

“Emergence is the way complex systems and patterns arise out of a multiplicity of relatively simple interactions.”

– Nick Obolensky, *Complex Adaptive Leadership:*

Embracing Paradox and Uncertainty

Exploring coherence and differentiation in the lands of IF

POD members: Cléo Burke, Lene Thomsen, Marielle Behrmann, Remko Berkhout, Renée Ryerson, Russ Watts

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IF and THEN- a story of coherence and differentiation

Once upon a time, in the land of IF, there lived a community of beings. Each being had their own ability to see, sense, and make meaning, and because of this, their conversations were rich with possibilities. Some of these beings were from “Up” and others were from “Over”, while some lived “Within” and also “Below”. They came together often to share their stories, made up of many observations about the here and now, mixed with awes and wows from the past, and sprinklings of hopes for the future. They mostly listened with awe, curiosity and excitement as others’ stories were so unique from their own. They learned and grew from these storytelling times together.

One day a request came from the nearby town of THEN (pronounced ‘sen’). The beings in THEN wanted to hear from IF about the origins of “their way”, how they created their way to be, and what was the fuel that kept them flowing in that direction. The leader of THEN was TED. He liked to talk. He liked to get from THERE to HERE, without stopping in IN BETWEEN. The beings from IF knew this and wanted to give TED something new and different, something puzzling to process, something TED could try on for size, and imagine with other senses.

Now, TED was not known for being curious as the job of TED was to require all beings in THEN to be precise, stay within their space (usually a red dot of some sort), and have a point and a call to action at the end of their speaking. In their way the beings of THEN together sought coherence, and when differentiation arose they did what they needed to do to quickly return to coherence.

Knowing they wanted to invite TED beyond the red dot into new curiosities, the beings of IF shared with TED some of the ways that they had discovered being together in coherence, but also in differentiation. This meant new ways of considering being simultaneously within and beyond the red dot.

TED was invited to experience coherence and differentiation in the way of the IF beings through embodiment and group play. Through these experiences, TED felt an increased energy and excitement, and even his heart opened in new ways that surprised him. TED used all he had learned to uncover even more unknowns within the THEN society context. Through numerous city hall meetings and open discussions, TED invited and supported the beings in THEN to notice when they experienced both coherence and differentiation, sometimes simultaneously. TED asked the beings to shift from a THEN single focus on prioritizing coherence to an IF focus holding the potential wisdom from both in every interaction.

The beings of THEN accepted this request, and there was much rejoicing as they noted in all ways an uptick in their energy and creativity. Their society bloomed and grew like they had never known before. Their mental, physical, emotional, and spiritual awarenesses expanded. They noticed more about themselves, about each other, about the things and the space that surrounded them. They decreed that they also wanted to share these awarenesses with the beings near and far, and that the best way to do this was through felt and experienced moments, not only through talking and words. Movement, images, and personalized connection to make meaning from the here and now, to the past and into the future was now more important than staying in the dot of coherence.

During the days, and months that followed, the societies of IF and THEN moved closer together. They enjoyed their differences and within these, they found coherence.

IF and THEN began to look more deeply inward and found that if they all asked the question, “If, then? Or If Zen?” (as many people began to say in the local dialect/slang), their first reactions to any story was to notice, to be curious, wondering what the body was doing, what emotions were moving within them. They also looked at the me, the you, the it and the its and found that each of these was an important perspective and constantly in flux and flow.

They wondered how they could communicate these awarenesses to the societies outside them, and what would be the best way to share. They said some things like ‘less is more’ and helping others ‘make it their own’ and used these as guiding principles. Looking forward, they felt very optimistic. We wish we could say that TED and those from the land of THEN lived happily ever after by having more experiences of differentiation, but we can say they lived their ever afters with more variety, wonder and aliveness. - The End-

Introduction:

The coming into being of our 30-minute experience for the IF Module 2 can be explored from different angles. The nature of the process has been one of emergence and co-creation, and so has this document. We hope you like the narrative story from the land of IF. It speaks to the experience we hope to offer our fellow cohort participants.

Bridging remarks into our development and design as a group and in service of our project:

In the beginning of our group formation, we refrained from focusing on the output (creating an experience for the rest of the cohort...) We first explored our learning edges and built a we-space - though we did not relate this explicitly to an integral approach, we did all commit that in the spirit of our course it would make sense to invest in this before moving forward.

Then, as the topic of coherence - differentiation was one of the essences of the first module, we looked inside ourselves and at our group interactions to understand this dynamic. As we journeyed, we increasingly found common ground around what mattered to us. We saw how gems and opportunities came from our moments of differentiation and enhanced the work we were producing. With our growing interest in each other's different views, our commitment to each other deepened. We also felt ourselves drawn to our embodied experiences of coherence and differentiation, and how the body is key to understanding their manifestation at gross and subtle levels. Once we were able to identify and name this, we became interested in how this might further help us develop as facilitators. As well, we wondered how we might create an experience for others to sense into their own ways of connecting to coherence and differentiation.

Defining our field and designing audience experience:

We designed an experience that engages the audience in multiple ways. We will invite participants to include their whole selves (i.e. sensation, emotion, presence, and mind). We want to pay specific attention to the LL quadrant we-space through a shared activity, as a basis for group reflection to unpack the experience with others in their cohort. We will incorporate play-embodiment into our experience through the method of moving the helium stick together.

Unpacking our desires for audience experience in session design:

Our aim is that attendees will generate insights on coherence and differentiation that may support their facilitation practice. We also want them to connect with and reflect on their experiences from their first POD processes - what worked in their group, what could have been done differently, and how might those insights influence the next group they find themselves in?

