M-World, S-World: Achieving wisdom in online groups

How to cite:

For guidance on citations see FAQs.

© 2018 The Authors and The Open University

Version: Version of Record

Copyright and Moral Rights for the articles on this site are retained by the individual authors and/or other copyright owners. For more information on Open Research Online’s data policy on reuse of materials please consult the policies page.
SIMON BELL
KEVIN COLLINS

ACHIEVING WISDOM IN ONLINE GROUPS

M. World

CHARLES CUTTING
Hey Kuma, I'm Coba.

You're doing publishing right?

I saw this on my publishing group.

I could help with the techie stuff?

I don't want to be the only other contributor. How about it?
I HAVE BEEN STUDYING FEAR.
I had been struggling with the negative and destructive issues which seem to fill up my world.

I call it M-world.

My work with fear had made me really aware of the ways in which isolated people, with no ability to work at scale, get picked off by the ‘Big Systems’ which seem to run the world.
THERE'S NOTHING WRONG WITH MY WORLD.

THERE ARE MANY REASONS WHY BEING INDEPENDENT, SOLITARY AND PRIVATE IS HEALTHY AND POWERFUL.
BUT M-WORLD CAN BE A PROBLEM.

TRUE. IF WE FOCUS ON OURSELVES AND NOT HOW OTHERS EXPERIENCE US IT CAN MEAN WE'RE POORLY EQUIPPED TO WORK IN GROUPS.
THIS CAN LEAD TO UNHELPFUL BEHAVIOUR.

I did get your email but I was busy which is why I didn't reply straight away!

I will never work sorry but just being honest.

That would be nice if you replied to my emails once in a while...

There's lots of ways we hinder a group effort. I'm sure you'll recognise them when we go into that later.

But first let's take a look at the problems facing group work.
The scale of the issues which confront us when we seek to work with others at distance often leads to us feeling fearful, disempowered and even lethargic.

This is learned helplessness. It is understandable and yet defeating.

What we want to confront on all sides often seems too big or complex to handle.

Despite huge strides in connectivity, human beings are often working in isolation.
To work together at a distance is a huge issue for us.

Look at climate change - that requires a global response. The ultimate issue of scale.

But is anyone really doing anything at that kind of scale?

On our own, in our own worlds, we are often the easy victims of greater and more powerful forces.
IN AN INCREASINGLY COMPLEX WORLD NO INDIVIDUAL IS ABLE TO (RE)SOLVE ISSUES BECAUSE THEY DON'T HAVE THE TIME...
It seems that many issues can only be solved if people collaborate.

But that is tough too.

What is collaboration?
Collaboration is:

- Communicating
- Sharing and empathy
- Picking up load for others
- Supporting others' efforts
- Managing expectations
- Negotiating common ground
- Caring how others feel and trusting yourself to trust them.
Kuma can't join the conversation.

OK, let's try again tomorrow.

I can see you but I can't hear you and I don't think my microphone is working.

working, sorry.
WE KNOW THAT COLLABORATION IS POSSIBLE BUT HOW POSSIBLE AND FOR WHO?

SHERRY ARNSTEIN CAME UP WITH A LADDER TO SHOW HOW PEOPLE CAN WORK TOGETHER AND HOW THEY DON'T.
The weird thing is that sometimes a group of people can look like they are collaborating but actually it is controlled by someone else.

Let's take a closer look at the limitations and possibilities of M-World.
IT IS THE WORLD YOU EXPERIENCE TOO BUT MINE LACKS ME.

A WORLD BASED ON ‘ME’ MIGHT HAVE THE FOLLOWING CHARACTERISTICS.
ISOLATION

LEADING TO...

SELF OBSESSION

SELF ASSERTION

AND SELF PRESERVATION

I live again.

prepare trouble!

BLAM!

BLAM

ARGH!

BLAM!

BLAM!

BLAM!

BLAM!

PLINK PLINK PLINK!

PLINK PLINK PLINK!

PLINK PLINK PLINK!

PLINK PLINK PLINK!

PLINK PLINK PLINK!

PLINK PLINK PLINK!

These are instinctive reactions.

