

APPLIED DYNAMICS OF THE CREATING SPACE: A THEORY OF INTERACTION

How understanding the Dynamics of the Creating Space can maximize both personal and organizational potential to produce amazing outcomes.

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ABSTRACT

Human interactions contribute to both the success and failures of many business and organizational transactions. Many scholars have studied human interactions from the perspective of interpersonal relationships, communications theory, and management practices. However, there is no theory that studies the interaction process itself. In other words, what is taking place in the space when two people or two groups come together and interact? Through an interdisciplinary lens that integrates knowledge and research from the fields of adult/leadership development, organizational design, and quantum physics, this new, integrated model proposes that something new is created every time an interaction occurs. And, by cultivating awareness of the interaction and subsequent creating process, the model outlines the steps for achieving a successful interaction that is purpose driven and outcome based. The model applies equally to interactions between individuals and between groups. This paper outlines a new model of interaction, describes the theory and philosophy behind the model, and highlights a specific method to increase the probability for successful interactions.

Human existence is defined by interactions. People interact in so many ways and on so many different levels-- cognitively, emotionally, and socially; in different environments, and in different contexts. Our interactions contribute greatly to the way we make sense and meaning out of the world. Our interactions define who we are both personally and professionally. However, despite extensive leadership development programs, sophisticated business strategies, and, complex professional coaching interventions, so often, when two or more people are brought together the outcome of the interaction is undesirable, unproductive and brings a negative consequence.

The fundamental importance of interaction between people has been studied by many leading scholars and academics in a variety of disciplines and fields. For example, Seagal's (1997) groundbreaking research and theory discusses the importance of understanding and appreciating the impact and influence of interactions. The Noble Prize winning physicist Richard Feynman said, "you can't say A is made of B or vice versa, [it's] all interaction (Gleick, 1992). Wilber (2000) emphasizes the significance of human interaction and relationships in the higher stages of adult development as a way to achieve maximum possibilities and potentials.

With a booming leadership and organizational development industry, it's amazing how many interactions continue to "fail"—in other words, not achieve its intended purpose. There

are significant data about the myriad of failed work place interactions. For example, mergers that fail to achieve their proclaimed objectives, to well planned change initiatives that derail, to newly hired “star” executives who are unable to lead the organization (Henry, 2001; Zigarmi & Hoekstra, 2009). These failed interactions even apply to a simple conversation, when two people cannot seem to communicate in a way that generates any mutual meaning between each other.

How can human interaction—both on an individual and on a collective level—fail at such a high rate? How can those examples above be possible when so many tools, strategies, and techniques exist which offer various steps and processes for success? What factors impede and interfere with these interactions? How can people and organizations develop and nurture the possibilities to produce valuable outcomes?

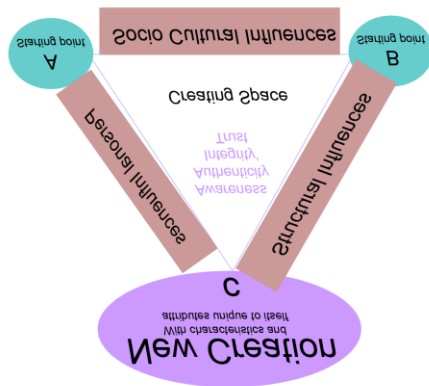
In this article, we will describe a model for more successful human interactions, both on the individual and collective level. This model incorporates research from several fields and provides a comprehensive approach to the process of interaction. Defined by The Creating Space that exists when a person interacts with another (whether the other is another person, a company, a social group, etc), this model outlines a method for achieving the desired and intended results and offers a new lens for understanding the potential reasons why even the most probable goals and outcomes are frequently not achieved.

So many undesirable results occur because there is an acute lack of awareness and understanding of the dynamics that exist in the space we’ve identified as “The Creating Space”. These dynamics involve how individuals relate and react to each other. The Creating Space refers to the point when people interact, specifically, *while* the interaction is occurring, but *before* the new outcome is created. Leading marketing authority Godin (2010) said, “if you interact with others you have the platform to create something new—something that changes everything.” Essentially, this model provides a power lens and methodology to harness the platform to which Godin refers.