Our hope is that attendees experience more specifically how coherence and differentiation arise in their bodies and also how they can use these as tools to employ. Differentiation may be seen as discomfort for some and excitement for others. We want each to inquire, how does it show up for you? Noticing that even in something playful with low stakes like lifting a stick as a group, we may have the experience of unease arising in the body...and we may act on that unease in ways that do not add value to our work as facilitators. If we find we feel unease in this situation, how often might this be showing up in our facilitation when the stakes are high?

What will we do? - Our game plan for the 30-minute experience is guided by this question: What is a simple way we can arrange an experience that is meaningful for cohort members with our themes of coherence and differentiation? In brief this resulted in the following design: 1. Brief introduction to how coherence and differentiation arose for us and what we learned. 2. Helium stick experience in groups and 3. Reflection on the activity with classmates.

Integral Approach to our facilitation - Being integral allows for more wholeness as it includes a wider range of perspectives and ways of being. Here's our plan from the *participants' perspective* using the four quadrants as a lens:

1) *Introduction:*

a) Attendees briefly hear our POD group's story of coherence and differentiation. For them it's primarily an ITS, objective perspective experience.

2) *Helium stick activity:*

a) Attendees move into groups to play a game to lift a stick with their cohort-mates. Entering into a LL group experience.

b) We give them instructions to lift the stick - these are UR actionable steps. Then we ask them to notice what arises in their internal, bodily experience around coherence and differentiation, rooted in the UL, I perspective.

3) *Reflection afterward:*

a) We ask them to gather in a new constellation with the other participants to share what they have observed from this exercise and to anchor any insights as to their own unique ways of experiencing coherence and differentiation, thus moving into another LL, we-space experience, where each can hear and be heard in what feels alive in the moment.

b) Looking forward, we ask them how might they apply any understandings to their future facilitation, assessing from the LR, taking a longer view of time and exploring opportunities for new ways to respond in different contexts.

What does understanding coherence and differentiation mean for us as Integral Facilitators?

By increasing our ability to feel into what is alive in the group field, from moment to moment, we have a powerful tool to help groups progress toward the objectives that are important to them. The development of this skill can be helpful as a means for taking the temperature of where the group is at at any given moment, and as well, we can use it as a tool to employ intentionally. For example, with coherence, we can create a feeling of harmony through pointing to shared meaning which can provide a rich foundation for deepening trust among the group members. Alternately, we can bring in differentiation to spark creativity and to create a heightened sense of alertness and presence in the body. As facilitators, we can learn to be more fluid in these energetics to support the group as needed.

Reflecting on our own practices and the course content, we found that in our engagements with (new) groups, we often see it as a main challenge to 'achieve coherence'. Our pod-experience prescended a few reframes: How to find a productive balance between coherence and differentiation, at any given stage in the process? What is a 'good enough' level of coherence to proceed? Could one speak of coherence IN perceptions of differentiation? How much ambiguity

and unclarity is a group able to hold? In our experience, coherence and differentiation were present in all stages. There was a certain level of commitment to 'staying in' and 'being for one another' from the beginning of our working time together. As well, within that container we experienced a fair amount of differentiation (i.e. confusion, disagreement). Identifying the presence of each, became useful in lifting energy levels towards continuing to press forward together, especially when we were at our most chaotic.

How does this influence listening to the group we are working with and shape the group's process in service of their intention? What can we do with it? How to create it? When to use it?

- *Hypothesis 1:* If a facilitator can perceive the qualities and potential of both coherence and differentiation, which includes remaining wholly present to the gross and subtle in the living moment, and then objectively relate to these as tools, then the possibilities of what can be done with a group opens up significantly.
- *Hypothesis 2:* The body is a key instrument to sense subtle levels of coherence and differentiation that will often hold the key to effective interventions and guiding by a facilitator.

Coherence and differentiation can be considered in terms of their level of intensity while being related to all 4 domains (emotional, physical, mental, spiritual). For example, as a felt sense (e.g. strong/ intense vs. light/moderate), as having a shared or disparate emotion (e.g. joy, calm, irritation, confusion) with more or less intensity, as an increase or decrease of energy (eg: an emphatic YES/NO to a less emphatic yes/no), as a convergence or divergence of thought, or as being fully present to the moment to less present, and as a shared experience or not.

Some examples of coherence and differentiation that arose for us:

- We felt coherence in our commitment to be together as a group in being 'for each other', although the group process had a fair amount of emotional differentiation (eg: confusion, irritation, humour, frustration, etc.)
- We were coherent in our determination to move forward in choosing a topic, but differentiated in what was most compelling (e.g. when both ritual and coherence/differentiation were in discussion).
- We were coherent in our commitment to being a POD even when not all members were present and we strongly felt something was missing in our field.
- We were differentiated in the contributions to the document development online, yet we had a shared intention to move the assignment forward, thereby creating coherence.

Throughout our journey our contributions became more 'whole'. Bringing in feelings, bodily sensations etc. enhanced the quality of listening and collaboration.

Our emergent learnings:

- Both coherence and differentiation can be thought of as existing on a spectrum of more or less *intense*. Effective facilitation is about finding a productive balance between coherence and differentiation, given the intention at hand, and the phase of a process.
- They can exist simultaneously, in relation to one another and separately.
- We can think of gross and subtle and very subtle levels of coherence and differentiation. For example, *gross coherence*, we all agreed to participate in a pod; *subtle coherence* - we have a shared topic and the energy is rising as we choose to brainstorm together; and *very subtle coherence* - a moment when we've shared a laugh, or a breath, or an energetic lift and this is moving us together in the same direction.