

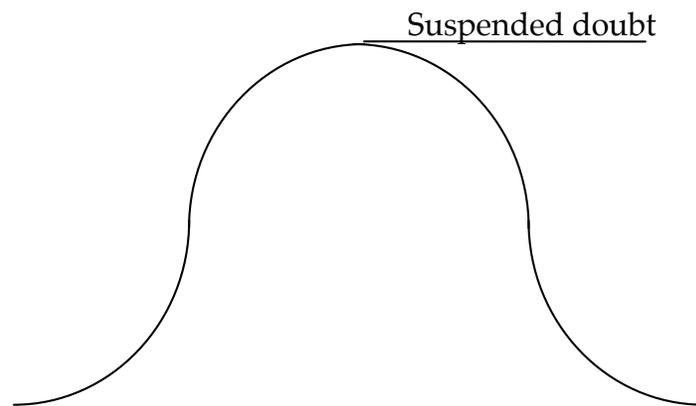
A Jungian View

We can learn a great deal from complex adaptive systems theory but it need not be the only lens through which we view organizational life and systems change. The work of Carl Jung, in particular his notion of the collective unconscious, can provide us with another wellspring from which to draw knowledge and insight about organizations and social systems.

Beginnings and endings are important. For the person, birth and death are fundamental boundaries. Similarly, every aspect of a group comes into existence and develops; and every development is bound for decline. Paradoxically, decline also carries within it the potential for renewal. Further, no group can remain ever unchanging—any effort to keep it that way will ultimately destroy it. Even in the short term it will render the group ineffective.

These basic assumptions can apply to an organization or group in its entirety. They can apply also to any of its organic parts: its goal system, its programs, its structure, its roles, and so on... So, everything goes through a cycle of growth and decline. We will first examine the decline phase and then the growth phase.

The decline of any organization (or a sub-unit, aspect, function, or the like) can be regarded as a series of steps related to *increasing doubt*.



At times the general functioning of a group may be highly acceptable to all. This may be indicated by high morale; the people involved are likely to be cohesive; there are common goals and congruent structures, and so on. We then say that the group exists in a state of *suspended doubt*. It is not that the group is functionally perfect. Rather, its members have for the time being unconsciously agreed to withhold doubt and skepticism. Everything is fine, or seems to be.

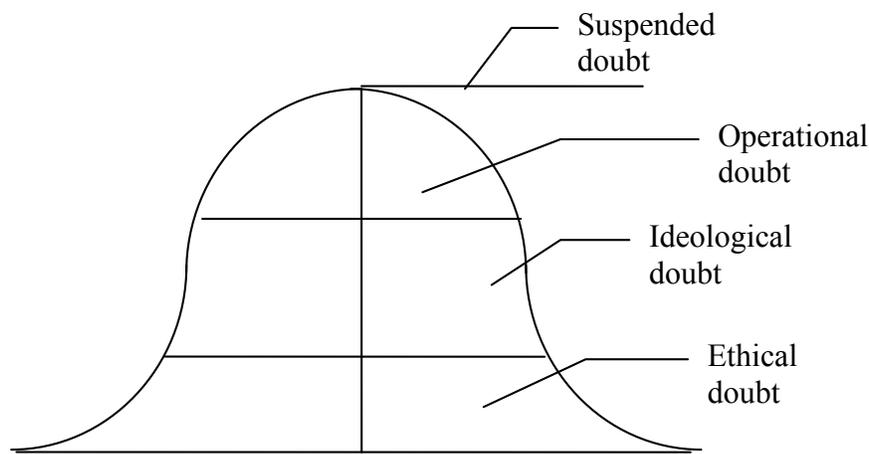
The first sign of decline appears when members start to tell leaders widely that things are not functioning as well as they might. Some doubt begins to be expressed. Colloquially, we might describe someone as saying: “We’ve got a problem here”. The first and most typical response is denial: “No we haven’t; everything’s fine; let’s not fiddle with the system, it’s working well.”

The doubt is about the operations of the group - plans, decisions, coordinating mechanisms, policies, procedures, budgets, structures. It is called *operational doubt*. During times of suspended doubt, people’s comments about the group are positive and characterized by enthusiasm and commitment. Operational doubt moves to a position in which the operational norms are questioned or challenged.

If such challenge continues, it is likely that leaders will ultimately accept the problem to some extent. They then attempt to institute changes designed to address the “problem.” Their intention is to return the system to a state of suspended doubt. Colloquially, we might typify this response by: “Yes, we agree. But we’ve spotted the problem and we’re working on it. All we need to do is fix up the system”. Such attempts may involve setting up a committee, doing a needs analysis, undertaking an organizational diagnosis, hiring a management consultant, or the like ... all expected to establish accurately the nature of the problem and the most appropriate steps to get things “back on track”.

