We Space Theory
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Introduction

We Space Theory attempts to clarify the interplay of the conscious and subconscious minds on sustained high performance; specifically, the unobserved gap between managerial "conscious" power to regulate behavior with the human "subconscious" drive for self-organization. Without fully understanding this seeming contradiction, fully motivated behavior is seldom achievable.

Humans, and for that matter all other mammals, have an innate drive to react spontaneously to different circumstances while striving to maintain their identity. Self-organization is emergent. It's our "autopilot" for self-preservation. Without it we could not survive yet we typically ignore it in management.

So, what are fundamental principles of "high performance?" As still advocated, management functions are comprised of the interlocking functions of organizing, planning, controlling, and directing the achievement of organizational goals. The overarching emphasis in this scheme is on "control" with not even a hint about employees' self-organization. As we will see shortly, people are extremely adverse to being controlled by others.

Ironically, the above functions of management were initially introduced over 100 years ago by the two most prominent management gurus at the time--Frederick Taylor and Henri Fayol. Clearly, at the time such disciplines as neuroscience and evolutionary biology, were hardly in existence. So, it's now high time that we integrate the important findings from these and related fields to the social constructs of management.

There is nothing magical about We Space Theory. It's all about harnessing the positive hidden dynamics of what makes us human in the pursuit of common goals. My objective in developing We Space Theory was twofold:

- First, to demonstrate that one does not have to be a neuroscientist or evolutionary biologist to adequately understand some of the pertinent findings in those and related disciplines. For instance, my Ph.D. is not in neuroscience. It's in business administration.

- Second, to offer a practical framework for taking the pertinent knowledge from these fields and applying it the fundamentals of management. More specifically, providing a practical way to narrow the invisible gap between the formal

(primarily the realm of the conscious mind) and the informal (primarily the realm of the subconscious mind) social dynamics within organizations.

Before we get into the specifics of We Space Theory, we first need to take a relatively "deep dive" into the field of social neuroscience. Once we resurface, we will then be better able to grasp the theory's fundamental structural dynamics and practical applications.

Mind Basics

Let's start with a relatively simple example. A manager calls a group together for an urgent meeting. She informs them that the firm is faced with an unexpected problem responding to customer orders. She instructs the group to do whatever necessary in order to come up with a solution and report back to her as soon as possible. Clearly, the problem has significant cost and income implications.

The question that pops up immediately is, "How involved and dedicated will the group be in solving the problem?" That is, will they just go through the motions or be motivated to go the extra mile? That depends on two invisible social dynamics. One, how well do the meeting attendees grasp the details of the problem? Two, how willing are they, individually and as a group, to become fully engaged?

Essentially, the first is primarily the function of the conscious mind. The other mainly the role of the subconscious mind. Putting it another way, one is the domain of supervision and fairly manageable. The other belongs to the realm of the employees (individually and as a group) and is, therefore, quite unmanageable. To fully grasp this dichotomy, let's first take a closer look at the general functions of the conscious and subconscious minds although they both function in unison.

The conscious mind defines all thoughts and actions (one at a time while we're awake) within our awareness. Specifically, it encompasses:

- Distancing--individuality by understanding own separateness from surroundings.
- Mindfulness--attention to experiences occurring in the moment.
- Mentalization--interpreting the behavior of others (theory of mind).
- Short-term memory.

On the other hand, the conscious mind defines all reactions and actions beyond our awareness 24/7 specifically by:

- Intersubjectivity--beliefs, values, habits, culture and language (relationship patterns).
- Integration--instincts, emotions, traits, attitude (personality).
- Coherence--mood, thoughts and behavior (mental models of reality).

- Long-term memory.

Further, there are considerable differences between the conscious and subconscious mind data processing speeds:

- Conscious: At about 40 bits per second.
- Subconscious: At about 10 million bits per second. More than 250,000 times faster than the conscious mind.

