The New (Ab)Normal

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Radical Perspectives and Practices in a VUCA-Plus World

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Preface

A colleague of mine, Walter Truett Anderson (1990), wrote a book titled *Reality Isn't What It Used to Be*. He was quite right in his appraisal that things have changed dramatically over the past half-century. Furthermore, he accurately observed that the fundamental way we view and interpret reality is not what it used to be! At the very least, it is hard to determine what is "real" and what is "unreal"—or what is an "alternative reality." We live in a world filled with diverse challenges that disrupt the usual way in which we seek to define what is true in an objective manner. We are required (often unwillingly) to admit that there is no one "true" reality. Rather, multiple versions of reality are being constructed to advance specific perspectives and practices to achieve certain desired outcomes.

There are many specific challenges that mid-21st Century citizens face as they live and work in their communities and nations. These challenges might relate to commuting by car or train into a major city or finding fresh and uncontaminated water when living in a small rural community. They might be domestic challenges concerning a child going off to college or a grandparent who is struggling with dementia.

These challenges are unique to each person and each society in our world. However, there are the almost universal challenges associated with volatility (V), uncertainty (U), complexity (C), and ambiguity (A) in our collective lives, as well as the equally challenging turbulence and contradiction that we all encounter every day. These are the VUCA-Plus conditions of life in the mid-21st Century —and each condition generates multiple challenges.

The VUCA Challenges

This book concerns these six VUCA-Plus challenges and some unique ways in which to view and act upon these challenges. I will be viewing each of these challenges from several different perspectives in this book and offer several distinctive strategies for addressing these challenges. Here in the Preface, I will dwell briefly on the meaning to be assigned to each of the VUCA terms and then suggest how we might expand on VUCA to produce VUCA-Plus.

In essence, complexity (C) concerns the many elements and dynamic interaction among elements that have to be considered, while Volatility (V) refers to the rate and shifting rate of change among the elements. The other two terms have to do with epistemology (acquisition of knowledge and definition of reality). Ambiguity (A) concerns the assessment of both the evidence available regarding reality and the meaning assigned to this reality. The fourth term, Uncertainty (U) concerns the stability of any assessment made about reality. Does reality change over a short period of time? Why do an extensive assessment if our world is constantly shifting? VUCA is deservedly becoming the coin of the realm among contemporary organizational and societal analysts. Here is a bit more detail regarding each condition.

Volatility

Volatility refers to the dynamics of change (accelerating rate, speed, and intensity) as well as unexpected catalysts of this change. Basically, volatility concerns rapid change in an unpredictable manner. Volatility has a systemic impact on our world: changes are occurring everywhere. There are change curves on top of change curves (Bergquist, 2014a). There is also an immediate personal impact. We are often surprised and unprepared under conditions of volatility.

Uncertainty

Uncertainty refers to the lack of predictability. This condition concerns the increasing prospects for surprising, "disruptive" changes that often overwhelm our awareness, understanding, and ability to cope with events. Uncertainty concerns a lack of continuity and a resulting lack of clarity regarding what is going to happen from day to day. There is a systemic impact.

Under conditions of uncertainty, it is hard to plan for the future or even for one or two days from now given that nothing seems to be permanently in place. Contingency (reset) planning is required rather than tactical or strategic planning (Heath, 2025). At the personal level, conditions of uncertainty require that we keep our schedule tentative and our expectations quite flexible.

Complexity

Complexity entails the multiplex of forces operating in our world as well as the apparent inconsistent flow of information. Complexity also concerns the sensitive interdependence of everything we touch. This leads to a pervasive sense of confusion—making it hard to arrive at smart decisions (steeped as we are in the moving dance of reality). The condition of complexity concerns the presence of many different things and events that simultaneously impact life and work.

There is a systemic impact. It is very hard to make sense of or even find meaning in that which is occurring every day. Slow thinking is required rather than fast thinking (Kahneman, 2013). There also is a major personal impact. We often must spend a considerable amount of time trying to figure out what is happening before making decisions or taking actions.

Ambiguity

Ambiguity is the condition of 'haziness' in which both cause and effect are hard to attribute. Relativity seems to cast a shadow over established rules. The condition of ambiguity weighs heavily on our ability to function and make choices while holding on to inconsistent data. Ambiguity concerns the presence of many things and events happening at the same time. Our imposing world is confusing and often easy to observe clearly and consistently.

The systemic impact of ambiguity concerns a loss of trust. We can't trust the accuracy of what we see or hear or of what "experts" tell us (Weitz and Bergquist, 2024). More than the other five VUCA-Plus conditions, this condition of ambiguity forces us to accept a social constructivist rather than an objectivist perspective on reality (Berger and Luchmann, 1966). When ambiguity prevails, all bets are off regarding the appropriate verification of truth.

What about the personal impact? Under conditions of ambiguity, we often must look and listen a second and third time to ensure that what is seen or heard is accurate. Even then, our view of the world is seen "through a glass darkly." We are vulnerable to messages offered by those who assure us that we are "correctly" seeing the world. Alternatively, we create our Bubble of Belief and remain steadfast in our view of the world in one particular (often ideological) way (Weitz and Bergquist, 2024).

The Additional VUCA-Plus Challenges

I add two other challenges: turbulence and contradiction. They are both interwoven in the fabric of VUCA. They each add a further layer to the challenge we now face in our mid-21st Century society. Furthermore, turbulence and contradiction often pair up with one or more of the other VUCA conditions to add even more weight to the mid-21st Century burden.

Turbulence

Some things are rapidly moving, while others are engaged in cyclical movement under turbulent conditions. Other things are not moving at all or moving chaotically. The systemic Impact concerns the operations of a world in which four systems operate simultaneously. These four systems create the "white water" world prevalent in mid-21st-century societies (Vaill, (1989/2008). At a personal level, navigation of a white-water environment requires an ongoing search for balance and direction which in turn requires ongoing attention to the shifting conditions of this environment.

In describing Turbulence, I am turning to a metaphor offered by Peter Vaill, who suggests that we live in a "white water" world. I have added to Vaill's metaphor by noting that this whitewater system incorporates four systems that are exemplified by the properties of a turbulent stream: (1) rapid change (flowing segment of the stream), (2) cyclical change (the stream's whirlpools), (3) stability/non-change (the "stagnant" segment of the stream), and (4) chaos (the segment of a stream existing between the other three segments).

All four of these systems are operating in our current environment. For instance, if we examine the COVID crisis, we find that rapid change occurred as the virus rapidly spread and communities throughout the world were massively impacted. Cyclical change was to be found in the patterned way that COVID-19 entered and spread in a community—and tragically in the way this virus or a sister virus probably will return.

We can find stability and non-change in the resistance to new norms and rules regarding addressing future virus invasions. All of this leads to the growing presence of the fourth system: Chaos. This is to be found not only in the inconsistent way we were each living our lives in response to the virus but also in the way public policies were formulated and revised in the United States and many countries over the past decade – and are soon likely to mutate (Christakis, 2020).

Contradiction

Contradiction concerns the frequent presence of radically different constructions and interpretations of reality—and the differing meanings assigned to the constructed reality. It should be noted that Contradiction is perhaps the most soul-wrenching of the six VUCA-Plus conditions. Valid and useful messages are delivered to us every day. However, they often point in quite different directions. They provide guidance and encouragement that lead us potentially to quite different outcomes. We are encouraged to eat one brand of cereal today and are told to eat a different brand tomorrow that "is much better for us" or "is more likely to be our child's favorite".

We also are told one day that most (or at least some) cereals are good for us. On another day we are told they are bad for us or worthless in the promotion of health. In one of our favorite magazines, we read about a major study that reports findings suggesting that moderately consumed cereal is good for our health. We need fiber in our well-balanced diet. Furthermore, cereals in one form or another have been around since humankind first wandered on earth. How can a grain of wheat or corn be bad for us? One day later we read an Internet article detailing the corrupt marketing of cereal. Even the so-called "organic" and high-fiber cereals offer little health-related value. Furthermore, the price of cereal is unconscionable. We are paying primarily for the fancy box in which the cereal comes to us and for the marketing of this cereal—not the grain itself.

Even more profound sources of contradiction are found in politics and social policy. We constantly face a choice between two options with both an upside and a downside. Furthermore, the achievement of one is likely to reduce the achievement of the other. Our governmental leaders solve a major social problem but increase the national debt. The need for control of pornography on the Internet is great but so is the need for an Internet that is free of constraints and values imposed by one group of "believers."

It is even more challenging to recognize that each side of the contradiction often needs the other side to exist to find direction and energy. We need a strong enemy if we are to build commitment to our cause. Having lost an election, our political party becomes the "loyal opposition" and often finds greater clarity and coherence in this role than when we are in power. We need to spend money on fancy cereal boxes precisely because other cereal boxes on the supermarket shelves catch our attention.

I wish to push the consideration of Contradictions a step further by suggesting that contradictions are often polarities. This being the case, then we can turn to the remarkable insights and strategies regarding polarities offered by Barry Johnson (1992/1996). As the "dean" of *polarity management*, Johnson identifies polarities as "interdependent pairs that need each other over time." He notes the soul-wrenching effect of polarities: "They live in us and we live in them." According to Johnson, polarities are pervasive in our life. "They exist in every level of system from the inside of our brains to global issues." Their soul-wrenching impact is based on their "unavoidable, unsolvable (in that you can't choose one pole as a sustainable solution), indestructible, and unstoppable" presence.

The systemic impact of Polarities and Contradictions centers on the credibility of advice being offered by people and institutions that can be trusted. Credibility is being challenged because the advice one trusted source offers is often inconsistent with the advice offered by a second trusted source. When we bring in dynamics associated with polarities, then we are likely to discover that advice offered by the second source is often triggered by the first source. The first source, in turn, becomes more vociferous (and often more extreme) in their pronouncement regarding what is correct and good in the world. The debate between two warring givers of advice is fully engaged. The intended recipient of useful advice is often left on the sidelines.

Many years ago, Plato offered the allegory of people living in a cave. These cave dwellers never directly review the world outside the

cave but rely on the shadows being cast on a cave wall—these shadows produced by placing some shapes in front of a fire lit on the cave's floor. Another version of the allegory identifies the source of the cave's shadows as the blocking of light at the cave's opening by people passing in front of the cave.

Once again, reality is equated with the shadows on the wall. Reality is not identified with events occurring outside the cave. Believing that these shadows are "reality", we find that the cave dwellers obtain an interpretation of meaning to be assigned the shadows from a trusted "expert" who lives with them in the cave. Soon, there is widespread reliance on the expert's interpretation rather than reliance on the shadows themselves.

I wish to update Plato's allegory by introducing the condition of Contradiction. We find that multiple experts offer alternative interpretations regarding the shadows. These interpretations are not aligned with one another. The debate between confident but contradicting interpreters ensues. Some of the cave's "experts" go even further. They claim that these are just shadows. They point to the figures inserted before the fire to produce the images on the wall.

Other experts might suggest that a "real" (or alternative) world exists outside the cave. The cave dwellers are confused and frightened. To whom do we listen? What do we do with those experts who are not to be believed or trusted? Do we ignore these experts? They are hard to ignore since they hang around the cave and offer disturbing observations. Do we instead throw them out of the cave—but then we would have to acknowledge that a world exists outside the cave? It is all soul-wrenching.

We need not live in a cave. Even outside the cave, we find it difficult to live with and be guided by contradictory information. All of this has a personal impact on us. We must change our minds—or at least be open to new perspectives and ideas. Agility is required (reference) along with an enduring tolerance for dissonance that

repeatedly appears in our assignment of meanings to shadows appearing in our world.

These shadows represent not only what exists out in the world but also that which exists inside us. Our minds and hearts are saturated with multiple images of self and reality (Gergen, 1991/2000). Midst Contradiction (alongside the other five conditions of VUCA-Plus) we must somehow find the capacity to think in a deliberative manner about difficult issues (Kahneman, 2013) and engage a high level of social intelligence in our interactions with other people (Goleman, 1995). Quite a tall order . . .

Implications of VUCA-Plus Conditions

In our mid-21st Century world, we must make decisions that take VUCA-Plus conditions into account. There is ambiguity, uncertainty and contradiction. Polarizing values are present making thoughtful consideration and caring compassion difficult to sustain; furthermore, these decisions are subject to frequent review and modification as we try to navigate our volatile, complex, and often turbulent VUCA world. Goal setting is often unrealistic. The ad hoc character of our VUCA-Plus world often produces a feeling of infinite possibility and an unrealistic sense that the sky's the limit.

Failure and disenchantment frequently are associated with a lack of realistic goal setting unless the process of designing and managing an organization includes not only the re-examination of context and strategy but also the regular re-examination of goals. Another frequent problem we face in a VUCA-Plus world concerns the complex interpersonal- and task-related skills needed to run an organization—or government. We are often "in over our heads" when seeking to build and sustain a viable working relationship with other people.

Thus, we must enter the challenging world of VUCA-Plus with several critical skills. First, is the ability to think in a careful, systemic manner about the world swirling about us. It is easy to

think quickly with nothing but a desire to make the anxiety go away. We are fleeing the lions—but to little avail. Second, we must acknowledge the stress associated with VUCA-Plus challenges. We must be mindful of this stress—and find ways to reduce it while being proactive in responding to the VUCA-Plus challenges.

Finally, our problem-solving and decision-making in a VUCA-Plus environment must be done in collaboration with other people. We are not strong enough to confront the VUCA-Plus challenges alone. It is in collaborative dialogue with other important people in our life that we find the courage, clarity and strength to not just make sense of our mid-21st Century world but also learn from the VUCA-Plus challenges and find nourishment and sense of self-purpose in successfully confronting these challenges.

I have intended in this book to make the conditions of VUCA-Plus not only more comprehensible but also more amenable to transformation from challenge to opportunity. Hopefully, the unique perspectives and strategies offered in this book assist in bringing about this transformative process. I first identify ways in which we are lured away from the task of directly addressing these challenges and are encouraged to travel down a rabbit hole into a distorted world of serenity.

I then offer several distinctive perspectives (lens) that make VUCA-Plus conditions more manageable—and the source of new ideas and new initiatives. These distinctive perspectives concern the effective engagement of Essentials in our life and work. I also introduce ways to focus on that which is the Essence of our life and work. In my exploration of Essentials and Essence, I introduce a new concept called *Polystasis*. This concept builds on the neurobiology model of Allostasis offered by Peter Sterling (2020) along with the dynamic, feedback-based T.O.T.E. model introduced many years ago by George Miller, Eugene Galanter, and Karl Pribram (1960). Specific strategies and tools (such as polarity management and white-water navigation) are introduced as ways to deploy the unique perspectives offered in this book.

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and virtual) in North America, Europe, and Asia. I am profoundly grateful for the learning opportunities found in these far-flung locations and offered by this highly diverse community of co-learners.

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Section One

VUCA-Plus: Challenge, Containment and Escape

Chapter One

Anxiety in a VUCA Plus Environment

Leaders of mid-21st Century institutions often face the "perfect storm" of organizational anxiety. They must deal with major VUCA-Plus-related challenges alongside the anxiety that accompanies these challenges. They must lead through the anxiety experienced by specific members of their organization. Furthermore, it seems that anxiety is quite contagious. One anxious person in an organization (or any group) can readily spread this anxiety to everyone else in the organization.

Diffuse anxiety ("angst") often pervades specific departments in the leader's organization. The diffusion can be even greater. Angst can pervade their entire organization and even the society in which it operates. This anxiety can be induced in many different ways—and there are multiple sources of organizational anxiety. If the challenges of VUCA-Plus are to be met, then the anxiety (and angst) that accompanies (and is often elicited by) the six conditions of VUCA-Plus must be understood and contained. I attend in this chapter to the nature and dynamics of anxiety.

The Nature of Anxiety

In some ways the contagion of anxiety is quite adaptive. When human beings were living on the African savannah, they were among the weakest and slowest creatures to populate this often threat-filled environment. It seems that we humans survived (and ultimately thrived) by working collaboratively via language and strong family and clan bonding. We all wanted to know if something was threatening one or more members of our group so

that we could act together to fight or flee from the source of the threat. Anxiety served this purpose.

Anxiety as a Signal

Many years ago, Sigmund Freud (1936) wrote about the signal function of anxiety. At the time, he was pointing to how anxiety alerts us to an important psychic reality: we are moving into dangerous territory regarding unconscious processes. We can expand on Freud's analysis by considering the collective signaling function served by anxiety in warning us (as families or clans) about sources of danger that are real (such as predators, crop failure or the pending invasion of an adversarial clan)—or are anticipated or imagined.

Two sets of neurobiological mechanisms might be implicated in Freud's signal of anxiety. These are the sympathetic and countering parasympathetic systems that serve critical functions in our daily journey through a shifting and at times challenging world. Within each of these two systems, specific neurochemicals play a central role. We can probe for a moment into the nature of these chemicals and, more broadly, the neurobiological basis of collective (and contagious) signaling anxiety.

First, there is the sympathetic system and adrenaline (also called epinephrine)—one of its primary agents and a key activator of our anxiety. When we are anxious, epinephrine and other arousing chemicals course through our veins and muscles. We are primed to take action that can alleviate the anxiety—be it against an approaching predator or invading clan. Without the sympathetic system in place, we would probably not feel anxious. Many of the anxiety-reducing pills that some of us take are in the business of blocking sympathetic activation.

The countering parasympathetic system also comes into play regarding the signaling function of anxiety – especially as this anxiety becomes contagious. In recent years, neurobiologists have come to recognize the important role played in our lives by a

specific neurotransmitter: oxytocin. It serves as a central agent in the parasympathetic system. Often referred to as a "bonding" and "nurturing" chemical, oxytocin is coursing through our brains and veins—more than is the case with most animals. Oxytocin pulls us together and makes us particularly fearful of being alone and isolated from family and clan members. We want to be close to others and feel threatened when others feel threatened. Anxiety is contagious and spreads rapidly precisely because we are pulled toward bonding.

Contagious Signals

This secretion of oxytocin could be considered the basis of empathy and might even be mediated by something called "mirror neurons" which are activated in us when we experience the wounding (physical or psychological) of other people. While the role played by mirror neurons is still quite controversial, there is very little dispute regarding the typical (and necessary) bonding of human beings with one another and the high level of sensitivity regarding our discomfort with witnessing the potential or actual suffering of other people with whom we are bonded – further intensifying the contagious and signaling nature of anxiety.

Clearly, we are attuned to the signal of threat transmitted by other people. This signal can be based on "legitimate" threats: the lion can be stalking us or the tribe living in the next valley can be plotting to take over our hunting ground or pastureland. However, as made famous by Robert Sapolsky (2004), we are quite adept at creating imagined lions. We can falsely conclude that our neighboring tribe is plotting against us. It's not hard to protect evil intentions onto our in-laws or former spouse. Thus, there can be "false alarms" that we have to manage with just as much skill as the alarms based on reality.

As parents, we must help our children sort out the difference between the bad things in life that are real and the "unreal" monsters lurking under their bed at night (equivalent in contemporary life to the imaginary lions of the African savannah).

As leaders, we must assist with addressing the imagined VUCA-Plus monsters lingering under our organizational beds. We are expected to discern the difference between valid signals and invalid signals. Leaders are "paid big bucks" to detect the real from the unreal. This can be quite a challenge in the world of VUCA-Plus.

There is a second task of discernment that is assigned to us, as leaders. This discernment is needed to differentiate between various types of anxiety that are precipitated by the kind of issues we face in our organizations (and our life outside the organization).

We must not only sort out the real and imaginary predators but also determine what kind of predator (issue/challenge) confronts us. I propose that we face six types of issues. Each type of issue possesses its own threat and opportunity for resolution. Here are the types—as they relate specifically to the overarching challenges of VUCA-Plus and as they produce anxiety.

A World of Puzzles, Problems, Dilemmas and Mysteries

The concept of VUCA has become quite commonly introduced into considerations of 21st-century organizational challenges. I would suggest that we move beyond the VUCA and VUCA-Plus environment by considering not just the content contained in these analyses, but also the nature of the issues embedded in this environment and the threat each condition poses.

I propose that four types of issues are addressed in this environment. The most prevalent of these issues are not puzzles. However, the most important and most difficult to resolve are problems, dilemmas, and mysteries. These latter issues represent the fast, powerful (and elusive) lions that actually threaten us in the mid-21st Century savannah. I briefly describe all four types and identify the distinction threat(s) each of them poses.

Puzzles

Puzzles are the everyday issues that anyone working in an organization must face. Puzzles have answers. They are unidimensional in that they can be clearly defined and easily quantified or (at least) measured. Puzzles concern such things as changing a production schedule to accommodate a major new order or determining the appropriate fee for a new, longer training program. Changes in organizational policies to accommodate new federal laws can be "puzzling" as can the rearrangement of office space or distribution of parking spaces.

With a puzzle, the parameters are clear. The desired outcome of a puzzle-solution process can readily be identified and is often important to (and can be decided by) a relatively small number of organization members. It is the type of issue rightly passed to the lowest level of responsibility where the necessary information is available. Puzzles were quite common in pre-VUCA-Plus organizations.

Anxiety arises from failure to solve a puzzle. The desired outcomes are clear and the inability or unwellness to achieve these outcomes is cause for concern and even punishment (demotion, loss of pay, removal from the job or project). Was the wrong person assigned to this task? Didn't we have enough resources? Was this the wrong solution?

There is yet another source of anxiety that is not often acknowledged – though it is frequently present. Those who have identified and perhaps started working on a puzzle discover that it is not actually a puzzle but is instead a problem or dilemma. There is a moment of shock—and perhaps some freezing. Then a shift in perspective and practice must be engaged. Otherwise, there will be repeated unsuccessful attempts to solve the puzzle.

Researchers who study complex systems use a landscape metaphor to distinguish a complex challenge from simpler challenges faced

in various systems, including organizations. Miller and Page (2007) provide the image of a single, dominant mountain peak when describing one type of landscape. Often volcanic in origin, these imposing mountains are the highest point within sight. There are no rivals. For those living in or visiting the Western United States, we can point to Mt. Rainer (in western Washington) or Mt. Shasta (in northern California). Mt. Fuji in Japan exemplifies this type of landscape.

You know when you have reached the highest point in the region and there is no doubt regaining the prominence of this peak. Similarly, in the case of puzzles, one knows when a satisfactory solution has been identified and one can stand triumphantly at the top of the mountain/puzzle, knowing that one has succeeded and can look back down to the path followed in reaching the solution/peak.

We know how the peak was reached, or the puzzle is solved. We can readily replicate the actions taken. Conversely, anxiety fills us when we have failed to reach the peak and can't figure out how to be successful in the future. Unfortunately, other landscapes are much more challenging—and these represent the dominant environment of VUCA-Plus. Our mid-21st Century world is filled with collective angst precisely because many issues we face are NOT puzzles.

Problems

The second type of issue that a 21st Century leader faces with VUCA and VUCA-Plus can be labeled a "problem". Some other authors have described these as "wicked" issues. Problems can be differentiated from puzzles because multiple perspectives can be applied when analyzing a problem. Several possible solutions are associated with any problem and multiple criteria apply when evaluating the potential effectiveness of any one solution.

There are many more cognitive demands being placed on us when we confront problems than when we confront puzzles—given that

problems do not have simple or single solutions. Anxiety often arises in conjunction with these cognitive demands. Problems are multi-dimensional and interdisciplinary in nature. They are inevitably complicated and anxiety-inducing in that they involve many elements (Miller and Page, 2007).

Any problem can be viewed from many different points of view— thus it is unclear when they have been successfully resolved (producing even more anxiety). For example, we find a technical solution and realize the problem has financial implications. We address these financial implications and soon find a whole host of managerial concerns emerging that are associated with the problem. We are perplexed, befuddled—and anxious.

Researchers and theorists who are seeking to understand complicated problems often describe the settings in which problems emerge as "rugged landscapes." (Miller and Page, 2007, p. 216) This type of landscape is filled with many mountains of about the same height (think of the majestic mountain range called the Grand Tetons or the front range of the Rocky Mountains that citizens of Denver Colorado see every day), as compared with a landscape in which one mountain peak dominates (think of Mount Rainier). In a rugged, complicated landscape, one finds many competing viewpoints about which mountain is higher or which vista is more beautiful. A similar case can be made regarding the challenging VUCA-Plus problems facing the 21st Century leader. How are clear, consistent, and accurate judgments made when we are anxiously torn in multiple directions?

Dilemmas

When certain issues that managers face appear impervious to a definitive solution, it becomes useful to classify them as dilemmas. While dilemmas like problems are complicated, they are also complex, in that each of the many elements embedded in the dilemma is connected to each (or most) of the other elements (Miller and Page, 2007). We may view the problem from one perspective and take action to alleviate one part of the problem; we

then immediately confront another part of the problem, often represented by an opposing stakeholder group.

Dilemmas are intimately aligned with the challenge of uncertainty in the VUCA model and the challenge of turbulence in the VUCA-Plus model. Uncertainty and turbulence travel hand-in-hand with personal and collective anxiety. We tighten our policies regarding new product development and creativity drops off. We increase prices to increase revenues and find that we are losing customers, thereby losing revenues.

Leaders do not always recognize a dilemma for what it is. They want to avoid the anxiety associated with uncertainty. New leaders who have not fully understood or acknowledged the unique nature of VUCA-Plus tend to see problems and dilemmas in a limited or simplistic way. They attempt to deal with them as if they are puzzles—hoping they are operating in a quiet stream rather than a turbulent river.

Turbulence is bad enough. The dilemma often is even more challenging. At times we find that the issue is a set of nested dilemmas. One set of conflicting priorities exists within another set of conflicting priorities. For instance, we want to pay one employee a bonus but are concerned that if we do so other employees who find out about it will be resentful and less likely to collaborate with their bonused colleague.

This dilemma, in turn, resides inside an even bigger dilemma: we want to increase salary and benefits for all our employees, yet also are trying to keep down costs because the market in which our product is being sold is highly competitive. These are complex dilemmas - not readily solved puzzles. Feelings of anxiety do not reside so much in potential failure; they reside more often in our inability to know how to address the issue at hand.

Living in a VUCA-Plus environment, contemporary leaders often confront the challenge of dilemmas and even nested dilemmas at almost every turn. As in the case of problems, dilemmas can be

described as "rugged landscapes." (Miller and Page, 2007) However, because dilemmas involve multiple elements that are intimately interlinked, they are far more than a cluster or range of mountain peaks of similar size.

This type of complex landscape is filled not only with many mountains of about the same height but also with river valleys, forested plains, and many communities (think of the Appalachian Mountains), as compared with a landscape in which one mountain peak dominates or in which a series of mountains dominate. In a complex, rugged landscape, there are not only competing viewpoints; these differing viewpoints are intricately and often paradoxically interwoven.

Life as a leader (or member of an organization) is often even more challenging and anxiety-filled in a VUCA-Plus environment. As leaders, we are likely to find that we are living and leading not just in a complex rugged landscape. We operate in what Miller and Page (2007) call a "dancing landscape." Priorities are not only interconnected. Priorities are shifting, and new alliances between old competing sides are forged. The landscape begins to dance when a world of complexity collides with a world of uncertainty, turbulence, and contradiction. Anxious leaders must learn how to dance.

Mysteries

When addressing the challenges associated with dancing landscapes, we enter a domain in which problems and dilemmas seem to merge into mysteries. Mysteries operate at a different level than puzzles, problems, and dilemmas. Mysteries are too complex to understand and are ultimately unknowable. It is inevitably viewed from many different perspectives that are systematic and deeply rooted in culture and tradition. Mysteries have no boundaries, and all aspects are interrelated. Anxiety associated with mysteries resides deep in our heart (and soul)—it is existential (May, 1996/2015).

A specific mystery is profound. Desired outcomes are elusive, yet they linger with all members of a society. They serve as the foundation for all sacred institutions in this society—for, ultimately, mysteries are spiritual in nature. Unlike puzzles, problems, and dilemmas they are not secular. Eliade's (1959) distinction between sacred and profane is directly applicable.

Mysteries are beyond rational comprehension and resolution. They must be viewed respectfully because they are awe-inspiring or just awe-full (Otto, 1923/1950). Depending on one's perspective, mysteries are the things "we take to God" or at least "take to heart". We don't turn to an organizational leader, public official, or high-paid consultant. Instead, we turn to our paster, a worldly friend, or (as a child) our wise grandmother for guidance (or at least reassurance) when confronted with a mystery.

The typical description of VUCA captures several of the most important dimensions of organizational mystery. The term unpredictable (U) is particularly relevant. As Taleb (2010) has noted, many Black Swans are to be found in our 21st-century world. Many VUCA-Plus events are like Black Swans—they can be imagined but are not likely to ever be encountered—until they occur. Specifically, some mysteries relate to traumatic and devastating events: Why did I get out of the World Trade Center while my desk-mate perished? Why is there evil in the world? Why did lightning strike our freighter but not the one next to it? Why did my child die before me?

Mysteries also encompass many positive events and moments of reflection. They can not only evoke threat and elicit anxiety-producing adrenaline but also evoke comforting memories and elicit pleasurable oxytocin. We ponder the source and meaning of a mystery: How did I deserve all these talents? Why have I been so blessed in my professional life? How did I ever raise such an exceptional child? How did I earn so much affection from these people at my retirement party? What is my destiny? Why did I fall in love with this person? Why did this remarkable person fall in

love with me? Operating in a container of safety, privileged reflections on these questions can occur. Lingering joy and appreciation replace existential anxiety.

Locus of Control

There is one additional dimension to be considered when identifying the sources of anxiety. This dimension concerns our assignment of control in a specific situation. We perceive mysteries as taking place outside our sphere of control or influence. Psychologists call this an external locus of control and note that some people are inclined to view most issues as outside their control (that is, as mysteries). By contrast, puzzles are usually perceived as being under our control.

Psychologists, such as Julian Rotter (1966), have identified this perspective as an internal locus of control and note that some people are likely to view all issues as being under their control (as puzzles). Anxiety for those with an external locus of control is likely to reside in their sense of helplessness in the face of threatening external forces that seem overwhelming. For those with an internal locus of control, anxiety is more likely to reside in their overwhelming sense of personal responsibility for everything that is happening in their life.

Problems and dilemmas are usually complex mixtures of controllable and uncontrollable elements. To successfully address a problem or dilemma, one typically needs a balanced perspective regarding an internal and external location of control. This is an important discernment in which to be engaged—and often quite difficult to engage when members of an organization (and particularly leaders of the organization) are anxious. When anxious, we revert to our preferred perspective (internal or external locus of control).

As I have noted, the sources of anxiety are likely to differ depending on one's locus. We are overwhelmed in different ways and find it difficult to provide any kind of discernment, including

distinguishing between the types of issues we confront. It is indeed quite a challenge—but worth the effort—to focus on issue type. One of the most helpful inquiries when facing problems, dilemmas, and (in particular) nested dilemmas is for us (individually and collectively) to identify what is and what is not under our control. A problem or dilemma embedded in a rugged landscape is more likely to have components under at least partial control of a leader than is a problem or dilemma embedded in a dancing landscape.

Conclusions

I am suggesting that we must fully appreciate the nature of a VUCA-Plus environment in which most contemporary leaders operate. This is especially under conditions when real (and imagined) lions are threatening us and triggering anxiety. A myriad of VUCA-Plus challenges are associated with identifying and addressing puzzles, problems, dilemmas and mysteries. Leaders typically want their issues to be puzzles that they can control or perhaps mysteries for which they have no responsibility. They are anxious when moving outside the domain of puzzles.

Puzzles can be solved—and we know when we have solved them. Mysteries are outside our control, so we don't have to feel it is necessary to resolve them. But problems and dilemmas—these are much more difficult to address. We must determine which aspects of the problem or dilemma are under our control and which are not. Typically, we engage this determination while experiencing some anxiety—for a confusing mixture of internal and external control is inherent in problems and dilemmas. That's what makes them so difficult to address.

A second set of challenges concerns the values inherent in the typical role played by leadership. Leaders are often considered much more successful, in terms of both fortunes and fame, if they can "solve problems"—often by approaching them as puzzles. This criterion of success is prevalent even in a VUCA-Plus environment. It takes a strong dose of courage, commitment, and persistence for

a mid-21st Century leader to acknowledge that the challenges are problems and dilemmas—which are not easily solved and need everyone to roll up their sleeves and work toward resolution. Fortunately, oxytocin exists alongside the adrenaline. We can bond while frightened. We can close ranks and collaborate in finding elusive solutions to elusive problems and dilemmas.

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Chapter Two

Searching for Serenity in a VUCA-Plus World

Where do we begin in providing an encapsulated (yet compelling) description of the challenging mid-21st Century world in which we now live and work? We can use words like "bewildering", 'incomprehensible," or "chaotic". These words describe how we feel, think, or see. We can also provide a label. We may declare that we live in a "postmodern world" or perhaps in a "post postmodern world." I have written about (and soon will be preparing a book about) what I am calling an "ironic world." These titles might be nice and tidy, but they don't say much about what this world looks like or how we think about and feel about it.

In recent years, four words have often been offered and grouped together to distill the challenges we now face. As I have already noted, these four words are volatile (V), uncertain (C), complex (C) and ambiguous (A). As a consolidated group of conditions, they are identified as VUCA. I have added two other conditions: turbulence and contradiction. Pulling together these six conditions, I have identified the VUCA-Plus aspects of mid-21st-century life and work.

In this chapter, I wish to broaden my consideration of each VUCA-Plus element by identifying polarities associated with each condition. I also introduce the "shadow" of each VUCA-Plus condition. These are the conditions of stability (as opposed to volatility), certainty (vs. uncertainty), simplicity (vs. complexity), clarity (vs. ambiguity), calm (vs. turbulence), and consistency (vs. contradiction).

Together, the six oppositional conditions create a state of *Serenity*. While there is much positive to be said in the short run about this state, the costs are great regarding the relationship between

Serenity and any clear and accurate perception of the "real" world in the mid-21st Century.

VUCA-Plus Polarities and the Search for Serenity

As I have noted, VUCA and VUCA-Plus can be of great value to those who assess, plan, and predict while serving in the mid-21st Century role of leader or expert. The challenges associated with the six conditions of VUCA-Plus are deservedly considered large in number and size. Each condition is fraught with multi-tiered problems and dilemmas often nested inside one another. We must make decisions in settings filled with volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity. Choices must be made in a turbulent environment swirling with contradictory versions of reality and polarizing values.

We are worn out, having to grapple every day with the conditions of VUCA-Plus. Personal and collective anxiety grip us, based on our frequent encounters with both real and imagined lions. Many observers of our contemporary social condition have gone so far as to suggest that this is an era of Great Exhaustion (e.g. Newport, 2016; Stoycheva, 2022). Thoughtful consideration and caring compassion are required—even when we are overloaded and tired. Furthermore, analyses we have made and decisions we have enacted are subject to frequent review and modification as we try to navigate a turbulent and contradictory VUCA world.

Angst and Serenity

I have proposed that collective anxiety (*angst)* is linked specifically to the six conditions of VUCA-Plus. These six conditions make the amelioration of Angst much more difficult. This cognitive and affective difficulty, in turn, tends to pull us toward simplistic, reality-denying, and polarizing beliefs and solutions. There is an important ramification here for those who seek to lead 21st-century organizations and social systems.

These leaders often must deal with the major VUCA-Plus-related challenges that escalate and sustain collective Angst. These women and men seem to be stranded on a boat that is caught up in the "perfect storm" of societal Angst. This is especially challenging when confronted with a major disruptive wave such as COVID-19 that is washing over the boat (Mura and Bergquist, 2020). Leadership in our 21st-century societies has become even more challenging given these unique Black Swan waves, as well as the big VUCA-Plus waves that are crashing over our boat right now.

The fundamental challenges in a VUCA-Plus environment involve determining what is "real" and how one forms beliefs, as well as predicting and making decisions based on beliefs and an assessment of this elusive reality. These thoughtful reflections are not easily engaged when the waves are crashing over us. We are anxious and exhausted. It is tempting to seek an easier way to meet mid-21st-century challenges. An alternative exists right before our "eyes" (and hearts).

Rather than confronting the challenges of VUCA-Plus, we can find ourselves in a real (or invented) land of serenity. Instead of volatility (V) we find stability (S). Uncertainty (U) is replaced by Certainty (C). We find SC rather than VU. This is a world of Simplicity (S) rather than Complexity (C), while the ambiguity (A) of VUCA-Plus is replaced with clarity (C). Another SC replaces CA. We find a two-fold SC. It is SC^2.

Serenity loves redundancy – and we have it with two SCs! Dwelling in this wonderland, we no longer have to navigate a turbulent environment. Rather there is calm. There is also consistency rather than contradiction. We can add calm and consistency to the world of SC^2. We now find the compelling "charm" of our six alternatives to VUCA-Plus in full operation. SC^2+ is alive and well!

Serenity is achieved when these SC^2+ conditions converge. SC^2+ provides a formula for the achievement of Serenity. Together these six conditions of serenity yield something of a utopian environment. Stability, certainty, simplicity, clarity, calm, and

consistency perhaps even offer us a touch of Eden . . .without the snake.

Seeking Serenity

On the surface, serenity does look quite tempting. It reduces Angst and opens the way for fast thinking and facile solutions (Kahneman, 2013). Furthermore, we can readily find Serenity in our world—at least short-term Serenity. Over the long-term, however, serenity is often elusive—and if we find Serenity in our mid-21st Century life, it may come at a cost. Much is lost when reality is distorted, and thoughts and actions become rigid. Most importantly, integrity is lost concerning our relationship with other people and our social system.

For instance, *Stability* requires establishing strong structures, processes, and attitudes. This make adjusting to the shifting conditions in our mid-21st Century world difficult. We establish what is equivalent to physical (and psychological) triangles to create and maintain stability. However, triangles are not easy to adjust. Unfortunately, our 21st Century demands agility. This means flexible structures, processes, and attitudes. We similarly find that *Certainty* (the second condition of Serenity) requires a rigidity of thought. It is hard to be both certain and creative, yet the shifting conditions of our mid-century society require that we be creative. This often means operating in organizational cracks (Stacey,1996) and the intersections between organizations (Johansson, 2004).

As a condition of serenity, *Simplicity* requires us to narrow our vision and our verification criteria. The cost of Simplicity is conveyed in the often-told story about the man standing beside the light pole looking for his lost keys, knowing that his keys are not located near the light. We attempt to find simplicity by standing near the light rather than searching for the problem where it resides. Similarly, we search for *Clarity* by standing at a distance and reconstructing what we are seeing so that it becomes clear. We "fill in" what we don't see or hear so everything is comprehensive

and meaningful. Jerome Bruner, a noted psychologist, suggests we go "beyond the information given" (Bruner, 1973). Even more broadly we participate with others in the social construction of reality (Berger and Luckmann, 1966) so that we might see, hear, and understand more "clearly."

There are two remaining conditions of Serenity (the + in SC²+). We find what seems to be *Calm* when we remain silent and immobile. However, this might not be a condition of Serenity. It might be a threat-induced freeze. We can easily mistake Calm for the Freeze response we make when attacked as the weak and slow creature on the African Savannah (Sapolsky, 2004). We act just like the other slow and weak rodents of the savannah who freeze rather than fight or flee. The defenseless rodents remained motionless. They hope the predator does not see them or ignore them and walk away. As Savannah inhabitants, we humans similarly would not move a muscle hoping for nonrecognition or indifference. Unfortunately, we were much harder to ignore than the rodent—especially when an attacking tribe approached.

Most of us no longer live on the African Savannah. Lions and invading tribes no longer threaten us. However, we frequently face other real (and imagined) threats. We still freeze when confronted with mid-21st Century challenges—at a time when we should be taking action. Unlike other undermanned creatures, modern-day humans don't shake off our freeze. Rather, we remain frozen in a physically unhealthy state of arousal for an extended period. Furthermore, we are easily eaten by lions (legitimate sources of threat) when we are frozen. We are "devoured" even more frequently by the unprocessed stress that the real or imagined threat triggers.

Similarly, we are inclined to get eaten when we insist on being *Consistent* and congruent in our beliefs and actions. We take wrong action and distort reality to avoid dissonance. We desperately seek out congruence and consistency between our self-image and our actions, between our espoused theory and theory-in-action

(Argyris and Schon, 1974), and between our values and our choices in life. Serenity comes at the cost of integrity. Like Faust, we sell our soul—now in exchange for "peace of mind." This exchange might require something more—that we sacrifice our lives. We are frozen in consistency. We are vulnerable to many anticipated and unanticipated predators. It seems that Serenity isn't always a desirable state when we try to survive on a 21st-century savannah inhabited by VUCA-Plus lions.

Given this summary description of costs associated with Serenity, I turn now to a more detailed analysis of the six conditions of serenity as each relates to its VUCA-Plus counterpart. I identify several distinctly different ways that challenge appears in our 21st-century world. These differences are framed as the left column and right column of polarity. In most cases, the left column represents a more conservative perspective on this challenge, whereas the right column is more likely to be at a cutting edge. I then identify ways in which the accompanying option of Serenity can be achieved to escape from this specific VUCA-Plus challenge. This allows me to expand on costs associated with engaging each condition of Serenity (SC²+).

Volatility and Stability

Volatility refers to the dynamics of change: its accelerating rate, intensity and speed as well as its unexpected catalysts. The Left Column perspective on volatility centers on *Commitment* in the midst of volatility. This perspective concerns being faithful. We act in a consistent and sustained manner. In this way, other people can readily understand and predict our behavior. What about the Right Column? The focus from this perspective is on *Contingency* in the midst of volatility.

This perspective concerns flexibility. We keep options open and allow learning to occur in order to modify the actions taken. An appropriate engagement would involve emphasis on the intentions (goals, vision, values, purposes) associated with the issue being

addressed. Which of these intentions should (must) remain constant and which can change depending on the shifting circumstances associated with this issue?

The Search for Stability

We live in a world of rapid unpredictable change. Furthermore, from a systemic perspective, volatility involves multiple changes that are often interwoven with one another. The rapid changes, cyclical changes, and chaotic changes of a white-water world are clearly evident. The personal impact of volatility on our sense of continuity and stability is profound.

We are often surprised and unprepared. Consequently, we look for some form of continuity and stability—a safe island on which we can land after being tossed about on a stormy sea. This island of safety offers a cure for the ailment of volatility—but at quite a cost. The cost is the loss of reality and the construction of a world that relies on a dualistic alignment with authority and a splitting of good from bad and "us" from "them".

We look out over our mid-21st Century world and find nothing that resembles *terra firma*. Miller and Page's (2007) would suggest our world resembles a rugged landscape. There is no one dominant element (no single presiding mountain); rather there are a host of mountain ridges and valleys. We find no single intention (goal, purpose, desired outcome) standing out as of greater importance than any other intentions. Furthermore, as Miller and Page noted, the landscape might be dancing. Priorities are constantly changing.

Unexpected ("Rogue") events are to be seen in our rugged and dancing landscape. These are big things that occur in an organization or community. They often serve as the base for the powerful narratives that are to be found in all social systems. These are narratives about heroic actions, foolish or even disastrous decisions, or a moment of courage or honesty. These are frequently repeated stories about a critical and unanticipated decision made

at the crossroads in the life of the organization or community. The success of an underdog (person or department) is often conveyed.

"Black Swan" is an appropriate label for the remarkable and powerful events that have caught our world by surprise (Taleb, 2010). We all know that swans are white—but what happens when a Black Swan is discovered? Similarly, how could we have predicted the Arab Spring, the election of an African American as president, or the expanded use and influence of the Global Internet.

As Taleb has noted, unanticipated rogue events are often governed by power laws (exponential increases) that move the rogue event quickly from small to large. Within organizations and communities, small variations in the dominant pattern of the system can lead to major changes in certain, unanticipated ways. These are the rogue events and the emergence of a whole flock of Black Swans. The rogue event is often preceded by periods of great stability (strongly entrenched patterns). This is what makes a rogue event so surprising and is the reason why this event has such a powerful impact.

We secure *Stability* (the first condition of Serenity) by dismissing or ignoring the Black Swans. An island of safety and stability awaits us when we pull ourselves away from our stormy 21st-century world. Our island can be surrounded by a large body of water. We vigilantly protect ourselves from the outside world. Our island might instead be surrounded by a small stretch of water and perhaps a sand bar that can be crossed at low tide. We hesitantly let in the outside world. We must consider how isolated we wish to be and for how long a period.

An island that is remote from the mainland can serve as a *Buffer* against an unanticipated rogue event. In an organizational setting, this buffer might be a financial reserve or a human resource reserve. The latter reserve can be created by the cross-training of employees to step into functions other than their own if emergency action is required. The buffer might instead involve diversification of an organization's offerings. As in the case of a healthy ecosystem,

product and service diversity in an organization enables it to survive changes in its "environment." Similarly, a community is more "adaptive" if its population is diverse (in terms of ethnic identity, race, socio-economic position, age, and gender identification)—despite the declarations made by advocates of "homogeny".

While buffers help to secure stability, they also require an expenditure of surplus money and time—which isn't always available in organizations or communities (especially when VUCA-Plus is prevalent). Buffers also can become an excuse for "hanging in" with the old way of doing things. Agility usually requires that leaders of an organization recognize the real consequences of remaining unchanged—even though it is tempting to delay executing a new initiative when a buffer is available. As system dynamics specialists (e.g. Meadows, 2008) have repeatedly demonstrated, delays can dramatically change the outcomes of a new initiative if and when it is finally enacted.

Leveraging and Trim Tabs

There is a more constructive way to find Stability amid volatility. We can offer *Organizational Leverage.* We set up a small stabilizing event or process in our organization or community to offset the volatility—much as we find with Buckminster Fuller's insightful analogy regarding "trim tabs." Fuller's trim tab is a small metal plate on the rudder of a ship that is set against the current direction of the ship—thus providing hydrodynamic stability for the boat. We set up a stabilizing trim tab in an organization as a countermeasure against newly emerging volatility and instability.

For instance, when a rogue event occurs, we remind our employees of our founding mission. This was done by the leaders of a major banking firm when they faced (unexpected) competition from another major bank that was dramatically changing several of its banking services. A major initiative in this bank focused on the founding story of the bank. Core values are represented in this founding story.

The leaders of this bank recognized that they were about to introduce major changes in their operations to counter their competitors' new initiatives. They wanted to be sure that these changes were still aligned with the founding values. Reminders of the founding story served as a trim tab for this bank—and it yielded some benefits. However, this stabilizing initiative soon lost energy. Employees were not particularly interested in studying the bank's history when they had to learn new skills and acquire new knowledge aligned with new ways in which this bank needed to operate (to survive).

A stabilizing trim tab was also introduced by the leaders of a utility company. Retired employees at all levels of the organization were invited (as volunteers) to mentor newly hired employees. The retirees provided a stabilizing history, knowledge of the business (at all levels), and a diverse set of skills that helped guide and support the transition of these employees into their new jobs. Once again, this trim tab intervention was of limited value. New employees politely listened to the "old timers" but paid more attention to the "new stuff" they had to learn.

We find that stability is rarely gained when engaged indirectly through trim-tab intervention. Conditions of volatility usually require direct action to "right the ship." This typically means that leaders of the organization introduce *New Structures and Processes* without relying on trim-tab countermeasures. Volatility produces stress and there is no escaping it with history or foundational values. We might set up a matrix structure that enables our organization to rely on existing functional departments (finance, R and D, production, etc.) while readily establishing new product or service lines. We can also introduce organizational processes that acknowledge both the value of stabilizing expertise found among those employees who have worked for many years in the same job, and the value of emerging expertise to be found in job rotations and ad hoc task forces (made up of both old and new employees from different divisions and levels of the organization).

Contingency Planning and Pre-mortem Reflection

At an even deeper level, Stability and Serenity are to be found in an organization's or community's plans for its future. The inability to avoid stress under conditions of volatility requires that we do some planning for rogue events and Black Swans—rather than ignoring them. *Contingency Planning* is needed. This mode of planning requires (as the name implies) that we plan for various contingencies—some positive and some negative. I (Bergquist, 2014a) have written about a related planning process, *Pre-mortem Reflection,* that has been advocated by behavioral economists.

While we are accustomed to doing "post-mortem" assessments after a project is finished, Daniel Kahneman and his colleagues (Kahneman, 2013) propose that we engage in slow and critical thinking before initiating a project. While optimism is valuable as fuel needed to start a project, it is also important to recognize potential problems and barriers associated with the project. Pre-project reflection helps a project team prepare for possible challenges (contingency planning). This reflection also helps to reduce the depth of a change curve that inevitably accompanies major new projects or changes in an organization's operations (Bergquist, 2014a).

Over the past decade, I have frequently encouraged planning teams to identify and address probable problems and barriers associated with the project or organizational change that is about to be mounted. This is contingency planning and pre-mortem planning. However, I often take contingency planning and pre-mortem processes further as a constructive way to find stability in a volatile world. I invite them to identify Black Swans that might impact their project or change. The shade of black can vary--with both unexcepted positive events lighting the way and darker negative events posing a major challenge.

When I work with a nonprofit organization these rogue events often involve surprising new sources of money or loss of financial resources. Unanticipated changes in public policy regarding

funding priorities are introduced when I am working with a government organization. Dramatic shifts in the size or focus of a competitor are common when I am working with a corporation. I even introduce some more humorous or "far out" Black Swans just to lighten the conversation and encourage creative problem-solving.

The swan might be the pill that significantly increases our intelligence or the landing of friendly aliens on Planet Earth. I sometimes suggest that the Black Swan is the elevation of one member of the planning team to the position of Emperor. They are commanding all operations in the world! The key factor is encouraging agility rather than stability amid volatility. Planning must be contingency-based and engaged prior to initiating a project. Strategies for securing stability such as buffers, history, retired employees, and trim tabs must be viewed as adjunctive to confronting the stress and challenges associated with Volatility.

Uncertainty and Certainty

Evolution and adaptation to an evolving environment require variance and uncertainty (anomalies). While we may seek to find a stable and predictable environment in our mid-21st century life, we are likely instead to discover a lack of continuity and resulting lack of clarity regarding what is going to happen from day to day in our life. There is an important systemic impact: it is hard to plan for the future or even for one or two days from now. Nothing seems permanently to be in place. At a personal level, we must keep our schedule and expectations quite flexible.

Uncertainty refers to the lack of predictability, the increasing prospects for surprising changes that are disruptive and often overwhelm our awareness, understanding, and ability to cope with events. In this case, a Left-Column perspective on Uncertainty would center on the *Assimilation* of changes into the existing framework. This perspective concerns making sense of and finding meaning in what is occurring in the present reality. By contrast, a

Right-Column perspective on Uncertainty would center on *Accommodation* to changes by adjusting or reworking the existing framework. This perspective concerns learning from and adapting to what is occurring in the present reality.

The appropriate management of this polarity would involve the creation and maintenance of a learning organization (Argyris and Schön, 1978). Emphasis is placed in such an organization (or community) on the learning that occurs following either success or failure in addressing issues associated with uncertain conditions.

The polarity is addressed by recognizing that learning always involves structures and concepts that already exist (assimilation). We don't acquire anything of importance if the incoming experience is alien to us. However, as we bring in and incorporate new information, the existing structures must change (accommodation). New experiences bounce off us (they are dismissed) if we are unwilling to accommodate them. A joint assimilation/accommodation process is required.

The Search for Certainty

There is a strong pull in our VYCA-Plus world to be rigid rather than flexible and open to new perspectives and practices. We become stubborn if we are not prepared for a high level of uncertainty and new learning. We find one specific way to be in the world and look for other people who similarly think and act.

Together, we create a Bubble of Belief. We collectively push for laws that enforce this one way of being in the world and seek to elect those leaders who are just as committed to this one way of thinking and acting. If we can't elect them in a legitimately recognized manner, then we are likely to join with others in manipulating the existing system or impose our own choices by force. Our rigidity leads to authoritarianism—as a cure for the seeming malady of uncertainty.

The search for *Certainty* is a major driving force for many people. It is probably the most compelling of the six pathways to Serenity.

In writing about the quest for certainty, John Dewey (1929) had the following to say:

> When theories of values do not afford intellectual assistance in framing ideas and beliefs about values that are adequate to direct action, the gap must be filled by other means. If intelligent method is lacking, prejudice, the pressure of immediate circumstance, self-interest and class-interest, traditional customs, institutions of accidental historic origin, are *not* lacking, and they tend to take the place of intelligence.

We see even in the early 20th Century perspective of John Dewey that the lure of Serenity is present. We can easily replace intellectual assistance with prejudice, immediate pressures, self-interests, customs, etc. that lead us to certainty and the comfort of Serenity (SC²+).

Three Paths to Certainty

Here in the middle of the 21st Century, our search for certainty might require that we *Confine Ourselves* to a small, confined silo where we can control (and therefore predict) everything. We set up large, thick boundaries between ourselves and those who are "other." (Oshry, 2018). In search of Serenity, we establish a closed system that can't sustain itself over the long term.

Ironically, this confinement strategy is aligned with a "modern" approach to management: the focus is on control so one can predict and subsequently plan and execute without disruption. I am reminded of the witch in the musical *Into the Woods*. She confines her daughter in a tower so that nothing can harm her. However, the daughter can't survive (psychologically) in this closed system and must find a way to escape the tower. Like the witch, we often suffocate those which we love when we seek to find safety and certainty for them.

If we can't control and build strong walls and towers, then we must *Limit Our Aspirations* and house these aspirations in the past: "We

have always done it this way and will always do it this way in the future." This is the perspective of the recalcitrant in Everett Rogers (1962) model of innovation diffusion. The recalcitrant is a person who is resistant to all new ideas. They are never likely to "leave home" and venture into new territory.

Actually, a recalcitrant often seeks out certainty and resists change because they were "burned" in the past by uncertainty—when they were trying to introduce something new in their organization or community. Failure in the enactment of new ideas not only leads to the loss of the idea but also to the loss of someone willing to try something new.

There is a third path. We ensure certainty by *Finding and Securing Power* in a system. With power comes control and with control comes an ability to do things "the good old way." There is also the matter of self-fulfilling prophecy. We can establish a system of power that will ensure our own assumptions about other people (and ourselves) are being fulfilled.

We assume that those "Other" people are unskilled, untrustworthy, and/or different from us. Without any power, they will fulfill our expectations--because we are free to act in a manner that elicits their poor performance, disruptive behavior, and/or strained relationship with us. We project all forms of negativity onto them. They become part of what Carl Jung would call our personal "shadow." Without power, these "Other" people are unable to oppose these personal projections. Furthermore, these personal projections often become part of a society's collective "shadow".

It seems that Certainty comes at a great cost. We can partially manage volatility with some pre-mortem planning; however, certainty is another matter. For us to be "certain" about something is to be removed from any serious attempt to deal with the other five conditions of VUCA-Plus. It is impossible to be certain when volatility, complexity, ambiguity, turbulence, and contradiction are swirling around our Head and Heart.

Complexity and Simplicity

Complexity entails the multiplex of forces, the flow of information that seems contradictory, and the sensitive interdependence of everything we touch. This leads to confusion, making it hard to arrive at smart decisions. We are swept up in a moving dance of reality.

A Left-Column perspective on Complexity would center on being *Clear-Minded* amid confusion. The central concern is sorting out what is most relevant and easily confirmed while dancing with reality. The opposing Right-Column perspective on Complexity would center on being *Open-Minded* amid confusion. From this perspective, we would be primarily concerned with recognizing and holding on to the multiple realities that reside in the dance with reality.

Coaching and consulting services can be appropriately and effectively used in addressing this polarity through encouragement and even facilitation) of slow, reflective thinking described and advocated by behavioral economists. Daniel Kahneman (2013), in particular, emphasizes the importance of avoiding fast, habitual thinking.

Slow thinking incorporates both clarity of mind (identifying and setting aside biases and sloppy heuristics) and open-mindedness (consideration of alternative perspectives, practices, and options). It is critical that thinking and decision-making slow down while we are saturated with the pervasive anxiety that accompanies Complexity (and the other conditions of VUCA-Plus), The polarity between clear-mindedness and open-mindedness can be effectively managed with the use of tools offered by Kahneman and his colleagues (Kahneman, 2013; Kahneman, Sibony and Sunstein, 2021).

Complexity

We live in a world that is not just complicated (with many moving parts) but also complex (with many parts that are interconnected) (Miller and Page, 2007). We must consider many different things and multiple, interrelated events that simultaneously impact on our life and work. The systemic impact of this complexity is great. It is hard in mid-21st century life to make sense of or even find meaning in that which occurs every day.

At a personal level, this means that we often must spend a considerable amount of time trying to figure out what is happening before making decisions or taking actions. Slow thoughtful analysis is required (rather than fast "knee-jerk" and habitual thinking) This requires discipline and sustained concentration—which is hard to maintain in our fast-moving world. We also find it hard to concentrate when facing the other VUCA-Plus conditions (ambiguity, uncertainty, volatility, turbulent and contradictions).

There is an alternative. We can choose to reframe our world so that it is not complex nor are the other VUCA-Plus conditions present. We can ensure that fast, habitual thinking wins the day. This requires that we radically distort the reality of our mid-21st-century life. To do this distorting of reality, we must join with others who similarly distort their world. We can engage in even greater distortions when relating to these other people who perceive reality in a manner aligned with our perceptions.

We form an echo chamber with those who think like us. Our Bubble of Belief is impenetrable. We devote energy (and money) to ensure that those who lead and have power will think like us. They might even have helped to "teach" us how to reason in this simplistic and fast manner. We are fully devoted to these people who are now in authority—or are vigorously (and often violently) seeking to be in authority.

The Search for Simplicity

As I have already suggested, there is a strong, widespread push for simplicity in our lives. This push is aided in the mid-21st Century by the media we consume. We ask other people at work to "give it to us in bullet points." We want to know the ten keys to success or the seven steps to take on the journey to health (or even happiness). We want sound bites when we pick up the news on our handheld device or even when we view our evening news on cable TV. "Tell me what I need to know and how I solve my problems. Make it fast and digestible." This demand for simple information and simple solutions is particularly prevalent when Angst is swapping the country or at least invading our workplace or household.

This search for simple, easily digestible views of reality is not new. It goes back to at least the world of Ancient Greece and the insights offered by Plato in his allegory of the cave. I first offered his allegory in the preface to this book. As you might recall, Plato proposed that we live in a cave and never gain a clear view of reality. Instead, we view the shadows that are projected on the walls of the cave. We live with an image of reality (shadows on the wall of the cave) rather than with reality itself. Plato notes that we have no basis for knowing whether we are seeing the shadow or seeing reality, given that we have always lived in the cave.

Shadows on the Wall

Plato speaks to us from many centuries past about the potential fallacy found in our search for simplicity in 21st-century societies. Most importantly, in our search, we can never know whether we are living in the cave or living in the world of reality outside the cave. It gets more complex.

Today, we live with an expanded cast of characters in the cave. First, something or someone is standing near the opening of the cave. Some narratives and perspectives serve as partitions blocking out some of the light coming into the cave. These partitions are

cultural or personal narratives that we meet with every day. We don't see reality. Someone or something else determines which parts of objective reality gain access to the cave and are projected onto the wall. Those holding the partition have grown up in the cave; however, they may embrace a different agenda from many (perhaps most) cave dwellers. They may even control the media in our mid-21st Century world.

There is yet another character in our contemporary cave. This is the reporter or analyst. We don't have enough time in our busy lives to look directly at the wall to see the shadows that are projected on the wall from the "real" world. The cave has grown very large. We often can't even see the walls of the cave and the shadows.

We wait for reporters to tell us what is being projected on the wall and for the analyst to tell us what the implications of these images are for us in our lives. At times, we might even turn to historians of the cave to trace wall image patterns and trends. Our reports and analysts—even our historians--share their interpretations in sound bits. Thus, we are three steps from reality. Furthermore, as I noted in the Preface, we might face the unsettling condition of Contradiction. We are offered differing and often contrasting analyses.

On behalf of *Serenity (SC²),* we believe that the shadows on Plato's cave are "reality." And we accept only one rendition of these shadows. We don't recognize that someone is standing at the entrance to the cave and selectively determining which conditions of reality get projected onto the wall. We don't acknowledge that someone else is standing inside the cave offering us a description and analysis. We don't accept that alternative (and contradictory renditions) might be valid.

We can hope for a direct experience or at least for "honest" interpretations. Yet, we remain confused about what is "real" and often don't trust our direct experience. We move, with great reluctance and considerable grieving, to a recognition that reality is being constructed for us and that we need to attend not only to

the construction but also to the interests and motives of those who stand at the entrance to the cave and those who offer us their interpretations.

Plato's allegory of the cave does provide us with the opportunity to gain insights through our reflections on the nature of the cave. We can critically examine the world that is projected onto the walls of the cave and the nature and agenda of the interpreters. This requires that we tolerate or even feel comfortable with Complexity. We should also consider whether or not to step outside the cave (direct experience). However, we must recognize that we might lack the ability or be allowed to step outside the cave. Or we might just be stepping into another cave.

Perhaps it Is safer to remain inside the cave than to venture outside without the help of interpreters. Should we (and can we) face the profound challenge of unmediated experiences (stepping outside the cave)? This certainly leads us far away from Serendipity—but may open the door (or cave entrance) to the fresh breeze of VUCA-Plus diversity—and reality.

Ambiguity and Clarity

Ambiguity concerns the 'haziness' in which cause-and-effect are assessed. Causes are hard to attribute. Relativity seems to trump established rules. Conditions of ambiguity weigh heavily on our ability to hold contradictory data and still function and make choices. An accompanying Left Column perspective on Ambiguity would focus on *Tolerating* this haziness. The primary concern would center on patience and being willing to remain in "limbo" until such time as the haze clears and actions can be taken. The Right Column perspective stands in opposition. This perspective would focus on *Engaging* the haziness. The primary concern is establishing a viable "truth" and "reality" upon which one can base and guide actions

Appropriate coaching and consulting services can be requested to address the ambiguity-based polarity. Those providing these

services can introduce multiple templates for assessing the nature of any challenging issue. One of these templates concerns the identification and analysis of both the immediate issue (the figure) and the context within which this issue is situated (the ground). A second template concerns the distance from which a specific issue is being addressed. It should be examined close up (as an intimate portrait) (proximal perspective) and at a distance (as a broad landscape) (distal perspective).

The third template involves temporal distance. The issue should be examined as it is currently being experienced (present time) and as it will probably be (or could be) present at some point ahead of us (future time). The polarity of engagement and tolerance is managed when each of these three templates is applied to the analysis of an important issue. The convening issue can be viewed from multiple perspectives—which allows for both immediate engagement and tolerance of certain immediate circumstances as well as longer term and "bigger picture" engagement and tolerance.

Confusion

Living in the mid-21st Century we are likely to find that many of the things we encounter and events happening around us can be quite confusing. Our world is often not very easy to observe clearly and the conclusions we reach about reality are often not consistent. Our collective blurry vision has an important systemic impact. As a society, we can't trust the accuracy of what we see or hear. Furthermore, we can't trust what "experts" tell us about the world in which we are living (Weitz and Bergquist, 2024).

If we are being honest with ourselves, then we are forced to adopt a social constructivist view of the world. There is no fundamental reality that can somehow be accurately assessed. Rather there are alternative constructions of the "real" world—which leave us with no clear, unambiguous sense of what is real and what is false. The traditional objectivist perspective must be abandoned. There is no objective way to assess the real world. We are living in Plato's cave.

The light projected on the wall is often flickering and not seen clearly.

What does this mean for us personally? It means we often must look and listen a second or third time to ensure that what is seen or heard is accurate. We must examine our assumptions and our constructed frame of reference if we are fully to appreciate our distinctive worldview. This task is quite challenging given all of the distorted lens and shades that are blocking our vision and creating our Bubble of Belief. How do we deal with what Frederick Jameson (1991) once called the "troubling ambiguity" of postmodern life?

We can regress to what William Perry (1970) labels a "Dualistic" perspective. We subscribe to the reality offered by one particular "expert" who arrives at our doorstep with a mantle of authority. This authority can come from academic or research-based pedigrees or a position of power. Unfortunately, academic-based and research-based credibility can readily be questioned given the instability of academic institutions and research in the mid-21st Century (Weitz and Bergquist, 2022).

Credibility can also be found in the repeated appearance of specific information (accurate or inaccurate) on the Internet. Apparently, many of us living in the mid-21st century are convinced by volume and redundancy. It must be true if we read and hear it often enough. Perhaps this maxim has always held true—predating the Internet. It gets even worse when this instability is accompanied by acknowledging social construction as an underlying framework for assessing the value of expertise. Patterns and assemblies of "fact" are assembled—making an "alternative reality" that much more acceptable.

With this assault of both defensible and indefensible "truths", we face the prospect of transitioning to what Perry titled a "Multiplistic" perspective. All expertise and expert messages are questioned. When faced with an assault of truths, it might be preferable to turn away from "credible" expertise and volume of information as primarily reasons to accept what we see and read.

We are guided instead by power and authority. Power is much more stable and reassuring that academic credentials or redundant Internet-based information. It is authority embedded in power that will often win the day when the world is saturated with ambiguity and flooded with information. Regressive Dualism triumphs and joins with an authoritarian perspective: We believe and follow those who rule. Those who advocate a version of reality that doesn't align with those in charge retreat to a corner of the cave. Those who suggest that there are multiple versions of reality are driven out of the cave . . .

The Search for Clarity

As we look at the world (from inside the cave or outside the cave) it is important to consider what we are looking at and what we are not looking at (ignoring) or seeing through a distorted lens. This means that we look back at our own attention strategies. Michael Polanyi suggests that we attend to that from which we are attending (Polanyi, 1969). The lens we are using greatly impacts what we are seeing. Most importantly, as I suggested about templates, we can look at objects and events that are distant in time and space, or we can look at objects and events that are close to us in time and space.

The distant (distal) objects and events are usually seen more clearly than objects and events that reside very close to us in time and space. Thus, in our search for clarity, we often remain at a distance and view everything from afar. We become historians of the past and might believe we need only replicate what we think worked in the past. As Mark Twain suggested, history might not repeat itself, but it does rhyme—and we can view this history through a lens that we believe is objective and free of present-day emotions and biases.

We also seek clarity by reducing everything to a distant number rather than a more intimate narrative. Statistics provide at least probability. This is reassuring in our search for certainty along with clarity. This "ideographic" approach to assessing reality enables us to accurately predict how many boxes of Cheerios will be consumed

this month. We are given a specific number and prediction that hover on the edge of certainty). We don't have to taste the cereal or even meet anyone who has chosen this cereal. We can look at a distance and need not get emotionally involved with anyone eating Cheerios today.

What happens when we focus on a specific person's choice of a particular cereal (or something other than cereal for breakfast)? Everything gets less clear and less certain. We are suddenly involved in a "nomothetic" assessment, with a focus close up on the actual muddy act of making food choices at breakfast. The cereal eater might surprise us. They might choose a waffle rather than Cheerios. They haven't eaten a waffle in more than a decade.

We are witnessing a Black Swan. Why the waffle? Does the breakfast eater even know why they made this choice? Behavioral scientists have won major awards (in economics rather than psychology) by delving into these fuzzy decision-making processes. They are willing to live with ambiguity and have offered many valuable insights based on this tolerance of ambiguity (cf. Kahneman, 2013; Ariely, 2008; Ariely, 2012: Thaler, 2015; Lewis, 2017).

What happens when we move in even closer to the subject of our study? What happens when this "subject" is us? What do we do with personal and highly intimate portraits of our life experiences? Often known as phenomenological studies, these inquiries inside our psyche produce insights of great value to not just ourselves but also other people.

I would point, in particular, to the autobiographical and visual portrayals of his internal psychic dynamics provided by Carl Jung (1963) in *Memories, Dreams and Reflections* and in his large, breathtaking volume titled: *The Red Book* (Jung, 2009). In these two documents, we encounter him "upfront and personal." Very few other psychologists (or authors of fictional or nonfictional books) have been as brave (though Jung did request that *The Red Book* not be published until after his death).

The phenomenologists take it one step further. They challenge the assumption that one can objectively report events or describe objects. Like Michael Polanyi, phenomenologists push for an exploration of one's own biases and perspectives as an observer and commentator on human behavior. Instead of trying to be objective, one can be honest and transparent. That means being candid about one's assumptions, biases, and purposes for writing about or discussing a specific event or object. One of the best ways to do this is to be interviewed about one's direct experience regarding this event or object.

I personally witnessed the profound engagement in this process of phenomenology on the part of a graduate student attending my graduate school in the early 1990s. Living with AIDS, my student had just lost his partner to this disease. I encouraged him to "enter the mouth of the dragon" and focus his dissertation on the experience of losing one's partner to AIDS and preparing for one's own death (which was likely during the early years of AIDS).

My student took on this profoundly challenging task by conducting in-depth interviews with six other men with AIDS who were grieving AIDS-related death of their partner. Taking a phenomenological stance, my student was first interviewed by a colleague regarding his own experience. During this interview, his own biases, fears, hopes, and reasons for conducting this study were revealed.

I have never seen a more "objective" study in which everything was revealed regarding the researcher's biases, assumptions, and motivations. His dissertation ended up being rough but saturated with profound insights not only concerning AIDS but also the processes of grieving and dying. My student died several months after completing his dissertation and being awarded a well-deserved doctorate.

This dissertation process was close and personal for me. I can't be objective about it even more than 20 years later. For me, the whole engagement is unclear. It is filled with my feelings of admiration,

sadness--and a sense of privilege that I was able to be with him for this final act of his life. Thus, I, like most people, can be clear from a distance but not clear up close and personal. Numbers are simpler than narratives. Big distal and ideographic pictures are clearer and less emotionally distorting than local pictures which are proximal and nomothetic). Serenity (SC^2) can ultimately be achieved only by closing our eyes and our hearts.

Turbulence and Calm

The white water is all around us at this point in the 21st Century. We are living in a turbulent world. Some things in our life and work are moving rapidly, while others are moving cyclically. We are also likely to find that some things are not moving at all—even if we would like them to move. Perhaps, most importantly, some things in our lives and work are moving chaotically. They are swirling about unpredictably. We might be able to adjust temporarily to one of these four conditions. However, we might soon find that we are facing a different set of conditions that require a different manner of planning, execution, and leadership.

What is the systemic Impact? The four systems (rapid change, cyclical change, non-change, and chaotic change) are all operating simultaneously—and they are often bumping into one another. There is another important factor that we must add to this complex equation. We know that any system will become chaotic when it moves fast. Overly rapid change damages everything in a system and makes this system hard to manage. Thus, in a world where accelerating change (the first system) is becoming more prevalent, we find that chaos (the fourth system) will also become more prevalent. The cyclical changes—that are more predictable—will become less prevalent.

Stagnation (the third system) will also tend to decline in magnitude—or it will become more isolated from the other systems. While a reduction in the size of this third system might initially seem to be a positive outcome, we find that this is not the

case, for the third system is often a source of stability for any system (especially a human system).

That which Talcott Parsons (1955) called "latent pattern maintenance" tends to reside in the third system. Furthermore, we know that the nutrients in a natural system (such as a mountain stream) reside primarily in the so-called "stagnant" portion of the stream. This is where leaves eventually end up and sink to rot (convert into new forms of nutrition for other living beings in this stream). We might find that this same nutritional function is being served in human systems. This third system is just as important as the other three.

Centering and Balancing

Given these characteristics of a "white water" world, we find that the personal impact is likely to be great for any of us who are living and working in this environment. The white-water world requires a search for balance and a centering direction—which in turn requires ongoing attention. We need a kayak when navigating the white water. Canoes will tip over. They don't offer the agility of kayaks. There is another requirement. We must find our center of gravity when steering our kayak through the white water. Peter Vaill ((1989/2008) goes so far as to suggest that this center of gravity is often found in a core set of principles and values. We might even adopt a spiritual perspective when searching for this center of gravity.

One might wonder if this core can be found in basic religious beliefs or an alliance with some authoritarian figure. Do we find balance when guided by firm religious tenets or the dictates of a strong leader? I would suggest that this rarely is the case, for this leader and their beliefs, alliances, and tenets are much too rigid. Like those operating the canoe, these leaders can only move in one direction (forward) and must shift their rigid perspective (single-bladed paddle) from one side to the other when navigating the white water. These leaders are working with a "one-dimensional" tool when counterbalancing and adjusting to changes in the water's

direction. This makes navigation very difficult. Similar limitations are found when leading an organization or community through white water. Single-edged solutions don't do the trick in turbulent environments.

By contrast, the person navigating a kayak engages a two-bladed paddle that makes counterbalancing and shifting directions much easier. Similarly, a multi-dimensional tool makes white-water navigation in an organization less challenging. Successful white-water leaders employ a variety of tactics and strategies when navigating the white water. At times they stick to tried-and-true procedures, while at other times they might rely on new procedures generated and tested in skunkworks.

The leader might look for a competitive advantage by venturing out to a new international market or they might look for a collaborative advantage by joining a consortium started by one of their competitors. The term Agility can readily be applied to successful kayaking—and successful leading of a mid-21st Century organization. This term does not readily apply to a person or organization caught up in the vice grips of a rigid religious belief or authoritarian rule.

A Left Column perspective would focus on *Centering* amid multiple changing circumstances. A "kayaking" perspective primarily concerns searching for and finding the core, orienting place that provides one with balance and direction. Agility plays a central role in moving the double-bladed paddle back and forth. A Right Column perspective focuses on *Balancing* amid multiple conditions of change.

From this perspective, we must allow for and participate in many balancing points and direction shifts in our work and life. For the kayaker, this means looking "downstream" to prepare for the upcoming challenges presented by the white-water river they are navigating. What might be found around the next bend in the river and how does my current position on the river prepare me for what might await me around the bend? Kayakers and leaders do

contingency planning when navigating their turbulent environment.

Keeping with the white-water metaphor, we can address this polarity appropriately and effectively by focusing proximally (up close) on our centering and simultaneously focusing distally (at a distance) on what might await us. Specifically, this means using centering—and agility—to think outside the immediate box and "lean into the future" (Bergquist and Mura, 2011) with forethought.

Otto Scharmer (2019) offers a *Theory U* way of thinking about and acting in a world of turbulence. He writes about "learning into the future." When engaging in this anticipatory learning, Scharmer suggests we must first seek to change the system as it now exists. Scharmer emulates John Dewey's suggestion that we only understand something when we kick it and observe its reaction. However, Scharmer goes further than Dewey. He proposes that we must examine and often transform our way of thinking in the world—which requires both centering and forethought—if this change is to be effective and if we are to learn from this change in preparation for the future.

From the perspective of whitewater navigation, this would mean we experiment with different ways of engaging our kayak in our current whitewater world. We particularly try changes based on polystatic predictions about how the river is operating around the next bend. Will there be more rocks, greater drop in elevation, more bends, etc.? We take "notes" on how our kayak is behaving in response to changes in our use of the paddle, our way of sitting in the kayak, etc.

Scharmer requires that we not only try out several ways of kayaking, and take notes on these trials, but also explore and embrace new ways of thinking about kayaking and the dynamic way it operates in the river's turbulence. These new ways are activated by what we have learned from the current trials. The new ways, in turn, influence other changes we might wish to test before

reaching the next bend in the river. Effective learning becomes recursive and directed toward (leaning toward) the future.

This type and level of learning is challenging. Furthermore, it is hard to determine which changes to make and how best to learn about them. These processes are difficult to deploy while still navigating the current white-water world. An expert on white water navigation might join us in the kayak (without tipping it over!). They can help us manage the real-time interplay between centering and forethought. It takes a particularly skillful coach or consultant who is herself both centered and forethinking if she is to be of benefit in the management of this dynamic, turbulent polarity. The request should read: "Coach or consultant requested who is willing to travel—on a white-water river. They must be willing to learn in real time alongside their client. A proclivity toward leaning into the future is a prerequisite."

The Search for Calm

It is understandable why we search for calm while navigating a treacherous white-water world. We do experience the Great Exhaustion. We might steer our craft to a quiet place on the river (the stagnant system) or pull our craft over to the side of the river and sit on the bank for a short while. In an organizational or community setting we look for calm in several ways.

The most obvious is consumption of mind-altering and emotion-altering substances. We drink a beer or something "stronger" while sitting on the bank. Things seem to be a bit less turbulent after one or two cocktails. We avoid dealing with multiple life crises by downing a bottle of wine every evening or by taking some of the pain-killing pills we obtained to treat a sore back. The pills seem to be helping as well with our sore life.

Alongside the pills are the denial and isolation strategies. We focus on only one segment of the white-water system. We may see only the recurring challenges—such as the annual audit or the drop in Fall sales. We might instead focus on the part of our life that has

remained the same for many years. We still go down to the local tavern and drink with our buddies. We leave the swirling world around us at the front door of this welcoming Bar. Daily rituals of many kinds make it a bit easier to deal with the ongoing changes.

Conversely, we might be addicted to the thrilling challenge of fast-moving operations in our organization. There is always a crisis and challenging deadlines. As long as we focus on the short-term, we don't have to worry about the long-term and serious, deep-seated challenges to our business. We never look down the river to what awaits us, for the current rapids offer us sufficient "highs". Neuroscientists tell us that we can easily get addicted to our own adrenaline. Under these conditions, a vacation from the "stress" of work ends up being unpleasant—for we are in withdrawal from our addictive internal chemicals. Similarly, we need the threatening competitor ("it is all win-lose") as well as toxic (and addictive) company politics ("Can you believe what he/she did! We must counter it!").

The calm might be applied at one moment as a short-term stress-reduction technique: "I am calm. I am perfectly calm!" We take a deep breath, meditate, listen to soothing music, work out in the gym for an hour, curl up for a brief midday nap, sit in the hot tub, or take a long shower. We might instead apply some "micro-aggression" against someone lower in the pecking order of our organization or community. A few of us are calm after we kick the cat, insult our daughter, or harass a clerk in our office. Some of these short-term remedies do work. We are calm--but only for a brief moment and sometimes at the expense of other people or our productivity.

Finally, there is a major, long-term calming strategy. This involves the search for sanctuary (Bergquist, 2017). We find short-term relief in the stress-relieving mini-sanctuaries we create (music, hot tub, meditation, etc.). This mini sanctuary might be a large, soft chair in our living room where we can read or listen to recordings featuring our favorite jazz pianists. We might also find this mini

sanctuary in our garage where we can work on a new cabinet or in a spare room in which we set up our easel and find a container for our paint brushes.

However, this might not be sufficient. Many of us long for relief that is not momentary. We find (or create) sanctuaries that last a day or two (festivals, fairs, vacations, etc.). Or we find sanctuaries that can last for a longer time. We can spend an extended period at a Zen Center or Recovery Center. Traditionally, sanctuaries were often established for people who had lost a battle or violated some societal norm. These losers and transgressors would enter (or escape to) a sanctuary that provides healing and learning. The heiau called "The City of Refuge" on the Big Island in Hawaii has served this important function.

Sometimes sanctuary is embedded in a ritual, like evening prayers for the Jew or one of the five periods of prayer for the Muslim. Sometimes it involves a routine, like stopping in the park to feed pigeons on the way home from work at the end of the day or having a quiet cup of coffee in the staff room of a busy corporation. Not always, but often enough to keep us engaged, these moments take us to a place we call our true home.

We are rested and renewed. We say, "Now I am more myself again." Sanctuary enables us to stop, hide, retreat, rest, and become "more ourselves again." We find calm away from the turbulence of everyday life. Yet, we can't live in a sanctuary all the time. We might heal and learn in a Heiau—but must return to a VUCA-Plus world that continues to do damage and elude comprehension.

Contradiction and Consistency

We have now arrived at the final condition of our VUCA-Plus environment. This condition is more likely to drive people to Perry's Dualism and an authoritarian regime than the other VUCA-Plus conditions. It is also the condition that is most likely to prove challenging to leaders who view themselves as open-minded. We are confronted with valid (though often ambiguous) messages

constantly being delivered. We often wish they would remain vague, for clear messages may point in different directions.

At a trivial level, we are inundated with advertisements that conflict with one another. Which, after all, is the best way to brighten our smile? Do we need one of those fancy whitening trays prepared by our dentist or will one of those much less expensive whitening toothpastes be sufficient? And what about mouth odor, wrinkles, and digestive challenges? There is a false sense that we are free when we make all these trivial choices.

As Erich Fromm (1955) noted many years ago, marketing orientation is pervasive in American life (and in most other Western countries). This orientation distracts us from real matters of freedom (Bergquist, 2024a). In mid-21st Century life, this distraction is not confined to Western societies. We even find it in the very different societal structures of China (Ma, 2019). Yet, we discover a new set of challenges amid this widespread escape from true freedom. These challenges center on contradictions in the marketing messages we receive every day. It is hard to be Serene if the world is hitting us hard from many different angles and forcing us to make difficult decisions about things that aren't ultimately of importance.

At a more profound level, we find political candidates offering perspectives and practices one day that seem to contradict what they propose one day later. Furthermore, one set of political candidates seems to be living in a quite different world from another set of candidates. There often does not seem to be a meeting ground. The moderate candidate and those advocating compromise seem out-of-date with current polarized political realities.

The splitting of political reality into profoundly contradictory camps is exacerbated by the misinformation, lies, and distortions offered by one or more camps (Weitz and Bergquist, 2022). It is one thing to acknowledge that there are valid differences in the way two political candidates view the problems their constituents are

facing. It is quite another thing to be confronted with profound differences based at least in part on the inaccurate information provided by one or both candidates. Contradictions based on different viewpoints can be addressed through constructive dialogue whereas falsehoods and deliberate lies often can be addressed only through litigious confrontation.

A major societal impact occurs when contradiction saturates our 21st-century life. Credible advice is offered by people and institutions that can be trusted—but the advice is often inconsistent. As a result, we can't trust any expertise, since the "experts" don't seem to agree on anything. We collectively regress to Multiplicity—using William Perry's term (Perry, 1970).

Faced with no one clear "reality," we decide that there is NO true reality. We turn collectively to expedient alignment with an authoritative version of "truth." Whoever has the most power and the highest status provides the "truth" and those who offer their version of the truth from outside the circle of power and status are ignored or isolated. The new golden rule is in effect: "Those with the gold will/should rule [and provide the truth]!"

At a personal level, contradiction can have a challenging impact. To remain "sane" we often must change our attitude about certain issues or at least be open to new perspectives and ideas. It is not hard to try out a new teeth-whitening procedure. It is much more difficult to change our political affiliation or attitude about an important issue such as domestic violence or climate change.

Psychologists and behavioral economists, such as Dan Ariely (2012), have conducted experiments revealing that we become cognitively "lazy" when tired, overwhelmed, or alienated. We fall back on habitual behavior and fast thinking (heuristics). Under these conditions, we not only can "relax" our critical capacities, but also take "delight" in finding that the contradictions disappear. We listen to one expert and one point of view (Weitz and Bergquist, 2024). We rely on one source of dental advice and one political

party. There is no need to ever depart from our individual or collective "bubble of belief."

