Exploring the Space of Performance and the Space of Creation
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The Space of Performance

The grounding assumption in this work is that action taken by groups flows between a space of performance and a space of creation as they meet a challenge. Our performances are the embodiment of our understanding. Whether large or small, a performance makes manifest what we believe - it reveals us to the world. By starting with performance - our embodied understanding - we can seek to discover what process brings that understanding into being. What it means to travel from creation to performance.

With that in mind consider the following definition:

**A performance reveals publicly our response to a challenge.**

In the theatre analogy, an actor accepts a role and over the course of the rehearsal process will create a performance which embodies all their understanding about the situation, the relationships, and the purpose: everything they believe is of value about the character. The role is the challenge and the performance reveals publicly their response (all they have come to know) about that challenge.
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In the same way any service, initiative, product, process, project, platform, or program can be seen as a performance - the public sharing of your understanding (all you have come to know either as an individual or group) about the challenge at hand.

Three areas of focus

There are three areas within which it is important to strive for clarity when preparing to share understanding publicly:

1. **The System:** We endeavor to fully understand the system within which we are acting.

2. **The Signal:** While acting within the system we strive to discover what information/feedback we need to attend to and what we can ignore. As well, we want to understand the key relationships on which to focus.

3. **Our Actions:** We seek to know what actions we should take within this system to address the question or challenge. Furthermore we want to be aware of the impact - intended and unintended - our actions have within the system.

Each area naturally influences the other. They do not exist in isolation; they are parts of a greater whole.
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Reaching complete clarity in each of these areas is rare. Yet in our preparation for performance we strive toward that ideal. We do not seek control by striving for clarity. We work to release ourselves within the performance and thus be available for what emerges in the moment. In the literature around the development of expertise, a necessary step in achieving mastery is to make as many actions as possible feel routine, in order to clear cognitive space for higher level challenges. In performance we need to act from the place of certainty in order to step fully into emergent possibility. This is one of the key paradoxes in performance.

A performance remains dynamic by taking in real time feedback (part of the signal identified), making adjustments, and achieving ongoing levels of clarity in each area. This makes it possible to continue to act with certainty and be open to emergent possibility (another key paradox of performance).
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Performing in a Team

The social relationship we have developed to organize groups of people to engage within a space of performance as we meet a challenge is the “team”. A slight disclaimer with this term: when speaking of “team” this refers to the conventional, ordinary sense of the word. This “team” has three main characteristics:

1. **Leadership = Hierarchy**: There are defined levels of responsibility and accountability.

2. **Role = Fixed**: People have an area of focus that is associated with a particular role. They focus their attention within that area, listening to role specific signal.

3. **Orientation = Outcome**: There is a clear outcome to be achieved by the team. Within each role there is an outcome for which they are accountable.

If we take as an ideal that people are collectively displaying their understanding of a challenge after a process where they have developed clarity around the actions, system, and signal, then organizing as a team can be useful in performance. At that point the three areas mentioned
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above become more nuanced and the negative impacts in each area are reduced.

The “team” as a way of organizing group performance breaks down when one is only asked to perform and not included in the process of creation. When people are assembled into roles, given an outcome, and directed to publicly display the understanding developed by others, a performance will lose its depth.

Within a reduced performance of this type you see a greater emphasis on formal leadership and hierarchy. This is the valuing of the structure of a team rather than the work of a team. Some leadership development focuses on equipping people in formal leadership positions with the tools/processes to move people quickly into performance.
The Space of Creation

We shall now move to the other side of the continuum and explore the space of creation.

All great performances - performances that reveal publicly an understanding of a challenge with such insight they shift what is possible - start in the space of creation. And great performances start here not because people are thrown into this space by circumstance but because they enter it by choice. Either because they feel compelled to address a question or because they realize that their present performance no longer meets the challenge they face.

When we step fully into a space of creation, no final performance is visible. How we will respond to the challenge we face is illusive at this point and this must be not only accepted but embraced. Entering the space of creation asks us to release what we presently believe about the question or challenge (beliefs often based on past patterns, current knowledge, personal biases, etc.). In the course of the work we will develop our understanding, discover our final performance, and become ready to reveal that publicly. At the beginning though, there is only a letting go and a clearing.
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Since the space of creation is the place from which our performance will emerge, we focus on the same three areas. The difference is that we work from the opposite assumption. If performance is about operating from certainty in the three areas, creation is working from the premise that we know nothing about them. In creation we are working from the ground up, building clarity as we go.