This model is informed from research and theory in the fields of quantum mechanics, adult development, leadership effectiveness and organizational transformation. This synthesized model establishes a new paradigm for understanding how successful interactions can be produced when careful *attention and intention* is applied to “The Creating Space” (See Figure 1).

When people interact with others they have the opportunity to create something new – something that can make a lasting difference. The outcome is defined by what actually happens when the starting points (A and B above) interact in The Creating Space—designated by the triangle in the model above. The vital conditions for an optimal outcome are: awareness, authenticity, integrity, and trust. These conditions must be continuously monitored and maintained at their highest levels to preserve the possibility of success. Recognizing, understanding and identifying the requisite characteristics of the starting points are critical for a successful new creation to form. Additionally, three key influencing factors: personal, structural, and socio-cultural factors, make the creating space dynamic and complex, and contribute to the difficulty and challenges of interactions. In order to illustrate what happens in The Creating Space, we will use a simplistic example.

Figure 1. **The Creating Space Model**



Consider what happens when two primary colors interact to form a new, third color. When yellow paint (Starting Point A) interacts with blue paint (Starting Point B) in The Creating Space a completely new secondary paint color emerges: green. This new paint color emerges and contains all of the properties and attributes of its precursor colors (yellow and blue) but is now a different and distinct color with unique characteristics and properties of its own. One of the most important features from this interaction is how green emerged with *all of the properties of yellow and blue contained within it*. For green to be created, it didn't have to choose to embrace either yellow *or* blue. Green encompasses both yellow *and* blue. The process is conjunctive and inclusive—the parts exist within the new whole (Fowler, 1981; Wilber 2000). In other words, blue and yellow are completely contained within green, yet green emerges and exists on its own.

This simplified example illustrates how two separate and distinct things come together as starting points, interact, and result in an entirely new creation. All interactions have the same tendency—to first come together and then create a completely new form. The way to get a positive, desired outcome is to focus one's intention and attention on the power and importance of The Creating Space.

The example using the interaction of the colors oversimplifies the complexity of the model when applied to human interactions. However, the color example nicely illustrates how bringing together two separate and distinct elements produces an entirely new creation. This new creation contains all of the original elements from A and B. This process occurs with every interaction - whether intended or not. What is unique to our human interaction is the presence of our intention—a notion of what we want to occur. By 1) increasing our awareness and understanding of the Starting Points, 2) actively monitoring and maintaining optimal levels of the four vital conditions, and, 3) recognizing and working with the three key influencing factors that operate on and within The Creating Space, people can then increase the likelihood of achieving the desired outcome.

WORKING WITH THE MODEL.

The process for working within The Creating Space includes five phases:

- 1) Identify and state the intention and the purpose
- 2) Identify the required starting points
- 3) Understand and work with the three key influencing factors—Personal, Structural and Socio-Cultural
- 4) Continuously monitor the Vital Conditions- Awareness, Authenticity, Integrity and Trust.
- 5) Maintain a clear vision of the desired purpose, i.e., the new creation, in order to recognize it and allow its emergence.

Each phase, while it has its own process, does not occur in isolation of the other phases. In fact, the integrated nature of the phases is what makes this process both challenging and very useful at the same time. The dynamic character of the phases reflects the dynamics, and often complex, character of business and organizational life. Additionally, the phases do not occur in stages or in a linear process. Each phase may be more necessary at a particular time, based on the situation and context of the interaction. In some instances, it may be important to revisit a particular phase in order to make the Creating Space an optimal environment for a successful interaction (See Figure 2.)

Figure 2: The Five Phases of the Creating Space



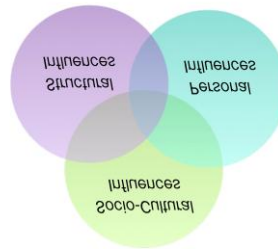
- Phase 1: Identify and State Intention and Purpose: In order to get what we want we have to know what we want and why we want it. The relationship between intention and purpose is an important one. Intention states what we want to do and purpose states why we want to do something. Purpose can often be defined by answering the question, “For the sake of what?” As an example a business student intends to do well on her exams for the purpose of finding a quality job. Not fully understanding and owning one’s intentions and not having a clearly defined purpose are common missteps at the outset of the creating process.