In a nutshell the conscious mind is:
- Slow
- Logical
- Deliberate
- Effortful

While the subconscious mind is:
- Quick
- Instinctive
- Automatic
- Effortless

Next, we need comprehend how all of the above comes into play as we continuously self-organize and try to maintain our identities. Basically, our actions/reactions are activated by what I refer to as the "three self-organization drivers." They "initiate" overt or covert responses as our senses continuously scan our environment. They are:
- A constant drive to minimize threat and maximize reward:
  - Threat is any avoid response--anger, fear, grief, intimidation, etc.
  - Reward is any pleasing experience--play, novelty, friendship, love, etc.
- A relentless drive to be causal agents:
  - Internally "rewarded" with fulfilment when in control.
  - Internally "punished" with anxiety when not.
- Emotions. They are the very heart of what the brain does when it processes external threat and reward impact. Specifically, they are:
  - The interface of mind, body and environment.
  - Activated instantly by our five senses.
  - The motivation behind behavior.

Finally, we need to understand how the subconscious mind, our autopilot, is programmed and reprogrammed throughout our lives. The prescribed name for our subconscious autopilot is the "Scripted Mode." Fundamentally, neurons that constantly fire together wire together forming the so-called Scripted Mode comprised of "cognitive filters."

Cognitive filters form and change by our actions and reactions to reoccurring activities. Thus, once formed, they spontaneously trigger physical and mental responses to repeated activities. In effect, cognitive filters are the operational programs supporting the self-organization drivers.

Operationally, instincts and cognitive filters instantly guess what incoming data is relevant and what's not. Relevant data is passed to the conscious mind. The remaining data is censored.

Accordingly, the Cognitive Mode is well adapted to recurrent settings. It rapidly interprets what's worked in the past but slow in solving novel new problems. As Bill Sullivan fittingly stated in *Pleased to Meet Me*, "We march through life believing that we're the drummer—but the shocking evidence reveals this is an illusion."

In summary, self-organization is our spontaneous adjustment to different settings while we striving to retain our self-identity. It's:
- Deep and fundamental to human relations.
- Not enforceable by any set of rules.
- Founded on integration and belonging.
- Processed by emotions.

From a management perspective, it's extremely important to grasp the "research proven" differences in "influence" between the conscious and the subconscious minds on our actions and reactions. Or, how much can people really be managed? We now know that formal directives and commands carry little weight; only about "five percent." Therefore, it should not be a surprise that Gallup surveys consistently show that, in general, three out of four employees are not fully engaged and that one out of four is "actively" disengaged.

We definitely can do better. So, let's take the above information and put it to better use, that is, place more emphasis on dealing with the "unseen" side of organizational behavior absent from formal accounting measures. Specifically, let's take what we've gathered from the mind basics above and put it to practical use.

