Chapter 6

HOLISTICALLY EDUCATING GRADUATE STUDENTS FOR THE CONCEPTUAL AGE USING THE PROCESS ENNEAGRAM™

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Grounded in the theories of complexity science, the Process Enneagram © was developed by Dr. Richard N. Knowles as a tool to help people in various social systems and organizations establish meaningful connections and work together effectively to accomplish common goals. In the last decade, the practical applications of the Process Enneagram in steel mills, coalmines, school boards, credit unions, law firms, and children's homes have demonstrated its significant value and transformative capacity for solving complex problems across the world. This paper contributes to the existing literature in two ways: (1) This is the first formal case study on the use of the Process Enneagram in the context of an institution of higher education; and (2) This particular application focused on the development of a value system and co-creation of an open and stimulating social environment rather than solving problems for people with already shared experiences.

INTRODUCTION

Learning takes place most effectively in a self-driven and socially stimulating environment. One of the biggest challenges in higher education is student engagement in the classroom. This paper reports the first formal case study on the use of the Process Enneagram © to help the university professor and students co-create a meaningful and shared learning space. I begin with a brief introduction to the Process Enneagram with its theoretical foundation in complexity science and development of the practical tool. I then provide the details on how the Process Enneagram was applied in a graduate seminar at a large public university in the northeast of the United States. I conclude this article with a summary of key lessons learned from this experience and a discussion on its further implications.

COMPLEXITY SCIENCE AND THE PROCESS ENNEAGRAM

Complexity science emerged from the development in a number of natural science and later social science disciplines such as mathematics, biology, physics, chemistry, computer science, economics, sociology, and psychology. The convergence of the discoveries in these fields has led to a general approach to the study of *complex adaptive systems* (CAS)—collections of individual agents who have the freedom to act in unpredictable ways, and whose actions are interconnected such that one agent's action changes the context for other agents. This approach has been used to understand systems such as termite colonies, forest ecosystems, stock markets, immune systems, working groups, and networks of organizations (Goldstein, 1996).

Each term in the name of CAS points out a critical aspect of complexity science: *Complex* implies diversity among various elements of different characteristics. *Adaptive* suggests the capacity to change based on lessons learned from previous experience. And a *system* is made of interdependent and interactive single parts and it is more than just the sum of all (Lacayo, 2007). Therefore, the fundamental principles of complexity science emphasize that an organization is a living system not a machine; individual agents within the system can self-organize and make changes without central control; free flow of diverse information is essential for the system to evolve; order is emergent; the change process is nonlinear; and small changes can have big impacts (Capra, 1996; Wheatley, 1992). Grounded in the theories of complexity science, the Process Enneagram was developed as a practical tool to (1) help people in various social systems and organizations solve complex problems, (2) establish meaningful connections, and (3) work together effectively to accomplish common goals. The Process Enneagram is known to be the only tool to fulfill all the three-abovementioned purposes simultaneously.

Although the enneagram was first conceived by a Russian spiritual teacher Gurdjieff, introduced to the West in the early 20th century, and later elaborated in the writings of Ouspensky (1949) and Blake (1996), it had limited real world applications until the development and publication of the Process Enneagram (Knowles, 2002). Visually, the Process Enneagram is a diagram that consists of nine points evenly placed on a circle and connected by different types of lines (see Figure 1). These nine points are marked with numerical and corresponding textual labels (0—Identity, 1—Intention, 2—Issues and Ambiguities, 3—Relationship, 4—Principles and Standards, 5—Work, 6—Information, 7—Learning and Potential, 8—Context and Structure, and 9—Identity). The different types of lines indicate different processes. There are three primary processes: The Circular Process (marked by the circular solid grey line through points 0, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9), the Zigzag Process (marked by the solid red arrows from points 1 to 4, 2, 8, 5, 7, and back to 1), and the Triangular Process (marked by the dotted black line through points 0, 3, 6, 9). The Circular Process represents the elements visible to the agents in a CAS. It is the starting process and helps establish baseline data. The Zigzag Process represents the unfolding of a world that is invisible to most people. It is the process of transformation. The elements on the right side of the Process Enneagram can help agents in a CAS co-create a shared value system and an open and stimulating environment. The elements on the left side of the Process Enneagram can guide the agents to realize the values in their actions and accomplish their common goals. The Triangular Process represents the process of self-organization. It is the core process of the Process Enneagram because it is the source of meaning and integrity. The Process Enneagram helps people set boundaries, initiate self-organization and meaningful communication, uncover the true challenges that underpin the complex

