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Apithological System Dynamics in Strategic Sustainability Conversations

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When facilitating social learning processes in multi-disciplinary strategic conversation groups for societal sustainability the dynamics of knowledge diversity, identity framing, values conflicts and information inequality will often surface. These can result in both generative and dissipative structures in the formation of information, collaboration and meaning in such conversation groups. The recognition of these dynamics can assist in informing the facilitation of those constructions.

This paper records learning experiences from two strategic conversation groups involving twenty six multi-disciplinary participants which were formed to examine macro-sustainability issues in ten distinct spheres of sustainability impacts. After identical and joint initial formation processes, the participants formed into two groups of equal diversity in gender, age and background disciplines to work on identical programs. One group was defined by the homogeneity in operant levels of consciousness, the other for its diversity in cognitive frames and perspectives. Distinctly different results occurred in the processes and the quality of outputs of the two groups.

The apparent divergence between the two groups highlighted the measured contrasts in individual learning intentions, self-perception of held knowledge and their commitment to collaboration. The initial productive performance of the homogeneous group was in contrast to initial dysfunction within the heterogeneous group. Following a learning intervention and the introduction of a specifically designed inquiry process using the principles of integral methodological pluralism, the heterogeneous group learned to become highly productive and process proficient, although the conditions for conflict remained essentially unchanged.

The study raises questions about the significance of information paucity, knowledge humility and the perceived value of collaborative inquiry in generating meaningful multi-stakeholder solutions to complex sustainability challenges. The apithological (*generative*) and non-apithological (*non-generative*) dynamics of the two groups altered over the ten strategic conversations held. The presence of an *emergent trichotomy* of formative conditions in the structures of information, communication and intention was concluded as being significant. Various observations are made on the formation dynamics of the generative conditions necessary to enable successful multi-disciplinary collaborations for societal-level sustainability outcomes.