In this phase, the most important questions to ask are, “What do I/we intend to create?” and “Why? For what purpose? For the sake of what?”

Phase 2: Identify the Required Starting Points: Based on the desired creation and intended purpose, the next question is “What do I/we need to start with for this potential creation to be realized?” Recall that all interaction begins with two Starting Points and then ultimately results in the creation of something new. In the paint color example above, if the person wanted purple rather than green it would have required starting with blue and red, rather than blue and yellow. Without an explicit awareness to what is needed at the beginning, along with a clearly defined intention and purpose for what is being created, a creation will occur but will not likely be an outcome that is as productive or desired. Clearly identifying what the requisite Starting Points are and the intended outcome will maximize the potential for creating the desired result and reduce the possibility of a default outcome.

- Phase 3: Understand The Three Key Influencing Factors: Although many factors influence human interactions, adult development theory and organizational development literature suggest three factors that significantly influence the patterns of adult development and interaction (Kegan, 1995; Sulpizio, 2010). In the Creating Space, the most significant influencing factors are: Personal Factors, Structural Factors, and Socio-Cultural Factors.
 - The primary dimensions of the Personal Factors include:
 - i. An individual's personal stage of adult development
 - ii. An individual's thoughts
 - iii. An individual's feelings and emotions
 - iv. An individual's beliefs and belief system
 - v. An individual's physical health and wellness.
 - The primary dimensions of the Structural Factors include:
 - i. Physical Space: Room Configurations/Facility Layout
 - ii. Personnel Structures/Organizational Hierarchy
 - iii. Policies and Procedures
 - iv. Communications Structures (Technology, Audio/visual)
 - v. Supporting Resources (People, Systems)
 - . The primary dimensions of the Socio/Cultural Factors include:
 - i. Collective Norms – Shared Rules
 - ii. Language – Shared Meaning
 - iii. Traditions – Shared History
 - iv. Values - Shared Ideals
 - v. Relationships – Shared Exchange

Each of these three Key Factors greatly influences human behavior, both on the individual and collective level. And, importantly, the three factors do not operate in isolation—in fact, each of them impact and influence the other. For example, it is well known in many Native American cultures that conducting conversations around a circle (whether around a circular table, or sitting in a circle) as opposed to sitting in a square with the participants' facing directly across from each other, tremendously effects the quality, flow and authenticity of the dialogue. In this way, the structure of the table influences the personal interaction, which contributes to the culture of the group. Therefore, it becomes extremely important to be aware of and acknowledge the significance of these factors and to understand how they influence thoughts, emotions and behaviors, and as such, the dynamics of the creating space.



- Phase 4: and Monitor and Maintain Optimal Vital Conditions in The Creating Space: There are certain conditions that must be present for a desirable outcome to result. These conditions are: awareness, authenticity, integrity and trust.
 - Awareness is having presence and alertness to the self and others’ emotions, surroundings, relationships, and focus of attention.
 - Authenticity occurs when one’s actions and behaviors are reflective and consistent of one’s true, unmasked self.
 - Integrity is adhering to and living out one’s personal code of ethical and moral principles.
 - Trust is the glue that binds and is what results when one has faith that the other will honor and keep their promises.

Here, the most important question to ask is, “What is the state of the Vital Conditions?” Conditions are constantly changing and dynamic – they are not static. The dynamic nature of the Vital Conditions in The Creating Space is why constant attention and vigilance to conditions is imperative.

- Phase 5: Allow Creation to Emerge: Finally, the interaction is allowed to take place until the creation emerges to its optimal level of completion. Here, the two most important questions to ask are: “How do we know we are creating what we intended?” and, “How do we know when the creation is complete?” If you have a clear visual image of your intended outcome then you will know the creation when you see it. Over-processing a creation can sometimes be as harmful to an organization as under-processing. The ultimate challenge is to know the optimal time to stop and begin the next creation.

