

Challenging counter-resistance – working with what falls beyond the pale

The way the economy works is changing radically. Organizations in every sector are being exposed to increasing pressures from ‘digital transformation’, ‘platform architectures’, the need for ‘horizontal transparency’ across boundary-crossing collaborations and ‘multi-sided’ demands. These pressures *invert* the organization, requiring it to shift its primary focus from internal activities to external relationships in order to be able to follow customers’ journeys. These pressures have been strengthened by the effects of the pandemic. They spring from customers’ resistance to having to follow suppliers instead of having suppliers follow them. The effect is to turn organizations *inside-out*.

This workshop will provide opportunities for participants to share their experiences of trying to meet these challenges within the context of their work. We will focus on two situations selected by participants from those they put forward as possibilities prior to the workshop. We will be assuming that what makes these situations challenging is symptomatic of how the larger organizational context ‘walls off’ support for new kinds of vested interest, placing them ‘beyond the pale’. We will be working with the relationship between the individual’s experience and what might be going on in the larger context that would sustain this counter-resistance.

The goal of the workshop will be to provide opportunities for experiential learning using a plus-one process to explore the situations brought by participants (Boxer 2019). We will use this process to uncover the gaps that underlie the dilemmas participants face and to understand how the ‘walling off’ of these gaps shows up in resistance/counter-resistance dynamics at different levels of the organisation. We will introduce Lacanian thinking to consider what unconscious dynamics these gaps might be symptomatic of, and to explore what forms of intervention are needed to change the dynamics within the larger ecosystem.

Given the online nature of this workshop, we will be meeting online prior to the workshop. We will also be creating follow-up opportunities to review workshop learning and outcomes.

References

Boxer, P.J. 2019. 'Challenging impossibilities: using the plus-one process to explore leadership dilemmas', *Organizational and Social Dynamics*, 19: 81-102.

A **plus-one process** focuses on enabling participants to question the ways in which they ‘listen’ i.e. the ways they make sense of situations experienced as challenging to their existing ways of understanding.

How participants will be spending their time

Prior to Day One		
Pre-recorded material		
20 mins	I: Parallel process, dilemmas and ‘walling off’	didactic
20 mins	II: Introducing the Plus-one Process I	didactic
20 mins	III: Strategy ceilings and working ‘across-and-up’	didactic
Pre-Meeting		
08:00-09:00	Introductions and preliminaries	Plenary
09:00-09:15	Plan for two days	Plenary
09:15-09:30	Choosing the two Situations for us to work with	Plenary
Day One		
11:00-12:00	Plus-one Process - I	fishbowl
12:00-12:30	the metaphors & counter-narratives	fishbowl
12:30-13:00	Witness Process – I	large-group
13:00-13:30	Emergent challenges and ‘across-and-up’	large-group
13:30-14:00	Q&A	large-group
Day Two		
11:00-12:00	Plus-one Process – II	fishbowl
12:00-12:30	the metaphors & counter-narratives	Fishbowl
12:30-13:00	Witness Process – II	large-group
13:00-13:30	Emergent challenges and ‘across-and-up’	large-group
13:30-14:00	Q&A	large-group

The main points of the professional development workshop are to learn about:

- **Parallel process** – identifying the different layers of vested interest relating to client situations.
- **The plus-one process** – questioning existing ways of making sense of a given client situation.
- **Three moments and two crises** – establishing how one is challenged by these situations.
- **Dilemmas and ‘walling off’** – recognizing what underlying challenges are being refused.
- **Double challenge** – the way an organisation’s governance relates to its demand environment.
- **Strategy ceilings** – analyzing what remains foreclosed within the larger organisational context.

At the end of the workshop, participants will be able:

1. to identify the *dilemmas* inherent to the client situations presented.
2. to recognize the *parallel processes* by which participants are engaged with these dilemmas.
3. to distinguish between the different kinds of larger organizational context in terms of *strategy ceilings*.
4. to distinguish between the different kinds of *defense against innovation* by which ‘walling off’ is sustained.
5. to critique the forms of ‘*walling off*’ sustained by these larger organisational contexts.
6. to use the *witnessing* of the plus-one process to work through the challenge of each case.