

Description of a Working Method for Nature Constellations

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Version 1.0 – 1 February 2007

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Introduction

The following material is a translation and adaptation of material in German based on the work of the Sixth-Sense-In-Service¹ team as a whole from 2003-2006, as well as on many things we have learned over the years from our teachers, especially Albrecht Mahr of the Wuerzburg Institute for Systemic Constellations (Ken) and Integrative Solutions, and Karl-Heinz Rauscher (Berchthold).

Nature Constellations follow the same general pattern of work as other constellation work (such as Family Constellations or Organizational Constellations), but is more closely aligned with Systemic Constellation work which attempts to work with a system itself, without predetermination of what the elements or relationships of the system might be. (see http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Systemic_Constellations)

On the other hand, our experiences as a team and individually in constellations involving elements of nature have led us to expand or extend certain aspects of the constellation process normally used for systemic constellations. Every constellation is unique, especially when one is including natural elements with which we as human beings have relatively little direct experience, and one always learns something new. Nevertheless we believe that it is important to have a general approach and an outline of how the constellation process is to proceed, and to

¹ Sixth Sense in Service Team German language website at www.sixth-sense-in-service.net The teams English language website is www.nature-constellations.net

only depart from this approach and pattern when there are specific reasons, or clear needs from within the constellation itself, to do so.

Time Frame

It is important that enough time is available for a constellation that the process is at its end “round” and complete. Under normal conditions the minimum amount of time required is one hour. If the constellation itself runs into some inflexible or externally imposed time constraint, is it possible to “pause” the constellation and restart it later (yes, it really does work! Systems are much more robust than we normally think). The responsibility for ending the constellation in a good way, and at the optimal moment, lies with the Facilitator.

Facilitator instead of “Leader”

In much constellation work written in English the person who supports the participants through the process is known as the “Constellation Leader”. In the recent (29 January 2007) Wikipedia entry quoted above the term “trained facilitator” is used in place of leader. We support and encourage this selection of words. To claim that a human being is “leading” the constellation seems at particular moments in Nature Constellations to be quite inappropriate and reflects only our general hubris with regards to all things not human and not the real situation. One only has to stand in the presence of a 1,000 year old linden tree, not to speak of a five million year old mountain, to realize that our role in this work is to support or facilitate communication and enable movement, and not to lead. The content of the communication and the direction that the constellation will take once it has been set up and started belong to the system itself, and the parts of the system. There is a humility needed - especially in working with natural elements - that the term facilitator better captures.

In addition to the practical side of supporting the constellation process as described below, the Facilitator has the main responsibility to “hold the space” in an energetic sense, although certainly everyone present can help with that as well. “Holding the space” means that there is a felt sense of connection and protection that surrounds all that occurs, regardless of what occurs.

Facilitator Training

As noted in the Wikipedia entry, a facilitator must go through a training process in order to support a constellation process. The training process, as well as the basic qualifications of the facilitator, must be consistent with the area being addressed in the constellation. For example, if one is working therapeutically with individuals then it is necessary not only to have the background and credentials to practice psychotherapy that are required in the location where one practices, but also a constellation training that includes significant therapeutic aspects. A second example: if one practices organizational constellation work then it is necessary to have a sufficient basis in working with organizations, plus a constellation training that includes working with organizations.

Nature constellation work is a new field, but our experience as a team is that facilitators of Nature Constellations are best served by both a background in a particular area where they plan to work with constellations (such as in forest management, animal husbandry, biology, landscape planning, architecture, city planning, shamanism, ecopsychology, environmental activism, etc.) and also a training in constellation work that includes the specific issues and approaches for this application area.

In no way does the term Facilitator make the person who supports the constellation less responsible for the overall process and the well-being of the people who participate in it. To the contrary – when one consciously adopts a facilitator role one may find it easier to be aware of the situations and needs of the people in the group and to support the work in a way that does the most good and the least harm than when one is “leading” the group somewhere.

“Focus” Rather than “Client”

Constellation work came originally from Family Therapy. The one facilitating the constellation in this first application area was a therapist and the person who came with the issue was the “client”. In organizational constellations the person with the issue or problem is almost always called the “client” and the Facilitator is usually called a consultant.