We Space Fundamentals
A We Space "emerges and constantly evolves" while two or more people engaged in some sort of a transaction(s) whether within a family, business or just a casual encounter. There is two-way communication and something is exchanged—items or information.
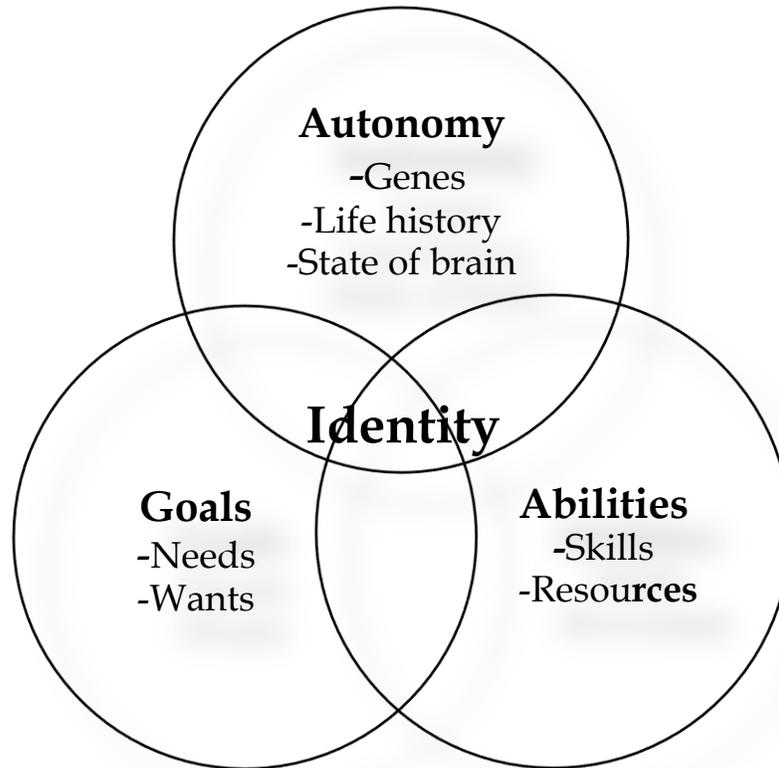
Typically, a business transaction within a firm or between firms or customers is carried out "formally." Namely, in accordance with some set of instructions and procedures.

All this belongs mostly to the sphere of management. However, as we gathered from the mind basics above, official directives have limited influence on the subconscious mind unless they are in line with the participants cognitive filters or autopilot programs. Consequently, most individuals only do enough to get by thus limiting performance value and increasing transaction costs.

So, how do we get people's subconscious minds on the same wavelength with formal plans and programs? The answer is "supportive relationships." As Dan Siegel as eloquently stipulated, "Of all factors in humans that predict positive outcomes supportive relationships are number one." Why? Because relationships emerge and evolve mainly in our subconscious minds. As depicted in the illustration below, We Space expands or contracts depending on the level of supportive relationships among its members. It's all about the informal side of life and work.
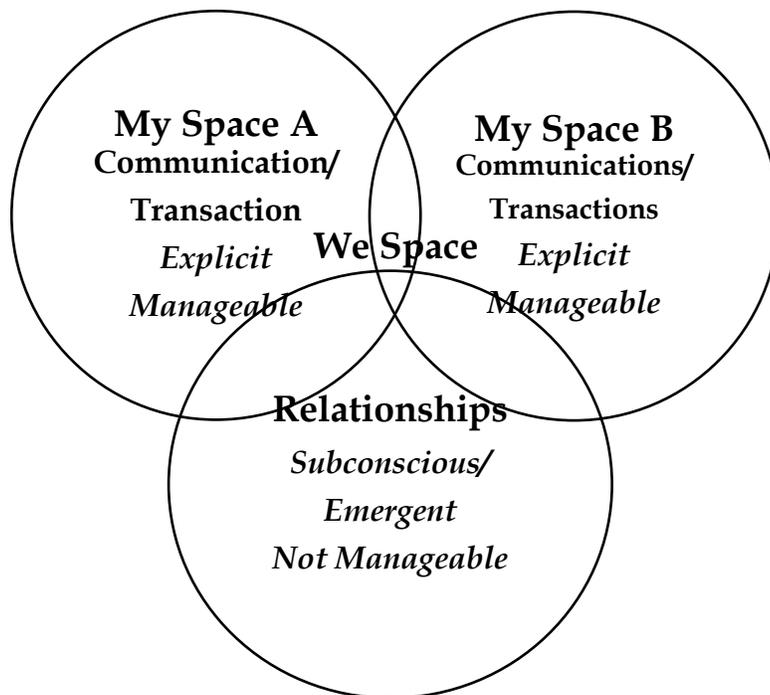
We Space dynamics also are clearly dependent on the makeup of each of its members. As portrayed by the figure below, it evolves around each person's "self-identity." Specifically, how much autonomy they feel they have, what their aspirations are and how capable they think they are in reaching desired personal and group objectives. Identity is not set in stone but evolves slowly throughout the life of an individual.