Life becomes much easier: "Don't change the news channel or pick up a newspaper or social media posting that offers an alternative interpretation of the daily news—or even a more balanced perspective." After a hard and demanding day of work and time playing with our kids, the last thing we need is a thoughtful analysis offered from several different political perspectives. Enough already! Authoritarianism makes it much easier to relax and retire from the daily challenges of life and work. No more contradictions. It is all clean and simple. Our Bubble of Belief is soundly in place and will never be disturbed by disruptive messages.

Perspectives, Practices, and Polarities

Contradictions exist when we are presented with two or more perspectives or sets of practices that are of equal validity and are equally useful. However, these perspectives and practices differ significantly from one another and are not readily reconciled. The Left-Column perspective would focus on *Appreciating* the value of each viewpoint or practice before choosing the best one. The primary concern from this perspective is determining where the greatest truth is to be found, and which option is most aligned with our values. The Right-Column offers an alternative perspective. It concerns *Integrating* diverse perspectives and practices. The primary concern from this perspective is the recognition that there is one (and only one) unified reality that can be viewed from multiple, complementary perspectives. The differing perspectives and practices that we encounter are only components of a larger, unified perspective or practice.

These two columns need not remain in conflict with one another. A tool called Polarity Management was first introduced by Barry Johnson (1992/1996) to address the many contradictions we face in our individual and collective lives. We turn to the perspectives offered by Johnson. As he notes, we tend to linger briefly on the advantages inherent in one option when confronted with two

viable options. Then we begin to recognize some of the disadvantages associated with this option. We are pulled to the second option. Yet, as we linger on this second option, we discover that this perspective or practice has flaws and disadvantages. We are led back to the first policy—and must again face the disadvantages inherent in this first option.

The swing has begun from option one advantage to option one disadvantage to option two advantage to option two disadvantage back to option one advantage. We are whipped back and forth. Anxiety increases regarding the swing and failure to find the "right" answer. The vacillation also increases in both intensity and rapidity. This is what the dynamics of polarization are all about. There is inadequate time and attention given to each option.

Polarity management begins with reframing our focus from Either/Or to Both/And—thus bringing in the Right-Column focus on Integration. The next step is to recognize the value inherent in each perspective or practice—thus bringing an Appreciative focus to the Left-Column. Rather than immediately jumping to the problems and barriers associated with each option (which drives us to the second option), we spend time in the appreciative column seeking a better understanding of the merits associated with each option. Only then do we consider the "downside" of this option— and only then do we turn to the other option (once again noting its strengths and then its downside).

With this preliminary analysis completed, we shift our attention to what happens when we seek to optimize the benefits of either option at the expense of the other option. We search for rich insights and productive guidance in each option, rather than seeking some simple resolution of the contradiction. An important cautionary note is introduced at this point. Barry Johnson warns that we must not try to maximize the appeal of any one side. Rather we must carefully optimize the degree to which we are inclined toward one side or the other. How serious are we about our exclusive focus on one side and how long will we sustain this focus?

We must balance the duration of our stay on one side with consideration of the other side.

Optimizing also means we must find a reasonable and perhaps flexible set point as we act in favor of one side or another. Finding these acceptable optimum responses and repeatedly redefining them is the key to polarity management. We must be flexible in both our appreciation and our integration of contradictions. Johnson has one more important point to make regarding the management of polarities. He identifies the value inherent in setting up an alarm system as a safeguard against overshooting either side of the polarity. It would be prudent to build an alarm system that warns us when we may be trying to maximize one side and are on the verge of triggering negative reactions coming from the other side. As in the case of turbulence, we must seek both balance and forethought while addressing contradictions.

The Search for Consistency

Must we engage the difficult slow-thinking processes advocated by Daniel Kahneman when we seek to manage contradictory perspectives and practices. Do we need to call up Barry Johnson and use polarity management? Instead, we can find consistency and eliminate contradictions by adhering rigidly to a schedule. The same outcomes are produced every time we adhere to this schedule. If we have a regimented routine, there are likely to be predictable impacts on other people and our environment. Everyone is relieved.

When this routine is highly restricted, each outcome will be closely related to other anticipated outcomes. They will be fully consistent with one another. We order the same breakfast at our nearby restaurant. We know how this meal will assist digestion and prepare us for a day of routine work. We are wearing a suit of psychic armor made of one material. It is without any unnecessary joints or openings that might allow for flexibility, variance, inconsistency – or incongruence. We are clad in a metal suit, like the Tin Man in *The Wizard of Oz*—unable to move and in search of

a heart (Bergquist, 2023a; Bergquist, 2023b). We protect ourselves with "character armor" (Reich, 1933/1980) that admits no intrapsychic challenge (dissonance) or contradiction—but at considerable cost. Much like the Tin Man, we not only lose all flexibility but also our unique and authentic self (our heart) when donning the armament of deeply protective character.

Consistency is also achieved when all diverse, external viewpoints are blocked out. The club one chooses to join is highly selective. The "other" is never allowed in. Homogeneity is of highest priority and groupthink is a pre-requisite. We don't want "no bad news" (to quote from *The Wiz* a musical remake of *The Wizard of Oz*). This purity of thought and belief often is reinforced by a formal or informal "black ball" system. One is admitted to the club only when everyone inside the club agrees to the invitation.

Admission to the "inner temple" requires not only a test of shared belief but also a process of "purification" (or "initiation"). Initiates are required to sacrifice a part of their identity. They endure trials that test their commitment and willingness to subjugate themselves to the will of those already residents of the inner temple. Purification ensures consistency. All inconsistencies are scrubbed away. Serenity (SC²+) is assured. However, this is quite a sacrifice to make on behalf of one's search for consistency. Cognitive and emotional congruity are attained but at the cost of a deeper level of personal integrity.

Finally, we find consistency when we become "true believers." This often accompanies our entrance into the inner temple. A set of tenets in our religion or life philosophy requires us to think, feel, and act in a certain manner. Each of the tenets is compatible with each of the other tenets. We find a long history of debate and resolution associated with each tenet that ensures full alignment. As "God-given" gospel, it purportedly contains no contradictions (though many are present but never acknowledged).

Each tenet is aligned with an overall view of the world and a set of commandments regarding how one should act. There is nothing

but consistency in our life when there is full alignment with the food we eat, with the prayers we pronounce several times each day, with the people ("fellow believers") we allow into our life, with the person we choose to marry, and with how we are preparing for our own death. All these "faithful" preferences and practices fit within a single comprehensive and rigid framework. With this framework in place, there is little opportunity for contradictions to arise in any domain of our world or at any moment in our life. Yet, at what cost?

Conclusions

In essence, there are two ways to address the challenges of VUCA-Plus. We can escape to Serenity (SC²+)—and absorb all of the costs associated with this condition of denial and dysfunction. Instead, we remain with these challenges. We find ways to embrace and find both energy and partial solutions within each challenge. We can even "manage" the polarities inside each of the six VUCA-Plus conditions. There is so much more that can be done with VUCA-Plus challenges than hightailing it to a rabbit hole.

Having made this brash statement, I ask myself a fundamental question: am I overly optimistic in suggesting that we don't need to escape into Serenity? A second question is posed: Can polarity management help us face the challenges of VUCA-Plus? I also ask a third question. Can we hold on to two or more contradictory beliefs without dropping one of them? Perhaps I should replace these three questions with a fourth and fifth question. Fourth, do we have any other option if we are to be successful in addressing the overwhelming challenges of VUCA-Plus? Fifth, if there is another option is it just some disguised form of regression toward Serenity?

Management of VUCA-Plus challenges and the polarities inherent in each VUCA-Plus condition requires a level of meta-learning. We learn how to manage each condition and each polarity by reflecting on and learning from this management. We discover ways to more

successfully identify, analyze and manage the VUCA-Plus polarities.

I propose that Polarity management enables us to hold two or more beliefs in abeyance as we slowly and thoughtfully consider the merits and drawbacks of each belief. I believe that we can apply what we have learned from engaging each of these six conditions to our broader appreciation for our mid-21st Century world. This meta-learning enables us to lean into and learn into a future that will undoubtedly pose even greater challenges than we now face. Am I being too optimistic? The alternative is to remain frozen on a 21st Century savannah populated with many VUCA-Plus lions. We would stand motionless and helpless in this threatening environment. We would feel polarities coursing through our psyche and soul. Not very healthy . . .

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Section Two

Finding What is Essential in a VUCA-Plus World

Chapter Three

Essentials I: Polystasis, Anchors and Curiosity

Up to this point, I have posed the challenges of VUCA-Plus. These challenges are associated with conditions in the mid-21st Century of Volatility, Uncertainty, Complexity, Ambiguity, Turbulence, and Contradiction. When confronted with these conditions, I have noted that we can escape into a rabbit hole and find ourselves in a wonderland of Serenity (SC²+). Volatility becomes stability, while uncertainty becomes certainty—at the cost of denial regarding the real world. Complexity becomes simplicity while Ambiguity is replaced with clarity—at the cost of living in a wonderland filled with dysfunctional and destructive behavior. Turbulence is replaced by calm and contradiction by consistency.

However, there is little calm or concurrence in a life being led by those seeking Serenity at all costs in a wonderland of distortion and authoritarian rule (Weitz and Bergquist, 2024). Instead, we can turn to polarity management. At the close of Chapter Two I suggested that polarity management could help us address the many challenges associated with VUCA-Plus. In this chapter and the next four, I introduce strategies and tools that provide a viable alternative to Serenity when coping with pressing VUCA-Plus issues. One set of tools addresses the Essential factors embedded in each VUCA-Plus issue. The second set of tools concerns ways to focus attention and energy on the Essence of each VUCA-Plus condition.

I turn first in this chapter to the nature of an Essential perspective. I then focus on ways volatility can be transformed into anchoring

and uncertainty can be transformed into curiosity. In the next two chapters, I consider ways an Essential perspective can help transform complexity into enablement, ambiguity into an appreciation of perspective, turbulence into learning, and contradiction into prioritization.

Nature of Essential

The essentials in a system can be considered those matters inherently of the utmost importance. Essential elements and desired outcomes are basic, indispensable, and necessary. They might also be considered unavoidable. When not openly addressed, these elements and desired outcomes in a relationship, team, or organization become "elephants in the room."

Given these conditions, we must search for and find the essential outcome of challenges in a VUCA-Plus world. This search is difficult, for this world is saturated with perspectives and needs that frequently shift unpredictably. Given the challenge faced by this search, I wish to devote some attention to the motivations that underlie this search for what is Essential. I will also introduce a new way to think about dynamic processes associated with this search.

The Motivation of Essential

Essentials are situated at the top of any system. It can be represented as the tip of a pyramid of hopes and needs. From this perspective, Essentials can be considered *Aspirational*. We believe that something good will be achieved which overrides everything else. The challenge is to retain the system's core values while aspiring to one set of values that we believe are aligned with the greater good.

There is an alternative representation. It is the portrait of a fiery pit. That which is essential can be oriented toward heaven (aspirational) or toward hell. The latter way to think of Essential is from the fear-based perspective of *Apprehension*. The fiery pit looms in front of us. We fear that something bad will overtake everything of importance to us. Essential matters become

existential. They receive our sustained attention because the future of our relationship, team, or organization depends on our achievement of specific, essential outcomes.

For many people living in a traditional Christian world, the avoidance of Hell is even more motivating than entrance into Heaven. From a more secular and contemporary perspective, the fear of loss (according to behavioral scientists) is greater than the hope of gain. The outcome of this perspective typically is a failure to search for anything other than a pathway to survival or escape. We typically find a rabbit hole that allows us to enter the distorted wonderland of Serenity. We exchange our anxiety for a dose of "alternative reality" (SC^2+).

A third perspective regarding what is essential can be taken. This perspective is especially relevant in a VUCA-Plus world where many issues are elusive. We are grasping for something important, though we are unsure what it is. That which is *Enthralling* becomes that which is Essential in our world. We have to figure out what is happening to us or happening out there in the world. We spend time reading everything about that narcissistic leader we hate. Newspapers feature stories about events that are over-powering and destructive—rather than manageable and positive. Our life is spent trying to find something called "happiness" that is supposed to be central to our life—and our society ("the pursuit of happiness"). We are pulled to the "awesome" and filled with wonder. Unfortunately, this perspective on Essential often leaves us powerless observers of what we can't control.

I vote for the aspirational perspective.

The Dynamics and Statics of Essential

Homeostasis has been the prominent perspective regarding the essential state of any system. Supposedly, we live in a world with a strong tendency for things to move back to some preferred state after being thrown out of kilter by some external event. Our blood pressure increases as we are determined to outrun the lion—be this

lion real or imagined (Sapolsky, 2004). Our blood pressure returns to its normal level after we have eluded the lion. The thermostat in our living room is set to return the temperature of this room to 70 degrees after it drops by several degrees when we open the window for several moments on a chilly winter day. After our master craftsman returns from sick leave, we will return to the regular rate at which our high-priced chairs are produced.

All well-and-good. However, we are finding that the world doesn't work this way. We live in a world of allostasis rather than homeostasis. Introduced by Peter Sterling (2020) about the physiological regulation of our body, Allostasis refers to an organism's capacity to anticipate upcoming environmental changes and demands. This anticipation leads to adjustment of the body's energy use based on these changes and these demands. Allostasis shifts one's attention away from a homeostatic maintaining a rigid internal set-point to the brain's ability and role in interpreting environment meaning and anticipating environmental stress.

Peter Sterling (2024) puts it this way:

> Nearly all physiological and biochemical regulation is continuously and primarily managed by prediction, even the smallest changes when a thought flashes through the mind and predicts something that needs either raising or lowering various systems to adjust to the predicted demand. Corrective feedback is used secondarily when predictions fail. To me, this is the origin and purpose of the brain, to manage these predictions. When our body returns to "normal" from a deviation, normal is not due to a set point but to the brain's prediction that this is the most likely level of demand. How the brain does this across time scales from milliseconds to decades and spatial scales from nanometers to meters, is a huge mystery.

> The interactions that occur between the brain and body are quick and fully integrated, making it difficult to distinguish between these two functions. The brain

predicts and the body responses in a highly adaptive and constantly changing manner.

While Peter Sterling, as a neurobiologist, has focused on the body's use of neurotransmitters, hormones, and other signaling mechanisms, we can expand his analysis by looking at the function of stasis in all human systems. Not to distort Sterling's important description and analysis of the allostatic processes operating in the human body, I am introducing a new term: *Polystasis*. I have created this word to designate the multiple functions engaged by complex human systems in addressing the issue of stasis. As Peter Sterling has noted, it is not simply a matter of returning to an established baseline of functioning (stasis) when considering how actions get planned and taken in a human system.

Early in the history of the cognitive revolution and aligned with the field of cybernetics (feedback theory), three prominent researchers and scholars from different disciplines came together to formulate a model for describing human planning and behavior. George Miller, Eugene Galanter, and Karl Pribram (1960) prepared *Plans and the Structure of Behavior* that described the dynamic way in which we are guided by a reiterative process of acting, testing, modifying, and re-engaging our behavior. They presented a T.O.T.E. (test-operate-test-exit) process repeatedly engaged as we navigate our world.

As with T.O.T.E, Polystasis blends the concept of Statics (stabilizing structures) with that of Dynamics (adaptive processes). Operating in human systems, we are guided by certain core outcomes that do not readily change (statics); however, we must also be open to modifying these guiding outcomes as our environment changes. As Sterling has proposed, the static notion of homeostasis is inaccurate—especially when applied in our VUCA-Plus environment.

The Polystasis model incorporates three processes. First, there is *Appraisal*. As Peter Sterling has noted, there is an ongoing need to monitor the environment in which we operate to determine if a

new baseline (desired outcomes) is required. We informally or formally predict the probability that our current desired baseline of functioning can be achieved. Is it even desirable? At this point, I introduce a concept offered by another neuroscientist, Antonio Damasio (2005). Damasio proposed that a somatic template continually provides information regarding our bodily state. Perhaps, this template plays a central role in Sterling's Allostatic process. Similarly, there might be a set of psychosocial templates that we frequently reference when making polystatic predictions and adjustments. These templates offer a view of our psychological status and the status of our external world (especially our social relationships).

A psychosocial template might trigger our attention when something is threatening us. Is it a thought or emotion inside our Head and Heart? Or is it an externally based threat? As Richard Lazarus noted many years ago (Lazarus and Folkman, 1984), threat appraisal is complex and involves a multistage process. Elsewhere I have suggested that we establish three threat categories in our Amygdala (Bergquist, 2011).

I derived these categories from the semantic differential of Charles Osgood (1957). Is this threatening entity not interested in our welfare (bad)? Is it strong (rather than weak and ineffective)? Is this threatening operating in an immediate active manner (rather than inactive or threatening at a temporal or special distance)? Our Amygdala is triggered, leading to an immediate change in our somatic template. This soon leads to a change in our psychosocial template as we better understand (correctly or incorrectly) the nature and scope of the threat. As Robert Sapolsky (2004) notes, we then engage fight, flight, or (more often) freeze in response to the real or imagined threat.

Alternatively, the psychosocial template is triggered when something a bit "different" occurs in our psyche or in the world where we dwell. The "new" template doesn't match the template that existed a few minutes before or with some relatively stable

baseline template we have built during our lifetime. It is a "deviant" template that draws our attention and impacts our polystatic process. Sometimes called a schema (Young, Klosko, and Weishaar, 2006), the more stable template concerns our view of how other people see us and how much control we have over external forces impinging on us. Michael Polanyi (2009) might propose that we lack full awareness of this template. We have only tacit (rather than explicit/conscious) knowledge of this psychosocial template—or the somatic template identified by Damasio.

While the Amygdala-based appraisal will trigger survival behavior, the deviance-based appraisal is likely to trigger further exploration and even a growing appreciation of that which is different. For instance, the unexpected soaring upward of a pitch in a musical composition may portray love and aspiration. Just as the plunging downward of a pitch might powerfully portray despair. Similarly, we are drawn to a painting that in some way "deviates" from what we would usually expect, much as a compelling photograph offers an unaccustomed viewpoint. Even humor often requires that we are caught off-guard by the final turn of the story.

The motivational hierarchy offered by Abraham Maslow (2014) provides us with a way to understand the general appraisal made by human beings. I propose that we can expand on this understanding by introducing the dynamic appraisals operating in both the world of Allostasis and Somatic templates and the world of Polystasis and Psychosocial templates. These templates and dynamic appraisals best describe the source of ongoing moment-by-moment adjustments in human behavior.

At the immediate (proximal) level, our appraisals are dictated neither by the long-term (distal) search for fulfillment of a Maslow need, nor by the simplistic stimulus-response process offered by early behavioral psychologists (such as Clark Hull and B. F. Skinner). The model of immediate, proximal appraisal that I have proposed fits much more closely with that offered by Miller, Galanter, and Pribram. We are constantly altering our *Appraisal*

(Test) of the current state based on information derived from our somatic and psychosocial templates.

We *Adjust* if the current baseline of desired functioning is no longer appropriate. As Sterling proposes we identify a new level of functioning. An alternative ("allo") stasis is based on predictions regarding the probability of success in achieving this baseline (stasis). Miller, Galanter, and Pribram propose that we are Operating (Adjusting) when we establish a new stasis.

We *Act* on behalf of the new baseline of desired functioning. In keeping with Miller, Galanter, and Pribram, we again Test (appraise) to see if the adjusted level is still appropriate given ongoing environmental changes and our experience of acting on behalf of the new stasis. T.O. T. E. and dynamics feedback systems are alive and well in the Polystatic world.

Under homeostasis, daily adjustments are made via what I would identify as first-order change (Argyris, 2001). They require first-order learning which is usually based on habitual ways of thinking. Such a model of stasis might effectively operate in a highly stable world. However, our world might be operating in a rugged and perhaps even moving (dancing) landscape that looks nothing like a flat, stable plain (Miller and Page, 2007).

There is no return to a previous state. Rather as Sterling proposes, adjustments are made based on what we predict will be the next setting of this dancing environment. These adjustments are made to fit with Essentials. They require shifts in the interpretation of environmental meaning and anticipation of specific environmental challenges. These shifts, in turn, require second-order learning and second-order change (Argyris, 2001).

All of this may seem mechanistic and abstract (an occasional critique of Miller, Galanter, and Pribram's T.O.T.E. model). However, Polystasis comes alive when we recognize that this recursive process moves quickly. It is often not amenable to the

slow thinking described by Daniel Kahneman (Kahneman, 2013) nor to the reflective practice of Don Schön (1983).

Polystasis also comes alive when we apply it to real-life situations. For example, my blood pressure might not return to "normal" if I am anticipating other lions (real or imagined) (Sapolsky, 2004). A new "normal" is quite fluid--for I continue to appraise, adjust, and act (moving through the hostile environment of the Savannah). Polystatic processes are Essential to my survival in this anxiety-ridden environment. Dynamic feedback based on T.O.T.E. is alive and well in this hostile environment. I am also alive and well—thanks to polystatic processes.

I next offer an example of Polystasis by returning to the classic homeostatic example of thermostatic regulation. I must live in a comfortable environment. This is Essential. I address this Essential matter by adjusting the thermostat if I anticipate the window remaining open to provide some ventilation. However, I can make an even more immediate adjustment. I can choose to put on or take off my sweater. I can change chairs. These actions enable me to sit further away from the window.

Even more immediately and intimately, my body will adjust based on what it predicts I will do to accommodate the temperature change. I know that the thermostat is a slow and often secondary Polystatic player. The homeostatic adjustments of the thermostat will often arrive late. They are not very effective when compared with the act of adding or removing the next layer of clothes or moving to another chair.

What about our production of finely crafted chairs? There is the more distant ("distal") solution. Just as we may have to change the thermostat in our home, a decision might be made to train someone else to build the high-priced chairs. We do this if we are uncertain about the long-term health condition of our master craftsman. However, our polystatic adjustments are much more immediate (proximal). They are based on immediate predictions regarding what is taking place on our production floor.

As the production manager, I immediately predict that something has to change when my master craftsman calls in sick. I set new (temporary) standards and priorities regarding what we will produce today. We'll increase production of the cheaper chairs. Predicting the future (distal planning) I will inform our marketing person that we need to push the sales of these cheaper chairs (at least for a short duration).

At an even more proximal level, my mind will be predicting that my body's stress level is about to increase. I will be activating the sympathetic level for a short duration until I get things "arranged" and "adjusted" for the coming production day. I will also spend some time reflecting on what is likely to be the longer-term health status of my senior craftsman. I can overthink and over-worry (inventing lions) or be realistic (assessing the presence of real lions).

How I approach this task of planning for my craftsman's absence will have a major impact on how I manage my body and production staff. That which is Essential (the financial viability of this company and the quality of the finished product) will provide important guidance and stability (statics) as adjustments are being made and remade at all levels (dynamics) under the conditions of Polystasis.

The key point is that the baseline itself is likely to repeatedly change when Polystasis is operating in a shifting (dancing) environment with changing somatic and psychosocial templates constantly at play. This change might involve quantity (raising or lowering the baseline) or quality (shifting to a different baseline). We remain vigilant regarding real and imagined lions.

Our templates are fully available to us—even if we remain unaware of their powerful presence. We weigh the costs and benefits of changing environmental conditions (such as an open window in Winter). Our priorities are considered. Do we want fresh air, or do we want to reduce the cost of heating in our home? We determine that reduced costs are Essential. As a result, we not only keep the

window closed but also reduce the thermostat to 66 degrees and put on a sweater.

Our body (somatic template) predicts and anticipates this change. Adjustments are made that enable us to live in a cooler environment. The baseline has changed. A new level of homeostasis might be established with a change in the thermostat, but this is a secondary adjustment. Settings on the thermostat will (or may) remain in place until the Spring, while the clothes we wear and the windows we open will make a bigger, more immediate difference. We can do a better job of meeting our Essential goal of reducing heating costs by wearing a sweater or closing the window than by moving the thermostat up a notch.

We alter our ways of adjusting to (and buffering) the impact of shifting conditions (as noted by our deviant psychosocial template). Our craftsman reports in sick. We can do nothing and hope for the quick recovery of our craftsman. Perhaps we recommend that he visit a doctor or consume some chicken soup. We might wishfully anticipate his rapid recovery or the healing power of chicken soup. Our errant prediction, in this case, might put us in jeopardy of making wrong decisions and failing to adjust production schedules or change production priorities.

Alternatively (Peter Sterling's Allo), we can predict and plan immediate (proximal) changes in the schedule and priorities. We can anticipate a need to meet financial quotas by altering our promotion of chairs in a specific price range. We remain keenly aware of what is occurring on the production line (Test). We change our production plans if this is necessary (Operate), see if this alteration is working (Test), and then turn our attention away from the production live (Exit). We have scheduled a meeting with the head of marketing regarding potential changes in promotional priorities.

If we turn our attention to leadership in an organizational system, we find that there is much we can do and must do about predictions at both the proximal and distal levels. At the short-term (proximal)

level, stress-management techniques and production shifts that I have already mentioned can be engaged. At the longer-term (distal) level of prediction, we anticipate what might happen in our world –such as our craftsman being sick again. As the owner of a small business, we must be prepared for many possibilities. To remain "stuck" with one homeostatic standard is to lose the agility required of someone who owns a business.

At the same time, we must be cautious about becoming "trigger-happy." We must avoid being afraid of lions that aren't present. Furthermore, each major change in the baseline brings about a challenging change curve. A major change can impact both the level and quality of production and service rendered. Those working on the production line might not be skillful (or motivated) when pumping out cheap chairs. They might themselves be oriented to slower, fine craft work.

The change curve can also damage morale among those working in the organization. Those on the line might resent having to "sell their soul" (and their craft) on behalf of the bottom line (producing cheaply made chairs). There is also the matter of self-fulfilling prophecies. We must be sure that our anticipations are not self-fulfilling. Our master craftsman becomes sick again because of stress associated with making up for lost time when returning to work or because he fears being replaced by a craftsman who doesn't get sick.

I mention one specific condition of Polystasis that is relevant as a difficult societal issue facing us in the United States. This has to do with the policy of *Reparation*. American policymakers are faced with the challenge of determining if it is appropriate to provide certain citizens with compensation for their lost wages as a result of gender, racial, or ethnic discrimination.

What about the loss of income for their ancestors who served without pay as slaves? How does one determine the appropriate restoration of that which has been Essential for a specific group of people who have experienced long-standing discrimination and/or

physical violence? The baseline will be shifting as we begin reflecting on the appropriate restoration. Hope increases or it is squashed during these deliberations. More is anticipated or less is expected about financial reparations or the offering of apologies.

How ultimately do we assign value to loss of hope or loss of dignity? What payment is due for physical abuse or even death? The answer(s) to these difficult questions reside(s) in assigning meaning and value to specific environmental conditions both past and present. This meaning and value will shift from moment to moment and from one constituency to another constituency. Nothing restores the homeostasis of a discriminatory society, especially if this homeostasis involves returning to a previous mode of repression.

The environment must (and will) continually shift. Anticipations will change repeatedly as potential solutions are proposed. The meaning will be reconstructed multiple times as each constituency seeks to understand and perhaps appreciate the perspectives offered by other constituencies. Different values will emerge and gain ascendance as different constituencies are brought to the table. Baselines are constantly shifting. Predictions are frequently modified. Potential actions are proposed and abandoned with the shifts in baselines and predictions. Polystasis will prevail.

Before leaving this focus on Polystasis, I wish to reiterate that this rapidly moving process often comes at a cost. As I mentioned when introducing Polystasis, the quick engagement of appraisal, adjustment, and action is not amendable to slow thinking--not to reflective practice. Our somatic and psychosocial templates are frequently adjusted in ways that might not align with reality. Imaginary lions are a specialty of modern humankind. Polystasis is aligned with noncritical, knee-jerk reactions.

Don Schön (1983) has cautioned us about these reactions. Schön is likely to reintroduce his teaching of urban planning courses at M.I.T. He would undoubtedly suggest that planning in this domain will inevitably require Polystatic processes. As is the case of

reparations, urban planning inevitably involves changing baselines, altered predictions, and complex action plans—for an urban landscape is inevitably rugged and dancing. The psychosocial templates associated with urban planning are often raw and misguided, especially when urban politics are involved.

Daniel Kahneman (2013) would join Schön in urging restraint. Fast thinking should be avoided when operating in a dynamic polystatic manner. Kahneman may suggest that Polystasis and the formulation of psychosocial templates are vulnerable to the inappropriate uses of heuristics. We often use simplistic and outmoded heuristics when shifting our template, changing our baseline, and making predictions in a dynamic environment.

We might, for instance, apply a Recency heuristic. Adjustments are the same as the last time we faced this environmental shift. We put on a sweater the last time we felt a chill. We took specific action the last time we lost an indispensable worker (our accountant). We can take the same action regarding our absent craftsman.

Polystatic adjustments can become habitual. A heuristic of Habit is applied. We always slip on a sweater at this time of day (imagining that the temperature in our room will change). We indiscriminately apply the same employment policy regardless of the employee being considered.

Then there is the matter of Primacy. The first action taken when facing a challenge remains with us. We messed up the first time and learned to avoid this situation at all costs. This is still the case. I never recovered from the chill when opening the window last week. I will keep it closed until it is Summer. I will never forget that this employee got sick at a critical moment. I can never rely on him in the future.

Given this potential vulnerability of recency, habit, and primacy we must ask: how do we adjust to a new or changing baseline? Adjustments will operate differently when we face an Essential challenge and when motivations (and anxiety) are high. We are

inclined to think very fast and be especially noncritical when the stakes are high. Emotions are intense. Furthermore, we might always imagine a threat when we are tired or distracted—we indeed become "trigger-happy." Anxiety becomes a common experience. Retreat and isolation become common polystatic actions.

Kahneman's fast-thinking heuristic might even be the easy labeling of people with different skin tones—especially those from a different socioeconomic level or culture. We immediately view these people as different. They become the "Other" (Oshry, 2018; Weitz and Bergquist, 2024) Our proximal environment becomes threatening when we encounter a person with darker skin or someone speaking with an accent. We rapidly and uncritically predict trouble. We imagine a dark-skinned lion or lion from another continent. The baseline changes as we shift into survival mode. We take action to avoid this person.

All of this means that we need to be careful about the assumptions we are making and the heuristics we are applying under specific conditions. These are conditions that involve Essential matters or that hold the potential of being threatening. It is in these conditions and at these moments that we must be particularly vigilant and reflective.

We must ask ourselves: is this situation really like the last one? Can I do a better job this time in coping with this challenging situation? If this is truly important (Essential) then perhaps I should get some assistance. I might have to open up to differing points of view. Is this genuinely threatening or am I only imagining that it is threatening?

In short, Polystasis might be an Essential adaptation given our shifting VUCA-Plus environment. However, this process can also lead us astray. We must indeed be vigilant and reflective. The Essential Lens can be of value in this regard.

The Essential Lenses

Following this introduction to the motivations and dynamics of Essential matters, I propose a model of Essential that portrays the fundamental way Essential operates as a transformative process. It safeguards against the maladaptive polystatic processes I have just identified. I offer the following summary graphic concerning how an Essential lens operates.

Graphic One

The Essentials Model

Postmodern World | 6 VUCA-Plus Conditions | Lens of Essentials | 6 Transformations | State of Essentials
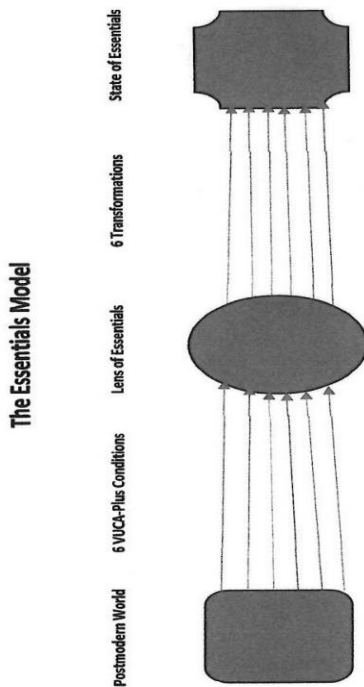
This portrayal centers on the function of Essential as a set of convex lenses that transform the conditions of VUCA-Plus into forms and processes leading to constructive engagement of the six conditions of VUCA-Plus. These lenses also lead to the creation of a world of Essentials that holds the potential of providing purpose and yielding gratification. While I am about to suggest specific strategies to engage that move VUCA-Plus conditions to the identification and appreciation of that which is Essential, I first offer four basic questions that open the way to these transformative moves.

Four Functions Served by the Essential Lenses

Four functions are served by a lens intended to detect and highlight Essentials: convergence, magnification, divergence, and extension.

Convergence: What is important and deserving of our attention?

Often accompanied by a filter, a lens can provide clearer vision for us when we drive a car at night or in a foggy condition. Similarly, the VUCA-Plus world is often quite hazy and dimly lit. A lens is required that highlights key features in the fog and blocks out distracting elements. Fog is distracting when we are driving. Other cars on the road deserve our attention.

It is hard to make polystatic predictions when driving under foggy conditions or navigating in a hazy and dimly lit VUCA-Plus world. We encounter the haze of ambiguity, volatility, and uncertainty, along with the dim lighting of complexity, shifting scenes of turbulence, and confusing sounds of contradiction. Living under conditions of Polystasis, we must be able to predict and adjust, using somatic and psychosocial templates.

We need to focus when seeking to make accurate predictions. We are less likely to be blinded or confused when we navigate these difficult conditions with clarity regarding what is Essential. We can look past the fog to discover what needs our attention. We can

distinguish between the sound and the noise. We can attend to our valid feelings and set aside our fears of imagined lions. We can attend to important matters regarding our ongoing predictions and our ultimate achievement of specific goals.

A major challenge emerges when adjusting our lens to focus on Essentials. Sometimes, the important matters are obvious. We only need to establish policies and procedures that require our system to direct attention to priorities. For many years this meant some variation of "Management by Objectives." More recently, this has often meant creating an organization that is mission-driven or driven by values or purposes (e.g. Pascarella and Frohman, 1989; Warren, 1995; Wall, Sobol, and Solum, 1999).

Attention in such organizations often shifts from a bottom-line mentality to a set of outcomes that enable the organization to sustain itself over a lengthy period (Estes, 1996). Elsewhere, I have suggested that this challenge can be met by appreciating what is distinctive and a source of strength in an organization (Bergquist, 2003). I am joined in offering this perspective on Essential matters by those who have championed Appreciative Inquiry (Srivastava, Cooperrider, et al., 1990; Cooperrider and Whitney, 2005).

At other times, identification of what's important—and ultimately what's Essential—is not quite as straightforward. There may be multiple stakeholders and multiple commitments. For instance, we are finding the emergence of social entrepreneurship as a way to attend both to the welfare of the organization and the welfare of the society in which this organization operates (Bornstein, 2007). Furthermore, complex systems are likely to yield many competing interests for they are composed of many parts--each with their agenda.

A blizzard of diverse (often contradictory) demands makes prediction and navigation difficult. However, complex systems are also made up of parts that are all interconnected. We need not envision a blizzard. Instead, like Donald Schön (1973) envisioned many years ago, we approach our complex organization as a

network with all parts of a system being connected in a pattern that makes some sense. Most importantly, a network contains Nodes that connect many parts.

At these nodal points, we find concentrated information that can be used for predictions. We will also find what is most important. We focus on and seek to manage change at the node (or at least appreciate the information contained in the node) because the operation of this node is likely to have significant influence over the many parts with which it is connected.

For instance, the primary node in the transportation system of a major city might be its central train or subway station (the "Hub"). It could also be the major intersection of its many freeways (an "interchange"). In an organization, the C-Suite might be an obvious node. Less obvious might be its business process management unit or its quality control office. Whatever happens at the nodal point impacts what is happening elsewhere in the system. Thus, the polystatic baseline and predictions residing at the nodes in any system are critical to the system's overall operations (actions).

Convergent lenses of Essentials can be deployed to find the critical nodes in any system. We need to monitor only the flow of information in a system's nodes and prepare narratives regarding how important decisions are made in these nodes. For example, we might ask: Who is at the table? What information has been most persuasive when decisions are made? Which nodes yielded the most information? Who was the most influential of those representing each node? An appreciative approach can be taken that focuses on the successes of nodes in the system. Polystatic predictions are based on this appreciation of past success. What are the ingredients and who participated in specific successes at any node?

This analysis will often yield insights regarding how the system as a whole most often operates out of or in conjunction with specific nodes. The efficiency of boarding processes at a railroad hub might be critical to the on-time operation of the entire system. An office

of interdepartmental relations might be instrumental in bringing about effective deployment and coordination of resources throughout an organization. The Marketing Department might have done a great job of gathering perspectives from throughout the organization regarding how best to describe the functioning and benefits to be derived from a new product.

Magnification: What should be understood and appreciated regarding that which is important?

We shift our attention to lenses installed in a magnifying glass or microscope. These lenses are directed to a specific entity or cluster of entities. Something is identified as important. It receives magnified attention and is studied in great detail. Essentials must be fully understood and appreciated. A specific dynamic of magnification and attention is often ignored—even if important.

Predictions are likely to be inaccurate or skewed toward some "shiny" but distracting goal when an Essential element is overlooked. We are pulled toward a sweet-tasting pie rather than a healthier piece of fresh fruit. We focus on the upcoming board meeting and spend little time with family members. We ignore or misinterpret our daughter's request for assistance with homework. Our company is guided by quarterly profits rather than longer-term financial gains and organizational agility. We set aside the master plan of our company and attend to the spreadsheets.

Magnification serves an important function concerning the valuing of that which is Essential. It is crucial when identifying an appropriate baseline and engagement in successful polystatic prediction. We must keep the cost of heating our home low. It is important that we also maintain a comfortable life in our home. Which is Essential: financial security or comfort? Is it more important to be vigilant about potential threats (be they real or imagined lions) or to be free of stress? We must decide. That which is Essential deserves our attention and our polystatic focus. Furthermore, once we have identified that which is Essential it will

become increasingly valuable as a guide to our predictions and actions. We magnify what is valued.

To add more detail to this proposition about magnification and values, I suggest that when we study something in detail and with knowledge (magnification), the thing we are studying gains value. I can recount a story of this dynamic occurring in my own life. After my father passed away, I found an old pocket watch in his dresser. I happened to wind it up and found that the watch still ran.

In honor of my father, I replaced my wristwatch with this pocket watch. After about a year, the watch quit running. I took it to a watch repair shop. The gentleman operating this shop examined my watch and declared it could no longer operate. He warmly and appreciatively stated that my watch: "has worn down after many years of service."

This knowledgeable and thoughtful craftsman asked me if I wanted to know more about this watch. I immediately said "Yes." He opened the back of the watch and took me on a brief tour through all of the interlocking gears. The craftsman then paused and shared some interesting information. He indicated that this watch was manufactured in Sweden and was worn primarily by men doing manual labor.

At this moment, I realized that this must have been my grandfather's watch. He had migrated from Sweden to the United States as a young man. Once again, the craftsman opened the back of the watch and told me more about how the many gears operated in this basic workman's watch to make it always run on time. With a smile, he noted that accurate time is important when working as a manual laborer on "someone else's time."

This kind and wise repairman fully appreciated my grandfather's watch. The watch had increased in value for me. While it no longer ran, I kept the watch close to my heart. I placed it in a bell jar and set the jar on a bookshelf in my living room. As is the case for many people, my living room bookshelf serves as an "altar" for displaying

my family's Essentials (Ruesch and Kees, 1969). The watch represents something Essential in the history of my family. It exemplifies the life values brought down to me by my father: working hard, being "on time," and taking care of what is important. The lens of magnification served me well.

Others have observed a similar correlation between appreciation and attention (magnification) on the one hand and increased value on the other hand. As David Cooperrider has noted, when Van Gogh appreciated and attended to (painted) a vase of sunflowers, he increased the value of these flowers for everyone. Van Gogh similarly appreciated and brought new value to his friends through his friendship: "Van Gogh did not merely articulate admiration for his friend: He created new values and new ways of seeing the world through the very act of valuing." (Cooperrider, 1990, p. 123)

Peter Vaill similarly recounts a scene from the movie Lawrence of Arabia in which Lawrence tells a British Colonel that his job at the Arab camp was to "appreciate the situation." (Vaill, 1990, p. 323) By appreciating the situation, Lawrence assessed and helped add credibility to the Arab cause, much as a knowledgeable jeweler or art appraiser can increase the value of a diamond or painting through nothing more than a thoughtful appraisal. Lawrence's appreciation of the Arab situation, in turn, helped to produce a new level of courage and ambition on the part of the Arab communities with which Lawrence was associated.

At any point when we fully appreciate the perspective offered by someone with whom we are working, then we have raised the value to be assigned to this perspective. We may be engaging this perspective in ways unknown to our colleague or his associates in the organization—thus opening new vistas. We can similarly benefit from the appreciation offered for our ideas by other people in our workplace. These perspectives and practices will increase in value for us. They will also be enriched and assist us in building more ambitious (yet realistic) baselines for our polystatic processes.

Divergence: What else is important that deserves our attention?

An Essential lens and its accompanying mirrors can serve a third function. A kaleidoscope is created when two or more reflecting mirrors are placed at an angle in a cylinder with a lens through which we view an array of images. This optical device yields many different perspectives in viewing small pieces of glass, stones, or other items.

These random objects are seemingly in disarray. Yet, they produce a stunning pattern of beauty when seen through the kaleidoscope lens. Beauty is found in the diversity of objects viewed and their intricate interplay via mirrors. They form ever-changing displays as we rotate the kaleidoscope tube or attached wheel. The lens, in this case, is expanding our breadth of vision. We see something more than was readily apparent when viewing the assembled objects in the kaleidoscope's tube.

A lens can similarly expand the Essentials in our work and life. Our polystatic predictions can become broader in scope and more systemic. We can become more flexible in assigning baselines to the polystatic process. Historically, we see this expansion in the U.S. Declaration of Independence. This document declares that a government should expand its purpose from just serving as a source of security regarding the life of its citizens. This expansive declaration ensures that citizens of the soon-to-be-established nation are free (liberty) to live a distinctive life in the pursuit of happiness. This was a remarkably expansive vision regarding the Essential functions of a "democratic" government.

However, a polystatic process includes adjustments in baselines based on the entrance of additional or new information (Test). Concerning the Declaration of Independence, limitations were acknowledged periodically regarding the scope of freedom being declared.

A challenging question, for instance, was posed by women at the Seneca Falls Convention in 1848. Isn't the Declaration, as written, profoundly limited in scope with the exclusion of women? In 1852, Frederick Douglass similarly asked: "Are the great principles of political freedom and of natural justice, embodied in that Declaration of Independence, extended to us [as African Americans]?" (Richardson, 2024, p. 188)

More stones and gems of different forms and substances must be added to the kaleidoscope of freedom and independence if the "democratic" government is to realize its full potential as a beautiful work of art and justice. Diverse is essential not just to the fostering of creativity (Page, 2011). We can't find true democracy—or true freedom (Bergquist, 2024)—in our current globalized society without the welcoming of multiple narratives, traditions and perspectives into our society. The dominant Western-based "grand narrative" is now dead . . . long live the diversity of narratives!

At a psychological level, we find an expanded vision of what motivates people in Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of needs (Maslow, 2014). Much as in the case of the Declaration of Independence, Maslow proposed that people are motivated not just by the need for security (physiological viability and safety). They also wish to fulfill a host of other needs—ranging from a sense of belonging and love to one of self-actualization.

Maslow significantly expanded Essentials regarding one's personal life. This leads us from narrow expectations of a healthy and protected life to a life filled with achievement and transcendence. Our polystatic baseline has changed (and has been elevated). When we predict a life of mere survival, our body will prepare only for this survival. When we predict achieving higher-order goals, we will act in a way that realizes these goals. Our body will mobilize to assist us in leading an "active life" filled with purpose and meaning (Palmer, 1990).

We find a similar expansion in the listing of work-related needs. Many years ago, Frederick Hertzberg (1959) declared that we need more than just paycheck and on-the-job safety when we enter the workforce. He called these the hygiene factors. We also wish to find meaningful work and recognition of the tasks we have achieved. These are the motivating factors.

In my writing, I have added the need for companionship in the workplace, interesting work assignments, and the opportunity to influence operations in one's organization (Bergquist, 1993b). When we predict that these needs will be met, our mind and body look forward to the gratification found in the work we do every day. The positive and productive engagement of Polystasis in our life, aligned with a positive interpersonal schema (psychosocial template), produces self-fulfilling prophecies regarding the quality and meaning of our work.

I propose that the divergent Lens of Essentials enables us to expand our expectations as employees in an organization and as citizens of a nation. We experience a kaleidoscope of interconnected needs that produces a beautiful new pattern of behavior. Our work becomes our playground. Years ago, I was with a group of people who created something called "plork" which was the design of activities that blended play and work. Our need for personal achievement is fully integrated with our desire to serve our community (we engage in "social entrepreneurship").

With this expansion and interconnectivity comes an expanded sense of the Essential roles to be played by the leaders of our organization and nation. Leaders must now be aware of and serve as active advocates for and agents of those policies, procedures, and practices that open the opportunity for achieving an expanded list of Essential needs (Bergquist, 1993b; Bergquist, Sandstrom, and Mura, 2023). Like those who framed the Declaration of Independence, it is the role of Essential leaders to expand the vision of what can be achieved at a personal and collective level.

Extension: What is of great importance as we look into the future?

It is tempting to focus only on immediate goals and to assign proximal baselines to our polystatic appraisals in our anxiety-filled world of VUCA-Plus. How can one plan to achieve long-term goals or set more distal baselines when our world is filled with volatility, uncertainty, and turbulence? How can one predict what is about to occur in their VUCA-Plus world? Even short-term predictions and short-term goals are hard to establish in an environment that is saturated with complexity, ambiguity, and contradiction.

At best, we can predict short-term financial gains based on our decisions. We can establish financial goals for the upcoming quarter. A "bottom-line" mentality would seem appropriate given that anything other than financial status and purchase of goods and services is hard to measure. Our baseline is based on sales volume and profits during the coming three months. We predict how many shirts we will sell or homes we will sell. Our Excell-spread sheet takes us out three months. Following that there is only speculation. We predict, act, and adjust based on what we can see. This provides a very short horizon.

Certainly, a "just-in-time" mentality would seem appropriate given that we don't know what will occur next. Unfortunately, this proximal ('up-close") perspective and accompanying short-term tactical prediction and planning are inadequate when we navigate mid-21st Century life and work. This short-term perspective and approach to planning leaves us "knee-jerking" our predictions and our way of navigating life.

We risk losing touch with that which is Essential. It is hard to engage in long-term strategic planning based on a distal ("further away") perspective. However, there is no other option. As in our use of telescopes, we can design a lens of Essentials that extends our vision. We can use this lens to view distant lands and potential conditions in our land.

This optimistic view regarding the multiple Essential lenses offers us a bit of reassurance regarding the successful engagement of VUCA-Plus. The crux of the matter, however, concerns how one might design these lenses so that they can be deployed successfully. I turn now to the matter of design.

Designing the Lens

As with the venerable Swiss knife, we can construct a set of Essential lenses that serve several functions. I suggest three types that might be included in an Essential lens set.

Multiple Visions

First, like the kaleidoscope, a lens can be designed to produce multiple visions of the future. We can trace several different scenarios regarding what the future might look like. These scenarios should range from best case to worst case. One variant is the "pre-mortem" process I introduced earlier in this book. As I mentioned, the planning team identifies what it would look like if the project doesn't accomplish its goals—and (expanding on the pre-mortem process) what might happen if a Black Swan messes up things. In my consulting work, I have further developed this process by introducing an appreciative perspective: How might past successes be replicated in this project? What would the project look like if it was successful?

I move beyond the pre-mortem process when I train the lens of Essentials on what is to be learned from the potential success and failure that might influence our current planning. I am encouraging my client, as Otto Scharmer (2009) suggests, to "learn into the future." Specific contingency plans are formulated based on the learning that has occurred.

This enables an organization to successfully address each set of diverse conditions as these conditions might relate to the potential emergence of newly desired organizational outcomes. We predict and build the capacity to adjust (or abandon) baselines,

psychosocial templates, predictions, and actions as a way of living in a VUCA-Plus world. We "lean into the future" through our engagement of dynamic polystatic processes.

Backward Vision

A second lens operates like the rearview mirror on an automobile. We work backward with this lens in our planning process. We begin with our distal goals (3-5 years from now). We then identify what should be accomplished during the coming two years if we are to achieve the distal goals. Our attention then is directed to the coming year. What can be done to ensure success (or at least increase its probability) in two years.? Finally, what can be done right now toward achieving our one-year goals? In this way, we move from strategic to tactical planning.

Given the value of contingency planning in our VUCA-Plus environment, several different conditions might be identified that must be considered when planning for the long-term (3-5 years), then the short-term (2 years), and finally the upcoming year. This would lead to the generation of several different tactical plans for the coming year—alongside criteria for determining which plans to engage at any one time during the coming year.

Ironically, predicting backward and moving from distal to proximal might be one of the most adaptive ways to work in our changing world. We project ourselves forward in an unpredictable world and use this projection to set appropriate parameters for our immediate predictions. We position ourselves out ahead, sometime in the future, and look back on how we got there from today. This future might be desirable or undesirable. Either way, we track out probable (or at least possible) steps leading us to this future state. This is an important element of what Agnes Mura and I have called "leaning into the future" and what Otto Scharmer has termed "learning into the future."

Illuminating Vision

The third lens magnifies and illuminates. We created a "learning environment" that ensures successful operation of the first two lenses. The critical question becomes: How can a "learning environment" be established and sustained? Accompanying questions must also be addressed. How can slow thinking be ensured (Kahneman, 2013)? What types of assessment—both quantitative and qualitative—can be used? How can sessions be designed and facilitated to ensure safety in timely reflections on successes and failures?

How can the process of implementation be designed so that mistakes (which are inevitable in a VUCA-Plus environment) are not repeated multiple times (Argyris and Schön, 1978)? How can mistakes be turned into "teachable/learning-full moments"? What increases the probability of higher-order learning while reflecting on the current situation (Kegan, 1982; Kegan, 1994: Vaill, 1996)? This means reflecting on the learning process itself and potentially revising this process. I devote considerable attention to higher-order learning throughout this book, for the skills and accompanying motivations related to this form of learning are critical to successfully engaging polystatic processes.

End Game Vision

Whichever lens is engaged, and whichever process is implemented, the fundamental purpose of an Essential lens is to keep the "end game" in mind when polystatic predictions are made and the VUCA-Plus environment is navigated. This is an existential matter. It brings together an Essential Lens with a Lens of Essence. The End game might not be the survival of a family, organization, nation, or global environment; however, an end game is existential if it means preserving some core (Essential) value or purpose. It is not enough just to continue existence. Why exist if there is no reason for this

existence (purpose)? Why exist if it means abandoning the core values on which our existence is based?

I am reminded of a consulting contract I had with a group of small colleges in the United States. I was meeting with the presidents of these institutions (that are often struggling). I brought in a prominent "futurist" to assist with a planning process engaged by the presidents. The futurist started by asking the presidents to spend a few minutes reflecting on what difference it would make if their college went out of business during the coming year. This respectful futurist was asking the presidents to reflect on the Essential value their college brings to the world.

The reaction of the presidents to this assignment was passionate and highly negative. They refused to engage in this reflection and asked the futurist to leave immediately! I was not viewed positively and gradually had to rebuild my credibility. While the presidents valued the other planning processes I had introduced, they certainly did not appreciate being asked this existential question: what is the purpose of your institution's existence? They threw out the existential version of an Essential lens offered by the Futurist. It is indeed a hard lens to deploy when planning for the future.

Transformations

With these introductory comments regarding how a Lens of Essentials can be deployed, I consider transformations that can be made regarding each of the six conditions of VUCA-Plus. Each of these transformations requires that we direct our Lens to something Essential. In this chapter, I will discuss the Essential-based processes that help to transform two of the VUCA-Plus conditions: volatility and uncertainty. These transformative processes are based on the engagement of appropriate anchors and curiosity.

In the next chapter, I introduce a process called Enablement that helps to transform complexity and identify different perspectives that can be taken in predicting and making decisions--thus

reducing ambiguity. I conclude this set of chapters by describing transformations made in confronting the final two VUCA-Plus conditions: turbulence and contradiction.

I begin with Anchors.

From Volatility to Anchoring

This first transformation concerns the engagement of *Contingency* amid volatility. This transformation requires flexibility. A Lens of Divergence is selected. Options are kept open. Multiple visions are sought. Learning takes place to modify the actions taken. As I have noted regarding Polystasis, adjustments are constantly being made—based on changing templates and shifting predictions regarding the environment in which we are operating. The appropriate engagement of Contingency involves an emphasis on intentions (goals, vision, values, purposes) associated with the issue being addressed. Which of these intentions should (must) remain constant? Given the shifting circumstances related to this issue, what can be changed?

I introduce the metaphor of anchor to address the Contingency transformation and provide a framework for addressing these questions. While most people think of anchors as heavy objects that keep a boat from moving, some anchors allow for some change while also providing stability. Like the Lens of Divergence, these latter anchors offer continuity and change.

Ground Anchor

The Anchoring metaphor was first used by Edgar Schein (2006) when writing about the nature of careers. I wish to expand on the metaphor used by Schein. In using this metaphor, it is important to acknowledge the two kinds of anchors I just mentioned. The first is the so-called *Bottom or Ground Anchor*. This is the large anchor that most of us non-nautical folks envision. The heavy bottom anchor consists of a shaft with two arms and flukes at one end and a stoke mounted at the other end of the shaft. This type of anchor digs into the sea floor once the boat moves.

Chains connecting the anchor to the boat become tense. They prevent much movement of the vessel. More simply, a ground anchor can be a slab of concrete to which a ship is attached when moored. These anchors are meant to be permanent. Similarly, some Essentials in an organization are permanent. These Essential ground anchors are often associated with the mission and values of the organization. They are rarely modified—and are never to be discarded! Typically, they also come with a stable psychosocial template and minimal changes in baselines, predictions or actions.

Sea Anchor

The second kind of anchor is called a *Sea Anchor*. This drift anchor or drogue typically is not as heavy as the bottom anchor and is often shaped like a parachute or cone with the larger end pointing in the direction of the boat's movement. The sea anchor helps to orient the ship into the wind and slows down (but doesn't prevent) the boat's drift.

This anchor provides flexible anchorage when the vessel faces strong tidal action or shifting wind. The sea anchor is used when the ship is far from the shoreline and the sea floor is located many fathoms below. The sea anchor contrasts with the ground anchors in that it is intended not to hold a boat in place but to align the ship with the wind and tides. The sea anchor slows down the movement of a beat in any one direction.

Some of the Essentials in an organization operate like sea anchors. They similarly provide alignment and direction for an organization or society. They provide guidance and parameters for the organization as it shifts gradually with environmental changes surrounding a specific issue. It is important to note that the process of Polystasis operates like a sea anchor—as does the process of Allostasis.

While homeostasis is based on the premise that there is a permanent baseline (ground anchor) to which we continually adjust, both Polystasis and Allostasis suggest that the template and

baseline (like the surface anchor) are shifting while providing direction and some continuity. We adjust our psychosocial template with changing environmental conditions (especially changing interpersonal relationships). Our baseline adjusts to the new realities we face from day to day (or even moment to moment). Predictions shift and actions do not remain the same. We are agile in our work inside an organization and in our non-work life.

Benefits are inherent in both the ground and sea anchor. One of the critical roles to be played by an Essential Lens is that of discernment: in this case, discerning the difference between bottom and sea anchors. A particular Essential Lens can help us focus on each type of anchor's appropriate use. A Magnification Lens might be used with a bottom anchor, but the Lens of Divergence makes sense with a sea anchor. The Divergence Lens can help us ensure that shifting actions are aligned with shifting intentions (sea anchor). A Lens of Magnification ensures that certain intentions are fully understood and remain securely in place regardless of environmental shifts (ground anchor).

Organizational Patterns

I take this analysis one step further. I suggest there is something fundamental operating in organizations. These are organizational patterns. Both bottom and sea anchors maintain behavioral patterns in our organizations. The diverse ways patterns are established, reinforced, and provide energy in our organizations tend to organize around several anchors. Some of these patterns and anchors are unyielding. They operate as bottom anchors and are firmly implanted on some organizational (or societal) sea floor. These bottom anchors are often based on strongly held collective values, beliefs, hopes, fears—and even shared myths.

Any disruption of these patterns or this bottom anchor can be profoundly disturbing and a source of sheer panic. The Magnification Lens can be invaluable in bringing us to a full appreciation for the important stabilizing role that patterns play. Our polystatic predictions are disrupted. The anticipation of

disorder and chaos leads our bodies to engage in defensive biology. Focus turns to our internal state and away from our external state. We may freeze in a state of inaction. Or we might act in a frenzied and often ineffective manner. Our body is preparing for either fight or flight. This would make sense if there were a legitimate enemy to defeat. However, our mind is messed up, for we can win no battle and there is no safe place to which we might flee.

Other anchors operate like sea anchors. They can be moved in direction or orientation. They may shift gradually with the tide or the wind. These are the organizational variations. A Divergence Lens enables us to detect and fully appreciate these variations. We are challenged, but not profoundly threatened, when invited to reflect on and consider changing our predictions based on the direction or orientation of these organizational sea anchors. We thoughtfully determine whether a battle is necessary and if it can be won. Rather than flee, we find a way to remain calm. We slow down our thinking, making use of the Lens of Divergence.

From Uncertainty to Curiosity

VUCA-Plus issues associated with Uncertainty (and Surprise) pose a major, multi-tiered challenge for leaders and other decision-makers in contemporary organizations. As Joe Berkowitz (2024) notes "uncertainty is a critical driver of stress." Yet, Berkowitz cites research evidence suggesting that uncertainty can also be aligned with curiosity. Curiosity may, in turn, "be humanity's brightest, most powerful spotlight for illuminating the unknown." Berkowitz illustrates the motivating feature of curiosity by citing Albert Einstein:

> In a letter Albert Einstein wrote to his biographer in 1953, the brilliant scientist claimed to possess no special talents other than being "Passionately curious". False modesty aside, it was only through pursuing his interest in the world's mysteries that Einstein could reveal so many hidden secrets about the universe.

Essentials-based transformation occurs when we discern the nature of an issue that our organization is confronting. We use a Convergent Lens to hone the issue. We set the conditions for new learning using a Lens of Illumination. We become particularly curious about those issues that are not simply addressed. That which is Essential will change depending on the type of issue. Certain issues evoke our curiosity. Others do not. These issues are routine and boring, or they are unexpected and overwhelming.

In the preface, I briefly described four types: puzzles, problems, dilemmas, and mysteries. In this chapter, I introduce two additional types (messy problems and polarities) and suggest why some of these six issues elicit our curiosity. I also propose ways that each type has been (or could be) most successfully addressed— especially when the issue is critical and Essential.

We find the capacity to transform uncertainty into an appropriate level of "passionate curiosity." The capacity to transform uncertainty into "passionate curiosity" increases when we can "illuminate" issues by determining whether or not we have some control in confronting them. I begin with those issues that manifest as routine puzzles. We have considerable control over them. However, these issues rarely elicit much curiosity.

Puzzles

As I have noted, puzzles are the everyday issues we must face. They rarely are Essential—nor do they evoke much curiosity among those who face them. Rarely are we surprised when puzzles occur. However, we may label them Essential because they must be successfully solved. Much as in the fable of the Dutch boy keeping his figure in the dike to keep the city from flooding, we have certain critical tasks to perform every day. At other times we declare that something is Essential only because we want to appear competent and successful. At such a point we should pull out our Lens of Convergence and ask if resolution of a specific issue is truly Essential.

Answers are easily found when puzzling questions are asked. Puzzles are easily solved--and we know when they are solved. They are unidimensional, for they can be clearly defined and quantified (or at least measured). Actions that bring about success can easily be predicted in our Polystatic world. We rely on tried-and-true heuristics. Habitual behavior reigns supreme. Nothing gains our attention—other than the prospect of success.

Puzzles are often important to (and can be decided by) a relatively small number of people. This is the sort of issue that is rightly passed to the lowest level of responsibility where the necessary information is available. Employees are often placed in specific roles to solve ongoing puzzles—whether they occur on an assembly line, at the front desk of a hotel, or in the accounting office of a small business.

Miller and Page (2007) offer a portrait of the primary features in a world filled with puzzles. Their landscape contains a dominant peak. When arriving at this peak, a Backward Lens is used to identify the path required to reach the peak (solve the puzzle). We can record this path and know it can be traversed in the future (using the Extension Lens). We know how to operate when, once again, we need to reach this peak or solve this puzzle. Our polystatic process remains stable—with the same baseline, predictions, and habitual behaviors. A simple adjustment can be made to the actions taken even when we are unsuccessful in achieving a particular outcome, .

We went to a very crowded supermarket last week and felt the physiological impact of crowded aisles and long waits at the checkout counter. We adjusted our schedule and have found a better time for the supermarket—when there are fewer shoppers. There is a slightly bigger and more complex puzzle to address. My ears have told me there is too much noise at work. I hear what is being said by another staff member at the next desk. I complain. Partitions are set up between desks at my office.

It is not uncommon for us to rely on old assumptions and polystatic predictions even when the issue is big and life-threatening. Many of us confronted the challenge of COVID by predicting that a protective device would help. Sure enough, new masks have arrived at our front door to help us confront this virus. We begin to stay home at the recommendation of our state officials. They are to be trusted. Their recommendation helped to reduce the rate of infection. A puzzle presented itself and solutions emerged. Or did they?

Problems

I have labeled the second type of issue as a Problem. Many Essential issues belong to this second category. These issues often arise without warning. Uncertainty is prominent. Predictions are inaccurate. Our psychosocial template no longer seems fully relevant. Actions can be counterproductive. However, curiosity is aroused. What is going on here? It has drawn my attention. My Magnification lens is brought out and I focus on the nature of this challenging condition. My polystatic process becomes less automatic. I take out my Backward lens, slow my thinking, and reflect on what has not been working (and what has worked).

As noted in the preface, problems can be differentiated from puzzles because they are less predictable, and multiple perspectives can be applied when analyzing a problem. We dust off our Divergence Lens and the kaleidoscopic lens that produces Multiple Visions. Several possible predictions and solutions are associated with any specific problem. Multiple polystatic baselines can be engaged and many criteria can be applied when evaluating any solution.

Many more cognitive demands are being placed on us when we confront problems than when we confront puzzles—given that they do not have simple or single solutions and were not anticipated. We also experience affective demands. The problem frightens us for a short time. Can we genuinely be successful? And how will we know that success is at hand? Yet, like Einstein, we

eventually might become "passionately curious" about this problem. We may bring out our Lens of Illumination and spend countless hours and forfeit nights of sleep searching for a solution.

Given that problems are multi-dimensional and interdisciplinary, it is unclear when a problem has been successfully resolved. The challenge is amplified, based on the level of importance assigned to this problem. If we are not overwhelmed by its importance, the problem will provoke our curiosity if it is Essential. Our Lens of Illumination is applied. We might be curious about the actual status of this problem. Is it Essential that we find the solution to this problem in short order?

There are additional matters associated with confronting a problem. Cognitive and affective challenges are associated with the Uncertainty aroused by the unexpected appearance of this problem. There is also the possibility that it will reappear if not solved right now. Even if it is solved, the darn thing might reappear later—like an unwanted relative or guest. Perhaps our Extension Lens is required.

There is also the matter of stakeholders and audience. The outcome of the problem-solving process itself is likely to be of significant interest to many people when it focuses on an Essential problem. We need our Divergence Lens once again. How do we know if this Essential problem has been permanently resolved? The criterion will often vary depending on the stakeholder group being considered.

The most important and difficult discussions may revolve around agreeing on criteria for solving an Essential problem. For instance, at the public policy level, Essential discussions regarding a virus can revolve around reducing the number of deaths or keeping the economy from total collapse. How will we know if we have successfully combated the virus if we don't even know what "success" would mean? Is success all about lives or does it center on livelihoods?

At the personal level, we must ask questions that are impossible to answer. Whose feelings and whose life are most important in this family? With our limited budget, who receives funds for college? When and how do we tell our kids that Dad has lost his job or that Mom is pregnant? We can't even evaluate if the solutions are successful. Was a college education "worth it"? Was it appropriate that we immediately shared our news about Dad or Mom? We will continue to be plagued by the unanswerable question: "Did we do the right thing?" There is a lingering concern. "Have I been a wise and caring parent?"

At this stressful point, it is tempting to abandon curiosity. We move into survival mode. We place all of our Essential Lens back in the drawer. We freeze in place and abandon any reflection or exploration of alternative perspectives or practices. Yet, at this point, we must apply an Essential lens. It is a lens that magnifies the details of this problem and expands our viewpoint. Out comes the Magnification and Divergence Lenses. We might even grab the kaleidoscopic lens of Multiple Visions.

What are alternative ways to view prevention or alleviation of this problem? Should we consider both strategies for protecting ourselves against the virus and ways we gain immunity by being exposed to the virus? Should we explore a variety of perspectives regarding the treatment of this problem? Do we listen to the viewpoints on COVID-19 vaccinations offered not only by scientists at the National Institute of Health but also by those scientists and physicians who warn about the potential side effects of available vaccines? Are there some new opportunities that emerge from the solution to this problem? Has COVID-19 taught us important lessons regarding how to confront viruses in the future (see Appendix A)?

We may become curious about the best ways to handle many domestic issues. What advice is most credible? To whom do we listen regarding the value of a college education? What are the personal qualities that best predict a successful college career?

What can we learn about parent-child communication? Do we feel more empowered and less helpless because we gathered some information before making a difficult decision? Do we have an opportunity to learn something new based on the curiosity elicited by this Essential challenge facing our family?

As noted, Miller and Page (2007) use "rugged landscape" when describing settings filled with problems. These are all-too-common mid-21st-century settings where abundant problematic issues must be addressed by us individually and collectively. This rugged setting is found during a pandemic invasion (such as COVID-19). Multiple perspectives are credible. A host of priorities can be cited. Public policies are saturated with politics and competing financial interests. Our polystatic predictions are wandering all over the place. We don't even need our kaleidoscopic Lens to appreciate the multiplicity.

Can we remain curious about the problem even when this curiosity exists alongside our confusing reactions to this problem? Curiosity must remain dominant. We need our Lens of Illumination. We must continue to explore, research, confirm, and disconfirm as we journey through this rugged landscape. We must use Polystasis and the Lens of Divergence accompanied by our Lens of Illumination. A "rugged" psychosocial template must be applied.

Messy Problems

There are problems... and then there are messy problems! We tend to see many issues in a limited or simplistic way. We attempt to deal with them as if they are puzzles or problems. We are likely to bring out our Lens of Convergence. We are surprised when addressing an Essential issue that is "messy". We bring out our Magnification Lens and probe deeper into the complexity, seriousness, and potential tragedy of the issue we face. Our polystatic process "ain't working!" Our psychosocial template isn't up to the task. Our predictions lead us astray.

For instance, when faced with the multi-faced challenges of a pandemic (such as COVID) we are navigating a "swamp." It is not a turbulent river or stormy sea. When figuring out where to allocate college funds, we face many related issues that can create a swamp. What about past relationships with our kids? Do we consider our children's attitudes about "fairness" in family relations or the worth assigned to a college education? Very swampy. Our Essential Lens easily become "mucked up."

Russell Ackoff (1999) described the swamp many years ago as a "mess." Others have identified these messy issues as "wicked problems" or "tangled webs." Whatever we call this type of issue, we must stay with an issue located in a swamp long enough to achieve real and sustained solutions to the uncertain Essential issues we are facing. We must take the appropriate Lens out of our psychic drawer (often the Magnification Lens). We can't avoid making Polystatic predictions and living with the consequences of these predictions.

Messy problems are to be distinguished from "regular" problems in that they don't just involve multiple elements (a complicated system). They also involved a complex interweaving (tangled web) among these elements (a complex system) (Miller and Page, 2007). Messy problems are indeed "wicked" when it comes to understanding let alone seeking to predict what is about to occur and finding the "solution" to an Essential issue.

Each of the many elements embedded in the mess is connected to most of the other elements. Uncertainty abounds in large part because these elements have suddenly connected. It is like the complex and powerful processes in nuclear fusion and fission. Perhaps like those scientists who have spent their entire careers being curious about fusion or fission, we can be curious about the messes we face and apply our Essential lens of Illumination. Family priorities and patterns of behavior among family members can be intriguing. We can be curious about family dynamics and acknowledge that all families operate in "messy ways." Most

importantly, we can "cut ourselves some slack" when setting up financial priorities and managing important disclosures.

The challenge is even greater. The rugged landscape is shrouded in clouds. We can't determine which is the tallest mountain and how to navigate in this rugged terrain. We can't even see the mountains clearly through the haze. It is like traveling along the highway leading through the Great Smokey Mountains (in the Eastern USA) Everything (as the name implies) is often "smokey." The VUCA-Plus condition of Uncertainty is joined with the condition of Ambiguity. The mountains are beautiful—but the beauty is captured in the vague outline of peaks and valleys. VUCA-Plus reigns supreme, with conditions of uncertainty and ambiguity appearing in full strength when confronting a Messy problem.

What might elicit our curiosity and induce us to bring out our Lens of Illumination? We might wonder what it would look like if the fog cleared. We generate several alternative predictions of what resides on the other side of the fog bank. We create multiple contingency plans that address the possible environments that are now shrouded. Do we find out what this environment was like before there was fog? Is information about pre-fog conditions still relevant? We might even be curious about the source of this fog. Is someone or some institution benefiting from the fog? Should we direct our attention to the fog-maker(s) rather than that which resides in the fog bank?

In whatever way we wish to explore the landscape with and without the fog, we must acknowledge the inevitability of making some mistakes amid the mess. The psychosocial template is never fully appropriate. Our predictions will not always be accurate. Actions will not always produce the desired outcomes. Some self-forgiveness is a requisite when addressing any messy problem. Curiosity is only possible with the prospect of this self-forgiveness regarding the potential of making a mess out of the messy problems we are facing. Our Lens of Illumination will inevitably be splattered

with the swamp's mud (disruptive, distracting, and distorted information).

Dilemmas

Certain Essential issues that we face elude a clear and stable solution. We don't know which Lens to use. This uncertainty leads to a significant increase in levels of anxiety—which, in turn, leads to rigidity of thought and a preference for fast thinking and quickly formulated solutions. We leave all of the Essential lens in the drawer. Under these conditions, polystatic predictions are likely to be lousy. The resulting biological reactions and behaviors are often maladaptive: "garbage in and garbage out." Recognizing a maladaptive response, we are likely to try something else – which also will fail. There is now a dithering of biology and behavior. This creates yet another challenge.

It becomes useful to classify these Essential issues as Dilemmas and to acknowledge that these contradictions are likely to occur frequently in our mid-21st Century society. We may be uncertain about the immediate dilemma but can remain certain that there will be many dilemmas in our VUCA-Plus environment. I propose that many elusive problems and messes are dilemmas. Dilemmas are like regular problems in that they are complicated. Like messy problems they are complex. Like both problems and messes, dilemmas require that we engage a Lens of Magnification to understand what we are facing.

The challenge is even greater. The interwoven elements are often in opposition to one another. The VUCA-Plus condition of contradiction joins with the condition of uncertainty. Different priorities and/or different perspectives are present. We may view the issue from one perspective and take action to alleviate one part of the issue. We then immediately confront another part of the issue. This other part is often represented by an opposing point of view offered (with passion) by other members of our family, community, or society. We move from one prediction to another prediction, and from one dithering reaction to a second or third

reaction. Our Magnification Lens proves to be of little value. We become more knowledgeable about each part but do not know how to deal with both parts simultaneously.

As in the case of problems and messes, dilemmas can be described as "rugged landscapes." An entire complex ecosystem is involved in rugged landscapes. This ecosystem incorporates the outcomes of competing elements that push against one another (earthquakes), erode one another (riverbeds), and/or produce diverse fauna and flora (trees, plants, animals, etc.). In this setting, we also find exceptional beauty that presents itself in many ways—suggesting our use of an Essential lens of Diversity.

Nature itself can be viewed as a kaleidoscope. The uncertainty creates opportunities for not just beauty but also curiosity. Like Einstein, we become creative when we are curious. Our Lens of Illumination can help us find the path forward. Ralph Stacey (1996) has noted that we are most likely to find creative solutions in richly textured (complex) systems. These solutions are often located in the curiosity-filled gaps between various sectors operating in a family, organization, or community.

Franz Johansson (2004) writes about the *Medici Effect* (referring back to the leadership provided by the Medici family during the Italian Renaissance). This effect is engaged in the intersection between often-competing disciplines. New solutions are generated in this intersection. Members of one discipline are curious about what those in another discipline have to say.

New learning can occur as alternative perspectives on an important issue are introduced. Artists can learn from scientists. Historians can provide insights to those who are engaged in politics. I have conducted sessions where art professors in a college can learn about the use of laboratories from professors of chemistry, while at the same time teaching these chemists about the use of studios as a mode of education.

Members of an organization can hold opposing and contradictory views and still be effectively and creatively engaged with one another—provided that a Lens of Illumination is being collectively deployed, and curiosity is complemented by a motivation to learn. By being curious about the perspective held by the other side and seeking to gain insights about the other side, they can meet the challenge of VUCA-Plus. Their personal and collective polystatic processes can yield thoughtful and appropriate predictions and actions.

The sign of a viable, creative organization is that it can live with and manage its dilemmas in real time. It becomes a "learning organization (Argyris and Schön, 1978). Viability and creativity are also evidence of a loving family. The leaders of this organization or parents of this family can address the dilemma without questioning the identity of one's organization or family at every turn of the road. These leaders and parents can avoid whip-lashing strategies. The leaders need not confront dilemmas by reactively tearing down and rebuilding their organizational structures. The parents need not scapegoat or exhibit preferential treatment for one of their children.

Accurate predictions can be made and continually adjusted to competing viewpoints and values of the organization or family. It all depends on the acceptance of diverse perspectives, encouragement of creativity, willingness to learn from mistakes — and presence of an appreciative climate in the organization or family (Bergquist, 2003). Multiple lenses are engaged. Divergence along with Extension (concern for the future). Lens of Multiple Visions and Illumination.

Returning to our landscape metaphor, we may live in a "dancing landscape" (Miller and Page, 2007). This term is certainly very appropriate in describing many of our current challenges. The VUCA-Plus conditions of volatility, uncertainty, and turbulence speak to the nature of this dance. When a world of complexity

collides with a world of volatility, uncertainty, and turbulence, the landscape begins to dance.

We must all learn how to make our families, organizations, communities, and societies dance in this challenging landscape (Kantor, 1989). It is worth noting that dancing is often a source of creative movement. And this movement is a source of joy. We create something new that expresses something Essential. Joy and novelty reside at the heart of dance. They also reside at the heart of a vital personal and organizational life.

Polarities

There are simple puzzle-based issues. There are challenging problems, messes, and dilemmas. Then there are dynamic polarities that offer exceptional challenges! Like dilemmas, polarities are inevitable and predictable. They need not reside in uncertainty. We can predict they will occur and adjust our baseline following this recognition. Like dilemmas, polarities are multi-dimensional with many moving parts that stand against one another. This means that it is not easy to target just one baseline. We might even need two different psychosocial templates.

Polarities are unlike dilemmas in that these parts (and the perspectives and priorities associated with these parts) don't just stand there in opposition. They create a dynamic oscillation in the system in which they operate. Furthermore, this oscillation can be quite destructive to this system, bringing about a state of freeze or instability. Given these dynamic conditions, the baseline might be quite "slippery" and will itself oscillate in alignment first with one end of the polarity and then with the other end. Must we shift psychosocial templates? Do we replace one Lens with another one?

I bring back the concept of polarity management that I introduced previously in this book because it is critical to navigating a VUCA-Plus environment. Barry Johnson (1992/1996), the principal architect of polarity management, observes that we are often confronted in our contemporary world with polarities. Two or more

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legitimate but opposite forces are found in a VUCA-Plus condition of contradiction. Reflections and debates are engaged concerning the benefits and disadvantages of each side.

Organizationally, the two or more opposing and contradictory forces are often embodied in "camps." For example, the healthcare administrator's interest in minimizing expenses is pitted against the primary care department's need to invest in new equipment. A centralized corporate system requires standardized offerings, but the offices of specific branches of this corporation require flexibility in running their daily affairs.

Neither position is "wrong." "Exquisite truth" is to be found in the positions taken by both camps. The organization is now polarized. Uncertainty no longer exists. The opposing perspectives and positions are "painfully" obvious. Fortunately, someone recognizing this as a polarity can bring both parties "to the table". Using a Magnification lens that takes in the entire polarity, a mutual understanding can be reached regarding the benefits and possible negative consequences of holding either position while excluding the other. Once the strengths and risks of the two sides are understood, the dialogue is directed towards what happens in our attempt to maximize benefits accruing to either side at the expense of the other side.

An additional step must be taken. Here is where curiosity gains a foothold. The Lens of Illumination is brought out of the drawer. An Essential question is posed: what do both sides have in common? What is the goal, outcome, or value they both share? If nothing else, this might be their shared survival or at least finding an end to the swinging back and forth. Usually, however, there is something more than just this shared lower-order purpose. In a safe and supportive environment, we can be curious about some higher-order purpose—and in this curiosity comes the potential for someone facing the polarity to "discover," "uncover" or learn about this higher-order purpose.

Returning to our dancing landscapes, we find (as in the case of dilemmas) that there are multiple mountains to view when we look out over the mid-21st Century landscape. As with dilemmas, the landscape is dancing. However, in the case of polarities, another force is operating that produces the dance. This dynamic is the swinging back and forth between the two contradictory and competing ends of a polarity. An oscillation occurs in the dance, with the dancers twirling around. This motion may be repeated until there is exhaustion or madness. Neither a Lens of Convergence nor a Lens of Divergence works when there is dancing. At best, one might deploy the Extension lens to look past and beyond the current dance.

Back to the mountains. We first decided to climb up to the peak of a nearby mountain. We immediately identify the many challenges we face in seeking to ascend this mountain. So, we turn our attention to the second nearby mountain (which is just as tall). We soon come to recognize that this second mountain has its obstacles. We stand there uncertain about the direction in which to move. We are frozen and stressed. No action is taken and the opportunity to reach either summit is lost. The missed opportunity, in turn, further increases the stress. There is an additional negative impact. The frozen condition seriously damages our health. We never want to return to this damned mountain range!

In turning our attention from mountain climbing to organizational leadership, we find that an important sign of viability and vitality in a mid-21st Century organization is its capacity to live with uncertainty—and its leaders' skillful engagement of this uncertainty to produce clarity and resolution. The Lens of Illumination is evident accompanied by a spirit of sustained collective learning (Argyris and Schön, 1978).

Through polarity management, leaders can confront their organization's dilemmas, paradoxes, and polarities in real time. The dance of oscillation is hard to avoid. However, it can (and must) be anticipated and managed—especially when the issues are

Essential to the organization's functioning. And it is worth recalling that curiosity can arise when we observe other people dancing: "What are they doing? Are they enjoying themselves and perhaps even trying to convey something?"

There is something even more important. We can be curious about our dancing (alone or with one or more partners). Do we follow a standard pattern: perhaps a fox trot (for the old folks) or a bit of twisting (for the middle-aged and semi-old folks) and some "free-lance" dancing (for the young folks)? Or do we "strike out on our own' and create a distinctive dance?

What about our dance-like engagements in our organization? Are we old-fashioned, new-aged, or improvisational in our work with other people? What about the dance-like envisioning of our personal future? And can a collective dance be engaged as we create a future for our organization? Rosabeth Kanter (1989) believes that even leaders of big, old organizations can dance. An Essential question is posed: can we dance individually and together with other people? A Lens of Illumination can profitably be focused on the dance.

Mysteries

As already mentioned, we enter a domain with mysteries in which problems and dilemmas seem to merge. Messy problems and polarities also seem to migrate into Mysteries when we begin addressing challenges associated with dancing (and even oscillating) landscapes. It is important to note that mysteries are often linked with Essential issues that can be predicted. Uncertainty can be avoided when the inevitable appearance of Mystery is acknowledged. However, it is not enough to acknowledge the inevitability. Though these mysterious Essential issues may be predictable, they are often difficult to understand and are ultimately unknowable.

We must also acknowledge that many mysteries are filled with complexity, ambiguity, and contradictions. A specific mystery is

profound. Unfortunately, in many cases, mysteries reside in the world of negative apprehensive Essentials. They are "hellish." In some cases, fortunately, mysteries reside in the world of positive, aspirational Essentials. They are "heavenly." Thus, the Mystery is either awe-inspiring (aspirational Essential) or awe-ful (apprehensive Essential). If nothing else, a mystery is likely to be Enthralling. It is therefore hard to ignore as "the Elephant in the room".

As with dilemmas and polarities, we anticipate encountering many mysteries in our lives—but also find it hard to do much about mysteries. We rarely are confident about the appropriate Lens to use when viewing a mystery. The Lens of Divergence is seldom needed—for the mystery is itself kaleidoscopic! A Magnification lens might be engaged. However, it is used for appreciating the mystery's numinosity ("awe-fullness") rather than for any "resolution" of the mystery.

Like Einstein, we can be "passionately curious" about the profound mysteries we encounter. However, most of us don't have the brainpower of Einstein to confront mysteries with curiosity or to engage the Illumination Lens when encountering a mystery. There is too much to learn! We are easily overwhelmed. We must narrow the mystery.

We use a Convergent Lens to deal with only a portion of its big "awe-full-ness." For instance, we know that powerful storms will occasionally disrupt our agri-business crops or the tourism on which our resort depends. Increasingly, we are aware that climate change will make these storms even more predictable. We can't do much about climate change (a distal event), but we can do some contingency planning (proximal event) regarding the potential loss of crops or tourist trade.

I offer a timely example of a mystery about which we are apprehensive. This mystery concerns the viruses that are now impacting our collective lives. Ultimately, we probably can't do much to control the occurrence of viruses –at least not in our

personal lives. Viruses are distal events. However, we can focus on steps to be taken in avoiding the virus or treating it. This proximal perspective turns the mystery into a somewhat manageable problem. Or it becomes a less manageable dilemma. As already noted, it can also become a particularly challenging polarity.

