Classroom as Organization meets POS:
Teaching about High Performance Teams
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Classroom-as-Organization (CAO): A Constructivist Organizing Framework
- Constructivist
    - Students learn by doing
    - Learning occurs when students make their own constructions about knowledge
- Organizational
    - The class itself is a living system (an organization)
    - As an organization, a classroom environment can provide personalized "data" as a test for all OB-related concepts
    - The professor can use organizing processes to delegate administrative responsibilities to students
- Framework (metaphor of the Garden)
    - *Choose Seed*: Professor can choose to create any of a variety of organizational types
    - *Infrastructure (e.g. a trellis)*: The class design functions as a form that generates a unique manifestation each time it is used.
    - *Nurturing*: The professor's facilitation choices shape the evolution of the variety of organization that emerges.
- History
    - CAO enjoyed some popularity as a pedagogical approach from 1976-1995.
    - Generally, professors aimed to simulate highly formalized corporate life.
    - The logic and principles can be applied to create unique learning environments relative to any topic.

High Performance Teams: Example of CAO in action
- Assumptions and Aspirations
    - I want students to experience what is like to be part of an exceptional organization and/or team.
    - From the POS and related complexity literature, I believe that exceptional organizations facilitate **connectedness**, are characterized by strong **feedback loops,** and a foster healthy balance between **divergent** and **convergent** processes.
    - I explain to students that my role is to **facilitate** their learning, NOT to lecture extensively.
    - My role at the front of the room diminishes as students become more empowered to function as participants in highly developed teams.
    - Every activity is designed to help students learn some concept related to high performance teams.
    - Students will be expected to learn by doing.

- Class Structures
    - Students are organized into **self-managed teams**
    - Each team is given a **differentiated role**: scheduling, hospitality, service record coordination, journaling, feedback coordination
    - **Students make most decisions** about their area of administrative responsibility
    - **Students create workshops** that they facilitate with their peers
    - **Feedback is pervasive** across every activity in the class.

- Class Requirements
  - Reading – individual and **group quizzes**
  - Citizenship – **service**, **journaling**, **feedback** to others, **workshops**
  - Writing – Reflective analyses of (1) self in a team and (2) group and team development
  - Oral Exams – students meet one-on-one with the professor

- Role of the Professor (see Table 1)
  - ***Early phase***, the professor is more directive. He or she challenges the norms related to student roles, nurtures connections and a supportive emotional climate, and helps students to develop confidence that they can accomplish hard tasks.
  - ***Middle phase***, the professor transitions to the role of coach. He or she assigns and encourages student groups to manage in-class responsibilities, helps students to share authentic feedback with one another, and facilitates discussions in which they learn from their efforts
  - ***Mature phase***, the professor becomes a delegator and moves from the stage to the background. He or she encourages students to take ownership for in-class activities, engages students in reflective exercises, and facilitates—as needed—to keep the class on track.

Representative Student Comments (Excerpts from Final Journal Entries)

I firmly believe that thanks to excellent "gardening skills," we have all become high performance teams – and that is a bold statement…. We began this journey with vast amounts of dissonance, evolving to understanding group dynamics as a whole, applying them, and recently, perfecting our proverbial form. We have come a long way!

On Tuesday it took my awhile to realize that Dr Bright was sitting in the back of the room. We all have learned to take the initiative and get things going for class without him telling us what to do. I also think that the workshops this week went a lot smoother. Everyone was relaxed and ready to go!

Teams [members] had the opportunity to give feedback to team members this week… This [feedback] session was much more informative and meaningful. We took the opportunity to give feedback very seriously and put a lot of thought and effort into what we would share with each other. I honestly feel so blessed with the team I have been a part of...

I am not generally a fan of journaling, especially when others read it, but when writing my paper, I found it so interesting to read others journals as well as my own from previous weeks. You can see the progression of the class in the journals. My favorite journals were those written after the workshops; you can "hear" the excitement and pride in classmates writing about how the workshops went. I have to say that as much as I dislike journaling, I am glad that we had to do it.

As I reflect on how my group evolved into a high performance team and also how the class turned into a high performance organization, I am in amazement. Class went by so fast, but I feel that I learned a lot about myself and also about my classmates. I feel that each of the activities/workshops that each group had to do made everyone become closer and form a bond with each other. I feel that this class is very different from any management class I have ever taken. I am so grateful for this experience.

