career issue objectives or conflicts with one's boss or direct reports. Finding balance in one's personal and professional life through constellations can quickly take pressure off, improve health and overall life satisfaction.

CONSTRUCTIVISM

If organisational constellations acknowledge the hidden dynamics of what is really happening within an organisation then some theorists have taken it a step further.

Systemic constructivism has the ability to acknowledge “what could be” in terms of your ideal organisation. One innovator, Prof. Dr. Matthias Vanga Von Kibed creates the greatest possible outcome with the executive team by coaching and asking questions and guides the team to agree on shared values/vision. Then these concepts are tested with representatives with no knowledge of the dynamics. Typical tests are explored in the areas of innovation, conflict, multiple decisions and belief polarities.

The facilitator leads a search for solutions and the expansion of everyone's perception. The systemic approach shows what works – not why it works.

TRUSTING THE PROCESS

Systemic thinking represents a cutting edge approach to Business Problems. Today's leaders need to know instantly the strengths and potential pitfalls of their strategies for both small business and corporations.

Why not take advantage of the mathematics of theoretical physics.

It all began in 1944 when Max Planck, the father of quantum theory said:

“All matter originates and exists only by virtue of a force.....We must assume behind this force the existence of a conscious and intelligent mind. This mind is the matrix of all matter”.

Many spiritual masters have taught us that “anything in the universe that is not in truth will eventually fall apart”. This includes relationships, organisations, businesses and our health. Business leaders owe it to themselves and those they lead to do “whatever it takes” for their organisations to flow and expand. The universal truth begins at the top. It’s time for leaders to acknowledge their own blind spots, and the shadow it creates within their organisations. The web of life cannot be denied. Those leaders who possess the humility to explore the interconnectedness of life will not only survive but excel. They will examine how their unconscious patterns of leadership may suppress rather than inspire their followers to be the best they can be.

The most practical, efficient and effective way of achieving this outcome, in spite of its esoteric appearances, may very well be constellations and systemic approaches to organisational leadership and strategy.

In the years to come, we may discover this approach to be a profound synergy between spiritual and scientific intelligence.