Daniel Kahneman's System 1 seems to fit this.
A WAY OF KNOWING INSTINCTIVELY WITHOUT REFLECTION OR REFERENCING WIDER DATA.
SHARED WORLD IS SHARED

HERE WE MAKE THE EFFORT TO INCLUDE THE VIEWS AND ASSUMPTIONS OF OTHERS.

A WORLD BASED ON SHARED VIEWS MIGHT HAVE THE FOLLOWING CHARACTERISTICS.
EMPATHY

LISTENING

MUTUAL SUSTAINABILITY
These are rational and reflective characteristics.

Daniel Kahneman's rational system 2, or, even more powerful, what Csikszentmihalyi called flow.

And maybe even a new kind of system, system 3 - an holistic end for the process of rational thinking.

S-world becomes an opportunity for systemic and rational experience.
IN THEIR OWN WORLDS THEY WERE ORDINARY PEOPLE, BUT WHEN THEY MEET THEY BECOME...

THE S-FORCE

THE DRAMATIC DEBUT OF A STARTLING NEW BREED OF TEAM, BROUGHT TO YOU BY:

SIMON KEVIN CHARLES
BELL * COLLINS* CUTTING
AUTHOR * AUTHOR * ARTIST

EDITED BY: FRANCESCA BENATTI,
KAREN KEAR, LARA PICCOLO
AND IAN JOHNSTON.
THAT SOUNDS LIKE AN OPPORTUNITY NOT TO BE MISSED...

AND CAPABLE OF DELIVERING SERIOUSLY POWERFUL RESULTS.
BUT WHAT DOES THIS MEAN IN ONLINE GROUP WORK?
This seems so simple. You consent to s-world and everything gets better?

Oh, if only!

The reality is somewhat different.
It's difficult to empathise with strangers - trust is key.

People do not share world views, time-zones or aims & objectives.

All these things need to be achieved.

Nothing is accomplished without team work and effort.
HUMAN BEINGS HAVE LIMITED PERSPECTIVES

DAVID EAGLEMAN IN 'THE BRAIN' DESCRIBES HOW THE BRAIN PRISONER IS FED FALSE AND LIMITED NEWS.

WE ARE INDIVIDUALLY BOMBARDED BY 'FAKE NEWS' FROM OUR SENSES

BUT MORE THAN THIS WE MISS THE FACT THAT WE ARE THE AUDIENCE TO OUR OWN REALITY BUT WE ARE ABSENT FROM IT.

THINK ABOUT IT LIKE THIS---
LIKE A 'FONDS FOOTAGE' MOVIE WITH A SUBJECTIVE CAMERA, WE TRIP AROUND THE WORLD.

WE PEAK AT OTHERS AND ENGAGE IN ACTIONS BUT WE OURSELVES ARE RARELY TO BE SEEN.

IF WE LOOK IN A MIRROR OR EXPERIENCE OURSELVES IN A SELFIE IT CAN SPOIL THE IMAGE WE HAVE OF OURSELVES.
WE ARE GHOSTS IN OUR OWN WORLD

AND THIS IS TRUE FOR ALL OF US.
So much could be said about how we rarely experience ourselves.

Unless, that is, we engage in some active self-reflection.
IT SEEMS TO ME THAT WE CAN BE OVERWHELMED WHEN WE ARE IN ISOLATION.

ALTHOUGH SOME PEOPLE DO FIND ISOLATION EMPOWERING, WE ARE SOCIAL ANIMALS AND HAVE A DESIRE TO COLLABORATE.

PLATO CONFRONTED THIS CONCEPT OF PERCEPTUAL ISOLATION THOUSANDS OF YEARS AGO WHEN HE DESCRIBED 'THE PRISONER'.
LIKE MISTAKING SHADOWS ON
THE WALL FOR REALITY…

INDIVIDUAL PERCEPTION
CAN BE WRONG OR DISTORTED
But it seems to be the human condition.

It can be.

