The Spider & The Honeycomb

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The Spider Web and the Honeycomb is a binary metaphor describing two distinctly opposite patterns of how organizations relate to persons and resources. In short, whether they nurture life in and through persons or they extract resources from them.

The Spider Web

The first side of this metaphor is the Spider Web. The intent of a Spider Web styled organization is to capture and exploit the resources of persons. These persons can be members of said organization or they can be persons that are outside of it but either relate to it or depend on it.

All Natural

In Nature, a real spiders web is an organic net fashioned out of the spider's body that ensnares flying insects. The spider wraps its victims up and later eats them by draining them of their fluids to sustain itself.

Organizational Web

This pattern found in Nature, also appears in many human organizations. A Spider Web organization is one in which all of the internal and external activities serve the distinct purpose of providing sustenance to the Spider. The Spider is either an individual or a small group of core individuals for whom the organization exists. Everyone else, from internal member to external complete stranger is drawn in and used to exploit their resources for the purposes of benefiting the Spider.

Implicit Exploitation

This description sounds remarkably intentional, as-in first degree level design, but nothing could be further from the truth. Most Spider Web organizations are neither actively nor consciously aware that they exist and operate in such a manner. They don't know they are Spider Web organizations at all. This lack of self-awareness and identity is because many persons would never consciously fashion or engage in such a bizarrely exploitive relationship intentionally. It is repugnant to consider that the sum total of personal exertion ultimately benefits a Spider to the peril of all others. Most of the time, Spider Web organizations exist without the realization that they are, in fact, Spider Webs.

Nature of The Web

In a Spider Web organization, the Spider requires the Web a mechanism to accomplish its goals. The Web is placed purposefully in the flight path of its victims - meaning those that the Spider can exploit. In human organizations, this includes the placement of products and services. They are "cast out" so as to get as much "in the path" of the Spider's customers or clients by maximizing the Web's reach.

What makes this pattern distinctly Spider Web is identified by what is done with those that are "caught" in the Web. Every person brought in by the products and services of a Spider Web organization, whether they become an outside customer/client of the organization or an internal member somewhere in the hierarchy, find their resources serving the sustenance of the Spider distinctly. This resource absorption and Spider sustenance is done either overtly or covertly, but is ultimately both uniquely and distinctly beneficial to the Spider.

Uber Tragic

Over time, the non-Spiders in a Spider Web organization find themselves empty, used up, and drained of life. The insects on the literal side of the metaphor are dead. The persons on the symbolic side of the metaphor are sadly close to it: hopeless and empty. Oftentimes such victims, like fully drained bugs, are left in a state of confusing despair; wondering what meaningful purpose their lives have served except to benefit the Spider.

You might imagine that the Spider is comfortable and obese in this scenario. In the most vicious ironies, I assure you they are more likely lean and wretched - especially the shrewdest of them. A talented Spider carefully crafts the illusion of being perpetually unsuccessful or on the wrong side of good fortune so as to better drain new potential victims of their vital resources. Need becomes another strand of the Spider's Web. Again, this is usually an unconscious, unrealized paradigm to the Spider itself, meaning they self-deceive themselves into remaining lean and in apparent need instead of feasting on their victim's resources to obesity. Few individuals are both malicious enough or self-aware enough to self-identify as a Spider, something that is both tragic and intrinsic

to the Spider Web pattern.

The Honeycomb

The other side of this metaphorical duo is the Honeycomb. Where the Spider Web facilitates exploitive misery to all, the Honeycomb teems with life. Life and life more abundantly (John 10:10). Honeycomb is a product of a honeybee hive, the sum total effort of individuals serving a common, productive purpose around a Queen. A Queen is an individual or group of individuals that both integrates with and manages the activities of the Hive. The Queen is very unlike the Spider, working to nurture the colony under her charge by infusing it with life and directing the proliferation of life. In a Honeycomb, life is shared and spread by all.

Naturally Abundant

In Nature, the Honeycomb is an integral part of a Hive of honeybees. It is the portion of the Hive where the bees store honey, pollen, and place their larvae. The honey itself is something so nourishing that many animal species other than bees benefit from it. Honeycomb is the result of something cooperative and productive to such an abundance that it benefits both the Hive and the world around the Hive.

Every stage of the honeybee lifecycle serves a purpose. The cumulative activities of a honeybee Hive yields a generous amount of honey and creates new hives. Great Queens yield more Queens. Sometimes a Queen births a new Hive themselves, leaving the new Queen behind. Other times, the Queen sends forth a new Queen to create a new Hive. Hives produce Honeycomb, Honeycomb nurtures life. All together, this never ending process generate layers and layers of life.

In the Honeycomb, every bee serves and benefits simultaneously. The Queen does not solely benefit, but rather benefits her portion while serving the Hive uniquely by managing the community's activities and plans. For the Hive to thrive, the Queen must manage it in such a way that it grows and expands - creating more honeybees, more Hives, and more Honeycomb.

Practical Life

The Honeycomb, like its metaphorical opposite: the Spider Web, is not usually an intentional arrangement in practice. There are many idealistic expressions of what Honeycomb could be, but in practice such theories are typically found to be impractical. Sadly, idealism is not the practical inception or catalyst for Honeycomb styled organizations. They instead tend to produce Spider Webs built on inadequate principles. Utopia is the forerunner of dystopia. Life-giving abundance is not found in the ideal. It is found in the practical.

In a Honeycomb organization, the Queen is not self-aware that its purpose is to proliferate the life of the honeybee no more than the worker bee is conscious that its purpose is to collect pollen and fashion honey. Yet somehow out of a practical and prolific order abundant life emerges. It is the act

of producing, the practice of sharing together, and the order of mutually caring that shape the practicality of abundant living through mutually beneficial solutions to life's challenges.

This Honeycomb abundance is what fuels the Hive to sustain vibrant life. But seldom is this process consciously realized or purposely articulated as an ideal. This is why Honeycomb organization principles are found in memoirs more than than proposals.

Colliding Worlds

Nature provides its own irony in the midst of this metaphor. Honeybees are a version of flying insects, the very type of being that the Spider Web is designed to snare. The material used to shape and grow Honeycomb is gathered by the round trip flights of worker bees from the Hive to flower and back again. In between those trips lies the peril of the Spider Web.

Honeybees that are caught, are sucked dry of what life they have to offer. Those that avoid or escape the Spider Web continue to contribute to the Honeycomb and continue to travel the paths that lead to the Spider Web. Those that are wise, know to veer away from the Spider Web and not disturb the Spider.

Neither Spider Webs nor Honeycombs truly exist in isolation. Instead they coexist in natural tension.

Unraveling Idealism

The Spider Web would not exist and thrive without the Honeycomb because it survives only on the resources of victims it can exploit. But the Honeycomb has no use for the Spider Web. We would all wish for a world in which there were no Spider Webs, but that world does not exist.

The real question is whether we are in the midst of a Spider Web or a Honeycomb.

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