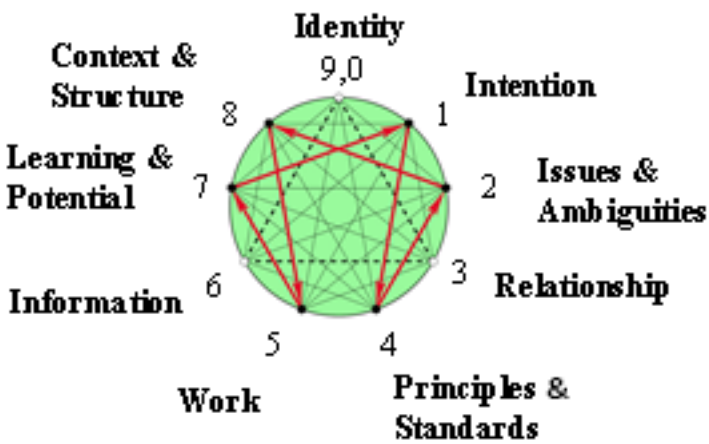

Figure 1 *The Process Enneagram*

problem they are facing so that they can establish open and trusting relationships, coordinate and collaborate to create effective and sustainable solutions (Knowles, 2002).

From 2002 to 2012, the practical applications of the Process Enneagram in steel mills, coalmines, school boards, credit unions, law firms, and children's homes have demonstrated its significant value and transformative capacity for solving complex problems across the world. This paper contributes to the existing literature in two ways: (1) This is the first, published formal case study on the use of the Process Enneagram in the context of an institution of higher education. (2) Reports on the use of the Process Enneagram to this date have been predominantly focusing on solving problems for people with already shared experiences. The case presented here rather focuses on the development of a value system and co-creating an open and stimulating social environment for a group of people without preexisting relationships or shared experiences.

APPLYING THE PROCESS ENNEAGRAM IN A UNIVERSITY CLASSROOM

In Spring 2011, I applied the Process Enneagram in a graduate seminar on Entertainment-Education that I taught in the Department of Communication, University at Buffalo, The State University of New York. A total of nine graduate students enrolled in the seminar, including five Ph.D. students and four M.A. students, eight from the Department of Communication and one from the Department of Geography, five were male and four were female, three were American students and six were international students. Most of them had not met before this class.

Introducing The Process Enneagram

The Process Enneagram was used as an icebreaker activity on the first day of class, January 19. After showing a TED talk by Sugata Mitra on Children-Driven Education, the class had a short discussion about how education is a self-organizing system and learning is an emergent phenomenon. Then the attention was brought to the diagram drawing on the foam board taped on the back of the classroom wall. The students were told that this diagram is called the Process Enneagram and it was developed by Dr. Richard N. Knowles based on his work experience in various organizational settings and his understanding of theories of complexity science, self-organization and leadership. The students were also informed that the Process Enneagram had been applied in different contexts to help people understand how activities take place and create an open, effective, and sustainable social environment to work together and achieve

their common goals. Then the students were invited to participate in a class activity that used the Process Enneagram to explore a research question: "How do we make this class the best it can be?"

Running The Process Enneagram

Given that the students and I did not know much about each other, a combination of the Zigzag Process and the Triangular Process were adopted in this context and the class went through the elements together (following the points 0—1—4—2—8—5—7—3—6). For each element, I first explained what it meant, provided specific examples, and then invited the class to share their thoughts and questions. As our discussion went on, I made notes on the board and color-coded them to correspond to the specific elements (see Figure 2).

Identity: Who Are We?

I opened up and introduced myself first: "I am the instructor and I would also see myself as a facilitator and a participant in the process of learning and communication. I am a new faculty member in the department. I am passionate about the subject of this seminar entertainment-education and am very happy to share with you the exciting practice and research in this field." I also shared a short personal story about how I became interested in entertainment-education. Subsequently, all the students were invited to share a few things about themselves and how they see themselves as related to the theme of the class. Many students pointed out their interests and work experiences related to entertainment-education such as working with a NGO to promote organ donation, participating in anti-smoking campaigns, broadcasting radio programs, and organizing events at fan clubs.

Intention: What Would We Like To Have Accomplished In The Next 16 Weeks?