Our experience in Nature Constellation work is that the term “client” often does not fit the situation or the various expectations of the work very well, and may sometimes be jarring. If, for example, an environmental group does a constellation around ways in which an endangered species in a nearby mountain forest may be better protected, the person who provides the input about the issue is not a “client”, but a concerned fellow-being! The term client carries the taste of commercial considerations and so we do not use it unless the constellation is actually occurring in this commercial framework. For example, if a company wanted to re-locate its headquarters into a new town but had questions about the best location, they might very well contract with someone to facilitate their work using Nature Constellations to investigate the potential locations for the company. In this case there is no difficulty with the term Client.

In work it is simpler for us to use the term Focus than Client or some other term, and so you will see it in our documents and hear it when we talk. We use the term Focus because what is needed to begin a constellation in a good way is exactly that, Focus.

The Paradox of Intention

There is a paradox involved in constellation work. The paradox is that we almost always get involved in a constellation when someone has a “problem” and wants things to be different from the way (they perceive) things are. It is their “Intention” to change something, for themselves or in the world. On the other side, a system can only open to us when we drop our intentions and see it as it really is, absent our preconceptions. So the Facilitator, as difficult as it is, must understand and support the intention of the Focus, but stand apart from it at the same time.

Bert Hellinger, the pioneer who first used constellation work in with individuals and families in a form of family systems therapy was very clear on this difficult point: “Having intentions, we act as if we were superior to reality, as if reality were an object of our scrutiny, rather than the reverse, that reality scrutinizes us.”²

Hellinger related this non-intentional strategy to the scientific approach called Phenomenology, and appealed for as much phenomenological objectivity as possible in constellation work.

Taking this phenomenological approach brings with it a great relaxation and freedom in the entire process: our goal in the constellation becomes to look at the systemic situation as it is, and see if there are possibilities within the system for movement or change, and not to “fix something.”

If when we facilitate a constellation we are focused only on the Focus’s intention, then all of our unconscious energy goes into trying to see things that support our idea of a good solution and not see things that contradict that idea. The result is that we can no longer see things as they are, and the real truth of the situation is not able to show itself, and real possibilities for movement may be blocked. This is difficult for many people to understand, much less accept. The most helpful metaphor is the medical model: we want doctors who try to see what is really going on in our bodies, through whatever techniques they can, and not doctors who tell us what they think we want to hear without finding out the truth.

² Hellinger, Bert, *Love’s Own Truths*, Zeig, Tucker, and Theisen, Phoenix, AZ, 2001, p. 3

Participants

The number of participants in a constellation can vary widely. The Wikipedia Systemic Constellations entry (again, as of this writing), says that the number of participants in a constellation is between 10 and 30. What this number refers to is the number of people who are present.

The participants in a constellation are of four types: 1) the Focus, 2) the Facilitator, 3) those people chosen as Representatives, and 4) those who are not chosen as Representatives but form the “Outer Circle” that surrounds the area where the Representatives stand and move.

In our experience, it is possible to have a perfectly good constellation with two people (Facilitator and Focus). In this case some kind of material objects such as colored sheets of paper can be used to setup the positions of the Representatives that have been chosen. Then the Facilitator and/or the Focus can stand in the positions on the colored papers and sequentially experience what is “true” in that moment for that Representative, moving the papers as needed.

There are other techniques, such as the Resonance Method, for working with larger groups of people in constellations.

For Nature Constellations as described here one needs at a group of at least five people. The upper limit is the number of people who can stand in a circle surrounding the working area where the work is done in a circle is small enough that everyone can hear everything that is being said.

There are no special requirements or training required for participants. The ability to stand as a Representative and experience meaningful sensations and receive relevant information is universal. All one needs is a willingness to open to the experience. There are reports of work with handicapped individuals with wonderful results.

Finding a Location for the Constellation

Family and organizational constellations are in the rule done indoors in meeting rooms or other interior spaces. Nature Constellations can also be done indoors, but seem to be especially rich and surprising when they are done outdoors. For working with environmental issues that have a specific location, such as a forest, or with issues that involve buildings or other constructions, it can be very useful to perform the constellation on the relevant location.

Our findings as a team concerning outdoor constellations include 1) the necessity to clearly mark the circle where the work is being done (such as with a rope or circle made of natural materials collected and laid by the participants), 2) openness to treat environmental sounds, whether man-made or natural, as part of the constellation, 3) readiness to include participation by animals or the wind or other natural elements as a part of the constellation, and 4) helpers who stand outside the circle of the constellation and communicate with people who come by and are interested (such as in a public park in a city) to explain what is going on.