Then there are the personal (proximal) and profound mysteries surrounding the impact of births and deaths. We know that all things have a beginning and must come to an end. However, these inevitable, mysterious outcomes are profoundly difficult to accept. Doulas can help us prepare for the birth of a child, and hospice workers can help us prepare for death--as can reading a book such as *Being Mortal* by Atul Gawande (2014). We can even be curious about the process of birth and death. These mysteries have always been a source of curiosity and creativity for authors, dramatists, poets, artists, and philosophers—leading to many books, plays, poems, and paintings depicting birth or death.

Frequently, it is not a matter of addressing a portion of a mystery so that it becomes a problem, dilemma, or polarity. Rather it is a matter of acknowledging that a mystery contains multiple and often nested dilemmas. The mystery might even reside in the middle of polarity. These dilemmas and polarity-embedded mysteries are hard to understand or address. They reside beyond rational comprehension and resolution.

Mysteries must be viewed with respect. They cannot be ignored (which would lead to Uncertainty). Some mysteries relate to traumatic and devastating events. These yield to what I have identified as an apprehensive perspective regarding what is Essential. Why did I get out of the World Trade Center while my desk-mate perished? Why did the fire reach our home but not the one next to us? Why did my child die before me?

The virus evokes many profound questions of mystery that are nested or evoke polarities. Why was my mother forced to die alone when COVID-19 hit? Could the government have done something about this—or could I have done something? Our troubling

concerns are based on a nested dilemma. Where did all of this anger in our society about the virus come from? Why was there such distrust of some people and agencies? Will this anger and distrust reappear when the next virus hits our shore? Should we impose some restrictions on expressing this anger? Should we find ways to confront the distrust more forcefully when future viruses invade? Or do we freely express this anger and distrust in our "open" society? The mystery of reoccurring viruses is now couched in polarity regarding societal restrictions.

Mysteries can also provide an opportunity for the engagement of what I have identified as aspirational Essentials. The productive processes of Polystasis enter the picture at this point. A new project has fallen into my lap. I have received a remarkable opportunity to demonstrate my competence in leading this project. I shift my baseline. I set up predictions and plans for success in operating this new project. I then act on behalf of the new baseline I have established. Another opportunity emerges that we have brought about ourselves. Perhaps we have shared five wonderful years with our partner. It might now be time to have a baby. New baselines regarding child-centered accomplishments are established by the two of us and we make plans.

Opportunities might also emerge in reaction to events in the immediate past. I might have gained so much support during my treatment for Cancer that it is now time for me to "give back" and do volunteer work at the treatment center. I establish a new baseline regarding time to be spent assisting other people with cancer. I predict that there are certain ways in which I can be most helpful. I find that the baseline must be adjusted, and my predictions must shift a bit as I begin working with those people who are facing the mystery of cancer.

A mystery is inevitably viewed from many different perspectives and is often deeply rooted in a specific culture and tradition. Mysteries have no boundaries, and all conditions are interrelated. As I have noted, COVID-19 is fundamentally a mystery. We don't

know why this horrible virus has afflicted us. There is often a "Why" question to be addressed when confronting a mystery such as COVID-19. We can seek out a religious or sacred answer by asking if we, as human beings, somehow deserve to be "punished."

Is COVID an apprehensive Essential? Are the wages of sin now evident in the impact of this virus on our collective life? Is this some divine retribution for the inequities and warfare we have inflicted on our fellow human beings? From a more positive perspective, we might perceive that God is just trying to show us that life is precious. We should spend more time with our loved ones. We should provide our neighbors with gracious support. There is a divine presence that is guiding us through troubling times.

The "Why" question regarding COVID can be addressed at a more secular and political level. Perhaps the virus highlights cracks in our societies that have been ignored for many years. The virus is trying to teach us. We can learn from the virus about the best way(s) to engage a polystatic process containing realistic baselines and predictions regarding the treatment of future viruses. Is there a way in which we can frame COVID as an aspirational Essence that enables us to learn about and reform our healthcare system (as well as our approach to confronting future viruses)?

At yet another level, we might ask if Mother Nature is trying to take back her environment. During the COVID outbreak, we could see the signs of a clearer and less contaminated world. Reduced automobile travel and industrial production resulting from COVID led to environmental healing. Can we learn a lesson regarding this improvement in our environment? Can we assist Mother Nature without having to endure a pandemic?

Answers to these profound questions require us reluctantly to bring our Extension Lens out of the drawer and to confront an important bias concerning *Locus of Control* (a concept I introduced in the preface). Psychologists have noted that some of us assume we have no control over the mysteries (or other issues) we face. Another

group of people expect that they have control over most issues (even some mysteries).

Change might not be an option—given that an external locus of control is inherent in mysteries. However, we can prepare for the future occurrence of specific mysteries (finding an internal locus of control). We can do something about our environment (or cease to do something that disrupts our environment). We can emulate Joseph of the Old Testament and increase grain storage in anticipation of a drought. Perhaps, we save a few dollars for the "rainy day" that might arrive soon.

Locus of Control: Uncertainty, Curiosity and Discernment

We are oriented to an *External Locus of Control* when we view ourselves as quite small compared to the vast force field surrounding us. Most issues are outside our control. Many of these issues are framed as mysteries. Operating in a polystatic system, those who embrace an external locus of control do not believe that they can predict a specific change in our environment and that they can do nothing to influence those changes that do occur. They either adapt to the change or do nothing. A dominant external locus of control can leave us passive or frozen.

By contrast, some people frame everything as puzzles that can be controlled—and are predictable. Psychologists identify the perspective embraced by these people as an *Internal Locus of Control.* Given this more optimistic perspective, we engage in an active polystatic process. We predict that something can be done about this change in our environment.

In most cases, with an Internal Locus of Control, we hold on to a benevolent psychosocial template. The world "is operating on our side." We act, await the outcome of this action, and readily adjust our actions based on the initial outcomes. We take responsibility for this outcome when embracing an internal locus of control. We rejoice in the successful outcome and may enjoy a squirt of feel-

good dopamine. Or we are hit with a bout of anxiety given the occurrence of an unsuccessful outcome that should not be repeated.

Either perspective leads us to prepare physiologically for a new set of actions. Given an internal locus of control, we may often be optimistic about the future but can easily be disillusioned. Those with an internal locus of control are vulnerable to mood swings, moments of intense anxiety, and late nights at work. An external locus of control can lead us to risk aversion. We are hesitant to take any action. Passively, we are likely to await something outside of our control.

Discernment and Passionate Curiosity

A critical role is played by discernment when it comes to locus of control. We tend to perceive puzzles, problems—and even messes, dilemmas, and polarities—as being within our control if we have an internal locus and are inclined to act rather than sit back and reflect. With an external locus of control, we might perceive everything as outside our control—even puzzles. We are "pawns" in the hands of someone or something playing a cosmic game of chess.

There is likely to be agreement among all parties regarding the source of control to be found in mysteries. We all tend to agree that mysteries are taking place outside our sphere of influence or control—this is part of what makes mysteries so awe-full and yet so compelling (the focus of many novels and movies). This is also why collective angst regarding mysteries is often associated with the VUCA-Plus condition of Uncertainty.

Problems, messes, dilemmas, and polarities are usually complex mixtures of controllable and uncontrollable elements. VUCA-Plus conditions inevitably contain this mixture. Furthermore, this mixture inevitably produces perceived uncertainty regarding the appearance of many Essential issues. Internal and external locus of control exist side by side. This is especially common with nested

dilemmas and the challenging polarities we often face with the virus and other mid-21st-century conditions.

A problem or dilemma embedded in a rugged landscape will have a large portion of its components under one's partial control. By contrast, a problem, mess, or dilemma embedded in a dancing landscape is less likely to contain many components under one's control. A polarity embedded in an oscillating landscape has likely been the primary cause of this oscillation.

This type of polarity is even more elusive when it comes to control. It is hard to determine what is potentially under our control. This doesn't mean we should give up on our attempt to lead in a dancing landscape or manage an oscillating landscape. It only means we must be patient and persistent when working in this landscape of mixed uncertainty and certainty.

Illumination and Passionate Curiosity

While most of the Essential lenses afford us little help in confronting mysteries, the Lens of Illumination can be of great value in helping us sort out matters of control. Our primary (Essential) task regarding Illumination is to engage in the frequently mentioned processes of reflection and slow thinking. We employ these processes to discern what we can and cannot control. We should be curious about how we might best navigate a dancing landscape.

Our Lens of Illumination leads us to ask important questions. How does this landscape work? Are there any nodal points in this dancing network where some influence can be asserted? In the past, have I been able to navigate a similar landscape with some success? As I have already mentioned, we might be able to control one or more elements of this landscape—but probably not all of the elements. Perhaps we join others as they push or pull one or more landscape elements in a specific direction. It is all about patience and persistence—along with a little help from our friends and an Illuminating Lens.

Passionate curiosity should reign supreme alongside thoughtful patience and focused persistence when living and working in a dancing landscape. Many intriguing questions can be posed when engaging the Lens of Illumination. Which elements connect with which other elements? Are there some patterns in this rich, evolving tapestry? What is predictable and what is uncertain?

We will successfully address a challenging Essential issue (be it a problem, mess, dilemma, or polarity) only by being curious and creative in exploring alternative roles for us to play individually and collectively in a dancing landscape. Most importantly, with the help of an Illuminating Lens, we can embrace a balanced perspective in assuming a polystatic stance regarding predictability and the determination of internal and external loci of control.

The Fundamental Decision: Serenity or Essentials?

I return to our opening observation as I conclude this first chapter on the Lens of Essentials. When faced with the many challenges associated with VUCA-Plus it is very tempting to seek out the rabbit hole as an entrance into a serene wonderland of distorted reality. The alternative is to find or create one or more Essential lenses. An Essential lens might help us focus on what is important in life and work. This lens might also enable us to magnify and maintain sustained attention to what we have identified as most important.

Specifically, Essential lenses can help us expand and diversify our vision regarding important issues. Furthermore, these lenses can assist us in extending our perspective (in time and space) regarding what is of greatest and sustaining value in our lives and work.

In this chapter, I have tended to those lenses that transform the world of VUCA-Plus into one with stabilizing anchors. Through the engagement of an Essential lens, I have also suggested how we might find ourselves curious regarding the issue(s) being addressed

and how this curiosity can lead to clarity and creativity in a dancing landscape.

Dualism and Serenity

A cautionary note is introduced before I consider other ways VUCA-Plus conditions can be transformed (in Chapter Four). This caution offsets some of the optimism I have displayed regarding Essential lenses. We must recognize that operating in the "real" world is never easy even with the potential assistance provided by Essential Lenses. As I have advised, an Essential Lens is best accompanied by slow and reflective thinking, appreciative feelings, and tolerance of that which remains volatile and uncertain.

As I shall observe in the next chapter, the challenging conditions of complexity, ambiguity, turbulence, and contradiction inevitably exist in a VUCA-Plus environment. Some people find it much easier to reside in the wonderland of Serenity (SC²+). They prefer finding Serenity in a distorted wonderland rather than finding what is Essential in a VUCA-Plus world.

Those living in Serenity might see the world in black/white, good/bad, right/wrong terms. As I have noted, William Perry (1998) uses the term *Dualist* when describing the world in which these people choose to live. Olga Tokarczuk recently portrayed this dualism. A Nobel-prize-winning author, Tokarczuk (2022/2024) writes in *The Empusium* about the life of a small group of men living in a European sanitorium. A doctor at the sanitorium speaks of the compelling desire to make things simple and certain by framing everything as a duality (Tokarczuk, 2022/2024, p. 273):

> [We wish to] simplify what seems to us to be unnecessary complication. And the greatest simplification is black-and-white thinking, based on simple antitheses. . . . The mind establishes for itself a set of acute opposites—black and white, day and night, up and down, man and woman—and they determine our entire perception. There's nothing in the middle. Seen like that, the world is far simpler, it's easy

to navigate between these poles, it's easy to establish rules of conduct, and it's particularly easy to judge others, often reserving the luxury of obscurity for oneself. This kind of thinking protects us from any uncertainty, crash, bang and it's all clear, like this or like that, there is no third option.

The young patient listening to this declaration asks what the world is like when the dualistic frame is removed. Our wide doctor declares: "[The real world is] blurred, out of focus, flickering, now like this, now like that, depending on one's point of view." In this final statement regarding "reality", we find the challenging conditions of VUCA-Plus and the understandable desire to escape down the rabbit hole into a reassuring and calm world of dualistic clarity.

It is interesting to note that the characters in Tokarczuk's sanatorium lived in pre-World War I Germany. Virtually all of these men were not only blatant misogynists but also authoritarians who would have been strongly influenced by the dominant role played by two German Kaisers and Chancellor Bismarck. Several decades later, these men would have been eager recruits into the ranks of Hitler's Third Reich.

Seeking out Serenity, these men—along with many members of contemporary American society—were inclined to accept the expertise of someone who is in authority and offers simple solutions to complex issues (problems, messes, dilemmas, and polarities) These "experts" are luring the dualists down the rabbit hole to Serenity (Weitz and Bergquist, 2024). Facts offered by an authority figure are accepted uncritically and without hesitation by those seeking Serenity. The exercise of authority is right, good, and strong when we dwell in a wonderland of Serenity (SC²+)—or the rigid, authority-dominated world of the Kaisers and Bismarck's Second Reich or Hitler's Third Reich.

Elizabeth Kolbert (2022) recently wrote about this pull toward Dualism when reflecting on a famous social psychological study. The Robbers Cave studies of the 1950s provided a compelling

narrative of how two groups of boys at a summer camp readily polarized and assigned good/bad labels to one another. Kolbert suggests that we might be conducting a comparable "real life" experiment today as we Americans divide not into the Boy's Camp Rattlers and Eagles—but instead into red Elephants (Republicans) and blue Donkeys (Democrats).

Given that we are a bit older than the boys at camp, we can do much more harm to one another than the boys could, especially if we are living in a wonderland of Serenity (SC²+). Kolbert proposes that this Dualism is particularly seductive for adults—for Dualism "flattens, distorts, reduces character to symptom, and in turn, instructs and insists upon its moral authority."

Kolbert (2022) concludes that "the solace of its simplicity comes at no little cost. It disregards what we know and asks that we forfeit, too—forget about the pleasures of not knowing." The characters in Tokarczuk's Empusium similarly find that the solace of simplicity and comfort of knowing for sure come at a cost—for this is a novel about horror and death.

Relativism and Reality

There is more to be said about the "pleasures of not knowing." These pleasures seem to align with the concept of curiosity that I have associated in this chapter with the transformation of uncertainty into clarity and curiosity. Furthermore, if he were to read Kolbert's account, William Perry would probably suggest that the pleasures of not knowing belong to those people whom Perry calls the *Relativists*. These are members of our society who take on the challenge of freely viewing an uncertain world. They are open to the idea that there are relative truths. There also are relative goods and relative bads. And even relatively trustworthy and relatively untrustworthy authorities.

Relativists are willing to examine their perspectives and practices. They are even curious about tacitly held (unconscious) perspectives and practices. The Lens of Illumination is frequently

engaged. However, Perry emphasizes another important characteristic. The relativists are doing this reflection and critical inquiry regarding perspectives and practices while sitting on the sidelines. They view the world through their Lens of Illumination through quite a distance. They study the Robbers Cave results but don't go to the cave themselves or participate in a real-life adult experiment on attitude formation. They might engage in some of the oscillations I have portrayed in this book concerning decision-making in VUCA-Plus settings. They go back and forth regarding what to believe and what to do. Everything seems to become a dilemma or even a polarity.

If Relativists go to the camp, they are likely to find this camp filled with Dualists. The Dualists readily attend the camp if they assume that the "good guys" are readily identified, and if they discover strong authority at the camp to back up and rigidly enforce their version of the cave, camp, good guys, and bad guys. What happens if Relativists are "in charge"? Dualists are likely to wait impatiently for these Relativist leaders to "make up their minds" and take some action. Not only does a Dualist grow impatient with the Relativist's delays. They also become suspicious of the Relativist's ultimate alliance.

It doesn't take long for the Dualist to assign all Relativists to the bad (and evil) side of the bucket with two partitioners. Finally giving up, Dualists decide that action must be taken based on Facts provided by other trusted authoritative experts associated with the Cave. The Dualists provoke a revolution against the Relativists-- thus enacting a polarization that parallels the boys' creation of two groups in the original study. Alternatively, the Dualists leave this camp to find a camp where their version of reality is supported by authority. The "Cave" in this camp will be where they find Serenity (SC²+).

There is an alternative outcome of the adult Robber's Cave experiment. It is an outcome that generates a different set of challenges. Instead of revolting (fight) or leaving the camp (flight),

the Dualist might listen to the Relativist. They might be attracted to the Relativist's world of curiosity (the Lens of Illumination). Furthermore, the Dualists might reluctantly find good reasons to doubt experts who present an alternative reality.

When this cognitive and affective "revolution" occurs, the Dualists will shift their perspective. However, they typically do not become Relativists. Instead, the Dualist embraced *Multiplicity* – which is a variant of Dualism. If the alternative authority can't be trusted, then what's to say that the Relativists can be trusted to provide the "truth." Perhaps NO authority is to be trusted! Everyone is suspected. We are left alone to find the truth and check out the Facts. The Multiplistic stance was on full display in American culture during the 1960s. It might also be the dominant perspective in our VUCA-Plus world of the mid-21st Century.

The Multiplist might not choose to enter the wonderland of Serenity (SC²) —for it is filled with "true believers" who can't be trusted. However, the Multiplist is also unlikely to accept the world of VUCA-Plus with its swirling uncertainty, ambiguity, and complexity. They remain in some aimless state of alienation (from authority) and confusion (about what to believe). Neither Serenity nor alignment with anything Essential is to be found in the heart and mind of the Multiplist. They are truly "strangers in a strange land." Do they grow out of this alienation and confusion? Perhaps. Alternatively, there is always a cycle of addiction that numbs alienation and confusion. What is to be done?

Transitions

I suggest that something can be done regarding the challenges faced by the Dualists and Multiplists in dealing with the real world. Both can be met with understanding and appreciation for the transition of thoughts and feelings in which they are now engaged. William Perry notes that the transition at any level is difficult. Each transition requires that we grieve the loss of contentment (and even loss of innocence) to be found at the previous developmental stage.

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We are being kicked out of multiple Edens on our way to a life of thoughtful action (Palmer, 1990).

Transition of Multiplists

Multiplists can be gently invited to try on an Essential lens. Perhaps the Lens of Convergence. This lens helps the Dualist focus on a specific aspect of "real life" that is important to them. For instance, they might focus on their family and its priorities. Rather than accepting the advice offered by a fancy expert on family relationships, the Multiplist is invited to take on a focused convergent lens of appreciation that enables them to find a time in the life of their own current family (or family of origin) when "they were doing it right." They become their own "expert".

In what way is the original attraction of each partner for the other partner still present? How can the original passion be rekindled—for at least a short while? When has love been effectively expressed in their family through empathy and support for some family member who has been struggling? What about moments of caring (called "bids") when one member of the family has felt loved and protected by other members (Bergquist, 2023c)?

The Multiplist might also (or instead) be invited to put on a lens of Divergence that expands their vision. Rather than seeking a specific truth, the Multiplist is gently encouraged to see the beauty manifest in kaleidoscopic diversity. They attend a lecture where five different versions are offered regarding what their favorite movie is "about." What might the "force" mean in the Star Wars series? What are the many different strengths (and weaknesses) being portrayed in superhero movies?

For those who are not "into" science fiction or action movies, there might be an invitation to explore different ways in which the emotions of love or grief are expressed in contemporary films. Or ways in which the developmental challenges of adolescents are portrayed. We can begin with movies (or TV series or novels) and then move into real life. We then reflect on the diverse expressions

of one's own heroism, love, grief, or developmental challenges. Our Multiplist is guided in their transition to Relativism by initially embracing a distal perspective (watching a movie or reading a book) and then moving to a proximal perspective (their own life).

A third Essential lens might be offered to the Multiplist. This lens of Extension would guide this person toward their future. The Multiplist is invited to consider what their life might be like in 10 years—or even 25 years from now. They will be older. The world is likely to look quite a bit different. I often ask someone to imagine looking in a mirror and viewing the person they will be at some future point. What would they look like? How would they feel? What health issues might be present?

From this intimate view of themselves (proximal perspective), I invite my clients to consider what the world would look like that surrounds them in the mirror (distal perspective). Other family members? Their work environment? Maybe they envision the state of their community and nation (including where they might be living at this point in the future).

This "life planning" enables a Multiplist to recognize that they are unlikely to be the "same person" in the future. The person they see in the mirror looks quite a bit older. Their body might have lost some of its shape and energy. Yet, with these physical alterations, they will retain certain features and beliefs. Their "surface" anchor allows them to drift over time to a new location; however, their ground anchor ensures they don't drift too far.

For the Multiplist, there can be changing "truths" and "realities" over time. This will occur while there are still strong, enduring truths, realities, and values in their life that provide guardrails and guidance. This blending of change and continuity, in turn, allows them to accept and appreciate the multiple truths and realities to be found in the Heart and Mind of other people. Relativism is slowly and caringly introduced through engaging the Extensions lens in these "life planning" processes.

Transition of Relativists

I suggest that something can be done to help Relativists deal with Dualists alongside their transition from sideline observer to activist. There are ways for the Relativist effectively to make decisions and act decisively in the VUCA-Plus world. They can thoughtfully introduce Polystasis. Alternative psychosocial templates can be tested out. Relativists can act and reflect on this action. The lens of Convergence is most appropriate—for Relativists should focus on what they are going to do or have done, rather than considering options or playing (at a distance) with other realities. A bit of Magnification might also be helpful as the Relativist carefully examines their potential or actual impact on the world.

Relativists should be encouraged to participate in an adult version of the polarization experiment—this "experiment" being the real polarized world of mid-21st Century communities. They might seek to eliminate or at least reduce polarization at the cognitive and affective caves existing in the real world—remember Plato's cave. They can become interpreters, teachers, and peacemakers. The Relativist can help other participants in the experiment slow down their knee-jerk polystatic process. They can find the appropriate lens to guide their actions in response to struggles occurring in their own Robber Cave. This usually is the Convergent lens of Essence.

If they are to become engaged rather than sitting on the sidelines, Relativists must continue to be reflective and critical in their judgments. They must slow down their polystatic process or at least be reflective regarding the outcomes of this process (Schön, 1983). This mode of thought is now applied not only to the observational, predictive, and interpretative phases of Polystasis, but also to realistic and ethical actions to be taken in our mid-21st Century world.

The Relativist will undoubtedly be hesitant to take any action given the confusing VUCA-Plus world in which they live. However, they

eventually DO have to move forward and take action (alongside other people) if this world is to remain viable and sustained for future generations. It is time for the Convergence lens to be engaged. Divergence is no longer timely.

Perry identifies this as a movement from Relativism to *Commitment in the Midst of Relativism*. Despite our biases and distorted perspectives on the world in which we live and our vulnerability to distorting heuristics, we commit to doing something. This is better than sitting back and doing nothing in a polarized robber-cave-type world—for this polarized world is unsustainable. This shift to commitment is inevitably stressful—much as the shift from Dualism to Multiplicity and from Multiplicity to Relativism is hard on the Head and Heart.

Conclusions

Retreat to Serenity and SC²+ is not viable in our challenging mid-21st Century. Navigating life and work in this world is not easy, for it is guided by imprecise and often conflicting Facts, alongside relative truths, unreliable authorities, and contradictory values. Our Essential lenses certainly help. However, courage is still required. And it takes great courage when the stakes are high. We need a valiant heart when seeking to find what is Essential and when committing to that which is Essential.

All of this must be done while navigating a VUCA-Plus world filled not only with volatility and uncertainty but also complexity, ambiguity, turbulence, and contradictions. I turn to these latter four conditions in the following chapter. Continuing our reflection on the nature of Essentials.

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Chapter Four

Essentials II: Enablement, Perspective and Learning

I have just introduced a set of strategies and tools that provide a viable alternative to Serenity (SC²+) when coping with pressing VUCA-Plus issues. I will continue my introduction of these strategies and tools in this chapter and Chapter Five. I turn at this point to ways complexity is transformed into enablement, ambiguity becomes an appreciation for alternative perspectives, and turbulence is newly aligned with learning.

The Nature of an Essential Lens and Assessment of Essential Outcomes

Before offering descriptions of these three transformations, I wish to provide a more detailed description of the Essential lens graphic that I introduced in Chapter Three and suggest how Essential outcomes should be assessed.

Graphic Representation of Essential Lens

We begin on the left side of this model (see Graphic Two). I proposed several decades ago that we are living in a postmodern world (Bergquist, 1993). I have since proposed in multiple documents (Bergquist, 2020; Bergquist, 2022; Bergquist, 2024a; Bergquist, Sandstrom, and Mura, 2023) that this postmodern world is saturated with vulnerability, uncertainty, complexity, ambiguity, turbulence, and contradictions (VUCA-Plus).

Graphic Two

The Essentials Model

Postmodern World — 6 VUCA-Plus Conditions — Lens of Essentials — 6 Transformations — State of Essentials
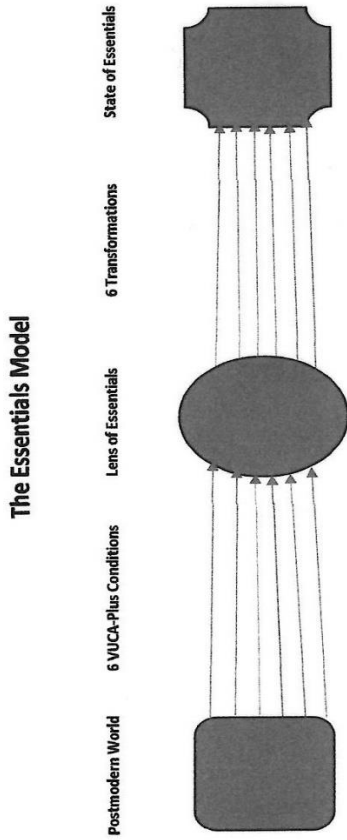
We can consider at least two options when facing these challenging VUCA-Plus conditions. We can seek to escape from these challenges by dropping down a (cognitive and affective) rabbit hole and dwelling in a wonderland where a distorting Serenity (SC²+) exists. Instead, we can engage in transformative processes that enable us to make constructive and creative use of these six VUCA-Plus conditions. I portray these processes in Graphic Two.

The six arrows leading from the postmodern box in this graph point to the central figure in this graphic. This lens potentially serves four functions. It can provide *Convergence,* enabling us to sort out what is Essential. We can set aside the less important. Second, the lens can *Magnify* by highlighting and providing detailed attention to the Essential.

The lens can offer an important third function. It can provide *Divergence* by expanding our vision of what is Essential. A fourth function is served when the lens provides *Extension*. We can look into the future to determine what is likely to emerge as Essential. In Chapter Three I began identifying the way each function best serves specific VUCA-Plus conditions. I continue suggesting matches between lens function and VUCA-Plus condition in this chapter and Chapter Five.

On the right side of the lens in this graphic are six lines pointing toward a box identified as the Essential State. These lines represent the transformations of each VUCA-Plus condition. Through the use of convergence, magnification, divergence, and extension we can transform volatility into a process of anchoring and transform uncertainty into a thoughtful discernment of the type of issues being confronted in our postmodern world.

I addressed both of these transformations in the previous chapter. I turn in this chapter to three transformations that can be engaged via the multiple functions served by an Essential lens. These transformations concern the conditions of complexity, ambiguity, and turbulence. Chapter Five is devoted to transforming the condition of contradiction.

Assessment of Essential Outcomes

Before I address these three Essential transformations, I wish to consider an important matter related to the polystatic process I have already introduced. The Polystatic process is critical to the dynamic transformations I am proposing. At the heart of this process are the ongoing cybernetic adjustments being made to the established baselines and Essential outcomes of projects and programs in which we are engaged. Ultimately, the VUCA-Plus transformations are being made on behalf of these projects and programs. It is important (even critical) to know how we are doing, what can be learned from, and what adjustments can be made in our project or program based on ongoing assessments.

In most cases, multiple project or program outcomes are to be assessed. While a project or program might have only one Essential outcome, it is more common to find this project or program being assigned several outcomes. Establishing a realistic polystatic baseline can be difficult given the presence of multiple desired outcomes, each of which can impact the nature and level of the baseline.

It may be appropriate to portray the baseline as a *Target* with multiple baselines positioned on the target at varying degrees of difference from each other. At times, the baseline outcomes might even be on opposite (contradicting) sides of the target. However, in many instances, the baseline outcomes stand not in opposition to one another but instead beside (complementary) one another—as is the case when transformations from complexity to enablement occur.

The outcomes usually can be assessed with a Magnifying lens using quantitative measures. While, as we shall see later in this book, the outcomes associated with "the Lens of *Essence*" are best assessed qualitatively, those related to *Essentials* lend themselves to numerical rather than narrative assessments. A Return on Investment (ROI) is often appropriate (Phillips and Phillips, 2008), as is an assessment process such as Intentional Analysis that is

focused at any one moment on distance from a desired baseline (Bergquist and Mura, 2014).

The key point is that the baselines assigned to a specific project or program and assessments made of these baselines must be flexible. Any polystatic process is dynamic with feedback frequently (if not constantly) adjusting the baseline and creating new conditions for its assessment. As with Miller, Galanter, and Pribram's T.O.T.E. model, Polystasis requires ongoing "testing" of the psychosocial templates. Information gained from actions taken is also inspected, as is the revised desirability of any specific outcome.

Now to the Essential Lens' capacity to transform three VUCA-Plus conditions: complexity, ambiguity, and turbulence.

From Complexity to Enablement

I have already introduced the distinction drawn between complex and complicated systems. At this point, I want to extend this distinction by relating it to how VUCA-Plus complexity can be transformed into enablement. Specifically, it is not only that elements of a complex system are interconnected. It seems that opportunities exist for any one of these elements to help another connected element be successful.

I use the term *Enablement* when describing this assistance. Some of the elements might hold great assistive potential. Other elements might operate mostly in isolation from other elements in the system or operate primarily in opposition to other elements. A Magnification lens is required to discover the web of enablement that exists in a system. A lens that looks backward might also be of value as we look to the history of interdependency in the system in our search for patterns of enablement.

This potential might reside in the enabling element's connection to many of the additional elements in the system—serving as a node in the system's network. The potential might exist because desired outcomes associated with this element are located near the center of the Target and other desired outcomes are clustered near the

target's center. The element might instead have high enablement potential because this element can provide much-needed (often just-in-time) assistance. For instance, this high-enablement element might possess critical information, offer relevant training and education, provide policies regarding safety or equity, or be an important funding source.

A colleague of mine served as both director of finance and director of strategic planning at her university. She had a great power of enablement in this institution. Another of my colleagues served for many years as Academic Vice President (AVP) and Director of Institutional Research at her college. Her enablement capacity came from her formal power as AVP and her position as a source of critical information regarding broad institutional function.

A third colleague has combined his formal role as Director of Production in his organization with an informal role as a mentor and guide for young members of his organization. For many years, he would spend several hours after work on Friday going to a local bar with some of the newly minted employees in his division (and more recently with young employees from all divisions). He listened to their stories, answered their questions, and recounted stories about the founding, successes, and near disasters of the organization. A few beers helped; however, his caring and thoughtful manner was maximally enabling in bringing about this informal but invaluable new-employee orientation.

I offer a fourth example of enablement that concerns the human body rather than a human organization. My physician colleague, Jeremy Fish, has spoken about the "Four Horses of the Apocalypse" in health care. He borrows from a best-selling book called *Outlive* by Peter Allia (2023). At the start of a healthcare forum that Jerome and I recently led (Fish, 2024), Jeremy noted that there are four major ways in which people's lives are cut short.

These "horsemen of the apocalypse" are heart disease, cancer, neurodegenerative diseases, and type 2 diabetes. In each case, a key factor concerns the production and management of Insulin.

Metabolic dysfunction's association with insulin enables the four horses to operate. Insulin levels serve as an enabling node in the human physiological network. Dr. Fish and Dr. Allia would suggest that insulin regulation is an Essential element in medical treatment plans precisely because it is enabling. In focusing on this enabling regulation, physicians could revolutionize how people seek to extend their lives.

Finally, there is the allostatic dynamic operating in our decision to ingest caffeine during our stop at a coffee shop on the way to work. My colleague, John Preston, has applied his knowledge of neurobiological functioning and his experience as a clinician to his recommendation that anyone doing psychotherapy should insist that clients keep moderate their consumption of highly caffeinated coffee while in psychotherapy. Dr. Preston even requests that his clients reduce their consumption of heavily caffeinated drinks before starting psychotherapy.

High levels of caffeine are likely to trigger high levels of arousal. High levels of arousal and anxiety already are to be expended during therapy sessions. Caffeine serves as an accelerator. Dr. Sterling would probably suggest that allostatic predictions and adjustments under these conditions are partly based on levels of caffeine-induced arousal. During psychotherapy, our level of arousal would be determined by our anticipation that stressful issues will be addressed during the session (an accurate prediction).

Our level of arousal is also influenced by our anticipation that we need to fight, flight, or freeze based on our current caffeine-inducted level of arousal (an inaccurate assessment and prediction). Caffeine enables an inaccurate Allostatic prediction. We are "deceived" by the caffeine into thinking that something (other than the psychotherapy) is threatening us. We are forced to be inappropriately vigilant. We are prone to anxiety. These are not very helpful companions during a psychotherapy session. Nor do they aid us during our life outside the therapy office.

Rogue Events and Leveraging

We leave the therapy office and venture back into an outside world that is filled with its own unexpected and often anxiety-triggering events. I turn specifically to the role played by Enablement in the production of Rogue events. First, it should be noted that Enablement shows up in many ways. A Lens of Divergence and one that provides Multiple Visions can supplement the lens of Magnification.

As I have illustrated, enablement can be found in the way someone gains influence in an organization by serving several critical functions or locating themselves at a nodal point in the organization. Enablement at the biological level can be found in the role played by one physical function in our body as it relates to an important outcome: the extension of lives.

Enablement is also found in the precipitation of quite dramatic events. For instance, it can appear in a rogue event that generates change throughout the system. Rogue events are likely to occur when a system is complex with many connecting parts. Interconnectivity and this tight interweaving create conditions for a surprise. A dramatic shift in one area of the system can rapidly lead to adjustments and even major changes in other areas.

Peter Senge identifies several conditions that trigger a rogue event. Senge (1990, p. 63) first notes that cause and effect are not closely related in time and space in many complex human systems:

> When we play as children, problems are never far away from their solutions—as long, at least, as we confine our play to one group of toys. Years later, as managers, we tend to believe that the world works similarly. If there is a problem with the manufacturing line, we look for a cause in manufacturing. If salespeople can't meet targets, we conclude we need new sales incentives or promotions.

However, in some instances, a highly influential action or situation can influence something that seems far away in time or space. The

resulting event can be identified as a *rogue event*. We use a term like rogue because we have been unable or unwilling to look beyond immediate cause-and-effect relationships to identify the real causes of the rogue event.

We often don't recognize or acknowledge enablement. We fail to recognize the enabling power of operations in one area of the system as this operation reaches out to operations in other areas. A change in accounting practices solves our manufacturing problem. We are startled. It is a rogue event because we failed to connect accounting to manufacturing. We are surprised by the impact that a slight change in a specific product line has on the effectiveness of a sales campaign because we previously ignored the intimate relationship between product design and sales. A leader becomes unexpectedly ineffective in motivating her employees because the relationship between lower employee motivational levels and the company's new compensation package is not recognized.

Senge (1990, p. 63) offers a second perspective regarding rogue events. He notes that small changes can produce big results: "Small, well-focused actions can sometimes produce significant, enduring improvements if they're in the right place." Malcolm Gladwell (2000, pg. 7, 9) has similarly focused on this dynamic in his description of *tipping points.* Specifically, he draws a parallel between tipping points and epidemics:

> The Tipping Point is the biography of an idea and the idea is simple. It is that the best way to understand the emergence of [unanticipated and profound changes] is to think of them as epidemics. Ideas and products and messages and behaviors spread just like viruses do. . . . [T]hree characteristics—one, contagiousness, two, the fact that little causes can have big effects, and three, that change happens not gradually but at one dramatic moment—are the same three principles that define how measles moves through a grade-school classroom or the flu attacks every winter. This tipping-point principle—which

systems thinkers call *leveraging*—parallels the chaos theory concept of self-organizing criticality.

Leveraging and tipping points are insightfully illustrated by a remarkable process I have also mentioned: the trim tab on a ship's rudder. Buckminster Fuller offers his description of the way trim tabs are used for navigational purposes:

> A trim tab is a small "rudder on the rudder" . . . It is only a fraction the size of the rudder. Its function is to make it easier to turn the rudder, which, then, makes it easier to turn the ship. The larger the ship, the more important is the trim tab because a large volume of water flowing around the rudder can make it difficult to turn. . . . [S]hips turn because their rear end is "sucked around." The rudder, by being turned into the oncoming water, compresses the water flow and creates a pressure differential. The pressure differential pulls the stern in the opposite direction as the rudder is turned. . . .

At this point, Fuller shifts his attention to the remarkable role played by the much smaller trim tab:

> The trim tab . . . does the same for the rudder. When it is turned to one side or the other, it compresses the water flowing around the rudder and creates a small pressure differential that "sucks the rudder" in the desired direction. . . . The entire system—the ship, the rudder, and the trim tab—is marvelously engineered through the principle of leverage. . . . So, too, are the high-leverage changes in human systems . . ." (Senge, 1990, pp. 64-65)

Trim tabs provide a small change that impacts much larger changes. Similarly, rogue events are often small forces that impact larger forces, bringing about large organizational changes. Much as massive avalanches are precipitated by some small event (such as the shifting of a stone at the top of a snow-covered hill), so we may find that the movement of substantial resources in an organization

is triggered by some small event (such as a single industrial accident or a compliment offered regarding a specific service rendered to a high-profile customer).

Essentials-oriented leadership may be effective when it operates like a trim tab. A leader may not be able to turn the ship or organization themselves. The organization is too big, complex, or unwieldy for anyone acting alone to have a major impact. Rather, the effective leader brings out the Magnification lens and looks carefully (and creatively) for enablement. They will pick a specific rogue event that has already occurred or will help to create a small, roguish event that will, in turn, impact other moderately large events. These events may then bring about significant organization-wide changes. This leveraging may enable a skillful and insightful leader to "dance" with their massive enterprise (Kanter, 1989)

Often, as in the case of Fuller's trim tab, one will produce, use, or encourage a rogue event that moves an organization in a direction opposite to that which is intended. The reaction to this event will, in turn, create a new momentum that moves the organization in the desired direction. One is reminded of the biblical tale in which the wise counselor offers to cut a child in half to resolve a conflict regarding custody of the child by two contending women. The horrible prospect of such an act drives at least one of the women (the true mother) in the opposite direction. She is willing to give up the child to spare its life. In this way, the true mother was revealed. A threatening inhumane act was averted.

An excellent, real-life example regarding the use of leverage and rogue events in corporate life concerns the emergence of courage and honesty among a group of corporate executives in a major American financial institution. I was consulting with a senior vice president in this institution, who had a reputation among his vice-presidential subordinates for being very demanding and intimidating. The Senior Vice President knew that he was discouraging risk-taking behavior through his abrupt manner. He

wanted to change his leadership style to encourage more creative problem-solving on the part of his staff during a particularly turbulent transition in the life of his financial institution.

A consulting team I led collected extensive information from his vice presidents regarding the Senior Vice President's leadership behavior. Much of this information was quite critical of him. After reporting the information to him (which he received quite openly), the team met at a retreat site with the Senior Vice President and all his subordinates. The team presented an oral summation of the interview data. The immediate and highly emotional reaction of his vice-presidential reports to this presentation was an absolute and unqualified rejection of everything my consulting team had said: "[Senior Vice President], you are a wonderful leader! How could the consultants have so grossly distorted the facts? Who hired these incompetent people!"

Along with other consulting team members, I wondered if we were at the right meeting. Perhaps we had been set up. After about twenty minutes of killing the messenger, one of the vice presidents (who had been quiet) spoke up. He took a deep breath and then stated that "the information being presented by these people is accurate. I've talked with many of you in my office or in the hall about these very issues. I'm tired of beating around the bush. Let's bring this stuff out in the open!" There was a short pause. Everyone looked at the senior vice president for his reaction. He appeared to be somewhere between neutral and appreciative of the vice president's candor. The other vice presidents then began cautiously to state their concerns and verify that the information in this oral report was accurate. The meeting was productive. Tangible steps were taken to alleviate some of the personal and structural problems this group of financial leaders faced.

The vice president who first spoke up exhibited *Organizational Courage*. The Senior Vice President also exhibited organizational courage. After all, he had contracted with the consulting team in the first place to present their critical report (without editing) to all

of his vice-presidential reports. Perhaps both men were simply tired of the old way of operating. They were willing to take risks to change things. Both men may have felt sufficient job security to take a chance. Maybe I witnessed a special kind of "roguish" organizational courage that was unexpected in this organization (or at least in this team of organizational leaders).

Typically, when courage occurs in an organization, it operates like a self-organizing system in which the neighborhood effect is in play. First, one person takes a risk; then the person next to them takes the risk. Soon everyone at the table is "flocking" around the act of candor. The starting point for this courageous tipping point is unpredictable, momentary, surprising, and often transforming.

We usually can't determine beforehand when organizational courage will be exhibited or who will be the courageous person--though we are terrific Monday morning quarterbacks. We can't accurately predict when or where the first act of courage will be engaged. However, later we can look for points of connection in our system (there are often many). We can follow this up with analyses regarding how and why this impactful connection occurred. In the future, we might be able to do a better job of predicting courage. However, the manifestation of courage can still surprise us, and a rogue event often occurs when courage emerges.

A second example of the rogue event (as it relates to leadership) comes from a different source: John Lennon of the Beatles. Before his death, Lennon often told a story about the police who were protecting John and the Beatles at a concert in Los Angeles. The crowd became very excited during the concert. Members of the crowd began to storm the stage located in the middle of a baseball field. The police began to club members of the crowd. Serious injury was looming as members of the crowd became more agitated and the police grew more anxious about their own safety, as well as the safety of the Beatles.

In a remarkable rogue action, John Lennon suddenly stopped the concert. He calmly told the police: "These people will not harm us,

so please don't harm them." The crowd and police immediately ended their confrontation, everyone quieted down, and the Beatles completed their concert. There were no further incidents.

This incident exemplified the intrusion of courage or optimism into a complex and highly charged event. One action, taken by John Lennon, manifests self-organizing criticality and dramatically alters the emotions and behaviors of all people involved in the concert—as did actions taken by the Senior Vice President and his vice-presidential subordinate at the retreat setting. Non-nautical trim tabs were operative.

The Delay Function

Complex systems are challenging to understand and manage not only because all of the parts of this system are interconnected but also because the nature of the connection between all of the parts is quite diverse. Complex human systems do not operate like a Swiss watch or any other carefully crafted machine with intricate connections between all its parts. Rather, the human system is a messy living entity with inconsistent connections between parts. That is why magnification and thoughtful inspection is often required.

Sometimes the parts are connected through physical links (as in interlocking gears), while at other times they are connected via shared information and coordinated execution. This messiness is also found in the ongoing allostatic adjustments anticipating changing environmental conditions. These allostatic predictions become even more challenging when differing information is received and integrated by these different parts. Given these differing sources of information, it is hard to coordinate actions taken by these interconnected parts to address these predictions.

There may be something of greater importance than differences in the information received. These are the differences found in the amount of delay occurring in the sharing of information or resources from one unit of the system to other units in the system.

There are also delays in the predictions being made in each unit. The adjustment being made based on these predictions is also delayed.

Without the comfort of a mechanistic homeostatic model of biological and organizational functioning, the delays found in a system can throw a wrench into its Allostatic workings. Delays can mess up the Allostatic process and lead one to simple predictions and fast thinking based on a false and manufactured (heuristic) sense of reality.

As many system theorists have noted, the delays that operate in all systems have much to do with how this system operates. Delays strongly influence the decisions that are (or are not) made and, as a result, strongly influence the way a system "behaves" (Meadows, 2008, pp. 57-58):

> Change the length of a delay may (or may not, depending on the type of delay and the relative lengths of other delays) make a large change in the behavior of a system . . . . Changing the delays in a system can make it much easier or much harder to manage. You can see why system thinkers are somewhat fanatic on the subject of delays. . . . We can't begin to understand the dynamic behavior of system unless we know where and how long the delays are. And we are aware that some delays can be powerful policy levers. Lengthening or shortening them can produce major changes in the behavior of systems.

The VUCA-related impact of delay is considerable. First, delays in a system increase uncertainty regarding how the system operates and what the outcomes will be of its operations. Second, delays tend to cause oscillations in the system, as one part of the system overreacts to the delayed receipt of information or resources from other parts. This oscillation, in turn, increases volatility and uncertainty. Third, differences in delays regarding connections between units increased both volatility and ambiguity.

Turbulence is inevitably created—for all four systems are operational and often bump into each other. One system operates quickly all the time. This is the system that "runs" rapidly down the river. The fast moving System One also reacts quickly to changes in other systems. In many ways, this system tends to be "twitchy" when it operates in a human organization. Changes in the baseline, psychosocial template and predictions often take place to often and too quickly. They may be "thoughtless", driven by fast thinking and habitual modes of problem-solving and decision-making.

Another system in the turbulent environment reacts quickly—but in its usual cyclical pattern. Partial changes are made, but then there are delays in other changes that need to be made. Eventually, there is a return to the old, established way of doing things. Homeostasis is in full operation. The cyclical system provides primary justification for the often-recited maxim that "The more things change, the more they are the same."

It seems that little change is also to be found in the third system. The still and often stagnant side water pools of the stream seem to display little change. At first glance, homeostasis would seem to be operating in the side water system; however, there actually is no homeostatic return to a previous state for there was never departure from this stable state in the first place. The assignment of homeostasis to this still pool is inappropriate in yet another way. As I have noted, there is a dynamic (allostatic) subsystem operating in the pools. This subsystem provides nutrients to many species living in the river. Much as is the case with fallen trees near the riverbank, death on the side-water's bottom is providing life to still-living entities.

Overall, things in the turbulent river are changing moment to moment. Whitewater prevails. Even the riffles existing at the edge of still water pools are dynamic and always changing. Many organisms cling to the rocks where the riffling occurs—for this is where they find food. Nutrients also are to be found on the edge of rocks that create the cyclical movement of water (system two) and

on the limbs and tree trunks that have fallen into the stream, providing barriers that create the still pools (system three). With all of the bumping together of different delay patterns, the fourth, chaotic system might be prevalent. Nothing but chaos may operate in many parts of the overall turbulent system if delays are prevalent in this system.

What about turbulent systems that operate in a corporate setting that is far away from a mountain stream? Varying delays (and the level of acceptance) in implementing the change contribute to the chaos found in many human systems. This occurs especially when mid-21st Century systems are saturated with VUCA-Plus conditions. An important fourth point is to be made in our application of the whitewater metaphor to the operations of human systems. Even if there is relative consistency in the delayed flow of information and resources from one part of the system to another part, the dynamics of any system are changed dramatically as a result of lengthy delays.

Some of the most important (Essential) changes to be made in any human system relate to the duration of this delay. Long delays often have a greater system impact than the number of resources available, the system's size, or the amount of available information. This systemic view of delays may require use of a Divergence lens to view all factors leading to delay. This lens is engaged alongside an Extension lens, for considering the long-term impact of the delay.

And then there is the ultimate delay! Systems that face an avalanche of VUCA-Plus challenges often become frozen in place—like a frightened animal on the African savannah (Sapolsky, 2004). In this frozen state, delays become large and significant. When the unfreeze takes place (if it ever does), there is suddenly an inconsistent flood of information and resources to all parts of the system, leading to extensive oscillation and increased VUCA-Plus-related anxiety. Accurate predictions can't be made. Inappropriate

reactions abound. Failure further increases angst (collective anxiety). Chaos has been created.

Leader as Butterfly

One of my Chinese colleagues has offered an apropos analogy. My colleague suggests that an effective leader serves as a butterfly when seeking to understand, make predictions, and act upon an Essential condition. This leader knows she has a brief time to be credible. She must constantly change and shift directions with the wind. There is no protection for the butterfly outside the cocoon. It does not live in a state of Serenity. Nor does this butterfly leader do the mundane and safe managerial work of the silkworm (ignoring that which is Essential).

The butterfly leader is not always valued for her practicality, as is the silkworm leader. Nor does she have the *potential* assigned to the leader living in a cocoon. The butterfly leader is a real person rather than a mythical possibility. The butterfly leader must find purpose and value in subtle ways. She must carefully choose a perspective while learning how she can center and balance in a white-water environment. I am about to consider alternative leadership perspectives and will focus on white-water centering and balancing later in this chapter.

From Ambiguity to Perspective

When addressing the prominent VUCA-Plus condition of Ambiguity, it is important to identify the Essential Lens to be selected when viewing the world. We must carefully choose a lens when determining what is real and what is unreal at this moment in time. It is primarily a matter of perspective. We can choose a Convergence lens that offers a proximal perspective. Our world is likely to look quite hazy up close. We try to clean the lens, but nothing comes into focus.

The condition of ambiguity is not easily altered. It is not just a matter of haziness. Rampant shifts in the winds and currents are present (leading us to the fifth VUCA-Plus condition of

turbulence). Everything is swirling around us in a blur and great quantity. Sometimes it is stated that we receive news as if the fire hydrant of information has been opened up. We are trying to obtain a drink but each of us is slammed in our face by an informational gush.

Fortunately, we have the option (at least at times) of taking a more distant view of our world. We can choose an Essential Lens of Divergence or an Extension lens. They each offer a distal perspective. We can listen to a historian, sociologist or anthropologist. They can place our current crises in a broader (even cyclical) context. We can look toward a far horizon (both temporal and spatial) to gain a clearer sense of what is occurring.

This broader perspective is particularly important if we are concerned with Essential matters in relationships, organizations, communities, nations, or our planet. Essential issues impact our lives! However, this broader perspective is vulnerable to bias and manipulation. We should recall the insights offered by Plato. We might be listening to interpreters of shadows cast on the cave's wall or those commenting on these wall shadows. We mistake these interpretations and commentaries for the direct view of a world outside the cave.

Numbers vs. Narratives

A central problem emerges regarding Ambiguity. We confront this problem when we seek to identify and gain a full understanding of what is Essential. When things are hazy and turbulent, reality depends on how we seek out the "facts" (Bergquist and Weitz, 2022; Weitz and Bergquist, 2024). We must carefully choose a lens guiding the tools when making sense of our world and securing the "facts". We typically should choose a Convergent lens. We need to focus on what to accept as "fact."

Do we rely on numbers or narratives? Do we focus on convincing numbers or a compelling narrative when dealing with something Essential? Do we attend to the big picture or the smaller, more

intimate picture? Which source of "facts" is most important for us to embrace when addressing something critical? Do we seek out the quantitative Facts found immediately before us and other people? Or do we search for qualitative integrity? Perhaps a story eliciting emotions and a sense of personal understanding. Which perspective (proximal or distal) leads us away from Ambiguity to a clear and "realistic" viewpoint?

In the battle between numbers and narratives, bet on the narrative—especially when finding what is Essential amid Ambiguity. Even more importantly, bet on the single case rather than the numerous cases. Behavioral economists (e.g. Kahneman, 2013; Ariely, 2008) have shown us that we are most likely to dwell on a specific tragic event rather than a large-scale catastrophe.

There is a remarkable photographic portrayal in the movie, *Schindler's List,* of a single girl in a Jewish Ghetto being followed through the streets as people all around her are being herded off to the concentration camps. A Convergent lens is being skillfully used. Somehow the tragic life (and death) that is awaiting this girl is more compelling than the tragedy evident among those who have already been placed in trucks that are headed to the camps. The latter portrayal would be provided by a Divergent lens. A landscape rendering would be offered of the broader events that are occurring. A lens of Extension would yield an even broader view. It might be a documentary concerning the entire rise of the Third Reich and German antisemitism.

A social reconstructive essayist, John D'Agata (D'Agata and Fingal, 2012), pushes the matter of portrayal even further. For D'Agata it is not just a matter of the portrait being influential, it is also a matter of understanding and appreciation:

> Numbers and stats can only go so far in illustrating who a person is or what a community is about. At some point, we must . . . leap into the skin of a person or a community in an attempt to embody them. That's obviously an incredibly

> violent procedure, but I think that unless we are willing to do that . . . then we're not actually doing our job.

D'Agata must attend to the cautionary note offered by Jim Fingal, his fact-checking colleague. Fingal counters D'Agata with concern about getting the facts right and portraying reality. D'Agata then counters Fingal by emphasizing the need for a genuine (rather than superficial) understanding of reality.

Put directly, do we learn anything important from a number rather than a narrative? When faced with an Essential issue, do we fully understand what occurs when we generate statistics rather than watch, listen, and feel what is truly unraveling in the world? Can a lens focusing on numbers and "facts" provide a valid and useful view of our hazy and turbulent world? Is it better to focus on one person, one event, or one existential choice—as did the director of *Schindler's List?*

Ideographic vs. Nomothetic

I believe that clarity amid ambiguity can be addressed by choosing an Essential Lens that provides a specific mode of analysis when we seek to make predictions based on what is "real." This would be a Convergent lens coupled with a Magnification lens. As I have noted, this is not a time for Divergence or Multiple Visions. This is a time to select one or the other: an Ideographic mode or a Nomothetic mode.

The ideographic mode of analysis often provides a proximal perspective whereas the nomothetic mode tends to be aligned with a distal perspective. The key question concerns "reality. Are facts to be found in large numbers (nomothetic perspective) or are they found in the specific case (ideographic)? Is it better to view something objectively from "on high" (distal) or subjectively "up close and personal" (proximal)?

The noted psychologist Robert Coles (e.g. Coles, 1967) embraced an ideographic perspective. He focused on individual cases and provided a general observation only after many single cases had

been presented. Guided by the ideographic methods engaged by Henry Murray (2007), Coles and his colleagues at Harvard University—such as Erik Erikson, Gordon Allport, and Robert White—featured extended narratives in their presentation of insights gained from intensive study of individuals (ranging from a small boy living in urban poverty to an international figure such as Mahatma Gandi).

We encounter a quite different mode of analysis when we leave the ivy-covered halls of Harvard and travel West to the corn and wheat fields of Middle America. We find the heartland of nomothetic analyses in the public universities of the Midwest (especially Minnesota and Illinois). These analyses are embedded in what has been called "Dustbowl" empiricism. Behavioral scientists at these universities were strongly influenced by the logical positivism of those in the early 20th-century Vienna Circle.

Many positivistic philosophers and scientists escaped Europe before World War II and found academic positions at growing Mid-West universities. These positivist perspectives strongly influenced and even guided the perspectives and practices of behavioral scientists in these universities. These Midwest behavioral scientists tended to assert that statements of fact are legitimate only if they are based on verifiable evidence. They strongly believed that behavioral sciences were only "sciences" because they adhered to positivistic, verification-based modes of inquiry.

Being guided by this strongly empirical stance, psychologists, sociologists and anthropologists of the mid-20th Century generated large amounts of data when identifying and classifying many complex phenomena. Aided by the early use of high-powered computers, many empirical studies addressed such elusive phenomena as behavioral patterns (e.g. factor analyses of Personality traits) and societal attitudes (e.g. cluster analyses of attitudes in several countries about international conflict).

Unlike in the halls of Harvard, speculation was discouraged in these Mid-West universities. "Pompous" theorizing was set aside, while

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attention was devoted to that which can be assigned a number and can be verified at a 95% degree of confidence. "Mythical theories" were fine for barroom conversations, but they don't tell us anything about what is happening right now. Behavioral observations were king (if they could be measured). Individual case studies and personal narratives were left to the novelists, poets, and barroom theoreticians.

As one example from my discipline (psychology), nomothetic facts have profoundly influenced the way we think about and catalog mental disorders. Inventories such as the MMPI produce numbers regarding mental health status that have guided the choice of treatments in clinics and hospitals for many years. This type of inventory has been used less often in choosing human development "treatments" in contemporary corporations. However, the MMPI and other mental health assessment tools have occasionally been inappropriately (and often illegally) used in corporate personnel decision-making. Today, there is even the threat of these inventories being used to select high-level officials in the federal government. There is NO place for inventories in nonclinical settings that test for neurotic—let alone psychotic—tendencies.

The nomothetic approach has been absent when attempts are made to understand human behavior and development. Quantitative "facts" are rarely displayed to describe personalities—with the important exception of "facts" from the Myers-Briggs Type Inventory (measuring the personality types first presented by Carl Jung). Ideographic "facts" have more often been prevalent. I should note, however, that a model of personality that is based on factor-analysis has gained considerable traction in recent years. Often called O.C.E.A.N, this model identifies five factors that play a major role in determining human preferences and performance.

Other than "O.C.E.A.N., the study of individual lives (such as those conducted by Erik Erikson, Robert Coles' colleague at Harvard University) has had a much greater impact than factor analyses over the past seventy years in the areas of personality and lifelong

human development (e.g. Vaillant, 2012). Facts about lifetime changes in our perspective and practices have gained our attention, whether these Facts are presented in a fictionalized novel or a psychobiography. As D'Agata asserts, we might "not be doing our job" if we opt out for means, variances, and correlations, rather than quotations, stories, and portrayals.

There is another issue to consider regarding nomothetic and ideographic analyses. It concerns the matter of predicting human choices. This issue is especially important when we use a Lens of Convergence or Magnification to make predictions amid VUCA-Plus Ambiguity. In most instances, large-scale measurements (nomothetic) lead us to high levels of Accuracy with regard to broadscale prediction. However, they lead us to lower levels of Ambiguity than more intimate measurements (ideographic) when it comes to matters of understanding and the prediction of individual behavior.

We can predict with some certainty the number of people on a specific day who will select Cheerios for their breakfast meal. However, we can say little about the probability that Susan Thomas living in Little Rock Arkansas will choose Cheerios today. Considerable Ambiguity exists when rendering a portrait of one person's behavior (proximal perspective). Predictions regarding choices this person will make today produce even greater Ambiguity—and Uncertainty. It is only from a distance, and with a lens providing a distal perspective, that our world may seem understandable and somewhat predictable.

From Turbulence to Learning

Life on the white-water river can be both enthralling and terrifying. As Peter Vaill has noted, a turbulent environment is filled with surprises, novel problems, and messes (ill-structured issues) (Vaill, 1996, pp. 10-12). Costly and annoying issues emerge and are often recurrent (Vaill, 1996, pp.12-14). Confusion abounds (Vaill (1996, p. 178):

Another word for permanent white water is confusion--the problem of what to believe; whom to trust; what events, technologies, groups and organizations, and laws and traditions can serve as anchors of meaning. In the modem world, meaninglessness derives not only from an absence of sources of meaning but, ironically, also from a surfeit, a cacophony of competing meanings as offered by this or that guru, this or that "total system," this or that self-improvement program. The incredible variety of competing sources of potential meaning acts back on our consciousness, adding to the confusion we feel. We often hear criticism that people tend to go from one "solution" to another, to jump from bandwagon to bandwagon without ever touching solid ground.

The white-water environment is one in which the challenge of finding an Essential can be great. As Vaill noted, "experts" are inclined to inundate this environment with competing meanings and priorities. The VUCA-Plus condition of turbulence meets the condition of Contradiction. Confusion in the white-water environment also comes from prevailing volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity. The full complement of VUCA-Plus conditions is often present.

With all of these challenges to face, one Essential opportunity is often overlooked. There is a wonderful opportunity for significant learning to take place. There is also a requirement that this learning takes place (Vaill, 1996, pp. 19-20):

Permanent white water puts organizations and their members in the position of continually doing things they have little experience with or have never done before at all. The feeling of 'playing a whole new ball game' thoroughly pervade organizational life. . . . *This means that beyond all of the other new skills and attitudes that permanent white water requires, people have to be (or become) extremely effective learners.*

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> The importance of learning, particularly lifelong learning, has been stressed repeatedly over the past two or three decades . . . The validity of these calls to arms is finally being confirmed by our experiences in the permanent white water of modern organizations: we are all playing catch-up. . . . The presence of permanent white water demands that we look anew at the challenge of continual lifelong learning . . .

I would frame the issue of learning in a whitewater environment a bit differently. First, I would approach this learning from a more positive perspective than Peter Vaill offered. A turbulent environment opens up opportunities along with challenges. As I will soon note, whitewater environments are not only overflowing with experiences of Awe. They abundantly offer the possibility of achieving a remarkable psychological state called Flow. It is when Awe and Flow come together that we can engage in truly exceptional learning.

I would also like to take one step beyond what Vaill has proposed regarding the nature of learning that can occur. Given that four systems are operating in a whitewater environment, there are different lessons offered in each of these systems. An abundance of diverse learning opportunities is available if we can move beyond the panic and survival mode accompanying a daring journey down a whitewater river.

I will consider learning opportunities in each of the turbulent systems but turn first to the basic stages of learning that take place in a challenging whitewater environment.

Stages of Learning

Many years ago, the noted social psychologist, Kurt Lewin described significant learning as taking place in three stages: unfreezing, learning/change, and refreezing (Lippitt, Watson, and Westley, 1958). These three stages directly apply to learning that can take place in a world of turbulence and white water. We must

first unfreeze our existing view of the world. This means facing conditions that challenge or disturb our current way of thinking and feeling. Peter Vaill would suggest that unfreezing challenges our existing sense of being in the world. At the very least, unfreezing alters our baseline and predictions (engaging Polystasis) and disrupts habitual fast thinking. Without unfreezing, we are not truly open to new learning.

The second stage of learning and change is where something new is acquired that alters our way of thinking and feeling to some degree. It requires establishing a new baseline, new predictions, and (ultimately)new behaviors. Kahneman's slow thinking and Donald Schön's reflective practice are required.

The third stage concerns the firming up of our commitment to and use of the new learning. Stage three learning leads us out of a thoughtful and reflective state of relativism to William Perry's commitment in the midst of relativism. We reset our baselines and revise our predictions. While many of our old ways of doing things are still relevant and fast (habitual) ways of thinking can still be engaged, there is a new direction in which we wish to move. Some new goals are envisioned.

I propose that Lewin's three stages of learning are engaged while navigating white water. Furthermore, learning occurs in somewhat different ways in each of the four systems operating in the whitewater environment. Most importantly, learning on the turbulent river is best firmed up and reinforced in a setting that nourishes interpersonal collaboration. We retain and use what we have learned when we are joined on our boat by "fellow travelers" who are "co-learners" and "co-leaders." I wish to expand on these three basic proposals. I begin with Lewin's stages.

Apprehension: I align unfreezing with the apprehensions that inevitably accompany our standing on the shore of a whitewater river. We anticipate that we will soon enter this river in a kayak (or some less appropriate vessel). Two psychic forces confront us when standing on the shore of this river. The first force is *Awe*. We

look out at the turbulent waters of this river and find this turbulence to be awe-full: beautiful, surprising, treacherous, powerful.

Keltner (2023, p. 13) writes about this inspiring natural Awe. It is to be found not only when standing on the shore of a raging river but also when witnessing an earthquake, thunderstorm, or wildfire. Or we stand passively on the shore of a high-surf ocean. We deeply admire what we view in front of us. Yet we also fear the sights and sounds of the pounding Surf, especially if we are about to enter this awe-full ocean on our surfboard.

The second force is located at the other end of the spectrum from Awe. This second force is the prospect of *Flow*. We experience the exceptional and uplifting experience of Flow under conditions of challenge matched with sufficient support and capacity (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). We can anticipate the experience of Flow if we know that we can be successfully challenged in navigating this whitewater environment—or the thundering Surf into which we charge with our board. Our body is energized. Adrenaline kicks in and we experience fight (one of the three primary stress responses). We can do it!

Or can we? Is the river too strong for us? Is the Surf too high? Do we lack the knowledge, experience, or strength to guide our boat through the swirling water and down the raging river? Will we be swallowed up in the mountainous waves? Fear sets in. Adrenaline is now energizing one of the other two stress responses. We want to run away or remain frozen. We are apprehensive. We are torn between the urge to fight, flight, or freeze.

Appreciation: an alternative perspective can be taken regarding the turbulent river on which we soon might be afloat or the Surf we might ride. We can breathe in the oxygenated air that accompanies turbulent water. We can savor the richly textured sounds of the tumbling water. We become satiated with the Awe rather than remaining fearful of the Awe-fulness. We can follow the flow of the river or the flow of the waves and envision finding Flow inside us

while navigating the river or high-surf ocean. We can view this as an opportunity to learn rather than as a potential failure. This is a teachable moment if we dwell on the positive prospects rather than the negative possibilities.

This decision point regarding appreciation versus apprehension seems to be aligned with what Peter Vaill (1996, p. 75) identifies as "feeling learning":

> Feeling-learning is one of the most important modes of learning as a way of being because the pace, pressure, and complexity of permanent white water can leave us distracted, anxious, and breathless. Millions of us go through years of intensive learning in the institutional learning mode without ever getting much help in feeling and internalizing what we are learning and what we know.

Vaill (1996, p. 75) does not believe that traditional institutions of higher learning provide this type of learning:

> The institutional learning model tends to omit all the deeper modes of learning and knowing and the help we need with these, not because the philosophy of institutional learning denies the existence of the deeper modes so much as it lacks methods for conducting learning at this level. Learning as a way of being is learning by a whole person, and that means feeling the learning as well as possessing it intellectually.

Feeling-learning is one of the most important factors in retaining what is learned. Maybe the reason information we "cram" is retained only for a short period is that we do not develop our feelings for the material but try only to remember it on a technical level. Feeling learning also enormously enriches the learning experience. Even institutional learning expresses this in one of its favorite cliches, the "love of learning." The love of learning is real. And it is essential.

It would seem that converting apprehension to appreciation, savoring Awe, and anticipating Flow are moments of feeling-learning. We don't even have to launch our kayak or hop on our surfboard to begin the process of learning. At the moment we decide to engage the turbulent environment of the river or ocean important lessons are available regarding our courage, resilience—and potential risk-aversion.

There is additional learning. Peter Vaill mentions several kinds of learning occurring in the whitewater world. In setting the frame for presenting these forms of learning I turn to the fundamental insights regarding learning offered by Jean Piaget, the noted Swiss biologist and observant child psychologist. Piaget (2001) distinguishes between the assimilating and accommodating dimensions of all significant learning.

Assimilation: Piaget proposed two sides to every coin of significant learning. One side of the coin is *Assimilation*. As a learner, I must have an existing frame of reference for any new experience. Without this frame, I will not be able to make any meaning of the new experience or will label it and absorb it inaccurately. The other side of the coin is *Accommodation*. I must somehow adjust what I now know or believe given the new experience. If nothing changes, then nothing is learned.

When turning apprehension about the whitewater world into an opportunity for new learning, I must first do some assimilating. I must find a way to move beyond just Awe regarding the turbulent world face. I must somehow make this world of whitewater make some "sense." There are three actions I might take. First, I can appreciate what I already know and what I have done in other whitewater worlds. Second, I can remain clear, as Vail (1996, pp. 187-188), proposes, about mission and purpose.

Why am I on the river? Why the ocean? And why am I seeking to learn something new? Why am I traveling on the river or leaping into the sea? I am leaving firm land "on behalf of" something of importance. I am reminded of the Tarot card of the Charioteer. He

is traveling forward--yet carrying his chariot with him. At a more mundane level, it is like a snail carrying its shell while moving through its environment. My mission and purpose are the chariot and shell.

Third, I launch my kayak on the turbulent river or face my board toward the Surf knowing that I will make mistakes. I must frequently correct myself. The capacity to correct oneself is one of the reasons to embark on the journey in a kayak rather than a less "agile" canoe or skiff. This is an acknowledgment of Polystatic dynamics. Vaill (1996, p. 82) submits that a successful reflective learner will view the learning process as "continual experimentation rather than a system that gives the learner only one or two chances to 'get it right'.'"

With this polystatic process must come some safety and security. We must balance the challenge of polystasis with adequate support (Sanford, 1980). Surfboards come with a line attached to the surfer. The board and surfer will often disengage in the high Surf. No one is a perfect navigator of whitewater environments. A safe place (sanctuary) proves valuable when engaging in Vaill's "continual experimentation." I address the matter of sanctuary at several later points in this book—often in association with navigating a turbulent river. I also suggest that support is found within one's own Head and Heart when reflecting on the painful moments when we fail to "get it right."

As Argyris and Schön (1978) often emphasized, one is successful in facing challenging times not by avoiding mistakes, but instead by learning from these mistakes and avoiding the same mistakes a second or third time. Ongoing organizational learning is based on this tolerance of mistakes but intolerance of repeated mistakes. The term "action research" is often used to describe the tight feedback-based process identified by Argyris and Schön. With the process of action research –and action learning in particular—in place, we are moving from assimilation to accommodation when adjusting to the mistakes that have been made

Accommodation: We must be open to doing things differently when faced with the prospect of making a mistake. As Peter Vaill (1996, p. 82) notes, this means that we must be aware that we are about to learn something new and try something different. An assumption is made in a learning organization that everyone will be engaged in ongoing growth through learning. Vaill (1996, p. 82) suggests that this means we should feel free "to ask for help without embarrassment of apology and [are] able to be non-resentfully dependent on someone who has more knowledge or expertise."

A commitment to psychological safety (Edmondson, 2018) accompanies an assumption of ongoing learning and growth. Safety requires attention to three domains that have been astutely identified by Goodwin Watson (Watson and Johnson, 1972): structure, process, and attitude. Safety at the structural level would include the formal policies and regulations of the organization, as well as the ways these policies and regulations are enforced. Appropriate levels of authority and accountability (Simons, 2005), and a commitment to measurement of such factors as morale and motivation (Bergquist, Sandstrom, and Mura, 2023) also provide a foundation for organizational safety.

Process-based safety concerns the way in which people treat one another individually and in groups. While "good manners" can rarely be taught, process-based safety can be increased with sufficient interpersonal training and mentoring, along with the skillful facilitation of group meetings (see Appendix B). The strong emphasis on human relationships for fifty-plus years is founded on the assumption that process-based safety is critical to organizational productivity (e.g. Schein and Bennis, 1965).

We must pause here, for safety (as Watson would suggest) must ultimately be secured not by structure or process but by attitude (at the individual level) and culture (at the collective level). Psychological safety is secured in one's Head and Heart. How do we feel about the structures and processes that have been introduced? Do these initiatives secure safety or are they just

"public relations"? Are there prevalent assumptions that members of this organization genuinely care about each other and appreciate one another (Srivastava, Cooperrider, and Associates, 1990)? Do folks respect one another's rights while feeling some collective responsibility for the overall welfare of those working in this organization?

Ultimately, effective accommodation doesn't just require safety. It requires our capacity and willingness to learn from and about the context and environment in which we operate. We are taught by the mistakes we make. We learn most about the world in which we work when we fail. This is especially the case when we are operating in a whitewater environment.

It is also important to recognize that we must never only engage in accommodation. We must retain our fundamental values (the ground anchor) and reasons for entering the whitewater. The chariot we ride and the shell we carry must never be abandoned. As Peter Vaill reminds us, we are always accommodating (and learning) on behalf of some enduring mission and purpose. Thus, we can blend accommodation and assimilation.

We can take our Backward lens out of the drawer, so that we might review and appreciate our past successes in similar whitewater settings. We can reflect on and learn about ourselves as learners and successful accommodators. We can appreciate our distinctive skill as a "change agent." This appreciation is particularly salient when the change occurs inside our Head and Heart—and in our courageous navigation of this turbulent environment.

Abundant challenges face us in navigating a whitewater world. The challenge is a little easier to address when (to quote the Beatles) we "get a little help from our friends." These "friends" can be other people in our life. They provide both support and ideas. In an environment of safety, we are likely to find this support (along with the willingness to take risks and disclose thoughts and feelings about our whitewater environment. Our "friends" might also reside inside our psyches. They can be the Lens of Divergence that enables

us to navigate the four systems, and the Lens of Illumination that guides our learning in each system.

Learning in Each of the Four Turbulent Systems

Each of the four systems operating in a whitewater environment requires a somewhat different approach to learning – and each system offers a distinct "lesson plan."

System One--Rapid Movement: this system requires learning in "ultra-drive." Peter Vaill writes about continual learning (Vail, 1996, pp. 79-80) For Vaill this means the kind of learning that interconnects all sources of meaning. It involves a sustained openness to new experiences—which is certainly to be found when navigating a rapidly moving river. Often mediated by computerized ("online") instruction, the navigator of whitewater environments tends to rely on just-in-time learning. As Vaill notes (1996, p. 76), online learning tends to "de-institutionalize" the learning process. It can occur at any time and in any place. There is no need for a classroom or a formal instructor. We know that this form of "just-in-time" learning tends to be more effectively retained and used than learning in a formal educational setting (Bergquist, 2024b).

Another important advantage is associated with online education. Since it can occur "just-in-time" there is likely to be a short time gap between the need for new ideas and the delivery of these ideas. This leads to the potential for greater organizational agility if this orientation to learning is shared among all members of a group or organization. We can begin to identify and promote collective agile intelligence that enables a team to learn fast, think fast, and adjust fast—abilities that are needed when navigating the rapidly moving System One of a whitewater river.

System Two—Cyclical Movement: Peter Vaill (1996, pp. 84-85) identifies what he calls "reflexive learning." This type of learning seems to "come naturally". It is a tacit form of learning that enables us to "know" which settings are most amenable to learning for us. Reflexive learning also occurs when we are clear about how to cope

with pains, frustration, and disappointment in our work and life. We "know in our bones" limits regarding our openness to new learning and new challenges. This reflexive learning occurs because we repeatedly arrive at the same place in our work and life. We live in cycles and can learn profound things while living through these cycles.

Another important way is available where the movement of System Two can yield a distinctive form of learning. Cycles tend to elicit ceremony. Even if it is just a sigh of relief at the end of a work week or a cup of coffee at the start of a new day, there are moments when we repeat certain "rituals" to acknowledge the beginning or end of something. "Ceremonial learning" can also take on a larger and more formal function—related to an important motivator called "generativity." As Gary Quehl and I have noted (Bergquist and Quehl, 2019), we are generative when we care deeply about and engage in actions that align with this deep caring.

There are ceremonies of caring that honor transitions such as weddings, anniversaries, births, new jobs, retirement, and (finally) death. Each ceremony concerns the need for new learning associated with profound change. Ceremonies commemorate past achievements, heroic actions, and emerging challenges. These ceremonies encourage learning about the past, so we do better in the future. Or they encourage new learning regarding what is about to occur.

These cyclical celebrations tend to occur in unique settings that suggest what is learned will differ from what is experienced and learned in other settings (Graeber and Wengrow (2021). They also tend to elicit Vaill's feeling-learning. Repeated cycles produce reflexive (tacit) learning and ceremony-based learning that penetrate our Heart and Head. As Vaill notes (1996, p. 74):

> . . in permanent white water, learning is not restricted to facts and methods. We are also possessed of learning attitudes – attitudes of curiosity, courage, trust, self-

respect, tough-mindedness., optimism, and an ability to keep a sense of perspective.

These important attitudes are found amid repetition. They are rarely acquired in one setting or during one sitting. We learn "in our bones" by experiencing and responding to similar events a second and third time. We ensure that in-the-bones learning is retained by embedding and celebrating it in the ceremony. We learn every time we attend the church service, blow out the candles on our birthday cake, or witness a couple taking their wedding vows.

System Three—Non-Movement [Stagnation]: One's initial impression might be that there is little to learn in a system that isn't moving. Stagnation implies status quo and closed-mindedness. I would suggest that this is a misconception. There is much to learn about how things currently exist and operate in any system. This can be framed as "appreciative learning."

We focus on that which is strong and effective in our current work environment. We come to appreciate what exists right in front of us. Like Jimmy Steward in *A Wonderful Life*, we discover that we have made an important difference in the world where we live and work. And we don't need an angel to guide us—though an appreciative coach or consultant might be of value.

To fully appreciate the nature and power of an appreciative perspective regarding learning, we begin by acknowledging that we should be in the business of establishing mutual respect with our colleagues in a working environment. We are in a mutual search for distinctive competencies and strengths. The goal is not to change intentions (goals, purposes, etc.), but to help others (and us) fulfill existing aspirations. The term appreciation has several meanings that tend to be built on one another (Srivastava, Cooperider, and Associates, 1990).

First, appreciation refers to a clearer understanding of another person's perspective. We don't try to change this perspective by moving into one of the other systems of the whitewater world. Rather, we come to appreciate the point of view offered by our colleague(s). Appreciation also refers to an increase in worth or value. The value of a painting or stock portfolio appreciates. The painting doesn't have to be altered, nor does the stock portfolio need to be modified.

Value can increase even if no movement is taking place. Vincent Van Gogh looked at a vase of sunflowers and in appreciating (painting) these flowers, he increased their value for everyone. Vincent doesn't have to alter the arrangement or replace the sunflowers with roses. Nothing needs to change for value to increase. Van Gogh similarly appreciated and brought new value to his friends through his friendship: "Van Gogh did not merely articulate admiration for his friend: He created new values and new ways of seeing the world through the very act of valuing." (Cooperrider, 1990, p. 123)

From yet another perspective, appreciation concerns our recognition of contributions already made by another person. "I appreciate the efforts you have made to ensure that this project gets off the ground." Appreciation can be exhibited constructively through the daily interaction between an administrator and her associates. It involves mutual respect and active engagement accompanied by a natural flow of feedback, and an exchange of ideas. Specifically, appreciation is evident in attitudes regarding the nature and purpose of work. If the administrator "sees work as the means whereby a person creates oneself (that is, one's identity and personality) and creates community (that is, social relations), then the accountability structure becomes one of nurturing and mentoring." (Cummings and Anton, 1990, p. 259)

Appreciation in an organizational setting also refers to recognizing the distinctive strengths and potentials of people working within the organization. An appreciative culture is forged when emphasis

is placed on identifying and honoring inherent potential. This culture is enhanced by the uncovering of those latent strengths that already exist in the group or organization. This approach contrasts with one focusing on those weaknesses or deficits that precipitate movement and change in the group or organization. People and organizations "do not need to be fixed. They need constant reaffirmation." (Cooperrider, 1990, p. 120)

Paradoxically, when someone is fully appreciated and reaffirmed, they tend to live up to their newly acclaimed talents and drive, just as they will live down to their depreciated sense of self if constantly criticized and undervalued. Carl Rogers suggested many years ago that people are least likely to change if change is requested and are most likely to change when they have received positive regard—what we would identify as appreciation.

Rich, insightful learning can occur in a non-moving System Three. This might be the most important learning to gain in a whitewater world—for it is easy to forget where we are right now when we are always looking at new challenges that await us downstream. We might be able to use what we can now know and engage the wisdom we now possess in meeting these awaiting challenges.

System Four—Chaotic Movement: Finally, we must prepare for navigation on that part of the river that "makes no sense." This is where things are swirling around unpredictably. It is at the edge between the other three systems that movement becomes chaotic. Furthermore, the faster rate that System One moves the greater the likelihood that this rapid movement will break apart and become chaotic (System Four). A small tree branch might fall into the river. Chaotic turbulence increases. A "rogue" event occurs and "all hell breaks out" in an organization.

The temptation when facing chaos is to take actions that parallel this chaos. We flail around, striking out in all directions. We are moving from one habitual reaction (Kahneman's fast thinking) to another in our arsenal. We need not operate in this manner. Quite

the opposite, this is a moment to engage in what Vaill (1996, p. 62) identifies as "creative learning":

> Permanent whitewater . .. presents problems that often require us to explore new areas of knowledge and skill that no one else has every synthesized in quite this way before. . . . In permanent whitewater we frequently feel we are "playing a whole new ball game," "writing the book as we go," "learning as we go."

While Vaill assigns this form of learning to general whitewater conditions, I would suggest that creative learning is particularly aligned with the chaotic System Four. When operating in the other three systems we are more likely to engage strategies we have often used before. It is tempting in these three systems to rely on habitual, fast thinking (Kahneman, 2013). System Four allows us to try something new. To repeat what Ralph Stacey (1996) suggests, we innovate in the cracks—and as Franz Johansson (2004) proposes, we are likely to break all the rules and share new perspectives when dwelling in the intersection between different cultures and worlds of belief.

I would also append Vaill's statement by noting that creative learning and successful engagement with System Four chaos requires what Argyris and Schön identify as "second-order learning" (Argyris and Schön, 1978). We pause, test out our assumptions (which tend to be quite primitive when confronting chaos), and reflect on what we have done in the past that might make sense now and on what alternative actions might make sense. This is a time for Polystasis. We alter the baseline (our goals, purposes, desired outcomes) based on the emerging predictions regarding what occurs amid the chaos. This prediction might initially be flawed. However, predictions can improve with further refinement. The baseline and psychosocial template can be more realistic and appropriate. The resulting actions are more effective.

Peter Vaill identifies this dynamic process as "expressive learning." This form of learning concerns doing things and learning from our actions. As Vaill (1996, p. 66) notes:

> The only way to get a sense of the activity itself is to do it, however clumsily and haltingly. If we think about anything we personally are quite good at, we will probably discover that we engaged in this expressive, or "performing," quality of learning from very early in our involvement. It was not the elements that grabbed us; it was the whole activity.

Once again, I would suggest that expressive learning often occurs in more chaotic life domains. The chaos resides not only in our sense of awe regarding the actions we are about to take for the first time but also in the performance of these actions in the real, "messy" world. Expressive learning is not found in the tidy world of instructional manuals or theoretical books about management, conflict resolution, problem-solving, and decision-making.

In his analysis of learning in a whitewater environment, Peter Vaill moves beyond expressive learning when introducing the concept of "action learning." This form of learning is particularly relevant to our confrontation with chaos and how Polystasis takes place. In describing action learning, Vaill (1996, p. 70) turns to insights offered by R. W. Revans (1986) regarding this form of polystatic learning:

> Ravens is a pioneer in this point of view with his process of action learning. . . . In the United States, action learning means taking action in an organization, learning from the results, and incorporating that learning into further action. (This process is also often called action research.) Revans's idea of action learning is quite different.

Revans and Vaill particularly emphasize the collaborative nature of this form of learning (differentiating it from "action research" which can be engaged in a more isolated setting) (Vaill, 1996, pp. 70-71):

> [The goal of action learning] is to create learning teams of working managers to work on real organizational problems and to structure the experience in such a way that both useful solutions to these problems emerge and substantial learning occurs for participants, learning that goes beyond the technical details of the particular problem.

We see the emergence of Argyris and Schön's second-order engagement during this action-learning process. Learning "goes beyond the technical details of the particular problem." New insights often emerge regarding how learning takes place when addressing chaos. New ways of addressing the chaotic challenge are employed and lessons are learned regarding the relative effectiveness of these new strategies when facing other (inevitable) chaotic challenges in the future.