It can lead to shared activities that appear to be collaborative but in actual fact are competitive.
BUT WORKING HARMONIOUSLY TOGETHER WE CAN REALLY MAKE THINGS HAPPEN

GREAT TEAMS, GROUPS AND COMMUNITIES HAVE BEEN THE BASIS OF HUMAN PROGRESS
IT'S JUST THAT S-WORLD MAY NOT LAST TOO LONG

PRETTY SOON S-WORLD BREAKS DOWN AND M-WORLD TAKES OVER AGAIN.
SO, WHAT IS TEAM-WORK EFFORT?

LOTS OF PEOPLE HAVE TRIED TO FIGURE OUT HOW WE CAN WORK EFFECTIVELY WITH OURSELVES AND OTHERS.
DONALD SCHON, CARING

KAREN HORNED, REFLECTION

DAVID KOLB, LEARNING CYCLE.
THERE ARE LOTS OF GROUND RULES
THESE RULES WORK AS WELL FOR ONLINE GROUPS AS FOR FACE-TO-FACE GROUPS.
THERE ARE MANY EXAMPLES OF HELPFUL S-WORLD BEHAVIOUR FOR ONLINE COLLABORATION.
1/ Making your point and then allowing others to contribute

2/ Supporting other contributors

3/ Explaining rather than assuming

4/ Summarizing an argument. Checking understanding.

5/ Encouraging and asking for others' views & questions

6/ Rephrasing what someone else has contributed to make it clearer and show personal understanding

7/ Encouraging contributors to talk about their feelings as well as the job in hand.

8/ Expressing doubt in a positive manner.

9/ Encouraging others to contribute

10/ Expressing approval of others' views before being critical.

11/ Empathizing with others

12/ Asking for support if you need it.

13/ Showing interest in other people.
IF WE CYCLE IN AND OUT OF M-WORLD AND S-WORLD WE GET THE BEST FROM OUR SOLITARY TIME...

AND CAN WORK EFFECTIVELY IN ONLINE COLLABORATIONS.
Welcome to M-world.

I live in M-world.

You live in M-world too.

I don't meet me in my M-world and you don't meet you in your M-world.

But I meet you all the time and you regularly bump into me.

We are strangers to ourselves in M-world, that is just the way of it.

It's really, really close. Closer than the hundredth of the width of a butterfly's wing.

You could not put a piece of paper between M-world and S-world.

But they are so very, very different and they occupy very different places.

But when we meet in S-world, I am part of a community, my perspective is confronted and completed by yours and others.

My thoughts are shared and my journey is not so lonely.

The problem seems to be that S-world is hard to find.

When the need is great, in an instant they are all moved to and share in S-world.
IN MY M-WORLD I DON'T EXIST

IN YOUR M-WORLD I EXIST BUT YOU DON'T

IN YOUR M-WORLD YOU DON'T EXIST

WHEN YOU AND I ARE AT OUR BEST WITH EACH OTHER, WE LEAVE OUR M-WORLDS AND COME TOGETHER FOR A WHILE, WE MEET IN ANOTHER PLACE

LET'S CALL IT S-WORLD

S-WORLD IS VERY, VERY SIMILAR TO M-WORLD

THEY ARE AN INFINITY APART

IN M-WORLD I AM ISOLATED, MY PERSPECTIVE IS STRANDED TO ITSELF

MY THOUGHTS ARE MY OWN AND MY JOURNEY IS THE JOURNEY OF THE SOLITARY

BUT IS IT?

ODDLY, PEOPLE WHO NEED EACH OTHER FIND EACH OTHER EFFORTLESSLY IN S-WORLD

ALL M-WORLD SEPARATION DISAPPEARS, THE NEEDY ARE UNITED IN AN INSTANT

BUT PEOPLE, EVEN REALLY, REALLY CLEVER AND TALENTED PEOPLE WHO DO NOT WANT TO NEED EACH OTHER CAN NEVER FIND S-WORLD, NOT EVEN IF THEY ARE ALL TOGETHER IN THE SAME ROOM, SITTING RIGHT NEXT TO EACH OTHER FOR HOURS AND HOURS, LOOKING RIGHT AT EACH OTHER.

THEY REMAIN IN THEIR M-WORLDS WHERE THEY DO NOT EVEN MEET THEMSELVES