The Preparation for the Constellation

Every nature constellation requires some form of preparation for the participants. It is important that so far as it is possible all of the individuals present are brought to feel themselves “present”, that they are in some kind of contact with one another, and that they are open to the sensations of the surroundings and place. The quality of this being present, in contact, and open together appears to enable a “field” into which the form of the constellation can most easily find expression. It is the Facilitator’s job to bring this group experience into being, to the degree possible. The clarity and directness of the constellation is often directly related to the clarity and directness of the group before it begins, so care in this step brings many benefits later.

There are many techniques for preparing a group for a constellation. A few are:

- Walking together through a garden
- Sitting in a circle in silence
- Sense exercises with touching or listening
- Singing a song together

Decide Who Will Provide the Focus

In many situations, such as where a consultant and a client are involved, there will be a clear idea as to who will be the Focus.

But in many other situations, such in a working team or group, or even in a public workshop, it may not be clear who should “go first” with their issue or question to be addressed in the constellation.

In our work it has been useful to have a “round” in the group, even if they know one another well, or are complete strangers, to find out a little of who they are, why they are present, and if they have “something they would like to work on” – but naming this only in a few words, without a big discussion or details. This means that the setup for sitting is on chairs in a circle, if one is indoors, or in a circle standing or sitting on the ground, if one is outdoors.

Usually it is best to complete the round, then review the issues that have been brought up. The real question then becomes, “Where is the energy?” It is best when this is a group consensus. The Facilitator then decides in the case in which there is no group consensus who will “go first” or, in a series of constellations, who will “go next.”

Clarify the Issue

The participants should be already sitting in a circle. Once it is decided who will be the Focus, the Facilitator and/or Focus move to be sitting beside each other in the circle. It is traditional in Constellation work that the Facilitator sits to the left of the Focus, in a supporting position.

Through a series of questions the Facilitator supports the Focus in stating what it is that the Focus would like to explore – that is, the Issue – and what the relevant aspects of this exploration should be. The Facilitator often asks a question of the form “What would a good outcome be like?” There needs to be some reason for doing the work. Curiosity is not enough.

Important aspects of this clarification process are:

- The time taken is sufficient. Clarifying the issue can take only a few moments, or much longer, depending on the complexity of the issue and other factors.
- The Focus presents the Issue, not the Facilitator
- The Facilitator is the catalyst for the Focus, helping him or her to reach clarity about the Issue while holding back (the Facilitator’s) own ideas and concepts of what the Issue is. This requires deep listening and an ability to gently support the process through open questions.
- The Facilitator decides when the Issue is clear enough in order to proceed to the next step. Often this is in large part an intuitive call on the part of the Facilitator, or there is a noticeable change in the body language, facial expression, breathing, or tone of voice of the Focus that signals that he or she is now in contact with the real issue.
- It does happen that after some period of time the Facilitator decides that there is not enough clarity with the issue, or that the issue is clear but the facilitator does not want to work with it. At this point it is the responsibility of the Facilitator to explain the situation in as simple and honest a way as he or she can and stop the process.

Establish the Boundaries of the System and Starting Representatives

In this phase the Facilitator clarifies the boundaries of the system that will be included in the constellation and suggests the initial Representatives. Normally this has been happening in parallel with the clarification of the Issue, whether it has been explicitly mentioned or not. But it can also be done as a separate step after the Clarification of the Issue. The challenge of this process is that in some sense all systems are coupled or connected in some way with other systems. This is complex enough in human and organizational systems, but can be even more difficult in natural systems, where we often know relatively little about how the system operates in reality, but have instead only vague ideas from observations or logic.

The boundaries of a system still leave a lot of flexibility about which specific Representatives will be included in the initial setup of the constellation. It is the responsibility of the Facilitator to suggest to the Focus the Representatives for the initial configuration of the constellation. Sometimes the Representatives needed are obvious, but often selecting which will provide the clearest system picture depends somewhat on the intuition of the Facilitator.

The Focus must agree on the Representatives to be chosen. If the Focus does not agree on the Representatives that the Facilitator has suggested, there has to be some kind of negotiation or discussion. If a Focus insists on inclusion of some Representative that the Facilitator believes is not relevant, there is usually no harm in going ahead and acceding to the request and including the Representative, as it will become quickly apparent in the constellation if the Representative has relevance or not. On the other hand, if the Focus insists that some Representative suggested by the Facilitator should NOT be included, that is usually a cause for some concern. For example, if the Focus says, with significant emotion, "I don't know why you want me to include my dog in this constellation. That makes no sense. We have a wonderful relationship, he is always healthy, and it has nothing to do with my cat being sick. I told you that this is about my cat!", then the Facilitator would normally take this resistance as a sign that it is very important to include the dog, as the dog may be the only one who really knows what is going on with the cat.