Autonomy
-Genes
-Life history
-State of brain

Identity

Goals
-Needs
-Wants

Abilities
-Skills
-Resources

Now imagine two or more self-identities of people merging or trying to merge in what I've named "We Space." So, let's take a closer look at the interactions and subtleties of such a union. In doing so, we also need to keep in mind that all of us strive to be distinctive yet enough like others in order to be fully accepted to a group or society. Further, it's also wise to heed Max Ehrmann's advice, "Exercise caution in your business affairs; for the world is full of trickery. But let this not blind you to what virtue there is; many persons strive for high ideals; and everywhere life is full of heroism." It's definitely all a very difficult balancing act.

We Space Development
Prior to or while joining a We Space, potential candidates first do either a conscious (slow and deliberate) or a subconscious (quick and effortless) cost benefit analysis as to what they may be getting into. Employees of an existing enterprise usually have little say as to where they are assigned or reassigned. However, once in place associates will self-determine who they will form close or supportive relationships with.

That happens instinctively whether in a business organization, prison or death camp. Essentially, We Spaces are self-organized nodules within a more encompassing organization-wide informal network or the so-called informal organization. Thus, the combined We Spaces or nodules efforts are the primary determinants of the overall

system transaction costs and benefits. So, let's take a more in-depth peek at how a We Space develops.

We Space formation dynamics are best described with the help of the diagram below. In essence, when two or more individuals meet, for whatever reason, there is a potential to form a We Space for mutually benefit. It can also be just a "bump and run" or hello and goodbye.

Goals:
-Needs
-Wants

Potential

We

My Space A

My Space B

Space

Abilities:
-Skills
-Resources
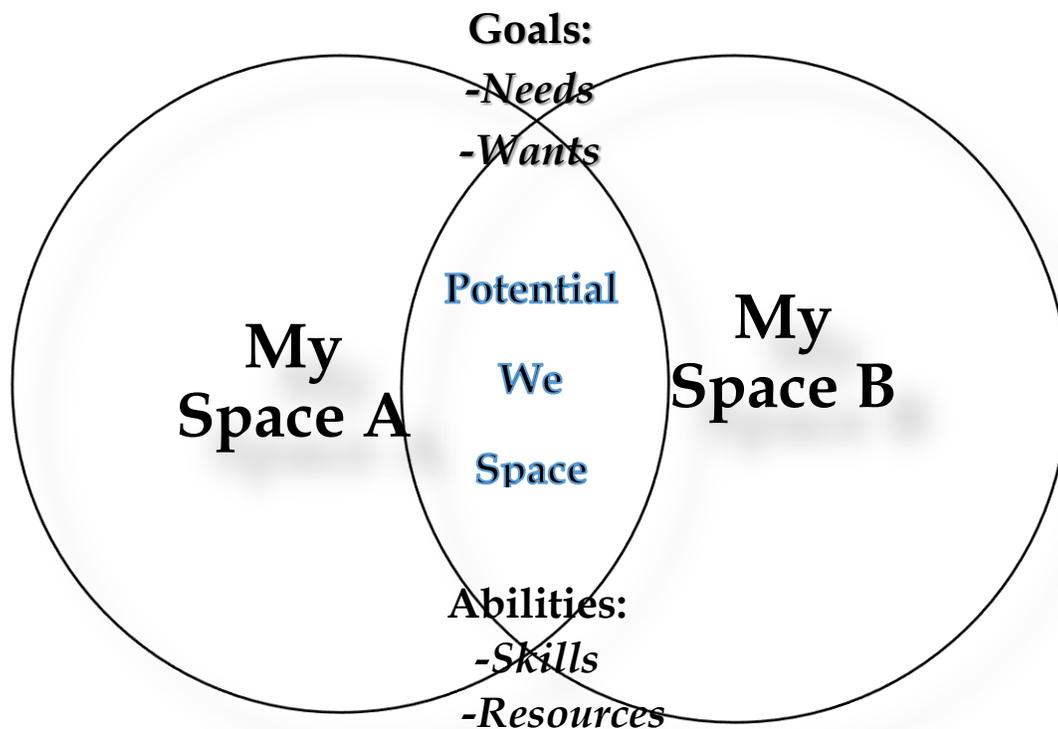
Wheather the chance meeting(s) forms into a We Space depends on the goals and abilities of the people involved. For example, if the parties have overlapping needs and/or complementary skills and resources it makes sense to further engage in mutually beneficial transactions. We Spaces develop in order for its members to accomplish more than they can on their own. It could be a simple but rewarding thing as bieng shielded from a contemtious manager.