Such attempts, in the long term, tend not to resolve the increasing doubt. In such cases, more often than not, the underlying goal is to “manage the person” asking the question rather than the question itself. The result is often that nothing is really done about the concerns of the members raising the questions.

In turn, their questioning becomes more serious and their doubts deeper.



We now begin to see them questioning the purposes and goals of the group and seeking rational responses rather than the “standard party line”. Their own conviction of belief is in doubt and it no longer undergirds their practice. Typically, members might say things like: “All this patching up is worthless; the whole system is bankrupt and we need to renew the whole lot; we no longer know why we are in this business.”

Such doubt is termed *ideological doubt* for it questions the basic purposes and goals of the group. It is typically met by leaders with an ideology-based response through recourse to the group’s charter or such attitudes as are exemplified in the comment: “That’s the way we’ve always done it and we will continue to do it that way”.

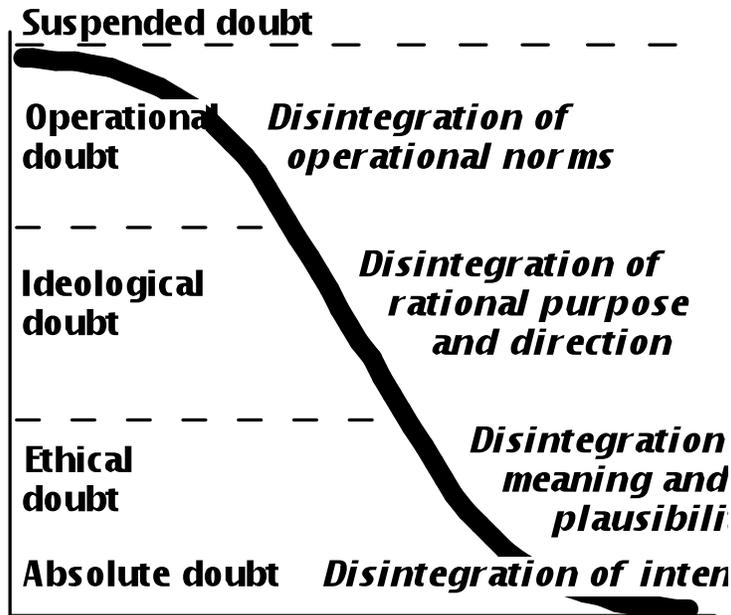
The seeds of alienation are now setting in. The leaders tend to adopt progressively defensive responses to the increasing doubt. This period is characterized by rational argument and debate; conventional wisdom is challenged and the assumptions which underlie the group are critically examined.

If the group remains unresponsive to these concerns, doubt intensifies yet further. Alienation is widespread. The group may be viewed by many as oppressive and uncaring of such things as basic working conditions. Questions about moral or ethical values implicit in the group’s goals or practices are now raised.

The situation reaches a point characterized by the response: “All this renewal is getting us nowhere; the whole system is losing its meaning for us.” Leaders take up increasingly defensive and retrenched positions in the face of such doubt and tend to revert to highly arbitrary and autocratic management styles.

Widespread commitment is lacking throughout the group. The general systems for communication and coordination break down very easily or become inoperable. The state is called *ethical doubt*.

People say things like “Once we were a team pulling together and enjoying our work and each other (suspended doubt). Then we became a club - we had some common interests and generally worked in the same direction but only came together for support and networking, for we found we couldn’t work together (ideological doubt). Now we are a motel - people coming and going in the night without any real connection to one another (ethical doubt). And if we don’t watch out we will soon become a hospice.” This is the last stage before ultimate breakdown or *absolute doubt*.



An organization or group can still continue to exist when there is widespread ethical doubt, but it will be very ineffective and inefficient. Its members get no rewards for their participation and contribution to common goals.

There is widespread breakdown of basic management principles and practices.

John Sherwood originally characterized the next stage of absolute doubt as one of widespread cynicism and despair. The system is barely workable. It may even cease to function, although this is not always the case. In other words, people are saying, “What’s the use — there is nothing at all in it for me”. In times of high unemployment and uncertainty, people in such organizations have fewer options for going to other organizations. In his view, they may therefore suppress such doubt behaviorally yet still experience it emotionally and motivationally.

However, in the light of some work done by Eric March⁴ based on the models supplied by William Bridges, I am less convinced now that absolute doubt is such a dysfunctional state - it may be a necessary transitional state before renewal can occur (see below).