I distributed course syllabus and used this element to propose and discuss specific goals with the students. Some goals raised by the students were general (e.g., self-discovery, peer-to-peer learning) whereas others were more specific (e.g., Why American shows are so popular? How to use the entertainment-education strategy to train other educators? How can we work with media industry practitioners?). But all of them turned out to be very useful.

Principles & Standards: What Should Be Our Ground-Rules To Achieve The Goals?

We talked about the use of technology such as cell phone and laptop during class meetings. I told the students I would expect everyone to take the responsibility of

doing the best we could. Sharing was important. And there were no stupid questions. I then asked the students if they had any suggestions. The issue of self-plagiarism came up. I had a chance to clarify the school policy. We also agreed on having a 15-min break and the boundary of appropriate media content to show for class discussions.

Issues & Ambiguities: What Challenges Might We Encounter In The Coming Weeks?

I brought up the issues of time management and possible challenges with severe winter weather and asked the students what problems they thought we might have. They proposed to organize a Skype conference call in case of severe weather. I also got to clarify the different purposes and requirements for some of the assignments.

Structure & Context: What Are The Physical And Social Environments We Are In?

I gave examples of the institutional context and the class schedule and opened it up to the students for further thoughts.

Work: What Are We Going To Do In This Class?

I went over the course materials, readings, assignments, research paper, and course website. I then asked the students if there were anything they wanted to add, remove, change, or clarify. I was glad to be able to incorporate the specific class information into this process and made small changes to respond to the students' requests.

Learning: What Are We Going To Learn? How Are We Going To Learn It Together?

Since it was only the first class, we didn't spend much time on this element.

Relationship: What Would We Want Our Relationships To Be Like In This Class?

I proposed the characteristics such as openness, mutual support, and trust.

Information: How Would We Want To Create And Exchange Information In This Class?

I suggested the use of textbooks, course readings, and course website to begin with.

Overall, the first class guided by the Process Enneagram went smoothly. It did require some preparation such as checking out the classroom space for posting the diagram and arranging the chairs and finding appropriate materials to post the diagram. Although the Process Enneagram is usually presented on flip charts in workshops, I was able to obtain foam boards and use double-sided tapes to post the diagram in the back of the classroom. The students and I spent more time discussing the elements on the right side of the Process Enneagram, which was consistent with our