Vaill and Revans believe this important and difficult learning will succeed in interpersonal settings where both support and diversity of perspectives are present alongside the polystatic processes of review, adjustment, and action (Vaill, 1996, p. 71). Learning about interpersonal relationships occurs through group meetings as participants learn from each other and from those they must consult.

Historical learning occurs from seeing the problem through time. Strategic learning occurs when this issue is related to broader organizational objectives and processes. Paradigmatic learning occurs through challenging underlying assumptions. In the process, traditional ways of doing things move from being protected to being problematic.

In general, the whole matrix of policies, practices, and ideas within which the problem resides become the objectives of group interaction and mutual learning. For Vaill, this form of learning (unlike action research) thrives in what William James calls "knowledge of acquaintance" (Vaill, 1996, p. 67).

Learning amid chaos is neither abstract nor objectively distant. Learning occurs while we are engaged in battle. We learn amid chaos and battle with the assistance of a Convergent lens (focusing on action learning) and a Lens of Extension (looking down the river). Under these conditions, we also learn collaboratively with "a little help from our friends."

Learning Together with Other People

The interpersonal focus resides at the heart of Peter Vaill's reflections on learning within a whitewater world. For Vaill ((1996, p. 188), it is critical in a whitewater world to not only be clear about one's mission and purpose but also to be inclusive of other people: "the ability to keep members of the organization in touch with each other, to help people feel needed and significant, to combat people's feeling of being cut off and isolated and the resentment that white water often causes."

Vaill (1996, p. 75) once again quotes R. W. Revans: ", "*real* people learn with and from other *real* people by working together in real time on real problems." Ceremonial learning is effective because it occurs in a collective setting. 'Just-in-time" learning is sustained and reinforced when multiple people learn simultaneously— usually in response to a shared challenge.

Collective Learning: Valid and useful learning requires a process of collective learning. We learn together while navigating the whitewater environment in which mid-21st Century organizations operate. Ambiguity can be observed and personally experienced by all members of the organization. Distinctive (often cutting-edge) lessons are learned. A diverse set of insights are offered by individuals, teams, and task forces in the organization. Our Lens of Divergence is required along with the kaleidoscopic lens that yields multiple visions.

In virtually all of these cases, learning takes place at a second level of learning—what Chris Argyris and Don Schön (Argyris and Schön, 1978) have called double-loop learning. Chris Argyris (2001)

offers a useful distinction between habitual, single-loop learning (related to Kahneman's fast thinking) and double-loop learning (related to Kahneman's slow thinking):

> . . . learning occurs in two forms: single-loop and double-loop. Single-loop learning asks a one-dimensional question to elicit a one-dimensional answer. My favorite example is a thermostat, which measures ambient temperature against a standard setting and turns the heat source on or off accordingly. The whole transaction is binary.
>
> Double-loop learning takes an additional step or, more often than not, several steps. It turns the question back on the questioner. It asks what the media call follow-ups. In the case of the thermostat, for instance, double-loop learning would wonder whether the current setting produced the most appropriate temperature for this room and, if so, whether the present heat source was the most effective means of achieving it. A double-loop process might also ask why the current setting was chosen in the first place. In other words, double-loop learning asks questions not only about objective facts but also about the reasons and motives behind those facts.

At this point, we confront a challenge. Those who will use our double-loop insights typically want the message they receive to be single-looped. They are usually allowed to adopt this preference when working and learning in isolation without facing disconfirming information. Unfortunately, a large portion of truly valid and useful information requires that the recipient(s) of this information do something different (double loop) rather than more of the same (single loop). As Argyris and Schön (1974, 1978) have repeatedly shown, this type of learning is difficult to achieve and transmit. Furthermore, double-loop learning is often associated with equally as challenging double-loop change.

Higher levels of learning and change typically require broad-based and hard-won support from and collaboration with other people

working in the organization. In turn, collective support and shared learning are based on organizational character and culture. A *Learning Organization* must be created and sustained. As the name implies, emphasis is placed on collective learning in this organization.

As I have noted regarding mistakes made by individuals, collective mistakes will inevitably occur in a VUCA-Plus world. We can't avoid making collective mistakes. The key goal in a learning organization is to avoid making the same collective mistake a second time. Mistakes are common particularly if our organization attempts to be agile and creative. We can learn from our mistakes— even under challenging VUCA-Plus conditions. We create a "stupid" organization if we block this learning. Mistakes are repeated in the stupid organization. Nothing is learned from history. Habitual (fast-thinking) behavior prevails. The same solutions are repeatedly applied unsuccessfully to the same problems.

I move beyond Argyris and Schön by taking a more appreciative perspective—which is required for full engagement of the Lens of Essence. In a learning organization, we can learn not just from our mistakes but also from our successes. It is not enough to celebrate when we get it right despite uncertainty. In addition to celebration, we must reflect on what has produced successful outcomes.

In other words, we should "catch them [us] when they [we] are doing it right!" We need to reflect on what occurred and what we did that influenced the desirable outcomes. Kahneman's slow thinking and double-loop learning are required when we are thoughtful about either failures or successes. Those with expertise in appreciative inquiry can be very helpful (Srivastava, Cooperrider, and Associates, 1990; Bergquist, 2003; Cooperrider and Whitney, 2005).

Collective Intelligence: There are important collective dynamics associated with the shared framing and reinforcement of distorted insights and false learning that pervade many organizations –

especially those faced with the anxiety-provoking challenges of VUCA-Plus ambiguity. Single-loop learning or resistance to all learning is prevalent when we are anxious, overwhelmed, or exhausted. By contrast, certain collective dynamics operate when an organizational culture of learning has been established.

These dynamics are to be found in a learning organization even when VUCA-Plus anxiety is prevalent. They yield an outcome known as *Collective Intelligence* (CI). I propose that these organizational dynamics (and resulting high levels of CI) begin with collecting valid and useful information from multiple sources using multiple methods. At least three methods should be used to gather information from at least three sources. I will have more to say later about this important (perhaps critical) process. Suffice it to say that this process, called *Triangulation,* should be engaged in any setting saturated with VUCA-Plus.

Collective dialogue (Gergen and Gergen, 2004) is then initiated, based on the triangulated information that has been collected. Collective learning occurs when this dialogue occurs in a safe setting (Edmonson, 2018). This setting allows for continuing reflection (Schön, 1983) on the perspectives and practices displayed by all organizational members.

High levels of CI require, in particular, that the dynamic setting in which the intelligence is engaged encourages rich inquiry about self-fulfilling assumptions and biases that influence and perhaps even govern interactions among those who are collectively learning (Argyris and Schön, 1978).

Smart collective intelligence and learning requires one other interpersonal dynamic. This is the capacity to avoid or break through a process that Argyris and Schön (1978) call "self-sealing." When self-sealing is operating, specific assumptions, observations and justifications are not only never made public but are also "banned" from public disclosure. They are "sealed" away—without a mailing address.

Furthermore, there is a seal placed on the seal. When asked if a self-sealed "secret" is available for discussion and review, the "required" answer is: "Yes, of course we can talk about YYY." The conversation comes to an abrupt conclusion. The self-sealing remains firmly in place. There is no talking about that which can't be talked about! Collective stupidity results from this self-sealing process.

In recent years, the concept of collective intelligence has gained considerable traction. While much of the attention is directed toward ways collective intelligence is enhanced with Artificial Intelligence (AI) and specific digital applications, some attention is devoted to the psychological aspects of collective intelligence (Arima, 2021). The results from several research projects indicate that performance by a well-functioning team on a specific problem-solving task is often superior to the average performance of team members or even the most "intelligent" team members. We know that for collective intelligence to be successfully engaged—and for it to exist in a learning organization—team members must be able to communicate effectively with one another. Information silos hinder collective intelligence, while emotional intelligence (EQ) enhances CI and team performance.

According to Hughes and Terrell (2007), a team's EQ is based on a sense of purpose, acceptance of one another, a perception that the team is a distinct entity, shared commitment, shared pride, clarity about roles and responsibilities, and resilience. Collective skills related to these ingredients include forming team identity, finding appropriate motivation, emotional awareness, interpersonal communication, tolerance of differing views, resolution of conflicts, and creating a positive mood.

Elsewhere, I have offered an appreciative perspective regarding these collective skills, suggesting that an *Empowerment Pyramid* must be created and maintained. Empowerment requires that a team move from effective communication to skillful conflict management, and then on to creative problem-solving and appropriate decision-making (Bergquist, 2003).

Beyond the ingredients and skills needed for a team to become collectively intelligent and for an organization to be saturated with learning is the creation of a supportive environment. Members of a team and organization must forgo their competitive spirit (at least with one another). A culture of individualism and individual gain must be discouraged. On the positive side is the presence of a collaborative culture. Members of the team and organization must be willing (even eager) to work with one another. They must find gratification in the relationships established with other team members and enjoy the collegiality that comes with "winning" as a team rather than as an individual.

Members of the team and organization must appreciate the strengths shown by one another. They must also identify and replicate collective moments when they are functioning effectively. Attention is given to those occasions and settings in which members of the organization communicate openly and clearly on behalf of their collective learning. These are occasions and settings where organizational members skillfully use their collective intelligence to manage conflict, solve problems, and make decisions (Bergquist, 2003).

Leader as Learner: examples set by the leader as a learner resides at the heart of the collective learning process. Peter Vaill uses the term "leaderly learning" (Vaill, 1996, p. 127) to label the leader's commitment to learning. I would add to what Vaill has offered by suggesting that the leader's ongoing learning has a multi-tiered impact on the system they lead. Beyond being exemplary, the leader will find ways to improve their functioning through learning from the feedback offered by those with whom they work. Insights gained from learning something new contribute to collective learning and the intelligence manifest in their organization.

To push even further, I would suggest that leaderly learning requires Otto Scharmer's "learning into the future." Scharmer (2009) offers a "Theory U" way of thinking about and acting in a world of turbulence. He writes about anticipatory learning. To

engage in this learning, Scharmer suggests that we must first seek to change the system as it now exists.

Scharmer aligns with John Dewey's suggestion that we only understand something when we kick it and observe its reaction. However, Scharmer goes further than Dewey. He suggests that we must examine and often transform our way of thinking. Both balance and agility are required if this transformation will be effective and if we are to learn from this transformation ("learn about our learning") in preparation for the future.

From the perspective of whitewater navigation, this would mean we experiment with different ways of engaging our kayak in our current whitewater world. We take "notes" on how our kayak is behaving in response to changes in our use of the paddle and our way of sitting in the kayak. Furthermore, we try ("pilot test") several changes that might prepare us to navigate the river as it likely operates around the next bend. Will there be more rocks, a drop in elevation, or more bends—and how might we address these challenges?

Scharmer requires that we not only try out several ways of kayaking, and take notes on these trials, but also explore and embrace new ways of thinking about the kayak's operations. What dynamics are operating as the kayak interacts with the river's turbulence? These new ways are activated by what we have learned from the current trials. The new ways, in turn, influence other changes we might wish to try before reaching the next bend in the river. Effective learning, in other words, becomes recursive (polystatic) and directed toward (leaning toward) the future.

Contingency planning: An emphasis on learning into the future, demonstrated in the priorities and behavior of a learning-oriented leader, provides the foundation for planning changes in one or more of the four whitewater systems. We look ahead to the bend in the river and consider how we can best prepare for the unknowns to come. Agile planning must accompany the multiple modes of learning that Peter Vaill has introduced. Alternative plans

(contingencies) must account for the many future conditions that might be faced on the journey down a whitewater river.

As Dan Heath (2025) has emphasized, we must be open to "re-set" processes. Some contingency plans should begin with the assumption that conditions "down-river" are likely to resemble those that are now operating. Other plans should be based on the possibility that conditions will be quite different. In some cases, these conditions will be quite favorable to our navigation of the river, while other conditions to be considered pose a major challenge—for they are brand new, highly stressful, or impacted by external factors over which we have no control.

Typically, at least five contingency plans should be generated at any one time: (1) conditions similar to the current time, (2) slightly different but favorable conditions, (3) quite different but favorable conditions, (4) slightly different conditions that are unfavorable, and (5) quite different conditions that are unfavorable.

Contingency planning requires the accompanying engagement of Polystatic processes. Repeated testing, operating, (re)testing—and re-setting must be enacted before exiting. T.O.T.E. must be engaged regarding all four operating systems. Baselines must be adjusted, predictions changed, and plans altered. Psychosocial templates need to be re-assessed.

While these alterations might require the creation of entirely new plans, they are more likely to require that we identify (and perhaps adjust) one of the contingency plans that have already been generated. After all, we can learn from the past. We can appreciate plans that have worked in the past. We can engage in this reflective process while acknowledging that the future will differ from the past. We can appreciate the past while leaning and learning into the future. These are Essential features of any Polystatic process that is successfully engaged when navigating a whitewater environment.

Conclusions

We look for leverage points when identifying and acting upon something Essential. We seek to identify enabling elements in a system. These are elements that increase the probable success of other elements. We view the world as an integrated system with each part of the system interwoven with all other parts. When considering Essentials, we pick a Lens of Essentials that enables us to gain a clear perspective regarding the world in which we are operating. How do we choose to frame this world and the outcome we desire?

Do we use a Convergent lens that provides a close (proximal) view/ Will this lens enable us to obtain a subjective view of something intimate? Do we want to Magnify what we are viewing? Do we wish to acquire more detailed information to create a fuller narrative regarding the life and dynamics of what we are studying? Do we instead choose a Divergent lens or an Extension lens that provides a more distant (distal) perspective that helps us objectively look past our spatial or temporal horizon? In other words, do we wish to view our world and desired outcomes from a distance or up close? From today or next year? From our living room or a set of statistics? Should the Essential outcome be considered a challenging number or a compelling narrative?

The systems thinking and selection of an appropriate lens and perspective are required while we navigate a turbulent, whitewater river. As Peter Vaill strongly suggested, these multiple operations on behalf of successful river navigation require that we engage in many kinds of learning. We learn by viewing what occurs as we take action on the river and by reflecting on what has happened when we do take action. Our polystatic baseline, psychosocial template, predictions, and resultant plans and actions will change as we think, feel, and experience first-hand the life to be led on the

turbulent river. It is all very challenging, but also potentially quite gratifying and rich with opportunities for new learning.

And then we hit the contradictions. Our Essential outcomes clash with one another. The actions we take in navigating the river yield several distinct lessons—that often differ from one another. We confront Contradiction, which is the sixth condition of VUCA-Plus. I turn to this final (and ultimately most challenging) condition of VUCA-Plus in our next chapter.

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Chapter Five

Essentials III: Prioritization

In the previous two chapters and this chapter, I introduce a diverse set of strategies and tools that I believe provide a viable alternative to Serenity (SC²+) when coping with pressing VUCA-Plus issues. The full set of strategies and tools concerns the Essential challenges embedded in each of the VUCA-Plus issues. I turn in this chapter to transformative ways in which contradiction becomes a matter of prioritization.

A critical matter exists about the process of Polystasis when engaged under conditions of contradiction. We need to establish templates and set the baseline as a guide to predictions and actions. However, when confronting contradiction, competing priorities are often facing us—as are alternative psychosocial templates. We don't know what Essential is because each competing priority is Essential in one way or another.

We may eventually be able to address both priorities but might need to do something right away about the starting point and the matter of deferral. I propose that we can deploy one of two strategies. The first one is often recommended when first addressing the challenge of prioritization. It concerns values clarification and sequencing. The second is a bit more novel and of more recent origins. It concerns the management of polarities.

Over the long run, effective management of polarities is of greater, lasting benefit than clarification and sequencing of values. While values clarification and sequencing require a Convergence lens, the management of polarities requires the initial use of Divergence and magnification lenses following by the introduction of Convergence and Extension lens. As it already becomes apparent, polarity management is a much more complex process than values

clarification and sequencing. It requires some very thoughtful analyses, an initial tolerance of ambiguity (one of the six VUA-Plus conditions), and a willingness to open up to multiple perspectives (a kaleidoscopic lens that engenders multiple visions). It is certainly tempting (and sometimes appropriate) to stick with the matter of values. I first consider this prioritization option.

Valuing and Sequencing

We set priorities in two ways. One way to prioritize is by assigning a higher value to some options than others. The second way is to assign all options equal value but set up sequential prioritization with some options being addressed before others. Whichever way we choose to proceed, a Convergent lens of Essentials is required. This is a time and place for decision-making. It is not a time for exploring multiple options.

Valuing

The first way is quite straightforward—but is often soul-wrenching given each option's importance (Essential status). In making the difficult decision regarding this prioritizing, I return to the criteria of Essential that I introduced previously in this book. I distinguished between those Essential matters that are aspirational (positive motivation) and those that are filled with apprehensive (negative motivation).

I would go one step further than I did in the previous chapter. We need to be cautious about only prioritizing Essentials filled with apprehension. When we are driven only by negative motivations (avoiding negative outcomes), we are likely to be trigger-happy and sink into a crisis management mode of leadership. We can even become addicted to the "adrenaline rush" occurring when we address a crisis. We live as "macho" men and women who long for the fire and the fury—emulating the heart of someone like Red Adair, the famous oil well capper who was played (of course) by John Wayne in the movie about his daring work.

Conversely, we must be careful about always placing the "good stuff" at the top of our list. While it makes sense to be "opportunistic" and look for the "low-hanging fruit," it is also important that we keep the bigger (often longer-term) priorities in mind. These higher-rated priorities often intermingle apprehension with aspiration. They frequently require clear discernment between an internal locus control (focusing on that over which we have control) and an external locus of control (focusing on that over which we have very little control). Slow thinking (Kahneman, 2013) is critical, as is the ongoing Polystatic readjustments of baselines (aspirations) in response to clarifying or changing environmental conditions (often laced with a fair amount of apprehension).

There is another cautionary note to offer regarding aspirational priorities. It is easy to focus on the short-term priorities rather than the long-term. A classic example comes from the world of professional sports. A short-term aspirational priority centers on preparing our team to win the game—often at all costs. However, if our team was to win all games then the long-term priority is being ignored (at great expense).

The long-term Essential priority is to provide the paying customer with entertainment. The game must remain competitive. It must bring people to the game or to the viewing of a game on TV or cable--thus bringing in revenues. From a short-term (Proximal) perspective, winning is Essential. People are drawn to a winning team. From a long-term (Distal) perspective, entertainment is Essential. People want to attend a competitive game—they don't want to be bored.

Priority should also be given to Essential matters that involve problems, messes, dilemmas, or polarities rather than puzzles. As I have noted, a puzzle is an issue that has clear answers, is provided in a direct, unidimensional format, and is easily accessed to achieve success. By contrast, a problem is an issue that can be viewed from several different perspectives, involves complex dynamics (with

many interrelated parts), and is not easily accessed regarding the level of success. Messy problems are to be found in settings where multiple regular problems are intertwined.

Dilemmas are even more challenging and complex. Parts of the issue being addressed are often not only intertwined but also contradictory to one another. Addressing one or two of these parts might make it difficult to address other parts. Finally, we have polarities—the challenging conditions I address in the next section of this chapter. Essential issues and those elements of all issues that stand in direct and dynamic polar opposition to one another must be addressed in a manner other than the establishment of priorities.

While it is tempting to prioritize the resolution of Essential puzzles (which often present as low-hanging fruit), this prioritization diverts our attention and energy from problems, messes, dilemmas, and polarities that must be addressed before puzzles can be permanently resolved. Conflicting, confusing, and intertwined priorities (common in a VUCA-Plus world) will make it virtually inevitable for everyday puzzles to pop up repeatedly. We must get on with the difficult work of addressing issues of greater complexity and scope than puzzles. Otherwise, we are wasting our time.

Finally, I suggest again that one's focus should be on nodes in a network. These are the points of intersection where valid and useful information is most likely to be concentrated. Furthermore, the close connection of nodes with many parts of the system will produce successful outcomes regarding many Essential matters. Enablement is fully engaged.

For example, when formulating plans to assist underserved populations in an urban or rural community, it is often of value to identify the natural helping network(s) that already exist in this community. Typically, natural helping networks are sets of links among relatives, friends, and acquaintances. Informal and formal groups of service providers who interact at different levels also serve this networking function. These networks appear to revolve

around a "central" person as the network's focal point. This central person is the Node of this network.

We will inevitably find Essential Nodes of assistance at the heart of any natural helping network. These are the people, informal assistance agencies, or formal human service agencies to which members of this community already turn:

> I go to Mrs. Flournoy when I need something for my headaches. She lives just down the street.

> When my son began to play with the wrong kids, I go to that priest who runs the youth program that my son attends. Father Joseph knows how to talk to his kids.

> When there are rumors of a new COVID breakout in our neighborhood, I go to that supermarket on 46th Street and ask Janice, the pharmacist, about what is happening.

High priority should be given to influencing, reinforcing, and supplying new information to these nodes. This works much better than trying to establish the credibility and convenience of some new sources of information and support. While these networks and nodes are likely to exist in community settings where many problems, messes, dilemmas and polarities abound, they are often excellent sources of information and support for addressing these issues. Effective enablement tactics and strategies are engaged by those who serve as the invaluable Nodes of the network.

Sequencing

The usual—and "very polite"—mode of sequencing is for one of the parties to say: "After you." This is being gracious. We now know that a generous act can also offer us a squirt of "feel good" chemicals. While we probably can't get high on or addicted to this act of kindness, it certainly can motivate us to open the door for someone at the hotel or encourage someone else to speak while we remain quiet.

This is all very nice—but not necessarily productive. The gracious person might also be the one with the best idea. The person invited to go first through the door might feel patronized by us. The person asked to speak first might be waiting to hear from us before speaking up. Or they might not have much to say.

Most importantly, graciousness should not provide the foundation for thoughtful, systematic problem-solving and decision-making. Nor should it guide the communication pattern during an important meeting. It definitely should not be the primary strategy for resolving a conflict. Empowerment in the engagement of communication, conflict-management, problem-solving, and decision-making requires meta-level conversation, especially when the matters being addressed concern Essentials. We should ask: How do we best sequence our ideas and concerns? Should we consider ways to identify immediate and long-term Essential priorities?

A more thoughtful approach is to focus on the low-hanging fruit. Which initiative is most likely to yield success? This can motivate one's move to tougher initiatives. We are opportunistic. We go with the flow and make use of the existing momentum. This is an obvious suggestion and a well-proven strategy.

However, it risks "addiction." We grow accustomed to easy successes and are increasingly leery about tackling the tougher ones. These are the ones that are most often associated with that which is Essential. We think and act short-term and fail to be systematic in our analysis, purposeful in selecting a sequence, or engaged in activities that further our learning (for the future).

My first alternative suggestion returns us to the description of enablement that I introduced in the previous chapter on Essentials. In this chapter, I considered ways in which we can transform complex issues and conditions into matters of systemic enablement. Systemic analysis is engaged. We look at the interweaving of those issues we face.

We see that it is possible to leverage one or more of these issues by resolving specific ones so that others are resolved. In other words, some outcomes can be valued not because of their inherent, isolated importance, but because achieving these outcomes can lead to the achievement of other important outcomes.

Thus, in seeking to sequence action regarding several different initiatives, it is often appropriate to act first on those that impact the most other initiatives. Using the network metaphor, we look for nodes and intersections that are first to be addressed.

My second alternative suggestion is that we focus not only on our current situation—with all of its complexity. We also look upward and outward. We seek clarity and commitment regarding higher-order purposes. While many differences exist among us about immediate priorities when seeking to sequence several initiatives, we might wish to slow down our work and consider why we are engaged in this conversation.

We use Peter Senge's (Senge, 1994) five Whys to move deeper into the purpose of our work. Priorities often emerge when we are clearer about why we are gathered together. If nothing else, we are likely to move beyond "win-lose" and the bruising of personal egos. Our graciousness now is based on purpose rather than just being kind. We invite someone else to go first. This will help us all get to where we want to go collectively.

The third alternative I provide is a real "humdinger." It can easily be viewed as defensive, reactive, and downright pessimistic. This alternative, however, is based on sound research conducted by those in the behavioral economist school of thought. As I have already noted, regret is an important motivator. It might be stronger than the desire to avoid loss or be successful.

This being the case, then sequencing might be based on this motivational hierarchy. We first ensure that the actions to be taken do not lead to regret. Have we failed to give serious consideration to some looming opportunity? Is there some low-hanging fruit that

escaped our attention? When we look back six months from now are we likely to "kick ourselves" for not going down this alternative path? The aforementioned premortem assessment can include consideration of potential regret.

Following a focus on regret, we focus on the potential losses we might incur. Premortem dialogues are directly relevant. We consider what might happen if things "go wrong." Attention is given to how unexcepted external events might impede the new venture. Some contingency planning could accompany consideration of these potential barriers—what I will soon identify as "negative forces." Loss-related attention should also be directed to internal barriers.

We will inevitably encounter resistance to new ideas and initiatives once they are implemented. Everyone will have to adjust their operations if the new project is broad in scope. What will be the depth and duration of the inevitable change curve accompanying this project? How big of a buffer (money, personnel, energy, facilities) do we need that can help us sustain a temporary drop in levels of production and morale as we adjust to the new initiative and learn how to operate in an altered environment?

Finally, potential success is considered. This is not to be viewed as just an opportunity to preview satisfaction and celebration. While this preview can provide us with a neurobiological "high" (and can be addictive), it can also be distracting. Given the potential success of an initiative, there are important points to consider. For instance, how will success be sustained (given the elevated expectations arising from success)? Short-lived success is often more damaging to an organization than failure.

There is also the matter of managed expectations. The success of a specific project doesn't solve everything in an organization. I know from my experiences leading a graduate school that there can often be a "letdown" after achieving some major goal. We have been selling the potential benefits to accrue from the success of our new project. Now there is a chance to see if these benefits are present.

They often are either absent or not so great. To quote Peggy Lee: "Is that all there is?" We face yet another challenge regarding our plans for the future. We have "confiscated" the future of our organization when a major project has been successful. We must craft a new vision and learn how to live in and lead our newly altered organization. Success is wonderful. However, it needs attention—as does Regret and Loss.

I offer a fourth alternative suggestion. We might move beyond both systems and intentions to focus on the future. We pose a new question: "Which initiative will yield the greatest learning for all of us?" If John Dewey (1929) is correct in suggesting that we tend to learn about something only by trying to change it, then we might want to act first on something that provokes the most immediate and clear feedback.

That which is most "learning-ful" comes first. We appreciate the "kick-back" from a controversial move forward. We ascend one of the difficult peaks in the range and learn from this ascent. We then move to the second peak. And on to the other peaks in the range. This somewhat radical approach provides us with not only a way to sequence various initiatives but also with the opportunity to "learn into the future." (Scharmer, 2009). The fruit might not be low hanging, but it could be quite juicy and nourishing to the soul . . .

Polarity Management

I opened this chapter by suggesting that competing priorities are often facing us. They are contradictory (this being one of the conditions of VUCA-Plus). We don't know what is Essential because each competing priority in one way or another is Essential! While we might wish to prioritize or to sequence, there is another way to manage and benefit from existing contradictions. We engage in the management of polarities—a novel strategy and tool that requires use of our full drawer of Essential lens.

In introducing this alternative way of managing two contradictory Essential pathways and outcomes, I turn again to the work of Barry

Johnson (1992/1996). Johnson's perspectives and related tools can guide our actions in the future. Johnson suggests that polarity management can be used with everyday dilemmas. It can also be of great value in addressing major societal challenges associated with contradiction in a VUCA-Plus environment. Polarity management is of great value in settings where two or more legitimate but opposing` forces reside.

I offer a specific example of polarity management by turning to the ongoing personal and collective struggle regarding individual rights and collective responsibilities. Polarity management provides important guidance in addressing these two major Essentials in our mid-21st Century society (and in most contemporary societies).

Both/And Rather Than Either/Or

Polarity management first requires a Divergency lens. It is not a matter of either/or. It is a matter of both/and. This lens is joined by a lens designed to produce multiple visions. As I have noted, the polarity management tool is not for the "faint of heart" (fearful of multi-staged processes) or those who are "closed-minded" (intolerant of ambiguity).

Many people already involved in deliberations regarding individual rights and collective responsibilities have framed the policy regarding these two Essentials as an either/or option. I will frame our analysis around these two polar-opposite Essentials as a both/and.

I begin by identifying some of the benefits and disadvantages of each Essential. The benefits yield short-term (tactical) and long-term (strategic) outcomes. The disadvantages relate to what we don't know and what might be an unexpected and devastating outcome.

BENEFITS: FOCUS ON INDIVIDUAL RIGHTS	BENEFITS: FOCUS ON COLLECTIVE RESPONSIBILITY
Motivation to Achieve Freedom to Innovate Absence of Arbitrary External Control Ability to Protect Personal/Family Interests/Property	Motivation to Cooperate Support for Innovation Absence of Arbitrary Internal Control Ability to Collectively Protect Both Personal and Community Interests/Property

DISADVANTAGES: FOCUS ON INDIVIDUAL RIGHTS	DISADVANTAGES: FOCUS ON COLLECTIVE RESPONSIBLITY
Abuse of Unregulated Personal Power Infringement on the Rights of Those Without Power Uncontrolled Accumulation of Individual Wealth Lost Sense of Caring for Other People and the Greater Good	Abuse of Overwhelming Collective Power Infringement on the Creativity and Initiative of Individual Citizens Uncontrolled Growth of Government Lost Sense of Personal Aspiration and Opportunity

I suggest some of the action steps that might be taken on behalf of each policy and some early warning signs that typically indicate that a specific societal policy is not working well or creating unintended problems.

ACTION STEPS: INDIVIDUAL RIGHTS	ACTION STEPS: COLLECTIVE RESPONSIBILITY
Emphasize personal achievement (advertising/public figures) Reward personal innovation and creativity Enact public policies and regulations that protect individual rights Enact laws that Protect Personal/Family Interests/Property	Emphasize Cooperative attitude (advertising/public figures) Support and fund collective innovation Enact public policies and regulations that protect against inhumane and destructive acts Enact laws that Protect Community Interests/Property

WARNING SIGNS ABOUT INDIVIDUAL RIGHTS	WARNING SIGNS ABOUT COLLECTIVE RESPONSIBILITY
Abuse of Unregulated Personal Power Infringement on the Rights of Those Without Power Uncontrolled Accumulation of Individual Wealth Lost Sense of Caring for Other People and the Greater Good	Abuse of Overwhelming Collective Power Infringement on the Creativity and Initiative of Individual Citizens Uncontrolled Growth of Government Lost Sense of Personal Aspiration and Opportunity

These initial summary statements regarding the pull between two societal perspectives can be framed as a polarity. A typical process of oscillation tends to occur. We linger briefly on the advantages inherent in one of the options. Then we begin to recognize some of the disadvantages associated with this option. We are pulled to the second option. Yet, as we linger on this second option, we discover that this perspective has flaws and disadvantages. We are led back to the first policy—and must again face the disadvantages inherent in this first option.

The Polarity Graph

The polarity-based dynamics of our policy deliberations might be portrayed on a graph—like the following:

Polarity Map®

Action Steps
How will we gain or maintain the positive results from focusing on this left pole? What? Who? By When? Measures?

Greater Purpose Statement

Action Steps
How will we gain or maintain the positive results from focusing on this right pole? What? Who? By When? Measures?

Values = positive results of focus on the left pole

Values = positive results of focus on the right pole

Emphasize personal achievement (advertising/public figures)

Reward personal innovation and creativity

Enact public policies and regulations that protect individual rights

Enact laws that Protect Personal/Family Interests/Property

Upsides/Positives
Motivation to Achieve

Freedom to Innovate

Absence of Arbitrary External Control

Ability to Protect Personal/Family Interests/Property

Upsides/Positives
Motivation to Cooperate

Support for Innovation

Absence of Arbitrary Internal Control

Ability to Collectively Protect Both

Personal and Community Interests/Property

Emphasize Cooperate attitude (advertising/public figures)

Support and fund collective innovation

Enact public policies and regulations that protect against inhumane and destructive acts

Enact laws that Protect Community Interests/Property

Individual Rights and **Collective Responsibility**

Abuse of Unregulated Personal Power

Infringement on the Rights of Those Without Power

Uncontrolled Accumulation of Individual Wealth

Lost Sense of Caring for Other People and the Greater Good

Downsides/Negatives
Abuse of Unregulated Personal Power

Infringement on the Rights of Those Without Power

Uncontrolled Accumulation of Individual Wealth

Lost Sense of Caring for Other People and the Greater Good

Downsides/Negatives
Abuse of Overwhelming Collective Power

Infringement on the Creativity and Initiative of Individual Citizens

Uncontrolled Growth of Government

Lost Sense of Personal Aspiration and Opportunity

Abuse of Overwhelming Collective Power

Infringement on the Creativity and Initiative of Individual Citizens

Uncontrolled Growth of Government

Lost Sense of Personal Aspiration and Opportunity

Fears = negative results of over-focus on the left pole to the neglect of the right pole

Fears = negative results of over-focus on the right pole to the neglect of the left pole

Early Warnings
Measureable indicators (things you can count) to will let you know you are getting into the downside of the left pole.

Greatest Fear

Early Warnings
Measureable indicators (things you can count) to will let you know you are getting into the downside of the right pole.

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This graph portrays important dynamic movement. First, an arrow on the graph suggests movement from left-top to left-bottom and then to right-top. The movement continues to right-bottom and back again to left-top. We are whipped back and forth. As concern (and even anxiety) increases regarding each perspective, the intensity and rapidity of vacillation also increase. This is what the dynamics of polarization are all about. Inadequate time and attention are given to each option. We swing back and forth. This is the dance of polarity dysfunction.

A Polarity Analysis

We are now ready to begin the polarity analysis. First, we consider what occurs when we try to increase benefits associated with one Essential at the expense of the other Essential. In the case of supporting individual rights, the maximization of support for personal initiatives and ambitions would tend to delay but ultimately accelerate the acquisition of personal wealth and power, ultimately leading to the formation of an unregulated and often abusive oligarchy (composed of the super-wealthy).

Furthermore, we now know that emphasizing personal rights does not inevitably produce an increased desire to achieve or innovate. The "have-nots" are much more likely to fall into despair and lethargy—alienated from the society in which they now live. We soon witness societal disruption and even revolution as the power and wealth chasm widens. We eventually might find some social reform (or at least increases in charitable contributions). However, the reformers would probably find their actions were too little and too late.

Conversely, suppose we completely override an Essential concern about personal rights and fully adopt the collective responsibility perspective. In that case, we are likely to witness repressive and intrusive regulations that are applied indiscriminately to the lives of those living in this highly controlled society.

It might be even more destructive if those living in a society know little about individual rights (as seems to have been the case with the Estonians I interviewed). There is a yearning for something different—for some corrective measure. Yet, this alternative option is not well known, nor has it often been engaged in a society where a repressive form of collective responsibility has existed for many years.

At the very least, there would be deeply felt (though often ill-defined) concern shortly regarding the ultimate "heartlessness" of the collective responsibility perspective. Those advocating collective responsibility might have the best of intentions. However, the outcomes can be counter-intuitive with citizens feeling just as alienated from the sources of power as they would be in a world dominated by personal rights.

We would inevitably find that projections become hollow regarding the potential number of people served by new public policies and priorities. These projections are nomothetic numbers. An ideographic narrative that focuses on the distinctive needs of each citizen is absent. Local neighborhoods (often ethnically or culturally based) are torn down in favor of high-rise towers. Dehumanizing "stone cities" replace distinctive neighborhood enclaves.

Optimization

Barry Johnson warns that we must not try to maximize the appeal of any one side. Rather we must carefully *optimize* the degree to which we are inclined toward one side or the other, and the duration of our stay with consideration and enactment of this side. We progressively engage our Magnification lens on each polarity.

How serious are we about our focus on this one side? How long are we going to sustain this focus? We live with dynamic and highly productive tension under the best conditions. Can we live with and in this tension? Optimizing also means we must find Polystasis— with reasonable and perhaps flexible templates and a flexible

baseline—as we favor one side. Finding these acceptable optimum responses and repeatedly redefining them is the key to polarity management and achievement of Polystasis.

The fundamental recommendation in managing this particular polarity is to remain in the positive domain of each perspective long enough to identify all (or at least most) of the key benefits and potential actions to be taken that maximize these benefits. Thinking must slow down. A systemic analysis must be engaged. Time should be devoted to and attention directed to slow and systemic identification of potential ways in which the two perspectives can be brought together on behalf of an integrated response to the challenges of mid-21st century life.

This polarity management recommendation is not easily enacted. It is particularly problematic when we are facing two powerful Essentials. As Johnson and others engaged in polarity management have noted, effective management of polarities requires constant vigilance, negotiation, and adjustments. The second option regarding collective responsibility seems to be aligned specifically with an emphasis on vigilance. Caring public policy can easily become nothing more than numbers and the imposition of clumsy regulations.

Similarly, those espousing personal rights must be open to adjustments. Citizens cannot operate in splendid isolation, looking at and interacting with the world through their silos. They must allow the world to enter—with all its needs (and demands).

In agreement with the polarity management experts, those advocating either perspective must continuously seek and refine a dynamic, flexible balance between consideration and compassion in seeking a balance between rights and responsibilities. Each side's beneficial contributions can be enjoyed without engendering serious negative consequences. We must accompany this balance with some immediate, tangible correctives.

The Alarm System

Johnson has one additional point to make regarding the management of polarities. It concerns the warning signs that I identified earlier. Johnson suggests the value inherent in setting up an alarm system as a safeguard against overshooting either side of the polarity. This system is set up while focusing (magnification lens) on each polarity.

It is prudent to include an alarm system that warns us when we may be trying to maximize one side and are on the verge of triggering negative reactions. The alarm signal for those advocating personal rights might be a growing abuse of unregulated personal power. And infringement on the rights of those without power. How do we know if abuse and/or infringement are occurring?

The Alarms of Personal Rights: What is the metric for measuring abuse? This is not easily measured. We have the newspaper (and now Internet accounts) of this abuse, but these reports are inevitably biased. Truth "ain't what it used to be" (if it ever was). An imprecise measure is the number of lawsuits enacted against those with wealth and power—and the percentage of these lawsuits that are settled in favor of the plaintiff (when compared to percentages when the defendant is not wealthy or powerful). There is also a more indirect measure centering on the taxes paid by those at various economic levels. We might declare it abuse and infringement if the wealthy pay fewer taxes than the middle class. If nothing else, an alarm should be ready and waiting if many accounts are being offered from many different constituencies regarding abuse.

A somewhat easier and more creditable metric can be used when considering the accumulation of individual wealth. One can look at the income gap. If it is widening, then there is cause for concern. The term "accumulation" is important here. It is not just a matter of income gap. It is also a matter of a small number of people

holding great wealth. The super-wealthy possess power as well as wealth. They signal the flaw in consideration of personal rights as a recipe for the "democratization" of wealth. When wealth is centralized, then power is centralized.

Another signal is particularly elusive and perhaps ultimately of greatest importance. This signal concerns a growing sense of helplessness and hopelessness—resulting from (and contributing to) an isolationist stance regarding societal welfare. This signal might be apparent at a deep, psychological level. Do many members of a specific society lose any sense of caring for other members? Is it inevitable that tribalism is present when the rights perspective prevails?

Do people lose their capacity (or motivation) to care about the welfare of those less fortunate than themselves if individual rights are emphasized? Is "trickle-down" economics nothing more than an occasional drip from the accumulated largess of those sitting in the corporate towers? How do we know that a declining concern for other people is occurring? At some level we all "know" when inequity and indifference are abundant. Do we truly need a financial signal or tangible signs of social discontent (such as demonstrations or increases in violent crime) to know that an exclusive focus on personal rights isn't working? Does this shift in attitude need to be measurable?

The Alarms of Collective Responsibility: The alarm system for safeguards against collective responsibility run amuck is to be found, as I have already mentioned, in the abuse of overwhelming collective power (usually assigned to the state) and infringement on the creativity and initiative of individual citizens. As in the case of the signals for those advocating personal rights, the responsibility signals are not easily measured and are often misunderstood or ignored.

We can look at such inadequate measures as the number of new laws and regulations passed during the past year that restrict citizen behavior, or the number of patents being offered for new

inventions. The alarm might be triggered if the number of new rules is growing and/or the number of new patents is declining.

As in the case of financial signals for those advocating personal rights, a tangible metric can serve as an alarm for those advocating collective responsibility. This alarm is the size of government (at all levels). Financially, we can calculate the percentage of GNP to be assigned to governments as compared with that assigned to nongovernmental institutions. The number of government employees can also be measured, as can the ratio of funds housed in governmental agencies and those housed in non-government organizations (NGOs) that provide human services.

At what level can we consider any society to be government-dominated? It is more than the government owning and operating businesses (such as health care and banking) that could be owned privately. It is about the underlying assumption that government can do this work better and more equitably than private enterprise. When is this assumption regarding government effectiveness no longer questioned? When is the effectiveness of private enterprise no longer being questioned on the other side? Alarm bells should go off on both sides if the critics have been silenced and the oppositional voices are no longer heard.

There might be disillusionment among those hoping for an improved life under the auspices of a strong government based on collective responsibility. Major social unrest might arise among those populations receiving the least care and witnessing what seems to be cavalier societal disregard for their actual (distinctive) welfare. Control of policies might become more centralized and embedded in vested social and economic interests among those granted political power. Tragically, it has often been the most liberal governments that have generated the highest levels of corruption and scandal. Greed is not exclusive to those with great wealth. "Robber barons" come in many different shapes and sizes.

This disillusionment need not be confined to failure of government officials to deliver on their political promises. We might find a lost

sense of personal aspirations and opportunities. While declarations that "welfare moms" are pumping out babies to keep government money coming in are largely mythic, there is an unintended consequence of governmental support that hints at growing dependency and an accompanying loss of vision.

It is a systemic, "chicken-and-egg" dynamic—a cycle of poverty is created. No jobs are available nor are adequate education and training available to those living in poverty. As a result, these men, women, and their families must rely on government support. With this support comes confirmation by the government that these victims of poverty are simply incapable of making a living (the assumption of personal inadequacy) or will never find a fulfilling (or even unfulfilling) job (the assumption of a life without opportunity).

There is no need for education or training if poor people are inadequately equipped to learn—or are afforded no opportunity to use the education and training they have received. The cycle of poverty is sustained and intensified. The principles found in system dynamics and other systemic perspectives powerfully represent the reinforcing and accelerating dynamics operating in a world of poverty.

Any sense of hope is lost. Any aspirations regarding the future soon disappear. A culture of poverty is established (Lewis, 1969). As those identifying and describing the cycle of poverty over the years have noted (Moynihan,1969), the psychology of poverty (hopelessness and helplessness) might be even more difficult to overcome than the poverty cycle.

Alarm signals must be sounded for those advocating collective responsibility. Hopefully, we can address some of the negative consequences of rampant individualism with established safeguards and a clear articulation of alarm signals. However, the opportunity for freedom and escape from poverty is not found in the culture or cycle of poverty. This cycle and culture are not easily combated with some new public policies or funding. As with many

Essentials in contemporary societies, the two sides of a polarity regarding rights and responsibilities are firmly entrenched and not easily managed.

It is precisely at this moment and on this occasion that we must pull our Extension lens out of the drawer. Yes, we are inevitably overwhelmed by the challenges inherent in any major social polarity—such as individual rights versus collective responsibility. We look for a rabbit hole and imagine living in a world with fewer contradictions and more manageable challenges. However, when we view the world through our lens of Extension, we see a dystopian world in the future that is filled with alienation and despair if a polarity such as rights versus responsibilities is not effectively managed. So, we shove up our sleeves, open our Minds and Hearts, and prepare to confront a troublesome contradiction.

Conclusions

We have arrived at the end of this set of chapters regarding Essentials-related transformations. How do we remain with the VUCA-Plus challenges so we might find ways to embrace and draw energy from each challenge? I have suggested that it is critical to be guided by an Essential when engaging in one of the VUCA-Plus transformations. We identify what is most important (Essential) when engaging in ongoing polystatic review, adjustment, and action. This process of Polystasis and a focus on Essentials is required when operating in a VUCA-Plus environment.

We are confronted with abundant, overwhelming, and interactive challenges when navigating a turbulent environment. Peter Vaill (1996, p. 178) has suggested that the world of white water is inevitably confusing given its many diverse challenges. I offer an analogy drawn from observations of predatory behavior in the natural world and an ancient parable often shared about priority setting. They each portray what is occurring in our whitewater world.

First, we are like the hawk swooping in on the flock of birds. There are so many birds and so much movement that it is hard to focus on any one bird. The hawk swoops into and then through the flock, not snatching any one bird. Like the hawk, we lose the ability to latch on to anything. We are bewildered and in Awe of everything that swirls around us (Keltner, 2023). How do we stay focused?

Second, like the donkey who stands between two stacks of hay, we move back and forth between the two stacks and ultimately choose neither. We oscillate between opposites (polarities). We don't know how to lead or manage in this world of competing haystacks and multiple VUCA-Plus conditions. How do we choose among the haystacks and respond to these conditions?

In this section of the book, I have offered six transformations that might be of assistance. I have just provided an analogy and parable that might help us better grasp the VUCA-Plus challenges. I close with three summary (and somewhat poetic) statements that might help guide us in our transformative journey from VUCA-Plus conditions to envisioned and enacted Essentials:

> *"I might be blinded but I can still see."* Sustained focus is required, along with attentive thinking.

> *"I might be trigger-happy, but I can still reflect before acting."* We need to linger a bit. Slow and reflective thinking is required.

> *"I might be wrong and am willing to reconsider."* We must frequently re-examine our perspectives and practices. Critical thinking is an essential tool to be used repeatedly as we face the challenges of VUCA-Plus.

Each of these responses moves us deeply into our Head and Heart. They each lead to our engagement of a second set of lenses when navigating the world of VUCA-Plus. These lenses concern Essence. I propose that Essence complements Essential. The two sets of lenses together enable us to lead and learn—without being

tempted to escape down a rabbit hole to the distorted world of Serenity and SC²+.

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Section Three

Finding Essence in a VUCA-Plus World

Chapter Six

Essence I: Patterns, Self-Organization and Illumination

In this chapter and the next, I introduce a diverse set of tactics and strategies that provide a viable alternative to Serenity (SC²+) when coping with pressing VUCA-Plus challenges. This set of tactics and strategies focus one's attention and energy on the Essence of each VUCA-Plus issue.

I begin this chapter by drawing an important distinction between Essence and Essential. I then offer a reflection on the nature of Essence itself and turn to how Volatility is transformed into the recognition of patterns. From there I shift to consideration of ways that Uncertainty is transformed into the maintenance of patterns, Complexity is transformed into emergent self-organization, and Ambiguity is transformed into Illumination. We find the Essence of life successfully lived in a VUCA-Plus world through a sustained focus on patterns, self-organization, and illumination.

Essence vs. Essential

Before delving more deeply into the meaning and dynamics of Essence and the Lens of Essence, I wish to offer a more detailed description of the distinction between the two key concepts in this set of chapters: Essence and Essential. While these terms have the same philological origins (Latin: *essentia*) and are often used interchangeably, I wish to distinguish between them.

In drawing the distinction, I first offer some of the words used in dictionaries when defining each term. The word Essential is used to designate something of utmost importance, something basic,

something necessary, indispensable, or unavoidable. That which is Essential is important to the highest degree. It is necessary.

The word Essence is used when describing the intrinsic nature or indispensable quality of something—especially something abstract or elusive. The Essence of something determines its character. It is a property or group of properties of something without which it would not exist or be what it is.

At a whole other level, Essence refers to an extract or concentrate obtained from a particular plant or other matter and used for flavoring or scent. I would suggest that these two meanings of the word "Essence" are not that far apart. Both uses of this word refer to setting aside the peripheral and finding that which is pure, clear—and in some sense unified and coherent.

This attempt to connect the two meanings of Essence leads me to the distinction I wish to draw between Essential and Essence. A lens used to find the Essence of some system focuses on a single, unifying feature in this system. By contrast, a lens used to discover what is Essential in a system focuses on the many components of this system. I suggest that Essential concerns a process for sorting out and prioritizing a complex system's components.

When we determine what is Essential, we sort out and prioritize what is valuable, whereas the Lens of Essence focuses on deep, underlying patterns. We discover or uncover what forms and governs these patterns. Learning takes place on a holistic level. There is no separation of the system into parts; it is not about establishing priorities and preparing a list of Essentials. Rather, finding Essence concerns our learning about what dwells below and what is to be most fully appreciated.

A Judging Viewpoint

I would point to a specific personality type and perspective offered by Katherine Briggs and Isabel Briggs-Myers (Briggs-Meyer and Myers, 1995) (based on personality types identified by Carl Jung). The type and preference engaged with the Lens of Essentials is called *Judging*. It combines the Jungian preference for sensing and thinking.

I offer a summary description of this type and preference taken from the 16 Personality Type website (Sixteen Personalities, 2024):

> People with the Judging . . . personality trait feel most comfortable when the course ahead is well-marked. They would rather come up with five backup plans than deal with events as they come. Preferring to consider their options ahead of time, personality types with this trait prefer clarity and closure, sticking with the plan rather than going with the flow. It's as if Judging types always keep a mental checklist. When they cross something off their list – or even start an item on their list – they consider it complete and not open to reconsideration.

I would suggest that to cross something off of one's list, one must first order the items on this list—and this requires identification of that which is Essential:

> Whether a life goal or a response to an emergency, people with the Judging personality trait can develop a clear and actionable plan. Judging individuals tend to have a strong work ethic, putting their duties and responsibilities above everything else. To them, rules, laws, and standards are the key to success. They can be too dependent on these measures, whether applied to themselves or others. But the intent is almost always one of fairness and results.

It is where and when one is fully aware of that which is Essential (including Essential values), that one can be clear, consistent, and ethical in one's actions. It is also where and when one finds and remains aligned with a rigid set of Essential priorities and values that one can be rigid and poorly adapted to a VUCA-Plus world.

A Perceiving/Prospecting Viewpoint

An important contrast can be drawn at this point. The Lens of Essence is aligned with and energized by a personality type and preference labeled Perceiving by Myers-Briggs. It combines the Jungian preferences for intuition and feeling.

The 16 Personality Type authors (Sixteen Personalities, 2024) have renamed Perceiving as "Prospecting" and offer the following summary description:

> Prospecting . . .individuals are much more flexible [than the Judging individuals] when it comes to dealing with unexpected challenges. This flexibility helps them seize unexpected opportunities as well. These personality types tend to react to their environments rather than try to control them, helping them to make their own luck in whatever the world delivers. People with this trait hold that life is full of possibilities.

I suggest that a life full of possibilities is generated by first discovering (or even inventing) the Essence of life. It is in this Essence that all possibilities reside—or from which they are generated:

> People with the Prospecting personality trait can be slow to commit to something because of uncertainty or the potential of everything else. If they don't moderate this trait, indecision or a lack of conviction can be a problem. They can seem unfocused. What was important to them one week may be forgotten the next. . . . Despite those concerns, this personality trait can offer a great deal of creativity and productivity. Theirs is almost a stream of

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consciousness quality. . . . This can lead to serial passions that keep Prospecting individuals stimulated as they explore the buffet of choices always before them.

In this statement, we find both the opportunities and barriers in the life of those with a Perceiving/Prospecting orientation. They can be quite creative and productive if residing in a world with clarity and consistency at its core (Essence). Without this core, the Perceiving/Prospecting person can become "untethered" and may wander about for a lifetime in the world of VUCA-Plus. They are living and acting without purpose or direction. With this distinction between Essential and Essence in hand, we are now reading to delve specifically into the nature and dynamics of Essence.

The Essence of Essence

The Essence of something—some system—concerns the intrinsic nature or indispensable quality of this something (system). I return to Olga Tokarczuk's account of life in an early 20th-century sanatorium. A young artist who is dying of consumption describes how one can find (or avoid finding) Essence:

> We rarely notice what a painted landscape is really like. We fix our focus on the horizon and look at the depicted image. There we see the lines of hillocks and hills, woods and trees, the roofs of houses and the course of roads, and because we know what they are, and we know their names, we see everything in these categories, all separately. Ah, we say, the road winds through a valley. Or: The forest is growing on a hillside. Oh, there are some bare mountaintops. That's how we see. . . . But I tell you, there's another kind of looking too, total, complete and absolute. I call it *transparent looking*." He repeated these words twice, ... "It goes beyond the detail, it leads . . .to the foundations of the view in question, to the basic idea, leaving out the minor features that continually scatter a person's mind and vision. (Tokarczuk, 2024, pp. 176-177)

Ultimately, this "transparent looking" is concerned with an abstraction. The Essence of something determines its distinctive character and its purpose for being. Essence might be considered a contemporary version of the Platonic ideal. It might also be aligned with the stance taken by Plato's mentor, Socrates, concerning the most important question we should be asking ourselves: How should we live? In our search for Essence, we must discern the good we hope to attain in life and determine how we might change on behalf of this greater good (Callard, 2025).

There is also an important sense that Essence is a property or group of properties of something without which it would not exist or be what it is. From another perspective, Essence is a distillation of something. It is an extract or concentrate obtained from a particular plant or other matter and used for flavoring or scent. It is the elixir to be found at the specific point when an entity is at its peak in terms of flavor, consistency, or purity.

The elixir also exists in an object or event of sublime beauty where something simple, clear, and important is conveyed. For instance, Henryk Gorecki's *Symphony of Sorrowful Songs* conveys the Essence of despair and suffering. Furthermore, Dawn Upshaw's pure vocal tones on my recording capture this Essence from the perspective of a grieving mother. I find the distillation of powerful emotions—the elixir of sorrow—when listening to this extraordinary musical composition.

In essence, Essence is about going deep—as I find when listening to Gorecki's symphony. It concerns setting aside the peripheral and the noise to find the pure, unadulterated, and indispensable. We are searching throughout our life for the Essence of this life (its ultimate meaning and purpose). We are engaged in the act of appreciation—looking for that which is eternally fulfilling. We wish to catch ourselves "doing it right [correctly, ethically, effectively]." This search for the Essence residing in any system is central to the polystatic process and the accompanying process of

establishing and being guided by appropriate somatic and psychosocial templates.

As I have noted, we need to set the baseline as a guide for predictions and actions in the dynamic and ever-changing way we seek to understand and work within our mid-21st Century world. We find volatility, uncertainty, complexity, ambiguity, turbulence, and contradictions in this world. When faced with these VUCA-Plus challenging conditions it is easy to whipsaw.

We risk losing our identity and access to the "true" nature of this world. Our search for and appreciation of the Essence to be found in this world—or some segment of this world—is critical for this sense of Essence as an anchor point for our sustaining templates, our steady sense of self, and our consistent sense of the world in which we live and work.

The Singularity of Essence

Sometimes the search for and appreciation of Essence leads us to one factor or desired outcome (the Essence of that to which we aspire). I would call this *Portrait Appreciation*. This is the Bliss that Joseph Campbell describes—and that George Lucas has translated into a notion of "the force" in the *Star Wars* movies. According to Campbell (1991): "If you do follow your bliss, you put yourself on a kind of track that has been there all the while, waiting for you, and the life that you ought to be living is the one you are living. Follow your bliss and don't be afraid. Unanticipated doors will open."

While the bliss and the force might be mythical in nature or the vision of someone who loves to work in the realm of myth, we have a "lived" version of these singular manifestations of Essence in the findings of Mihalyi Csikszentmihalyi (1990). As I have noted, he studied and has written about something he calls the *Flow* experience.

As with bliss and force, Flow lifts one to a high state of awareness. We engage in an activity that is both challenging and achievable. Rather than being frozen in a state of anxiety (when facing

something overwhelming) or stuck in a state of boredom (when facing something that is easily accomplished and often repetitive), one exists in a threshold between anxiety and boredom that is highly motivating. When in a state of Flow (produced by an activity such as rock climbing or researching a difficult topic), we lose all sense of time and find that all other priorities and perspectives fade from view.

I suggest that we linger in Flow to participate in that which is both beautiful and (at times) terrifying. These strong feelings may arise from the world we face (whether a sheer rock wall or pile of ancient texts); however, they also arise from our internal perception of strength. This strength is both beautiful and terrifying. Midst these competing and swirling emotions, we find a balance between challenge and support in the threshold of Flow. We often discover significant learning within this threshold (Sanford, 1980). Fundamentally, we are aware and profoundly appreciative of the emotions and attendant learning found in the singular Essence of Flow.

The Essence of Diversity

At other times, Essence is found in the appreciation of diversity. I would call this *Landscape Appreciation*. While Flow is best portrayed as a portrait of someone engaged in a singular activity, the Essence of Diversity is best portrayed as a landscape. As Dwight Jones (2020) (an award-winning photographer) notes, a forest of diverse forms and features cries out to us: "Bring it on!"

Many shapes, movements, and forms of light and shade can be found in a forest. A sumptuous feast for the eyes is being offered. A diversity of sounds is also found in the forest, as well as many smells and tactile sensations. Variable breezes are felt on our skin and a variety of adjustments are made by the muscles in our body as we walk through the forest. Yes, "Bring it on!"

Much like Dwight Jones, one of the primary characters in one of the protagonists in Isabel Allende's *Portrait in Sepia* (2006) finds a landscape of interconnected diversity:

> I was discovering that everything is related, is part of a tightly woven design. What at first view seems to be a tangle of coincidences is in the precise eye of the camera revealed in all its perfect symmetry. Nothing is casual, nothing is banal. Just as in the apparent vegetal chaos of the forest there is a strict relationship of cause and effect-- for each tree there are hundreds of birds, for each bird there are thousands of insects, for each insect there are millions of organic particles--so, too, the campesinos at their labors or the family, sheltering from winter inside the house are indispensable parts of a vast fresco.

For this young person in Allende's novel, the vibrant, tightly woven design "is often invisible: the eye doesn't capture it, *only* the heart." I would beg to differ a bit. I think that the Essence of Diversity is experienced not only in one's heart but also in one's eyes, ears, nose, skin, and muscles. The diversity is brought together in a manner that may create as much Flow as Csikszentmihalyi finds in the active engagement of a rock face or stack of books. This diversity also sets the stage for the ongoing adjustment of baselines, predictions, and actions when engaged in the dynamic and requisite process of Polystasis.

The Lenses of Essence

With this introduction of Essence to be found in two forms, I propose a model that portrays the diverse way in which Essence operates. This portrayal centers on the function of Essence as a Lens that transformed the conditions of VUCA-Plus into forms and processes that not only lead to a constructive engagement of the six conditions of VUCA-Plus but also to a world of Essence that is learning-rich and life-affirming. While I am about to suggest specific strategies and tools that transform a VUCA-Plus condition to a state of Essence, I first offer four basic questions that open the

way to these transformative moves. These might be considered the four specific lenses to be engaged when seeking Essence.

Leading Part: How is this system governed?

The first lens through which one can view a VUCA-Plus world concerns the leading part of the system being viewed. This might be considered a lens of Leadership. An organizational perspective encourages focus on the person, unit, or dispersed function operating in a system that provides guidance and coordination. Our Polystatic baseline is often established in conjunction with identifying and being guided by this leading part.

While the leading part is often found in all sectors of an organization (or any system) when it is young, it is likely to be found in a specific sector of the system as an organization matures (Bergquist, 1993b). Leaders are identified and provided with both authority and responsibility. One can discover something about the singular Essence of a system by observing what those serving as leaders in this system say and do.

One can also gain insights regarding this system's Essence by observing the reactions to these words and actions by those residing in the system. Given that polystatic baselines are often influenced by the leading part, members of an organization can be led astray if the leading part is inaccurate or biased in its portrayal of the world in which the organization is operating.

Statics: What provides stability for this system?

A second lens concerns the policies, procedures, and processes that hold the system together. This lens provides a structural perspective. This is the conservative element of a polystatic process: the baseline and predictions must remain relatively stable if we operate with some level of sanity in our VUCA-Plus world.

While attention is usually drawn to the dynamic properties of a system, there are often overlooked mechanisms in the system that provide stability and continuity. It is in the statics (rather than

dynamics) of a system that one will find Essence. That which is repeated and replicated every day and taken for granted constitutes the Essence of a system.

Those involved in the study of complexity would point to the fractals found in most living systems—especially those that are self-organizing. The same structure is replicated at all levels of a pine tree (limbs, branches, needles). It is often noted that Mother Nature is rather lazy. She will repeat that which works. She replicates many times and at many levels. The same can be said for human systems. It is in these replications that we find Polystatic stability.

Primacy: How does the founding of this system influence how this system is operating today?

A third lens relates specifically to the founding experience of a system. What happens at birth and what happens first (primacy)? What were the baseline and first predictions to be found when establishing a polystatic process in a specific system? At the level of an individual human being, we can focus on this person's early life (a psychoanalytic perspective) or even their experience at birth when seeking to understand their motives and behavior later in life. One can engage a similar perspective when seeking to understand why a system operates as it does. There are decisions made early in the life of this system and events that impinge on the system when it is first formed--and continue to impact the system throughout its life.

In many cases, the responses made to early challenges in the life of a system continue to dictate the way that members of this system view the outside world—even when this world has changed and when the system has matured. Old baselines and predictions linger and influence (even determine) how we act.

The leadership style(s) engaged early in the life of a system are likely to remain in place, even when new leaders enter the system. Founding stories are told repeatedly to ensure that values and

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priorities are maintained. Behavioral economists write about the power of primacy in decision-making. This effect operates at the level of an entire system. The Essence of any system resides in this primacy.

Central Operating Principle: What is the fundamental assumption about how this system should function?

My colleague, John Krubski (2023), introduces a hierarchical perspective when proposing that one central operating principle (COP) must be identified when any team is planning, solving problems, or making decisions. This represents the fourth lens of Essence. The COP Lens (1) is designed to illuminate and support three (3) distinctive (yet interdependent) propositions identified by an individual or team seeking to find the Essence of a specific problem or project. These propositions, in turn, are derived from the person's or team's identification of seven (7) significant facts about the system. John describes a 7-3-1 process that enables a team to gain clarity and insight regarding steps to meet any challenge facing the system.

Much of what John Krubski proposes is based on recent findings in neurobiology, behavioral economics, and the decisional sciences. I would add to what John has proposed by suggesting that the Essence of a system is to be found in the central operating principle and that the baseline is best established in alignment with this principle.

Furthermore, diverse VUCA-Plus challenges can be effectively transformed into actionable items using John's 7-3-1 process. I would also suggest that the central operating principle is closely aligned with the leading part and statics of the system—established (at least in part) during the founding moments of this system. Taken together, these four lenses enable one to ascertain Essence.

Having identified these four lenses of Essence, I now turn to the specific strategies and tools that can be deployed when using one

of the lenses to extract and evolve Essence from the six conditions of VUCA-Plus—and to establish a viable and agile polystatic process.

From Volatility to Pattern Recognition

In the white-water world, rapid water flow is "certain." However, frequent changes make this rapid flow difficult to track and navigate, causing volatility. In the second segment of the white-water environment, however, continuity and predictability can offset volatility. Repeated patterns emerge in the circular movement of water.

We find similar cycles and patterns in the world that operate far from the white water of a turbulent stream. These cycles and patterns can help establish polystatic baselines and predictions. There is a widely used statement regarding cyclical patterns. It takes several different forms. One is: "While history doesn't repeat itself, historical events do tend to rhyme."

I add several relevant adages and words often heard by those who adjust the Lens of Essence to address the matter of cycles and patterns: "This too will occur again." "Just wait. The opportunity will once again arise—just be patient." "What can we learn from this event and from strategy and tactics we engage in addressing the challenge(s) associated with this event—for it will come again and we can be better prepared to address the challenge." "We will inevitably make mistakes; however, we can learn from our mistakes (as well as our successes) for things seem to repeat themselves."

While these adages can be reassuring, they require the use of one or more of the lenses of Essence. First, one should use the Lens of Primacy to identify the source of a specific pattern. When was it established and under what circumstances was it established? Many years ago (Bergquist, 1993b), I wrote about the critical role played by a mission in contemporary (postmodern) organizations, given the shattering of traditional boundaries to be found in modern organizations. I borrowed a concept ("attractor") from

chaos theory when considering the forces that pull people together to form a purpose-driven organization.

I also borrowed from Teilhard de Chardin, suggesting that all key attractor elements and dynamics of an organization are present at the moment of its formation. I offered an example concerning the formation of the Hewlett-Packard Corporation in a Palo Alto garage (Bergquist, 1993b, p. 203):

> If Teilhard's notion is extended to organizational theory, all central elements of an organization must have existed within the boundaries of this organization at the point when it began. These central elements are replicated again and again as the organization grows and becomes more finely differentiated. Thus, when Bill Hewlett and David Packard began building oscillators in their garage, all of the central dynamics of the Hewlett-Packard Company must have already been in existence: all of the major points of both promise and struggle, all of the major strengths and weaknesses, all of the principal modes of operating (planning, problem solving, decision making, communication). The "H-P way" would have already been established and was replicated many times over as Bill and Dave moved to bigger quarters and hired more people to meet the needs of their growing company.

The Lens of Primacy plays a critical role given the determinative role played by founding patterns in establishing sustained organizational patterns (e.g. "H-P Way"). We must serve as historians in examining and fully appreciating the founding stories of an organization. My consulting work often included conducting interviews regarding these founding stories I attended in particular to stories told by founders of the organization (if they are still present).

I also attend to those in the organization who represent the "old way" in which the organization operated. While the old way is a "remnant" of the past—as are those who defend the old way—this

remnant often contains important reminders of the founding (and still relevant) values, visions, and purposes of the organization (Bergquist, 1993b, pp. 202-203). As Teilhard (1955) proposed many years ago, all of the fundamental elements of an organization (including patterns) are to be found in its founding. They remain (linger) in the minds and hearts of organizational remnants and the "social unconscious" (Hopper and Weinberg, 2019)) of all the organization's members.

The lingering presence of founding patterns points us to the value inherent in a second lens of Essence. This is the COP (Central Operating Principle) lens introduced by John Krubski. The engagement of COP requires not the creation of a new fundamental pattern but instead the discovery and appreciation of a pattern that already exists (lingers) in the organization. Furthermore, this discovery process begins with the identification of seven critical facts regarding one's organization and three propositions regarding how the organization must operate given these facts.

Krubski has found a way in 7-3-1 to "discover" fundamental patterns beginning with a confrontation of current reality (7 facts) and moving to a slow-thinking analysis of implications concerning this reality (3 propositions). Sitting at the table with those engaged in 7-3-1, Teilhard would probably suggest that the fundamental operating principle (COP) has always been there and deeply influences the conducted analysis (three positions). COP even has a "thumb on the scale" regarding the appraisal of reality and the selection (construction) of organizational "facts" and their prioritization (only 7 are allowed).

One can derive a sense of "certainty" (ascertainment) regarding fundamental and enduring organizational patterns by taking the Primacy and COP lenses from the Essence drawer and directing them to founding and ongoing organizational operations.

Appraising and Appreciating Patterns

Systems sustain certain patterns and replicate basic structures everywhere while ensuring that each system differs a bit from other systems. Scientists suggest that viable systems are in dynamic equilibrium. Each viable system fits into a specific ecological niche and sustains a specific operational pattern compatible with (adapted to) this niche. The pattern is sustained and reinforced precisely because of this ongoing adaptive outcome.

The story doesn't end here. No viable system is completely successful in adapting to its environmental niche. If it were completely successful, then it would dominate and take over the niche—leading eventually (and ironically) to its demise. We see this evolutionary principle poignantly and often tragically illustrated in the human dominance of our global environment. We humans have learned how to adapt successfully to certain niches. We have "tamed" nature and have come to dominate specific environmental niches, which has led to the extinction of certain species and many disruptions (such as climate instability).

In essence, an inevitable tension exists between adaptive and maladaptive structures and processes found in any system as it relates to its environment. A major corporation can be quite effective in altering a product line to meet shifting customer needs but is ineffective in adjusting the complex, digitally based processes needed to produce this altered product line. A family business establishes a new research and development unit to "keep up" with the changing VUCA-Plus world. However, the right family member is not found to head this new division.

Patterns provide stability and the capacity of systems to sustain relatively successful adaptation to their environment. Stability and adaptation are both critical. The science of *Statics* concerns the construction of structures (such as buildings and bridges) that are stable even when faced with high winds and earthquakes.

Conversely, the science of *Dynamics* concerns the processes of interaction and change among system elements.

The design, creation, and maintenance of viable organizations must formally incorporate Statics and Dynamics. The patterns of an organization informally reinforce both Statics and Dynamics. A Structural lens of Essence focuses on Statics, while the Leading Part focuses on Dynamics. A Primacy lens helps us identify initial organizational Statics and Dynamics. The COP lens enables us to appreciate and build on ways these Statics and Dynamics still operate (as the propositions and COPs) in the organization.

Patterns also play a critical role in Polystatic operations. Polystasis relies on patterns so that the polystatic process is not overwhelmed. Patterns provide useful predictions and help to establish and refine psychosocial templates. On the other hand, disruptions of and variations in patterns can be effectively addressed when a polystatic process is engaged, for adjustments in baselines and predictions are fundamental properties of this process.

Disruptions and variations accompanied by a polystatic process enable an organization to adjust to environmental changes. These disruptions and variations allow other systems to dwell in this environment and help each system enter into mutually beneficial relationships with other systems in the environment. Each system is good enough to live in the environment, but not good enough to dominate it. This is the beauty of nature when working effectively.

This is all very nice in the abstract. What does this look like in the real life of organizations? What about the role played by organizational leaders? This is where a Leading Part lens should be brought to bear when answering this and related questions. How does the production manager in the corporation keep up with the needed changes in their production process? Should leaders of a family business move outside the family to find someone to head the new R and D division?

What are the answers to these questions? A Leading Part lens should provide not only clarity regarding the roles to be played by leaders of an organization but also clarity regarding the purposes and direction of this leadership, as well as the style of leadership most appropriate to the organization's setting and current situations (Bergquist, Sandstrom and Mura, 2023).

There is also the matter of stability. As I have noted, organizations often experience a drop in productivity and morale when making a major change. This change curve threatens to destabilize the organization. Change curves reside on top of change curves. As the title ("Can the Center Hold?") of a chapter in one of my book (Bergquist, 1993b) suggests, our postmodern world of fragmentation and multiple realities tears at the fabric of our organizations.

The Center might now hold. Leadership must be available to provide assurance and stabilizing actions. A Structural lens can lead us to some effective policies that can buffer the impact of these change curves. We can increase our reserves (energy, funds, human resources) or call for a "cease-fire" in new change initiatives.

These policies might help with the change curve—but the center still might not hold in the stormy postmodern sea of mid-21st-century life (Bergquist, Sandstrom, and Mura, 2013). Systems of all kinds need a leading part once the system begins to mature and differentiated functions begin to emerge.

A Leading Part Lens is required to sustain attention to this critical element of any viable system. Pattern variations are a prerequisite to any system's evolutionary viability. Polystatic processes enable the system to accommodate these variations. However, continuity of leadership (or at least specific leadership functions) is also required. Baselines and psychosocial templates can't bounce all over the place nor can resulting actions always be erratic and often misdirected.

Patterns in the World: Fractals and Sonatas

There is a remarkable structure to be found in nature that exemplifies the interplay between patterns and variations. I have already identified this structure: it is a fractal. We discover natural fractals in the structure of pine trees, in the shape of many seashells and river deltas. We also find fractals in domains other than nature. Fractals are beautifully displayed in classical music (particularly music of the classical era).

There are usually two major themes presented initially in the Exposition (to be found in the sonata form frequently used by Classical era composers such as Haydn, Mozart, and Beethoven during his early years). Typically, these two Exposition themes are contrasting. One is loud and the other is soft. One is fast while the other is slow. Or one is in a major key and the other in a minor key. We find the major tensions in the Exposition. This tension often provides the movement's energy.

However, this contrast rarely makes this movement memorable for most listeners. Typically, the second part of the movement is of greatest interest. This second section of a sonata is labeled "Development". It contains several (or many) variations on the two major themes. As listeners we may not even be aware that these are the same two themes as in the Exposition (providing continuity). Furthermore, we might not be aware that these two themes are being presented in varied ways, often playing off in new ways against one another.

The sonata movement then (as a rule) concludes with a Recapitulation of the original two themes (allowing us as listeners to return to "the home base"). We are reassured that there is continuity along with the variations. A coda (usually a new theme) might also be provided that ends the movement with a flourish.

If you want to appreciate how the sonata form operates listen to a symphony by Mozart or Beethoven (though Beethoven often does

many new things with the sonata form). You can even listen to a later symphony by Brahms or Dvorak to get a good feel for the sonata form. Beethoven's piano sonatas (as the name implies) are built around this musical model. To get an even more dramatic sense of a theme that is offered in diverse forms, listen to J.S. Bach's amazing Goldberg Variations.

Why do I mention the sonata form? This fragment of music theory seems to be a bit distant from the fractal forms found in nature and a long way from the statics operating within organizations. I begin with this form because we can vividly (almost poetically) see the fractal being literally "played out" in a musical sonata. We emotionally experience the divergence (turning outward) away from the comfortable and expected—and then experience the equally emotional convergence (turning inward) back to the origins and the expected.

I propose that vital and enduring organizations create their own sonata forms. We find balance and sequencing of convergence and divergence in these organizations. This balance resides at the heart of a polystatic process as it operates in a successfully agile organization. In essence, a vital and enduring organization creates its own white-water environment. It also produces the process needed for navigation of this turbulent environment.

The diversity associated with multiple perspectives, multiple sources of expertise, and multiple belief systems is balanced against the "glue" that holds the organization together and provides the container for this diversity. This glue is found in the Lens of Essence that focuses on the leading part. This is the "soft" lens of process and attitude that enables (and promotes) variability and innovation. It also is found in the "hard" structural lens that provides stability and continuity. Together the dynamic lens of leadership and static lens of structure produce an agile, self-organizing system that remains viable in a VUCA-Plus environment.

This broad, distal perspective on patterns and organizational viability can provide us with guidance. However, we can also look for guidance from a closer, more proximal perspective. We see several fundamental themes playing against each other in multiple ways. These themes include organizational purposes, directions, patterns of behavior, and subcultures. We see these organizational themes coming together occasionally and then departing from one another—much as in a musical sonata. The patterned interplay between themes and variations is found at all levels of any organization. It is present in many forms. I offer three of these forms.

Words, Metaphors, and Stories

Patterns can be found at the "micro" level in the daily speech of those working in an organization. They are found in frequently used words, phrases, and metaphors that describe specific events or desired outcomes in the organization. For example, specific sports or technological metaphors might frequently be used. While some sports metaphors, such as "teamwork" and "winning" are commonly used and are not unique to an organization, other sports metaphors are unique and specific to this organization. Similarly, some technological metaphors, such as "interfacing" and "module" are common, but others are unique to the organization.

Adjust your Structural/Statics lens to obtain a more proximal view. Look for the unique words and phrases that keep getting used. They tell you about the shared perspectives and values of those working in the organization. The COP (central operating principles) lens might be engaged to reveal words and phrases that are used repeatedly. This redundancy might be found in the "facts" that are constructed in the organization to reinforce the COP.

Words such as "we've been told" might often appear alongside the name of one person or department. Other words such as "its' obvious" might be joined by specific sources of the "obvious" (such as the "Internet" or "Government Reports"). We might also find certain words and phrases appearing whenever analyses of the

"facts" are engaged. Phrases such as "Our bottom line tells us" or "We have been told by . . ." reveal something about the fundamental assumptions being made about priorities, authority, and trust.

At a second level, we find patterns in the extensively shared personal and organizational stories. Parker Palmer (1990, p. 11) points to an approach taken by Barry Lopez who suggests that it is in the telling of stories that we create "an atmosphere in which [truth] becomes discernable as pattern." Stories are likely to be offered in particular to new employees or visitors.

These stories might be about the organization's founding (Primacy lens). They might also be about triumphs or failures that teach "lessons" about how things are done in this organization (Structural/Statics lens). Inspiring stories are told about specific leaders (Leading Part lens). Eternal enemies and villains that require vigilance and loyalty are mentioned (often in hushed tones) (Structural/Statics lens).

It is not important to know whether or not the story is true. Veracity does not reside at the heart of the matter. COPs are not based on valid facts or viable propositions. They are based on what members of an organization believe to be valid, viable, and COP-congruent.

However, it is important to determine what message is being conveyed or lesson learned, why this story keeps getting offered, to whom the story is being offered, and why it is being offered repeatedly. Stories can tell us much about the fundamental assumptions, values, and aspirations held collectively by members of the organization. Stories contain the glue (Lens of Leading Part) and reveal the organization's central operating principle (COP lens).

Interactions, Gatherings, and Norms

At a third level, we are likely to find fractals and sonatas being observed in the widely exhibited behavior patterns of those working in the organization. Adjust our Structure/Static lens to distal. Do those working in the organization follow a routine each day when they come to the office (or when they work from home)? Is there a certain sequence of informal or formal meetings leaders of the organization have each day with their staff? Why do these routines and sequences occur and what happens when the pattern is broken? Is there a common sequence of interactions occurring among members of their organization?

At the organizational level, we can readily observe behavioral patterns that often involve the actual movement of people in the organization. For example, we might observe the repeated gathering of people at a specific place in the organization. Those involved with observing social patterns (or those designing buildings and social spaces) describe "socio-petal" (as in centripetal) movement of people toward one another—the pull toward some favored meeting place (Sommer, 1969). Why do they meet there and what transactions occur in these places?

I am reminded of the legendary meeting of the Banians (Indian traders) underneath the spreading Banyan Trees. These traders and travelers met to converse, exchange information, and learn from one another. The Banyan Tree operates like the country store where people once met in rural America. This same socio-petal force might operate in mid-21st Century "county stores," such as McDonalds or Starbucks.

They might also operate on specific social media platforms that populate the Internet. It is not just the Banians who want to converse, exchange information, and learn from one another. What is the equivalent in any specific organization? Where are the meeting places (physical or digital)? What is the location and

content of conversations engaged in these socio-petal settings conveying about fundamental organizational values and concerns?

Finally, we find patterns existing at a much subtler, more pervasive, and more profound level as the norms (implicit rules) of the organization. What is rewarded repeatedly in the organization? What is punished or ignored? What can members of the organization share? Can they be candid when offering their observations? What is forbidden or discouraged regarding what members can convey? What is "acceptable" behavior in the organization, and what can't one do without taking a big risk (concerning his reputation, power, or status)? We often find that the norms of an organization are *self-sealed*, indicating that they are enforced but can't be discussed. The sealing is usually even more pervasive. We can't even mention that we can't talk about these norms.

Identification of Variations

What about variations in these patterns? We find variations at each of the levels we have just mentioned. It is through variations in the patterns of organizations that we find creativity. The acceptance of variation by leaders of an organization is often critical. A Leading Part lens should be front and center. While leaders should ensure continuity, they must also be champions of change.

In a major study of change initiatives in private liberal arts colleges that I helped conduct during the 1980s, we found that the support of leaders for a change project was a key factor in determining its success (Bergquist, and Armstrong, 1986). While leaders of the college (for example, the president and academic dean) need not be actively involved in the change project, they should be champions of the change—frequently speaking about it, ensuring adequate financial support for the project, and hosting events to celebrate its success. A side note: those obtaining outside funding for the project are often forgotten. They should be invited to these celebrations.

The evidence regarding leadership and change was found in American colleges. Is this alliance evident in other types of organizations? Ralph Stacey (1996) would seem to be aligned with this perspective. He writes extensively about the creative dynamic in organizations, noting that organizations grow and adapt precisely because they are not orderly. Leaders of the organization must acknowledge and support (and sometimes guide) this disorderliness. Systems survive (and thrive) in a specific niche precisely because they are not fully adaptive—and therefore cannot dominate their niche.

We see what happens when one organization builds a monopoly in a specific sector of our society and when one leader dominates the decision-making processes of their organization. Some sloppiness and competition are required to not only keep organizations honest but also allow for creativity and change. Rather than being dominant, a leader should be open to multiple, diverse perspectives (Page, 2011)—and should sometimes lose the argument.

As in the case of a virus that successfully invades a person or society, dominant forces in an organization or society are eventually quite deadly. Neither the dominator nor the system they are dominating survive. Our Lens of Leading Parts should be directed toward ferreting out self-destructive, variation-crushing leadership practices.

What do the variations look like in organizations when we focus our Lens of Leading Parts on them? I would note, first of all, that the variations are often quite elusive. When listening to a sonata-form symphony we are often unaware of the subtle variations—unless we are trained in musical composition and have a musical score in front of us. Similarly, we are often unaware of variations in organizational patterns unless we have a "trained ear" or have organizational documents to review while observing this organization's operations.

First, we should turn our lens toward the obvious and seemingly trivial clues regarding variations. These are the surprises that occur

in the organization. Someone in a meeting makes an embarrassing statement. This statement may reveal an important (but rarely expressed) truth about the organization. Miscommunication occurs between two leaders. This "failure to communicate" may indicate that two or more contradictory truths reside in this organization. Perhaps leaders of two divisions in the organization make contradicting decisions. Conflicting actions are taken. The production department can't fulfill a commitment made by the marketing department. This might indicate that several contradictory goals guide decisions and actions taken in this organization.

Second, we look for emotionally charged events. Disrupted patterns will inevitably generate emotional responses: anxiety, disappointment, embarrassment, anger, hope. We can begin our investigation of variations by looking for emotional reactions that exceed or differ from those that occur regularly in the organization (the regular emotional reactions being part of the organization's pattern). Once we have identified the unique emotional reactions, we seek out the events that generated these reactions. A variation of the pattern often underlies (and has generated) this emotional reaction.

Third, we can focus on rogue events. As I have noted, these are the big, surprising incidents occurring in an organization. They often serve as the base for the powerful narratives that are to be found in all organizations. These are narratives about heroic actions, foolish events, and moments of courage or honesty. Stories are repeatedly conveyed about critical and unanticipated decisions made at crossroads in the organization's life. Tales are told about an underdog's success in the organization. This underdog could be an individual, team, or entire department. Stories regarding rogue events are repeatedly shared because they are important. Furthermore, the lessons to be learned from these events are easily forgotten. Dramatic reminders of these critical lessons are absent since these events rarely appear a second time.

An event is rogue if it is unexpected. Ironically, this event is often preceded by a set of predictable events. Lessons are to be learned using the Lens of Leading Parts. These lessons often involve this interaction between the predictable and the unpredictable. What are the responses of organizational leaders to unpredictability? Are they supportive of the disorderly creativity identified by Ralph Stacey?