On the other side of the coin in order to grow, an organization has to answer three basic questions:

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| 1 | Who are we? | What is our identity? |
| 2 | Why are we here? | What is our purpose? |
| 3 | How will we give expression to our response to the “who” and the “why”? | What processes will we use to achieve our goals? |

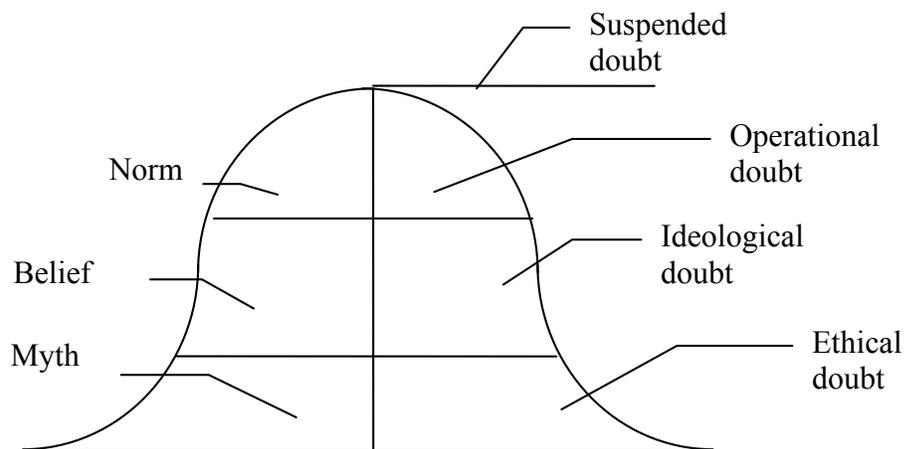
These questions can be examined in reverse order...

The most obvious components of a group are its normative procedures. These include such things as its programs and actions, its roles and the relationships among them, its policies, its communication patterns, and its treatment of members. In other words, they are its standard operating procedures: what it does and how it does it. These components are collectively termed the *norm* level or element of the system.

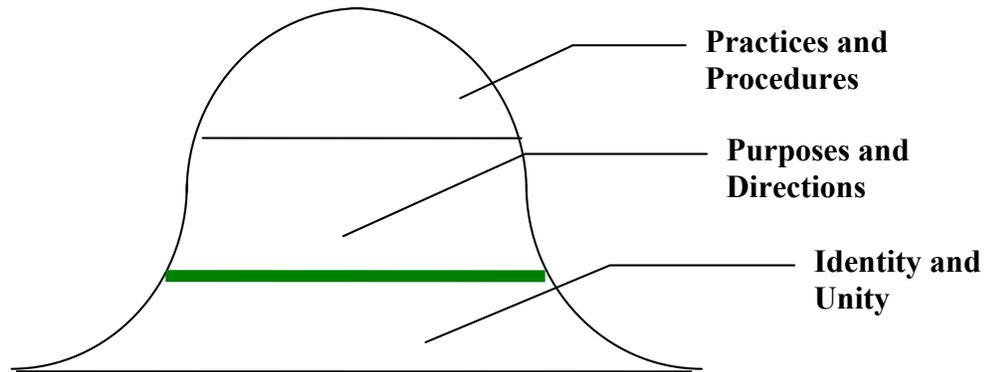
The second element or level is *belief*. By this we mean the group's rational statements of what it hopes to achieve. They are embodied in documents and through key people as statements of purpose or mission, broad aims, goals and objectives. At a more basic level they are the "credos" of the group.

The third element is that of *myth*. This has to do with the unstated values and assumptions which are at the heart of a group. It is from these that its statements of purpose and its goals derive.

By the word myth John Sherwood meant to convey an essential "core of truth" or basic sense of identity which a group possesses. This third layer he described as concerned with the fundamental assumptions we use to order the variety of our experience and give it meaning. He saw it as composed largely of unconscious values and processes. Though pervasive it is yet elusive in the rational world; it deals with time yet is outside of it; it is passed down through the organization from one "generation" to the next. It is essentially non-rational or, as Egan defines a similar concept, arational. (Egan, 1983, p. XIV-1)



In trying to use this framework as a working model (in Egan’s sense of the term) I and my colleague Bob Dick came to realize that the model could produce just as useful insights if it was seen more as a way of depicting phenomena of various depth rather than as points on a life cycle. Accordingly, the three layers came to have the terms of practices and procedures, purposes and directions, unit and identity. This had the added advantage of making them more “user-friendly” to clients.



Throughout the last ten years or so, this basic model has been variously seen as either one of depicting either depth or a context for a stage of growth or decline in a life cycle. However, as a descriptive model of organizational phenomena it did not directly address the issue of culture and in our earlier formulations we came to think of culture as constituting that which Sherwood described as the myth. The transposition of norm to practices and procedures, belief to purposes and directions, and myth to identity and unity allowed us to clarify some of this confusion. The distinction between Identity and Unity and the two layers above is quite important. Both Practices and Procedures and Purposes and Directions are realms of rational phenomena, whereas Identity and Unity is the realm of the unconscious and non-rational. We make a distinction between these two by talking about *above and below the green line*¹. This was aided by the work of Craig Lundberg on culture

¹ A term coined originally by Tim Dalmau in 1982 to signify this distinction, but popularized by John Burgess in 1992 then of BHP.