

# COLLECTIVE INTELLIGENCE

## AS A CAUSAL GROUND



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## INTRODUCTION

**P**EERING DOWN THROUGH A GLASS BOTTOM boat, we can see a school of fish, each one independent of the other, and yet the school as a whole morphs and changes form as the entire collective moves as one. Likewise, we see birds in flocks flying in the skies, each bird an independent entity but the entire flock seems to have a collective intelligence that operates as a unit. Herds of animals—sheep, wolves, cows, for example, behave in much the same way, each creature having separateness, but flowing along with the collective as if there is intelligence outside of any one creature, even as each creature has its own autonomy.

Collective intelligence seems to be a product of nature itself, arising with the earliest of mobile life then evolving in and through humanity, from tribal and mythic collectives, through contextual and systemic collectives, through causal collectives. These two forms, the individual and the collective, seem to be in a rocking chair relationship. Sometimes the individual sense of self seems to be foregrounded and sometimes the collective appears to be the primary entity. This very rocking back and forth seems to contribute to the energy of individual and collective evolution itself (O'Fallon, 2013).

Because of the evolutionary aspects of collective expression, some definitions are in order. We know that humans are different than a school of fish, a flock of birds or a pack of wolves, our evolutionary predecessors. What we have discovered about collective consciousness in humans is that it has some of the same qualities as our earlier forms, but one that up shifts from concrete, through subtle through causal consciousness and intelligence. We want to highlight the latest form of collective intelligence that we are experimenting with, Collective Causal Consciousness, but it is important to situate this experience within the trajectory of the evolution of consciousness itself.

## DEFINITIONS

*Concrete Collective Intelligence:* In our human world the earliest collectives that form are related to the concrete behaviour of the collective, which takes

precedence over the independence of the individual in what we call concrete collectives. Concrete collective intelligence revolves around shared rules, which are projected outwardly on everyone; and each individual introjects those rules as their unquestioning identity. Thus each person represents a human expression of a bird in a flock for they can move within the collective human flock but not outside of it, and the collective intelligence is concrete, based on strict behavioural rules. Individual behaviour is back-grounded to these collective norms and the result is uniform conformity (O’Fallon, 2008).

*Subtle Collective Intelligence:* A subtle collective is defined as a context, or a system. Here, one begins to feel the shared subtle energy with and between participants, feeling the effect of that collective energy “forming” them as individuals. Later they realize that they themselves are a part of projecting their own subtle energies and behaviours, beliefs, etc into the collective, even as they are introjecting these very energies, subtle behaviours and beliefs into themselves; they can begin to see how they have an effect on these contexts and systems even as the systems and contexts have an effect on their own individual subtle shape and identity. Subtle collective intelligence is a very advanced and profound, connective and energetic experience in which individual knowing seems sourced from contextual subtle energies, and intuition (O’Fallon, June 2010).

*Causal Collective Consciousness:* This is a rare form of collective consciousness, which we have been experimenting with for the past ten years at Pacific Integral in our Generating Transformative Change program. To understand causal collective intelligence, we need to define the word “Causal”, for it has many different connotations. “Causal” is often defined as an individual attainment, alluding to emptiness, illusion, very subtle, and/or the constructing nature of the individual mind that makes up stories, words and boundaries which are ever changing, and thus are fleeting and illusionary. Each mind-made fabrication is essentially seen as empty, to be replaced later by another one. Thus, the evolutionary thrust is experienced in each moment with the realization that nothing concrete or subtle is permanent, and a flow through time and space is experienced resulting in the empty but fertile potential. Like concrete and subtle intelligence, this is first experienced as a “state” – i.e., it is a temporary realization that can be experienced all along the path of evolution. Thus, anyone can participate in Causal Collective intelligence as a temporary state, which matures into a permanent stage that one can walk around with as an ordinary part of existence. This is the individual expression

of causal consciousness (T. O’Fallon, Fitch, G. , & Ramirez, V., 2011).

A stabilized conscious causal collective begins to arise when enough individuals walk around with individual causal recognition and expression and share a collective experience and understanding of how they can source from this infinite causal intelligence, influencing concrete and subtle collective intelligence by collectively accessing the causal field of existence – that is, they begin to “causalize” the former, unbending subtle-contextual-systems and concrete community expressions that they have lived within. These communities tend to release the subtle ceilings that hold people in place and give space for the individuals within them to soar in their individual causal expressions seated in and arising out of this empty creative potential of the infinite causal ground.