It is important for the Facilitator to check to make sure that the actual beings involved as Representatives "agree" to their being included in the constellation. Sometimes this can be checked with the Focus, but often the Facilitator must use an inner question and honor the answer that comes.

Considerations in this phase include:

- The Facilitator may state to the Focus and the participants in a simple way the boundaries of what he or she proposes to include. For example, in dealing with a threatened species of tree, it is critical that the Facilitator clarify whether the constellation is to look at the survival of the specific tree individual that stands next to the circle, the survival of all of this type of tree in this particular forest, or the survival of this type of tree on a global basis. If this was clarified in the Issue discussion with the Focus, that is probably best. But if as it sometimes happens this aspect of the issue was not addressed, it is the responsibility of the Facilitator to clarify it for the Focus and the Participants.
- Clarity about System Boundaries makes for a simpler and less confused constellation. The statement of the boundaries helps everyone to focus and seems to make what follows simpler.
- Stating the System Boundaries clearly helps the Facilitator later in the constellation if another element appears that was not considered "inboundaries", by prompting the Facilitator to make the conscious choice to let it into the constellation or noting it but leaving it out.

- There seems to be no limit as to what one can include as a Representative in a constellation, but usually the more specific and concrete each Representative is the easier it will be to understand what the constellation shows and integrate it in a useful way. For example, in a constellation about a community's rezoning an important greenbelt to make a space for an office complex, one gets 100 times more useful information by putting up as Representatives (among others) for the actual greenbelt and the city planning manager, as contrasted to having Representatives for "Nature" and "Modern Man". And the insights will usually be much more "actionable".

Select the Representatives for the Initial Configuration

As stated above, the Facilitator has the responsibility to propose to the Focus the Representatives that will form the initial configuration in the constellation. Once these have been agreed between the two, the Focus has the responsibility to choose from the participants one person for each of the agreed on Representatives and to position these Representatives in relative positions and orientations in the space inside the circle.

The main challenge of this process is for the Focus to choose and place the Representatives as spontaneously and intuitively as possible, with minimal effect from preconceptions or judgments either about the Representatives or the participants. The Facilitator has the job of assisting the Focus in attaining this spontaneity in so far as it is possible. Even if the choice and placement of the Representatives is done in a non-spontaneous way based on preconceptions or desires of the Focus, the constellation will itself work through these and show a more realistic picture. But this will take time and the initial situation will appear more confused.

Further considerations include:

- The participants have the responsibility to agree or not agree to stand as a specific Representative when asked by the Focus. It is not important that they state any ground for refusing, and they can do so on either personal reasons "I can't stand the idea of being the Representative for an American Airbase used for planes that drop bombs on people", or pure intuition. The refusal should be taken as applying to the specific representation asked, and not for all representations being filled.
- The Facilitator has the responsibility to ensure that the process of selecting and placing the Representatives, as well as the work that follows, is done in a concentrated and clear way, without disturbances (participants talking among themselves for example), and to bring the group back into presence and connection.
- The Facilitator should be able to help the Focus, especially someone not familiar with this way of working, to have some sense of "Normality" and security in the process, even if it may seem strange at first.

The Visualization

After the Focus has placed the Representatives in the space, with specific orientations, he or she sits back down with the other participants in the circle of chairs (if it is done with chairs) or in any case in a circle that surrounds the standing Representatives.

The Representatives are then reminded by the Facilitator to open themselves to whatever body sensations, emotions, impulses, or thoughts that may come to them. This may take a few minutes or a few moments. It is usually best for the Facilitator to wait until all of the Representatives have "felt their way in" before initiating any actions. Usually it is quite clear when someone has begun to experience information relevant to the representation for which

they stand, through changes in body posture, breathing, facial expression, or small body movements.

There are two ways of working past this point. The traditional approach first developed by Hellinger and still practiced by many, especially in therapeutic settings and organizational constellations, is for the Facilitator to go around to the various Representatives, based on what the Representatives display and/or intuition, and ask something along the lines of "How are you doing?" If the Representative has something they want to say, or a movement they want to make (such as a step forward or back), then the Facilitator will essentially give them permission to do it, or may repeat it to the group to make it clear for everyone. "OK, you say you are too close to the fox, that he makes you afraid, and you want to move back some. OK, so do that." This method tends to move at a slower pace, but can be easier to follow than the alternative free movement approach. On the other hand there is less richness in what is displayed, and more spontaneity. One danger is that the subconscious desires and fears of the Facilitator affect what happens and what does not happen in the constellation in a rather direct way.

