Understanding Organizational Design, Culture and Change Management from a Complex Systems Perspective

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It is common in today's executive education market to see courses being offered from consultants and academics that purport to teach organizational design, organizational change, or culture management. While there exists a wealth of literature on these subjects from a business and social science perspective, the tools and methods taught rarely achieve sustainable desired outcomes. One of the reasons such approaches fail is the top down nature of the assessment tools and change management strategies.
This presentation hypothesizes that the introduction of complex systems principles as a technique for understanding complex organizations can make a significant difference in the generation of theories, tools and methodologies for designing organizations, managing change, and influencing culture.

The presentation poses a framework for describing complex organizations as networks of agents based on a biologically inspired paradigm. It explores a model of fundamental behaviors of classes of agents and how to ascertain the emergent behavior in the organization of such complex distributed systems of agents with various fundamental behaviors. By experimenting "bottoms up" with basic behavior changes among specific agent classes, the effect on emergent behavior can be observed or modeled. Incremental adjustment to such behaviors is a control method that allows modification of emergent behavior. Such "inverse design" is the opposite of top down mandates for change or design. The presentation concludes with a short list of useful methods that follow this line of thinking. The purpose of the talk is to share ideas with the intent of influencing thought for furtherance of these concepts.