

The Structure of Emergence

Matthew Hudson and Philip Harland

"We can't solve problems by using the same kind of thinking we used when we created them." Albert Einstein

In previous articles, we presented an outline of David Grove's Emergent Knowledge, and a method of facilitating clients to make a 'Clean Start'. Here we look at the underlying structure of the six-part process, and illustrate it with excerpts from client transcripts.

At the start of a session Grove would ask clients to make a statement about what they would like to work on. He would then ask the following 'Power of Six' questions, applying the principles of iteration to create the context in which emergence could occur:

"What do you know about that?"

"And what else do you know about that?"

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"And what else do you know about that?"

And a summarizing question:

"And what do you know now?"

Six simple but powerful questions and a 'learning' or 'download' question. An epistemological (knowledge related) exercise that takes the client on an evolutionary journey in which the answer to each question is a lead into the next.

Here we follow three clients through a Power of Six process and note how the structure of their knowledge changes as a result. First, a setting up question, "What would you like to work on?"

Our clients respond:

SAM, a 29 year old female training consultant: *"Having the occasional cigarette (gasp!)"*

ALICE, a 32 year old teacher: *"I need to make a connection I severed years ago."*

RICHARD, 38, interested in personal development: *"I don't enjoy how I earn money."*

FIRST ITERATION:

"What do you know about that?"

SAM (smoking problem): *"It's a very comfortable habit connected to a belief I have about looking after myself and it feels very natural."*

ALICE (relationship issue): *"I know that I am responsible for the disconnection."*

RICHARD (job dissatisfaction): *"That it's boring, unfulfilling, and somewhat pointless. I'm gaining no worthwhile skills etc from it."*

The client is **proclaiming** what they know about the particular subject they have chosen.

Only when the client has said all they want to say on the subject will we go to the next iteration. Grove would ask these questions in a slow and deliberate way, so that each word could be heard and given equal value. He called this 'driving' the process – giving the client the impetus and energy to explore their psyche further.

SECOND ITERATION:

"And what else do you know about that?"

SAM: *"It's about holding on to my rebellious youth."*

ALICE: *"I know that it's because of my underlying fear."*

RICHARD: *"I don't enjoy it, it's boring and unfulfilling."*

Even though the client may have already stated all they think they know about the subject, they begin again. This time the impetus tends to move the client into **explaining** what they meant by their initial proclamation. Sometimes they will talk about how the issue affects them and others around them; or, as in Richard's case, they will in effect reiterate their first statement.

THIRD ITERATION:

"And what else do you know about that?"

SAM: *"It restricts my freedom, and I love being healthy so there's a conflict, and it's something I'm very secretive about - so it's anti-social smoking."*

ALICE: *"I know that I can't tap the reasons within myself fully; I think because what I would like to have happen is marred by my inability to fully picture the outcome I want because of all the negative images that interfere with that negative outcome."*

RICHARD: *"It's unfulfilling, it saddens me that I'm wasting my lifetime doing un-worthwhile behaviour for hours on end just to live comfortably."*

As clients consider the third question, their understanding is **reinforced**. This third iteration provides clients with an opportunity in which to explore the context, the world or the cosmology in which they and the subject exist. They may come up with a philosophical or meta-view of the subject of their attention, or they may provide a further definition of the problem or of their relationship to it.

Now that the issue has been **proclaimed** (iteration #1), **explained** (# 2), and the world in which it exists has been **reinforced** (# 3), there is a sense of final recognition: "This is it. This is the problem".

By the third iteration SAM is acknowledging that 'it' (having the occasional cigarette) is restricting her freedom. This is a more global concept. She also identifies a conflict between 'it' and her love of being healthy. And she acknowledges being secretive about 'it'. 'It' doesn't seem to be a part of Sam, but something external to her. The construction of the question "And what else do you know about *that*?" helps create the dissociation. Once the 'it' or 'that' is out there the client is likely to find it easier to adopt a meta-position in relation to it.

ALICE is identifying more information about her issue. She is redefining the structure of her problem in its current form to help her make sense of it.

RICHARD's three responses ('unfulfilling', 'saddens me' and the larger scale 'wasting my lifetime') are text-book examples of how a client may respond to the three iterations. Richard confirms and reconfirms the issue, then sums it up with a global statement.

All three clients have succeeded in pinning down the problem. They now have sufficient self-confirming evidence to support their existing beliefs about the issue.

FOURTH ITERATION:

"And what else do you know about that?"

SAM: *"I'm like my mother and my grandmother. We're all secret smokers for far longer than we would admit to anyone else - a history of subterfuge. AND there are other habits I've chosen not to inherit from them."*

ALICE: (pauses) *"That I am the saboteur."*

RICHARD: *"That my time could be put to better use and I'd be happier in myself."*

There is often a pause point here. The most common utterances are 'er', 'hmm', 'perhaps', followed by instances of when the subject of attention is not true, or comments about its idiosyncrasies. Grove called this stage of the process **'the wobble'**, when the original construct is undermined. Clients may also begin to give a history, or refer to the source, of the subject matter.

SAM follows this pattern. In the first part of her statement she confirms the history of her smoking: "I'm like my mother and grandmother". She underlines this with a "history of subterfuge". A second 'wobble' comes with the next word, "AND", which is followed by new information - "there are other habits I've chosen not to inherit" - that does not fit with the preceding information.