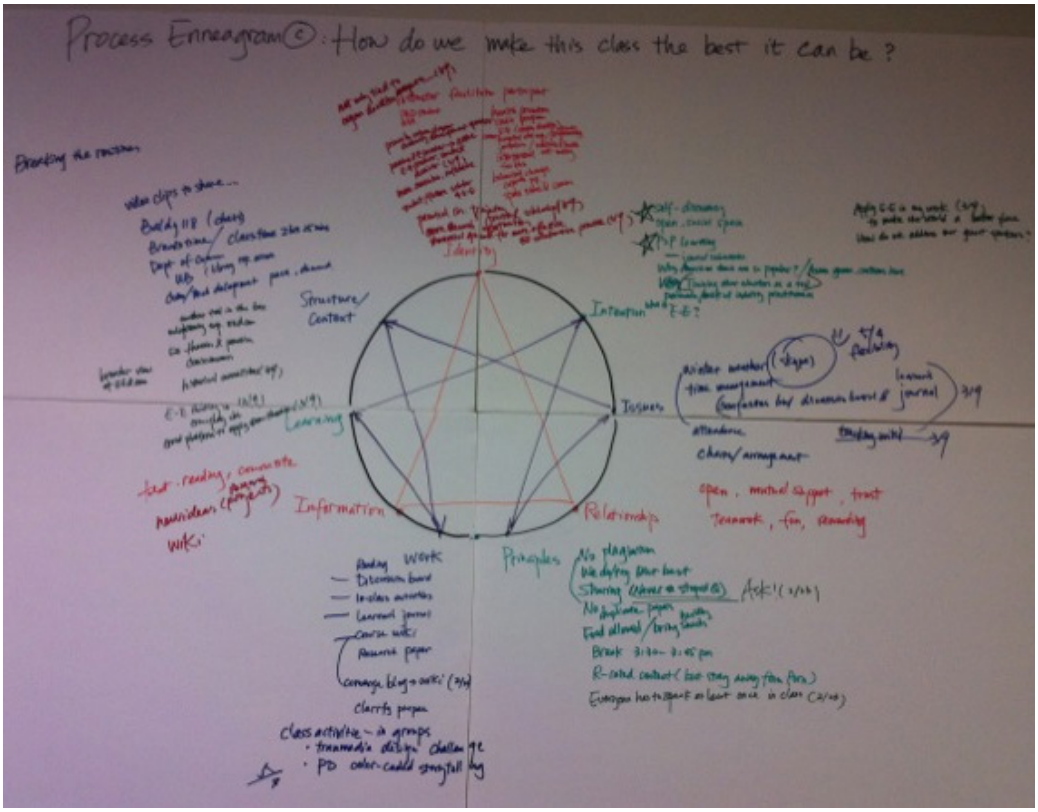

Figure 2 *Results from the Use of Process Enneagram*

purpose to establish a shared value system. My conscious use of the words such as *we*, *our*, and *us* as opposed to *I*, *my*, and *me* also helped cultivate a collective learning space. One student even pointed it out in a casual conversation afterwards that "you would say it is OUR class." Noting down the key words from students' comments and suggestions on the diagram board was an effective way to visually acknowledge their participation and appeared to be empowering, as this time around it was the instructor, not the student, who was taking notes.

Initial Feedback On The Use Of The Process Enneagram

As part of the class requirement, the students were asked to submit learner's journals each week. Although the specific topics for their self-reflection were not assigned, some students found the use of the Process Enneagram inspiring, personally relevant, and motivating. For example, one student commented,

> *The Process Enneagram © is a technique that is also relevant to self-organizing systems so I found it an especially interesting way to begin the course. I appreciated the opportunity to learn about my classmates and the instructor. The exercise made me*

realize how much I can learn from everyone in the class this semester. I also appreciated the chance to discuss the times in which the learner's journals are due and the instructor's understanding of my educational and professional obligations. When I first reviewed the syllabus I had hesitations about taking this course (based on the quantity of readings and exercises required for a seminar), but I do believe now that I will be able to derive sufficient benefit from learning more about this subject and writing a research paper on a topic of interest.

Another student said,

"If he [the teacher] is indeed wise he does not bid you enter the house of his wisdom, but rather leads you to the threshold of your own mind" (Gibran, 1923). As explained today, I believe that this class on entertainment-education involves a teaching method that indeed leads the students to the peak of their own thoughts, stimulate them to think for themselves, and encourages them to build self-knowledge. The use of the Process Enneagram in class was very interesting and well prepared that inspired my thoughts about methodology building for the creation of effective social environments. I think that by following this process, we were able to tackle very important points that we will have to face throughout the semester. First, by letting us present who we are and why we are interested in entertainment-education, we were able to understand each other and have an idea of what to expect from each other. Also, we were able to learn others' ambitions, interests, and expectations in class. Second, we established some principles and rules such as the avoidance of plagiarism, the time for break, and many others. I am personally glad that I learned that using work from class for publication is not considered plagiarism. I have a great amount of well-organized work done in class since last semester that I would like to include in my future publications. Also, considering the structure of the class and the issues we might face during the semester such as weather conditions was very helpful in predicting possible obstacles with which we might have to deal with. Finally, it is inevitable to say that this class will be at the same time challenging, entertaining, and educational. It will create a self-organizing system that will progress throughout the semester on its own. In fact, the course will surely give students coming from diverse backgrounds and disciplines the opportunity to contribute to the entertainment-education strategy as they are using the entertainment-education strategy. The preparation for class through the discussion board, the in-class activities, the learner's journals, and the course wiki are expected to create the best learning environment for emergence to occur.

Finally, a student wrote,

> *The Process Enneagram seemed effective at navigating the learning and problem solving experience. The learning experience was largely an introduction to entertainment-education and the problem, so to speak, was to how we were going to engage in the learning experience in the class. ...The enneagram was part of our learning process in this first class. As we moved around to the different components we were learning, getting to know each other and setting up our classroom space. We were setting some structure and form to our process and social engagement in the class, led by the instructor. Overall I took our first class to be a very successful learning and problem solving experience.*