Whether we are navigating a white-water environment, observing a flock of Nassim Taleb's Black Swans, or listening intently to a sonata, it is possible to transform VUCA-Plus volatility into a form and condition that is manageable and a source of creativity and vitality. It is in this transformation that we engage dynamic, polystatic feedback-based processes. Specifically, we apply the Lens of Leading Parts when identifying patterns and variations because leaders play a major role in establishing (and maintaining) patterns while appreciating and supporting variations.

We might also wish to look backward via the Lens of Primacy to see where the patterns come from and engage the Lens of Structure/Statics to see how elements other than leadership support and help to craft the pattern. The Lens of COP might also be applied when identifying how patterns align with the COP and how they support the ongoing but often unacknowledged engagement of COP in the organization.

Ultimately, the focus of a Lens of Essence on an organization's patterns and variations reveals the organization's leading parts and central operating principle. Patterns point us to the organization's structure and stability—its Statics. Dynamic variations operate alongside the opportunity for change. Statics and Dynamics work together, providing key balancing ingredients for an organization's agility and development. Through our Lenses of Essence we discover that Polystasis is alive and well in our organization!

From Uncertainty to Pattern Maintenance

Leadership certainly plays a major role in not just the establishment of patterns but also their maintenance. However, other powerful forces do an even bigger share of pattern maintenance—and often without their role being acknowledged. Engaging the Lens of Structure/Statics, one can discover several of the powerful forces that provide what Talcott Parsons (1955) identified as the latent pattern maintenance operating in any viable social system. Put in less elegant terms, this means using the lens to look for the Glue that holds a group of people together.

This maintenance also provides the Glue that keeps a polystatic process from breaking apart under the pressure of unmitigated VUCA-Plus. Just as the human body can be overwhelmed by the allostatic load of unremitting stress (McEwen and Stellar, 1993), organizations (and other social systems) can be overwhelmed by a heavy polystatic load encumbered by VUCA-Plus. Appraisals become wildly inconsistent and inaccurate. Adjustments occur willy-nilly. Collective angst pervades the thoughts, feelings and actions of those living and working in this system.

Glue and Load

Social systems find manageable appraisals and appropriate adjustments in polystatic baselines and predictions in pattern maintenance. The resulting polystatic actions will tend to conform to (or at least align with) the established patterns of the system—making life inside the system more predictable and less stressful (thus reducing allostatic load on its members). If the systemic glue provided by the patterns is insufficient—if the polystatic load is too great—then the system and its members are likely to freeze or move into a state of rapid oscillation ("dithering").

As Karl Pribram has suggested, this dithering might often set the stage (tipping point) for a major phase shift. A resultant process of "emergence" requires a "radically" new polystatic baseline,

psychosocial template, set of predictions, and actions. All of this is quite startling for everyone involved. It is a source of major stress (and increased allostatic load) for those who must adjust to this major, transformational shift.

A second level of learning (Argyris, 2001) must be engaged. When engaged during a major phase shift, this level of learning requires reflection on one's way of processing information. We must challenge our current way of thinking and solving problems. Increased allostatic load inevitably accompanies these demanding cognitive (and affective) adjustments, making Polystasis more difficult to achieve.

So where do we find the glue that enables us to live with and in a VUCA-Plus world filled with uncertainty? I would suggest two sources of this glue: tradition and culture. There is also a third source of glue that is just as powerful as tradition and culture—and is often a primary source of these traditions and culture. This source of glue is the social defense mechanism first introduced by Menzies Lyth and subsequently studied by other psychoanalytically inclined observers of human systems. All three sources are considered.

Traditions and Culture

We find organizational glue operating in such seemingly minor events as the celebration of birthdays or preparing a special dinner every Sunday in a family system. Within organizations and tribal systems, this glue can be found in celebrations of success (joining the Fortune 500 or returning from a successful hunt). It also can be found in the initiation rites that bring young people into maturity within a specific community. I would also introduce retirement parties that enable someone to leave an organization with recognition and honor. Each of these events embodies an expression of deep caring (generativity) (Bergquist and Quehl, 2023)

The glue that maintains patterns might be embedded in the traditions embraced and engaged by members of a community. As represented in *Fiddler on the Roof* (a musical about life in an early 20th-century Russian shtetl), the community is sustained and protected through the patterned engagement of rituals such as the Friday evening Shabbat meals. Glue is also found in the central role played by the rabbi and in the marriage ritual.

Even more broadly, the culture of a specific organization or society can play a major role in holding it together. This is especially true during times of collective angst, as found in many contemporary VUCA-saturated societies. It is through the culture of an organization that anxiety can be either accentuated or contained. It is also through the organization's culture that the bonding of its members can be engaged in the constructive reframing and redirecting of anxiety (Bergquist, 2020).

There is another benefit. A strong culture enables members of an organization to understand, overcome, or adapt to the real (or imagined) threats inherent in the anxiety. In other words, uncertainty and attendant anxiety are reduced and patterns are maintained when members of an organization collectively (culturally) create a narrative about the source of the uncertainty and anxiety—as well as the current impact of this uncertainty and anxiety on the organization.

Cultural narratives can also point out ways in which VUCA-Plus conditions (especially uncertainty) and attendant anxiety can be reduced. These ways are represented in the operating patterns of the organization that are reinforced by the ongoing repetition of this organization's narratives. Influence goes in both directions. Specific behavioral patterns provide content for the narratives: "It all began when XXX". "We have been doing it this way for a very long time. I think it is supposed to improve YYY or keep ZZZ in his place."

Proponents of appreciative inquiry (Cooperider and Whitney, 2005) push the role of organizational narrative one step further.

They suggest that a shift in an organization's narrative might be the most powerful way to bring about change and improvement in the functioning of an organization. I would add to this appreciative insight. Narratives hold this power because they provide continuity and guidance regarding the pathway to change. This power, in turn, resides in the intimate relationships between narrative and organizational culture.

Edgar Schein (1999) suggests that an organizational culture is built on the narratives of past successes. Appreciative Inquiry practitioners would agree. They would suggest that this narrative should focus on an organization's real (not imagined) strengths and successes. The continuity and guidance provided by narrative and culture, in turn, is energized by the close three-way relationship existing between narrative, culture, and anxiety. A lens of Structure/Statics should focus on all three of these elements and their interdependence.

As a psychoanalytically oriented observer of organizational functioning in British health care systems, Isabel Menzies Lyth (1967/1988) commented on the fundamental interplay between the containment of anxiety and the formation of organizational narratives and culture. She carefully and persuasively documented ways in which nurses in an English hospital cope with the anxiety that is inevitably associated with issues of health, life, and death. Menzies Lyth observes how the narratives and culture of the nurses' hospital ameliorate or at least protect these nurses from pervasive anxiety. An organization's culture is the primary vehicle for addressing anxiety and stress.

Somehow, an organization that operates in an anxiety-producing climate of VUCA-Plus must discover or construct a culture-based buffer that both isolates (contains) the anxiety and addresses the realistic, daily needs of its employees. Some organizational theorists and researchers such as Deal and Kennedy (2000) as well as Edgar Schein (1992; 1999) have suggested that the rituals, routines, stories, and norms (implicit values) of the organization

help members of the organization manage anxiety inside the organization. It is important to note that these rituals, routines, stories, and norms are not a random assortment of activities. Rather, they cluster together and form a single, coherent pattern in the organization. They create meaning and contain anxiety.

Menzies Lyth specifically suggested that anxiety gets addressed on a daily basis through cultural structures and processes that operate in an organization. Menzies-Lyth labels these as "social defense systems." They are the patterns of interpersonal and group relationships that exist in the organization. Menzies Lyth's observations have been reaffirmed in many other organizational settings.

I have written about social defense systems operating in corporations (Bergquist, and Brock, 2008) and in post-secondary educational institutions (Bergquist, 1993a; Bergquist and Pawlak, 2008). Like Menzie Lyth, I have also written about these systems operating in healthcare systems (Bergquist, Guest and Rooney, 2004; Fish and Bergquist, 2024). Anxiety is to be found in most contemporary organizations—for they operate in a VUCA-Plus world. Efforts to reduce this anxiety are of prominent importance.

Menzies Lyth goes one step further. She suggests that healthcare organizations are primarily in the business of reducing anxiety associated with the organization's healthcare services. All other daily functions of the organization are secondary to this anxiety-reduction function. Given the provision of this critical function, the organization's culture is highly resistant to change. The existing social defense systems provide this resistance.

At the same time, organizational culture plays a central role in maintaining the patterns of the organization. Mutual reinforcement of the organization's current way of operating is prevalent. Culture supports the social defense system. The social defense system supports the culture. Pattern maintenance exists precisely because change directly threatens the informal social defense system that has been established in the organization. This

system helps those working in the organization and those being served by the organization confront and make sense of the anxiety inherent in the organization's operations. No wonder this system is being protected.

Stories are told of purposes and values that undergird the organization's way of being (to borrow Peter Vaill's term). It is in these stories that workers and patients find reassurance and guidance. We find that enduring narratives and the culture of a healthcare organization operate as its ground anchor. They should not be dismissed or ignored.

On the other hand, narrative and culture can facilitate change if needed. They can serve as surface anchors that shift with the tide and wind. This capacity for change is present if the existing culture is saturated with appreciation. Narratives of success in an appreciative culture can provide guidance in plotting a journey of change (Cooperrider and Whitney,2005).

Furthermore, as Edgar Schein (1999) has noted, the culture of an organization is often the residue of the organization's success in confronting varying anxiety-producing conditions in the world. Continuing success depends on the extent to which an organization is adaptive to its' pervasive anxiety.

This means that organizations' narratives must be aligned with the processes of polystatic adaptation and organizational learning. While the existing culture of this organization must be reinforced and deepened, it must operate as a living, polystasis-driven system that adjusts to shifting tides and unexpected winds. It is in this way that organizational culture and organizational narratives produce the most effective solutions for addressing the anxiety and sources of anxiety facing the organization.

From Complexity to Emergent Self-Organization

Scott Page is one of the major guides through the world of complex systems. I have already introduced an important distinction Scott Page and John Miller have drawn between complicated and complex systems. Unlike complicated systems, complex systems not only contain many parts. They also contain many parts that are interwoven with one another (Miller and Page, 2007, p. 9): "While complex systems can be fragile, they can also exhibit an unusual degree of robustness to less radical changes in their component parts. The behavior of many complex systems emerges from the activities of lower-level components." Typically, this emergence results from a powerful organizing force that can overcome diverse changes occurring at the lower-level components. In this interweaving, we find the Lens of Structure/Statics being applied to a system—for the interweaving yields a structure that holds the system together and enables it to be agile and adaptive.

Self-Organizing

Ilya Prigogine (1984) is one of the earliest guides to the world of complex systems. He won a Nobel Prize through observation of adaptive processes in complex systems. He considered complex, adaptive systems to be "self-organizing." There is no central control unit in these systems. Much as in the case of flocking birds and swarming fish, there is no one lead bird or fish; rather, there is an emergent interdependence of all members of the flock of birds or school of fish.

The actions taken by any one member of the system (be it an organization, flock, or school) are strongly influenced by actions taken by the member next to it. This "neighbor" effect is powerful and strongly influences the dynamics of most biological systems (including human systems). Our establishment of polystatic baselines, psychosocial templates, and predictions is strongly

influenced by the baselines, templates, and predictions established by neighbors. It is not only the leading part of a system that can provide direction. In recent years, an analytic tool called Agent-Based Modeling (Wilensky and Rand, 2015) has emerged based primarily on examining this neighborhood effect.

There are many benefits associated with the neighboring effect. First, there is no need for designating or empowering a leader. This saves time and resources. Second, there is the potential for greater agility. Influence and information flow through the system, unimpeded by formal hierarchy or chains of command. I bring in several concepts introduced in our first chapter on essentials when considering several other important benefits of self-organization and the neighborhood effect. These concepts concern the process of Allostasis as identified by Peter Sterling (2020) and the delay functions that System dynamic theorists such as Donella Meadows (2008) find operating in all systems.

When we rely on information received from our neighbor, the delay in transmission of this information is much shorter than if it comes from a more distant source (such as a leadership command center). This is a critical point to keep in mind when adjusting the spatial scope of a Structural/Static lens. Furthermore, if allostasis rather than homeostasis is operating in most dynamic systems—as we considered in the chapters on Essentials—then the ability to predict what is about to occur is critical in the ongoing adjustment of each system member to an ever-shifting environment.

The neighborhood effect greatly aids this predictive capacity, for the predictive power of any one member of the system is much greater if it is predicting the behavior of its neighbor (proximal prediction) than if it is seeking to predict the behavior of some distant entity (be it a leader or some other member of the system) (distal prediction).

This interdependence is deep. We grow to appreciate it when using a Structural/Static lens. I would go so far as to propose that interdependence defines the Essence of complex, adaptive systems.

Miller and Page (2007, p. 7) put it this way: "We need to find those features of the world where the details do not matter, where large equivalence classes of structure, action, and so on lead to a deep sameness of being."

This search for a "sameness of being" in a system serves an important function. It moves us from the bewildering challenge of understanding complexity to a clear and useful appreciation for the transformation of complexity into self-organization. In such a system, we lead by following. We coach rather than control or rescue (Emerald and Lanphear, 2015). We select one of the lenses of Essence that enables us to illuminate, clarify, and transform the challenges of our VUCA-Plus world. Alternatively, we can distort and deny by escaping into the house of mirrors featured in the wonderland of Serenity (SC²).

Self-Authoring

The search for "sameness of being" is not easy. As Robert Kegan (1994) prophetically suggested many years ago, we are often "over our heads" when addressing the complexity of contemporary life. We address the complexity by engaging in what Kegan calls third-order consciousness. First-order consciousness is found primarily among children and adolescents. I suspect that first-order consciousness is also commonly found among those living in the wonderland of Serenity.

The second order is found among adults trying to cope with the challenges of VUCA-Plus primarily by "hunkering down" and attempting merely to survive. While second-order consciousness is more adaptive than third-order consciousness when engaged in ordinary day-to-day life in most mid-21st-century societies, it doesn't work when addressing the critical challenges of complexity—as well as the other five conditions of VUCA-Plus.

A fourth order of consciousness enables one to construct one's own version of reality (self-authoring). This version is constructed within the context of one's relationship with other people

(collaborative-authoring). While those living in Serenity (SC²+) live in a distorted world that those in authority or with power have constructed, those seeking Essence find a way to "self-organize" their way of being in the world that is free of external, hierarchical constraints. While they may seek help from other people they trust to collaboratively author, this collaboration is of their choosing rather than being ordered by anyone. A major challenge appears. A fourth order of consciousness is required for this self or collective authoring to occur.

Fourth-order consciousness, according to Kegan (1994, p. 96) "amounts to the continuous creating and recreating of roles rather than just the faithful adherence to the demands within them." Those who embrace a fourth order of consciousness take full responsibility for their construction and recognize that other constructions are equally valid. Borrowing from the typology used by William Perry (1970), these folks recognize the relativism inherent in all versions of reality yet find that they can (and must) commit to one construction of this reality. They find the Essence of reality for themselves and allow this Essence to guide their actions in a dynamic, polystatic-based manner—with the help of one or more of the Lenses of Essence.

It should be noted that Kegan introduces a fifth order of consciousness—which he suggests is rarely attained. This order involves the recognition of broader patterns and interconnections among people and systems (the approach to Essence found in our analysis of the move from Volatility to Patterns). It should also be noted that Kegan (1994, pp. 100-101) does not envision people living all the time in fourth-order (let alone fifth-order) consciousness. He uses the analogy of learning to drive a car using a stick-shift versus learning only to drive a car with automatic transmission.

Some people can move easily between stick-shift and automatic transmission cars. Others are constrained by their failure to learn how to shift gears themselves. Similarly, those who can engage in fourth (or fifth) order consciousness can shift back to third order

for daily living. Those "stuck" in third-order will find themselves "over their head" when confronted with VUCA-Plus issues. They throw away all of these Lenses of Essence (if they ever had any) and look for a rabbit hole. Its entrance into a wonderland of Serenity (SC^2) will be tempting for those unable (or unwilling) to engage a fourth-order consciousness that is self-authoring and relational (collaborative-authoring).

From Ambiguity to Illumination

Ambiguity is perhaps best portrayed as a visual display. We pull the COP Lens out of the drawer hoping it will provide clarity and illumination. What we see is ambiguous because it is "cluttered" with many things. Many facts and propositions fill the COP page. Miller and Page declare that what we see is complicated. If it were complex, the facts and propositions could eventually be distilled, sequenced, or structured as a manageable polarity. Our Lens of Structure/Statics can be used when things are complex—but not when they are complicated.

What we see is more of a mess than a problem or dilemma. It is ambiguous rather than either volatile or uncertain. There is insufficient clarity to know what will surprise us or leave us unprepared to make a prediction. Complex systems offer redundancy and interconnectivity. They provide something to "see." There has to be some "thing" (event, person, outcome) that surprises us or remains elusive. Complicated systems don't offer us this "something."

Our view through the COP lens might be even more challenging when what we see is hazy. It is hard to make out the details through the fog (or distortion in our lens). Ambiguity exists because the facts are hard to ascertain (certainty is missing). Propositions are hard to formulate and easily become confusing or contradictory. Our view is also often hazy because everything is intertwined. The condition of complexity compounds complication.

How do we engage and overcome cluttered and hazy ambiguity? The lure of Serenity (SC²+) would lead us to eliminate the clutter or haziness by simplifying and adopting a closed, siloed perspective. Simplification leaves us with only one thing upon which to focus (thus blinding ourselves to many important factors). Alternatively, we leave the scene and look for conditions that are neither complicated nor hazy. We find a rabbit hole down which we can leap so we might enter a wonderland of fake news, alternative facts, and simple, bulleted analyses. We avoid the house of mirrors, choosing instead to join a tea party where everyone is happy and dishonest.

We have another option. We can borrow the Illuminating lens from our collection of Essential lenses. The Illuminating lens enables us to more fully understand and appreciate Essence as it is found even in an ambiguous condition. As frequently mentioned, we engage the processes of reflection and slow thinking. We employ these processes to discern which parts of the complicated system can and cannot be controlled.

We become curious about (rather than trying to escape) the challenging view our lens is affording us. We view the task of understanding and appreciating a complicated condition as a teachable moment. This learning-oriented perspective allows us to set polystatic baselines and make polystatic predictions even in a cluttered or hazy environment. As a variant on the T.O.T.E. model, we test, operate, learn, operate, test, learn, operate, and so on. We continue to learn from our experiences—as John Dewey and Peter Vaill have suggested--and eventually exit.

To illustrate (and illuminate) this perspective, I turn to an analogy I have often presented when teaching about or writing about the process of organizational consulting and coaching. The analogy concerns a ship entering a body of water (such as the San Francisco Bay) that must confront shifting currents and tides.

These currents and tides can be disruptive. Furthermore, fog might have settled in (often the case with the San Francisco Bay). This

makes it hard for the captain and crew to see in front of them. The illuminating perspective involves finding (or creating) a lighthouse that provides information regarding the complicated and often complex conditions in which the captain and crew find themselves. A strong light is emitted that pierces the haze. The lighthouse might indicate that it sits on land (to be avoided). It also can serve as a reference point when identifying a safe channel for travel to an appropriate berth.

One of the primary responsibilities of the ship's captain is to bring the ship safely to the entrance of the harbor (in this case the San Francisco Bay). At this point, the captain might bring the vessel to a designated berth themselves (Model I). Alternatively, they delegate control to a tugboat captain (Model II) or harbor pilot (Model III). There is a fourth option. The captain takes out their Lens of Illumination and looks for relevant information. The captain retains control of the ship but seeks guidance from signals emitted by the harbor lighthouse (Model IV).

Which options should be chosen for safe travel to the designated berth?

Sole Authority (Model I)

The first option is for the ship's captain to "go it alone." After all, between harbors, the ship's captain is in charge. As the captain of an organization or captain of one unit in an organization, a leader can use position power, or reward and punishment power to determine the direction of or guide the implementation of a specific change in the organization or the life of a specific person. While there is considerable ambiguity in the world of this sole leader—and many currents and tidal changes for the ship's captain to navigate—the ship's captain retains control and learns alone from the mistakes that inevitably occur (in this turbulent VUCA-Plus world).

This first approach to ambiguity begins with the assumption that one should, as a leader, take immediate and primary responsibility

for any change that is to take place in the organization's life. One changes things by doing it himself or herself, rather than by somehow convincing others that they should implement it.

This "Go It Alone" (Model One) practitioner is an administrator, an implementor, or an activist. The best thing one can do as a Model I leader is to act decisively and courageously when faced with ambiguity. One can learn from one's mistakes "along the way" and adjust things as needed (the polystatic process). This is learning by doing. This is the entrepreneurial "American Way" in full display.

Unfortunately, this type of activist learning is often done in isolation (a version of dysfunctional American individualism). One works alone on the frontier and is not exposed to the challenging and corrective feedback other people can offer. Those who learn alone are vulnerable to assumptions that are untested and self-validating. Thinking tends to be fast and filled with distorting "heuristics" (such as doing what I have done before or doing what everyone else is doing) (Kahneman, 2013).

Furthermore, if learning does occur, it tends to be first-level (doing more of or less of what I am already doing) rather than second-level (doing something different) (Argyris, 2001). The Model leader tries harder, puts in more hours at work, and spends more time worrying about the fate of their organization. However, they are still doing the same thing and eliciting the same outcomes.

Model One leadership is often engaged when an organization is in a crisis mode—which is common in a VUCA-Plus world. Leaders of the organization serve as "firefighters" and quickly put out the fire and resolve the crisis. Unfortunately, the organization usually returns to its previous crisis state, regardless of the wisdom and skill of the Model One leader, for the organization has not increased its capacity to identify and solve problems before these become crises. A vicious cycle of crisis and dependency sets in and is hard to break. Crisis management prevails.

Delegated Authority (Model II)

The captain turns control of the ship over to a tugboat captain. While not having direct control over the vessel, as it is being guided into a harbor berth, the tugboat captain does use the energy and other resources of their own boat to move the ship into or out of the berth. The tugboat captain in some sense "persuades" the ship's captain that it is appropriate for their tugboat to take control of the vessel because they (the tugboat captain) have expertise (knowledge of the harbor).

The ship's captain does not (in most instances) have to provide any energy or other resources to move the boat into its designated berth. All of the power needed to bring about the change (safe movement of the ship) is found initially in the tugboat captain and is transferred back to the ship captain when the vessel arrives at the berth.

Similarly, the leader of an organization typically delegates authority and responsibility to someone in their organization to handle the ambiguity by providing resources (money, time, equipment) that are needed to achieve the desired goal (arriving at the "berth"). However, sufficient resources are rarely enough if there is considerable ambiguity, for these are often the wrong resources or inappropriate goals.

As in the case of Model I, Model II learning usually takes place in isolation. This learning is rapid (fast thinking) and occurs at the first level. The one major difference is that the ship's captain is not making the mistakes, nor seeking to learn from their mistakes. It is the person to whom control was delegated that makes the mistakes. This makes accompanying stress and anxiety much greater.

There is a growing temptation to think fast and engage in first-order learning. It is a matter of adjusting rather than changing. Alternatively, the Model II leader (tugboat captain) can

play it safe and declare that it was "not their fault" that the ship failed to arrive at the appropriate dock. The third option is to fire the tugboat captain or choose a different tugboat company the next time assistance is needed in navigating this specific body of water. In an organizational setting, we can always fire a contracted employee or an outside consultant if a venture fails.

Temporary Authority (Model III)

Under conditions of ambiguity, a leader can temporarily step back (or step down) and ask someone else to take control. This person is better prepared to navigate the haze or find an appropriate way around the ambiguity. Our nautical analogy provides further clarification regarding the Model Three function. In directing a ship into or out of a berth, a Harbor Pilot often takes direct, temporary control of the vessel when moving it safely through the harbor. The power or energy needed for this change (the ship's movement) resides in the "on-board" leadership provided by the harbor pilot rather than in the power and energy of the tugboat (which resides exterior to the ship).

As in the case of Model I, the authority structure remains unchanged, but a new person (harbor pilot) temporarily assumes this authority. Learning is still likely to occur in isolation. Temporary Model III leaders (like the Model II tugboat captain) will feel the stress and anxiety of monitored performance. They ultimately have little lasting authority and can easily be booted. Everything has to work the first time. In most cases, there is no learning from mistakes. They have no time or space for either slow thinking or second-level change.

A colleague of mine told me about her father. He served as a harbor pilot working with ships entering the San Francisco Bay. There was no apparent ambiguity for him, for her father was well-acquainted with all of the currents and tides. He could see through the notable San Francisco fog. Unfortunately, not everyone has a harbor pilot to whom they can turn for guidance regarding the ambiguity they face. Furthermore, caution is required.

Unfortunately, many people may declare that they are harbor pilots but instead represent a world of distorted Serenity. The "legitimate" harbor pilot often helps the ship captain learn something about the harbor while arriving safely at the berth. While the captain will probably still need to bring in the harbor pilot the next time they arrive at this location, they can serve more as a co-pilot since they are more knowledgeable than the harbor pilot about their ship. Collaborative engagement might benefit everyone.

When we generalize beyond the San Francisco Bay, we find that the roles played by the temporary Model III leader are varied: negotiator, trainer, facilitator, diagnostician, expert, and (less frequently) judge. Whereas Model I and II leaders must have access to power and resources, the temporary Model III must know about the ambiguous environment in which the organization is operating (e.g. full "knowledge" about the San Francisco Bay). They must also possess superior interpersonal skills, especially when working with the leader(s) who brought them in.

Illuminating Authority (Model IV)

To return once more to our nautical analogy, Model IV leadership is provided by a captain using a Lens of Illumination. A lighthouse provides the needed information. The captain and crew use this information to guide the ship safely into or out of the harbor. Control of the vessel resides with the captain and crew. Model IV is all about free will and responsibility. Essence is contained in the light emitted by the lighthouse.

There is a single source of light. One point of reference is provided. The captain and crew have only to attend to, appreciate, and act upon information emitted by the light. The ship may crash on the proverbial rocks if information beamed from the lighthouse is ignored. Responsibility for this crash resides with the captain and crew – provided that the lighthouse issues valid and useful information (Argyris, 1970).

More generally, all polystatic processes require the information used when setting the baseline and directing the predictions to be accurate (valid). The triangulation process that I previously introduced is directly applicable here. The Information must also be relevant to predictions and decisions being made (useful). Relevance is often an elusive matter for it is always tempting to make "relevant" that which can be measured rather than that which is truly useful (but difficult to measure). We can refresh the lesson to be learned from the case of lost keys and the inappropriate and unsuccessful search for these keys by the lamppost.

Neither power nor interpersonal skills are of primary importance to the Model IV source of guidance and information. This type of leadership depends on the skills of those working in an organization to generate and integrate information. The lens of Illumination is used extensively. The roles played by those doing institutional research and strategic planning are critical. Computer-based tools that enable the synthesis of abundant sources and types of information are required. When used appropriately, Artificial Intelligence can be of valuable assistance. Most importantly, the four key questions regarding Essence that I noted before have to be addressed based on the valid information available—and information must come from multiple sources using multiple measures.

It is in the fourth model that the Lens of Illumination can be fully and effectively deployed. Valid and useful learning is based on information from at least three sources using at least three measurement tools. This is a process of *Triangulation.* The sources might come from inside one's organization as well as outside. Information might be gathered from those creating a product or providing a service and those using the product or receiving the service. At least three sources are used because at least two are likely to provide similar information, while the third source (even if yielding differing information) can further enrich the insights to be gained.

The triangulation of methods produces a similar outcome. Valid information is likely to come from at least two of the methods engaged in a triangulation process. Concurrent multi-method information helps to establish validity. However, rich insights can be derived from diverse (nonconcurrent) information from one or more methods.

The methods used might include collecting existing documents (e.g., sales records, profit and loss statements), interviews, direct observation of the work being done, and/or questionnaires (e.g., a consumer satisfaction survey, employee morale inventory). A second level of methods might also be engaged. These include observation of the initial reactions to information generated by the other methods and from diverse sources. For instance, a reaction-based questionnaire might be distributed following an initial report of results from a project review.

Triangulation and stability go hand-in-hand. Triangular structures reside at the heart of Statics. These structures provide stability, whether one is constructing a bridge or a roof. Similarly, the triangulation of sources and methods provides stability and credibility when leaders of an organization are illuminating the way forward. Returning to our nautical analogy, we can use triangulation when constructing a lighthouse to guide a ship/organization. Multiple methods and sources in generating information are critical for a captain/leader when guiding a ship to its designated berth (desired outcome).

Midst ambiguity—the cluttering and swirling of currents and tides, and the haziness of fog—it is with the illuminating information from multiple sources using multiple methods that members of an organization can best engage in collaborative learning. Self-authoring and collaborative-authoring find a welcoming home in a setting filled with valid and useful information coming from multiple sources and generated by multiple methods.

In conjunction with the Lenses of Essence, a Lens of Illumination enables the leaders and other members of an organization to make

successful decisions regarding their organization's performance in the past and potential future. Ships can reach their San Francisco Bay berth even on a foggy, wind-swept day . . .

Conclusions

When we approach Essence, there is inevitably a sense of Awe – and a touch of mystery. We know intuitively that we have identified, discovered (perhaps even helped to invent) something very special. This is the "elixir" or distillation of everything unique and of value in this system. This is the loadstone for the establishment of a viable polystatic process. We must keep all of this in mind (and heart) when we encounter, work, and live in a turbulent world often filled with contradictions.

We must tightly hold Essence, for our attention to Essence can easily be lost on a stormy (whitewater) sea with colliding (contradictory) currents and swirling winds. With Essence secure in our Head and Heart, we turn to turbulence and contradiction in Chapter Seven—the final two conditions of VUCA-Plus.

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Chapter Seven

Essence II: Engagement and Integration

In this chapter, I continue to suggest tactics and strategies that provide a viable alternative to Serenity (SC²+) as a way to cope with pressing VUCA-Plus issues. Specifically, I focus on ways turbulence can be transformed into engagement and contradiction can be transformed into integration.

We find the Essence needed to guide us through a white water world filled with contradictions. We discover transformative strategies of engagement and integration. We realize that Essence helps us identify the nature of changes (or non-changes) to make in our life and in the setting where we live and work. Before considering these transformations, I introduce specific perspectives concerning the nature of Change brought by four facets of Essence. Change is an important element in any transformation.

The Facets of Essence

As a Lens through which one can view their world, Essence comes with four facets. Each of these facets provides a viewpoint regarding Change.

Facet One: Zero-Order Essence

From the viewpoint offered through this facet, one finds that Essence exists in our current world. We are in "heaven" right now and need not change anything. We discover our *Bliss*. Facet One leads us to believe that we should be in the business of preserving what already exists. "Heaven on earth" is to be found in the appreciation of that which already exists and that which we have already accomplished.

Facet Two: First-Order Essence

We can perceive the Essence of what we specifically *Desire* at a specific point in time. Action is taken because we know what we want. First-order change is engaged on behalf of this Essence. This facet typically provides a perspective regarding personal transitions. We can lean into and learn into the future when viewing the world through this facet.

Facet Three: Second-Order Essence

We adjust our view of Essence. We focus on that which is *Emergent*. We recognize that Essence resides beyond or beneath what we initially perceived as being the Essence of what we want in life. A new perspective is emerging for us. We engage second-order change on behalf of this second-order Essence. We are involved in personal transformations rather than momentary transitions (Mezirow, 1991).

Facet Four: Third-Order Essence

When viewing our world through the fourth facet, we come to recognize that the Essence of what we desire requires that the system in which we are now operating must itself be *Re-formed*. We must "re-program our environment" if we wish to be successful in achieving that which is the Essence of a good life. We must build (or re-build) our own Jerusalem if we wish to dwell in heaven. Third-order change is required.

Facet four concerns systemic transformation. It concerns revolution (rather than evolution). Existing paradigms are challenged. This radical version of Essence is rarely found in large, enduring systems. Rather, this form of Essence is to be found in temporary systems that provide Sanctuary. These are short-term (though perhaps reoccurring) systems in which new perspectives and practices can be introduced and tested immediately (Miles, 1964). Alternative psychosocial templates can be explored. Polystatic processes are in full operation. The dynamic feedback

process (T.O.T.E.) introduced by Miller, Galanter, and Pribram (1960) can be immediately engaged in this safe, learning-ful environment.

Given this framework, I am ready to consider the VUCA-Polus conditions most conducive to varying perspectives on Change. These are the conditions of Turbulence and Contradiction.

From Turbulence to Engagement

Turbulence is perhaps the most visceral of the six VUCA-Plus conditions. Turbulence is immediately experienced in the swirl of events to which we must adjust every day. We listen to the news in the morning and recognize that our world will tilt a bit in some new direction. We might even try to avoid stress elicited by the morning news. We turn off the Cable news and eat our breakfast in silence.

However, we encounter other folks during the day who "fill us in on what has occurred." Many of us are living in urban or suburban areas. We commute to work. Turbulence is found in the "crazy" or "stupid" or "insensitive" driving behavior of those we "meet" on the highway. Even if we work from home, there are always changes to be made in our schedule, people we meet whom we don't know well or perhaps don't even trust.

There is no daily routine of walking out to the barn so that we might milk the cow. There is no country store where we go in the late morning to pick up some food or supplies and where we spend time with those neighbors we have known for many years. After work, it is the evening commute, perhaps soccer practice—and the evening news. Dinner is a bit late, and we spend time not just eating the microwave dinner but also hearing about what happened in the unpredictable lives of other family members. Perhaps an evening movie on Netflix (so many movies to pick from) and a return to the sanctuary of sleep.

This is our immediate world of turbulence. It is demanding of Change. But which of the four Facets do we select? The Leading Part Lens of Essence is held up to this white-water world so that we

might lead. So that we might find a way to engage this world in a thoughtful, minimally stressful manner. This lens enables us to make an appropriate decision regarding how to change (or whether to change) in preparation for turbulence or while navigating the turbulence.

Specifically, successful engagement with a white-water world requires both centering and balancing. This engagement is best performed in a kayak that is equipped with a double-bladed paddle. The Leading Part Lens points us to this type of vehicle and paddle for navigating our lives as leaders. I spend a bit of time exploring the task of centering and the task of balancing.

Centering

As a concept and strategy to be found in a wide range of practices— from pottery to yoga—centering concerns the search for a ground. It is a search for Essence--a point of orientation, a desired outcome. The world is typically viewed through the zero-order facet. This is the state of Singularity described in my previous chapter on Essence. There is one center. It doesn't change. Everything else might be shifting, but the center remains secure and stable.

One must find this center when creating a properly shaped vase or seeking inner peace. While venturing down a turbulent stream in a kayak, one's weight must remain in the kayak's center. While the paddler will lean to the right or left when dipping their paddle into the water, they must resist shifting their weight to either side of the kayak.

At a more metaphoric level, centering oneself in a venue (such as one's personal life or organization) while navigating a white-water environment requires clarity regarding values and priorities. We might look back to Socrates' challenge that we question the very purpose of our being: "How should we live?" More recently, we can point to Paul Tillich's (1957/2009) suggestion that an "ultimate concern" should always reside at the center of one's choices in life— especially when many choices are made in an often-chaotic white-

water environment. As I noted previously, it is in our engagement of this ultimate concern that we find the courage to reenter or remain on the white-water river of VUCA-Plus

While Peter Vaill (1996, p. 56) identifies seven "secular" modes of learning related to navigating the white-water world, he eventually turns to the spiritual core required to provide what I am calling the "centering" of the kayak. When reflecting on Vaill's approach to spirituality, it should first be noted that he is not referring to specific religious dogma. Rather, he is describing a process that "centers" on a search for meaning (not unlike Tillich's ultimate concern). According to Vaill (1996, p. 180):

> Genuine spirituality . . . is the willingness to enter into a process of dialogue about meaning, within oneself and with others; to stay with it over a period of time; and to remember that so far, no one has found the compelling once-and-for-all answer that warrants enforced universal adherence, the doctrines of several world religions notwithstanding. Rather than debate the absolutes of who is right, we all need to learn to think and communicate more theologically—something, however, that is probably not presently contemplated for any known M.B.A. curriculum or corporate management development program.

The search for meaning resides in an ongoing search for and refinement of life purposes in one's own life and the mission of one's organization. Concerning our centering on a kayak, a spiritual orientation would be manifest in our ongoing integration of a solid physical positioning at the bottom of the kayak with a sustained (and sometimes altered) focus on the reasons for venturing onto the white-water river. We look down to center ourselves and prepare for the next turn in the river while envisioning desired outcomes further down the river.

Vaill (1996, p. 182) offers this spiritual orientation (and the courage attendant to this orientation) when turning to the perspectives of Paul Tillich:

> . . . how do we know that there is something to search for, that there is learning available? There have been many answers and interpretations over the millennia. To me, one of the most persuasive is Paul Tillich's, for he was concerned with precisely the conditions of modern life that make up permanent white water. In his extraordinary meditation on the spiritual significance of anxiety and meaninglessness, Th*e Courage to Be*, Tillich (1952/2000) came to what I regard as a most heartening conclusion. The struggle with the unthinkability of the modem condition, the willingness to keep getting back in the boat and shooting the next set of rapids, is fundamentally an act of spiritual affirmation.

At this point, Vaill (1996, p. 182) specifically quotes Tillich:

> [Tillich proposes that] courage participates in the self-affirmation of being itself, it participates in the power of being which prevails against nonbeing.... Man is not necessarily aware of this source. In situations of cynicism and indifference he is not aware of it. But it works in him as long as he has the courage to take his anxiety upon himself. In the act of the courage to be the power of being is effective in us, whether we recognize it or not.

Vaill (1996, p. 182) drills down to an ontological Essence (the ground of being) in his continuing quote from Tillich's *Courage to Be*:

> Every act of courage is a manifestation of the ground of being, however questionable the content of the act may be. The content may hide or distort true being, the courage in it reveals true being. Not arguments but the courage to be reveals the nature of being itself. By affirming our being we

participate in the self-affirmation of being-itself. There are no valid arguments for the "existence" of God, but there are acts of courage in which we affirm the power of being, whether we know it or not. If we know it, we accept acceptance consciously. If we do not know it, we nevertheless accept it and participate in it. And in our acceptance of that which we do not know the power of being is manifest in us. Courage has revealing power, the courage to be is the key to being-itself. [Tillich, 1952, p. 181]

In his later work, Vaill focused on the role of leader as someone who encourages other people. Vaill would break apart the word en-courage-ment and noted that at the heart of the matter is *Courage*. A leading part Lens provides guidance regarding encouragement while bringing together the concepts of centering and courage. We are free and enabled to be courageous and take risks when we find firm ground and have established the Essence of our life purpose. We can enter the world of white water and provide leadership with a clear, centered sense of why we have dared to push off from the shore in our kayak. It is about confidence in one's competencies and clarity in one's purpose. We are centered.

Balancing

There is always the immediate challenge of stability when we step into our kayak. The kayak moves back and forth as we impose our weight. Immediately, we must find balance and our center as we push off from the shore. A second-order facet is required, for things are shifting back and forth. Third-order facets might even be needed if the environment one is entering is particularly turbulent. We enter the whitewater world. Some first-order adjustments must be made as we travel down the turbulent river.

This world of white-water turbulence is highly diverse. There is rapidly moving water, water that is moving in a circle, water that is not moving at all, and water that is moving in a chaotic manner (Bergquist, Sandstrom, and Mura, 2023). This is no longer the Essence of Singularity. Rather, it is the Essence of Diversity I

described previously. There is no better place to witness this Essence of Diversity than in a turbulent, white-water stream. In such an environment, one must find one's balance and one's center, especially when seeking to lead in this VUCA-Plus environment.

Fortunately, a kayak is well-designed and well-equipped to handle this balancing process. A kayak paddle is required with blades on each end (unlike a canoe paddle with a blade only on one end). When settled in the kayak, we shift the paddle from one side of the kayak to the other side, dipping it into the water and pushing either forward or sideways. Movement from the kayak's left side to its right side is not done quickly. This would be a form of disruptive "dithering." Rather the movement from side to side is done in a measured way that corrects not only the direction of the kayak (which is being shoved around by the white water) but also the angle of the kayak (shifting from right to left).

This balancing act can become part of our daily lives as leaders. Rather than turning off the news, we spend a minute considering how both sides of an issue offer insights into our current state of affairs. Even if one of the sides offers us only insights into the fears and frustrations experienced by certain members of our society, these insights are important as we interact with these fearful folks at work (and even on the highway). We might even engage some first-order adjustments (second facet) in our perspective regarding that "crazy" driver who just switched lanes in front of us. After all, we too have been switching lanes enabling us to arrive at work a couple of minutes earlier (or at least feel a bit more in control when facing the traffic "mess").

There is also the matter of "domestic" leadership. The moments when we are dashing off to soccer practice for our kids can be used to reflect on the growth and development of our kids. We can focus on the joy or relaxing at the soccer match. We simply enjoy watching young people engage in healthy and constructive activities. We can do some zero-order "appreciation" of family life. The microwave dinner might be offset by a delicious salad we

picked up on the way home, while the movie could be an "old-timer" that brings us back to a somewhat less hectic time in our lives. These are simple, first-order adjustments we can make every day. It is all about balance—shifting back and forth between two or more perspectives, priorities, or practices.

At a "deeper" level, we see the balancing act operating at a fundamental and critical level in our psyche. The fourth Lens of Essence (requiring third-order perspectives) is often operating. We are swept back and forth in our lifelong development between two forces. There is a push toward greater independence and individual identity. There is a counter-push toward greater dependence and collective identity (Kegan, 1982). The paddler reaches over the port side of the kayak for agency and accomplishment. They then turn toward the starboard side to correct for communion and companionship (Bakan,1966).

We find balance in the "punch" and "counterpunch" of our ongoing swing between a life filled with action and a life filled with observation and contemplation. In *The Active Life*, Parker Palmer (1990, p. 2) writes about this balancing act. He addresses the issue of balancing vs. centering while leading in a white-water world. He noted that in focusing only on centering we can too easily remain in a state of contemplation (and in-action): "Contemporary images of what it means to be spiritual tend to value the inward search over the outward act, silence over sound, solitude over interaction, centeredness and quietude . . . over engagement and animation and struggle."

We must balance ourselves when we engage the world as a leader. We push and pull in one direction, and an opposite force surfaces. Our Leading Part Lens points us in a direction that leads to learning. We might again bring our Essential Lens of Illumination out of the drawer. As Parker Palmer (1990, p. 17) observes, "When we act, the world acts back, and we and the world are co-created." The first half of Palmer's observation offers us the challenge, while the second half offers the desirable outcome. We find balance and

integrative co-creation in the engagement back and forth with our turbulent world around us. It is in this balance and co-creation that we learn new things and find a new "way of being." Leadership meets illumination.

Entering white water in a kayak is always a risky business. It is "safer" to remain on the shore and simply marvel at the complexity (and beauty) of movement in the river. We become observers and even contemplative observers of nature's "wonderfulness." But we have not stepped into this river or into a kayak that enables us to travel safely on the river. We have avoided the opportunity to make a difference in our world. Palmer (1990, p. 23) suggests that "there is an intimate link between our capacity for risk-taking and our commitment to learning and growing."

In alignment with Argyris and Schön (1978), Palmer notes the likelihood that mistakes will be made. And failures will be experienced when we risk navigating a turbulent river. Learning that can take place following a mistake or failure enables us to travel successfully through the white-water environment. As Palmer observes (1990, p. 23), "a failed experiment [for a scientist] is no failure at all, but a vital step toward learning the truth."

Integration of Centering and Balancing as a Faithful "Way of Being"

Palmer (1990, p. 76) recounts the statement made by one of his colleagues: "I have never asked myself if I was being effective, but only if I was being faithful." In the testing of faithfulness, we find a joining together of centering and balancing. We embark on the turbulent river, knowing that we must be agile. We must move back and forth as our world reacts to our actions. We learn and adjust. A third-order lens is often required.

Yet, with all of this movement and adaptation, we also must remain "faithful" to a centering set of core values. Our ultimate concern must be kept in mind as we address the many immediate concerns associated with navigating turbulent white water. This focus on

faithfulness and ultimate concerns requires us to choose the first facet in our Lens of Essence. This facet provides clarity regarding zero-order nonchanging values and priorities.

Peter Vaill offers an insight-rich way of envisioning the learning-based integration of centering and balancing while navigating the whitewater environment. He writes about learning as a way of being: (Vaill, 1996, p. 43)

> Leaming in permanent white water is learning as a way of being. That equation is my basic point of departure. . . . Permanent white water is not just a collection of facts and events external to us. It is *felt*—as confusion and loss of direction and control, as a gnawing sense of meaninglessness. If learning is to be a major means of restoring our understanding of the world around us, the learning process itself should not add to our feeling of meaninglessness.

Vaill (1996, p. 43) offers a critique of traditional education:

> Yet this is precisely what the institutional learning model tends to do as it renders the learner passive and dependent, inundates the learner with great volumes of miscellaneous subject matter presented as absolutely essential knowledge, and then erects a powerful set of extrinsic rewards and punishments to keep the learner's focus on all this jumbled and largely meaningless content. By inadvertently creating meaningless learning experiences, institutional learning exacerbates white water problems and leaves the learner unsure of how he or she is ever going to live effectively in the chaotic organizations of the present and future.

At this point Peter Vaill (1996, p. 43) broadens the concept of "learning as a way of being":

> In the phrase learning as a way of being, being refers to the whole person—to something that goes on all the time and

that extends into all aspects of a person's life; it means all our levels of awareness and, indeed, must include our unconscious minds. If learning as a way of being is a mode for everyone, being then must include interpersonal being as well as personal socially expressive being—my learning as a way of being will somehow exist in relation to your learning as a way of being. In short, there are no boundaries to being. . . .

Clearly, as Peter Vaill (1996, p. 43) admits, "learning as a way of being is a very capacious idea." It requires the use of multiple facets, including both zero and third-order facets. We are invited to view the world and our state of being from quite a range of perspectives—and even perspectives that seem contradictory. This enterprise is not for the faint of heart.

As with all approaches to finding the Essence of something, Vaill acknowledges that "learning as a way of being" is not found on any standard list of learning outcomes. It is rarely identified on a list of leadership behavior. What makes "learning as a way of being" a particularly elusive concept is its "bigness." Vaill believes the learning modes he has identified and upon which I have expanded are fully integrated. That which is the Essence of something comes to us as a big, unified entity (Vaill, 1996, p. 51):

Learning as a way of being is a whole mentality. It is a way of being in the world. . . . .[The various modes of learning] are twists of the learning kaleidoscope. They should not be thought of as having independent existence or as items that we can work on one at a time. More than just a skill, learning as a way of being is a whole posture toward experience, a way of framing or interpreting all experience as a learning opportunity or learning process.

The presence of "learning as a way of being" is also not found in the organizational learning processes I previously described. As an integrative process and integrated outcome, this big, unified form of learning is found within one's personhood.

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Peter Vaill makes the concept of "learning as a way of Being" even more interesting. According to Vaill (1996, p. 53), this form of learning is not a collective experience:

> Learning as a way of being is not the same thing as either organizational learning or the learning organization. Rather, it is a companion philosophy, at the personal level, to these and other developments involving learning by managerial leaders and by organizations. In a previous chapter, I said that engaging in learning as a way of being is the key to successful institutional learning. Here, I suggest that it is clearly both a basic form of high-quality organizational learning and a prerequisite attribute of men and women who are to lead the way to the new learning organizations. Leaming as a way of being is foundational to all efforts to enhance the learning of managerial leaders.

I suggest that Vaill's elusive emphasis on "learning as a way of being" holds major implications for those seeking to manage in a whitewater environment. Vaill (1996, pp. 53-54) puts it this way:

> Today's management literature is packed with exciting statements about the new kinds of things the managerial leader of today and tomorrow needs to be able to do. Amid all these ringing calls to arms-and they are an impressive array of qualities and abilities, and probably quite valid— we may quietly ask, "And how is it that a managerial leader immersed in permanent white water is going to develop these sterling capabilities!" That is the question of the decade, perhaps of the next quarter century.

Vaill (1996, p. 54) introduces a challenge at this point:

> Many of us who are educators have been trying to answer this question with institutional learning, that is, we have been trying to design learning experiences for these managerial learners, experiences that will foster the abilities so many thinkers are saying they need. There is a

good possibility, though, that we have stumbled onto the limits of institutional learning philosophy and practice in these attempts.

At this point, Vail (1996, p. 54 acknowledges that he is probably not alone in his concerns about management education:

> Certainly there are hundreds of corporate directors of executive development and many, many M.B.A. program directors who are wondering if their curricula are actually developing the needed qualities in participants. Thinking long range, thinking strategically, handling multiple ambiguous variables at once, staying clear on fundamental vision and values, exuding integrity and steadfastness and interpersonal sensitivity in all one's affairs, handling stress with relative ease—these are abilities that we are no longer sure can be developed in a three day corporate retreat for "high potentials" or the introductory M.B.A. course in "management and organization." If the truth be told, we are not exactly sure how these qualities develop, although it is a nontrivial observation that they are qualities of character as much as they are behavioral skills . . .

This recognition of character rather than behavior led Vaill to a realization in his original 1990 book (Vaill, 1990/2008) that executive development is spiritual development—a conclusion I have already addressed regarding whitewater leadership and kayak navigation on a turbulent river.

Vaill (1996, p. 55) turns once again to the holistic and unified nature of this mode of learning:

> For all its significance, learning as a way of being is a rather prosaic phrase for the key concept of this book, but the phrase was deliberately chosen. One of the characteristics of the contemporary education and training world is a proliferation of catchy acronyms and labels that supposedly lend weight and credence to the newest

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learning technique or theory. Learning as a way of being is not necessarily a catchy label, and this is consistent with the descriptive problem that learning as a way of being poses. If we are trying to envision a learning process that is more personal, more present, and more continual than institutional learning, we should try to talk about it in a way that is as true as possible to the way that it operates. A learning process that is a way of being may be many things, but one thing it probably is not is a static list of verbal characteristics that can be summed up in brief labels.

As Vaill mentions, this perspective on learning is truly out of line with the traditional approach to identifying specific management characteristics and behaviors. Furthermore, as Vaill notes, "learning as a way of being" is not easy to market or fully comprehend. Like all matters concerning the Essence of some phenomenon, learning and leadership in turbulent environments requires a journey inward toward the "heart of the matter." This journey benefits from Leading-part lenses and lenses of illumination. However, the journey is rarely completed even with the engagement of these lenses. That which is the Essence is elusive—but worth the search. Once again, it is worth noting that this journey is not for the faint of heart.

From Contradiction to Integration

We live in a world that is filled not just with turbulence—but also with contradictions. Each of the other five conditions of VUCA-Plus adds to and amplifies these contradictions. Many opportunities for opposing views emerge when volatility, complexity, and ambiguity are present. Uncertainty leaves us in an anxious state of anticipation: we are waiting for the next dissonant element to emerge.

Yet, it is in contradiction that we find the Essence of Diversity. As I have noted, this is an important form of Essence. While it is tempting to view Essence as a matter of Singularity, there is an important and powerful way in which Essence is found in Diversity.

No better expression of this power can be found than in the guiding principle of *E Pluribus Unum* ("Out of many, one") on the Great Seal of the United States of America.

I turn one last time to insights offered by Parker Palmer. He quotes Neils Bohr, the renowned physicist: "The opposite of a true statement is a false statement, but the opposite of a profound truth can be another profound truth." (Palmer, 1990, p. 15) The challenge thus becomes one of moving beyond the debate regarding truth and falsehood (and the resulting casting off of contradiction). We move to an Essence-based search for insights and truths existing on both sides of a perspective and in diverse practices.

It all starts with the often-mentioned distinction drawn between complicated and complex systems (Miller and Page, 2007). System theorists seem to be particularly intrigued with complex systems containing many connected parts, and, as a result, are dynamic. Each complex system yields interesting and often surprising outcomes. Maybe that's what makes them interesting. Those systems that are complicated with many parts that are unrelated to one another pale by comparison with those that are complex.

However, complicated systems may often be much harder to manage or attack than complex systems. It has to do with the cluttering I identified earlier in this book. It is much harder to attend to any one part of a complicated system, given that there are many parts—and each part operates separately from the other parts.

Hence the cluttering. Many things are present. Much is happening at the same time. Where do we start? It's like figuring out where to begin uncluttering our teenager's bedroom—or (dare we admit it) when uncluttering our desktop collection of news clippings, printed emails, and unread books.

Flocking, Swarming, and Outlying

Cluttering is also to be found in nonhuman systems. The flocking engaged by birds and the swarming engaged by fish serve as protective devices because a predator (such as a hawk or shark) will swoop into the flock or swarm—and find it hard to concentrate on any one bird or fish. There is a "clutter" of birds and fish. A whole lot of bodies flashing by and swirling around. It is only when one of the birds strays from the flock that the hawk will find focus and can attack the lone bird. The lone fish is soon to be the hungry shark's next meal. The "smart" (and surviving) birds and fish "hide" in the clutter.

Among humans, we find a similar process operating as something called a "Gish Gallop." Gallop is engaged when one participant in a debate throws out many unrelated lies and distortions. This strategy was fully displayed recently during a highly influential presidential debate (Richardson, 2014). One's opponent (like the hawk or shark) doesn't know which lie or distortion should be the focus of their countering comments. The flock of lies and distortions protects the debater who deploys the Gallop. Alternative realities swarm around the head and heart of one's opponent. None of these realities end up making much sense. The opponent is angry, frustrated, confused, afraid, and perhaps even embarrassed about their inaction. There is a profound cluttering of ideas and feelings.

The flocking and swarming are particularly impenetrable when the parts of a system are not only independent of one another but also contradictory. It is one thing to convey a pack of lies. It is quite another thing to spew out lies or shout out policies that bounce against one another. This leader or political party is blamed one minute for taking the wrong action on a specific social issue and then blamed one minute later for taking no action on this issue.

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One's government needs to leave people alone to decide on key issues in their lives. Yet one's government must protect the unborn and the body of those ill-informed or unethical people who wish to make certain medical decisions. The Galloping politician often seems to be leaping down the Rabbit Hole to enter a wonderland of Serenity in which contradictions can easily exist next to one another—because they are ignored or distorted into bizarre alignment.

How do we address these contradictions using one of the Lens of Essence? I would suggest taking the GOP Lens out of the drawer. Guided by the General Operating Principle (GOP), the 7-3-1 process provides for both diversity (7 facts and 3 propositions) and focus (GOP). First, like the hawk, one can find the person or event that strays from the flock. This person or event offers a fact or proposition that differs from those produced by the group. The "deviant" bird is often quite vulnerable—as is the "outlier" identified by Malcolm Gladwell (2011). Gladwell's outlier is often the focus of attacks by those who guard conventional wisdom or accepted practices.

Like the hawk and shark, a group doesn't have to stray far (take many risks) or move very fast (find much opposition) when attacking the isolated, poorly defended person. These convenient attacks on outliers are cowardly and destructive. The world suddenly becomes unsafe and fearful (Edmondson, 2018). The attacks on deviance move the group or organization away for any diverse or creative contributions. Furthermore, the attacks are often justified by the group only when it enters a wonderland of half-truths and conspiracies. We sacrifice any sense of humanity when seeking to find compliance and a group environment of Serenity (SC²).

There is an alternative, Essence-based approach to take on behalf of the outlier. We can focus on their welfare and value their contributions as we formulate our 7 facts and 3 propositions. We can find ways to support their distinctive perspectives and

practices. I once served on a Board of Trustees at a college in the American Southeast. While most of the Board members were staunchly conservative, they brought in a defeated liberal candidate for the US presidency (George McGovern) to serve as the Commencement speaker.

My conservative colleagues indicated that it is precisely at this point in US history that we need to be sure that both sides of the political spectrum are being honored. The liberal "outlier" was supported rather than attacked by this Southern Board of Trustees. I was very pleased and honored to be a member of this Board as it applied the Lens of Essence to focus on the guardianship of political diversity. The General Operating Principle of this college concerns the inherent value of diversity in furthering the education of all members of the college community. This GOP was evident not only in the invitation extended to George McGovern but also in the college's nationally acknowledged support for severely disabled students.

Perspectives, Outcomes and Targets

A second approach can be taken when applying a Lens of Essence. It centers on placing a cluster of contradictory outcomes or perspectives on a target. The Lens of Structure and Statics is required. Using this lens, we envision printed statements of desired outcomes or diverse perspectives pinned on a target. The important point to make is that a target is not the bullseye.

While a bullseye represents the center point, the target represents the broader setting in which many different outcomes or perspectives can be identified. The target's structure provides for both diversity and focus. A stable condition (Statics) is established that allows not just for a Central Operating Principle (the bullseye) but also a variety of other principles that are key to the effective, agile operations of an organization.

Some of the outcomes or perspectives on the target are located very close to the bullseye. They might even reside inside the bullseye

itself. They are closely related to the widely accepted GOP of the system in which the target is located. They represent "the heart of the matter". This location of many desired outcomes and preferred perspectives within the bullseye is common in a simple or heavily regulated system. With compliance comes uniformity and the alignment of all perspectives, practices, and priorities. The bullseye represents the Essence of a non-complicated system. The system's stability (Static) is established in the alignments.

Structure and statics operate differently in a complicated system. Many of the outcomes or perspectives reside at varying distances from the bullseye. Furthermore, they are located near some of the other outcomes or perspectives. They complement and may even enable one another. Other outcomes and perspectives are found on opposite sides of the target. They contradict one another or operate independently of one another. Ironically, the divergent way these outcomes and perspectives operate in the organization provides stability (static). A triangular structure is produced (as in the case of the 3 propositions in the 7-3-1 process). While stability in a noncomplicated system is found at a point of alignment, it is found in the tension of a triangle in a complicated system.

The matter of Statics and structure does not end here. A group or organization must frame the tension as a source of vibrance and learning. Polarity is managed rather than ultimately being a source of organizational dismemberment. Items on the target of a complicated system are inevitably compatible or incompatible to some degree. The important focal point when using a Lens of Structure/Statics is to determine if there should be a sense of win/lose among outcomes or perspectives on opposite sides of the target. When this destructive position is taken, there can be no effective management of polarity. One outcome can't be achieved if another isn't. There is only one "correct" perspective. Everything is "up front and personal" (a proximal perspective). Both differing perspectives can't be valid.

In other cases, a Lens of Structure/Static reveals that no relationship exists between the outcomes or perspectives situated far away from one another on the target. Everything on the target seems to reside far away from everything else (a distal perspective). A system is labeled *Disengaged* when there are many unrelated outcomes, perspectives (or actions). By contrast, a system is considered *Enmeshed* if many outcomes, perspectives, and actions are intertwined (even if contradictory).

Bringing in the distinction made by Miller and Page once more, the disengaged system and target are complicated rather than complex. The target contains many unrelated perspectives, desired outcomes, and actions. Indifferences abound. By contrast, enmeshed systems and targets incorporate interconnected perspectives, outcomes, and actions.

Each of these either complements or competes with the others. Love and hate abound. The challenge for someone using the Lens of Structure/Statics is to engage polarity management. Love and hate together eventually produce enduring intimate relationships (Bergquist, 2023c). They similarly produce the vibrant, creative processes found in safe, fearless organizations (Edmundson, 2018) that effectively manage polarity.

Bias and Noise

Another important insight regarding targets can be offered. Daniel Kahneman and his two colleagues, Olivier Sibony and Cass Sustein (2021), write about the distinction between Bias and Noise. They begin with a story about assessing the success of someone shooting arrows into a target. One desirable outcome would be for all the arrows to hit the target in the same area. When this occurs, we can applaud the consistency of the archer. Another outcome would be for the arrows to arrive all over the target. Typically, we devalue this outcome. The archer has not been consistent in directing arrows toward the target.

Kahneman, Sibony, and Sustein suggest that these assessments of success must be questioned. The first outcome only indicates consistency—not that the arrows have arrived at or near the bullseye. The arrows could cluster at some point at quite a distance from the bullseye. This placement would reveal a BIAS. Conversely, arrows arriving at many places on the target reveal NOISE.

These authors suggest that there are different flaws in the archer's performance. Insights regarding noise and Bias extend further. Both Noise and Bias are frequently found in judgments most of us make. We feel confident in our judgment because it agrees with that of most other people (Bias). Conversely, we are an outlier regarding one specific issue. We "stick to our guns" when challenged by other people—precisely because of their opposition. (Noice).

Several things come to mind when we apply one of our Lenses of Essence to our two portrayals of the target. First, a Lens that focuses on diversity should usually be deployed. It is a matter of understanding and appreciating the full landscape of the items found on the target. A portrait can be drawn when there is only one item on the target that resides at the heart (bullseye) of the target. However, a richly populated target requires a landscape rendering rather than a portrait. The target, taken as a whole, is its Essence. The target's contents need not be distilled or altered to make things simple and tidy. A Lens that focuses on Singularity is not appropriate.

The GOP Lens might be taken from the drawer, given its landscape focus on both a shared set of guiding principles and a diverse set of facts and propositions. The Lens of Primacy might also be engaged. It can help us identify the sources of different placements on the target. For instance, who was throwing arrows at the target in the first place? The Leading Part lens might be of value as we seek out the best way to manage the polarity found among outcomes and perspectives on opposite ends of the target.

Second, the image of a target brings to mind the interdependence of specific endeavors (arrows). While the arrows might have been shot for specific independent purposes, they all eventually end up together on the target. Some arrows may land near one another. Others may land on opposite sides of the target. Our real world operates similarly. When viewed in a systemic, holistic manner, all of the priorities we face when arriving at a decision and all of our initiatives (endeavors) relate in some way to one another—even if the system in which the target resides appears to be Disengaged.

If nothing else, there is a zero-sum relationship between two priorities: when we attend to one, the other must languish. More often, achieving goals related to one endeavor impacts related goals. As I noted previously in this book, the success of some projects enables others to be successful or at least increases the chances that they will succeed. Essential enablement and Essence-based integration are closely related. As we increase the opportunity for enablement, we bring the arrows closer together. We increase the potential for the integration of seemingly disparate priorities and endeavors. Our lens of Structure/Statics can prove valuable if directed toward the identification of enabling relationships. And if attention is given to ways polarities can be integrated.

Clarification and Integration

I suggest that the following questions be addressed when turning our lens of Structure/Statics to the matter of integration. These questions concern the position of arrows on the target. What is the nature and purpose of specific endeavors:

- How would you know if you have been successful in this endeavor?

- What would make you happy?

- Who else has an investment in this project, and what do they want to happen?

- What would happen if you did not achieve this goal?

- What would happen if you achieved this goal?

- What scares you most about failing to achieve this goal?

- What scares you most about achieving this goal?

A group should test its assumptions to see if there is shared agreement regarding the answers to these questions. These agreements often lead to establishing the facts and propositions found in the 7/3/1 process. Special care must be given to the source of information related to these answers, for collusion might be in full effect. BIAS might be operating.

Conversely, NOISE operates if there are multiple and often conflicting answers to these questions. While diversity of thought and perspective can be beneficial (Page, 2011), this diversity can pose quite a challenge for groups. It is important to remain patient in addressing these differences. A Leading Parts lens might be deployed when determining the best way to test out assumptions and arrive at bias-free (or at least bias-light) agreement.

With clarification comes the potential for integration. A landscape rendering of the entire target can be produced. The following questions might be addressed in seeking to find integration:

- What happens to the other endeavors if you achieve the goals associated with this endeavor?

- Which endeavor is likely to have "the biggest bang for the buck" (enabling other endeavors to be successful)?

- Which endeavor represents the "low-hanging fruit" (most easily achieved), and how would its achievement impact the other endeavors (and priorities)?

- What might you do to bring the various endeavors closer to one another (through their sequencing, overlapping of resources, sharing of certain benefits, etc.)?

- What is the underlying problem if many priorities seem independent or contradictory? How do you best address this underlying problem?

Constructive dialogues based on the questions I have just identified often require us to bring out the Leading Parts lens. We use this lens to determine how best to manage the diverse perspectives emerging from dialogues regarding target positions and integration. Specifically, one can use Polarity Management when confronting the condition of contradiction found on complicated and complex targets. I believe that polarity management can effectively address many of the challenges associated with contradiction—and those posed by the other five conditions of VUCA-Plus.

Polarity Management

I conclude this exploration of contradiction as it is transformed into Integration by introducing several concepts from Barry Johnson's (2020) more recent book on Polarity Management. Called *And: Making a Difference by Leveraging, Polarity, Paradox or Dilemma,* this book expands on or clarifies concepts presented in his original, best-selling *Polarity Management*: *Identifying and Managing Unsolvable Problems* (1996). In bringing this chapter to a close, I consider ways his model of polarities relates to my concept of Essence.

Type of Issue and Essence

Barry Johnson (2020, p. 39) considers it very important to identify polarities—and not treat them as "solvable" problems:

> When an organization treats a polarity as if it were a problem to solve, it will reduce the attainability, speed, and sustainability of the "solution" they are trying to accomplish. When an organization can see a key underlying polarity within a difficulty or set of difficulties, it will increase the attainability, speed, and sustainability of the desired outcome.

However, Johnson also notes that not all difficult issues being addressed are polarities. They can be problems. Johnson distinguishes between problems that can be solved and polarities that must be managed.

While I appreciate the distinction drawn by Johnson (2020, pp. 223-230), I wish to draw attention to a distinction between not just problems and polarities but also puzzles, problems, messes, dilemmas, polarities, and mysteries. This is a distinction that I drew in this book. Johnson does hint at this more multi-faceted distinction in the title of his book (including paradox and dilemma in the title), and in several of the case studies he provides. However, I wish to expand on the distinctions drawn between different issues. I will briefly contrast each of the issue types to those issues that are embedded in polarities.

Puzzles: Most issues are easily addressed if we have adequate knowledge about the matter at hand. They are readily resolved if we have sufficient resources appropriate to the task. I previously noted that puzzles have specific solutions. They differ in this respect from other issues. We know when a puzzle has been solved. Furthermore, as Johnson (2020, p. 223) has noted, puzzles are short-lived. They are not ongoing. Puzzles have an endpoint and come with a correct answer. We can finish a crossword puzzle on Sunday morning, knowing that we have completed this puzzle. We can prepare a spreadsheet, send it to appropriate stakeholders, and move on to the next accounting assignment.

There is another important distinction to be drawn. Puzzles are usually peripheral to the Essence of a system in which the puzzle has emerged. However, we are often tempted to consider them central to our life. We find considerable satisfaction in solving puzzles that appear daily at home or work. We look forward to solving our Sunday morning crossword puzzle. We take a moment to enjoy the brief "high" we get in preparing the spreadsheet.

However, we must not be "lured" into believing that these puzzles are the only issues to be addressed. We must acknowledge that

these puzzles are NOT among the primary issues we should address. Issues associated with Essence are inevitably more elusive and difficult to face than the puzzles we have solved. Crossword puzzles provide an absorbing pastime—but are rarely critical to our work. Spreadsheets are nice. However, they yield no immediate solution to the challenging financial issues faced by our stakeholders.

Problems: In my scheme, much of what Johnson identifies as a problem would be considered a puzzle. As I have noted, problems do not have clear solutions. Rather, they contain multiple contradictory and interconnected elements that do not open this issue to direct, predictable solutions. Johnson is leaning toward this perspective when stating that "problems" can have "two or more right answers that are independent" (Johnson, 2020, p. 223).

Johnson (2020, p. 225) considers problems to be polarities if answers to these problems are interdependent. However, I believe that problems are found primarily in complex systems. Given that complex systems are composed of interdependent elements (Miller and Page, 2007) and that most mid-21st Century systems are complex and adaptive (Stacey, 1996/2000), we should conclude, following Johnson, that polarity-based problems are everywhere!

I don't think this is the case. Some problems are complicated rather than complex. They have many parts that operate independently. There is NO significant interweaving of the parts—such as that found in tightly woven fabric or a complex, adaptive system. If the issue being addressed contains two or more independent parts, then I would consider this issue to be composed of two or more puzzles rather than a single problem.

Whether or not we want to use the term "problem" when focusing on specific issues, there is an important point to be made regarding Essence and contradiction. We typically find that an issue contains multiple parts when aligned with the Essence of the system on which we are focused. These parts are inevitably interrelated. We soon recognize that this issue is a problem rather than a cluster of

puzzles. This brings us back to the matter of definition. Does this mean that every issue is inevitably a polarity if it contains many interwoven parts embedded in a complex system?

I don't consider them polarities, for we are not initially forced to prefer one solution over another. We are initially confused but not polarized. An urban planning issue, for instance, might include concern about zoning laws alongside the rising cost of materials. The cost of materials might produce pressure to modify the zoning laws, while the zoning regulations might require certain high-cost materials. While these two concerns are interconnected, they need not be contradictory. However, their interconnection does produce the challenge of finding an urban planning solution that factors in both the laws and costs. However, a solution often involves trade-offs that are never "ideal" regarding either law or expenses.

Messy Problems: In some cases, multiple interdependent problems produce messes. Urban planning is filled with messes. Various constituency concerns join Zoning regulations and the cost of materials. Transportation issues, collective bargaining agreements, and other wide-ranging matters are added to this "messy" list. While messes often contain polarities, the "real" challenge resides in sorting through the many issues involved in this mess. This is the point where the Lens of Essence becomes particularly important.

Somehow, in the muck and drama of messy deliberations, there should be a "guiding light." This is the lighthouse I mentioned when applying the metaphor of a ship battling the San Francisco Bay currents and tides. Several decades ago, I worked with a highly effective executive who insisted that a copy of her organization's mission was placed (under glass) at each seat in her executive conference room. She read this statement at the start of every "messy" meeting with her C-Suite colleagues. This engagement of her "lighthouse" was critical during the COVID-19 years. Her organization was forced to navigate through currents of shifting

needs and fears, as well as a strong outgoing tide of retreat from and surrender to the COVID-19 virus.

Dilemmas: We come close to Johnson's polarity when considering the role of dilemmas in our personal lives and organizations. According to Johnson (2020, p. 225), some dilemmas are polarities (such as the pull between being clear and being flexible in our relationship with other people). Many dilemmas are concerned simply with choosing between two bad options independent of one another.

Once again, I challenge Johnson's conclusions. Independence is rarely found in a complex mid-21st-century life or organization. While I agree with Johnson that a dilemma rarely concerns two positive options, I don't think they are often just about two bad options. The choice is often between one option that will lead to an immediate outcome (but involve sacrifice of some other important outcome) or a second option that will lead to a longer-term outcome (but involve sacrifice of the immediate outcome). This type of dilemma plays out in many settings where we have to defer gratification.

We save for our child's education rather than purchasing a home that will please us as a couple. We offer employee bonuses rather than increasing payments into an employee retirement plan. These are not matters of polarity, *per se*. They are concerned with sequencing and deferment. They also involve Regret, which is a powerful motivating force I will consider shortly. We find guidance in our attention to the Essence of the system where we operate. We find the courage and guidance to address an inevitably painful dilemma in our ongoing consideration of Greater Purpose (which Johnson emphasizes).

Mysteries: I turn finally to the most challenging issue of all. Mysteries "leapfrog" over polarities when considering elusiveness and deeply felt challenges. Mysteries are never "solved." They are not even "managed." Rather, we sit back and observe mysteries playing out in our lives. This can be the mystery of a self-centered

teenage grandson turning into a thoughtful and caring young adult. It can be the remarkable *Esprit-de-Corps* that suddenly appears when our company faces a major crisis (such as the COVID-19 virus). It can also be the sight of women and men leaping from an office building engulfed in fire on 9/11. We try to make sense of what has occurred. We wonder how we might have made a difference—but come up with no satisfactory answer.

There is an option. We can focus on managing our emotions (and thoughts) in reaction to the mystery. While the mystery is founded in an external locus of control, our feelings and thoughts reside in our internal locus of control. We can apply the processes I previously identified and described. These processes are Allostasis (Sterling, 2020) (which concerns the way our body operates) and Polystasis (which concerns how we relate to our world).

Both of these processes are often engaged when we address challenges inherent in a mystery. We modify psychosocial templates, baselines, and predictions about what is about to occur inside our body and outside where the mystery is taking place. Our subsequent actions can be appropriately engaged based on enduring values (Essence). We can share our appreciative appraisal with a maturing grandson or *Esprit-de-Corps* colleagues. We can find ways to assist those who are grieving the loss of loved ones after 9/11. We adjust yet also endure our fundamental commitments (Essence).

Polarities: We might now ask what polarity looks like if we are to differentiate between polarity issues and the others I have identified. Johnson (2020, pp. 217-222) offers a list of six ways in which polarities "show up":

1. Polarities emerge as a value or set of values . . .

2. Polarities show up as resistance based on a fear of something that could happen . . .

3. Polarities show up as one or more action steps. . . .

4. Polarities show up as a complaint or a complaint combined with a solution. . . .

5. Polarities show up as a vision or cream for a preferred future. . . .

6. Polarities show up as a conflict.

This list illustrates the breadth and rich insights associated with Johnson's model of polarities. Several features of this list stand out (at least for me). First, polarities appear when a positive perspective (values, aspirations, consensus) emerges alongside a negative perspective (fears, complaints, conflict). Polarities also appear when actions are being taken. Given these diverse ways in which polarities show up, I wish to focus briefly on the nature of these ways as they relate to the transformation of contradiction into an integrated whole (via the Lens of Essence).

Positive Perspective: An integrated, action-oriented transformation of contradiction can occur when a compelling vision of the future is introduced. As Fred Polak (1973) documented in great detail, an image of the future provides any system with direction and motivation. Without this compelling image, any system (such as an organization or society) will soon wither.

An appreciative perspective is closely associated with this compelling vision. I have repeatedly brought this perspective into my analyses regarding both the Lens of Essential and Lens of Essence. For Barry Johnson (2020, p. 7), this appreciative perspective is found in the Polarity-based capacity and willingness to "see ourselves and our world more completely . . . It is the capacity to see ourselves, our organizations, and our countries as more than our shortcomings." We move beyond polarization to integration via successful action when we "catch other people doing it right."

Negative Perspective: It is quite understandable that Barry Johnson focuses on the motivating force offered by fear. Johnson portrays the role played by fear as quite large when he sets up a Polarity

Map. It is Fear that drives our movement from one polarity to the other polarity. I push back against Johnson and offer a perspective from the Behavioral Economics school.

Fear is not the biggest motivator for many of these economists (at least if fear is defined as the potential loss of something, potential harm done to oneself or others, or the failure to achieve something). These forms of fear (and accompanying anxiety) are certainly powerful. However, there is another motivator that often tops fear. This motivator is *Regret*. We anticipate that we will feel remorse in the future if we have not chosen a specific course of action when we have had a chance.

If we take Regret into account, then we might move from one polarity to the second polarity not because we fear the ramifications of the first polarity. Rather, we are fearful (concerned) that opportunities offered by the second polarity might be overlooked in our haste to focus on the initial priority.

As with the proverbial donkey, we sit by the first stack of hay and imagine we have missed the opportunity to sample the rich texture and taste of the second stack of hay. Delightful smells from this second stack waft over to us. We move over to the second stack but even more keenly savor the rich smells emanating from the first stack of hay. Off we go back to the first stack. Our life is filled with regret—and we starve to death wanting never to miss the taste of either clump of hay.

I suggest, even further, that Regret ultimately resides in our desire for Essence—yet our inability to focus on this Essence. In some vague way, we "know" what it means ultimately to be satisfied and fulfilled. We can imagine munching on the world's most succulent hay. We can envision the feeling of happiness and contentment.

However, we don't know how to reach a state of Essence. And we are not sure if we truly know where to find Essence. In *The Wizard of Oz,* Dorothy and her companions are diverted by a poppy field of Serenity. They eventually arrived in Oz, only to discover that

Essence doesn't exist out there in some mythic land—such as Oz. With her colleagues, Dorothy was mistaken. They each found something about their Essence. Only after her long journey did Dorothy discover that Essence exists back at her home in Kansas.

The matter of Essence can be even more challenging in our real world. We might not be sure that Essence exists or that it is what we hope it will be. Peggy Lee writes and sings about what it means to be disappointed when finding that there is no Essence. I have already quoted her regarding the potential disappointment of success ("Is that all there is!"). Even when an Essence can be envisioned, we find it unsettling. This profound collective disappointment is portrayed in many venues--including *Men Like Gods* by H.G. Wells, Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World,* and Ursula Le Guin's *Always Coming Home.*

Value-Pairs

Barry Johnson (2020, p. 29) proposes that polarities always involve a pairing of contradictory values. We should keep this in mind as we bring in our Structure/Static lens to view polarity. I would suggest from a statics point of view that a paired structure is not very stable. A third structural element is required. This involves the resolution of polarity that Johnson desires.

In a later chapter (on Trust), I bring in the metaphor of a lever system (as in a seesaw or teeter-totter). A fulcrum (third element) provides the foundation for a beam (long board). Two counterweights (entities) located at each end of the beam provide the lever's dynamics (action), while the fulcrum provides the lever's static (stability).

My previous emphasis on triangulation similarly speaks to the value of this movement beyond pairing. While two versions of reality are likely to produce polarizing contention, a three-fold source and three-fold method produce a version of reality that often leads to consensus.

A Leading Part lens, along with a GOP lens, can be used successfully to identify a mode of leadership that promotes triangulation in not only the assessment of reality (7 facts) but also the slow, reflective thinking about these facts (3 propositions) and the alignment of both facts and propositions with the GOP.

Barry Johnson takes a similar approach in making use of a value pairing. If we look at values as pairs in polarity rather than as isolating, competing entities, then we can:

> . . . strengthen an organization's value platform. Not identifying the pole partner of a value will make an organization vulnerable to what is missing. Adding the value partner does not diminish the original value. On the contrary, it contributes to the sustainability of original values—and to the continuing existence of the company. This is true because a polarity is indestructible while one pole of a polarity is inherently unsustainable. (Johnson, 2020, p. 39)

I disagree with Johnson regarding the indestructibility of a polarity. However, I recognize that value pairs for Johnson open the door to building a sustainable value-based foundation for an organization. This foundation accommodates diversity (two values) and integration (pairing).

Putting on my hat as a psychologist, I wish to comment on Johnson's statement about the vulnerability of ignoring that which is missing. Like many other psychologists, I would propose that ignored or repressed values (or any image or entity) have enormous influence (often destructive) regarding an individual's or social system's blocking operations.

We must bring our "desires," aspirations, and values to the surface if we intend to "manage" them successfully as one half of a pair in a polarized system. When they remain isolated or ignored, our values can become "demonic." Carl Jung might suggest that they show up as a trickster operating in our unconscious "Shadow." We

end up "messing things up" when operating counter to the repressed values or (to borrow from Sigmund Freud) reveal these values in slips of the tongue (for instance, "I am rarely [rather than "really"] supportive of this project!").

Conclusions

Many insights are to be found in Barry Johnson's (2020) recent book. He is teaching me something important that might help me mature my concept of Essence. I reflect on the nature and dynamics of Essence having read what Johnson has to say about value-pairs and what he has written about the potentially positive dynamics of polarization: "If you can see a polarity within an issue, you can leverage the natural tension between the poles so it becomes a positive, self-reinforcing loop or 'virtuous cycle' lifting you and your organization to goals unattainable with Or-thinking, alone." (Johnson, 2020, p. 9)

Essence, Diamonds, and Value-Pairings

In applying Johnson's insights to my concept of Essence and the lenses of Essence, I turn to one of the most compelling images of Essence. I offer the image of Essence as a brilliant and multi-faceted Diamond. I am reminded of the way Diamonds are formed. They are forged under conditions of intense heat and pressure. Perhaps, like a diamond, Essence is often forged under high pressure exerted by a value-pair. The intense energy and emotions associated with that which is the Essence might emanate from this pairing of values.

I expand on the insights to be gained from Johson's value-pairs. Just as a polarity perspective might leverage tension into a positive "virtuous circle," the beam of intense energy radiating from the lighthouse might find its source in the dynamic interplay between competing yet interconnected values (value-pairs) and the associated pairing of differing perspectives concerning the world. For instance, the Essence of a viable organization might be forced, as Johnson (2020) suggests, in the polarity-based interplay between

the values of continuity and transformation. Similarly, the Essence of a viable nation might be forged in the heated (polarity-based) interplay between Justice and Mercy (Johnson, 2020).

Essence and Wheelbarrows

In exploring the nature of Essence and its functioning in all systems, it is important to pause for a moment and acknowledge again that this is an elusive phenomenon. It is easy to miss the presence of Essence or misinterpret the critical role played by Essence in a system's static and dynamic operation. I am reminded of an old joke (that I think I first heard when consulting in one of the former Soviet republics). It seems that there was a worker in a highly secure Soviet factory who would leave each day with a wheelbarrow that was filled with straw. The security inspector was certain this worker was stealing something hidden in the straw.

The inspector carefully searched in the straw every day but could find nothing hidden away in the straw. This daily search continued for many months. The inspector was growing increasingly frustrated. Finally, he informed the worker that this was his last day on the job. He was about to retire and needed to know what the worker was stealing. The worker proudly announced, "I am stealing wheelbarrows!"

Here is a wonderful example of the key feature in this story being ignored. Wheelbarrows were the essence of the worker's plan to steal from the factory. I have often wondered if the worker was also stealing straw. This is a joke precisely because no attention is given to the most important items: the wheelbarrow and perhaps the straw.

At an even deeper level, it is a joke because it represents the "stupidity" of Soviet security. The joke could be told because it was indirectly critical of the repressive Soviet regime. Humor is often the remedy for lingering frustration and despair—as I discovered during my work during the Soviet Union's collapse. Perhaps,

ultimately, the real Essence of this story concerns its indirect expression of strongly held but inexpressible feelings.

We often do not see what is obvious in our world. Our true emotions are not shared. We are stubborn and unwilling to view and talk about what exists right before our eyes. Under the challenging conditions of VUCA-Plus, it is hard to identify and sustain attention to the Essence of any system.

We search for meaning and purpose in the straw. We often fail to look at the wheelbarrow. Like the hungry hawks and sharks, we are distracted by birds or fish that flock and swarm about us. There are too many options and too many opportunities. And they never seem to be fully aligned with one another. So, we swoop through the VUCA-Plus conditions and end up with nothing.

Hopefully, some of the strategies and tools I have identified enable full use of Essence. By applying the various lenses of Essence, we can transform VUCA-Plus challenges into entities and processes that are not only manageable but also constructive and productive. I have prepared several additional chapters that further illustrate the use of polarity management in addressing the mid-21st-century condition of contradiction—and the intertwining of this condition with the other five VUCA-Plus conditions of volatility, uncertainty, complexity, ambiguity, and turbulence.