#### CAUSAL COLLECTIVE INTELLIGENCE: PRACTICE AND EXPERIENCE

Imagine sitting in a board meeting or legislative session in which every individual has entered the meeting having released all narrow personal and political agenda, in favour of what is best for the good of the whole of existence. Each person and the whole group remain present, with a clear, vast, and pure openness, empty of bias through the entire meeting, receiving and exchanging information, egos not attached to personal will or agenda. Each and all remain open, bringing forth the best in each, in service to the individuals, the organization and the whole of humanity, of sentience and of existence, past, present and future. Throughout the meeting each person is energized, creative and engaged, offering his or her particular skills and gifts fully. The clear, open, spaciousness of awareness is palpably present, individually and collectively, so that ideas and other subtle forms of contribution flow freely. All individuals move in and out of leadership spontaneously, stepping up when their particular natural skills, knowledge and experience are required (R. Kegan, Lahey, L., 2014). Through a willingness to surrender attachments to specific outcomes while remaining present to the intended results of a collective vision, the individuals simultaneously experience an infusion, distinction and integration of agency and communion, unleashing unique creative potential in service to the whole. Likewise, the collective serves each individual, affirming and supporting each person to bring his or her best skills forward. When conflicts arise they are faced honestly, with an understanding that there is a deeper truth required in order to move forward, usually a truth that considers the wellbeing of a larger

perspective or larger whole. The result is a spacious and open field for collective intelligence and collective causal consciousness to arise and offer up the best that humanity can offer itself in thought, word and deed. (Ramirez, 2013)

After the meeting, each person is energized to contribute their skills and experience toward the next steps of a clarified, collective purpose and vision; aware of the significant role they play in actualizing that vision. This organization is one that effortlessly attracts the highest calibre of professionals who are skilled, conscious, compassionate, and desire to contribute ethically to the future of our planet. The atmosphere is one of mutual respect, mutual care and a desire to work well together to produce original and high quality products and services for the good of all.

#### A C L O S E R L O O K

The willingness to release personal will and agenda into an empty spacious field of awareness (Ramirez, 2013; Scharmer, 2007) is the first and necessary action in this process. Most people can learn how to enter a state of Causal Awareness over time, and some have developed the capacity to live from this level of awareness as a baseline (O'Fallon, 2012). A facilitator who has stabilized this stage of awareness may remind everyone to empty their awareness into a deep, interpenetrating silence that pervades the entire field of individual and collective consciousness. People speak only when moved by a deeper impulse, on behalf of the whole, becoming a clear conduit for the transmission of wisdom, innovation and reason. The words are spoken through the resonance of the heart, from the clarity of vast open awareness, embodied through the uniqueness of the human who is speaking, yet spoken on behalf of all of existence. The words ring true with visionary, inspired realism based on that person's particular gifts and areas of expertise and yet not limited by those constraints. Her words inspire another voice to speak for the whole, and another, until the conversation is alive with engaged potential and excitement, where no one and everyone are responsible for the experience and results, both in the presence of the room and for the emerging outcome. This meeting evokes and invites the best within each individual in terms of personal gifts and resources on all levels, and provides fertile ground for collective expansion, stimulation and wakefulness within the particular team of collaborators.

The collaboration of hearts, minds and consciousness on behalf of the collective well being of existence brings a new sensibility and order to priorities

and values. These individuals and collectives can see more clearly global systems, structures, institutions and individuals who are both preventing and creating greater health, well-being and aliveness. From this place of clarity and openness, using all of the resources at their disposal, they begin to create new structures and re-order current, usable structures, systems, and processes that work for all of life, not just for their organization, but for a universal embrace that encompasses as much as awareness can hold. The transcultural human virtues (Ray, 2010) of compassion, generosity, humility, service, gratitude, beauty, truth and justice with universal care (Gilligan, 1993; R. Kegan, 1994) for the largest embrace imaginable (the entire planet and beyond) are foundational assumptions of everyone in this leadership collective.

Through Causal Collective Intelligence, unimagined resources and possibilities seem to appear out of nowhere through the infinite portal that is revealed through this collective consciousness and willingness to receive. Individuals in these collectives are energized, passionate, creative, happy, engaged, efficient and productive; and the collective itself becomes an attractor for others who are awake to this capacity for causal collective consciousness. We have seen these results bear out repeatedly in our causal leadership programs on three continents and among the staff of our own company. Globally engaged individuals in and from Ethiopia, Kenya, Australia, New Zealand, India, Iran, Turkey, Ireland, the United Kingdom, Mexico, Peru, France, Palestine, Kosovo, Norway, Canada and the US have cultivated causal collective consciousness. Because the best in each individual is permitted and called forth in relation to the whole, they are more uniquely themselves, more emotionally and relationally adept, and collectively more creative, productive and aware. They then take this learning and these skills into their own communities, cities and nations, inspired to impart this same innovative potential to as many people as possible.

Imagine a world in which our corporate and political leaders have the willingness, desire and capacity to act on behalf of the whole of existence. Causal collective consciousness offers us this potential.

#### P R A T I C A L S T E P S T O C R E A T I N G C A U S A L C O L L E C T I V E I N T E L L I G E N C E

In our experience in working with causal collectives and collective intelligence, we have identified several areas of practice that support their development.

To open and build a causal field in a collective, facilitation is needed to build the foundation. To

promote a causal field it is necessary to have individuals in the field who embody the causal awareness of awareness, who identify with and express the causal Self, and who have permission and agency to shape the container. Through a variety of practices, injunctions and expressions the collective is drawn into causal states and eventually into identification with these states and ultimately to a degree of self-generativity with them.