REVISITING THE PROCESS ENNEAGRAM

I posted the Process Enneagram in the back of the classroom each week although we didn't necessarily discuss it every single time (see Figure 3). Instead, the graduate students and I revisited the Process Enneagram in the middle and towards the end of the semester to discuss changes in the past few weeks and new challenges and solutions. For example, on February 23, the students voluntarily suggested adding to the "Principles & Standards" that whenever someone has a question, they should just ask (similar to the ground rule of "no questions are stupid"; and everyone should speak at least once in class. These suggestions emerged through the classes in response to some of the cultural differences amongst the students as some of them came from Asia and were more hesitant to pose questions or make comments during class discussions. This suggests that the learning environment was safe and comfortable enough for their peers to encourage them voice their opinions. On March 9, some of the students saw a closer connection to the class topic and added to the "Identity" element that they have changed from passive receivers to active producers, senders, and receivers in the process of entertainment-education, and they could see potential research trajectories in this area. They also expressed for "Intention" that they wanted to apply the entertainment-education approach in their work to make the world a better place and had started to think about how to address their personal questions to the guest speakers I arranged towards the end of the semester. For "Issues & Ambiguities" we clarified the confusions between two class components and worked out a way to keep track of individual contributions on the course wiki. Finally, on May 4, which was the last class meeting for the guest speakers' visit and final presentations, the students said they really appreciated the fact that in our first class we raised the potential challenge with severe winter weather and suggested coordinating a Skype conference call. They were grateful for the flexibility and it actually proved to be an effective solution when a graduate

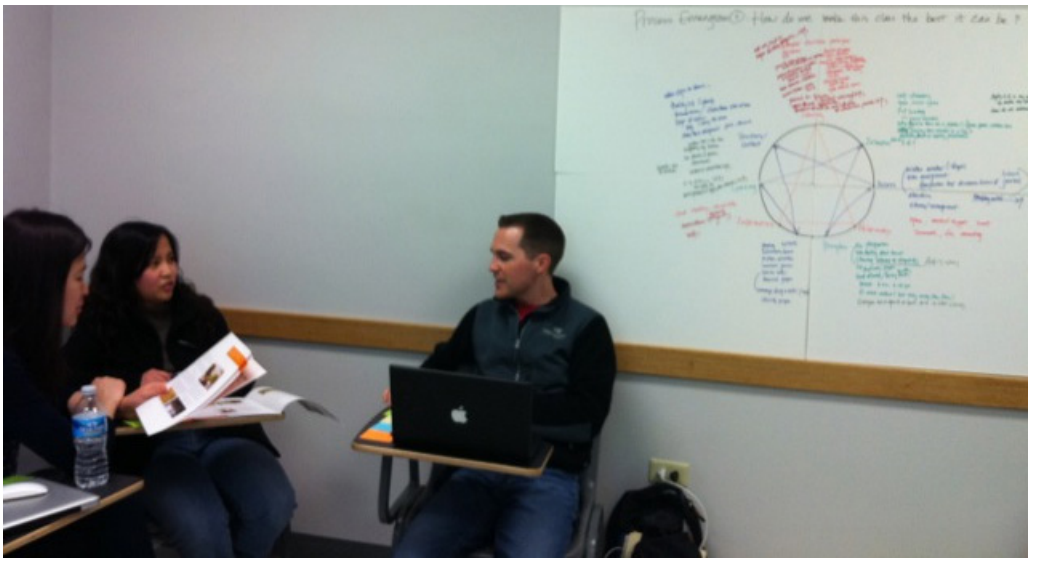

Figure 3 *Process Enneagram Diagram on the Back Wall of the Classroom*

student had to Skype in from his home in Rochester due to a snowstorm and road closure. For the "Work" element, students suggested to add class group activities to the diagram. They enjoyed the exercises to work in groups on a transmedia design challenge and using color-coded storytelling to understand a new concept Positive Deviance.

COURSE EVALUATION ON THE USE OF THE PROCESS ENNEAGRAM

At the end of the semester, students were invited to participate in an anonymous course evaluation online. The results yielded much higher ratings of the course and me as an instructor when compared to my colleagues in the department and across the university. When they were asked to comment on the element of the course they found particularly effective, one student wrote, "The participatory approach of the class is what makes it most effective!" and another said, "Cutting-edge methods made for an inspired pedagogy and a welcoming space for learning." When they were asked to comment on how effective the instructor was in teaching this course, one of the most flattering statements I received was:

> *"Opened new ways of thinking for me...was supportive of diverse research styles and methods...allowed the class to belong to all of us in a way that was engaging and respectful. Running a class is not easy, but she made the sessions something to look forward to each week and the readings were a perfect backdrop to understanding the subject AND to applying it for future research."*