In these additional chapters, I focus on Trust as an important but elusive form of Essence that operates in our contemporary society. Specifically, I offer a case study portraying the use of polarity management in addressing Trust as a major contradiction-saturated issue found in many interpersonal relationships and organizations.

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Chapter Eight

Essence III: Trust, Vibrance and Polarity Management

I offer a somewhat detailed description of Essence in this chapter as this key feature of any system relates to managing tensions that inevitably exist within Essence. I begin by introducing *Vibrance* as a feeling and experience that leads us to a sense of pleasure and presence. While there are many sources of Vibrance, I concentrate on the source of sustained Vibrance to be found in the tensions existing in polarities. It is in the push and pull between two modes of Essence that we find Vibrance.

I describe the nature of lenses through which one can view different models of Essence. In providing this more detailed description, I attend to one of the most important forms of Essence. This is the Essence of Trust—and Trust represents one of the most important ways we use the Lens of Essence.

Finding Vibrance

A sense of Vibrance is among the most pleasurable of human experiences. It is richly felt in the coursing of positive neurochemicals through our bloodstream. It is uniquely experienced in the psychological sense of feeling fully alive and present in the moment. The sources of Vibrance are diverse. We experience Vibrance at moments of Flow and Awe. During these moments, challenge is matched with sufficient capacity and with knowledgeable appreciation of that which is swirling around us.

We can anticipate the experience of Flow if we know that we can be successfully challenged. Our body is energized. Adrenaline kicks in. We feel Vibrant because our polystatic predictions suggest

positive outcomes. We can climb the cliff or make sense of those ancient manuscripts.

Similarly, a state of Awe can leave us anxious, frozen, and devoid of any energy. However, if we can frame awe-some and awe-ful as beautiful, our polystatic appraisal is not of threat but rather of pleasurable appreciation. Much as we can delight in the "terror" of a rollercoaster ride, we can thrive in the rain whipping around us during a thunderstorm. A deep chasm of awe, such as we face when first viewing the Grand Canyon, can lead us to full appreciation for the sublime rock sculpting ability of Nature. We glimpse the Essence of our Living World—and perhaps of Eternity—when looking down to the bottom of the canyon or up to the top branches of a Giant Sequoia tree.

The thunderstorm, Grand Canyon, and Giant Sequoia are sources of mystery. They operate outside the human domain. We can't account for their beauty, nor are they something for which we should feel responsible (unless we try to change, pollute, or destroy them). Our vibrance comes from our appreciation rather than our appraisal; we feel alive because the world swirling around us is ultimately composed of that which is unknowable and outside our control. We relax our polystatic vigilance, transform our self-fulfilling fears into positive anticipations, and trigger the release of pleasurable neurochemicals to complement this anticipation. Vibrance abounds!

Vibrance also comes from recognizing that the competence on which we rely (Home) has been used to accomplish ambitious goals (Quest). Vibrance is elicited when we find justification for Trust in our *Competence* (White, 1959). Similarly, we find Vibrance when our cherished intentions (Home) are fully supported by those in our life that we love—even when we are taking risks (Quest) while seeking to accomplish goals related to these intentions. We come alive and feel empowered and Vibrant when we can Trust that our *Intentions* are attainable (Bergquist, 2003).

There is also the matter of Trust in the *Shared Perspective* regarding important values and priorities with others in our organization or community. We might be on a creative journey that briefly takes us away from this perspective; however, we can still rely on understanding and support from other members of this organization or community. We feel and experience Vibrant in our living and work settings because we can be creative (Quest) while still connected (Home). True freedom within relationships is achieved (Bergquist, 2024a).

We are fortunate that our world provides us with many avenues to Vibrancy. We are blessed with the Vibrant opportunity to join Home with Quest and to bring together important polarities—including those associated with the Essence of Trust. I now consider some of these opportunities.

Vibrance and Polarities

Early in this book, I introduced the concept of Polystasis. I also brought in somatic and psychosocial templates. I suggested that there is a certain pull toward Polystasis and a specific template when a threat appears or when the emerging template doesn't match with previous templates. I further suggested that beauty (and even humor) might often emerge from the mismatch. I re-introduce another source of compelling tension in a template (actually two or more competing templates). This compelling tension is to be found in Barry Johnson's polarities.

Vibrance and The Other

I wish to move beyond the notion of polarity tensions being compelling. I propose that polarities are often vibrant. They provide us with energy and inspiration. They are like witnessing the aftermath of a car accident. We can't take our eyes off the drama inherent in the interplay between two viable and powerful perspectives. Much as we can't resist lingering on the physical (and emotional) wreck of the automobile and its passengers. We consume novels and poems written about polarities as well as

despair. Musical compositions often are built around contradictory (counterpoint) themes while portraying strong, soulful emotions. Movies and theatrical productions feature powerful emotions that attend conflicting protagonists. One need only go back to the Greek tragedies.

Vibrance invites both our attention and our distortions. We align with one side and define those in opposition as "Other" (Oshry, 2018). We are energized; however, this energy is often directed to one of two "causes" to which we are committed. The choice between causes tears us apart. We are inspired by a complex narrative regarding dedication and courage—but are often drawn to only one side of the narrative (as told by just one of the protagonists). The recent popularity of the musical and movie, *Wicked*, speaks directly to this one-sidedness of a powerful narrative. Do we celebrate or mourn the death of a witch lying under Dorothy's tornado-thrown home?

Vibrance and the Other Side of the Story

We fail to learn the lesson(s) to be derived from the other side. *Wicked* conveys the Wicked Witch's version of what happened in Oz. This theatrical production teaches us about the damaging effects of discrimination and the complex nature of friendships that exist amid this discrimination. The success of *Wicked* on Broadway and in movie theaters speaks to the potential Vibrance to be found in the discovery of both sides of the story told by those residing in polarized encampments.

Do we find Vibrance in other retold fairy tales (Loewen and Others, 2014)? Gregory Maguire, author of the original novel about the Wicked Witch, has not only published a series of additional books about the characters of Oz but also published revisionist and expanded narratives regarding the ugly stepsisters in the tale of Cinderella and further ventures taken by Alice and her friend, Ada, who also tumbles into Wonderland.

We also listen to the "other side of the story" (to borrow from Paul Harvey) regarding Darth Vader in the prequels to the original *Star Wars*. We might inquire into the alternative versions other notorious villains offer, ranging from Maleficent in Disney's *Sleeping Beauty* to the real-life Attila the Hun. Their versions might bring renewed Vibrance to these narratives that are often shopworn. Alternative versions also elicit an important Essence—the Essence of Trust. We are encouraged to consider what and whom we Trust when listening to the complex, multi-tiered narratives that form the basis for all fairy tales and historical accounts.

The Essence of Trust

As we begin our exploration of Trust, we find that it comes in many forms, influences our Polystatic process in many ways, and leads us in many directions that often conflict with one another. I first consider the multiple facets found in a Lens of Trust and then turn to several forms of Trust that operate in most of our lives.

Three Facets in the Lens of Trust

Facets in the Lens of Trust are each directed toward one of three aspects of Trust: competence, intention, and perspective (Bergquist, Betwee and Meuhl, 1995). I have already identified all three aspects when considering sources of Vibrance. We experience Vibrance when we feel competent, when we are clear about our intentions, and when we find shared perspectives among members of our organization or community.

All three of these aspects are contained in the Trust template. We "trust" someone because we believe they are competent and can "handle" our relationship with them. We also "trust" someone because we believe they are "on our side" and wish us well. Their intentions are "pure" and consistent. There is a third facet of trust. We trust another person because they share a similar set of perspectives and values. We tend to understand one another and

clearly comprehend what they have to say and how they "speak" nonverbally.

I often illustrate these three facets by offering an example taken from the world of interpersonal training. During the last decades of the 20th Century, I often used a training exercise called the "Trust Fall." One workshop participant stands on a bench or a deck and falls backward to be caught by other participants. While this is called a "Trust Fall," I would suggest three quite different scenarios that could be played out when the Trust Fall occurs.

One scenario begins with the request that the falling workshop participant bring their elderly but loving mother to the workshop. She stands below the bench or platform to catch her falling child. This woman has deep, loving concerns regarding the welfare of her offspring; however, she is not competent to gather in her son or daughter. She might even be squished by this falling child. Both mother and child are hurt. Trust in *Competence* is critical here.

I offer a second scenario. The person who is about to fall begins to insult other workshop participants. They are accused of being insensitive, stupid, or perhaps a bit "ugly." They don't particularly like the person falling off the bench or platform. They let this annoying person fall to the ground: "It serves them well!" These workshop participants are competent. They can readily catch the falling person; however, they don't have this person's welfare at the front of their Mind or Heart. Trust regarding *Intentions* plays a critical role in this scenario.

Finally, I offer a scenario involving people from several countries attending the workshop. They speak different languages and don't know much about the culture of the person about to fall off the bench or platform. They wonder about this "strange custom" of people falling backward off a bench or platform.

The person falls back and hits the ground. They are helped up by other workshop participants who ask (through a translator): "Do you want to fall again?" The "foreign" workshop participants are

competent and are committed to the welfare of all participants in the workshop (after all this is a "global goodwill" workshop). They just don't comprehend what is happening. A third facet of Trust is critical here. This is trust regarding the presence of a *Shared Perspective*.

Trust and Templates

Trust represents the Essence of our engagement in the world. It is particularly important to note that our psychosocial template is constructed in large part on the basis of assumptions we make about the level of trust to be found in our world. To what extent can we trust the competence of other people with whom we interact? Are most people honest and caring, or can't we trust that they are of "good will" (trust in intentions)? Do most people share a common perspective with us regarding the proper way to behave and the nature of a "decent" society?

Not too many years ago, those of us living in the Western World could assume that there was a shared perspective, given the dominance of a "grand narrative" in our society and in most parts of the world (Bergquist, 1993). However, this grand narrative has collapsed. Diversity of perspectives is now common. Thus, the mid-21st-century psychosocial template for most of us must now account for this diversity. Trust of all three kinds (competence, intentions, perspective) is not a certainty for most of us as we make polystatic adjustments in our interactions with other people.

An additional factor comes into play regarding the psychosocial template. Our assumptions about interpersonal trust tend to be self-fulfilling. When we assume that other people are trustworthy, our interactions with them tend to be open and supportive. This increases their trust in our intentions (and our interpersonal competence and benevolent perspective).

Conversely, we are likely to be guarded and withdrawn when we mistrust other people. Reticent behavior on our part will often engender mistrust about our motives, competence, and perspective

among those with whom we interact. Trust begets trust. Mistrust begets mistrust. Accelerating (positive) feedback loops prevail. A cycle of trust or mistrust is established.

While there are these three facets of trust (competence, intentions, perspective), certain fundamental polarizing tensions exist in establishing and maintaining the Trust template.

S^2 (Home) versus O^2 (Quest)

It is not just a matter of adjustments in the interpersonal domain of our psychosocial template that are based on Trust. The Essence of Trust comes in several different (and often contradictory) forms as with most (perhaps all) forms of Essence. One of these forms resides in our strong desire to find *Home.* We look to Trust as a critical outcome of this search for Home.

The second form is found in our desire to engage in a *Quest*. We wish to establish Trust before engaging in a Quest. Trust's Vibrance is partly created by the dynamic interplay between these contradictory forms. We direct the Lens of Trust to both Home and Quest. Remarkable energy and inspiration emerge from this focus on Home and Quest. Beginning with Odysseus's pull between Home and Quest, we find this polarity portrayed across many centuries, in many artistic formats, and many cultures worldwide.

It is important to note that Trust is both a desired outcome of many engagements with the world (Home) and a prerequisite for the successful engagement of many other initiatives (Quest). Both the image of prerequisites and the vision of outcomes are incorporated in the Trust template. Many (perhaps most or all) Essences within a system serve both of these functions.

For instance, as an Essence, Freedom can be a desired outcome AND a pre-condition for important initiatives. Similarly, Health, as an Essence, is a desired outcome AND a critical pre-condition for our successful accomplishment of many tasks. Our templates regarding those matters at the Essence of our being and life often must carry a large load of seemingly contradictory themes. That

might be one of the reasons why Essence resides at the heart of many "vibrant" myths, fairy tales, novels, poems, and historical accounts.

Vibrance and Polarity

I propose that tension provides the source of Vibrance for the Essence of Trust. The intense illumination and energy emitting from the Lens of Trust is produced by the pull between Home and Quest. Tension is inherent in (1) the basis of Trust within a safe and secure setting ("home") and (2) the engagement of Trust when in search of opportunity and when open to new experiences ("quest').

In the tension between the two S's (safety and security) and the two O's (opportunity and openness), we find the vibrant presence of Trust. I further propose that the vibrant dynamics of Trust are best portrayed as polarity. The most detailed and compelling portrait of polarities is provided by Barry Johnson in two books: *Polarity Management: Identifying and Managing Unsolvable Problems* (1992/1996) and a more recent volume called *And: Making a Difference by Leveraging Polarity, Paradox or Dilemma* (2020).

As a vulnerable species that was slower and weaker than most other animals living on the African savannah (our birthplace), we are inevitably seeking to find and maintain safe and secure environments. We long for nurturance—for we are a species with high oxytocin levels (a bonding peptide hormone). I am reminded of the comforting melody to be found in the second movement (Largo) of Dvorak's *New World Symphony* or the reassuring passages to be found in Copland's composition written to accompany Thornton Wilder's portrayal in *Our Town* of daily life in a small New England town.

We seek out and help to build settings in which there is order and continuity. We are historians who live in our past and are the architects of nests and gatherings of warmth and comfort. As repeated at the start of *Cheers* (a popular TV show), we wish to dwell where "everybody knows my name." Apparently, this tends

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to occur with no more than 150 people. The so-called Dunbar number suggests that there is an intimacy limit.

By contrast, as inquisitive beings, we wish to journey across the sea to a New World. We are restless about spending our whole life in a small New England town. We wander off and tinker with new gadgets. We are often addicted to our own adrenaline as we take on new challenges and climb a tall mountain. We grow uneasy with the same old things happening every day and yearn for the journey to a new place and encounters with those people who differ in some ways from us (balancing off those who look and sound like us).

We are explorers and inventors. The music by John Williams that introduces *Star Wars* or the composition by Michael Torke called *Javelin* calls us to this quest. We are architects of research labs and gatherings where new ideas are shared. As declared at the start of each *Star Trek* episode (a popular TV show), our mission is to "explore strange new worlds; to seek out new life and new civilizations; to boldly go where no one has gone before!"

Several vantage points can be engaged when viewing the distinction between S^2 (Home) and O^2 (Quest).

Chart One: Vantage Points

	S² (HOME)	O² (QUEST)
Values	Security Safety	Opportunity Openness
Compelling Image	Home	Quest
Perspective	Near (Proximal)/Present Far (Distal)/Past (History)	Far (Distal)/Future (Planning)
Orientation	Inward	Outward
Learning Process	Assimilation (Absorbing new information into current framework)	Accommodation (Modifying current framework based on new information)
Direction of Thought	Convergent (bringing thoughts together)	Divergent (moving thoughts apart)
System Status	Static/Strong	Dynamic/Flexible
Trust	Desired Outcome	Pre-Condition

Several important points can be made based on the distinctions offered in this chart. First, a strong tension exists in the specific lens of Essence being deployed—whether it be the Lens of Leading Part or COP. There is a strong pull inward (home) and push outward (quest) regarding the direction revealed by the lens. Furthermore, there is a push and pull in the psychosocial template of Trust. This template often includes myths of journey and discovery alongside myths of hearth and home. We are risking an unstable polystatic process while establishing and maintaining Trust.

A process of assimilation and convergence operates at Home in the world of security and safety (S^2). The Lens of Leading Part or COP is focused on what matters here and now. Furthermore, Trust is a desired outcome in the search for security and safety. We want to find a setting where we can trust the availability of resources to protect us from a hostile environment—along with the intentions, competencies, and perspectives of people with whom we interact. We are reticent about participating in a Trust Fall exercise with people we don't know or entering into an important relationship in the real world that requires us to trust strangers.

By contrast, a Leading Part or COP lens that focuses on the world of opportunity and openness (quest) is outward-looking. It is geared toward the future rather than the past or present. The Lens of Essence is pointed beyond the current horizon. When seeking opportunity and openness, we engage in accommodation and divergence.

All of this risk-taking and adjustment to a changing and challenging environment requires that we have already established trust in our ability to engage in a quest. We trust the resources and interpersonal support system we will need throughout this journey. We need an established Home before beginning the Quest. Thus, the psychosocial template of Trust contains both S^2 and O^2.

Differences *within* S² (Home) and O² (Quest)

The psychosocial template of Trust is filled with even more contradictions. While tension exists *between* Home and Quest, it exists *within* S² (Home) and O² (Quest). The vibrance in Essence is created by many tensions, including tensions within polarities. Specifically, there often is tension between security and safety, the two major values aligned with S² (Home).

Security tends to be a foundational (though distal) condition concerning viable human life. It resides at the base of Abraham Maslow's (2014) hierarchy of needs. We must find security in available and adequate shelter, food, and water. On the other hand, Safety is a somewhat more "advanced" and nuanced need for human beings.

At one level, safety involves protection from beasts and foes that might harm us (the Amygdala alert) along with shelter. At another level, safety concerns the condition of trust that we wish to find in our relationships with other people. While safety at the first (distal) level is rather easy to identify (are we sufficiently fortified?), safety at the second (proximal) level is more psychological. We have to "feel" safe when interacting with specific people.

When turning to O² (Quest), we similarly find that opportunity is more tangible than openness—though both conditions are primarily directed to psychological concerns rather than security. On the one hand, opportunity concerns our (distal) predictions about and planning for the future. By contrast, openness (like safety) is based on our (proximal) sense of trust regarding specific relationships with other people. In both cases, O² (Quest) is often a self-fulfilling, tightly interactional process.

We are likely to find an opportunity when we anticipate that it is available and when we take action to ensure its presence. Similarly, we are likely to find openness in our relationships with other people when we anticipate that this openness is reciprocated and when we

take actions that ensure this reciprocity or at least increase the possibility it is achieved.

S² (Home), O² (Quest), and the Three Facets of Trust

These distinctions between the fundamental S² (Home) and O² (Quest) values are important—not only because they create the Vibrance of Essence but also because they play an important role in establishing importance and viability regarding the three facets of trust I have identified. Competence is particularly important when we try to find security. We want to find a skillful carpenter to build our home and a stable supply of food and water at our supermarket. We are less concerned about the intentions of our carpenter or the producer of our food. They might be interested only in earning a buck. And they certainly can come from different cultures and might not be "fluent" in our culture.

Safety is another matter. Intentions are important. Are we interacting with a friend or with an enemy? Competence is also important, for we worry more about an enemy who is competent than an incompetent enemy. The latter enemy can be the source of jokes and caricature. The former enemy (powerful and skillful) is not the subject of humor.

A shared perspective can also be important when seeking out safety. Given that safety can be a psychological phenomenon, we want to be sure that our "friend" really understands and appreciates our situation (and we must appreciate their situation). The Amygdala alert is also to be found amid this safety concern. Are we confronting a threat that is not only strong and active but also intent upon doing us harm?

Opportunity and openness similarly require careful inspection because they play an important role in determining the importance and establishment of our three facets of trust. Opportunity is primarily reliant on our internal sense of competence. We are not worried so much about other people catching up. We are more

concerned about stepping up on the platform in the first place. Does it further our interest to fall back from the platform into the arms of some people we don't know? Isn't there a better use of our time? Aren't there better places where we might take a risk?

Our intentions take precedence over other people's intentions, though we know that we will need their assistance if we are to take full advantage of our opportunities. The matter of perspective also tends to be an internal matter. We embrace a unique perspective regarding purpose and the nature of success in life. The perspectives taken by those people who offer us an opportunity are important. However, their perspectives are not Essential.

It is matter of one's capacity to and interest in engaging what psychologists call a "theory of mind." This capacity concerns the ability to view the world from someone else's perspective. The way other people view the world helps us identify tactics and strategies. Nevertheless, this understanding of another person's perspectives usually does not determine the aspirations and goals we identify. Matters of control only relate indirectly to theory of mind. We might be able to "read another person's mind" but will give this insight little consideration when seeking to control a specific situation.

It is quite another matter when it comes to our search for openness. It is Essential that we gain an appreciation of another persons' perspective. That is one of the main reasons we are being open with them. In many ways, theory of mind represents the Essence of interpersonal effectiveness. We appreciate and are appreciated when we "know" another person and their perspectives. If we are "ignorant" about another person's world then we are inclined to be "stupid" in our relationship with them.

It is important to account for all three facets of trust when opening up to others and taking an interpersonal risk (such as falling off the platform). Are these other people competent enough to "handle" our disclosure of personal information and viewpoints? Do they have our interests at heart? Do they even understand why and how

we are being open (and is openness valued in their culture?) We fall backward off a platform when we increase our real openness with other people (rather than faking openness). We must discern the status of all three forms of trust when we offer a new idea during a committee meeting or provide honest feedback to a colleague during a coffee break. Risk is taken. Vibrance often ensues.

Fear, Loss, and Regrets

When engaging in polarity management, we must focus on not only the "upside" of each polarity but also its "downside." Barry Johnson (1992/1996) specifically encourages us to identify the fears associated with each polarity. As I have noted, we can further differentiate between fears concerning loss and fears associated with regret. I would suggest that we listen to behavioral economists and identify these regrets. They may play as important a role as the fear of loss in driving the shifting forces of polarity. They should be incorporated into the somatic and psychosocial templates when navigating the VUCA-Plus environment.

S^2 Loss

When considering the downside of S^2 (Home), we can first identify several primary fears regarding loss. First, there is fear that we will become rigid and stagnant by focusing on security and safety. We fear the loss of *Vitality*. Having secured our home, we never leave it. We remain close to accustomed food and water—no need to try something "exotic" when our palate has been satisfied with the regular old "ham and eggs" or "burger and shake." Our worst nightmare changes. It is not that we are insecure or unsafe. Rather, we have settled into a "humdrum" life. We are now that "boring" person we joked about during our youth. We have become bored with the way we live. The person we have become is no longer interesting. "By Jove, I now resemble my father/mother!"

When "stuck" in S^2 (Home) we find ourselves living a life of routine and complete predictability. I am reminded of an evening of minimalist music played by an orchestra in my region. While I

appreciated the willingness of this orchestra's conductor to try out new music and found the slow building of the tempo and emotional intensity of the music compelling, I also found that I was waiting impatiently for the composition to come to an end. Repetition can drain one's patience.

O² Loss

Fear that we lose our sense of well-being resides on the O² (Quest) side of polarity. We are overwhelmed. Our anxiety is no longer contained. We fear the loss of *Integrity*. I use this term as it relates specifically to structural integrity. We fear that we will "fall apart." The second use of the term "integrity" is also relevant. We lose integrity as it relates to character and honesty. When things are anxiety-provoking, then we cease looking at our compass of values and direction.

Instead, we become opportunists who seek any opportunity, even if it means sacrificing some core values (moral Essence). We share our Heart and Soul with another person. We find floodgates of negative emotions opening in this person. They display defensiveness, anger, disappointment—and perhaps rejection. Our flood gates have been opened. We feel embarrassed, disappointed, and/or angry. Our emotional and interpersonal intelligences are challenged. We don't know what to do next.

The accompanying nightmare centers on a swirling, chaotic world over which we have no control. We envision ourselves as strangers who are living in a strange land. I am reminded of Mussorgsky's musical composition, *Night on Bald Mountain.* Frightening demonic forces "come out to play" on the mountain. We long for the awakening of Morning and the tolling of church bells that bring Mussorgsky's terrifying score to a close. We fear becoming that "crazy lady/gentleman" who lived down the street when we were young. "My God, I might be driven to insanity like that neighbor I feared."

S² Regrets

I have identified some of the fears that attend to our residency in either the S² (security and safety) or O² (opportunity and openness) polarity. What about the regrets? When we have lingered in S² (Home) too long, we regret not having taken a bit of a risk.

Much like Jimmy Stewart in *A Wonderful Life*, we look at the posters of distant lands and wonder why we never took that trip. We look at the travel posters on our wall—or watch the inviting ads on our TV or the Internet that feature a beachfront or mountainside hotel.

We wonder what it would be like to book passage on a large ocean liner sailing the Caribbean Sea. Then there are the job postings that pop up on our computer or are identified by our close friend (who worries about our stagnation). We regret always saying "No" when someone offers us a chance to do something different. We wonder why we see only the hard side of any new venture. Filled with Regret, we often envy and hate those who have taken the journey outward from home. Our templates are replete with destructive and disorienting thoughts and feelings.

O² Regrets

At the other end of the polarity (O²/Quest), we find the regret that comes with living amid challenge and uncertainty. We pass by a house on our way back to the hotel where we are booked for several days. A cheery blaze in this home's fireplace warms its living room. We can imagine the life of this family. We wonder why our future includes no warming fire or welcoming living room.

We sit on a bench in the city park for several minutes, observing children playing on nearby swings. We reflect on the last time we spent quality time with our children in a playground. They have grown older and no longer spend much time at the park.

In the back of my mind comes Harry Chapin's song (*Cats in the Cradle*) concerning the father who never spends time with his son—and finds that his son is becoming "just like his father." This song is filled with regret. The message contained in its lyrics pulls at our fatherly (or motherly) heartstrings.

Why did I take this consulting assignment or agree to do a fair amount of work "out of town"? Here I am in an Asian (or European) city. I am a long, long way from home. Filled with regret, we often begin to both envy and hate. These emotions are directed toward those people who live in the house with the fireplace or those who are playing with their children. Yet again, our templates of Trust are replete with destructive and disorienting thoughts and feelings.

Chart Two: Fear, Loss and Regret

	S² (HOME)	O² (QUEST)
Fear	Boredom Rigidity Stagnation	Anxiety Sense of Overwhelm Lack of containment
Loss	Vitality	Integrity
Regret	Never leaving home Never taking a risk	Never being satisfied Never caring enough for what is really important

At the heart of the matter regarding the themes found in Chart Two is the psychological basis found in each theme. While there are internal and external factors to consider when framing the positive features related to Trust, the negative features tend to reside in our Heart and Head. Fear, Loss, and Regret play out inside us in response to conditions that often present themselves outside us.

Polarity Parameters

Having identified the key actors in this drama of polarized trust, I am ready to introduce three key parameters operating in all polarities. Two of these are emphasized by Barry Johnson (1992/1996). The third parameter is one I would add to the other two in preparation for a polarity-based analysis.

Both/And Rather Than Either/Or

Many of those reflecting on the nature of Trust tend to focus on only one of Johnson's two polarities. They might be among those who wax poetically and nostalgically about Home as the foundation for Trust. They would encourage us to recall what it is like to be wanted by those dear to us—and what it is like to care deeply about the welfare of those who are cherished. As musically declared in *The Fantasticks*, we should "try to remember" those precious moments – "and follow, follow, follow . . ."

Other people in our mid-21st Century world focus on Trust as a foundation for "Questing." They encourage us to get off the couch and embark on a journey. We should Trust our competencies and courage as we venture forth. Authorities on myth and the writers of Hollywood movies inform us that we should follow our bliss (Campbell, 1991) or rely on the *Star Wars* "force" to guide and propel us through extraordinary ventures into the unknown.

As creator of the *Star Trek* series, Gene Roddenberry encourages us to "go where no [human being] has gone before.' The tension between these two ends of a polarity is great. Home and Quest tug at our Heart, Head, and Soul. As I have proposed, the embrace of polarities yields Vibrance. In this case, Vibrance in the Essence of Trust resides in Home and Quest.

I will frame our analysis around these two polar-opposite stances and begin by identifying some of the benefits and disadvantages associated with each of these images of Trust. These benefits and

disadvantages lead us away from the horizontal dimension of polarities to a vertical dimension.

Positive and Negative Perspectives

There is a strong tendency for all of us (especially under stressful conditions) to focus only on the positive side of the ledger. We usually focus on the positive aspects of only one option. We might turn to the negative side of the opposing option but are unlikely to give much consideration to the negative side of our favored option. We over-praise, over-sell, and over-commit to our favored option. This often leads to surprise, disappointment, and abandonment of our favored option once it is enacted. These strong negative emotions drive the polarity's swing and impact the system's inevitable Change Curve.

We should look both left and right when crossing a busy intersection. Barry Johnson encourages us to look left and right when managing a specific polarity. It seems that there are "goodies" to be discovered on both ends of a polarity. Many years ago, the architects of Synectics and spectrum analysis (Gordon, 1961) proposed that good ideas are buried in any proposal being made in a Synectics group. I suspect that Johnson would offer a similar proposal regarding both sides of polarity. Any specific idea will have its downside. Not even "apple pie" is all good. We may find bits of an apple's core in our "apple pie." Furthermore, our pie will lose its wonderful taste when sitting out too long.

It seems that statements regarding those things or events that are all good often end up being nothing more than self-referencing tautologies. They reside only a short distance from: "Goodness is a good thing!" Or "Great ideas are inevitably great!" This type of tautology can clutter our templates of Trust. Self-referencing statements provide no baselines or predictions that could aid our polystatic processes.

We don't have to be eternal pessimists or grumbling curmudgeons to recognize that there are always concerns to be addressed when

considering any idea. This perspective relates to the behavior scientists' suggestion of a premortem assessment to identify what might go wrong when implementing any initiative (Kahneman, 2013). Our templates must contain a diversity of perspectives (both positive and negative) if they are to be used in our navigation of the VUCA-Plus world.

Positive and Negative Forces

It is in the balanced and sustained consideration of not only polar-opposite priorities and perspectives but also the positive and negative aspects of each polar position that we are best able to appreciate and eventually manage a challenging polarity – such as we find with S² (Home) and O² (Quest). Johnson offers excellent advice and many case examples in his two books (Johnson, 1992/1996; Johnson, 2020). He identifies the steps to be taken in conducting a polarity analysis. These steps include consideration of both the good and bad to be found in each polar.

I would suggest that the positive (good) and negative (bad) parameters be supplemented by a process of force field analysis that Kurt Lewin (2010) suggested many years ago. The total field of forces identified by Lewin can be incorporated into a helpful Psychosocial template. The diverse and often opposed forces in Lewin's field provide the Vibrance of Essence.

Kurt Lewin proposes that specific factors (forces) either assist or block the achievement of specific goals within this system (field). I expand on Lewin's analysis by borrowing again from Goodwin Watson (Watson and Johson, 1972). Watson suggests that these factors might be structural (S) in nature. They might also involve processes (P) and/or attitudes (A) operating in this system. A thorough analysis should include impinging structural forces, such as finances, staffing, facilities, and organization charts.

This analysis should also include processes I have identified as *Empowering*. These empowering processes relate to communication, conflict management, problem-solving, and

decision-making skills and styles. Finally, the field analysis should incorporate the more elusive forces associated with the prevalent attitudes and culture of the system. These forces relate to factors such as morale, appreciation, and expectations. We can conduct a force field analysis at the start of any polarity analysis by identifying the specific outcomes we hope to achieve concerning structures, processes, and attitudes. These outcomes can help guide our selection of a Lens and the direction in which we turn this Lens.

There are two sets of desired outcomes concerning this analysis. One set (S^2/Home) includes security and safety. The second set (O^2/Quest) includes opportunity and openness. I begin with the lens of S^2 (Home) and identify the structures, processes, and attitudes (SPA) that will facilitate the achievement of the S^2 goals (security and safety) within this system. These factors (forces) hold a positive *Valence* about S^2 (Home). This list might include such forces as a system's long history of stability (attitude), close working relationships among members of this organization (process), and the presence of long-established institutional operations (structure).

We then turn to the negative side of the force field ledger. Our Lens is turned in this direction. These forces hold a negative Valence about achieving desired S^2 (Home) outcomes. This negative Valence list might include a prevalent desire of members of this organization to try something new (attitude), the emergence of a new generation of members who prefer to relate to one another in a quite different manner (process), and the existence of "cracks" (such as growing financial debts) in the institution within which the organization is operating (structure). The list might also include fears (boredom, rigidity, stagnation) and concerns about lost vitality. Regrets might surface concerning the failure to leave home or take a risk.

A similar force field analysis can be conducted with O^2 (Quest). Once again, we turn our lens in two directions. We first identify the positive forces and then the negative forces to be found in the

organization's structures, processes, and attitudes. The positive forces might include expanded ownership of the organization (structural), hiring of young people with ample technological skills (process), and a prevalent spirit of entrepreneurship in the community where this organization resides (attitude).

The negative forces might include a lack of consistent financial support for innovation (structural), a lack of support and coordination between units of the organization (process), and a lingering fear regarding the broader economy in which the organization operates (attitude. The primary O^2 (Quest) fears (anxiety, overwhelm, non-containment) might be included on the list along with the feared loss of integrity and potential regrets regarding elusive satisfaction, lack of caring for others, and failure to discover what is important.

Two other assessments should be made regarding each of the forces that have been identified. The first assessment concerns the strength of each force as it helps or hurts the accomplishment of desired outcomes. The strength will vary depending on the specific outcome being considered. This assessment is important in the case of polarities. There is an inclination to overestimate the strength of a particular negative force regarding one polarity when beginning to swing to the opposite polarity. We have a strong desire to rationalize the swing. As a result, the enemies of the first polarity grow stronger. We find even more compelling reasons to escape this troubled and besieged polarity.

The second assessment concerns our confidence regarding the potential impact of each force on the desired outcomes. Are we sure this force will have a positive (negative) impact? How do we know that this force is particularly strong (or weak)? Do we need more research on this force to be better informed regarding the Valence and/or strength of the force? Once again, this assessment is particularly valuable when we are facing polarities. Our emotions are likely to be a bit higher when the push and pull of polarities are prevalent. We must slow down, double-check our findings, and

critically examine the assumptions and biases we bring to our force field assessment.

Upon completion of the force field analyses, we are prepared to begin our polarity-based analysis.

Graphic Representation of the Trust Polarity

The parameters have been identified. The players have been introduced. It is time to present a graphic that incorporates these parameters and players. Here is this graphic representation.

Polarity Graphic One
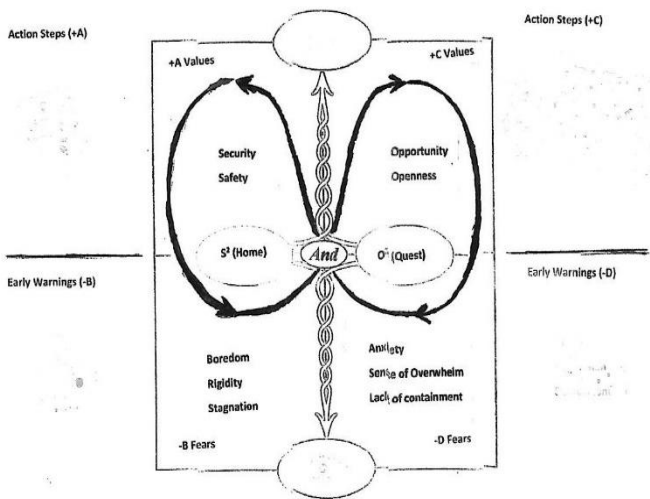
I have offered a broad portrait of polarities playing out in our lives and society. I just presented a graphic portrayal of the swing between the worlds of S^2 (Home) and O^2 (Quest).

Personal and Interpersonal Polarity Dynamics

I will now provide concrete portraits of several dynamics related to S² (Home) and O² (Quest). I examine the lenses brought by two hypothetical actors in their search for the Essence of Trust. They are Susan and Rick.

Susan

Our first person to face polarity lives in a nice suburban community on the outskirts of Cleveland, Ohio. Susan dwells in a daily regimented routine. She also lives in something of an informational silo. Her selection of news shows to watch and Internal messages to download is quite limited. She is highly selective in her admission of information about the world that is in any way "disturbing." Kevin Weitz and I (Weitz and Bergquist, 2024) have devoted an entire book to the description of "bubbles of belief" such as can be found surrounding Susan.

Susan brings a Primacy lens of Essence to her world. She is looking backward rather than forward. She is rather "old-fashioned" in this regard. Life for Susan in the suburbs is not unlike that lived during the 19th and early 20th Century by a majority of Americans. The life of these rural Americans consisted mostly of farming while Susan's current life is circumscribed by work as a receptionist in an office building near her home.

Yet, there were many ways in which Susan's daily life resembled that of the farm family. Susan has many friends in her neighborhood and has been engaged to a loving man she has known for ten years. He was introduced to her by one of her friends. Susan is enamored with the history of her local community and is religious about attending the county fair each year. The song *Country Roads Take Me Home* is one of her favorites, even though she rarely sees a country road and is firmly ensconced in her home.

Trust prevails everywhere in her life. Susan trusts the intentions of her boyfriend and her neighbors. She finds that her boyfriend is

competent in fixing broken appliances in her home. These are the first two facets of Trust—and she can check them off. Susan can also check off the third facet (shared perspectives) because she feels confident that everyone in her community perceives, thinks, and feels as she does. It would seem that Susan's entire community lives in a shared Bubble of Belief.

Susan may be using her Primacy lens to live in a world of distorted Serenity. Susan seems frozen in place. She feels ill-equipped to address the challenges of a VUCA-Plus world. For Susan, the "shelter" is critical. She needs a seemingly unchanging community, unchanging relationships with her boyfriend, and an unchanging job as a receptionist. Still, something is stirring in Susan. She loves her boyfriend—yet they are still not married. Susan is satisfied with her job as a receptionist but wonders if there is something more that she (as a woman) can do.

A couple of weeks ago, Susan stumbled on a program where Mika Brzezinski and a couple of other women were talking about an upcoming international conference where women were speaking about "knowing their value" as competent, ambitious human beings. Susan wondered about her own "value." Were her abilities fully realized in her daily routine for many years as a receptionist? Shouldn't she have been allowed to do something more challenging at her office? Was her competence as a receptionist making her "indispensable" – and therefore preventing her from being offered a new, higher-paying, and more prestigious job? A bit of frustration was welling in Susan's Heart and Soul. Should she look elsewhere for a job? Could she really "trust" the intentions of her boss? Was he interested in her welfare?

Regret was emerging. While Susan feared moving on to another job or even leaving her boyfriend and perhaps her community, she also wondered if she had settled for too little in her life. Maybe she never really valued her own "worth" as an employee—or even as a potential spouse. Susan imagined spending the rest of her life in the same town with the same boyfriend (or perhaps husband) and

holding down the same job. She was suddenly pulled toward getting out of her routine. There was the glimmer of a new horizon. Vibrance associated with a Home/Quest polarity began to energize Susan's daydreams and her dreams at night.

Susan loves old film musicals, especially *Hello Dolly* (starring Barbra Streisand). There is an extended scene filled with song and dance during which Dolly Levi declares that she is "coming back!" after spending many years hiding out. Susan suddenly replays this scene on her old DVD player. Unlike Dolly, Susan never left a vibrant life. Her life has always lacked Vibrance. With this disturbing realization, Susan opens her drawer to pick out the Leading Part lens rather than her preferred Lens of Primacy.

Rather than looking backward in her life—where no Vibrance seems to be found—Susan focused on how she was "leading" her life and the "non-leadership" role she was playing as a receptionist. She first rotates the Leading Parts lens to the facet of competence. Susan knows that she is "good at her job." Like Dolly Levi, Susan has great interpersonal skills. That's what makes her a terrific receptionist. Could she make better use of this valued skill? Susan recalls Mika Brzezinski's comments about "knowing one's value" as a competent, ambitious human being.

Susan then rotated to her facet of intentions. What is of greatest value in her life? As an "old fashioned person," Susan has always believed that there is some "higher purpose" to which she is called as a "spiritual" person. Has she spent much time considering this purpose? Susan suddenly recalls the playwright who composed the original play on which Hello Dolly was based. He is Thornton Wilder, who also authored "Our Town" which is one of Susan's favorite plays. The words of Emily, the recently deceased resident of Our Town's Grovers Corner, come forcibly to mind: "Does anyone ever realize life while they live it…every, every minute?" Emily's heart is filled with regret. Susan wonders if her heart is similarly filled with regretful acknowledgement that she neither

appreciates what is available to her nor is mindful of the purpose(s) that should animate her daily life.

We find that Vibrance has now appeared in Susan's front room, having lingered (perhaps for many years) in the "back room" of Susan's psyche. This backroom is aligned with the "other room" Truman Capote (1994) identified in *Other Voices Other Rooms*. Capote's brief novella concerns voices "tapped down" (or repressed) earlier in our lifetime. These voices reemerge as important, transformational guides in later life (Bergquist, 2012; Yong, Warrier, and Bergquist, 2021)

What voices are now being heard by Susan—thanks to Thornton Wilder? In what way(s) might the Vibrance now appearing in Susan's front room lead her to make some hard choices and take risky action? Might Susan join Dolly in finding a new life—perhaps with a new beau, a new job, a clearer purpose, and maybe a new community? Does she have enough Trust in her professional and interpersonal competence? Can she Trust her enduring intentions (to remake herself)? Will this mean she begins to see the world from a new perspective? Does she now more frequently bring out the variety of lenses in her psychic drawer? Will the Essence of Trust now include a Quest alongside a Home?

Rick

Our second case study concerns a man who lives in New York City. He brings a lens to his life that differs from Susan's. Rick moved from a mid-sized organization in Vermont to take a position at an advertising firm in the "Big Apple" (building on his work as advertising director of a mid-size newspaper published in his Vermont community). He lives an "exciting" life of challenge and creativity in NYC. His Leading Part Lens is fully operational—for he feels fully in command of his life and work. Leadership resided in his deeply embedded Internal Locus of Control. Rick might not be "in charge" of other people, but he was "in charge" of his own Head, Heart, and Soul.

A special evening at a Broadway play (often a Stephen Sondheim musical) follows dinner with a colleague at a "fabulous" New York restaurant. Then, a post-theater espresso at an off-Broadway bistro—maybe accompanied by a latke or slice of cheesecake. Rick holds a compelling vision of his future wrapped around his GOP lens. His General Operating Principle is founded on a belief that he is a "damned good" salesman. He can envision where he will be in his career in sales ten or even twenty years from now. He is in the business of selling visions to the recipients of his advertisements.

Rick is "hooked" on the excitement and challenges of his work life. His GOP keeps him energized (and sometimes up at night). We now know that "workaholics" like Rick may be addicted to the adrenaline their body produces. At the very least, Rick relies on his multiple doses of highly caffeinated coffee. He is equally dependent on high-voltage, deadline-driven work demands. It is telling that days away from work are unpleasant for Rick. He is withdrawing from his adrenaline-laced work. As a result, Rick often returns to his office on weekends or works at home on his computer.

Addiction might also reside in Rick's urban-based interpersonal relationships. They are high-voltage and often challenging—just like his job at the ad agency. Rick's General Operating Principle, like the GOP of many New Yorkers he encounters, includes a provision about hanging out with as many exciting people as possible. Many people Rick meets are engaged for only a few minutes. These interactions are "transactional" in nature. They are intended for task completion rather than interpersonal need satisfaction.

When Rick takes a few minutes to reflect on what is occurring in his interpersonal life, he allows one of his favorite Sondheim songs to swirl around his brain: "Another 100 people just got off the train." Rick imagines that each of the people has a wonderful story to tell. He recalls a World War I song: "How ya gonna keep 'em down on the farm after they've seen Paree!" For Rick, "the Big Apple" not "Paree" (Paris) keeps him enthralled and engaged.

Rick has several close friends in New York City. They are mostly associated with his advertising firm. When not attending theater, a typical early evening is spent with his ad-men friends at a bar near his place of work. While Rick is not a heavy drinker, he does like to get just a bit high with his friends. Rick is not currently dating anyone. Rick has no trouble finding men to date as a handsome, accomplished, and energetic Gay man. However, most of his dates aren't very pleasurable. Furthermore, given the lingering fears of sexually transmitted diseases, Rick is hesitant to get too involved physically (and emotionally).

Even with his hesitation about involvement with one other person, Rick trusts the journey he is on while living and working in New York City. His Leading Part Lens reveals Rick's deeply felt Trust in his ability to live in this vibrant city. He rotates his Leading Part Lens to a facet of competence. Rick knows that he is "good at his job!" Rick's Leading Part Lens also can be rotated to the facet of intentions. His commitment to work in advertising is sincere, as is the commitment of his advertising colleagues. Rick believes that he is an honorable and ethical advertising professional who is uniquely successful in his job. Furthermore, he chooses to work alongside other honorable and ethical advertising professionals.

While New York City is highly diverse, Rick shares GOP perspectives and values with most people he meets (ever so briefly) and his colleagues at work. A shared Trust in perspective is affirmed when Rick rotates to the third (perspective) facet of his Leading Part Lens of Essence. For Rick, leadership primarily concerns working with others who share common beliefs and values. Leadership in a matter of alignment. In many ways, Rick and Susan are alike. They both like living with other people in a shared Bubble of Belief. Perhaps, most of us share this preference with Rick and Susan . . .

The story doesn't end here regarding Rick's Head and Heart. In his powerful experience of Trust, our protagonist finds the troubling presence of another set of perspectives and values (another Lens).

While Home usually remains in the back room of Rick's psyche, he imagines moving back to Vermont. There are not many Gay men in his Vermont community. And there still are strong negative vibes in his community about Gay relationships. Nevertheless, Rick believes that those Gay men who do live in his Vermont community might have more in common with him than the many Gay men living in New York City.

There is also a lingering uneasiness about the work he is doing. Sometimes, Rick finds little gratification in producing and selling ads to clients with products about which he doesn't genuinely care. He misses the more "honest" work of financially supporting his local newspaper through his work as advertising director of this publication. As in many small communities, his Vermont newspaper struggles to stay alive. Rick sometimes thinks he could somehow help this newspaper survive using ideas regarding technology he acquired in New York City. An alternative vision of his future has emerged and vibrated in his back room. Voices from his past and "other room" are demanding acknowledgment. Rick envisions becoming a small-town savior rather than a successful urban entrepreneur.

As mentioned, one of the things Rick loves about living in New York City is attending theater. Alongside Sondheim musicals, we often find that *Avant-Garde* plays are on Rick's schedule. Rick loves to find a new play at an off-Broadway theater that is edgy and controversial. Recently, he attended a play that offered an alternative version of Samual Beckett's *Waiting for Gudot*. Instead of waiting for Gudot (God) to show up, the two protagonists (ad executives) are waiting for the new client and the big dollars that come with this client.

Called *Waiting for Avidus* (Avidus being the Latin word for greed), this play represented a pull for superficial success at the expense of ethics and an insatiable desire for more money. This play and the theme of greed stayed with Rick for several weeks. It rattled his GOP lens. What is his General Operating Principle? Does his

espoused GOP match with his GOP-in-use (to borrow from Argyris and Schön)? He takes out his Leading Part lens and rotates to the facet of intentions. Are his acts as an advertising professional genuinely honest and ethical? Or is he kidding himself? Perhaps Rick and his colluding colleagues are living in a Bubble of Belief that belies their *Avidus* (greed).

Rick felt he had no one to talk to about his reactions to Avidus. Something was stirring within him. Avidus swirled around his brain and aroused Vibrance in his back room. He was both intrigued about and frightened of the dissonance and discord that were now prevalent in his Psyche. Home and Quest were both alive and well. Their clear voices were now heard outside Rick's "other room." They were now playing as a full-formed polarity in his Head and Heart.

While Rick loves the "nontraditional" musicals written by Steven Sondheim and the avant-garde plays of Beckett and other "s##t disturbers", he also admits to loving old musicals that are to be found "on the Great White Way." He recently attended a Broadway revival of Leonard Bernstein's *Wonderful Town*. He left the theater with one of the songs lingering in his brain (and heart). It was "Why, oh, why, oh, why, oh /why did I ever leave Ohio?" Perhaps the "Ohio" tune lingered because of its similarity to a favorite theme in a Brahm symphony. However, "Ohio" might instead be stuck in Rick's brain because Comden and Green's lyrics to this song resonate with a slowly emerging desire to return home.

Rick replaces "Ohio" with "Vermont" and finds himself at times regretting his decision to leave home ("why, oh, why, oh). At times, Sondheim's "another 100 people getting off the train" can lead Rick to feel exhausted rather than exhilarated. This song (like *Waiting for Avidus*) can portray the dehumanizing impact of urban life. Rick is pulled by Regret concerning his decision to leave Vermont.

Rick slowly begins to consider a return to Vermont—even if this means the loss of wonderful opportunities afforded by the "Big Apple." Will the Essence of Trust now include a return to his

hometown alongside (or instead of) his ongoing journey of discovery in New York City? If he moves back to Vermont, might he regret leaving New York City? "Why, oh, why, oh, why, oh/why did I ever leave Big Apple . . ."

Societal Polarity Dynamics

I have focused primarily on dynamics associated with the operation of Trust alongside S^2(Home) and O^2(Quest) in our personal and interpersonal lives. These dynamics also seem to operate in much broader political and international spheres. While each era of world affairs is distinctive, certain familiar cycles take place. As Mark Twain indicated: "History never repeats itself, but it does often rhyme".

During the past century, we saw the establishment of order and some tranquility in early 20th Century Germany as I have noted under the autocratic rule of two Kaisers and Chancellor Bismarck); I have also identified a similar setting that was established during the 1930s (under the despotic rule of Adolph Hitler). Security and Safety were secured at the expense of freedom and individual expression. Serenity (SC^2+) was to be found only in a distorting world of half-truths, over-blown pageantry, and persecution of "other" people.

We find something quite different operating in early 1920s Germany with its *Avante Guard* expressionism in the arts (portrayed in the writing of Christopher Isherwood and later on Broadway in the musical *Cabaret*). Following World War II, we see a "new" Germany filled eventually with optimism and the reconciliation of East and West Germany ("the wall is torn down!") O^2 (Quest) is alive and well. Today, there might be a swing back toward S^2 (Home) —especially with the immigration challenge.

Similar, though perhaps less dramatic, polarity-based swings occurred in many other parts of the world during the 20th Century and are taking place right now (often in disturbing fashion). In the United States, safe and secure environments existed before World

War I—at least for those with power and wealth. We saw a more equalitarian establishment of safe and secure settings after World War II in the establishment of the American suburbs and a "clean" culture saturated with the perfect family (*Ozzie and Harriet*, *Leave It to Beaver*) and nostalgia (*Gun Smoke* and Disney's Main Street).

At the other end of the 20th Century swing was the freedom and frivolity of the mid-1920s (the flapper era) as well as the idealism and anarchy of the mid-1970s (the "hippie era"). We swung back and forth, replicating Johnson's polarity dynamics, and may now be engaged in another mid-21st Century swing. As I have noted, the swing might often be preceded by rapid oscillation. This oscillation might be present in the present-day trembling of our society between two quite different future societies.

A Polarity Analysis

I shift attention to what happens when we try to *maximize* the benefits of either polarity having completed the preliminary framing and charting, as well as introducing personal and historical polarities and templates, I identify and analyze the good and bad of each polarity. Furthermore, I conduct a force field analysis to generate insights and provide guidance in assessing each polarity's upside and downside.

S² (Home) Upside

In the case of sustaining a commitment to S² (Home), the maximization of security and safety would enable both Susan and Rick to live a comfortable life. All three facets of Trust would be achieved in their life. They would both be fully aware of and could use their competencies, complemented by the competencies of their friends and neighbors. Trust would have been firmly established.

Susan knows she can continue to do a good job as a receptionist. Rick knows (or at least believes) that he could successfully transition from a high-pressure job in New York City to a low-pressure job in his hometown. Rick could become a "big frog in a

small pond." Both Rick and Susan really "know" the people living in their small town (be it a suburb near Cleveland or a village in Vermont). As I noted earlier regarding the Dunbar number, at least 150 people "know your name" in a small community. Furthermore, you know their names and quite a bit about their personal history. In such a secure setting, you can Trust everyone's intentions and know that they all "speak the same language" as you and come with a history similar to your own when they interact with you.

From a broader historical perspective, we find a similar level of comfort and Trust in a society where S² (Home) reigns supreme. There is one dominant narrative that everyone in this society accepts as the "gospel". Nothing changes. There appears to be no need for major reform. This condition of security and safety produces a widely shared assumption that there are people in our society who are technically and/or socially competent. They can solve whatever problems arise.

Some of these members of our society are not only competent; they are dedicated to the welfare of our society. Dwight Eisenhower served as a father figure to an entire nation. John Foster Dulles identified the enemy (Soviet Union) and found sufficient resources to meet threats posed by this enemy. Everyone speaks the same language (English). They are socialized into a particular way of being ("the American Way").

S² (Home) Downside

Barry Johnson suggests that we pause at this point—and quit extolling the virtues and benefits of a life filled with serene security and safety. What happens if S² (Home) reigns supreme? First, it means that not much learning is taking place. Our children never quite mature and are vulnerable to disruption in the "regular order of things."

Second, life in a silo leaves one with little opportunity to experience and taste all that our vibrant world has to offer. We see only the sidewalls of the Silo and can glimpse upward to only that small

portion of the sky that shines down from the top of the Silo. Third, we must distort reality to live comfortably in a world saturated with VUCA-Plus challenges. As I have noted, a world of Serenity (SC²) is only found if we are willing to descend a rabbit hole to a wonderland of lies, conspiracies, and "alternative realities."

We find similar difficulties in the lives of Susan and Rick. A world of S² (Home) requires Susan to remain in her current job and foreclose any new learning or growth. She remains in a relationship that is not truly fulfilling and never meets anyone new who might be of "interest" to her—coming from a different background and perhaps even speaking a different language.

Rick might find that a move back to Vermont and residing once again in a world that provides more security and safety than New York City is purchased at the expense of growth-enhancing career challenges and the excitement of interacting with some of the 100 people who just got off the train.

Rick might also find that he must abandon a more open expression and enactment of his distinctive lifestyle when returning to his hometown. Security and safety come at the expense of displaying an authentic self.   In reaction to this downside of S² (Home), we turn to the other end of the polarity.

O² (Quest) Upside

We extoll the benefits of opportunity and openness in an O² world of Quest. We find innovation and adventure at this other end of polarity. An O² Quest produces an opportunity for growth and an openness to new experiences. We journey outward and upward, finding new paths and gaining new insights about the dynamic world in which we live. Susan envisions a life in which she is not only challenged to uncover her competencies. She is also provided with wonderful experiences that she cannot find in her suburban community. Susan imagines journeying to a major city—such as Chicago. She could find a job that differs from and is more fulfilling than being a receptionist.

What about Rick? Unlike Susan, Rick is living an O² life of Quest. He is thriving in the vibrant world of advertising in New York City. He finds a rich cultural life in this cosmopolitan environment. He can live in an environment that enables him to explore the full meaning of his lifestyle preferences. Susan could try out different lifestyle preferences in her own life if she embarked on an O² Quest.

Historically, we have found times during the past century when American society (and many other societies) has produced mini renaissances—with free expression of ideas and diverse images of a desired future. O² (Quest) provides opportunities for the entertainment of minority perspectives, as well as openness to new cultural forms (in the arts and media). O² provides the "oxygen" that refreshes and energizes a society. Borders are opened. "Newcomers" are welcome. These immigrants bring new perspectives and practices to an existing society that are viewed as a "breath of fresh air."

It is important to reiterate that Trust plays a quite different role at this end of the polarity. Trust is no longer the desired outcome. Trust is now a prerequisite to one's successful engagement in a Quest. If we can't Trust our competencies or the competencies of those supporting us, then we shouldn't embark on the journey. If we are not clear about nor certain of the reasons for taking on the Quest, then perhaps we should not choose this option.

Maybe we should stay put if this means journeying to a "strange new world" where our fundamental perspectives and practices are challenged or readily misunderstood. In each case, we must establish Trust before pulling out our roadmap and warming up the engine. If Trust has not been established, then it becomes an impediment (a negative force) and belongs on the downside of Johnson's polarity map.

O² (Quest) Downside

Is the journey outward into an exciting new world all good? Can we find "heaven" in a world saturated with O² (Quest)? I am reminded of an Emergency Ward physician I interviewed many years ago. He indicated that the Emergency Ward was "heaven" for him. It is a world filled with challenges, life-and-death decisions, and new learning (about surgical procedures) around every corner. What about today? Would this doctor still consider his emergency ward to be heaven after many years of facing these life-and-death challenges?

A world saturated with O² can kill us. We need some other gases in the air we breathe. We also need to escape from a world filled with O² challenges. These challenges are particularly prevalent in a VUCA-Plus environment. Opportunities are fine, but sometimes we need to relax into something we already know well and can readily engage. Openness is desirable. However, we don't want to be flooded with experiences or with people requiring our constant adjustment and adaptation.

Rick is certainly aware of the O² downsides. He is exhausted after a day of work and an evening of boisterous interactions with his work colleagues. He sometimes declares (to himself) that he has had enough of the "high life." He no longer wishes to scramble when finding a genuine way to appreciate the product or service being marketed by his client. He is tired of always living with the new and "exciting." How about working with something that is 'old news' and someone a bit boring!" Sparkles and glows can lead to headaches and the bright lights of Broadway can blur our vision.

Susan is unaware of the downsides found in that which is new and glittering. However, we can imagine a moment when Susan leaves her "old" job and "old" boyfriend. She pauses for a moment. Tears come to her eyes. She longs for the "old days." Perhaps Dolly Levi should never have gone to the Harmonia Gardens. Was she a bit "hung over"? Did Dolly's feet hurt following her evening of strenuous dancing? Susan recognizes that searching for a new job

in a new (much larger) community will present her with O^2 moments of regret and deep sorrow. "Why oh, why oh, why oh/why did I ever leave Ohio . . ."

Similarly, we find collective moments in a society when the era of innovation and exploration gives way (for at least a brief period) to restive support for the way "we used to do things." A conservative political party suddenly gains traction in the polls. Legislation that restricts immigration or bans certain Internet material is being prepared. Attendance increases at theme parks that feature replications of old seaport villages or western towns. Reruns of old TV shows are abundant on Cable TV. These shows feature traditional families—and are replete with comedy rather than tragedy.

We observe families checking into their DNA and preparing digital scrapbooks containing pictures of folks from the previous generations (s). There is suddenly a focus on the past—for the future is not looking great and profound societal change is coming around the corner.

Polarity Dynamics

What is the outcome of this pull between S^2 (Home) and O^2 (Quest)? Barry Johnson might predict that Susan, Rick, and Society are moving from a positive perspective regarding and accompanying prioritization of one polarity to a negative perspective and caution regarding this polarity. A shift takes place to the other polarity. A growing concern then arises about the second priority. Back to the initial priority and then on and on from positive to negative, back to positive, then to negative, and back to positive once again.

As portrayed in Polarity Graphic One, this swinging pattern produces a Figure 8 design. For Susan, the swing would begin with the positive of S^2 (Home). It would begin with the positive of O^2 (Quest) for Rick. We can start at either pole when describing polarity dynamics operating in most societies.

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Dithering

Polarity-driven swinging back and forth through Figure 8 can occur in several ways. The swing can be a form of *Dithering* (rapid swinging back and forth between two ends of a polarity). This dithering often occurs as a series of thoughts or feelings. Susan ponders the move to a big city, then recalls that she has a community bake-off to attend. She feels annoyed that she has to go to this event. She wonders if there would be these "obligations" if she "got lost" in an urban setting. She then notes that it might be lonely in the city. Susan gets ready for the bakeoff.

Rick similarly dithers for a moment while scurrying through a busy workday. There is a momentary flashback about that theatrical scene about returning to Ohio, then an interesting idea about the visual setup for the new advertising campaign. Stepping into the elevator, Rick recalls a line from *Waiting for Avidus* that makes him squirm a bit about his job. Stepping out of the elevator, he makes a mental note to set up that reservation for dinner tomorrow night ("I do love city life").

Dithering enables us to engage briefly in a fantasy about the other side of the polarity and then return to reality. Susan pauses during a brief break in her receptionist routine to daydream about life in a Paris *pied-à-terre.* Rick skims a copy of the *Farmer's Almanac* he purchased last week. He lingers on the weather forecasts and wonders if Vermont farmers truly rely on these forecasts.

Along with other members of his society, Rick starts to binge-watch a 6-part documentary on small-town America (S^2). Media researchers find that they soon abandon this series. Some initial viewers of this documentary are tracked. They click their remote and start watching a 4-part series on the latest nanotechnologies (O^2). Rick turns off his TV. He flips back and forth between a digital announcement he downloaded regarding the latest shows on Broadway and a section of another small-town-oriented magazine he purchased featuring homes located in the woods of New Hampshire. . . .

Flailing

I distinguish between Dithering and Flailing. Flailing is a dramatic swing involving enacted decisions rather than just shifting thoughts, feelings, or fantasies. Flailing can lead to precipitous decisions. Where should she live, what job should she do, and (even) whom should she love? Susan could decide to "take this job and shove it!" She could "kiss off" her boyfriend. She then hops on a Chicago-bound bus, hoping to find an apartment and a job. Susan "trusts" that the world (or a divine guide) will be "kind" to her and open new doors for her.

Instead, she can take a more "reasonable" step. Susan drives her car to a friend's home in Atlanta, where there is the prospect of a public relations job. This would be an advance over her receptionist job but still make use of the people skills she learned while being a receptionist. Then the flailing takes place. Susan realized that she had made a "big mistake." She returns from Atlanta (or from Chicago) and asks her boss (and boyfriend) to take her back: "It was a mid-life crisis."

Rick does some similar flailing about—though not as dramatic. He uses his two-week vacation in August to drive back to his hometown in Vermont. After visiting his relatives and old friends, Rick decides this is not a suitable time to move back home. His Vermont town is "not yet ready for him." The editor of his local newspaper is not in the mood for more "edgy" reporting. Rick returns to New York City. However, he is not through with flailing about.

Perhaps a return to his old town doesn't make sense. What if he moved to a large community in Vermont (such as Manchester)? Rick contacts the *Manchester Journal*. There are no jobs with this newspaper at present. Rick begins to panic. He contacts the *New Hampshire Union Leader*. Nothing is available. Maybe he should stay in New York City. However, his failure to find a potential newspaper position in New England only whets his appetite. We human beings most desire what we can't have. Sigmund Freud

offered us insights into this source of attraction: nothing is quite as tempting as the forbidden fruits of our society.

Collective flailing has been engaged frequently by societies throughout history. We collectively manifest short-term adoration of specific people and cultural artifacts (clothing styles, TV programs, colloquialisms, etc.). This adoration soon turns elsewhere. Flailing is pronounced when members of a society have lost their anchor (stable values), their revered leaders, and/or their collective vision of the future (Polak, 1972). We see dramatic examples of collective flailing in the turbulent numbers offered by reputable polling organizations and in the temporary celebrity status of a previously unknown movie actor or sports figure.

Many years ago, the noted artist, Andy Warhol, (purportedly) delivered a clear yet profoundly cynical perspective on the temporary status of celebrityhood: "In the future, everyone will be world-famous for fifteen minutes." We shift back and forth as a society between a preference for stability (S^2: security and safety) and a preference for new and exciting (O^2: opportunity and openness). The dramatic flailing that occurs between these preferences is often destabilizing and destructive.

Conclusions: The Matter of Trust

Fundamentally, preferences and priorities are based on Susan's, Rick's, and an entire Society's assumptions regarding Trust. Do we establish Trust in preparation for an O^2 (Quest)? I would suspect that Susan isn't going to move out of S^2 (Home) and is likely to ignore or discount the negative side of S^2 (Home) until she can Trust that the move to opportunity and openness are supported by sufficient Trust in her competence, in the intentions of people on whom she will rely when starting the Quest, and in the similarity of perspectives and values of the community (as well as new friends and organization) to which she is journeying.

Similarly, Rick is not likely to leave New York City and the world of O^2 (Quest) until he is assured (Trust) that his hometown will

welcome him back and that his distinctive lifestyle and partner preferences will be respected. He will also be testing out his intentions regarding the move back home. Can Rick openly embrace (Trust) his new dreams and aspirations? Why is he leaving the great opportunities in the "Big Apple"? Is he just fantasizing about finding a rewarding job as a reporter in his local newspaper? Trust must also be present when a society becomes quest-driven (O^2) When Trust is lacking, members of a society are likely to turn back from an open-minded relativistic frame (O^2) to a frame of Dualism (right/wrong, black/white) (S^2) (Perry,1970).

Trust is viewed quite differently when we are considering S^2 (Home). As I suggested, Trust now becomes a desired outcome rather than a prerequisite. A failure to achieve Trust by ensuring security and safety will lead us away from (S^2) to a cynical frame of Multiplicity (Perry, 1970). Truth and the description of reality are now based on what provides an advantage. An alternative reality is best understood as a convenient reality. Having been thrown out of Eden (S^2) by the betrayal of a respected, trusted leader or by the corruption of once trust-worthy sources of information, members of a society assume that nothing can be believed and that the "golden rule" should be altered to "those with the gold will rule."

As Andy Warhol might have observed, fame and fortune are up for grabs. Without a collective sense of Trust, the two ends of a polarity freeze in place. Nothing good or constructive occurs. The message is clear. We must firmly establish Trust if we are to emphasize security and safety. The challenge is now clear. How do we build a secure and safe platform of Trust where competency is evident, appropriate intentions are secured, and shared comprehension is achieved? We turn to this matter in our next chapter on the Essence of Trust.

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Chapter Nine

Essence IV: Trust, Optimization, and Polarity Management

Having explored an Essence approach to contemporary issues and considered how this approach might be applied to the Essence of Trust, we are now ready to begin identifying ways to best manage the polarities associated with Trust. Barry Johnson (1992/1996; 2020) writes about the "optimization" of polarities.

As part of this optimization, Johnson warns that we must not try to maximize the appeal of any one side. Rather, we must carefully optimize the degree to which we are inclined toward one side or the other. We must also optimize the duration of our stay on this side. How committed are we to focusing on this one side? How long will we sustain this focus?

Optimizing requires us to find a reasonable and perhaps flexible setpoint as we act on behalf of one side or another. Finding these acceptable optimum responses and repeatedly redefining them is the key to polarity management. We also might find specific Lenses of Essence to be useful in determining the appropriate responses.

Polystasis and Optimization

I find this polarity management strategy aligns with the Lenses of Essence and the concept of Polystasis that I introduced earlier in this book. As I have noted, the process of Polystasis differs from the traditional concept of Homeostasis. The baseline is continually shifting with Polystasis. Assessments of one's current environment are frequently re-engaged. By contrast, homeostasis requires a stable baseline. Homeostatic reassessments are rarely warranted unless major environmental changes occur.

Polystasis: As in the case of Allostasis [the process described by Peter Sterling to account for the dynamics operating in the human body], Polystasis involves an ongoing, dynamic interplay between an individual, group, organization, or society and their desired states, predictions, and actions. Under Polystatic conditions, we are constantly revising our templates and baselines. We then make predictions regarding what will happen if we take specific actions. This prediction, in turn, leads to modification in the desired state to which we hope our actions will take us.

Much as Miller, Galanter, and Pribram (1960) did in their presentation of a cybernetic model of human behavior, Polystasis requires ongoing feedback from one's environment and the agile adjustment of expectations and desired outcomes based on this feedback. While traditional behavioral perspectives begin with the assumption that human beings (and all sentient animals) seek to return to a state of satiation, the Polystatic perspective is more closely aligned with the 21st-century perspectives offered by neo-cognitive psychologists, many neurobiologists, and those in the positive psychology camp. Humans (and most other sentient beings) are inherently curious and playful. They seek to engage actively in and learn from interactions with their environment. Through these interactions, we gain valuable information that enables better Polystatic predictions. Polystasis serves a highly adaptive function in that regard.

Auto-telics: One final point. Polystasis is aligned with a theory of motivation that incorporates so-called auto-telic (self-motivating) properties—such as the joy inherent in playful behavior. The experience of competence (White, 1959) and of Flow (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990) provide this kind of auto-telic motivation. These motives, in turn, are the general (distal) psychosocial motives that complement the more immediate feedback-based Allostatic and Polystatic adjustments we make from moment to moment. We adjust internally (our neurobiological system) while accommodating externally (our psychosocial behavior).

Our Lens of General Operating Principles (GOP) helps to provide continuity and stability during Polystatic adjustments. While we can dance around the environmental changes taking place, our GOP lens identifies the tune to which we are dancing. Similarly, our Lens of Leading Part can provide direction regarding the direction taken when making the adjustments. Without the Leading Part, our adjustments can become nothing more than opportunisms or aligned accommodation. We lead ourselves and others in a world of VUCA-Plus that requires both continuity and agility, especially when a fundamental polarity of Essence is confronted.

Optimization: Barry Johnson describes a process of optimization based on the ongoing and dynamic assessment of polarity's two ends and modifying one's decisions based on this assessment. I am similarly describing a process that incorporates Johnson's conditions. Reasonable and flexible set points are established alongside optimal responses that are repeatedly redefined. A simple, mechanistic model of human behavior can't contain the dynamic processes described by Johnson.

Most importantly, a behavioral model that relies on returning to a stable state (homeostasis) is inadequate for addressing the challenges inherent in Johnson's polarities. Behaviorism might operate for a pigeon placed in a rigid cage or for white mice running through a maze that never changes. However, we live in a mid-21st century world that is never rigid (unless we make it so) and is always changing (unless we block the change). We can operate adaptively when faced with the polarities of contemporary life only if we embrace reasonable templates, allow for flexible and changing set points (baselines), and search for optimal responses (effective actions based on valid predictions).

Adaptive agility is a prerequisite when volatility, uncertainty, complexity, ambiguity, turbulence, and contradiction are pervasive. As noted, the Lenses of Leading Part and GOP can guide the maintenance of this adaptive agility along with the requisite

system continuity and stability (assisted by a Lens of Structure/Stasis).

Susan's Optimization

I turn back to Susan's and Rick's case studies. These studies center on the Trust-based polarity that exists between Home (safety and security) (which I have labeled S^2} and Quest (opportunity and openness) (O^2). Susan comes from a position of safety and security (S^2 /Home) but is considering a move to greater opportunity and openness (O^2 /Quest). Conversely, Rick is currently in a position of O^2 and is considering a move back home to greater S^2.

Optimization for Susan might begin with her review of the want ads in her local newspaper. Or with her Internet search for job postings in her community. Susan also begins to prepare a resume that enables her to look for a new job. Now comes the points of inquiry. For what type of job might she be eligible? How would the pay for a specified posted job compare with what Susan now makes?

Most importantly, is there something about an advertised job that stirs up Susan's aspirations? Is there alignment with her GOP? Susan takes on the task of predicting how likely she will be able to secure a "better" job. This becomes one of her 7 "facts." As she reviews several job postings, Susan will find that her prediction ("fact') is changing, as is her baseline. She gains greater clarity regarding what kind of job might be in her skill range and what kind of compensation she might anticipate.

Critically, Susan's aspirations are likely to change given this feedback regarding jobs in her community and her modified prediction regarding job success. Her subsequent actions will change based on this new baseline and prediction. She might decide to look at job postings in nearby communities. In examining these postings, Susan concludes she is making too much money as a long-time receptionist to consider any entry-level position. Her baseline changes. She might decide that a change of location is a

viable option. Perhaps she could leave her community. How about a job in Chicago? One of her 3 propositions is being crafted. It concerns the value of a sustained pursuit of challenging and gratifying work. Her GOP lens is in full use.

She returns to the Internet and searches for job postings in Chicago. There are many more postings. Her past review of jobs in her community enables Susan to sort effectively through job postings in Chicago. Susan adjusts her baseline regarding compensation, knowing that the cost of living in Chicago will be higher than in her suburban community. She has begun the process of optimization. Rather than swinging from one polarity to another, Susan is eliciting Internet-based feedback and adjusting her expectations and further actions based on this feedback.

Rick's Optimization

Rick can similarly engage in the process of Optimization and Polystasis. He takes action that is a bit bolder than that taken by Susan. He does return to his hometown during a vacation break. However, this journey back home comes with an agenda. Like Susan, Rick is asking some questions when returning to his hometown. These are the fact-finding questions that will help him pursue a 7-3-1 process.

He assesses his feelings and tests out the correlation between his fantasies of living again in his hometown and the realities of this life (especially given his sexual preferences and lifestyle preferences). Rick checks in frequently with his baseline regarding his life at the agency and away from work. He struggles with formulating a proposition related to establishing his life priorities. Does he rely more on his head or his heart?

Rick turns to his heart. He makes a more informed prediction regarding how he will feel about moving back to his hometown. His baseline will inevitably change based on his shifting prediction. Rick's anticipated income is likely to drop significantly (and there might even be an extended period when he is unemployed). Rick

also adjusts his baseline regarding what is reasonable regarding theater attendance, savoring a great meal at a fine restaurant, and finding friends who share lifestyle preferences with him.

Rick quickly checks his feelings. These might be the most important predictions that he will make. Using his GOP lens, Rick moves further in determining the 7 relevant facts and formulating the 3 propositions. Does he feel less stressed in his hometown than is often the case in New York City? Is this lower stress level likely to remain if he moves back home? What does he predict?

Is there a certain "glow" (a squirt of oxytocin) when he meets with members of his own family and with Vermont acquaintances from his past life? Is there a lightness in his step when he shops for groceries at the store he frequented as a much younger man? Will this glow and lightness be there if he moves back to Vermont? What does he predict regarding how he will feel about the loss of New York City cultural opportunities?

Two subsequent questions emerge. They relate directly to his formulation of the propositions. Can Rick trust his predictions— especially regarding his likely feelings? Can he accept the modified baseline that accompanies his predictions? Will he be sacrificing too much to find a new life in Vermont? Does an elevated baseline regarding comfort and joy (security and safety) compensate for the predicted loss of income, great theater, and compatible friendships? As Barry Johnson recommends, Rick must spend enough time in S^2 (Home) to gain clarity regarding the upside and downside of this polarity. Rick's predictions about life in an S^2 (Home) setting must be accurate and relatively free of reality-distorting biases.

Rick brings out his Primacy lens so that he might look back on his original decision to settle in New York City. Are there lingering feelings of relief—or perhaps regret—regarding this NYC choice? The Leading Part lens proves even more valuable for Rick. He focuses on the courage it took to make the NYC movement.

Does he find the same kind of "leading" courage when considering a move back to his hometown? Can he make a "difference" in his hometown community if he takes on a role as community leader or at least joining a "leading" communication venue (newspaper) in his community. Would this be better and more "ethical" than crafting an advertising campaign for women's lingerie or men's shoe polish?

Trust and Lingering

Jay Forrester, the primary architect of System Dynamics, enters our case studies at this point. Forrester has often declared that one should stand still and not do anything until they are clear about the dynamics operating in the system in which they intend to act.

Like Barry Johnson, Forrester recommends that we linger for a while when seeking to optimize the benefits of a specific polarity. Johnson's and Forrester's advice certainly can be directed toward Susan and Rick. Optimization requires more from both Susan and Rick. Some additional thought and planning must be engaged if Johnson's optimization is to occur.

Susan must identify criteria for accepting a new job (compensation, type of work, kind of organization, etc.). These relate to her three propositions. She must prepare a plan to leave her current job after obtaining a new position in her current community or in Chicago. How does she make the move in a way that minimizes the negative impact of this move? Perhaps it isn't Chicago. Instead, she could find a job in Cleveland (so that she can remain in her current home). What would be required in terms of transportation if Susan commuted to Cleveland?

Is stable residency to be found in one or her propositions? More generally, is she benefiting from her GOP lens? Her Leading Part lens might be of greater benefit. With her focus on leadership, Susan is reminded again of Mika Brzezinski's "knowing one's value" speech. Perhaps, she can best find her "value" by changing jobs—whether this requires moving to Chicago or commuting to

Cleveland. Susan is leaning toward a career shift. The comforts of Home would no longer be primary. To borrow from Peter Vaill, this would be a "leaderly" shift toward Mika Brzezinski's value-based Quest.

Rick faces a similar decision point. He must make what seems to be a comparable choice between Home and Quest. He would have to optimize a move back to Vermont by setting up criteria for accepting a new job in his hometown. He becomes familiar with theaters and restaurants within a 50-mile radius of his hometown. He spends time on Zoom with some of his old Vermont friends to determine if they still have something in common with the now more "cosmopolitan" Rick. His list of valid "facts" is growing. In his selection of the 7 facts, Rick is gaining insights regarding his proprieties. He finds that NYC theater and restaurants are important, as are old Vermont friendships.

Rick takes out his Lens of Structure/Stasis. Which of these priorities are likely to remain important throughout his life? He is suddenly struck by the realization that old, sustained friendships are an Essence in his life. The "good life" of New York City is exciting but might not endure. Important relationships will remain in place. They will become even more central in his life as he grows older. Rick is leaning toward a move back to Vermont.

I have focused on Susan and Rick's work regarding the alternative polarity in this illustration of Johnson's optimization process. The same process can be engaged when seeking to reinforce and optimize the benefits of the polarity in which one currently resides—and when incorporating planning for the future in their templates.

Susan can focus on improving her current preference for S^2 (Home), while Rick can find new forms of support for his or quest-driven (O^2) life. Most importantly, the assessment of Trust levels helps to determine appropriate baselines. Baselines can be more ambitious if the level of Trust regarding competence, intentions,

and shared perspective is high. The potential for integration, in particular, requires (and helps to bring about) high levels of Trust.

Susan and Rick must Trust that they are sufficiently competent to engage successfully in this "daring" blending of home and quest. Their Psychosocial templates must be infused with a sense of competence (along with a counter-concern about this competence not really being available or about this competence being overused or inappropriately used). When Polystatic processes are engaged, there will be greater clarity regarding intentions (baselines), for intentions are being repeatedly tested against predictions about the real world.

7-3-1, Polystasis and Optimization

The third facet of Trust is successfully employed when one tests assumptions and predictions embedded in the template against real actions taken and results obtained. We can gain clarity regarding untested assumptions and biased predictions by opening ourselves and our templates to ongoing feedback from an environment independent of our established beliefs (our Bubble of Belief) (Weitz and Bergquist, 2024).

Our Lens of Primacy helps us recognize and acknowledge the strength of our existing beliefs, while our GOP lens provides us with guidance regarding how to establish valid "facts" that move us beyond static beliefs. We can, in turn, create appropriate propositions related to the implications of these facts.

The General Operating Principle that emerges from 7-3-1 provides guidance in establishing appropriate, adaptive baselines, while the 3 propositions assist us in establishing appropriate, fact-based predictions. The 7 facts lead us to useful focal points for testing out the validity of our propositions and prediction. Polystatic meets 7-3-1. We benefit from this alliance when struggling with a Polarity of Essence such as we find with Home and Quest.

Optimization and Social Policy

Optimization can come to our rescue, along with Polystasis and 7-3-1, when we, like Susan and Rick, confront the Home/Quest polarity. We can deploy Johnson's optimization when addressing a polarity such as Home/Quest as an individual or in a group, organization, or entire community. How, for instance, might we optimize the polarity of Money and Equity?

I return to the Golden rule. While those with gold may rule a system, it is possible to optimize the S^2 (Home) focus on the achievement of security and safety. We optimize by setting up laws and regulations restricting the amount of money that can be poured into a campaign.

We further optimize by ensuring that nonprofit organizations receive some of the "gold" via donations so that they can operate on behalf of the welfare of all citizens (especially the underserved). Rather than immediately decrying the role played by "gold" in disrupting society (thus reducing security and safety), citizens can focus instead on maximizing the constructive use of available funds to ensure security and provide a safe setting for everyone in their community.

Patience and persistence are required to ensure that the "golden rule" is not turned on its head by S^2 autocrats or (in current times) by S^2 technocrats. Higher-order problem-solving and decision-making are also required if the collective psychosocial template of a society is to be balanced with the "gold". Those seeking to preserve the "golden rule" must appreciate the complexity of current political realities (relativism).

However, they must move beyond this reflective perspective to a commitment in the midst of relativism. They must assume a position of advocacy and apply constructive political leveraging to the current situation. One of these strategies, for instance, is the identification and persuasive representation of a specific downside

of the current S^2 polarity. A narrative concerning personal damage to a citizen victimized by the gold can be prepared.

Polarities and Polystasis

Polarity management recommendations are not easily enacted, especially when stakes are high, and stress is abundant. As Johnson and others engaged in polarity management have noted, effective management of polarities requires constant processing of vigilance, negotiation, and adjustments. Polystasis is required alongside templates that contain diverse perspectives and practices.

We must continuously seek and refine a dynamic, flexible balance between the two ends of the polarity (in this case, Home and Quest). Each side provides a viable psychosocial template incorporating beneficial contributions without engendering serious negative consequences.

We must accompany this balance with some immediate, tangible correctives if our Polystatic assessments and predictions indicate that our current baseline is no longer appropriate. The agility inherent in a Polystatic system is especially required when we face challenging societal polarities. Specific alarms must ring if we are off base—and we are often off base as members of a mid-21st-century society saturated with VUCA-Plus.

Alarm Systems

Barry Johnson has another important point to make regarding the management of polarities. He identifies the value inherent in setting up an alarm system as a safeguard against overshooting either side of the polarity. It would be prudent to build an alarm system that warns us when we may be trying to maximize one side and are on the verge of triggering negative reactions.

The alarm signal for the polarity of home and quest might foster a growing dissatisfaction with either priority. We would observe a struggling system: abundant vacillation, frequent reversal of an existing priority, and very short-term implementation, criticism,

and abandonment of revised actions. The signal might also be apparent at a deeper, psychological level. There would be a growing sense of helplessness and hopelessness.

S² (Home) Alarms

Certain alarms ring when Trust has not been established at home. Without adequate security and safety, one experiences one or more of the three Ss. One will become sleepy or at least not very alert. One's job becomes routine—as does one's nonwork life.

It is hard to stay alert when there are no new predictions or adjustments to make in one's baseline. One is sleepy not because of a lack of sleep but because there is no good reason to greet life and work with any enthusiasm. Boredom is often accompanied by long nights of sleep – yet there is always the feeling of being "tired" and just "not up to par."

The second fear (rigidity) is realized when one acknowledges stubbornness. "No" is more often stated than "Yes." There is little tolerance for novelty: "We always take this road when driving home . . . so don't try anything different!" The term "curmudgeon" is usually applied to old, stubborn folks. It can also be assigned to those who are too young to be ornery or crusty. An alarm blares.

It also blares when the third fear (stagnation) is realized. The signal might indicate a slowing down. We find it hard to make decisions—even those that are trivial. Our habitual thinking reigns supreme. We rarely engage in any slow thinking or reflect on what we are doing with our "precious" time on earth.

We become "sloggy" in our appearance, gait, and relationship with other people. We miss the jokes told by our friends. We sit silently at a friend's house and don't have much to say to our spouse or children when they ask how we are doing. It is hard for us to keep up with the fast pace of the mid-21st Century. Suddenly, all three signals unite: we are sleepy, stubborn, and slow. Something must change!