On the surface, this work is similar to an experience one might find in sitting meditation with others, but this is only the beginning. Our work is oriented towards “bringing meditation into life” in the sense that the capacity to embody and hold a causal awareness is sustained not just in meditation practice, but in the midst of all actions of life, as we relate, work, collaborate, communicate, and so on. This requires us to step into the next territory of practice, which involves developing causally grounded facility in the concrete and subtle territories. Causal collectives must be skilled in all forms of collective work, physical, emotional, cognitive in a way that allow the mind and heart to stay open to the deeper, empty ground as we work and play in those dimensions. As an example, in GTC and in our organization, we work deeply with authentic communication and intimacy, with projection and introjection, and emotional intelligence, so that as challenges arise they can be processed skilfully.

As participants gain the capacity to be aware of the empty and still ground in themselves, in each other, and in all of existence while being in community, they begin to work with the concrete, subtle and causal territories dynamically, moving through form to emptiness, to a sense of the empty/full All, that is and includes everything, and from that ground they learn to let come deeper forms of direction and knowing. This process involves a kind of movement through a U Process (Scharmer, 2007), by opening the mind to all concrete experience without judgment, opening the heart to all subtle experience without separation or cynicism, and letting go free of fear into what wants to move us to higher expression. Participants first practice this individually, then as a collective, and eventually learn to continually return to the empty ground together allowing a deeper intelligence to emerge through them. Since conventional images and practices around collaboration are deep habits, no matter how evolved one’s awareness is, awareness tends to narrow when the body and mind are in motion. Thus, ongoing practice and learning are important.

One of the essential capacities that supports this movement is working skilfully with habits of separation and identification that arise in the subtle

ego. The self and collective are formed in the mind and may go through a variety of re-incarnations, moment to moment, as we construct and re-construct our sense of what is. We can become collectively aware of how we conceive of ourselves in every moment and let go into more fluid, interpenetrative forms of being. Working on multiple levels at once, causal collectives engage in a kind of meta-reflection as needed to identify the stories, constructs, and autopoietic patterns that shape themselves and the collective. Individuals learn to take action and speak in causal collectives with the explicit knowledge that while their words and actions may come from them, they don’t own them and that anyone else in the collective might have just as easily spoken them.

Over time, practice supports the deepening of our collective consciousness, action and wisdom. We bring forth in our work an evolutionary developmental perspective that spans birth to enlightenment (T. O’Fallon, 2011) and recognizes the extraordinary diversity of perspective and embodiment that can occur even in the smallest of collectives. We seek to seed this understanding in causal collectives so they can deepen into a wide view of who they are and what their potential is, and to engage in their own evolutionary potential and developmental movement. We work to support the immanent joy that is the human potential in each individual and collective, deepening love, moral sense, ethical action, play, wonder, humour, all of which serve the opening into collective intelligence, as the one consciousness lives in ecstasy and the delight of being, and is each one’s birth right. We support the collectives to gain greater and greater autonomy and self-generativity, by allowing them to take greater steps on their own, embody the practices that support their opening to the causal ground and collective development.

Finally, causal collectives, like their participants, engage in collaborative action in the world. We encourage individuals and collectives to step into the world and experiment with the promptings that call them. In doing so, it is necessary to develop collaborative approaches that support the level of complexity that exists at the deeper territories of awareness that arise in the causal states and stages. It is also essential to learn to comfortably act in the emergent, with limited concrete knowledge and foresight. Theory U (Scharmer, 2007) begins to point to this potential, as emergent futures take shape through experiments or prototypes. New organizational frameworks (Robertson, 2013) that allow for the enactments of potential in complex contexts without the need to fully map causes and conditions are useful. In practice, this is acting from



a deep sense of purpose on limited knowledge without a need for a master plan (while building on every other practice we have mentioned). Additionally, we have developed a model of leadership that has become known as Causal Leadership, (Ramirez, 2013) which re-interprets leadership in light of an understanding of individual and collective as deeply interpenetrated, in which leadership can be and is present in each “I” and “We” in any moment. Just like in our endeavour to learn and master any new skill, the development of causal collective consciousness takes trust and a sense of humour, in addition to frameworks and practices that support it.

#### RESEARCH AND SUMMARY

In support of understanding the levels of collective intelligence, Pacific Integral has ongoing longitudinal research where each person in our cohorts are given a developmental assessment, and then followed up every two years. This research is now in its 10th year, following over 200 people and 17 collectives from various countries and all segments of society. Some of these collectives have been tested and retested 5 times. The results show that with the experience of our Causal Intelligence experiment in our GTC program, individual and collective intelligence continues to grow of its own accord. This supports our premise that causal collective consciousness is a compelling, enlivening, engaging and deeply productive form of awareness. Causal collective consciousness has the potential to transform society and the world as we know it.



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