If it's a go for We Space then over time members develop a stronger and stronger "shared identity" that's tightly linked to the cohesiveness of the supportive relationship. Further, members also assume different comlementary We Space roles and develop more extensive common goals.

Interactions within a We Space are predominantly carried out by "value added knowledge facilitation" or "catalitic leadership" rather than position power. That is to

say, helping others to reach a solution without directly involving yourself. It also includes what Daniel Goleman calls "other focused guidance:"

- Cognitive empathy (I understand how you see things).
- Emotional empathy (I feel with you).
- Empathic concern (I want to help).

We Space Shared-Identity and Cohesiveness Levels

Clearly, it's not all "wine and roses" within We Spaces. There are several levels of shared-identity and cohesion within them depending on their maturity. I have identified six main levels:

- Collaboration
- Cooperation
- Coordination
- Compliance
- Coercion
- Bump and run.

We can disregard the "bump and run" level since it's only momentary. The other levels, however, can be used to gage how much real value is being added or lost by each nodule within the informal networks. Specifically:

- Collaborative environments (a perceived reward) allows brains to process data easier and faster enhancing productivity and innovation.
- Coercion and compliance (a perceived threat) has the opposite effect.

In addition, Collaborative "We Space" settings contain high levels of psychological safety—trust and mutual respect. Hence, members can speak candidly to each other when needed regarding:

- Relevant ideas.
- Questions.
- Concerns.

Fundamentally, We Space size and performance value is directly related to the degree of shared-identity, cohesion and collaboration—a shared scripted mode dynamic between members. Thus, as shared-identity and cohesion increases, transaction costs decrease and We Space relationship value increases. Accordingly, a method of tracking We Space levels should be a key component of every organization's dashboard.

The Organizational Sweet-Spot

Now let's take all this to the organizational macro level. For starters there are two varieties of We Spaces:

- Productive We Spaces.
    - Primarily for increasing group value.
- Off-Line We Spaces.
    - Primarily for personal fulfillment.

Clearly, you want as many productive We Spaces in an organization as possible. However, no one can hold their nose to the grindstone 100 percent of the time. Therefore, there is nothing wrong (and they are unavoidable) with Off-Line We Spaces. What needs to be avoided are counter-productive Off-line We Spaces that deliberately try to undermine the operations of an organization.

Linked Productive We Space, make up what I've labeled as The Organizational Sweet-Spot. Large or small every viable organization has one. Without a Sweet-Spot a business can't exist. So, every organization should do everything possible to assure that their Sweet-Spot is expanding and not contracting. The key to that is knowing the informal social relationship levels of the key areas of an organization.

Conclusion

The primary intent of this paper was to clarify and get a better handle on the performance hampering, unobserved gap between managerial "conscious" power to regulate behavior with the human "subconscious" drive for self-organization. The vehicle for this is We Space Theory. The concept allows to take a more in-depth look at the social dynamic within each nodule of the informal value networks that exist in every organization. This, in turn, provides a reasonable means to gage the relationship levels, from coercion to collaboration, within key transaction points helping to reduce costs and increasing performance value.

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