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3. **Our Actions:** We seek to know what actions we should take within this system to address the question or challenge. Furthermore we want to be aware of the impact - intended and unintended - our actions have within the system.

Our work in each area naturally influences the others (as well as influencing us in the process). As we reach insights in one area, the other two areas shift and change and we see them from a different perspective. As clarity develops, our understanding about the challenge or question may
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change to reveal new challenges and questions. In this organic and interconnected process of inquiry we develop our understanding and our performance takes shape.

Engaging in acts of creation fuels work in the space of creation (developing clarity in the three areas). There are four movements:

1. Inquire Deeply: This is the act of diving deeply into the situation, relationship, etc. We are not trying to understand or make sense, but to seek an intimate (embodied) sense of what is occurring.

2. Reflect Deeply: We take all the insight and experience from the inquiry and reflect on it personally. Asking ourselves “what do I already know?” and “how does that connect with this particular situation?” We also search for the lived experiences we have which are analogous to the situation in order make the situation personal.

3. Discover: We combine what was revealed through inquiry with our own reflections to create a personal expression of understanding. This can be captured as insights, as “What if” questions for exploration, or revealing new areas for inquiry.
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4. **Offer Generously**: We share our personal expression of untested understanding with others freely to see what connects and sparks with others.

Engaging in these actions individually and collectively gets things moving and keeps them flowing within a space of creation. Also, these four actions underpin all the work of moving across the continuum. The process of creation is iterative and these movements shape the movement within each new cycle. Therefore, it is vital when operating within a space of creation that we attend to the conditions that promote these four actions and value the capacities necessary for engaging in each movement.

**Working with teams in the space of creation**

When we move into the space of creation the tendency is to import our common social relationship for organizing people - the team relationship. We do not do this intentionally, but because it is the default social relationship for operating as a group on challenges. This does not always go well, since the qualities a team relationship promotes - hierarchy, role dependence and outcome focus - are not suited to engaging in acts of creation. Which means that people in the
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teams can be operating wonderfully for that relationship and yet make no progress in getting clear on the action, system or signal. The result, often, is an undermining of the confidence of a group in general, and those in formal leadership positions in particular.

Nobody likes to feel that they are not of value or that their efforts do not make a contribution. This is extremely acute with people in formal leadership positions since they have been valued for their ability to get things done. All of this can lead to a feeling that the challenge or question is unsolvable. In that case people have the tendency to take the first nascent answers they find and fix on them, or look outside for an answer (this is where best practice becomes a cliché performance). In both cases the team relationship is seeking to close down the space of creation in order to move back into a space of performance where their way of acting is of value.

It is not that teams operating in the space of creation are doing bad work or acting with ill intent. Rather the work they need to do is not supported (or valued) within the present group relationship. They need to draw on a different social relationship as the way of working together so they can engage in acts of creation and begin to get movement in the three areas.
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This is where the Ensemble relationship comes into play. It still focuses on the same three areas as a team but with a new focus:

1. **Leadership = Fluid**: Leadership continually shifts to the person with the capacity to meet the emerging challenge. Once the challenge shifts or a new one takes focus, leadership moves naturally to the next person.

2. **Role = Responsive**: People understand their responsibilities in relationship to the situation and the people with whom they are connected. People modulate their work in real time to what is occurring across the system.

3. **Orientation = Purpose**: Rather than focusing on the immediate outcome to be generated, there is a continual awareness of the largest purpose that wants to be served. This larger purpose guides what possibilities are pursued.

The ensemble relationship also asks those in formal leadership positions to enter into a new paradoxical relationship: co-creator whose central responsibility is holding the space of creation open (resisting the pressure to close and move to performance). To achieve success, those in formal leadership must let go of their authority...
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while exerting it to keep the space of creation open, invite the ensemble relationship, and attend to the actions of the ensemble.

The Ensemble relationship creates a platform upon which individuals and groups can engage in ongoing acts of creation. Establishing this new relationship between people opens up the space of creation; it allows groups to see possibilities, gain insights and create understanding.

Simple Rules for Developing Ensemble

1. Invite Play.
2. Create Intimacy.
3. Expand Attention.
4. Be Radically Curious.