APPLYING THE MODEL: A CASE STUDY

The effectiveness of this theoretical model is its diverse and useful applications. The following example highlights how The Creating Space model can be applied in the context of an executive leadership team.

This case highlights how the addition of a well-accomplished executive onto an already established leadership team hit various challenges. So many challenges, in fact, that after a year of repeated frustrations and disconnects, the executive’s ability to continue on the team was called into question. Both the executive and the leadership team overlooked and ignored the dynamics of their interactions. Through the lens of The Creating Space Model the root causes of

the challenges were identified. As the model was applied, innovative suggestions were offered to change the team's dynamic and ultimately the executive's performance.

The leadership team had been together a few years and had well-established norms. The team assumed that the promoted executive would just fit right in. The new executive didn't just fit right in. The team hadn't considered the fact that their existing team would change significantly, and a new team would emerge with the addition of the executive. Applying the five phases of the model to the above situation highlights the usefulness and practical application of the model.

PHASE ONE: STATE INTENTION AND PURPOSE

This organization wanted to add an executive to their well-established leadership team. The stated intention was to bring more knowledge of the organization's internal operations to the leadership team. They chose an internal manager who brought several years of proven success and technical/subject matter expertise to the team. There was unanimous consent within the leadership team that this individual had the right mix of management experience and operations.

In the Model, the established Team (Starting Point A) and the newly added executive represents (Starting Point B) come together. The articulated intention was: adding a new member to the team. However, this didn't accurately reflect what was in fact occurring. What was really occurring was the creation of a new team. This was a critical oversight and misstep which opened the door for many of the challenges that later occurred. Had they realized that a new addition, in fact, results in a new team (because of the presence of a new member), they could have paid much closer attention to the ensuing dynamics, factors, and conditions that the model identifies.

PHASE TWO: IDENTIFY THE REQUIRED STARTING POINTS

The team looked at the executive as coming onto their team. What the team didn't do was ask the question: What are the attributes of this person? In other words, what are the characteristics of Starting Point B? How do those attributes fit with and support our current team's culture and ways of interacting? That is to say, how will Starting Point B interact with Starting Point A?

Had these questions been asked, the team would have readily and easily identified that the executive is first orientated towards people or relationships. This executive builds confidence and trust by cultivating personal relationships. When the executive's preferred behavioral style toward first establishing individual relationships wasn't met, the executive felt completely disconnected and detached. Unfortunately, no one took the time to share the team culture and no opportunity was extended to the new executive to meet individually with team members. Rather she was just thrown into the first team meeting and was expected to be comfortable being on the team. For this team, they were focused on their established process and taking time to build individual relationships was not a first priority.

PHASE THREE: UNDERSTAND THE THREE INFLUENCING FACTORS IN THE CREATING SPACE

Once A and B were brought together and began to interact, the dynamics of the new team began. Right from the beginning there were challenges, such as failed expectations and personal mistrust, that stemmed from lack of attention to the personal, socio-cultural, and structural factors. When The Creating Space Model was applied the root causes began to emerge.

Personal Factors: Looking through the lens of Personal Factors, it became apparent that the newly added member felt ill-prepared to join the team. Shortly after joining the team she felt out of place and unvalued. No one had shared with her the team's decision-making style and other cultural norms. Consequently, because she didn't know the rules of the game she felt unable to participate. She interpreted her lack of knowledge about the team's norms and rules of engagement as her own lack of ability to perform within the executive ranks. Feelings of frustration, self-doubt, and isolation ensued. Her team members' interpreted her retrenchment as incompetence, which further fueled her insecurities and predictably impacted her performance. No one ever stopped to ask her, *How do you feel about being on this team?* And, because the team didn't recognize that they were in fact creating a new team, they just assumed that because she brought the necessary technical knowledge she would just fit into the already existing team. When no one showed her how to fit they assumed it was her personal inability rather than recognize it was their own failure to teach her the ways of their team. Rather than stopping to formulate new norms they instead assumed she would just slip right into their existing ways. The process was failing and her performance slipped precipitously.