Table 1:
Emergent Developments and Facilitation Activities in the Classroom-as-Organization Design

Phase	Emergent Developments	Facilitation Activities
Early	*Structural divergence:* • Adaptive organizing explained to students -- dramatically different from other classroom experiences. • Initiation of connections; students become acquainted. • Formal structure presented for students to take over. Emergence of initial informal structure as they do. • Experimentation to accomplish work. "No one knows what to do." Students make mistakes. • Seemingly innocuous initial behavior may have long-term consequences. *Anxious Emotional Climate:* • Many students express discomfort with ambiguity. • Testing of instructor expectations. To resolve ambiguity students ask for direction. • Student memos depict "chaos," "confusion," "anxiety." • Student memos express fear of failing or falling short of expectations. • Demonstration of relief and excitement at initial successes. *Underdeveloped Patterns of Feedback:* • Hesitance to talk authentically about feelings and perceptions; peer-to-peer feedback is almost all positive but *pro forma*, a performance for the instructor. • Students concerned about how peers perceive them, don't want "to look stupid." • Communications break down when students attempt to direct others' activities.	*Shape Emergent Structures:* • Signal that class will operate under different assumptions from what students are used to (e.g., change physical arrangement of classroom). • Lay out a formal structure, with differentiated roles, for students to build their emergent system on. • Delegate tasks as soon as possible. • Coach students about their roles; hold them accountable to act in their roles. *Nurture a Supportive Emotional Climate:* • Do NOT relieve students' anxiety and confusion. • Express confidence that trainees will find their way. • Show students that you care about them. • Be patient. Students and YOU are used to getting moving quickly. Emergence takes time. *Build Confidence:* • Catch students doing something RIGHT. They need to know when they are succeeding. • Model active listening. • Honor expression of all feelings, positive and negative. • Honor mistakes. Be unflappable when things go awry. • Help students to identify, express, and develop their strengths. • Have fun. Don't take anything too seriously.

Middle	**Structural Stability** • Emergence of leaders among students. • The system matures; routines taken for granted. • The class develops its own jargon and terms. • Negative emotionality gives way to positive. **Deepened Capacity for Feedback** • Face-to-face feedback evaluation (ranking) discussion. • Constructive criticism becomes a valuable asset. • Discussion of the meaning of rankings with no ties allowed. **Growing Awareness of Self Within a System of Relationships** • Deepening knowledge of how the system works. • Despite competitive ranking, norm emerges: put others first. • Startling discovery: I can influence others and the system.	**Reinforce the New Formal Structure** • Hold students accountable for doing their jobs. • Push the responsible groups until they begin fulfilling their responsibilities. **Foster Authenticity** • Get students to say what they think/feel. • Use ranking to open up discussions about expectations of self and others. • Push students to push each other to improve. **Facilitate Self-discovery** • Keep appropriate tension in the class. • Give feedback to students. • Reinforce and celebrate self-discovery.
Late	**Convergence in Task Processes** • Convergence in the use of language. • Uniform writing style in memos. • In memos reading concepts used to describe events and developments in the organization. **High Quality Relationships** • Peer pressure brings out the best in everyone. • Asking others for deep personal feedback. • Peer coaching. **Awareness of Transcendent Impacts** • Memos describe learning beyond the course. • Recognition of how "I react to others." • Deepened but detached appreciation of my strengths, weaknesses.	**Encourage Reflection and Perspective-taking** • Debrief the class as an organization. How did it achieve its goals? What was your experience over the semester? • Students interview one another. • Push students to become self-reflective. How far have I come? Have my goals and attitudes changed? What do I learn next? **Allow the Momentum to Reach Its Natural End** • Success = enthusiastic engagement in learning activities. • Professor emerges from "behind the curtain" – the role of the professor as facilitator becomes transparent.

Source for Table 1: Bright, David S.; Turesky, Elizabeth F., Putzel, R. & Stang, T. (2012). Professor as facilitator: Shaping an emerging, living system in the classroom. *Journal of Leadership Education, 11* (1), 157-176.

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