ALICE's wobble is simple and obvious: the new information is contained in her abrupt response, "I am the saboteur".

RICHARD has done an 'about turn', a common response in the fourth iteration. His initial proclamation, explanation and reinforcement were about lack of fulfillment and its associated problems. Now his attention is on how his time might be put to better use.

All three clients are processing differently to the way they were in their first three iterations. In the fourth phase clients may show signs of physical and/or verbal irritation. They might say "I don't know" or "nothing else" in reply to the question. They might experience sudden emotional disregard or intense emotional attachment. ALICE is not too happy, and seems to be taking responsibility for her relationship breakdown. RICHARD has switched from sadness (iteration #3) to the possibility of being happy (#4). The client's knowledge of the subject of their attention is changing. A crack in the structure has appeared. The facilitator needs to allow the client to process this new and often difficult phase fully.

FIFTH ITERATION:

"And what else do you know about that?"

SAM: *"I still really enjoy smoking, which is why I end up doing it but I don't enjoy the way it makes me feel afterwards. And it doesn't make sense with the way I eat and look after myself. Very clearly sabotage."*

ALICE: *"I know that I don't know why I am the saboteur."*

RICHARD: *"I need to be happy in what I'm doing, to be fulfilled in my life."*

The clients' responses include the wobble from #4, the piece of information that disturbed or disrupted the original pattern. Now that the information from #4 has been accepted as part of the system, the structure cannot remain intact. There is a

deconstruction, a de-patterning, a breaking down of previous beliefs, which now cannot exist alongside the new information. Grove called this the **'crash and burn'**.

SAM is clarifying her knowledge in iteration #5. In light of the fact that she chose not to inherit her mother's and grandmother's other habits, something else must be true. What she is doing is "very clearly sabotage".

ALICE seems to be attempting to locate an earlier source of the "saboteur" she has become. She now has the knowledge of not knowing - another symptom of deconstruction.

RICHARD is recognizing the gap in his life, and in order to make sense of what went before he is making a statement of a "need to be fulfilled".

The rising emotions of iteration #4 are dispersing. Clients experience a release, a freeing sensation like the removal of a restraint. They may be aware of this, as seems to be the case with Sam and Richard, or unconscious of it, as it seems to be with Alice. The old structures are breaking down.

SIXTH ITERATION:

"And what else do you know about that?"

SAM: *"Once I make a decision that something isn't a thing I'm going to have, I have no problems with my willpower. But I need to understand the structure, and for it to be outside the structure and for the space to be different. Because I only ever smoke on the balcony I need to change the look of the place."*

ALICE: *"I know that whatever the reason ... it's rooted ... in my past somewhere, rooted somewhere in my past & I know that it is somehow connected with my change of school, or even before, yeah yeah ... It's connected with school, it's connected with school."*

RICHARD: *"That happiness comes from doing what I enjoy."*

All that has gone before is re-evaluated. A new structure is emerging that is able to contain all the earlier iterations. From what Grove called **'out of the ashes'** a phoenix arises. The new knowledge is generated from the system itself. From its reconfiguration. The client is giving equal value to all the known parts of the system. This is a powerful stage in the emergent knowledge process - a moment of clarity, of self-confirmation, of a deeper sense of truth.

SAM has recognized that her issue is not about willpower, but about understanding the structure of her smoking problem. She is already starting to explore this, to relate it to the real world, and to how she can resolve the problem.

ALICE has seen through the veil of not-knowing (iteration #5), to the likely source of her 'underlying fear' (#6).

RICHARD has stated a positive truth for himself which takes into account everything he has processed so far. This is a very different statement from his original "I don't enjoy how I earn money".

Once clients have fully processed the sixth iteration they are facilitated into a learning place, where all that has evolved during the process can integrate back into the self. A final question encourages the client to consolidate the new information:

"And what do you know now?"

SAM: *"I need to find something I'm wanting more than the occasional cigarette, or different options."*

ALICE: *"I know that I need to resolve ... whatever that issue is ... before I can take the next step. But, it's all very vague in my head, like some kind of mushy soup."*

RICHARD: *"That I need to do what interests me, and what it is that I enjoy to be happy and feel fulfilled in my life."*

Sam, Alice and Richard have gone through six phases of knowing, and one of consolidation – of knowing that they know. What happens now? The knowledge that emerged from the first round of the process can become the subject of attention for the second round. The same six plus one questions can be applied to Sam's "finding something I'm wanting more than the occasional cigarette". Alice could go for several things: her "need to resolve" or "whatever that issue is", or even her "mushy soup". Richard could explore his "need" to do whatever it is that interests him; or what it might be that he enjoys "to be happy and feel fulfilled". The choice in each case will not be the Power of Six facilitator's. It will be the client's.

Is there a deeper meaning to the 'sixness' of the Emergent Knowledge process? Is it a natural mathematical phenomenon like the Fibonacci sequence? Another article will explore these questions.

Thank you to the clients who allowed us to quote from their first Power of Six process. Identifying characteristics have been changed.

To experience the Power of Six for yourself, register at www.powersofsix.com, click on 'Library' and select 'The Iterator'. You will find other articles in the library on Emergent Knowledge and the Power of Six.

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