Another approach to movements and actions by the Representatives that is used more and more is for the Facilitator to instruct the Representatives to open to their feelings, impulses, and thoughts, and to slowly and carefully follow them

In Nature Constellations our team uses this second form of free movement. The Facilitator asks questions of the Representatives or suggests possibilities to them only when they are in some sense stuck or blocked, or appear to need support to make their situation known. This means that we have seen constellations run from beginning to end without the Facilitator having to do or say anything other than recognizing the ending point, which in such a constellation is usually self-evident to everyone.

In some constellations the need for an additional Representative to come into the constellation is signaled in some way. In such a case it is the responsibility of the Facilitator to bring in and place the new Representative, or to ask the Focus to do so. For example, if a Representative says something like, "I feel something behind me. I am afraid of it." The Facilitator might choose to ask a participant to stand in that position behind the person. It is not important or even useful to at such a point "name" the Representative that has just entered, except to reflect what has been stated by a Representative "I am bringing someone in now to represent that which you are afraid of." It is better to let the process unfold with the new Representative included.

If another Representative is needed and there are no more participants available, one can use a piece of paper, a cushion, chair, backpack, or whatever else synchronistically comes to hand in place of the human Representative. The point is not the object, but the relationships and reactions of the other Representatives to it.

In some cases a participant sitting in the outer circle, who was not asked to be a Representative, may have sensations, impulses, or feelings during the constellation that he or she believes are actually part of the constellation but belong to some Representative that has not yet been placed. "Best practice" in such a situation is for the Participant to signal to the Facilitator what is going on. The Facilitator then determines what is being reported and decides whether to have the person go into the constellation at that point, or wait for a later point, or not go in at all. The most important point may be to have what information has come up clearly spoken into the circle, and acknowledged.

What transpires, then, in a constellation? It is much better to experience it than to try to write or read about it. Think of a ballet where the movements are not choreographed by a person, but by the underlying reality of a system that has been asked to show itself. Add to that a stage play with words not written by a playwright but by the beings of the Representatives themselves, by the fabric of the consciousness of reality.

How does it function? This is also a difficult question, although there are glints of possible scientific explanations in recent years that may provide explanation. In the meantime, like riding a bicycle, it is something easier to learn and do than to explain.

As the constellation approaches some kind of clarity or resolution, and if there has been a Representative for the Focus person, the Facilitator often will have the Focus come into the constellation and stand in the place of his or her Representative (who may take a step back or leave the constellation and sit down). This enables the Focus to experience directly the configuration at the end of the process.

When is a Constellation over? A constellation is over when the Facilitator says it is over. The optimal point is when something significant concerning the Issue has shown itself and there is a state of some balance in the overall picture. For example, we may now know (from an example above), that the city planning manager is jealous of a business building project in another town and is therefore breaking the zoning change rules. Or at least that is what the Representative of the City Planning Manager just said in the constellation. As soon as it was said, that Representative and all the others relaxed. And the Representative of the local environmental club (the Focus who is now standing in this position) was able for the first time to look into his face, and they both smiled. "I think we can leave it right there," says the Facilitator, looking around for any objections from the Representatives or Participants.

After the constellation is over the Focus goes to each of the individuals who have stood as a Representative and "Releases" them by taking their hands and saying something like, "Thank you, you are now James again" as a way of helping each individual step out of the Representative they have been in and back into their normal selves. It is the responsibility for each person to themselves internally step back from the Representative as well. It is a little like having been in a very good film, where we identified in a strong way with one of the characters, at the end of the movie. We can remember the experience, but we are not confused about who we really are.

Although it can sometimes look simple from the outside, the role of Facilitator is a challenging one.

- The Facilitator must keep an eye on the constellation as a whole and the situations of each of the Representatives, even though involved in some part of it at a particular moment.
- The Facilitator has a deep trust in the process as a whole and in each detail as it unfolds. This provides a kind of bridge for the Focus to experience this trust as well.
- The Facilitator is grounded in his or her body, and through their body to the earth, even though open to even delicate sensations and perceptions.
- The Facilitator avoids as much as possible pre-conceived ideas about what is showing itself and operates in service to the system that unfolds, looking for balance in that system.