LESSONS LEARNED AND FURTHER IMPLICATIONS

Overall, it was a successful experience applying the Process Enneagram in the graduate seminar with my students. By focusing on the elements highlighted in the diagram and following the directions in the Zigzag Process and the Triangular Process, we co-created a shared, open, and stimulating learning space. Together, we transformed the classroom from a typically hierarchical place to a collaborative environment. Reflecting on the process, there were a few observations that I found important in this case study:

- The genuine invitation: When students see the instructor not only as an subject matter expert dictating their learning process in the class but rather candidly inviting them to take initiative and share along the way, the door is open and the shared space is in place.
- The surprising discovery: When the instructor and the students all embrace the diversity residing in themselves and value the knowledge, skills, and experiences they each bring to the learning process, they realize they can learn from each other and there are always new things to discover in each class. Learning becomes more fun.
- The empowering visualization: When students see their ideas on the wall, they tend to be more engaged because they feel a sense of ownership.
- The mindful arrangement: Gareth Morgan has a quote: "Farmers don't grow crops. They create the conditions for crops to grow." When the instructor is aware the importance of self-organization and makes an effort to create conditions to facilitate the learning process, new order will emerge and the students will flourish.

There are different approaches to learning (see Figure 4 from Plexus Institute). Very often, the experience becomes a one-way flow of distributed information from the instructor. More enthusiastic instructors may manage an interactive two-way communication with individual students, but it has been challenging to develop a learning space for a complex community with all-way collaboration among participants, including both the instructor and all of the students. This is where novelty and emergent understanding will coevolve. This paper reports the first formal case study on the use of the Process Enneagram in higher education. This experience as described and analyzed above suggests that the Process Enneagram is a powerful tool for fundamental transformations and has great potential for applications in educational settings.

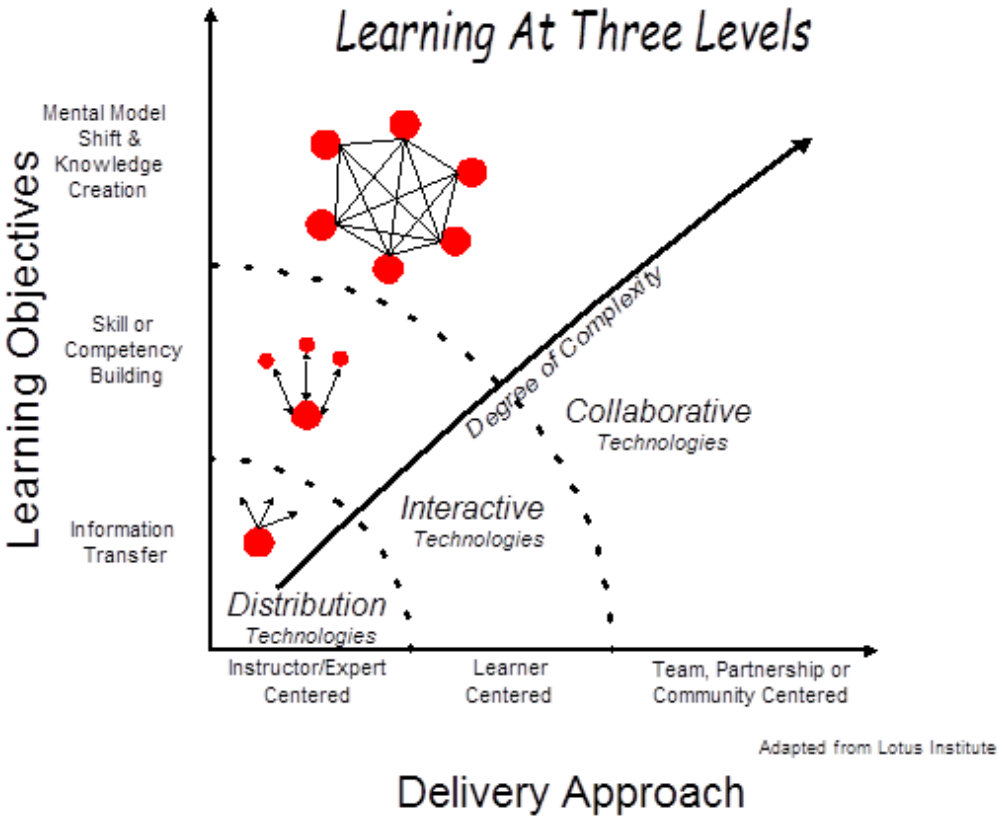

Figure 4 *Comparison of Learning Styles from Plexus Institute Introductory Course Material on Complexity Science*

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