Table One: S² Alarm Signals: Fear

The Fear	The Signal
Boredom	Sleepy
Rigidity	Stubborn
Stagnation	Slow

Our fears often are of secondary importance when we feel a loss or find a lingering Regret. However, it is easier to instantly smother our losses and regrets than to smother our fears. It seems that our losses and regrets are more elusive than our fears. They reside deep in our Heads and Hearts. The alarms associated with our fears are usually signaled in more obvious ways. Given the subtlety and depth of many feelings of loss and regret, we must pay attention to the signals that arise from realizing these losses and the growing power of our regrets.

At the heart of our sense of loss when stuck in S² is a vague (but powerful) sense of listlessness. Just as the label "curmudgeon" is often assigned to those who are old and rigid, the label "listless" is often assigned to young adults trying to figure out who they truly are. I am reminded of the scene in Rogers and Hammerstein's movie about the *State Fair*. At the start of this movie, we hear Jeanne Crain sing about her listlessness in the ballad "It Might as Well Be Spring." She doesn't know what is missing but does know that something has to change.

This same feeling seems to be apparent in the lives that many of us have led. It is particularly prevalent when we are going through a major life transition (Levinson, et al., 1978; Levinson, 1997) or when we have realized some major life goal and are now waiting for a new one to appear. We have "confiscated" our future and must build a new vision to which we aspire. We are "listless" in waiting for the

new vision to arrive. We feel a loss of vitality without a clear, inspiring goal.

Then there are the regrets. They can eventually overshadow the fears and losses. We have settled firmly in our home for many years, yet we regret never having left home. I return to Jimmie Stewart as he appears in *It's a Wonderful Life*. Stewart is suffering from a mid-life crisis. Like many men and women who have settled into an S^2 life, Stewart is in deep despair over a life that may be "wonderful".

However, it is a life that is also filled with regret—to the extent that Stewart tries to take his life. Stewart might have attended to his signal (restlessness) before he stepped on the bridge (to be rescued by a somewhat dysfunctional guardian angel). He might have done something about his regret. Even if it was just to recreate some of the romantic scenes Mary had prepared earlier in their marriage.

Finally, there is the matter of regrets regarding a life of security and safety that is free of risks. At times, we may feel we have been a "coward." Opportunities appeared on our horizon, but we stayed put. One of our old friends announced a new job. They shared their excitement about the prospects that opened up for them. We are relieved that we are not this person. At the same time, we are envious. Our envy soon turns to self-criticism. "Why do I envy this person since I would never make this leap myself? I have no reason to be envious. I do have good reason to give myself a kick in the rear end!!!"

Most importantly, we recognize that nothing we care about is sufficiently great for us to take a big risk. We conclude that we don't genuinely care about anything important other than a safe and secure home – and perhaps our family's welfare. When we don't care, then we become "care-less." There is a sense that we are detached from the important things in life. This suggests that we are also detached from our feelings. We are willing to sacrifice "care" to retain security and safety. This is very troubling. It is an important alarm signal to which we should attend.

Table Two: S² Alarm Signals: Loss and Regret

The Loss/Regret	The Signal
Loss of Vitality	Listlessness
Regret: Never Leaving Home	Restlessness
Regret: Never Taking a Risk	Carelessness

Many alarms can signal when we seem too comfortable with the status quo. We are aroused from our lounge chair by clarion calls: "Wake up!", "Move!" "Do something!" These alarms might have to sound out several times—for we are sleepy, stubborn, and slow. However, we are a bit listless and restless. We begin to reflect on our "precious" time on earth. This enables us to listen to the alarm. We are concerned about not seeming to care anymore about anything. Perhaps the alarms are doing us a favor rather than being just a source of annoyance.

O² (Quest) Alarms

The alarm signals regarding an over-emphasis on or extended residency in O² (Quest) have to be as loud and persistent as the S² Alarm signals. However, in this case, the alarms must compete against a busy life and the adrenaline-addicting pace of change and challenge. There is so much noise surrounding the O² quest that such concerns as the overuse of drugs or excessive consumption of food or coffee can easily be overlooked. We are working very hard—and this excuses our depression (or helps us ignore our lingering "blues").

We feel detached from the real world. We are playing a game that doesn't seem related to anything of real importance. That new marketing campaign consumes all of our attention (while we ignore the damage done by marketed products). Members of our

Skunkworks are inventing a new drug that will cure that nasty illness (but may have some major side effects). It is all about doing something new and exciting. These inventions will enable us to win—regardless of medical side effects or long-term financial consequences.

We must pay attention to the alarms. They uncover and signal underlying fears that we must not ignore. When we are anxious, there is a lingering sense of being overwhelmed. We feel like our world is not safely contained. There is a strong temptation to misuse medications, imbibe in too many Martinis, or spend too much time betting on sports teams. We might find that our temporary "High" from an exciting project is overtaken by a bout of fatigue, sleeplessness, and even depression.

We feel overwhelmed. This feeling often results in a short-term "bout of the blues" (temporary/ situational depression). However, excessive O^2 can also serve to cloche chronic (clinical) depression or serve as a vehicle for the manic phase of a bipolar mental illness. Even without the dramatic appearance of depression, overstaying and overreliance on O^2 (Quest) can leave us feeling empty and lost in a world that yields no meaning or purpose for us. It provides only a temporary "High". The alarms are ringing. We must make some adjustments.

Table Three: O^2 Alarm Signals: Fear

The Fear	The Signal
Anxiety	Drug Use
Sense of Overwhelm	Depression
Loss of Containment	Detachment

The alarm signals regarding O^2 can be expanded beyond the domain of fear--as we did with S^2. Important O^2 signals can be identified that relate to loss and regret. First, there is the profound but often elusive sense that one's integrity has been lost. We become "expedient." Discovering abundant opportunity, we are inclined to become "opportunistic." We grab the low-hanging fruit and do not consider whether or not this fruit is good for us or the community we serve. Ken Gergen (1991/2000) writes about multiple opportunities that saturate our sense of self. We suffer from *multiphrenia* (rather than schizophrenia) with many identities swirling around our Head and Heart.

When we pause to consider this loss of guiding values and priorities—and ultimately the loss of a unified, integrated sense of self—there is often an attendant sense of Guilt: "My God, what has happened to me!" "Will I do anything to make a buck or score a point at work?" "Where was the point that I forgot obligations to my spouse and children?" These guilt-ridden questions serve as important alarms. If they are ignored, then we are likely to experience regret at a later point in our life. I am reminded of Harry Chapin's "Cat's in the Cradle." Regret is expressed regarding a lack of quality time spent with one's son.

Reget is also likely to serve as an alarm in several other ways. We can regret the ongoing desire to always remain on the quest. Satisfaction is always one step ahead of us. In an interview I conducted several years ago with mature students in an M.A. program, I inquired about the money they "should" be earning in their current job. One of the students replied: "One dollar more than I am now making . . . " I then asked, "How do you know if you have been successful?" The answer: "When I make this one additional buck!"

One of my colleagues recently reported at a healthcare forum (Salus, 2024) on an experience he had as a child growing up in a lower-middle-class family. He made friends with another child who came from an upper-middle-class family. My colleague noted that

he had never been in a home when the backyard "seemed as large as a park!" After several months, his new friend indicated he was about to move. His father had just accepted a better job in another city. My colleague was stunned (and still vividly recalls this moment). Why did my friend's father get a new job? What's wrong with his current job? There was a first glance at (and awakening to) upper-middle-class life and values. The O^2 quest was in full display.

A fundamental question emerges. At what point do we have enough money? What is the Essence of Sufficient Wealth? Does the point ever come when we can Trust our financial well-being?? How much does/should my MA student indulge in the ongoing search for financial worth? Are any other achievements in life of equal or greater worth than money?

A second question is engaged. At what point does the upper-middle-class father quit moving from job to job? At what point does he consider costs accruing to his family? Is he indulging in a quest for job advancement (and perhaps more money) at the expense of other priorities in life? Does the MA student or his ever-moving father pause when the alarm sounds? Does the alarm even sound for these two O^2-inspired gentlemen?

Finally, regret comes when one recognizes that they have never cared enough about what is truly important in life. We keep a financial scorecard or a resume filled with many increasingly "important" job assignments. Does the scorecard or resume indicate anything about the difference we have made in our world? I recently wrote a book with Gary Quehl, a colleague who led several major educational associations in Washington D.C. By all accounts, Gary was a "success" in life. However, now residing in the foothills of California's Sierra Nevada mountains, Dr. Quehl is retired (like me) and reflecting on the nature of a "successful" life. We decided to do some of this reflecting by conducting interviews with other men and women who had led a life of major achievement.

The primary theme that emerged from these interviews concerned a motive I have already briefly introduced: *Generativity* and deep caring. Gary and I wrote a book (Bergquist and Quehl, 2023) in which we identified four modes of Generativity. One mode focuses on caring for children and specific projects we conduct. A second mode concerns our mentoring of other members of our organization or community. The third is founded on a wish to expand our caring over time. We become "guardians" of the past (history, awards, ceremonies, etc.).

A fourth mode concerns the extension of caring in space. We become "stewards" in and of our community. We find *Community Engagement* in this fourth mode. This mode of Generativity was important to Gary Quehl in his current life. For both Gary and me, an alarm signaled the absence of caring (beyond our own family) in our life of retirement.

While Gary has focused on the fourth mode of Generativity, I have become more of a historian (writer) and celebrant of achievements by other people (Mode Three Generativity). I suspect that Gary Quehl and I are not alone in doing some reflection at this point in our life—when the seduction of O^2 opportunities and potential success resides in our past. The alarms might have sounded somewhat late in life, but they did sound—and we paid attention.

Table Four: O^2 Alarm Signals: Loss and Regret

The Loss/Regret	The Signal
Loss of Integrity	Guilt
Regret: Never Being Satisfied	Excessive Indulgence
Regret: Never Caring Enough for What Is Really Important	Inconsistency/Fickleness

There is one other point that I wish to make with specific reference to regret and its emergence at various life stages. In making this final point, I place a hat on my head as a neo-psychoanalytic theorist. I have been particularly influenced during my professional life by the work of George Klein (a psychoanalytically oriented researcher and theorist working at New York University).

In one of his many essays, Klein (1967) introduced an interesting concept regarding the dynamic unconscious processes operating deep in our psyche. He described a process called *Peremptory Ideation* that I suggest relates to the dynamics and power of Regret.

Peremptory Ideation

Klein proposed that in our internal world (psyche), we create a specific idea or image that begins to "travel" around our psyche (head and heart). This train, already filled with ideas and images, picks up fragments of unconsciously held material (memories, feelings, and thoughts) along the way. The ideational train operates much like an avalanche and other forms of "strange attractors".

The train becomes increasingly rich and emotionally powerful as it picks up new intra-psychic material. It gains increasing energy from this unconscious material. We witnessed this train operating in the lives of Susan and Rick. The Vibrance occurring in their back room was generated by interactions and clashes in the content of their peremptory ideation. Truman Capote's voices from other rooms are the articulations of peremptory ideations.

At some point, this ideation begins to pull in material from outside the psyche. External events suddenly take on greater saliency (more emotional power and vividness). Events such as Susan's *Hello Dolly* or Rick's *Waiting for Avidus* are swirling around one's brain. They activate Vibrance in one's back room. These events are now connected to the internal ideation.

Klein suggested that this ideation takes priority when valuing, attending, and remembering in the external world. It assumes a commanding ("peremptory") presence. A positive (reinforcing)

loop is created, with the external material now joining the interior material. They all cluster around the original (often primitive) ideation. Vibrance is to be found in their clustering—especially when the material includes polarized pulls – such as that between Home and Quest.

Catching the Train: While Klein focused on the internal dynamics of peremptory ideation, I propose that this internal ideation might align with an external ideation arising from our challenging polarities. We can envision the internal ideation "hooking on" to the ideological "train" passing by us from an external source.

We hitch our thoughts and emotions to an outside train. Irrational and anxiety-saturated external ideation—such as regrets—can be particularly attractive, given that this internal ideation is likely to be quite primitive (often taking on a "haunting" presence). The internal ideation may be "haunted" by ghosts and goblins of regret from childhood and early adulthood.

We are also haunted by a collective unconscious inherited from our ancestors and culture. Regrets are passed on from generation to generation. It can be traumatizing when the train is drawing in the peremptory ideation of many people. We find that there are many societies in which there is a history of collective regret (slavery, war, ostracism, etc.). These collective, unconsciously held regrets produce what is now called the "social unconscious" (Hopper and Weinberg, 2019).

Members of this traumatized society held a common set of troubling images. Citizens often report similar regret-filled dreams and similar stressful bouts of regret-associated feelings. These feelings are easily triggered by events that produce nothing more than mild stress in many other societies.

With this powerful alignment of internal and external material, we become victims of personal and collective peremptory ideation. This new unconscious coalition demands attention. We are

obsessed, closed-minded, passionate, and regretful. Sometimes, we are driven to action.

Anxious Passengers: Collective regret can escalate collectively engaged peremptory ideation. Everyone on the train is uneasy about what is happening in their society or what has occurred in the past. Racism looms big and is often unacknowledged in American societies—and in those found in South Africa and Indonesia.

The anxiety associated with this Regret can, in turn, be produced by the loss of confidence in a chosen leader or by mild public protests regarding some social ordinance. It might very well be that the "social unconscious" material appears in our internal peremptory ideation. This being the case, one can imagine that an ideational train carries or is at least aligned with external images—such as one's impressions of a leader or a public protest.

Regret is a powerful emotion. It is one that Behavioral Economists often consider to be more salient than either the fear of loss or the prospect of gain. The internal psyche and external ideological train will hold the same social unconscious material.

A "perfect" storm of prejudice, intolerance, fear of the "other," and (eventually) violence is created. New reasons are generated to feel regret. One final point. It is more likely that this ideational train will be fully operational and pulling on external images when we are tired and overwhelmed. Such a state is not uncommon when living in the world of VUCA-Plus.

We step on board the train in an anxious and fatigued condition. We soon find that the train is filled with passengers who match our anxiety and fatigue. They also hold an often-unacknowledged feeling of regret regarding their personal life as well as their collective life. Together, we create and maintain even more bizarre fictional accounts of the menacing world of VUCA-Plus in which we live and work.

Bubbles of Beliefs become even more distorted. Our train of regret might also contain some less menacing elements. Music (and other art forms) might be particularly welcomed by the train—even if these are "blues of regret." They can be personal blues: "I did her wrong." "What did I have that I don't have now?" "Will you ever forgive me?"

They can also be expressions of collective regret and critical social commentary. Some members of our society are crushed down: "That Lucky Old Sun." "Old Man River." Other members of our society do bad things. The song "Strange Fruit" by Billy Holiday comes to mind. Many of Bob Dylan's songs (such as "A Pawn in the Game") and those of U-2 ("Sunday, Bloody Sunday") provide powerful musical critiques.

There are even whole musical productions that offer thinly veiled social criticisms—such as *Wizard of Oz*. Artistic expressions can enhance the content of a peremptory train while invigorating the psychic energy that propels the train. These expressions can also offer "acceptable" alarms to which passengers on the train might listen. In addition, they contribute to Vibrance in polarities that accompany pain and regret.

Collective Public Alarms

While I have focused on personal (often unconscious) alarm systems, collective alarm systems are prevalent in society. They are not unconscious. Rather, they are highly public—though frequently ignored. When a particular community, state, or nation seeks only to establish security and safety (S^2) then alarms are likely to be sounded in response to oppressive, authoritarian rule, rigid dichotomies (we/they, good/bad, right/wrong) and a lack of initiative among those living and working in this S^2 societies.

The alarms are sounded from deep in silos that provide superficial and often temporary security and safety for those living in these confined spaces (Weitz and Bergquist, 2024). Similarly, alarms

sound in a society that is enthralled with innovation and that which is new and shiny (O^2).

These alarms take on the form of deeply felt collective exhaustion (Newport, 2016). There are likely to be troubling increases in stress-related health issues, demand for mental health services, and abuse of a wide variety of substances in a society saturated with O^2.

Alarms, Allostasis, and Polystasis

Personal alarm systems not only impact the behavior of those confronting polarity; they also impact brains and bodies. Peter Sterling's (2020) model of allostasis is relevant. When faced with the downside of a specific polarity, our predictions are "alarming" about what could happen in and to our physical and mental state if we continue to do what we are now doing.

We might fear boredom (S^2) or fear its opposite—this being anxiety (O^2). With this fear in mind, we can predict that our body will have to change. Boredom will bring about the need for activity, while anxiety will bring about the need for defensive action.

Fear will also often require that we modify our psychosocial template. We identify new enemies that threaten our sense of self or our previously settled sense of life purpose and meaning. These enemies might be the lure of routine, bribery embedded in a stable income—or seductive Serenity.

Both of the fear-based predictions require that we mobilize our sympathetic system. We must mobilize to combat the new enemy. Our baseline changes. We no longer seek parasympathetic rest but are now preparing for sympathetic action. However, there is no direction in which we should direct our actions. The alarm offers a loud sound but points in no directions.

A blaring psychic noise signals the need for action—but no one and nothing is pointing the way forward. The sympathetic system will serve no important function if we subsequently fail to act. It will do more harm than good. We burn up while remaining immobile.

What happens at the behavioral level? Here is where Polystasis kicks in. The alarm sounds. We pay attention. Our predictions are now challenging the current way in which we are operating. We must alter our psychosocial template.

Our S² needs (security and safety) might not be easily met anymore. They come at a considerable cost to our freedom and sense of self-respect. How we have been trying to fulfill our O² aspirations (opportunity and openness) might no longer be working. We are exhausted and overwhelmed.

Our baseline is also challenged. We grow restless and want to find more life challenges. Alternatively, we are anxious and long for fewer life challenges.

Given these alterations in our baseline and predictions, we revisit the other side of our polarity. We can either bounce over to this other side (and then bounce back to the current side), or we can pause for a moment to reflect once again on the positive and negative forces operating on each polarity—and possibly find ways to engage and integrate each side of the polarity.

Expanded Graphic Representation of the Trust Polarity

I can now offer an expanded representation of the Trust Polarity, having introduced the alarm systems that Barry Johnson considers critical in shifting one's attention between the two ends of the polarity.

I present this graphic portrayal using the template provided by Johnson in his second book (Johnson, 2020). You will note that Johson has softened the term "alarm signals" in this template. He now uses the term "early warnings."

While I would consider some of the alarms I have identified in this chapter as "early warnings" (such as sleepy, slow, and perhaps detached and inconsistent), I would consider others to be quite

serious signals that demand our attention (such as drug abuse, depression, and guilt). Here is the expanded representation.

Polarity Graphic Two
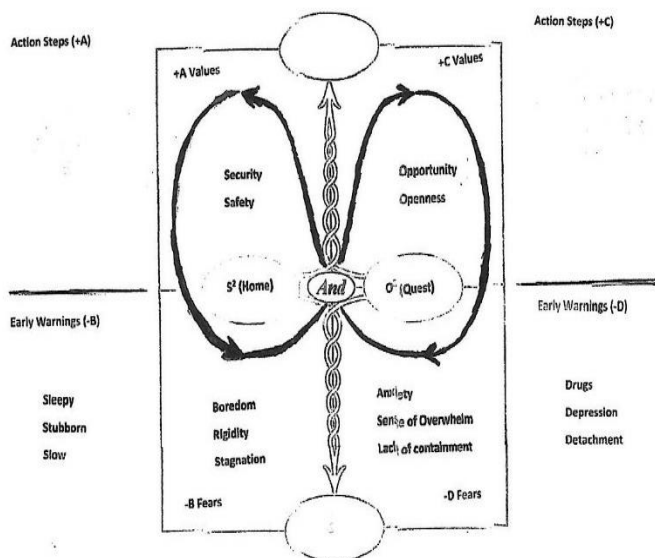
How does one bring about the capacity of a personal or large-scale system to integrate two sides of a polarity? How does one construct an integrated template of Trust? To begin with, one ensures that the safeguards are in place and the alarm signals are mobilized. Susan, Rick, and other members of contemporary societies can constructively address the negative consequences of each option. Optimally, this formulation could be engaged slowly and thoughtfully—with appropriate consideration given to Home and Quest. As a result, Susan and Rick might be ready to formulate an integrated template of Trust for themselves. Home and Quest might walk hand-in-hand into Susan and Rick's future.

A fundamental recommendation can be offered to Susan and Rick as they manage this polarity. Each of them should remain in the

positive domain of each option (Home and Quest) long enough to identify all (or at least most) key benefits and potential actions that maximize benefits. Time should also be devoted to and attention directed toward potential ways in which Home and Quest can be brought together on behalf of an integrated response to the polarity each of them is facing.

Home and Quest might join when preparing an integrated Psychosocial template and formulating a new action plan. Susan can take a new job in Cleveland and retain her home while engaging in a quest. She might invite her boyfriend to attend a couple's workshop with her. Perhaps this "Quest" for a better relationship can help sustain their relationship (Home). Hopefully, the workshop will lead them to a long-term shared commitment.

Rick can stay in New York City but write a column for his Vermont newspaper. He can also stay connected (via Skype) with family members and some of his old Vermont colleagues. Rick might also be selective in the work he does with specific clients. Some pro-bono preparation of advertising copy for non-profit organizations might also help him better align his actions with long-standing values and ethics. Like Susan, Rick might also find ways to establish a sustained long-term commitment with someone in his New York City life.

Integrating the Trust Polarity

These fundamental recommendations (derived from Barry Johnson's analysis) may prove invaluable when integrating the polarity's two ends. However, I propose that his polarity management tactics and strategies are insufficient when addressing the Essence of a complex societal issue such as Trust. I wish to move beyond Johnson—or at least use his insightful analysis as a platform for other perspectives. We need assistance bringing together the two poles of Trust for Susan and Rick—and most of us as residents of mid-21st Century societies. I first introduce an interesting perspective regarding fragility and then

consider three integrative tactics: sequencing, enabling, and reframing.

Anti-Fragility

Several decades ago, Nassim Taleb (author of *The Black Swan*) pointed to the fragility of most contemporary institutions (Taleb, 2012). Most institutions are not designed or prepared for the challenges inherent in a polarized system, especially when a crisis exists within this system. Institutions in our mid-21st-century world are fragile. The COVID-19 crisis in global health care, the climate-related Los Angeles County fires, the disastrous hurricanes of Louisiana and Florida, and the devastating typhoons of Asia repeatedly expose this fragility (Al-Azri, 2020). Yet, some institutions:

> . . . benefit from shocks; they thrive and grow when exposed to volatility, randomness, disorder and stressors and love adventure, risk, and uncertainty. Yet, in spite of the ubiquity of the phenomenon, there is no word for the exact opposite of fragile. Let us call it antifragile." (Taleb, 2012, p. 3),

It is not only natural disasters that expose institutional fragility. Many polarities also expose an institution as fragile. The templates that guide the directions taken by many institutions are unreliable. Things break apart because tensions between opposites drain an institution's energy and disrupt its focus.

Especially in the case of Trust, an institution is rarely unbroken if those working in the organization can't trust the competencies, intentions, and perspectives of those with whom they work. An individual whipsawed between Home and Quest will soon find that they have neither a home nor the prospects of a successful quest. They view their world through a shattered Lens and a crumbling Psychosocial template of Trust.

Yet, Taleb would have us believe that stressful polarities can provide vitality and direction. Members of an institution might

even find that tensions within an Essence such as Trust can produce Vibrance. These tensions can be beneficial rather than a source of disruption and threat of ultimate demise. Taleb (2012, p. 3) puts it this way. "Wind extinguishes a candle and energizes fire. Likewise with randomness, uncertainty, and chaos: you want to use them, not hide from them. You want to be the fire and wish for the wind."

Taleb identifies several strategies that help make an institution less fragile. He points out ways to open opportunities for learning and growth emerging from the crisis. He primarily encourages an optimistic mindset that discerns those challenging conditions (the wind) that can enhance an institution's operations (the fire). Vibrance and learning are to be found in wind and fire. For instance, we can use a hurricane crisis to learn how best to predict the severity and direction of future hurricanes. We can build better barriers against future storm surges.

Even more importantly, we can "learn a critical lesson" about climate instability. A similar (vibrant) mobilization of lessons to be learned and procedures to be employed can accompany a pandemic or an economic crisis. We can't predict when the storm, pandemic, or crisis will occur—for they are Black Swans. However, we know for certain that they will soon confront us. Given this knowledge, we can learn how to plan (and plan how to learn) in preparation for these events (Michael, 1973).

There is more to be done. We can bring in my model of Polystasis, fully recognizing that templates will be modified, predictions will change, and baselines must (and will) be adjusted. New actions will be taken based on modified templates, revised predictions, and adjusted baselines. We see Polystasis being fully engaged in the capacity of anti-fragile institutions to shift and adapt to changing conditions.

While homeostasis is found in highly fragile institutions and objects, Polystasis resides in institutions and objects that are flexible and non-fragile. A beautiful bowl or glass goblet is fragile.

It can easily shatter. The bowl or goblet exists in only one (homeostatic) state. It is not flexible unless it is made of a malleable substance like rubber. While other fragile systems can sometimes be repaired and returned to homeostasis, the shattered bowl or goblet (at best) can be stuck together with glue. However, this fragile object will never be quite the same.

It is worth noting that this bowl was once highly malleable clay. It only became rigid and fragile after being shaped on a wheel and fired in a furnace. Similarly, the glass goblet is composed of fine sand that was quite fluid in its original form. I am reminded of my work in Corning, New York. The headquarters of Corning Glass is located in this upstate community. Corning Glass was founded as a company that produced high-quality glassware (Steuben Glass) crafted with prized sand from the nearby Chemung River. It is a remarkable experience to witness the creation of fine glass objects at the Steuben Factory or the blowing of glass objects at a crafts fair. Sand is melted in a kiln. The fluid glass is typically cooled into glass bars and then melted again with a focused heat source. The melted glass is shaped into beautiful artistic forms.

I mention this multi-step process because something comparable occurs in human-shaped institutions. Young, fluid (often family-owned) organizations become increasingly rigid and inflexible as they "cool down" (grow older). Large institutions may be impressive in size and scope. Like a beautiful Steuben vase, these institutions might even be considered elegant in their design.

However, like the vase, they are fragile. Their leaders often are not inclined to dance (Kanter, 1989). They adjust poorly to a rugged, dancing landscape (Miller and Page, 2007; Bergquist, 2019b; Bergquist, Sandstrom, and Mura, 2023). The conditions of VUCA-Plus leave the leaders of many big corporations "bewitched, bothered, and bewildered" (to borrow from a Lorenz Hart lyric).

We can purchase an expensive Chihuly sculpture made of finely crafted glass and show this precious work of art to those visiting our home. However, we don't want these visitors to handle this

prized fragile object. Similarly, we don't appreciate innovators messing with our long-standing, high-prestige organizations. These "precious" institutions are fragile. They often remain unbroken only because they command their marketplace or benefit from government-enforced trade restrictions.

Those who lead these large, fragile organizations might not fully appreciate Nassim Taleb's critique. Faculty members working at large, prestigious Business schools might also not be his biggest fans, especially if they are invested in traditional management practices. Homeostasis is foundational for these academic folks as are managerial prediction and control. These homeostatic-based tools of management are gospel.

Taleb is getting into trouble with the traditionalists and leaders of large organizations by suggesting that we can identify those institutions that are or will readily be Fragile in our contemporary world. According to Taleb, we can also identify institutions likely to be anti-fragile. He bases his assessment regarding fragility on how complex systems relate to unanticipated ("Black Swan") events. To begin with, it is hard to arrive at accurate predictions when faced with complexity (Taleb, 2012. P. 7):

> Complex systems are full of interdependencies—hard to detect—and nonlinear responses. "Nonlinear" means that when you double the dose of, say, a medication, or when you double the number of employees in a factory, you don't get twice the initial effect, but rather a lot more or a lot less. Two weekends in Philadelphia are not twice as pleasant as a single one—I've tried.

When the response is plotted on a graph, it is not represented by a straight line ("linear"). Rather, it is portrayed as a curved line ("nonlinear"). In such environments, simple causal associations are misplaced; it is hard to see how things work by looking at single parts. Increasing this predictive challenge is the compounding effect of shifts in complex systems (with many interdependencies).

I provided an analogy in *The Postmodern Organization* (Bergquist, 1993b) between this compounding effect (often labeled "self-organizing criticality") and the dynamics of an avalanche. Some small (unpredictable) event (such as a gust of wind) or an intentional event (such as a cannon shot) moves a large block of snow. This cascading mass of snow recruits nearby snowpacks—and even recruits nearby boulders and trees. The avalanching system grows in size, power, and speed.

Taleb (2012, p. 7) offers a description that parallels what I have identified as an avalanching system:

> Man-made complex systems tend to develop cascades and runaway chain reactions that decrease, even eliminate, predictability and cause outsized events. So the modern world may be increasing in technological knowledge, but, paradoxically, it is making things more unpredictable. Now for reasons that have to do with the increase of the artificial, the move away from ancestral and natural models, and the loss in robustness owing to complications in the design of everything, the role of Black Swans is increasing. Further, we are victims of a new disease, called in this book *neomania*, that makes us build Black Swan-vulnerable systems. This is "progress".

Here is where Taleb's description of Black Swans comes in direct contact with his distinction between fragile and anti-fragile (Taleb, 2012, p. 7). According to Taleb, the odds of rare events are not computable. This is an annoying (and often ignored) aspect of the Black Swan problem:

> We know a lot less about hundred-year floods than five-year floods—model error swells when it comes to small probabilities. *The rarer the event, the less tractable, and the less we know about how frequent its occurrence*—yet the rarer the event, the more confident these "scientists" involved in predicting, modeling, and using PowerPoint in

conferences with equations in multicolor background have become. (Taleb, 2012, p. 7)

Finally, Taleb (2012, p. 7) turns to the wisdom about fragility that is offered by a widely available but unlikely source:

> It is of great help that Mother Nature—thanks to its anti-fragility—is the best expert at rare events, and the best manager of Black Swans; in its billions of years it succeeded in getting here without command-and-control instruction from an Ivy League-educated director nominated by a search committee. Antifragility is not just the antidote to the Black Swan; understanding it makes us less intellectually fearful in accepting the role of these events as necessary for history, technology, knowledge, everything.

We are left with an interesting (and important) paradox. Many of the events that expose fragility are manufactured by Mother Nature (hurricanes, floods, pandemics). Yet, Mother Nature might be the best teacher in establishing anti-fragile mindsets and systems.

It should be noted that Taleb examines systems and institutions that are NOT fragile. He considers those that are anti-fragile and those that are robust (immune from such mid-21st-century challenges as the six VUCA-Plus conditions). Taleb offers a rich and provocative list of institutional characteristics related to the Fragile, Anti-Fragile, and Robust categories (Taleb, 2012, pp. 23-27). The institutional characteristics most often associated with anti-fragile include increasing variations in the system, reducing the isolation of domains, and assuming a stoic attitude.

I would add a closely related strategy to his list. His list should include the capacity of an institution to integrate polarizing forces operating in (and energized by) the crisis. For instance, with the COVID-19 crisis, our society created a pull between a "herd" policy (natural buildup of immunization) and a preventative policy combining pharmaceutical interventions (immunization shots)

with nonpharmaceutical interventions (quarantine, masks, and social distancing). I have written about ways these policies can be interwoven (see Appendix A).

Similarly, we find a pull between short-term solutions when dealing with a "natural" disaster (immediate financial relief and construction of more effective barriers) and long-term crisis-related solutions (prevention of or at least slowing global warming). We must provide a comprehensive, integrated approach when confronting these inevitable future environmental challenges. We must learn to plan (and plan to learn) in sorting through the messy, dilemma-filled, and polarity-saturated issues associated with elements of fire, wind, water, and air that have turned against us—and that we have turned against.

Sequencing

I return to the choices being made by Susan and Rick. We can move beyond the specific polarizing challenges and opportunities facing Susan and Rick to consider the achievement of polarity integration. First, there is the potential sequencing and leveraging of the polarities. For instance, when seeking to integrate the two ends of a polarity of Trust, we might engage in a quest when seeking to find our "home" (identity, profession, enduring intimate relationship).

When young, we might try several summer jobs to determine what we "really" want to do in life. We might date a wide variety of people to find what we are looking for in terms of a life partner. Developmental psychologists like Erik Erikson identify this as a psycho-social "moratorium" that allows us to explore alternative identities. (Erikson, 1980) Later in life, we might use our "mid-life" crises to journey through alternative identities, occupations – and even relationships (Levinson, et al., 1978; Levinson, 1997).

We might switch the sequencing. We ensure that our home is secure before we begin the quest. We want to be sure that "home" is intact and will be there for us when we end our quest. We leave our current job. We begin to apply for jobs in a different field but

check first to be sure we have sufficient savings and insurance. We Trust that our loving life partner will be there even if we "crash and burn" with our new venture.

Perhaps Odysseus could embark on his long (10-year) odyssey because he knew that Penelope would always be there for him when he returned to Ithaca. In the case of Trust, we might think of Home and Quest as bookends. We first ensure adequate Trust at Home before debarking on the Quest. We then return from the Quest with new skills and knowledge. They further ensure security and safety (S^2) in our Home. These bookends of Trust not only provide stability. They also establish an integrated foundation for both Home and Quest.

Enabling

A second pathway to Integration is found in the process of Enablement I identified previously. We engage in a systemic analysis (such as that of Jay Forrester and his MIT team) that entails discovering how various factors (forces) in a system impact one another (Meadows, 2008). Specifically, we identify those forces most likely to enable other forces to have a strong, positive impact on the desired outcomes. When we successfully achieve X-Y-Z outcomes, new opportunities arise, and resources become available for A-B-C. While X-Y-Z might not be important in and of itself, it might be of great value because of its capacity to enable other components in the system to succeed.

It is not only a force field analysis that one can complete before embarking on a polarity analysis. One can also prepare a cross-impact matrix in which specific forces are listed on both the left side and across the top of the matrix. An assessment is then made regarding how each force listed on the left impacts each force listed across the top of the matrix. Does each left-side force help or hinder the effective engagement of each top-side force?

After completing the matrix, attention is directed to those forces that most often enable other forces to achieve a specific outcome.

In the case of a Trust-focused matrix, some forces relate to establishing and maintaining security and safety (S²). Others relate to the enhancement of opportunities and openness (O²). The systemic focus on enablement will help to bring about the integration of S² and O² forces.

Reframing

A third strategy can be engaged when integrating a polarity's two ends. This is the *Reframing* strategy commonly associated with Gregory Bateson and members of the Palo Alto group (Bander and Grinder, 1983). Reframing can be engaged in many ways (Bergquist, Sandstrom, and Mura, 2023). I offer two examples of reframing. They can bring about an integration of Home and Quest.

First, one can reconceive (reframe) the nature of Home. It need not be deeply rooted in one location. Like the snail, we can carry our "home" with us. An RV (home) can serve this purpose even as we engage in our Quest. For the younger crowd (and some older folks), a "fantastic" world exists on the Internet. An Internet user can embark on a digitally mediated quest to exotic lands, fighting dragons or giants, employing magic, and even falling in love with a mythic god or goddess. The journey to a world of digital fantasy can even allow us to change our identity (avatar) and engage with other Internet users (friends or foes) in a collaborative journey. We have journeyed far away without ever leaving home.

A cautionary note is of even greater importance: this Internet journey can be addictive and distract us from leaving our physical home to engage the real world. As Internet addicts or as parents of an Internet-addicted child, we must ask ourselves an important question. Is this faux quest contributing to the quality of our life and our search for an integration of home and quest?

Similarly, we can reframe the very nature of home. Our home might be considered the identity we assume when on a quest ("I am the traveling man/woman!"). It could be that our home is the story we tell others about ourselves (including the narrative of the Quest we

have undertaken). A somewhat different reframing involves a shift in the meaning and purpose of the Quest rather than the meaning and purpose of Home. We identify Quest as an introverted process. Our quest occurs inside our Head, Heart, and Soul. We don't need a computer or the Internet.

As documented in his *Red Book* (Jung, 2009), Carl Jung (the noted psychoanalyst) journeyed far and wide within his psyche. We can do the same. We can also be assisted in our internal journey by outside resources. We become voracious readers of travel books or watch documentaries on our Cable channel that offer a vivid portrait of lands and people far away from our physical location.

As observers of (rather than participants in) cross-cultural journeys, we expand our perspectives and learn to appreciate differing value systems and cultures. At some moment, we ask several related questions. Are these faux journeys to other lands as "good" as the real thing? How do the insights gained from these journeys compare with those gained from journeys into the challenging world of reality? Do intra-psychic events have as great a personal impact as extra-psychic events? Some regret reenters our search for a way to stay at home while embarking on a psychic journey.

Whichever strategy one chooses to deploy, the integrative process helps to enhance (distill) the Essence of Trust. The psychosocial template of Trust becomes more secure and capable of adjusting to shifting VUCA-Plus circumstances because it contains many interwoven elements. The Essence of Trust incorporates the dynamic tension between Home and Quest.

The Essence of Trust also requires the vibrant integration of all Trust elements. When full integration occurs in a psychosocial template, the Essence of Trust gains further depth and becomes much richer. As with all distillation processes, the pure Essence of the resulting elixir of Trust is to be savored and celebrated. I turn to this deepening nature of Trust in the following section of this chapter.

The Nature of Trust (and Mistrust)

Up to this point, I have concentrated on the dynamics of trust—the push and pull between S² (Home) and O² (Quest)—two sides of a Trust polarity. I have represented these two sides on a horizontal plane. The movement between them is represented by a figure 8. I now move from the horizontal dimension to the vertical dimension. I journey to a deeper level regarding the fundamental nature of Trust. As I have done throughout this book, I am expanding on a concept offered by other authors. This expansion is aligned with my suggestion that a Psychosocial template must be robust. It must contain multiple perspectives and practices.

Four Facets

Any Essence ultimately incorporates tension between its different perspectives (facets). A valid and useful template of Trust will accommodate multiple facets. First, there is an appreciative facet (what I have called the zero-order viewpoint). We assume that Trust is present (and perhaps always will be) in the system we examine. We have only to uncover (appreciate) this Trust. We then engage our world and interpersonal relationships believing that Trust exists in this world and relationship.

A first-order viewpoint (second facet) exists when we begin with the assumption that Trust can be established and maintained through enacting simple measures that establish Trust. For instance, Trust in an enduring intimate relationship can be maintained when both members of the couple offer small "bids" (expressions of gratitude, assisting one another, preparing a special meal, etc.) (Bergquist, 2023c).

The third facet directs us to an assumption that Trust is not easily won. We must adopt a second-order viewpoint. Our relationship with the world or another person must be significantly altered. We engage in a transformative process. Regarding our relationship with an important person in our life, this might mean that we engage in a "remarriage." Fundamental changes are established in

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our relationship with an intimate partner (Bergquist, 2023c). We may similarly engage in a "remarriage" with our organization or "re-marry" our way of being with many people.

Finally, there is a fourth facet. It brings us to a disturbing realization that Trust does not exist in the environment where we now work or have established important relationships. As behaviorists would suggest, we must "reprogram" our environment, for our behavior is determined at least in part by incentives (rewards and punishments) and other situational elements (stimuli) to which we are constantly exposed (Pierce and Cheney, 2017). This third-order viewpoint motivates us. We are moving to another location. We are granted a divorce. A safe place (sanctuary) is found to renew ourselves. A basic option might instead be chosen. We escape, turning away from a VUCA-Plus world that imposes multiple demands on our Trust.

TORI

I wish to introduce yet another perspective regarding Trust. To access this perspective, I turn to insights offered many years ago by Jack Gibb (1978). As one of Barry Johnson's mentors, Gibb helped to establish the T-Group (Sensitivity Training) movement in North America. He offered a program for many years focusing on the formation of trusting relationships. Often offered at the Torrey Pines Golf Club in La Jolla, California, the TORI program consisted of loosely structured group-based explorations of interpersonal relationships. Like the original T-Groups, Gibb's TORI programs provided a safe environment for open and interactive exploration of one's true and caring self as related to other people.

Focusing on Trust (T), Openness (O), Realization (R), and Interdependence (I), this intense multi-day (weekend) program was based on a fundamental assumption that Trust is a "Process of Discovering" (Gibb, 1978, p. 20):

> To trust with fullness means that I discover and create my own life. The trusting life is an inter-flowing and

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interweaving of the processes of discovery and creation. These processes have four primary and highly interrelated elements:

* discovering and creating who I am, tuning into my own uniqueness, being aware of my own essence, trusting me - being who I am. (T)

* discovering and creating ways of opening and revealing myself to myself and to others, disclosing my essence, discovering yours, communing with you - showing me. (o)

* discovering and creating my own paths, flows, and rhythms, creating my emerging and organic nature, and becoming actualizing, or realizing this nature - doing what I want. (R)

* discovering and creating with you our interbeing, the ways we can live together in interdepending community, in freedom and intimacy - being with you. (I)

Use of such words as "discovering" and "creating" may suggest to some that I am talking here of largely cognitive and conscious processes. I do not mean to imply this at all. I am referring to organic, holistic, bodymind, total-person processes that have the quality of an intuitive or instinctive quest about them. Each process is both a discovering and a creating—indistinguishable in fusion.

In many ways, the TORI programs were a "pure" form of the highly unstructured, richly exploratory (and often unpredictable) workshops conducted when T-Groups were being "invented" during the early 1960s. When reviewing the original book written about T-Groups by Gibb and two of his colleagues (Bradford, Gibb, and Benne, 1964), one finds an excitement in the first pages of the book regarding this new kind of training that had just been "invented" or "discovered." Building on the pioneering social psychological perspectives and practices of Kurt Lewin (Marrow, 1969), the first facilitators of these training groups were learning in

real time about how best to provide a safe environment for the exploration of "interpersonal sensitivity."

In line with Lewin, the original T-Group facilitators were "learning by doing." They represented the old John Dewey dictum: if you truly want to understand something, kick it and see what happens. Try to change something, and you will gain true appreciation for the way it works. Dewey's dictum later became the foundation for a mode of exploration called "action research."

Sadly (in many respects), the excitement of new learning and discovery was soon lost in the original T-Group book. They were still kicking (offering a challenging experience to T-Group participants), but they already seemed to "know" how participants would respond to the kick. We find definitive statements after the first chapters about how the T-Groups should be conducted and what can be expected from these groups if they are properly facilitated.

Jack Gibb's TORI groups were held on the West Coast more than a decade after the original T-Groups were first provided on the East Coast (Bethel, Maine). The TORI program retained the spirit of discovery and unpredictability displayed in the "genuine," "unscripted" interactions among those for whom the Bethel workshops were safe and welcoming.

Ironically, Jack Gibb sustained Kurt Lewin's spirit of experimentation and discovery while refusing to remain open to change (in the delivery of human service programs)—as Lewin also advocated. "Old" and "New" stand as a polarity on behalf of another Essence—in this case, the Essence of Human Service Quality. In the history of human relations training,

Jack Gibb resides on the side of the "new" (T-Groups) that soon became the "old." Even today, we look back on T-Groups and sensitivity training as something from the past. It typified the naivety of those seeking authenticity and freedom during the 1960s. Perhaps these groups also reflect the self-absorption that

Christopher Lasch (1979) identified as existing within a "culture of narcissism."

Whether representative of that which is at the cutting edge or disturbingly naïve, TORI groups brought Trust to centerstage. Given their free-form structure (or lack of structure), the TORI workshops provided both a major challenge to the formation of Trusting relationships among the TORI participants and an exceptional opportunity to find a level of Trust and opportunity for deep exploration of self that is rarely available in contemporary societies. We see the tension between challenge and opportunity operating in Gibb's TORI groups.

On the one hand, Gibb seems to be embracing a zero-order viewpoint. Trust is inherent in any interpersonal relationship or group. Gibb uses the term "discovery" rather than "creation" or "production" when writing about Trust. He is known for the phrase "trust the process."

This phrase represents a viewpoint regarding the inherent goodwill and competence present in any group of people seeking to establish a supportive environment where interpersonal relationships and modes of personal growth can be explored. Miller, Galanter, and Pribram's T.O.T.E. system was in full operation. Polystatic processes are engaged in this temporary system filled with security and safety (S^2).

On the other hand, Gibb is fully aware of barriers that are erected with the appearance of Trust. His most widely read essay concerns defensive communication and ways we avoid open communications (Gibb, 1961). This essay provides a report on the conditions that increase defensiveness, based on a study that Gibb conducted over eight years. Gibb points to the push toward evaluation, control, strategy, neutrality, superiority, and certainty as productive of a defensive climate.

Conversely, description, problem orientation, spontaneity, empathy, and what Gibb called "provisionalism" are conducive to

open and supportive communication. These latter factors contribute to the formation of trusting relationships. When evaluation and control are prevalent, mistrust is likely to emerge. Mistrust, in turn, requires that control becomes even more pronounced. This leads to even greater mistrust. A vicious cycle of mistrust emerges. Mistrust begets mistrust.

Defensiveness and Trust

I wish to add further to what Gibb has noted about defensiveness and trust. The Trust-inducing factors identified by Gibb are key components of any Polystatic process. If one is to adjust predictions and baselines in response to challenging VUCA-Plus conditions, then the capacity to accurately describe what is now occurring is invaluable.

A problem-oriented template allows for flexible, contingency planning. Most importantly, spontaneity and provisionalism are prerequisites if a polystatic process is to be adaptive. Obvious answers and repeated use of the same solutions might work when a homeostatic process is in play. They are out of place when engaging in dynamic polystatic feedback, alteration, and learning.

We can address the application of Polystasis to interpersonal relationships. We must be empathetic regarding the comparable VUCA-Plus-related challenges faced by other people. They are dancing just as much as we are. Our Psychosocial templates must embrace this shared dance. It is fully appropriate (perhaps necessary) that we dance together—for we are interacting together on a VUCA-Plus landscape that is not only rugged (complex, ambiguous, and contradictory) but also itself dancing (volatile, uncertain, and turbulent) (Miller and Page, 2007).

Gibb acknowledges the strong pressures that elicit defensiveness—and threaten mistrust. He lived and worked during a time when evaluation, control strategy, neutrality, and certainty were key components of management. Superiority was assumed to exist in the role played by managers in leading their direct reports.

Yet, Jack Gibb believed that Trust can be maximized, and defensiveness can be minimized in a TORI setting. Furthermore, elements of an integrated Psychosocial template are to be found in Gibb's TORI analysis. He noted that Trust can meet multiple needs, including needs related to both S^2 (Home) (security and safety) and O^2 (Quest) (opportunity and openness.

He first offers a vision of S^2 realization (Gibb, 1978, p. 14):

> Trust is more than confidence. One dictionary tells us that trust (derived from the German word *Trost*, meaning "'comfort") implies instinctive, unquestioning belief in and reliance upon something. Confidence implies conscious trust because of good reasons, definite evidence, or past experience. Confidence is more cerebral, more calculated, and based more on expectations than trust is. Trust can be and often is instinctive; it is unstrategized and freely given. It is something very much like love, and its presence or absence can make a powerful difference in our lives.

Gibb's analysis of settings where Trust does NOT exist is even more telling about barriers in the search for security and safety (S^2). Gibb (1978, p. 14) describes the defensiveness and alternative modes of security and conditions of safety that readily appear when Trust no longer prevails:

> As trust ebbs, we are less open with each other, less interdependent, less interbeing –not into each other in deep and meaningful ways; we look for strategies in dealing with each other; we seek help from others; or we look for protection in rules, norms, contracts, and the law. My defenses are raised by my fear that I do not or cannot trust you. The ebbing of trust and the growth of fear are the beginning of alienation, loneliness, and hostility. In a very real sense, we can say that trust level is the thermometer of individual and group health. With it, we function naturally and directly. Without it, we need constraints, supports, leaders, managers, teachers,

intervenors, and we surrender ourselves and our lives to them for guidance, management, and manipulation.

What about the Quest (O²) side of the Trust polarity? Gibb acknowledges this side. The O² side of Trust provides liberation rather than safety. It enables us to push outward rather than turn inward (Gibb, 1978, p. 17):

> Trust is a releasing process. It frees my creativity, allows me to focus my energy on creating and discovering rather than on defending. It releases my courage. It is my courage. It opens my processes, so that I can play, feel, enjoy, get angry, experience my pain, be who I am. The full life is a spontaneous, unconstrained, flowing, trusting life. . . . *Trust gives me my freedom and my fear takes it away.* Freedom comes from my own flow. It is not given to me or taken away from me by others. I create my own mindbody trust, which is my freedom.

In alignment with O² (Quest), Gibb writes about "a quest for being". This is a search for and creation of one's identity (Gibb, 1978, p. 23). This potential achievement of a clear sense of identity (being) might be critical given the challenge identified by Ken Gergen (1991/2000) regarding the appearance of multiple identities in our "saturated self".

Gibb's acknowledgment of S² and O² Trust leads us toward an integrated psychosocial template of Trust. He brings these two valued outcomes of Trust together through intimate interpersonal relationships. Our integrated template of Trust seems to require this intimacy. Jack Gibb acknowledges that vulnerability comes with intimacy. Trust must be present for us to let down our defenses (O: openness) and for us to grow (R: realize our authentic self). It is through our trusting and intimate relationships with other people (I: interdependence) that we find openness and growth.

Gibb (1978, p. 24) offers these poignant words about Trust, intimacy, and vulnerability:

> Genuine intimacy is a pervasive human want. It is made possible by our seeing each other as we are, without our masks, filters, or facades. In trust and intimacy I am able to show you my vulnerability. I recognize that my concept of vulnerability arises out of my defensive and protective fear. I project into you the capacity to wound me. If I trust you in depth, I know that you will not hurt me and also that I cannot be hurt. Thus, if I am hurt, I hurt myself. I have two sources of inner calm: my trust in myself and my trust in you. Genuine intimacy, achieved only in a state of high trust, is a calming state because risk of hurt is minimized. If risks are present, they loom small relative to the rewards of intimacy.

Vulnerability is always being risked with the engagement of S^2 (Home) and O^2 (Quest) in an intimate relationship. Our hold on an integrated psychosocial template of Trust is always tenuous. Mistrust is waiting at the door. I am vulnerable to assuming the existence of safety or creating a condition of security—only to find that safety doesn't exist or that security comes at a great cost. I am vulnerable as a dreamer. I may painfully discover that my dreams of success (opportunity) can't be fulfilled or that my openness with others is not reciprocated.

With the establishment of genuine Trust, the risk of either form of vulnerability is reduced. When there is Trust based on intimacy, managing a Trust polarity becomes less difficult. The time spent with the two positive conditions is likely to be longer. There will be a greater potential for the integration of S^2 (Home) and O^2 (Quest). With this integration comes the cycle of Trust ("trust begets trust") I mentioned earlier (Gibb's (1978, p. 16).

By contrast, Gibb mentions the cycle of Fear ("fear begets fear"). In the context of polarity management, fear would be produced by a failure to integrate polarities. We would be left with only one

option—one side of the polarity—and would fear the other side "winning the day."

The Other Side of TORI

I believe that Barry Johnson would respectfully suggest that caution needs to be introduced at this point. He would probably encourage us still to visit our vulnerability and assess the risk to ensure we are not deluding ourselves. In keeping with the spirit of Barry Johnson's polarization, I offer several cautionary observations regarding Gibb's TORI model.

First, it should be noted that while Trust might bring about more Trust (a positive feedback loop), it takes only one person in a group with a low level of trust to "break up the party" (disrupting the positive loop by providing negative feedback). Mistrust is likely to emerge if some group members "push" trust beyond what is acceptable (safe) for hesitant group members. I have always honored the dictum that the level of Trust in a group is no greater than the lowest level of trust held by any one member of the group.

Second, the Trust offered by Jack Gibb is quite lofty. He identifies a long list of "wants" that Trust can help to fulfill (Gibb, 1978, p. 61). As Barry Johnson has noted, the presence of ambitious expectations can set the stage for the appearance of a strong counter list of potential risks. As I cautioned, any proposal or initiative that is at all specific will have its downside. Kurt Lewin has similarly noted that the addition of positive forces to any force field will inevitably lead to the appearance of opposing negative forces.

I would also suggest that unrealistic promises and expectations can lead to a downturn in morale and productivity when a "hyped-up" project is underway. This means we must be cautious about "floating on wings" when leaving a TORI workshop. We must avoid becoming "addicted" to any temporary setting that provides us with the "high" of Trust. This Trust is likely to be short-lived or unrealistic. It leaves us vulnerable to the "low" (blues) of post-

workshop reality or leads us down a rabbit hole to the Serenity (SC²) of False or Distorted Trust.

Conclusions

I conclude this chapter by posing several questions. Is there a role to be played by TORI workshops during the mid-21st Century of VUCA-Plus challenges? Is room to be found in our collective Head and Heart for Jack Gibb's somewhat utopian vision? Perhaps, as Christopher Lasch might suggest, the TORI workshops are just a remnant of our collective narcissistic past. They might manifest the naivety of this time in American history—the 1960s.

I suggest that Jack Gibb's vision and applications still make sense. I am an optimist. I believe that TORI is relevant. The Essence of Trust is just as important in the life of mid-21st-century citizens as it was in the life of those of us who were citizens of mid-20th-century America. Perhaps it is even more important. We can still benefit from the process of TORI that Gibb introduced. However, we might want to incorporate some of the concepts and tools related to human relationships and problem-solving that have evolved since Gibb ran his program in La Jolla.

Polarity and TORI

For instance, we could blend TORI with Barry Johson's polarity management. I have worked with workshop participants who transition through each polarity and spend time in a small group composed of those who reflect on this condition as related to their polarity. One group works on the positive side of their left-hand polarity, while another works on the negative side of their left-side polarity. Yet, another group works on the positive side of their right-side polarity while the fourth group works on the negative side of their right-side polarity. The resulting conversations and dialogue are often quite intense in these four groups. The participants share similar feelings of hope, despair, optimism, and pessimism. Even love and anger appear.

Members of the four groups now move to one of the other conditions. Each group can remain intact so that each member joins the same group under the four conditions. Group members often share a similar shift in perspective and practice given each condition. Alternatively, some members join one another in going to one of the other conditions, while others transit to different conditions. This approach holds the advantage of each participant gaining an appreciation of multiple perspectives and practices regardless of the condition in which they find themselves.

Following the transit through all four conditions, workshop participants join small groups (usually not the same as the group with which they traveled through all four conditions—if this design option was used). These small groups are gently facilitated (TORI-like). Attention is given to the maximization of interpersonal safety (Trust). I have found this workshop design to be among the most powerful I have deployed in recent years.

Balint and TORI

A Revised Balint Method (Bergquist, 2014b) offers a second way to expand on TORI. This method involves enactment by workshop participants of various internal "voices" (hopes, fears, doubts, outside advice, etc.) that have been identified by one participant facing a specific problem. Each Balint participant serves at least once as the "protagonist" (the focus of a Balint group's attention). In this role, the protagonist "witnesses" the dialogue among those offering specific voices (perspectives) on the protagonist's problem.

When they are not the protagonist, each participant serves as a "voice" for several other participants. Participants gain personal insights from temporarily embracing one or more "voices" during a Balint session. A full group conversation occurs after each protagonist shares what they have learned from the enactment of their internal voices by other members of their Balint group. Other members of the Balint group gain additional insights from this conversation. Small TORI-like groups follow, providing in-depth processing of these powerful Balint experiences.

Labyrinth and TORI

I suggest a Labyrinth journey to accompany small group dialogue (Pattakos, 2021). Participants identify a specific Essence-based outcome before entering the Labyrinth. This outcome might be a successful or fulfilling career, serving as a caring and thoughtful parent, or simply leading a life of purpose and meaning. The ins and outs of the labyrinth journey inevitably elicit strong feelings that can be shared during subsequent small group dialogue.

I sometimes combine the Labyrinth journey with Progoff-related journaling (Progoff, 1992). Life and Career Planning can accompany the labyrinth journey and small group (TORI-like) dialogues. I tend to be selective about the site I choose for the labyrinth journey. I am particularly partial to a labyrinth in the Grace Cathedral on the top of San Francisco's Nob Hill. I find that the site of a workshop makes a difference. Certain settings seem to be particularly conducive to creating an environment of Trust. I would place the site of NTL in Bethel Maine, on my list of Trust-filled sites – along with the Torrey Pines Golf Course that Jack Gibb frequented.

These are only three of the many possible workshop designs that help to create a setting in which Trust can be discovered or created. Specific design elements (such as polarity transitioning, Balint voicing, or labyrinth journeying) produce valuable insights shared with others in a setting of Trust.

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Chapter Ten
Essence V: Establishing and Maintaining Trust

Up to this point, I have identified a variety of lenses that might be applied when focusing on the Essential ingredients of Trust and when seeking the Essence of Trust. However, I have not yet provided a User's Guide to these lenses.

How does one build a sense of Trust regardless of its use? Chapter Ten is devoted to the provision of a Trust guidebook. I offer several recommendations about Trust establishment and maintenance, especially in a VUCA-Plus-saturated setting.

It is at this point that Essentials and Essence join hands. What are the Essential steps to establishing the Essence of Trust? How does one become trustful (Essence) as a competent, well-intended, and perspective-aligned psychosocial architect who helps to design and construct a safe environment that contains all of the Essential elements of Trust?

I offer a set of action steps that are aligned with a psychological model of interpersonal and group relations. My colleague Will Schutz proposed this model (quite successfully). I share my personal experience of working with Will in a trusting relationship. I then provide a more poetic description of Trust in my User's Guide. I rely on the wisdom offered by Oriah Mountain Dreamer in his widely read statement, "The Invitation." I dip into my trusting relationship with Gary Quehl to illustrate insights gained from this wise Native American elder.

Steps to Trust I: Psychological Description

As an engineer turned human relations expert, Will Schutz (1994) has proposed that effective personal and group relationships are built on the fulfillment of three basic human needs: Inclusion, control, and openness. We seek to fulfill these needs by actively pursuing interactive moments that lead to their fulfillment or by waiting for others to engage us in a way that fulfills this need.

Schutz proposed that these three needs are fulfilled sequentially. We first ensure that our need for inclusion is fulfilled. We can then move on to the need for control. With the establishment of clarity regarding control, we are ready to address the need for openness (what Schutz originally called the need for affection).

I incorporate Schutz's three interpersonal needs in my User's Guide to Trust. All three needs are Essential. The fulfillment and appropriate sequencing of these needs produces interpersonal Trust. The sequencing begins with the need for inclusion. Trust is first established when those involved in a relationship (personal or collective) feel included.

Trust is maintained when those in a relationship are comfortable with how matters of control are addressed. Trust is further maintained when those in a relationship find it safe to be open and candid with one another. First inclusion, then control, and finally openness.

Interpersonal needs are met in a wide variety of ways. Trust is achieved by interpersonal journeys along many pathways. I rely on the distinction drawn by Schutz between active (expressed) and passive (wanted) pursuit of interpersonal need fulfillment when identifying some of the paths that can be taken to achieve the Essence of Trust.

Spatial Representation of Needs

The interpersonal need for Inclusion can be best defined in spatial terms as In/Out. This need concerns the decision, first, as to whether or not someone wants to join a specific group. The criteria for a decision to seek membership center in part on the nature of work being done by the group as well as its reason for being in existence.

The interpersonal need for Control can be best defined in spatial terms such as Up/Down. Authority must be clearly defined. Control must be firmly established. There are those in charge and those who are guided by those in charge.

What about Openness, the third interpersonal need? This need can be best defined in spatial terms as Near/Far. This need is key in the establishment of a caring, supportive environment. We are inclined to be open when it is safe to express concerns and suggest alternative perspectives regarding how the group or organization operates.

We are ready for a more detailed description of each need and its relationship with Trust. I will also explore the proactive and reactive strategies for fulfilling each need and offer case studies that show each need in operation in the search for Trust.

The Need for Inclusion

We are drawn (at least in part) to other people, groups, and organizations that are inspiring and have a compelling vision. This is especially the case if the specific nature of work being performed by this group or organization is closely aligned with its vision and inspiration.

If we are in some sense an "outsider" (because of race, ethnicity, gender, age, or abilities), then another important criterion emerges: Do they want me? Acceptance can be a major factor for many people in our increasingly diverse world of work. Trust

requires foremost a sense that other people want me to be part of their life (or at least this relationship or group).

Decisions regarding inclusion and Trust focus on gaining more information about the relationship or group. We want to know more about the other person with whom we might establish a Trusting relationship. We want to know not only about the nature of work being done by a group or organization and its vision but also how it operates. What is the nature of its leadership and its priorities? Put simply, we want to know what is happening inside before we knock on the door.

Key Inclusion Questions and Concerns: Someone with a strong inclusion need has several immediate "agenda" items when considering entry into a relationship, group, or organization. How do I find out about this person, group, or organization? Illumination is of highest priority: a light of some sort must be shined on the group, for it initially resides in the shadows (operating behind the door). In making decisions regarding inclusion, I need to know about what I might be facing. I must illuminate the relationship, group, or organization to the greatest extent possible while realizing that it probably will not be fully lit until I have established a connection.

As Kurt Lewin (Marrow, 1969) noted many years ago, we can't really begin to understand any social system until we push it--and it kicks back against us. We operate a bit like a piece of litmus paper that is dipped into a solution and is changed (in color) by this solution, thus revealing something about its character (level of acid content). This is what today, in the behavioral sciences, we often call action science (Argyris, 1985). It is what Lewin original labelled as "action research."

We find out about the Essence of some relationship or institution by seeking to influence or at least interact with it. Thus, we are caught in polarity. We want to remain outside the room before entering into a relationship, group, or organization. Yet, we don't really know what we are getting into until we have opened the door

and engaged with this social system (interpersonal relationship, group, or organization).

There are two Essential questions to ask about Inclusion. The answers ultimately guide the establishment of a psychosocial template of Trust. (1) Do I want to be included in this social system, and (2) How do I get included or stay un-included? The answers to these questions are often not easy to obtain – for the relationship, group or organization does truly exist in the dark until such a time as we know what is really happening in this system.

We don't know the system's "real" values or purposes regarding present-day operations. Clarifying questions usually can't be asked because the level of trust is still very low (since this system has not yet begun to operate with me as a member. We can't really "Trust" how the system is operating when it is in full view of me—as the person considering inclusion. Everyone might be 'on good behavior" (because the system wants me to join) – or might be "acting badly" (because they are not sure if I should be included).

Even when deciding to enter a relationship, group or organization and having been accepted into this system, a thoughtful person is likely to just observe what is happening in the system—which means that they are often relatively quiet when first entering a relationship or joining a group. It is about being realistic regarding the relationship, group or organization being considered for inclusion. How is this system really going to operate and what truly are its values and its priorities?

If this is a transactional relationship or a working group or organization, we also want to know about its desired outcomes. Does this person have a good reason for asking me to join them in a Trusting relationship? Does this cluster of people have a good reason for gathering together and working with one another? Is there a compelling purpose in forming a Trusting relationship.

Many years ago, Martin Buber (1958) wrote about relationships that have a higher-order compelling purpose—a commitment to

something greater than either person in the relationship. He identified these special relationships as *I/Thou* and contrasted them with *I/It* relationships that exist without any higher order purpose.

Having gathered this information, the prospective member of the social system turns consciously or unconsciously to five primary tactical concerns regarding inclusion:

(1) Should I just stand here for a bit and observe this person or cluster of people to see what is happening before committing myself?

(2) How do I determine if I actually want to be part of this relationship, group, or organization?

(3) How do I get genuinely included if I do want to join?

(4) If I don't want to engage in this relationship, group or organization, do I still have to join this social system for some reason?

(5) What role should I play in this social system so that I can be included and remain included, or not be truly included but still "show up" as a (reluctant) participant in this relationship or as a "member" of this group/team?

The answers to these five questions help to establish a tacitly held template of Trust regarding in/out matters.

What about those people who come to a relationship, group or organization with an orientation toward something other than working with other people? They might be "introverts," "loners" or simply folks who like to work alone or with a few other people whom they fully trust.

While they are likely to lean toward the collection of relevant information when first knocking on the door, they often embrace quite different priorities when knocking on the door—and can get in trouble when at least partially ignoring the information.

Unfortunately, these potential members of a group or organization may be vulnerable to the P.R. of this group or organization.

Even when they confront the reality of the other person, group or organization in its daily operations, they are likely to hang on to their original perspective regarding this person, group or organization. These are folks who often are not only reticent to join with other people but also lack the "social intelligence" to make accurate discernments regarding the "character" and priorities of these people.

Cognitive dissonance reigns supreme, which can lead to self-deception regarding the real values held by other people. Disillusionment and de-moralization are all-too-frequent outcomes of those without social IQ determining whether or not to seek inclusion in a social system. This is often why they are reticent about working with other people whom they do not know well.

There are also those people who are inclined to break through the door. Rather than knock and ask to be invited in, these bold (often extraverted) folks are likely to enter with a blaze of activity and a flurry of ideas (good and bad). They are inclined to join with Kurt Lewin in learning about the social system by observing how other people react to the way in which they are acting or the ideas they are presenting. Notes are taken about the level of acceptance (as well as the vitriol) that comes with their behavior and/or introduction of an idea.

Is the resistance a matter of not liking the idea—or not liking someone new to the system getting so actively involved? Is someone entering a new relationship supposed to be "careful" about what they say and do? Are new members of a group supposed to sit back and observe for a while?

Basically, as we are about to see, it is a matter of proactive and reactive inclusion. If we get it wrong about the accepted processes of inclusion than we are likely to be assigned for at least a short period of time to the "penalty box." We might have some good

ideas, but these ideas are likely to be met with stony silence or a few brief words of dismissal.

Proactive and Reactive Inclusion: An important decision must be made as to whether we are going to actively seek inclusion in the social system (proactive inclusion) or whether we are looking to others in the social system to invite us in (reactive inclusion). When we are motivated by a proactive need for inclusion then we are "inviting ourselves" into the relationship or group – and therefore are taking the risk of being rejected by the other person or group (informally or formally). The person with whom we are about to relate might find a "good" reason to make our initial meeting quite short. They might decline to meet for a second time or at least find multiple "excuses" for not finding time for the second meeting.

The "termination" of a brief relationship is rarely stated in an overt manner—however, the message soon becomes clear. "I don't really want to establish a relationship with you." Similarly, group members might directly or indirectly indicate one of the following: "who invited you in?" "Wait a minute, we have to decide if we want you to be a member of this group!" "I'm not sure you will want to be a member of this group." "I think you should reconsider since you are not liked by most of us." While these words are not usually stated directly to someone wanting to join a group, there are many ways that these exclusionary inclinations are expressed through nonverbal behavior, communication patterns in the group, or assignment of roles and responsibilities in the group.

Of course, there is also the possibility that another person will welcome our active engagement with them upon first meeting. They are themselves a bit "shy" or "awkward" in meeting new people and appreciate the proactive initiative we have taken.

Similarly, group members might welcome one's proactive gesture of inclusion. They might be guided by a focus on collaboration and/or advocacy of differences and community. There might be a sigh of relief. The person under consideration is addressing the matter of inclusion. There might also be appreciation for this "bold

action" being taken (often leading to perspectives on the need for control in the group).

Some appreciation of the risk taken in being proactive about inclusion is most important as it relates to establishing Trust. This appreciation is aligned with clear and transparent communication by a new acquaintance or group member about their interpersonal needs and/or concerns about group operations and dynamics. Acknowledgement of important interpersonal needs and concerns about interpersonal relationships and group operations might be reciprocated by the other person in a relationship or existing group members. This, in turn, paves the way for transition in the future to interpersonal needs for control and openness.

What about reactive Inclusion? I am waiting for other members of the group to invite me in. I am waiting for some gesture from this person I have just met regarding their interest in me. I devote my energy to observing and taking mental notes of what is occurring. I fear rejection even though I am mature and self-confident. For many women of a previous era, this might be reminiscent of waiting to be asked to dance at the high school prom.

The pain of sitting at the side of the dance floor and hoping for an invitation to dance is palpable. It is not just the fear of never being asked. It is also the fear of the wrong boy asking you to dance. To offer a more balanced analogy, it should be noted that the young men also suffered. What if she doesn't want to dance with me? I will be crushed. It might be better to avoid asking her. But then I will just be sitting (or standing) here, making a fool of myself.

We are now grown up. We no longer attend high school dances (with an accompanying sigh of relief). Yet, the issue of reactive inclusion is still salient. How do I let another person know I want to establish a relationship? How do I tell group members that I would like to meet with them to be considered for group inclusion? What if they don't want me? Perhaps it is better to sit back and hope I will be included. There are subtle ways to invite inclusion; however, it is also important not to seem too needy (like the tail-

wagging dog who is saying "pet me, pet me" or even "love me, love me").

There is also the fear of being inconsequential. It might not even be a matter of thoughtful inclusion by the other person or the group. I simply might not matter. I am not "on their radar." They missed our planned meeting yesterday and sent no regrets. They have forgotten me. I have been left behind while other members of the group move forward. Collaboration and the honoring of differences are nowhere in sight.

If there is a community, I am not a member. If Trust does exist, it lingers nowhere near me. There is the matter of being the outsider – someone of the wrong gender, race, ethnic group, or class. It is a matter of accent, age, or sexual preference. For these people, a shadow often hangs over a desired relationship or membership in a desired group.

The "outsider" is not likely to know fully what the world is like for the person with whom they hope to relate. Achievement of a theory-of-mind (which I mentioned earlier in this book) is likely to be selective. An outsider is interpersonally blind when relating to some people or some group. They don't really "know" much about how this person or group really operates precisely because they are on the outside.

Ironically (and poignantly), information about this other person or this group is particularly important—for when one is somehow in the minority, then the issue of inclusion is often particularly important and a potential source of major pain if the process of genuine inclusion is flawed. Trust is precarious when becoming "in" is unlikely and remaining "out" is a predictable outcome.

Resmaa Menakem (2017) (among others) identifies something called "micro-aggression" in his book, *My Grandmother's Hands*. These are the small but frequent episodes of harm that are experienced by many marginalized people. Exclusion from a group either formally or informally) can be one of these micro-

aggressions (when informal) or can become a macro-aggression when the exclusion is formal (the "black ball" phenomenon). The alarm bells of exclusion are ringing. Trust is nowhere to be found.

A Case Study of Inclusion: I wish to illustrate the way proactive and reactive inclusion operate. I live in a Maine community (Harpswell) that is tight knit. Surrounded by the Atlantic Ocean, Harpswell offers a long history of fishing (especially the hauling in of lobster) and boatbuilding. Many families in this community can trace their roots back many generations, and it often takes a long time to gain acceptance as a "true" member of the Harpswell community.

In other words, one is an "outside" (from "away" as they say here). It is therefore probably smart to be reactive and wait to be invited in. Or you can live with the assumption that you will always be an outsider—in which case, you just hunker down and enjoy the spectacular view of the ocean and savor the fresh (and remarkably inexpensive) lobster meals.

Then, along comes the outlier. We will call her "Sarah." She and her husband recently moved to Harpswell. Sarah was very successful as a corporate executive in New York City. The "Big Apple" is one of those places that true Mainers hate – along with anyone from Massachusetts. As a transplanted New Yorker, Sarah would be at or near the bottom of the list regarding those most "welcomed" into the Harpswell community. Sarah decided to take a proactive stance regarding inclusion. Rather than waiting to be invited in (which could take a long time), she hosted a pig roast.

Sarah invited all of her neighbors to bring a side dish (assigned by the first letter of their last name) and join in the consuming of the pig and side dishes brought by other members of the community. More than 70 people showed up for the first roast. This event has been held every year for the past five years – and is eagerly awaited. Sarah has met many members of the community and is already a leading figure in the community (which relates to her own high need for control and influence which was honed during her years as a corporate executive).

Sarah was proactive. She said: "here I am and here is how you can get to know me and my husband" "I'm not waiting for you to invite me to your home. I have invited you here along with many of our neighbors. Come and enjoy pig and dialogue." While members of many other closely-knit communities, who are thoughtful about the issue of inclusion, have established programs to welcome new residents to their community, Sarah took the action herself, and Harpswell now has the pig roast as one way to welcome in newcomers.

The Welcome Wagon initiatives of other communities assume that the new residents will be reactive regarding their inclusion, while Sarah illustrated how one can be proactive. She doesn't just sit at the side of the dance floor. Sarah goes out and grabs one of the reticent boys and starts dancing with them. What a radical departure from our established way of being in the world as teenage boys and girls! Welcome to the 21st Century of gender-based relational norms. And welcome to Harpswell! Come and savor some smoked pig!!

The Need for Control

Individuals, groups, and members of organizations may have different ideas about how to move forward, but some perspectives and practices call for moving beyond these differences. There is an action orientation demanding that something gets done. There is a push for results. If we are going to move forward, we must figure out who will be influential in this relationship, group, or organization. It is equally important to determine how this influence is to be successfully engaged. Is it a matter of expertise, formal position power, and a willingness to become actively involved? What is the key influence in this social system?

Essential Control Questions and Concerns: Fundamentally, members of any social system must determine who is in charge. They make this decision individually, with another person, in a team setting, and/or in conjunction with the entire organization.

This helps them establish a control-based psychosocial template of Trust.

Who will be dominant in this relationship? Who gets to speak the most? Who makes the final decision? Does this dominance shift depending on the issue being addressed or does it remain in place regardless of what needs to happen? What will be the leadership structure of this group or organization? For example, will we appoint a single leader, rotating leadership, or perhaps leadership assigned to specific tasks?

Then, there is the matter of each member's assessment of their own desire for control. Do I want to be influential in this relationship? Do I wish to acquire some authority in this group or organization? Several Essential questions must be addressed in establishing this template: (1) Do I want to become influential and/or gain control in this social system? If I do, how should I become influential and in control? And (2) Do I instead want the other person in this relationship or other people in this group or organization to be primary sources of influence and provide control?

Are we concerned about influence primarily because we are interested in gaining attention to some idea and, hopefully, find that this idea is subsequently enacted? Or does the desire for influence and control reside at a deeper level? Do we always feel more at ease if we are "in charge" or at least have a major "say" in what is to be done?

What is the real reason why we want to be influential? Is it more a matter of wanting to be visible? Do we want to be in control simply because we are most comfortable in a group or organization if we are in control? Are relationships in our life most enjoyable and enriching if we guide their direction and assume responsibility for their outcome(s)? Or is it a matter of reducing levels of anxiety by taking action (rather than remaining in a state of freeze)? If this is a case of anxiety, then there is likely to be a focus on the actions being taken.

Anxiety is often reduced in a social system if specific goals are achieved that relate to the primary purpose for the existence and continuation of this system. We are anxious about joining this social system and find that the anxiety is reduced (metabolized) when the system acts and is successful. For many of us, anxiety is reduced if we are somehow leading the charge. We are proactively influencing the action taken on behalf of the system's survival (thwarting an existential threat)

What does it take for us to lead the charge? To answer this fundamental question regarding control, we must find or establish clarity regarding authority in the system. Our control-based template of Trust depends on this clarity. There are three primary concerns:

(1) how am I (and how are we) going to figure out how the power operates in this system?

(2) How do we assign authority within this system and to whom do we give this authority?

(3) How do I determine where and with whom I want to align myself, given the structure of authority in this system. How do I navigate the power operating in this relationship or collective endeavor?

If there is significant agreement about critical matters, then the system is likely to lean toward (or even openly embrace) a strongly top/down mode of leadership. Trust is established because we know who is in charge and know that they will lead us to a successful outcome (to which we are all committed).

By contrast, if most of the members of a system wish there to be little formal control (a low need for control) then members of the system are likely to lean toward a more laissez-faire mode of leadership – in other words not much formal leadership at all. If there is little Trust in the current competence and intentions of the formal leader, then a bit of fumbling about will be preferable to

insensitive and "stupid" leadership. No "bull in the China shop" need apply for the positive of leader in this social system!

Many social scientists (such as those operating out of the Santa Fe Institute) have been studying complex dynamic systems in recent years. They have found that traditional hierarchical rule is often incompatible with dynamic and complex systems. Beginning with Ilya Prigogine's theory of dissipative structures (Prigogine and Stegner, 1984) and leading up to more recent descriptions of complex adaptive systems (e.g., Miller and Page, 2007), there is now ample evidence that most systems in nature are not hierarchical. Just as a flock of birds does not have a formal lead bird, so large, complex organizations (especially those that are international in scope and diverse in product or service offerings) are not amendable to traditional modes of authority and control.

These organizations actually operate like a flock of birds in what is called a "self-organizing" manner. Leadership (and control) is quite fluid when flocking and self-organizing take place. Furthermore, Trust is no longer dependent on a stable and strong center of control. We have traditionally used the term "lasses-faire" when labeling social systems that are populated by people with a low need for control. We assume that this lasses-faire perspective and practice is often accompanied by suspicion regarding formal authority. However, this might not always be the case.

We can now label these social systems as "dynamically self-organizing." A more "agile" form of leadership is desired. Control shifts depending on the issue being addressed and the type of expertise held by members. However, it should be noted that even with this new label, self-organizing, low-control systems are likely to frustrate members with a strong need for proactive control. There is little appreciation on the part of these "control freaks" for leadership provided by their more collaborative colleagues.

If we don't fully buy the self-organization premise, we can expand our identification of leadership styles by reintroducing Goldilocks. She will help us construct a hot/cold psychosocial template of

Trust. Relationships and the control of organizations can be relatively "cold" with frequent shifts in authority or simply a minimal concern for any assertion of control or authority.

Conversely, relationships and organizations can be quite "hot." One person is in charge. Everyone else plays a secondary role. I witnessed a "hot" relationship several days ago at a restaurant. At a nearby table, one man was doing all the talking for more than a half hour. Others at his table were there to listen and occasionally nod their heads in agreement with his highly opinionated and very loud pronouncements.

Similarly, I consulted with the leader of a healthcare organization several years ago in which a major reorganization was being planned. When asked to diagram the current structure, a small team of physicians and administrators drew a simple diagram: one big circle with all lines leading to a second even larger circle (which represented the current leader).

There was NO organizational "design." There was only command and control at the top of the organization. Trust was nowhere to be found in this healthcare organization. There was considerable pessimism among those at the table. Their negative attitudes were justifiable. The reorganization never got off the ground. The organization remained "hot" and all templates of Trust were focused on this one leader.

By contrast, I witnessed the interaction (or lack of interaction) between two young people at a San Francisco restaurant. They were sitting at a coveted table overlooking the Pacific Ocean. Each of them was on their cellphone and never interacted with one another—despite the "romantic" setting in which they were located. There wasn't any "there, there." Neither of these two people was influencing the other person. Total independence and total lack of control. They were exhibiting a very "cold" relationship. Was any "caring"—let alone any Trust—to be found among these two young people?

Similarly, I consulted with a struggling urban university. Virtually all the faculty members lived far away from this rather destitute setting. Faculty meetings were rare. Formal leadership at the university was ridiculed. Students found no reason to "hang out" at the university's student union. It was a "cold" environment in which to work. I could find no Trust in the halls of this university.

Furthermore, I could find no one to interview regarding the problems this university's leaders face. Its president declared his university to be the "Princeton of the West." The only thing his university had in common with Princeton was the school colors. There was no "there there" and certainly no emulation of the very old, established traditions of Princeton. I found myself (like the faculty members) looking forward to going home.

A non-dualistic Goldilocks analysis would suggest that relationships, groups, and organizations need not be too hot (autocratic) or too cold (laissez-faire); rather, there can be a balance between high and low levels of control. We can identify this balanced level of control as a democratic form of leadership. Or we can use a less politically loaded term and call it collaborative. We can use an even fancier term such as "synergetic."

We usually find Trust in this environment. Trust will be moderated, and collaborative leaders are in charge of Goldilocks' porridge. However, we must be mindful that some members of the system who come from a high-control perspective are still unlikely to accept this Goldilocks "compromise." They will hold on to their "hot" psychosocial template of Trust.

Proactive and Reactive Control: The dynamics of both proactive and reactive control often tend to be just as subtle as those of proactive and reactive inclusion. Inclusion and control needs aren't always easy to fulfill when a social system is operating in the midst of md-21st Century VUCA-Plus. In both cases, these needs are usually informally established and tacitly acknowledged in an interpersonal relationship but are sometimes explicitly addressed through the formal operations of a group or organization.

For instance, in the case of Inclusion, there can be an actual vote to determine if someone is admitted into an officially formed group. This can be a vote taken by an external constituency (such as the election of congresspeople) or by those who are members of the group (as in the case of many social associations and fraternal organizations).

As we turn to Control, we find, in most cases, that the formal role of manager, director, or chair is assigned by someone or some group operating at the higher level of the organization. Even when the leadership of a group is not formally assigned from outside, the decision to be made about leadership has often been made in a public manner.

The issue of control can sometimes be formally addressed through the selection of officers in an organization. Often this is the case with the boards of nonprofit organizations as well as with corporate boards. Leaders can even be selected by an external constituency (as in the case of elected officials who preside over a legislative body—for example, the American Vice President who is selected by the general population rather than members of the US Senate).

All of this is now in flux regarding both interpersonal relationships and larger social systems. Not many years ago, control was assumed to exist in the hands of the male in a relationship—or in the hands of that person with the greatest social status (based on race, ethnicity, socio-economic status, etc.) This assumed control is often now being challenged. White Anglo men, in particular, must no longer assume they are in control. Negotiated control is now required. In many instances, both parties seek a bit of Goldilocks' balance.

At the broader group and organizational level, the assignment of leadership and control is now often a bit more confusing than it used to be. There is often bouncing between a straightforward autocratic mode of selection and a more convoluted selection process. The latter system usually involves selection by a small group of people (an oligarchy) and perhaps a pro forma process of

approval by a larger body. Even the process engaged in selecting an American President and Vice President is now being challenged. We are collectively confused about the nature of authority and the role to be played by various stakeholders.

With this cautionary (and perhaps disturbing) note, we return to the matter of proactive and reactive. The similarities between the dynamics of inclusion and control soon disappear when it comes to how proactive and reactive behavior is exhibited in a social system – and the way emotions often accompany struggle for control in this system. First, a proactive seeking of control usually shows up in a manner that everyone can see. While the person seeking control might not be explicit about their need, the proactive quest usually is manifest in a high level of verbal activity (even dominating the airtime in their system and a high level (and ratio) of offering opinions (rather than just sharing information).

I am reminded of the fellow I observed at the neighboring table. The proactive control seeker generally displays a high level of energy and activity in the group or organization while others in the group or organization try to sort out control and authority issues. There might be considerable maneuvering behind the scenes in the choice of a leader, but the move toward identified leadership at some point is explicit. It is rapid if significant work has been done in the "back room" (engaging the oligarchy I have mentioned.) A culture of passivity is cultivated. Little is accomplished during formal meetings that is meaningful or purposeful.