Structural Factors: As we looked through the lens of the Structural Factors, two things jumped out as less than optimal: physical structure and communication structure. First, the physical structure of their meeting room did not support team collaboration. The room had a large square shaped table made from joining together four rectangular tables. There was a large donut hole in the middle about 10 ft x 10 ft. This design configuration reflected a Military Tribunal more than it did a supportive, professional exchange. Feelings of sharing were replaced by debate because of the table set up. This space configuration impacted the new executive a great deal although she wasn't aware of it until we brought it to her attention.

Secondly, shortcomings in the communication structure surfaced. This executive is very visual and the team's primary structure for communicating information was auditory. In fact, they rarely sent out materials in advance of meetings. Instead, they would debate and discuss issues in a groupthink atmosphere. So, her high need to visually see information in advance, in order to process and absorb, was thwarted. Therefore, when she attended the meetings she was unable to participate in a meaningful way. This was not because she wasn't intelligent but because the information hadn't been presented ahead of time for her to see.

Socio/Cultural Factors: Finally, as we looked through the lens of the Socio/Cultural Factors, one primary area surfaced: the absence of a common language with shared meaning. When the executive joined the team she frequently heard the phrase "support and sponsor" from her colleagues. This phrase was used especially when one team member was bringing forth an idea or a proposal. The CEO would then survey the team to determine if the other team members' could "support and sponsor" the idea or proposal. The new executive assumed "support and sponsor" meant "I will help you in anyway I can to make sure your idea is implemented or your proposal is successful." So, when early-on she put forth some suggestions and heard this phrase echoed around the room, she was thrilled. Then, as time unfolded and no one stepped forth to give her staff support or monetary sponsorship she was confused and upset.

As we put the lens of the Model to her challenges we dug deeper with this phrase to find its shared meaning on the team. What we uncovered was "support and sponsor" really meant the following: "I will publicly endorse your idea or proposal. I won't vote no. But, privately, when we leave the room, don't ask me to actively do something to move your ball down the field. I won't work against you but I also won't work on behalf of you." While this shared definition,

which more closely mirrored “neutrality”, is certainly not wrong or unethical, it is worlds apart from “actively working on another’s behalf.”

Had the meaning of this phrase been shared with the new executive early on, many challenges could have been avoided. Instead, for months she grew increasingly upset and despondent at what she thought was supposed to have been offered on her behalf and wasn’t. In reality, all her colleagues thought they were indeed supporting her because they voted yes in the room.

PHASE FOUR: MONITOR OPTIMAL VITAL CONDITIONS:

If appropriate attention had been paid to the operant conditions, which permeated the team, one could have identified the erosion of trust, and the executive’s feelings of a lack of integrity from her colleagues. She grew increasingly concerned that people did not do what they said they would, all the while telling her she was a valued colleague. In her mind, they lacked integrity and had not earned her trust. If awareness had been placed on making sure the language of the team was properly defined and interpreted, with practical examples, a completely different experience could have taken place. But because no one paid attention to the changing and eroding conditions between the executive and the team, the benefits of early intervention were missed. Not only did the executive feel like her colleagues were acting without authenticity, she herself felt that she was being inauthentic. The declining conditions were a signal that something was off and the relationship had gone awry. Unfortunately, awareness came very late in the game.

PHASE FIVE: ALLOW CREATION TO EMERGE

Because of the application of the Model various solutions were offered, which significantly improved this new leadership team. Not least among them was supporting the executive in her efforts to understand and master the language and norms of the established team culture. The executive reported that this comprehensive approach in studying the three Key Influencing Factors and all of their dimensions “not only transformed her but also transformed her relationship with the team and her colleagues.” She said, “I know who I am, and I have found how to be myself and be successful on the team.” Identifying for the executive her need to first build personal relationships before she can actively participate in a group process was a major breakthrough. The executive has emerged as a confident, thoughtful and highly respected member of the leadership team. The leadership team now understands and appreciates the transformation that occurs when a new member is added to an existing team.

The above case illustrates the relevance and value of The Creating Space Model and the process of the five phases. As demonstrated with this executive and the leadership team, business people and organizational leaders can learn to understand and use the five phases of The Creating Space Model to address their challenges and increase their potential to produce valuable outcomes.

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