The dynamics of proactive control don't stop here. Even when leadership has been formally assigned, there are often continuing struggles behind the scenes regarding who is "really" in charge and how authority is truly being distributed in the group. Is this the "real" leader, or is someone else or some cluster of people actually "pulling the strings"? And what about the "loyal opposition"? Typically, their perspectives or interests are not represented by those in authority. How are the divergent perspectives and interests being addressed in this group?

Those members with a strong proactive need for control usually are quite sensitive to these issues, whether they are "in charge" or not. Finally, there is the matter of alignment with those in control. I need to consider ways to work with those in charge if I have a strong need for control, but I have little control. Perhaps I can follow the lead of a collaborative colleague If I am successful in this alignment, then I have what is often called "referent power." I have the leader's ear" and can represent other members in voicing their concerns and requests.

We can turn to the conversation being led by the loud and opinionated fellow at the neighboring table. How do those sitting at the table relate to him? Is the nod of agreement (or at least listening) enough? Is this a case of what Gregory Bateson (1972), the noted anthropologist, has called "schismogenesis"—the tendency of participants in a system to increase the contrast in their behavior as their interactions continue?

Our fellow at the neighboring table talks more. Other folks at his table talk less. He talks even more. They talk even less. Is he talking more because he is becoming increasingly anxious regarding the maldistribution of airtime? It is indeed ironic that some people who become anxious about talking too much end up talking even more frequently to reduce their level of anxiety. Others at the table might have grown resentful of his conversational dominance. As a result, they decide to shut up and wait for the "loudmouth" to somehow and sometime stop talking.

The need for control is typically less obvious among those who are reactive. As the name "reactive" implies, those with this orientation want other people to step in and take control (or at least exert considerable influence). Usually, those with a reactive need for control are the quiet ones in an interpersonal relationship.

They wait for the other person to start the conversation and are more likely to respond to a text message than initiate one. They will wait for a dinner invitation (and then pay for the meal). Group or organizational members with a strong reactive need for control

usually sit back and watch the battle for control be engaged. Typically, they line up with the "Winner" of the control issue and are relieved when control issues are finally resolved.

Often, the reactive perspective on control is engaged by those marginalized in a group or (more generally) in society. At the individual level, the marginalized person is likely to wait for cues from the person with whom they are meeting. They are more likely to adjust to the other person's culture and mode of operating rather than wait for the other person's adjustment. The marginalized person often comes from a strong tradition of being asked (or forced) to remain quiet and inactive while the leadership decision is made.

As a woman, minority, young person, or person with disabilities, the assumption is often made that they are automatically ineligible for a position of leadership---and they are not expected to be very influential. While their opinion might be tolerated ("All of us are interested in what you have to say… "), they often hesitate to speak up. They assume that their opinion and advice will never be taken seriously or that their perspective will be placed in a box filled with many stereotypes ("that is the way *those people* tend to think").

Case Studies of Control: As I did with the need for inclusion, the dynamics of proactive and reactive control are illustrated with brief case studies from my work as a consultant. I first convey what happens when reactive control is dominant—which is commonly found in intentional communities (communes). Struggles for control, authority, and leadership are surprisingly common in these visionary and seemingly collaborative communities.

While members of communes often desperately want to live in a world of openness and trust, they can't get past the issue of control. The group is dysfunctional when most members don't want any control (laissez-faire) or look passively for others to take control. Furthermore, this type of group is also quite vulnerable to being taken over by a highly charismatic leader. This persuasive person offers absolute control in exchange for absolute allegiance. They

portray a false paradise of absolute openness (requiring only their control as the leader).

On the other hand, I can turn to an organizational consultation I completed with leaders of a major church in North America. The leaders of this church have a strong commitment to biblical values and aspirations. These leaders were becoming increasingly concerned with the hierarchical nature of their church. They noted that the early Christian church (as described in the New Testament) was not hierarchical (perhaps an example of what today we would call a "self-organizing system").

Why not restructure their church to reduce traditional modes of authority and control? Church leaders became architects who purposefully looked at existing models of nonhierarchical organizations—including the self-management systems being deployed in manufacturing firms such as Volvo. They didn't mind that these were "secular" institutions—those designing these self-management systems could still provide guidance.

Unlike those living in the Utopian communes with which I consulted, these church leaders were not running away from control. Rather, they were discovering ways to best allocate and manage control in their organization (church). They were trying (with considerable success) to create a "lukewarm" Goldilocks organizational structure that had integrity.

These church leaders held the advantage of already establishing an I/Thou foundation of Trust. They connected and collaboratively built a template of Trust because they shared a commitment to a higher good and higher (spiritual) source of guidance. A strong foundation of Trust enables us to address the challenge of Control. At the same time, when we successfully confront this issue, we further enhance Trust. The Cycle of Trust seems to be potentially available in the interpersonal world of Control.

The Need for Openness

Openness concerns a willingness (even eagerness) to express and share thoughts and feelings with someone with whom we are relating, as well as members of a group or organization. There is also an openness to innovative ideas, perspectives, and practices. This is an often-overlooked dimension of Schutz's openness.

Perhaps it is overlooked because it represents an often-elusive connection between relationship-based (interpersonal) openness and task-based openness to new ideas. This connection should not be overlooked, for the union of relationship-based and task-based openness is critical to the building of productive collaboration between two people and among members of a group or organization (Hershey and Blanchard, 1977; Gratton and Erickson, 2007).

The most challenging form of openness has to do with the genuine welcoming of people into a relationship or into our group and organization who are different in some important way from ourselves. It is in this openness to differences that we find the building of genuine community in our mid-21st Century life of global diversity. It is also in this welcoming that we find a powerful blending of concerns about inclusion with concerns about openness.

Those who embrace this dimension of diversity wish to see beyond the current state. They look upward and outward in order to become inspired. They look upward so that they can better see their shared destination. They help other members of the group become inspired by the vision of a greater good—for their relationship, their team, their organization and ultimately their society.

Essential Openness Questions and Concerns: The need for interpersonal openness comes to the fore when we are about to act. We must figure out how we are going to conduct ourselves. This is especially the case when we are relating to someone quite different

from ourselves or working with members of the group/team who might differ in important ways from us and from one another. Here are concerns about openness that should be addressed as we establish a Psychosocial template of Trust to guide the nurturing of this third interpersonal need:

(1) In what ways and at what times are we going to explore the fundamental way in which we are operating, and how do we go about changing our operations if they are not supporting safety or honoring diversity? To do this, we must speak candidly with the other person in our relationship. Trust must have been established with this other person.

Similarly, the group or organization must determine the extent to which members of this group or organization are willing to talk about what is really happening, and if the group or organization as a whole can trust what members of the group or organization are saying about the operations of the group or organization. Amid all of this, we can return to the Cycle of Trust that is critical in forming Jack Gibb's world of TORI. Openness begets trust which begets more openness which begets further Trust and so forth.

(2) How do we determine if the actions being taken by the person with whom we are relating or by other members of our group or organization align with what they say and what they espouse as their values and vision? How, in other words, do we assess and openly discuss matters of honesty and integrity? The term "authenticity" is often relevant in this regard. Once again, a Cycle of Trust might exist with Trust and Authenticity reinforcing one another.

(3) What is the appropriate balance between conversations that are task-based and those that concern personal and interpersonal issues? This discernment is especially important if these issues might impact on interpersonal, group or organizational functioning. The conversation itself should focus on both the Task (T) and Relationships (R). The conversation must also include

concern for the Method (M) of operating that best brings together effective task-related and relationship-related behavior.

It is not enough to share feelings about the way in which we are working together. We also must share feelings and thoughts about the best ways in which to structure the task, make use of available resources, or even adjust spans of control, authority, support and influence that are associated with the task (Simons, 2005; Bergquist, Sandstrom and Mura, 2023). This TMR Model is more fully described in Appendix B.

(4) How do we appreciate, learn from and preserve those moments when relationship, our group or our organization seems to be functioning at its most effective level—with full participation by each of in the relationship, and by all members of the group or organization. There is a sense of joy in doing the work together, and a spirit of accomplishment that is energizing and renewing. This appreciative perspective can be offered in the narratives being shared, in the celebrations being conducted and in the statements of gratitude being offered. Once again, a Cycle of Trust can be created with Appreciation and Trust dancing together.

In order to address these four concerns, we must be candid with ourselves and those with whom we are relating. There are two specific questions which we must ask one another in establishing a trusting relationship and creating a shared template of Trust. We must ask one another: (1) How open do I want to be in sharing my ideas, experiences, concerns, hopes, and fears" (2) How open do I want other people to be in sharing their own ideas, experiences, concerns, hopes and fears? As in the case of both Inclusion and Control, there are proactive and reactive perspectives on Openness that lie behind the two questions being broached.

Proactive and Reactive Openness: The need for Openness parallels the need for inclusion and need for control. Some people are quite willing – even eager—to share their feelings, hopes, fears and observations with other people, while other people are reticent to do so. Those who are reluctant typically wait for other members of

the group or organization to take the initiative. At the extreme are proactively open people who share their entire life history sitting next to an unfortunate stranger on an airplane. Indiscriminate openness must be endemic to commercial aircraft. Many hours are yet to pass before the plane touches down on foreign soil and we are relieved of the stranger's openness. Regret is keenly felt about not purchasing a set of noise-cancelling headphones at the airport.

At the other extreme is the reactively open person who can't easily be prodded into a conversation—even at the start of a team-building workshop. They have a closed interpersonal template that seems to be indifferent to the setting in which openness is requested (and expected). We might be assigned this person at the start of the workshop.

This being the case, we are "required" to carry the "interpersonal load" during a warmup exercise with this person. They smile and wait for us to produce something of mutual interest. The journey seems almost as long as that flight with the non-stop discloser. Polystatic adjustments are warranted in both the case of a team-building workshop and the long flight on an airplane. We can't always be either open or closed. An eternally closed or forever open template is rarely appreciated by those with whom the dualist interacts.

In a relationship, proactive openness can be of great value—when engaged in moderation. It is important for each of us to gain a clear sense of another person's perspectives, values and past history if we are going to be working with them. Similarly, in a team building session, appropriate proactive openness can be quite valuable. We are not trapped on an airplane with a total stranger—rather we are helping to make the group or organization operate in a more effective (task) and pleasant (relationship) manner.

There are contributing members who begin to share their own observations about group or organizational functioning (Method). They may also share their own hopes for and fears about the group or organization's productivity with other members—no life

histories, just task-oriented, relationship-oriented and method-related feedback.

In some cases (perhaps most cases) an important distinction must be drawn between openness about task-related issues and openness about relationships. Issued related to openness about the operations of the relationship, group or organization. I have already identified this as the dimension of Method (M) in a working relationship. It is particularly important to distinguish Method (M) issues from issues related to Task (T) or Relationships (R). The methods we use allow us to be both productive (task) and engaged (relationship). Three forms of openness are to be found in the TMR Model. We need honest appraisals of (1) task performance, (2) quality of relationships established with one another in the group, and (3) way we operate in seeking to achieve desired task-based and relationship-based outcomes.

While task and relationship-oriented feedback might be familiar for those who are acquainted with such concepts as emotional intelligence (Goleman, 1995) and situational leadership (Hershey and Blanchard, 1977; Gratton and Erickson, 2007), Method-oriented feedback seems to be unique to John Wallen. Time needs to be devoted to Wallen's important concept of Method during a team-building workshop or other group-based settings.

Without attention being given to operational issues, a working partnership, group or organization is likely to bounce back and forth between task and relationship—with little attention being given to constraints (and opportunities) related to the relationship between and interdependency of task and relationship. Inappropriate assignment of responsibility, authority, support or influence can mess up the task performance and quality of relationships (Simons, 2005; Bergquist, Sandstrom and Mura, 2023). Appropriate balancing requires attention to Method.

Many Method-oriented actions can be taken. Two of us might decide to meet more often (or less often). We might meet in some other less distracting place or prepare an agenda prior to our next

meeting. These are Method related matters. Similarly, with open feedback in place regarding how we are operating as a group, we can consider ways (group methods) in which to do a better job regarding the task or our relationships.

For instances, we might decide to spend five minutes at the end of each meeting to identify the most effective use of our time together during this meeting. We might instead rotate the role of facilitator for each meeting or ask one member of the group to sit outside the group for a single session, serving as an "anthropologist" (reporting at the end of the meeting on interactions they have observed during this meeting).

What about Reactive Openness? This orientation is found among those who wait for others to take on the "interpersonal load." Unfortunately, this orientation is often of little value in sustaining a productive relationship. Fortunately, reactive openness can also be found among those people who are identified as "good listeners" (or at least patient listeners). These are the folks who will listen to the stranger next to them on the airplane (rather than putting on their earphones).

The reactive openness folks on the airplane will actually ask some questions that produce an even more extended life narrative. Perhaps this narrative is actually of some interest and relevance to the listener. At a much more productive level, we find the same kind of "good listeners" in our work setting. They might even be "active listeners" who move beyond the encouraging reception of another person's ideas. They provide clarification, expansion and critical appraisal of these ideas (Bolton, 1986; Mura and Bergquist, 2019; Gallo, 2024). I have introduced some tools for active listening in the appendix to this book.

In a group or organizational setting, those with high reactive openness needs will wait for and even encourage other members of the group or organization to share their feelings, hopes and fears— as well as share observations about group or organizational functioning. While these reactive openness members of the group

or organization are not always given the credit that they deserve, the contributions they make can play a major role in transforming their group or organization into an effectively functioning system. While many groups or organizations would probably only find this role being performed by an outside, highly paid process consultant (Schein, 1998), there are those groups and organizations that are fortunate enough to have this role being played by one or more of their own members.

While the praise that can be heaped on these reactive members is deserved, it is important to reiterate that a reactive openness orientation can create problems in a relationship or group. The sharing of ideas and emotions is critical among those participating in a task-oriented relationship or group. This sharing goes beyond listening and inquiring.

The reactive participant in a relationship might grow tired of always serving just as a "listening post." We may find that the reactive member of a group ends up feeling abused or ignored. While they will not willingly share their own information about personal emotions, reactive participants may expect that the person with whom they are meeting or someone else in the group will ask them for their perspectives and observations: "Thank you for asking, here is what I have observed/what I am feeling." The output can be quite voluminous and often quite insightful.

However, the comments being made are often a little late in the life of the relationship or group. If someone is dominating a conversation, they are likely to remain dominant even if the other participant in the conversation asks to speak. The voices that are not actively heard in the first quarter of a meeting often get ignored later in the discussion.

Furthermore, the comments being made by the reactive participant in a relationship or member of a group can sometimes be filled with spite. These comments are offered more as retribution than as contribution. "Thanks for finally being quiet and allowing me to speak. However, it is a little late to comment on the idea you

proposed several minutes ago. I even forgot what I was going to say!" "Unfortunately, I was not asked earlier for my input. I could have told all of you that this wasn't going to work long before you headed in the wrong direction!"

There is also the matter of members with a low need for openness. Their Psychosocial template is a "closed book." These members will often be reluctant to share their own feelings and perspectives. They will be even more uncomfortable about someone else doing much sharing. On the airplane, they are likely to request a change in seats – or certainly put on their headphones or pretend to fall asleep.

Those with low openness needs will avoid "intimate" conversations with colleagues—even after knowing them for a long period of time. Within a group or organization, they often will consider any open sharing of feelings or offering of observations about group functioning to be disruptive of the group's work on the task: "What's going on here! We're not one of those damnable therapy groups. Keep your feelings to yourself—or take them home and share them with your loved one, not with us!"

The role played by a closed-up colleague in a relationship or reticent member of a group often creates a barrier to establishing a comfortable interpersonal relationship or the successful transition of group to team (Bergquist, Sandstrom and Mura, 2023). As I have already noted, one of the widely accepted guidelines for process consultants is that the level of overall trust (and openness) in a relationship or group is no greater than that of a member of the relationships or group who is least trusting (and least open). As this person goes, so goes the relationship or group.

The closed-up member of a group is particularly sensitive to the lack of safety in their group. In many ways, they serve as the "canary in the coal mine." They sound an "alarm" (often quietly), indicating that things are not "safe." It is quite a challenge to bring this closed-up member of the group to a point where they are sufficiently trusting about the intentions and interpersonal competencies of

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other members to become a bit more open. It will get even worse if they are coerced to be more open (by being repeatedly called on to share their feelings or observations).

It is even worse if they are manipulated in an effort by other members to encourage openness (by effusively praising the closed member for sharing a bit of themselves). Similarly, in an interpersonal relationship, the openness of both members, ironically, is dependent on the shared acceptance of "closedness." Just as many people are likely to resist changing when change is demanded, so they are likely to resist opening up in a relationship when forcefully asked to be "candid" or "honest."

The S^2 (security and safety) end of the Trust polarity is key to Will Schutz's openness. Amy Edmonson (2018) has reminded us that safety is critical to the functioning of organizations. The 20th Century strategy of "playing it safe" doesn't align with a 21st Century VUCA-Plus environment. Too many unknowns swirl around us to play it safely.

Successful group operations require the creation of a safe environment that allows for innovative ideas, newly identified challenges, and slowed-down problem-solving (Kahneman, 2013). The best approach involves adopting a disciplined and appreciative approach in working with any member of the group or organization who operates with a "closed book" template. In many cases, this involves acknowledgement of their discomfort (as a canary) and then finding ways to increase safety in the group.

When the reticent discloser does voluntarily offer some observations (usually task-related), the other member of the relationship or one or more members of the group can not only thank them for their observations but also briefly comment, in an articulate appreciative manner, on the impact of this disclosure. "Your comments regarding how my own fears seem to distract us from our work are welcomed. I will try to frame my concerns in a more productive manner." "Your observation has actually contributed to group or organizational functioning. That specific

comment you made has helped to move our group toward successful completion of the task." Not too much attention and not too little attention is given to the reticent member of a relationship or group. A bit of Goldilocks once again.

Hopefully, we can find appropriate and successful ways in relationships and groups of which we are a member to blend task issues more effectively with interpersonal issues. We can make the task more enjoyable to do and relationships more satisfying precisely because we are getting things accomplished. We can get things accomplished precisely because we enjoy working with other members of the group.

Proactive openness certainly can be welcomed—just as proactive inclusion and proactive control prove to be of value. "Welcome to the pig roast (proactive inclusion)!" "Thank you for inviting me to the pig roast (reactive inclusion): "Here is what I think we need to accomplish during our meeting today (proactive control)." "I agree with the agenda that has just been proposed. Let's move forward." (reactive control)" "I would like to comment on what I think happened during our meeting yesterday (proactive openness)." "I appreciate your candor in reflecting on the feasibility of this project. (reactive openness)."

Case Studies of Openness: As I have done regarding both inclusion and control, I will share several stories about openness that comes from my own consulting career. I turn first to work with a leadership team at a major American banking institution. I was called in by a Senior Vice President who was recruited from another corporation to shake things up in this division of the bank.

He was to provide some assertive leadership by driving the vice presidents working under him to be both more productive and more innovative. His bank was losing out to another major bank that had introduced new banking practices and was increasing its share of the banking market. New ideas are desperately required. He is just the man to produce these ideas!

What our Senior Vice President found was that his reports had become even more conservative. Their departments had become even less productive under his "repressive" leadership. I was brought in with a team of consultants to help improve the situation. As part of our contract, my team conducted a series of interviews with all the Vice Presidents.

They uniformly indicated that their new boss had been unsupportive and threatening. It was "either his way or the highway". My consulting team was faced with the prospect of reporting these findings to our client. He was surprisingly open to our feedback. He suggested that my team share these findings with his entire group of Vice Presidents, and we did so.

After we had completed our report, one of the Vice Presidents stood up and declared that our report was fraudulent: "our Senior Vice President is a fine man and is absolutely supportive of our work. Sir, you should fire these consultants – they had not told you the truth." The room grew quite silent. We were preparing to leave very quickly and consider another line of work! Suddenly, one of the Vice Presidents (who we later found out was usually quiet in the group) spoke up.

This courageous Vice President indicated that the report we had delivered was quite accurate. These criticisms of the Senior Vice President were often voiced in the backrooms (but never in front of the Senior Vice President). He then said (I remember his words): "This is our one opportunity to make things better. If we can't be honest in this setting, then when can we be honest! We are all hurting. None of us want things to stay the same." At this point, several other VPs spoke up. They supported this very open statement. Now, the Senior Vice President spoke up. He indicated his appreciation of the courage shown by these members of his team. It is this kind of courage and honesty that he had been looking for when brought in to promote innovation.

Members of his vice-presidential group began working together in a collaborative, risk-taking manner. Their progress over the

following six months was impressive – and this bank is now back in a much better position regarding market share. Miracles were not wrought, but important progress was made by this Senior Vice President and his executive group as the level of openness rose. Trust was on the rise. A Cycle of Trust was lingering on the sidelines—waiting to be ushered in by the quiet but brave Vice President. Openness begets Trust which begets more openness, which begets more Trust . . .

There is one other story of openness that I wish to share. I was working with faculty members in an academic department located at an American university located in the Pacific Northwest. We were in the midst of a three-day faculty development retreat held at a beautiful setting on a wooded lake. Members of the department were conveying some of their own narratives about why and how they got into the teaching business.

The stories they were sharing seemed well-rehearsed. They had probably been heard by colleagues several times before. Nothing much was occurring, except some important reflections on how the academic world was changing. Their department's curriculum needed reform. Constructive dialogue was engaged. However, standard academic practices and designs were offered. Ideas were mostly borrowed from other universities. Little attention was given to the faculty members' hopes, fears, or aspirations.

Then, as in the case of the bank Vice President, there came a moment of openness and honesty. This moment originated from an unlikely source. As in the case of our courageous Bank Vice President, the source was a quiet participant. It was a faculty member who had sat on the sidelines during most of the retreat. Retreat participants were asked to describe the environment in which they felt most productive. In what setting did they feel most comfortable with their role as a faculty member?

The quiet member hesitantly spoke up. He indicated that he most enjoyed reading historical volumes in his den at home. These books took him far away from the everyday world in which he was living.

It was not surprising to discover that he aligned with this practice of historical review and scholarship since history is this faculty member's discipline. However, he went on to share his fears about the world in which he is living. He indicated the following: "I am a very closed person. I don't open up with many people – even my wife and family." It was a remarkable moment. Ironically, this statement about being closed was the most open and honest statement made during this retreat.

His colleagues sat there for a few moments without saying a word. His words touched them. They admired their colleague's perspective for perhaps the first time in many years. It was not only the curriculum that needed to change but also how each faculty member lives and works in a changing and challenging world. The retreat became much more productive as a result of this disclosure.

The faculty member who was least trusting took a risk. He helped to raise the level of openness and trust among all members of his academic department. A Cycle of Trust was engaged briefly in this wilderness setting. The faculty members had become a team. The faculty of this department made significant progress in updating their curriculum—and becoming closer and more supportive of one another.

Trust and Interpersonal Needs: A Personal Reflection

I conclude this perspective on Trust and Interpersonal Needs by sharing an actual interaction I had with Will Schutz. This interaction occurred during a planning meeting that concerned an MA human relations program in which Will Schutz and I were both teaching. There was a significant challenge associated with convening this group. The leaders of this MA group had brought together a group of men and women who were accustomed to being in charge and doing planning by themselves.

The episode I will disclose offers a display of Will's own sensitivity regarding inclusion, control and openness. It also illustrates the

way in which fulfillment of these three needs relates to achievement of Trust in a personal relationship, as well as in a group. My own Psychosocial template of Trust was altered as a result of this interaction between the two of us.

Will Schutz and I had known each other for several years (mostly in conjunction with this MA program). Will was much more "famous" than I was at the time. Furthermore, he was publicly more prominent than most of the other faculty members. He was at the top of the status-based totem pole (of which we were all aware). Yet, Will treated me (and other members of the faculty team) with respect and deference. He did a beautiful job of managing the *Inclusion* of all team members (regardless of status).

Will also was a superb informal facilitator of our planning team. This team was filled with strong egos. He provided a thoughtful amount of *Control* and ensured that everyone felt influential as well as included. Finally, and most dramatically, Will Schutz both exhibited and invited *Openness*. He was quite candid in the opinions and feelings he offered regarding the process of our planning group and the nature of participation by all group members (including himself).

A high level of Trust was established in this planning group – largely as a result of Will's contributions. A collective Psychosocial template of mutual respect and trust was established. I suspect that our personal somatic templates were also filled with parasympathetic messages of calm. Allostatic predictions of safety were prevalent. They lead to a willingness to disclose perspectives and feelings.

It is in Will's open expression of feelings regarding me that I found the high level of Trust to be most evident. My interaction with Will began after another team member offered a comment that was critical of an idea I had presented. I was one of the most vocal (perhaps "mouthy") members of the team. Another group member came to my "defense" after the critical comment was made. This member suggested (polystatically predicted) that the critical

comment would dissuade me from remaining a participating and productive team member.

At this point, Will Schutz spoke up: "You don't need to worry about Bill Bergquist's feelings, he is so well-defended that you would need to hit him over the head with a two-by-four to get his full attention! Bill doesn't easily back off from anything!" There was a moment of silence. Planning team members seemed to be in shock about this "brutal" assessment of my defensiveness and persistence. I was initially taken back by Will's comments. However, I quickly realized that Will had offered a "brutally" honest appraisal of how I handle negative feedback. Much like the Senior Bank Vice President, I appreciated the honest feedback being given to me.

I entered the conversation and was quite honest (I believe) for a few moments. I indicated that I do use my psychology to fend off negative feedback. I do the same with positive feedback. I appreciated Will Schutz's honest observations. However, this "disclosure" on my part might itself have been a clever defensive routine. I closed my statement by indicating that I needed to ponder what Will had said. I would try to move past my defensive routine to absorb the insights and implications of what Will Schutz has offered me.

I could absorb the harsh observations that Will Schutz made during this meeting because I had established a high level of Trust regarding my relationship with Will. His competence, intentions, and shared perspectives (regarding human relationships) were evident in his work as a planning group member. The group's ability to meet inclusion, control, and openness needs increased my capacity and willingness to take in Will's comments. Safety had been achieved in this group, despite the significant challenge associated with convening these high-ego folks. I have spent time reflecting on my defensiveness and how I distance myself from many challenging interpersonal relationships.

The impact of Will Schutz's comments continues. My Psychosocial template regarding Openness and Trust still includes my memory

of this moment. I am sharing this episode with you as a reader for the first time. Even now, in preparing this personal reflection on Trust, I must consider if this is a further example of my frequent defensive use of objectification and intellectualization. Do the last couple of paragraphs display my defensive routine? I continue to ponder. Though he passed away in 2002, Will Schutz lingers in my mind and heart. Thank you, Will, for being a trustworthy colleague.

Steps to Trust II: Poetic Description

While the steps to be taken based on the guidance of Will Schutz can lead us to a trust-full relationship with other people and groups of people, I ponder the deeper meaning of Trust. I wonder if the Essence of Trust ultimately resides at a level that insightful psychologists and consultants like Will Schutz can't quite reach.

I find myself searching for an analysis of and rendition of Trust that is both more soulful and filled with a sense of spirit (Moore,1992). I imagine that soul-full Trust leads us deeper into meaningful relationships. Conversely, spirit-full Trust leads us up higher toward a more aspirational and productive relationship with other people and with those who join us in seeking to create a better world. What might be a psychosocial template of Trust that is filled with both soul and spirit?

The Invitation

While struggling with this matter of Trust at the level of soul and spirit, I was clearing out some old papers to make room for documents related to recent authorships. Among these papers was a copy of a poem/proclamation prepared by Oriah Mountain Dreamer (2024). Called "The Invitation," this widely known statement spoke to me directly regarding the matter of Trust. Bringing in his wisdom alongside collective wisdom acquired from his Native American community, Oriah Mountain Dreamer speaks to the Essence of Trust. He identifies the conditions he looks to when establishing an authentic relationship with another person.

I believe that his wisdom relates to the soul and spirit in a trusting relationship. Furthermore, as I carefully read *The Invitation*, I discovered four facets of Trust: Intentions, Integrity, Inspiration, and Integration. Each of these may have to be incorporated in any Psychosocial template of Trust. I also found that each facet manifests in both spirit and soul. Spirit-full Trust is based on the appearance of "real" (genuine) values and purposes that do not readily change. They are never just convenient. By contrast, Soul-full Trust is based on the willingness to take risks when engaging in external world actions. This Trust is also based on a readiness to risk exploring the world residing inside us. These internal risks might be the most imposing.

I wish to apply these distinctions to each of the stanzas offered by Oriah Mountain Dreamer. I realize that my categorizations do not do justice to the unique wisdom being offered by this Native American elder. I recall a speech I heard many years ago when attending college. Theodore Gill (President of the San Francisco Theological Seminar) suggested that stuffing God into a specific theological box is foolish and rarely satisfying. I must similarly acknowledge that I am doing some stuffing. I fully recognize that Mountain Dreamer's Invitations encompass much more than the Essence of Trust. I am incorporating only part of his wisdom in my psychosocial template of Trust. With this caveat in mind, I begin my exploration of this poetic account of Trust.

Spirit-full Intentions: We come to trust other people when we feel confident that their intentions are clear (for them and us) and are held consistently. Furthermore, we are drawn to other people when their intentions are lofty and worthy of our mutual engagement:

It doesn't interest me
what you do for a living.
I want to know
what you ache for
and if you dare to dream
of meeting your heart's longing.

Soul-full Intentions: It is not enough that people we trust offer lofty dreams. They must also be willing to dig deeper and take a risk in accord with these lofty intentions:

It doesn't interest me
how old you are.
I want to know
if you will risk
looking like a fool
for love
for your dream
for the adventure of being alive.

Spirit-full Integrity: We trust someone if they are a bit bruised and battered, yet are still true to themselves and are still open to a dream:

It doesn't interest me
what planets are
squaring your moon...
I want to know
if you have touched
the centre of your own sorrow
if you have been opened
by life's betrayals
or have become shriveled and closed
from fear of further pain.

Soul-full Integrity: We must trust that the other person is knowledgeable about and appreciative of the opportunities that their bruising and battering bring to them—and the opportunities of bruising and battering that I bring to the relationship. As Nassim Taleb (2012) would suggest, we want to relate in a trusting manner to anti-fragile people. They don't avoid challenges.

Furthermore, they are not just resilient. It is not enough that they "bounce back." Those who are anti-fragile have been bruised and battered. However, they are anti-fragile precisely because they bring lessons learned and strengths found in these bruising and battering experiences to encounters with new experiences that are just as challenging. Beyond bruising and battering, we want to join in a trusting manner with those who are oriented (as we hopefully are) toward joyful and expansive growth through both achievement and adversity:

I want to know
if you can sit with pain
mine or your own
without moving to hide it
or fade it
or fix it.

I want to know
if you can be with joy
mine or your own
if you can dance with wildness
and let the ecstasy fill you
to the tips of your fingers and toes
without cautioning us
to be careful
to be realistic
to remember the limitations
of being human.

Spirit-full Inspiration: The Essence of Trust relates to what is "real" in the world. It also relates to the joint construction of a trust-full reality within a relationship. As Leslie Brothers (2001) proposed, we create our reality at any one moment in time in our relationship with other people—especially those we Trust. We generate joint narratives founded on a clear sense of self (for both of us).

This narrative, in turn, builds on and is inspired by a shared sense that there is something of greater importance and purpose than the two of us—Martin Buber's I/Thou (Buber, 1958). Based on this I/Thou ("trustworthy") relationship, we construct an agile (polystatic) narrative with another person that allows for disappointment and change as well as beauty and Trust.

It doesn't interest me
if the story you are telling me
is true.
I want to know if you can
disappoint another
to be true to yourself.
If you can bear
the accusation of betrayal
and not betray your own soul.
If you can be faithless
and therefore trustworthy.

I want to know if you can see Beauty
even when it is not pretty
every day.
And if you can source your own life
from its presence.

Soul-full Inspiration: under conditions of VUCA-Plus, we face many daunting challenges in our daily life. These challenges are made less overwhelming if we can share them with other people in a trusting relationship. In fact, as I have noted, these challenges can actually be energizing ("Yes!") and transformative. Trust, in turn, is increased if we can find and reliably count on the support and shared appreciation of another person. Together, we can be inspired to support and nurture those ("the children") who are vulnerable (fragile) to these challenging conditions:

I want to know
if you can live with failure
yours and mine
and still stand at the edge of the lake
and shout to the silver of the full moon,
"Yes."

It doesn't interest me
to know where you live
or how much money you have.
I want to know if you can get up
after the night of grief and despair
weary and bruised to the bone
and do what needs to be done
to feed the children.

Spirit-full Integration: A trusting relationship ultimately requires that we have somehow "put ourselves together." Parts of our psyche do not remain isolated from one another. Our multiple Psychosocial templates are related to and aligned with one another.

Our dreams include all parts of us ("good" and "bad"). The strengths and weaknesses that both of us bring to the relationship are all acknowledged and engaged in a "full-hearted" manner. We live "a fiery life' together (for a few minutes or a lifetime):

It doesn't interest me
who you know
or how you came to be here.
I want to know if you will stand
in the centre of the fire
with me
and not shrink back.

It doesn't interest me
where or what or with whom
you have studied.
I want to know
what sustains you
from the inside
when all else falls away.

Soul-full Integration: Perhaps most importantly, I want to know that you actually "like yourself"—including those parts that are hard to like. Many years ago, Erik Erikson (Erikson, Erikson and Kivnick, 1986) suggested that we eventually forgive (and like) ourselves only after we have forgiven other important people in our life (including our parents).

I suspect that the reverse is also true. We can only begin to truly 'Like" another person when we begin to "like ourselves." And this means "liking ourselves" even when we are standing alone looking at ourselves in the bathroom mirror. It might go back to an insight offered by Erich Fromm (1956). He suggested that we can only truly love another person when we have come to love ourselves.

I want to know
if you can be alone
with yourself
and if you truly like
the company you keep
in the empty moments.

Maybe it is as simple as this. The Essence of Trust resides in the love of self and love of the other person on behalf of something greater than both of us: I/Thou.

A Trusting Relationship: The Invitation Accepted

I have been fortunate (blessed) to find this trusting relationship with many people in my life. However, I want to focus specifically on one of these relationships. It is with the aforementioned Gary Quehl, my long-term friend and colleague. Gary and I have not only written the book about deep caring and generativity, the two of us also collaborated in preparing a book about civic engagement (based on a project we conducted in Northern California). Furthermore, Gary served as senior editor of five best-selling handbooks I wrote during the 1970s about professional development and consultation in higher education institutions. I wrote these books while the chief consultant to a major higher education association in Washington D.C. headed by Dr. Quehl.

There has been something very special about working with Gary for over five decades. He has been success-oriented rather than failure-avoidant. This success orientation is rare. Failure-avoidance is common among leaders of the Washington D.C. higher ed community. Housed in buildings around Dupont Circle, most heads of large national and international educational associations are noted for playing it safe (S^2). By contrast, for Gary Quehl, we should meet the lofty goals of at least one project (O^2)—even if this means failing to meet another project's goal.

Over the years, I could strike out several times as long as we hit an occasional home run! Home runs were aplenty while working with Gary in his leadership of one higher education association. Major grants, significant national conferences, and long-term educational reform programs were abundant. I even wrote several widely cited books that conveyed insights gained from these higher education projects. This meant I could trust Gary over many years as a source of spirit-full and soul-full inspiration. In addition, I could trust his spirit-full and soul-full intentions. I could take a risk because Gary would catch me when I fell.

Gary's success-oriented leadership carried over to his position as head of another Dupont Circle organization. It was the largest higher education association in the United States at the time. I once again served as a major consultant to Gary. We had some hits, but also some strikeouts. Gary was confronted by some very stubborn resistance at Dupont Circle—for he dared to suggest that the position of certain administrators in American colleges and universities should be elevated. They should sit at the table when major decisions are being made regarding the future of their college or university.

Gary left Washington D.C. after several years. Like many leaders seeking change in our nation's capital, Gary ended up a defeated "Beltway" warrior. I struggled at the same time with my consulting career. He and I both went through soul-full journeys of disappointment and frustration. To borrow from Oriah Mountain Dreamer, we were both *weary and bruised to the bone.* Yet, our relationship remained intact and even deepened as we continued to collaborate and celebrate as dear friends.

Gary and I also experienced successes and failures on a personal level. Together with Gary, I *touched the centre of [my] own sorrow. We* both had *been opened by life's betrayals*. Gary and I traveled hand-in-hand through heart-breaking divorces and partial separation from our children. I remember spending evenings with Gary listening to sorrowful songs (such as Sondheim's "Send in the Clowns"). We were sipping on a bit too much wine while lamenting our misfortunes.

Gary and I shared many a *night of grief and despair. However,* each of us met the wonderful woman we would eventually marry. Gary and I were together when I met my future wife, Kathleen. Furthermore, I introduced Gary to his future wife, Bonnie. Gary Quehl and I together *risk[ed] looking like a fool for love.* He and I built a foundation of Trust based on both Spirit-full and Soul-full Integrity.

Finally, there is the matter of Integration. Over many years of being together, working together, and feeling together, Gary Quehl and I have established both Spirit-full and Soul-full Integration. All aspects of our lives have been revealed to one another and have been fully accepted. We both know what sustains us when things are going well.

Even more importantly, we both *know what sustains [each of us] from the inside when all else falls away.* In many instances, these integrating sources of knowledge about one another accompany the release of inhibitions. Together, we have *[stood] at the edge of the lake [or ocean] and shout[ed] to the silver of the full moon, "Yes."* This shouting occurred on the deck of my cottage in Maine or the edge of a hot tub at Gary's home in California.

The shouting celebration has often occurred hand-in-hand with other people we care about. I recall Gary and Bonnie's wedding at a coastal Northern California home that Kathleen and I owned and loved. We celebrated Gary and Bonnie's loving commitment to one another with their family and friends. Our shared shouting went even further and took on a different form. Gary and I serenaded a dear friend at a national conference held on the campus of a small college in Illinois. Both Gary and I had been members of fraternities in college. We had learned songs required to celebrate the "pinning" of a young lady by one of our fraternity brothers. Our dear friend had never been pinned as a young woman. Nor, as a Jewish woman, was she allowed to join a sorority at the college she attended. Gary and I decided that we should honor our dear friend with songs.

It was a hot, humid evening. She stood on a balcony with other women attending this conference. Gary and I stood below the balcony. We offered our friend every one of our fraternal songs of devotion and love. There was not a dry eye to be found on this balcony. Gary and I had declared our deep appreciation (even love) for our cherished friend. And we discovered a new alignment of Trust (Intentions) in one another. We found that we both cared

deeply (generativity) about the damage done by antisemitism and other forms of hatred in our world. We helped one another enact this caring through the offering of song.

Gary and I went on to celebrate the accomplishments and presence of many other people. There were graduation ceremonies at my doctoral institution, special dinners with friends, and surprise appearances of one another at birthday celebrations. Gary and I joined hands and hearts to *stand in the centre of the fire . . . and not shrink back.* Each of us, with the help of one another, built a foundation of personal Trust (Soul-ful Integration) that has enabled us to *be alone with [our]self and . . . truly like the company [we] keep in the empty moments.*

Thank you, Oriah Mountain Dreamer, for providing me with new insights into Trust. And thank you, Gary, for manifesting Trust in our long-term relationship . . .

The Essence of Trust: A Graphic Representation of the Polarity Map

I bring this chapter to a close by completing Barry Johnson's Polarity Map (Johnson, 2020). I have incorporated insights gained from Will Schutz and Oriah Mountain Dreamer. I am also now at a place to "crown" this Map with the fundamental theme—the Essence—of this polarity exploration. It is the Essence of Trust. The analysis of polarities embedded in Trust helps to define the tension that provides the Essence with energy and Vibrance.

I consider the psychological steps identified by Will Schutz to be particularly relevant to the establishment of S^2 (Home) (security and safety) Trust, while the expansive steps poetically portrayed by Oriah Mountain Dreamer tend to most closely aligned with the O^2 (Quest) (opportunity and openness) forms of Trust.

It is in the failure to manage this polarity in an effective manner or in the attempt to escape from these polarities that we find the opposite of Trust – this being Mistrust. I have tried to identify the

settings and processes in which Trust prevails as well as those in which Mistrust is likely to be prevalent—and destructive.

This polarity map and attending analysis can be applied when creating a Psychosocial template of Trust and establishing enduring Trust in any interpersonal relationship, group, or organization.

Polarity Graphic Three
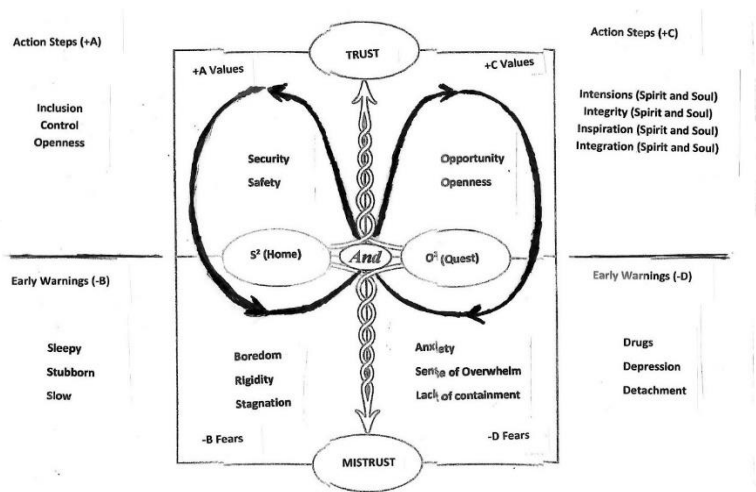
You might note that I have roughly darkened the lines and arrows representing movement between the S² and O² ends of the Trust polarity on each polarity graphic I have presented regarding Trust. While Johnson represents this movement with soft, smooth lines (perhaps suggesting that this movement is often subtle and unacknowledged), I represent the movement with rough bold lines and arrows—suggesting that the movement is quite dramatic, noticeable, and rugged. Even a differing perspective offered by a change in facets regarding Trust can produce disturbing disorientation. Shifting gears, abandoning bubbles of belief, and

overcoming cognitive dissonance is rarely pretty, pleasant or perfect.

Furthermore, I suggest that the movement itself may become a matter of concern. It can buffer or block action. A "meta-level" polarity may emerge addressing the basic tension between change and stability. There is often a push toward "trying something different" (Dynamics) that is countered with a push toward "keeping everything the same" (Statics) This polarity of Dynamics and Statics is prevalent in many settings. It often exists independent of and supersedes a focal polarity such as Trust. Change versus continuity is sometimes a contentious issue in and of itself, regardless of the polarity being engaged.

Postscript

I conclude my analysis of the complex and dynamic nature of Essentials and Essence. I have offered several ways of distinguishing between Essential and Essence. I offer a "down-to-earth" example of how these terms differ. I turn to sports for this distinction. As I mentioned in a previous chapter, the Proximal Essentials during a baseball game are those factors that lead to achieving a victory. They include the capacity to hit the ball to a place in the field where it can't be caught (offense), the capacity to run from base to base without being tagged out (base-running), and the capacity to catch a ball that is hit in your vicinity (defense). There are also Distal Essentials. These concern the game's competitive nature. Both teams must be strong. Otherwise, the lopsided game is a bore. Some entertainment on the side might also attract Fans, as do the hotdogs and beer.

By contrast, the Essence of a baseball game is displayed at the moment when victory is achieved. There is minor celebration when one of the Essential factors is displayed (perhaps a fist-pump, a shout of "hurrah" or a pat on the back or rearend when the player displaying the Essential factor returns to the dugout. The Essence of the game is evident when one team wins the game. The celebration is quite different. Players race onto the field, hug each

other (regardless of the role played by the person being hugged), and often turn to those in attendance (if it is a home game) to share the celebration.

What does this "down-to-earth" example suggest? First, some of the Essentials operating in a ball game concern short-term (proximal) tactics individual ball players engage. From moment to moment, players make immediate decisions about whether or not to hit the ball, race to the next bag, or position themselves to catch the ball.

Second, the Essence of the ball game is ultimately guided by longer-term (distal) decisions regarding who will play a specific position and what is the batting order among those who are playing the game. Winning a game is attributed, ultimately, to participation by all members of the team—along with the manager and other members of the team management staff. They are all celebrating—not just the hero of this specific game (who might be the one interviewed by the press at the end of the game).

Even longer term (distal) decisions are made by the general manager (usually in association with the manager) regarding which players to recruit, retain, bring up from the minor leagues, send down to the minor league, and so forth. Essence is all about winning games and hopefully ending up playing in (and winning) the World Series. When we explore the Essence of baseball, we find that there are actually two components. These two components conflict—providing the tension that makes the Essence of baseball "vibrant."

As I noted previously, a game like professional baseball is played not just for one team to win; it is also played to generate revenues for both teams (regardless of which team wins the game). If one team always wins, then people will quit coming to the game and revenues from broadcasting will drop off. The strategic goal is to win – but not win too often! The prospect of both winning and losing provides the "glimmering" energy and suspense. This tension

resides at the heart of baseball's Essence—and the Essence of any sport for that matter.

Similar dynamics can be identified when considering the Essentials and the Essence of Trust. The Essential factors are those that contribute to the establishment of Trust in an interpersonal relationship, group, or organization. In this book, I have identified some Essential factors contributing to Trust attainment. These factors are often related to specific decisions made and actions taken by individual members of a social system.

By contrast, the Essence of Trust is found and displayed at the moment when there is sufficient Trust to declare "Victory"—leading to the identification and full appreciation of Home (S^2)! Th Essence of Trust is also discovered and displayed at the moment when "Victory" can be declared with regard to the accumulation of sufficient Trust (competency, intentions, shared perspectives) so that one can begin a Quest (O^2) as an individual or member of a group or organization.

All of this makes sense when considering a baseball game or the engagement and use of Trust in a stable, manageable setting. Even the polarity of Home and Quest can be readily managed under conditions of calm and certainty. However, a baseball game is played in a quite different manner during a rainstorm or when the players and fans face the threat of thunder and lightning. The players bravely play a bit differently when confronting this "messy" situation—or the game can be called off. The mid-21st-century conditions of VUCA-Plus produce conditions that are threatening and messy. We are all "players" in this VUCA-Plus world. And the game can't be called off.

I have proposed that a Lens of Trust resides at the heart of critical transformative processes when we confront a storm of vulnerability, uncertainty, complexity, ambiguity, turbulence, and contradiction. The challenging VUCA-Plus conditions can be transformed into integrative conditions of security and safety (S^2) (Home) alongside opportunity and openness (O^2) (Quest) when

the Essence of Trust is secured. Trust resides at the heart of many transformative processes. Trust is to be prized as an invaluable prerequisite and desirable outcome in the navigation of our stormy mid-21st Century life and work. We would rather not cancel the game . . .

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Section Four
Engaging the New (Ab)Normal

Chapter Eleven

The New Realities

On Sunday, November 10, several days after the 2024 election, *The Boston Globe* offered a banner on page one that read: "The blurred fabric of America." Platoff, Brodey, and Koh (2024) of the Globe editorial staff introduced this theme of blurred fabric with the following front page narrative:

> It was the dairy farmer in Rural Wisconsin who believes that Donald Trump will be better for the economy, tariffs be damned. It was the 48-year-old North Carolina restaurant employee who voted for some Democrats down ballot but went for Trump hoping for cheaper gas and groceries. It was the Haitian American college student here in Reading [Massachusett] who four years ago believed he would "never in a million years" support someone he considered a "racist bigot." This year, all three pulled the lever for Trump, part of a sprawling new coalition that reshaped the electoral map as it returned the former president to power.

What is this all about? Has the fabric of American society and American culture become so rendered and the American vision regarding values and a desirable future become so blurred that there is no shared sense of what is Essential or what represents the Essence of American character? Have the words I wrote in previous chapters been of little value regarding the guidance of American culture and governance of American society?

My immediate knee-jerk response to these provocative questions is to declare that all is lost and that the "other team" and "other vision" have won the day. Why finish this book when we are far from any clear and compelling list of shared Essentials in America? Are cheaper gas and groceries sufficiently "essential" to set aside such "old" Essentials as Democracy and Freedom?

For many post-election commentators, this election only makes sense if one engages an economic perspective. And this perspective should not extend beyond the kitchen table. There is no way to make sense of Essence when a Haitian student abandons the societal Essence of tolerance and justice, which ultimately provides him with protection. Perhaps it is easy to trade off the challenge of Relativism and Commitment-in-Relativism for the certainty of Serenity and the dualistic assignment of people and ideas to one of two categories (right and wrong/good and bad).

My perspective changes slightly when I pause and finish reading this article. This article's final sentences: "Sitting at the emptying bar in front of a string light American flag, Nachreiner [who voted for Trump] lamented the nation's division. "Why can't we be friends?" he sang." An article written soon after the election by David Brooks confirmed this matter of lost friendships and understanding. This thoughtful journalist and social observer (Brooks, 2024) suggested that the re-election of Donald Trump should be viewed with humility.

Brooks puts it this way: "American voters are not always wise, but they are generally sensible, and they have something to teach us. My initial thought is that I have to re-examine my own priors." Perhaps we all have to re-examine our priorities. There may be something to learn from the Trump supporter who makes his decisions at the kitchen table and focuses on expenses associated with gas and groceries. Brooks goes on to note that:

> . . . we are entering a period of white water. Trump is a sower of chaos, not fascism. Over the next few years, a plague of disorder will descend upon America, and maybe the world, shaking everything loose. If you hate polarization, just wait until we experience global disorder. But in chaos there's opportunity for a new society and a new response to the Trumpian political, economic and psychological assault. These are the times that try people's souls, and we'll see what we are made of.

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Perhaps the real Essence of American society and culture concerns trying our collective soul and examining our deepest character. In the title of his essay, David Brooks might have hit upon the heart of the matter concerning this Essence: "Voters to Elites: Do You See Me Now?" As Brooks suggests, this might be the time for those of us who have a nice home, financial security, and a meaningful job to LISTEN carefully to those less fortunate. They might have something to teach us.

Most importantly, can we truly be "friends" with those who have voted for Trump and whom we are inclined to assign such labels as "uneducated", "short-sighted," or "just plain stupid"? Even if we can't be friends, those on the opposite end of the political spectrum need not be dismissed, discounted, or despised as the "Other" (Oshry, 2018). We are fortunate to find that David Brooks not only challenges us to appreciate our fellow citizens but also offers us guidance in other writing he has done regarding interpersonal relationships.

David Brooks and Relationships

In another essay he prepared for *The New York Times,* David Brooks (2023) provides us with a brief portrait of his own upbringing. While raised in a Jewish family, Brooks describes his own family as being "reserved, stiff-upper-lip types. . . . There was love in our home. We just didn't express it." David Brooks seeks to rectify this situation for himself and his readers by advocating the acquisition of social skills alongside "openheartedness." He sets the stage for the advice he will be offering by making the following observation:

> The real process of, say, building a friendship or creating a community involves performing a series of small, concrete actions well: being curious about other people; disagreeing without poisoning relationships; revealing vulnerability at an appropriate pace; being a good listener; knowing how to ask for and offer forgiveness; knowing how to host a gathering where everyone feels

embraced; knowing how to see things from another's point of view. People want to connect. Above almost any other need, human beings long to have another person look into their faces with love and acceptance. The issue is that we lack practical knowledge about how to give one another the attention we crave. Some days it seems like we have intentionally built a society that gives people little guidance on how to perform the most important activities of life.

Here are the skills that Brooks thinks are Essential if we are to truly "see" other people: (1) attention, (2) accompaniment, (3) artful conversation, (4) big questionnaire, and (5) standing in another person's standpoint. While Brooks suggested in 2023 that these skills are applicable in all social situations, I will focus on their application in the world that Brooks describes following the 2024 election. I begin by noting that several of these skills are a combination of skills and attitudes. I offer this "correction" in large part because attitudes are particularly vulnerable to stress, anger, and distrust.

We might retain social skills if they have frequently been applied in various settings. However, attitudes can be shattered or at least bent when we interact with someone we don't admire or trust—and when the world around us is threatening and filled with uncertainty. These are conditions in which many of us found ourselves following the election. When positive attitudes have been challenged, the skills are often applied with a "clenched jaw" and a closed mind. We feign listening and caring for the other person but can't remember what this person said twenty minutes later and still have no empathy or liking for this &*#*$%# person.

Under these challenging conditions, it is important to note that Brooks has identified these as Essential skills (and attitudes). Throughout the first half of this book, I have emphasized the

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critical role played by *Essential* when the world is challenging—as is the case with VUCA-Plus conditions. If we value and use a set of skills only because they are accessible or convenient, then we are likely to abandon them or misuse them when "the going gets tough."

Most of Brooks' five skills/attitudes are not easily engaged. They must be repeatedly practiced, stubbornly applied even under difficult interpersonal conditions, and re-adjusted repeatedly as we find both success and failure in using them. The dynamics of Polystasis must be fully operational when we interact with people with whom we strongly disagree regarding the 2014 election outcomes. Adjust, adjust, and then adjust once again. We must ensure that Brook's Essential Skills/Attitudes are genuinely being engaged on behalf of something greater than that found in the heart of either member of the relationship.

As Martin Buber noted, this higher-order commitment is required if an *I/Thou* relationship is to be established. For Brooks, this *Something Greater* is the "building of a friendship or creating a community" in a way that helps to meet our desire to connect. Here is where Essence enters the dialogue.

We engage Brook's five skills/attitudes on behalf of this desire (perhaps need) for connection. Furthermore, as noted earlier in this book, the pull toward connection is driven by a hormone called oxytocin (and several neurotransmitters). We are "wired" for relationships. As "social animals" (Aronson, 2018), we might only need the Essential skills identified by David Brooks to take actions energized by these powerful neurobiological drivers.

With these initial features of Essential and Essence in place, we are ready to consider each of Brook's five skills/attitudes as they address challenges associated with the 2024 election.

The Gift of Attention

First, there is Brook's "gift of attention". This gift is given to another person when we communicate respect. This is done through sustained direct eye contact while offering questions that indicate a desire to appreciate the other person's perspectives and practices. We ask someone who voted for Trump which of his priorities (his Essentials) are most important and why they are important. The "Why" question is asked not in judgement against this person's perspectives and priorities but in an attempt to gain fuller appreciation for what motivates the Trump voter and provides them with meaning (Senge, et. al., 1994).

As I have noted elsewhere (Bergquist, 2003):

> Fundamentally, the process of appreciation refers to efforts made to gain a clearer understanding of another person's perspective. We come to appreciate the point of view being offered by our colleagues or the situation in which other people find themselves. This appreciation, in turn, comes not from detached observation, but rather from direct engagement. One gains knowledge from an appreciative perspective by "identifying with the observed." Compassion rather than objectivity is critical. . . .Neutrality is inappropriate in such a setting. Compassion, however, does not imply either a loss of discipline or a loss of boundaries between one's own perspective and the perspective held by the other person.

This appreciation and compassion are challenging when turning to the perspectives and practices of someone voting for Trump. To gain this understanding, I suggest that we not only seek to discover what is Essential for our oppositional colleagues concerning their vote for Trump. We must also seek to dig deep ("why?") to get at the Essence of this person's values. We may find that they are not that dissimilar from our own. We may share a desire to find Home (safety and security) (one of the poles of trust considered in the

previous chapter). We might also find that this pull toward safety and security is offset by our shared yearning for Quest (opportunity and openness).

It might be that I find safety and security in government policies that differ from conditions sought by my Trump colleague. Similarly, I am willing to take a risk. I initiate the quest into a new political landscape by embracing some items on the progressives' agenda, such as universal healthcare and free postsecondary education for all citizens. My oppositional colleague is willing to support our new president in his risky ventures into large-scale tariff increases and massive deportation. A constructive dialogue can be founded on the stressful Essence-based push-pull polarity we both encounter.

I would also suggest that reference be made to the distinction I have drawn between ground and surface anchors. What is ground and what is surface regarding the nature of values we hold? Some values are deeply anchored in our psyche. They are usually embedded in our Heart and Soul during childhood years. Political perspectives are among those that often serve as a ground anchor. We don't stray far from core values and beliefs when we enter the voting booth. In our conversation with those at the other end of the political spectrum, we must gain clarity regarding the other person's ground anchor. We are unlikely to find anything changing for them as a result of our conversation. Our ground anchor of political values and beliefs is also unlikely to budge.

The ground anchor values tend to center on a polarity I have featured in this book: individual rights versus collective responsibility. One embraces either an emphasis on individual rights (accompanied by a sense of freedom) or an emphasis on collective responsibilities (accompanied by a sense of obligation). Closely related preferences for big or small government, local or national rule, and (often religiously based) openness to diversity of lifestyle and social practices are likely to be ground anchors. They

are heavily weighted and firmly embedded in the ground soil. They are not easily moved.

On the other hand, there are politically oriented surface anchors that shift a bit with the "tide" and "currents" of history. These political values and beliefs are likely to have been formed as adults and are open to modification based on the "real" world in which we live. Our conversations with those on the "other side" might lead to some changes of perspective by either of us—especially if we deploy the interpersonal skills and are guided by David Brook's attitudes.

These surface anchors often relate to and are even entangled in messes, dilemmas, or polarities. Surface anchor issues are confusing and don't lend themselves to internal control. If they are messy problems or dilemmas, we may find that new solutions require a shift in the orientation of our surface anchor (and make major polystatic adjustments in our baselines). When facing a polarity, we may have to fasten our boat to several surface anchors.

While these anchors might point us in different directions, they are more likely to align us in the same direction—especially if the tide or wind is strong. Our organization might be committed to serving underserved populations. It must remain financially viable to stay "in business." The pull is strong between the surface anchors of service and finance. Suddenly, the tide shifts as governmental support dries up. Everyone in the organization now seeks service options that attract private dollars. The two surface anchors are now oriented in the same direction.

Surface anchors might be related to a specific group of people, such as those suffering from war-related PTSD. Two or more surface anchors might be attached to this issue. For instance, collective responsibility for the welfare of those with PTSD might be embraced by citizens who come from different political perspectives. Patriotism might be the surface anchor for one citizen group, while healthcare equity is a surface anchor for the second citizen group. Differing values and perspectives are set aside as these two groups seek to improve services for those suffering on

behalf of their country. Shifts in attitudes might accompany this attentive collaboration across differing perspectives.

Knowledge shared regarding various aspects of PTSD can be illuminated for both citizen groups. One group might direct the other group's attention to the variety of sacrifices made by those who "serve their country." Revelations can be offered regarding PTSD among firefighters and healthcare workers (treating COVID) as well as soldiers. The other group might provide detailed information regarding many manifestations of PTSD—some obvious and others subtle.

Increased knowledge creates conditions for shared understanding and compassion. An expression of thoughtful patriotism might engender a shared commitment to the identification of best practices in the treatment of PTSD. Finding these best practices may be the best way to honor service provided at the expense of PTSD. Common ground can be found among those from different political perspectives, opening the way to at least a minor shift in surface anchor values and the beliefs of each party.

Other-Centered Accompaniment

David Brooks introduced this second skill/attitude by referencing use of this term in music. A pianist accompanies the singer. I offered a variant on this skill/attitude in my description of Enablement. A person or program is beneficial because they enhance the performance of another person or project. Accompaniment is the often "thankless" and unacknowledged task of helping to make someone else successful. We sing about this in "You're the wind beneath my wings" and acknowledge this contribution in our yearly celebration of Mother's Day, Father's Day, Administrative Assistant Day, etc. While these special days can often be quite patronizing, they can also shift a spotlight to someone rarely featured in our life-play.

Brooks offers several insights regarding the role played by the accompanist. They leave a lovely trace of caring and compassion.

There is "lingerability" in the impression they have made on other people at a meeting or party. Creativity increases, risk is taken, and openness is encouraged because the accompanist has helped to establish safety in the meeting or party. A second impact of accompaniment concerns what Brooks has called the "practice of presence." He quotes a student who was grieving the death of her father when invited to participate in a father-daughter dance at a wedding where she was serving as a bridesmaid:

> What I will remember forever is that no one said a word. Each person, including newer boyfriends who I knew less well, gave me a reaffirming hug and headed back to their table. No one lingered or awkwardly tried to validate my grief. They were there for me, just for a moment, and it was exactly what I needed.

This heart-tugging episode reminds me of a practice I learned from a friend many years ago. A long history of "standing" for another person as they undergo a major life transition exists in many cultures. We might be standing for them when they are engaged in a job interview, meeting for the first time with prospective parents-in-law, or attending a loved one's funeral.

We still find a remnant of this practice in the role played by a bridesmaid and best man at a wedding. They stand next to the bride and groom, acknowledging their deep caring and support for those about to be wed. They are there to "accompany" the bride and groom through their marriage. In so-called "Covenant marriages," this "standing" is expanded to include all members of both families.

The benefits derived from Brooks' accompaniment are fully displayed in wedding ceremonies. What would it be like if we were to stand up for the perspectives and practices of a Trump voter? Our standing support is to honor their right to hold a position different from ours and our obligation to help them secure and sustain this right. What a powerful act of accompaniment this would be. Perhaps it would lead to a new joint, risky journey toward collaboration for both of us.

Artful Conversation

When it comes to how we should converse with other people, David Brooks is an activist: "If you want to know how the people around you see the world, you have to ask them." In this statement, Brooks seems to be anticipating the perspective he took immediately after the 2024 election. He suggests that the Elitist Democrats were not listening to less-well-educated Republicans (especially MAGA Republicans). He encouraged the Elitist Democrats to quit talking and try listening to those on the opposite side of the political spectrum.

We might follow up on Brooks's critique of these Democrats by asking if they were not (and perhaps still are not) listening to the perspectives of Republicans because these perspectives are not worthy of any attention. Or is it more basic than this? Do the Elites not want to hear the challenging message being delivered by the Republicans? In his 2023 essay, Brooks wrote about being a "loud listener."

Other communication experts—such as John Wallen—often identify this conversational strategy as "active listening" (see Appendix C) and "empathic listening (see Appendix D). One does not simply sit back and let the other person talk. Thoughtful questions are asked. Clarification is requested and provided—often using communication tools such as Paraphrase and Perception Check (see Appendix E). Both the sender and receiver acknowledge and describe their emotional reactions—often using a communication tool called Description of Feelings (see Appendix F).

Brooks further suggested that the loud listener avoid eliciting answers to questions that are tightly framed. Open-ended questions should be asked that elicit stories and insightful narratives rather than simple factual answers. The interpretation, meaning, and framing of a story, along with the verbal tone when sharing it, become more important than the story's details. Using active listening strategies such as Paraphrasing and Perception

Check, the loud listener repeats to the sender what they believe the sender said (as processed through the receiver's mind and heart). They then check on the accuracy of their perceptions regarding what is being conveyed. Brooks indicates that this is a "looping" process—it relates closely to the feedback-intense process of Polystasis that I have introduced in this book.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, Brooks suggests that one should never end the conversation or be the "topper" who has the last word. If we are the final speaker, it should be as a summarizer of what has been conveyed by both parties. Or we, as the final speaker, share our appreciation of insights offered by the other party. In particular, we should not close our conversation with someone at the other end of the political spectrum by indicating why they are wrong, ill-informed, or just plain "stupid."

Dismissive words can stop a conversation cold, while a few simple words of attempted understanding can do wonders. Orson Welles once narrated a short award-winning documentary (Schmidt, 1970) where a few words broke open a long-standing and devastating dispute between two clusters of defiant believers. One person uttered four words that collapsed the chasm between these clusters. They could now join with one another. The four words were: "You might be right." Perhaps we should consider uttering this phrase at the end of a difficult conversation with those at the other end of the political spectrum. These four words might also prove valuable when managing a polarity.

Even if these words are not used to close a conversation, the attitude underlying the end of a conversation can override and cancel all of the good work done along the way. Nonverbal dismissive gestures can damage a relationship. So can a condescending expression or a clearly communicated desire to end the conversation. One must genuinely be interested in learning from those who offer differing perspectives and embrace alternative baselines and predictions. After all, in some ways and at certain times, "they might be right."

Asking BIG Questions

At this point, David Brooks seems to embrace the concepts of Essential and Essence. Thanks, David, for anticipating what I have written. Brooks suggests that the quality of our conversations with other people depends on the quality of questions we ask. Trivial questions help to create trivial relationships: "What do you think of the weather this past week?" "Hey, what do you think of that trade for a decent wide receiver?"

As Brooks notes, children often ask disturbing and "inappropriate" questions that get at the heart of Essential matters in our lives and the Essence of living a good life. A precocious neighboring child frequently asks Kathleen and me: "What'cha doing?" This is followed by an even more penetrating ("Big") question: "Why'ya doing it?" As David Brooks suggests, the big question asked by a child might center on an important relationship in our life (and their life): "Do you love Mom?" or "Why do you stay with Dad?" As adults, we might follow Tevia's lead (from *Fiddler on the Roof*) and ask our partner: "Do you love me?"

Often, as adults, we might not ask a probing question about love or marital status; however, we might ask a BIG question regarding moments in another person's life. This question often concerns events that have occurred: "What happened?" Brooks observes that BIG questions regarding childhood are particular winners: "Where did you grow up?" A wonderful story tumbles out of the adult's heart and mouth. As someone who has studied and written about enduring intimate relationships (Bergquist, 2023c), I often ask a couple how they met—and I usually encourage each of them to offer their independent account followed by their "joint account."

The BIG question might instead focus on etiology (cause): "Why did that happen?" Once again, a simple answer isn't adequate when this BIG question is asked. A narrative is required (and wanted). As David Brooks notes, "people are dying to tell you their stories. Very often, no one has ever asked about them." As someone who often conducts interviews, I know that the request is rarely refused—and

most people (if asked) will reveal that no one has ever invited them to be interviewed.

Most importantly, the BIG question is often asked at what Brooks calls "the 30,000-foot" level. This question concerns the patterns and life-fractals that we considered in Chapter Aix. We might ask someone about repetitions in their life: "Why have you always taken a job that requires major challenges regarding the welfare of other people?" Instead, we might ask about paths they have avoided in their life—which often requires that our question starts with an "If": "if you were to get that job in Human Relations, what would you like to implement?"

These BIG questions can also begin with "When": "When you were faced with that major decision regarding the move to XYZ, what factors did you consider?" I propose that these 30,000 foot questions are important when trying to understand another person's voting behavior: "*IF* you had the option to vote for XXX instead of YYY would you have changed your vote?" "*When* you entered the voting booth, what were your immediate concerns?" As I have already noted, the WHY question can be of great importance—especially if it is offered in a non-judgemental manner: "WHY is this particular issue of great importance to you?"

Essential and Essence reside at the heart of most (perhaps all) BIG questions. We are asking another person to identify the Essentials in their life. Brooks suggests that we ask about the "chapter" we would like to write concerning the next five years of our life. There are also those matters in our life that are no longer Essential. Brooks quotes Peter Block (an eminent consultant): "What have you said yes to that you no longer believe in?"

There are also questions regarding Essence. They range from our neighbor's "what-cha doing" to a question often asked by Monica Guzman (a journalist Brooks quotes): "Why you?" Within this range, we find answers concerning the meaning of our work. Answers emerge about the significance of relationships we establish with other people. Perhaps we even gain insights

regarding our "way of being" (the centering and balancing of life midst turbulence that we featured in Chapter Seven).

We must be particularly cognizant of Essentials and Essence when interacting with and asking questions of someone who voted for the "wrong" person. David Brooks suggests that we "Elites" who lost the last election must be particularly attuned (perhaps for the first time) to the Essentials embraced by those who live check-to-check. We must truly "see" those voters who considered the Essence of a Good Life to be attendance at an Evangelical church every Sunday and forgiveness of Donald Trump's transgressions given that he is leading us to a "New Jerusalem" where one set of truths and one set of values dictate collective beliefs and actions.

Stand in Their Standpoint

This final skill/attitude identified by David Brooks seems at first to be impenetrably obscure. What is Brooks writing about? At first, this skill/attitude appears to be an alternate version of the widely heard commendation that we "walk in another person's moccasins" (an indirect and perhaps patronizing acknowledgment of simply wisdom to be found among our Native American colleagues).

However, standing seems to be something a bit different from walking. While walking concerns movement and being on a journey, standing concerns establishing principles and holding firm to these principles. Furthermore, Brooks has done a clever job of juggling the words. We are taking a "stand" (our action), but it is in alignment with another person's "stand" (standpoint). We are being resolute. However, it is not at the expense of another person's resolution (especially if this resolution is not aligned with our own).

Brooks puts it this way (perhaps in anticipation of the 2024 election results): "My first job in any conversation across difference or inequality is to stand in other people's standpoint and fully understand how the world looks to them." He offers the following recommendation: "I've found it's best to ask other people three

times and in three different ways about what they have just said. 'I want to understand as much as possible. What am I missing here?'"

I find myself nodding in agreement with Brooks. I point to the triangulation process I introduced earlier in this book as a way to establish a rich and valid version of that which is the Essence of a matter we are addressing. For Brooks, triangulation (three questions offered in different ways) creates conditions for gaining a valid understanding of the other person's perspectives; as a broader strategy (engaging three methods along with three sources of information), triangulation creates conditions for gaining a valid understanding of that which represents the Essence of something we deem to be Essential.

I think both David Brooks and I would agree that multiple versions of reality are safeguards against the Bias phenomenon I have identified. We might discover something quite surprising if we have three sources of information gathered in several different ways. We might find that we are not fully "correct" in our assessment of the current situation. If one of the outcomes of our triangulation fails to match with the other two, then the best move isn't to dismiss this "outlier." Rather, we are being offered the "gift" of dissonance.

We are invited to rethink our assumptions (biases) and reassemble the "noisy" information. We might even be led to declare: "I might be wrong." The remarkable outcome of this declaration in Orson Welles' documentary is that everyone began to reexamine their assumptions and conclusions. A major gap between two polarized parties was closed. Collaboration took place. Something similar might occur in real life. Triangulation can lead to a reappraisal on the part of all parties. As a form of dynamic Polystasis, this collaborative reappraisal can be particularly adaptive in a challenging VUCA-Plus world.

Brooks points to the work done by Kerry Patterson and colleagues (Grenny, et al., 2021) regarding "crucial conversations." As those writing about crucial conversations observe, all important

conversations occur at two levels. Content is conveyed alongside emotions that reside within and are displayed alongside the content. Both levels are particularly evident and influential when the conversation occurs between two or more people holding different political positions. While we are accustomed to articulating the content, the emotions are usually conveyed nonverbally. In a crucial conversation, words must be assigned to the emotions. I offer an interpersonal strategy called "Description of Feelings in Appendix E. This is another valuable interpersonal tool offered by John Wallen.

Turning to other John Wallen insights, I would add a third level. As noted, Wallen proposes in his TMR model that a third level concerns Method (M). It requires a focus on the structure of a relationship. Who is doing the talking? Who is doing the listening? What is the setting in which the conversation takes place? What is the power relationship between those involved in the conversation? The operations of this third level profoundly influence how words and emotions are displayed and interpreted. As Wallen has often noted, this third level is rarely given attention. While a discussion about words is more widely acceptable than a discussion about the emotions experienced by each participant in the crucial conversation, less attention is usually devoted to the structure and operations of the relationship.

Power differential is critical when conversations concern politics. Yet, conversations about this differential are forbidden in many societies—including American society. Closely related to this matter of power differential are those third-level dynamics related to gender, race, ethnicity, sexual preferences, and other distinctions that create a gap in the relationship between people as they engage in crucial conversations. This gap seems to be acknowledged by David Brooks: "If we let fear and a sense of threat build our conversation, then very quickly our motivations will deteriorate. We won't talk to understand but to pummel. Everything we say afterward will be injurious and hurtful and will make repairing the relationship in the future harder."

Fears and threats regarding power differentials and discrimination derail or distort the conversation. Focus is placed on the numbers rather than the narrative. "How many?" and "How much?" replace the more important questions regarding Who and Why. As I noted in Chapter Four, the immediate, discerning perspective (nomothetic) must be retained and asserted in place of an artificially objective and detached counting on numbers (ideographic).

It is through a focus on the "up-front and personal" in a crucial conversation that Respect is shown. It is when intimate stories are told that mutual appreciation is achieved. Honesty and candor are in the air. Crucial conversations under these conditions allow for consideration of all three levels by those involved: content, emotions, and relationship.

Being Human

David Brooks ends his essay on interpersonal skills and attitudes by being painfully candid. He is a bit humble and humorous. These elements of David's character often enable him to offer challenging observations and difficult insights. David acknowledges his flawed humanness: "I enter into a conversation vowing to be other-centered, then I have a glass of wine, and I start blabbing funny stories I know. My ego takes the wheel in ways I regret afterward." I suspect that David's acknowledgment is aligned with the flaws found in most psyches and behaviors (certainly in my own). With a glass of wine (or something more intoxicating) comes political discourse. And it is here where we are particularly inclined to falter—and where we are most in need of the five guardrails provided by David Brooks.

There is one attribute that is particularly endearing about David Brooks. It is his optimism. David writes about an improvement that he believes is occurring in his own interactions with other people: ". . . there has been a comprehensive shift in my posture. I think I'm more approachable, vulnerable. . . .I have a long way to go, but I'm

evidence that people can change, sometimes dramatically, even in middle and older age."

Perhaps there is hope for the rest of us. I have taken us on a challenging journey through VUCA-Plus. I have flushed us out of a rabbit hole that provides Serenity (SC²+) but at the expense of any firm grip on reality. I have not left us faced with an impossible task. I introduce the concept of Polystasis as a way to acknowledge the dynamic nature of the new normal, VUCA-Plus world in which we now reside. We must be agile in our engagement of this world—requiring dedication to lifelong learning and a leaning and learning into the future.

Suggestions are made about ways to engage two related strategies. One of these strategies concerns embracing a clear and dynamic perspective on the Essentials in our life. The second strategy focuses on discerning the Essence of challenges we face in a world saturated with volatility, uncertainty, complexity, ambiguity, turbulence, and contradiction. In a previous chapter, I referenced the work of Paul Tillich, a noted theologian. According to Tillich (1957/2009), one's Ultimate Concern should provide lifelong guidance. I would suggest that our focus on Essence leads us directly toward this Ultimate Concern in our own life.

Paul Tilllich (1952/2000) also wrote about the *Courage to Be* authentic and caring in our life. Tillich's courage to be was considered by Peter Vaill to be critical in centering our life' kayak. I would expand on Vaill's perspective by suggesting that this Courage is required when we choose to view the world through the lens of Essentials and Essence. The "faint of heart" probably should remain safely ensconced in the Wonderland of Serenity (SC²). David Brooks wishes to see other people as they actually exist—and to be seen clearly (and appreciatively) by important people in his life. Perhaps this is the Essence for all of us as "social animals." We want to see and be seen. Ultimately, we require nurturance and connectedness to survive in a hostile world (such as that which exists today).

Who knows, the search for connectedness might even lead us (with David Brook's guidance) to a productive and caring conversation with someone on the other side of the political spectrum. . . .

Donella Meadows and Leveraging

David Brooks shares the attribute of optimism with another of my guides for this book—Donella Meadows. She is the first author of a major book on the limits to be found regarding the use of most resources in the world (Meadows, et al., 1972; Meadows, et al., 2004). She is also the first author of a book that focuses on resources that have no limits—these being the resources of learning (Meadows and Randers, 1992). Furthermore, Donella Meadows writes about the intractability of complex systems, yet she believes there are impactful leverage points. These leverage points provide the framework for my final, summary reflections on ways we can best live and lead in our new (ab)normal world.

While Brooks provides us with an intimate (proximal) interpersonally-based set of recommendations regarding now to navigate our new reality, Donella Meadows is stepping back and offering (as she always does) a broader (distal) system-based set of recommendations regarding the best ways to navigate (and change) the new reality. Specificallly, Meadows (2025) identifies twelve leverage points that enable us (potentially) to change and improve the system in which we reside. I introduce these twelve points in what Meadows believes is the order of their increasing effectiveness (and difficulty to execute).

Parameters

For Meadows, the parameter-based leverage points are the easiest to leverage. She places subsidies, taxes, and standards on her list. These changes typically involve numbers. They are most often used as leverage when leaders try to change and improve functioning in their organization. Unfortunately, these change efforts are often just "window dressing." These leverage points are rarely effective over the long run.

We can categorize most of these parameter changes as first-order changes. They involve some adjustment in baselines and predictions during the engagement of Polystasis. Furthermore, they are often introduced in response to a lingering puzzle. At an organizational level, this puzzle might concern the standards being set in the organization. Production standards might be too ambitious, leaving the employees demoralized. The first-order answer is to lower the standard. Conversely, the production standards might be too low, leaving the employees with little to strive for—so the standards are elevated.

At the community level, we find a real-life example in the categorization of smog in mid-20th century Los Angeles. This toxic mixture of areal pollutants, haze, and fog filled the lungs of those living in this fast-growing metropolitan area. This issue was readily solved by lowering the standards regarding what would be labeled as smog by the Los Angeles government. There was something "smokey" in the air that burned the lungs of Angelinos—but it wasn't "smog."

We find similar first-order changes occurring in one of the other parameters identified by Meadows. This parameter is taxes. At all levels of government, we find taxes raised or lowered as a way to solve societal problems and/or as a way to reduce public discontent (and enable an elected official to remain in office). While there may be considerable infighting among politicians regarding tax issues, the raising or lowering of taxes is not itself difficult to initiate. It is just a matter of changing laws and regulation.

We can bring in Miller and Page's (2007) distinction between complicated and complex at this point. Adjustments in tax policies may be complicated, given that a number of changes typically need to be made in the "black letter" laws and "black letter" taxing procedures. It is assumed, however, that changes in tax rates do not involve complexity. This is wishful thinking on the part of elected officials. Increased or decreased taxes impact a complex interweaving of household finances, cost of goods and services,

societal priorities, levels of public unrest, levels of public confidence in and support for elected officials, and many other factors and forces. It is rare that any public act is complicated rather than complex.

Many other examples can be offered that reinforce Donella Meadow's conclusion that parameter changes rarely are effective or long-lasting leverage points for change. We need to move away from the "easy" puzzle-based solutions to those solutions that treat the issues being addressed as problems or even messes, dilemmas, polarities or mysteries.

Buffers

A second level of leverage identified by Meadows concerns the "stockpile" we build in preparation for "stormy weather" and "lean years." This was a favorite leverage point for Moses when he accurately predicted lean years in Egypt and recommended that food be stored in preparation for these years. We find something similar being recommended by government officials who suggest we store ample canned foods and nonperishable staples in preparation for a nuclear explosion (1950s recommendation) or virus outbreak (2020s recommendation).

Making use of Polystatic theory, we can portray the leaders of an organization or government predicting a shortfall of critical resources, resulting in a shift of the baseline (increased reserve of these resources). Making use of system dynamics terminology, Meadows specifically points to the sizes of buffers and other stabilizing stocks, relative to their flows. She is suggesting specifically that buffers should be large if a long period of reduced or unstable flow is anticipated. Flow refers to the input of tangible resources such as food, water, and energy. Along with Donella Meadows, I would also add less tangible resources such as human talent and motivation, education, interpersonal trust, institutional reputation, public confidence, and tolerance for ambiguity (versus appeal of authoritarian perspectives).

While large buffers are attractive (and often recommended by financial gurus), they also can be quite costly. As any smart businessperson knows, large inventories are very expensive. They are costly not only because of the space they fill but also because they are resources that are not being used. A silo filled with rotting grains is just as unsound as a refrigerator filled with rotting vegetables. Rainy days may come and go, but unused food will always rot and be thrown away (accounting apparently for about 40% of the food we purchase). Even if the resource doesn't "rot" it is "worthless" is never used.

For instance, human talent that is never appreciated will be "worthless." Furthermore, the person who possesses this talent—and may have expended time and money acquiring this talent—will certainly not appreciate being ignored. The appreciative perspective that infuses much of the writing in this book and other books I have authored or co-authored (Bergquist, 2003; Bergquist and Mura, 2011; Bergquist and Mura, 2014; Bergquist, Sandstrom and Mura, 2023) directly addresses the value of uncovering and making full use of human resources.

This second leverage point is directly relevant to several other concepts I have introduced. First, Meadows introduced a dynamic perspective regarding the nature of systems when considering the role to be played by buffers. I have emphasized this perspective throughout this book—beginning with the notion of polystasis. I would suggest that large buffers (substantial stockpiles) not only prepare for "weathering" a time of scarcity, these buffers also tend to reduce the need for frequent polystatic adjustments in baselines and projected actions.

If we have placed a large amount of money in the bank, then we need not modify our supermarket shopping habits when the price of food goes up. A large college savings account enables our teenage child to attend their favorite university regardless of rising tuition levels. Yet, as just mentioned, buffers are costly. At times it might be better to allow for the agility of our polystatic processes that

embrace the more static state of a large buffer. Most importantly, consideration of buffer size requires a shift from first-order to second-order reasoning. We must slow down our thinking, test our assumptions and priorities, and remain open to revised baselines and views of reality on our way to decisions regarding the size of a buffer.

Two other important matters must be addressed regarding buffers. They also require slow, reflective thought. These matters concern the kind of resources being stockpiled and the purpose of this stockpiling. What are we saving? Is it money, food or some other tangible resource? Have we ignored less tangible resources such as relaxation time, goodwill (serving the underserved) or happiness? Moses was saving grain for the future famine. Did this mean that some people in Egypt were now being starved? We might be ignoring other family priorities when saving money for our teenager's education.

These matters relate to the emphasis in this book on the Lenses of Essential and Essence. We must determine what are the Essentials in our life when deciding what to stockpile and how much to stockpile. The Essence of Trust and Happiness in our life must be considered when determining what we should sacrifice and what we must retain at all costs. Moses appreciated the pharaoh's Essential concern regarding food security in the future. The education of our child might represent the Essence of what we believe to be our responsibility at a parent.

Structures

The third way that Meadows suggests for leveraging change is by altering the structure of material stocks and flows. This leverage point centers on logistics. It involved highly diverse matters ranging from transport networks to demographics ("population age structures." I already began to approach this third leverage point when suggesting inquiry into the content of buffers that are being established.

Operating as "stocks," the buffers we establish operate in quite different ways and have a different impact on the system if they involve trust rather than money, or they are composed of facilities rather than reputation. The baselines in a Polystatic system will also look quite different if they involve intangible rather than tangible stocks.

I would also note that many of the buffers/stocks and many of the polystatic baselines actually blend tangible and intangible resources: trust and money go together, as do the size of a facility and the reputation of the institution operating in this facility. An emphasis on being "BIG" requires an expansive size of not only physicial structures and workforces, but also credibility and (often) command of the marketplace.

Meadows expands on this notion of structure when including flow. For instance, what is the mechanism engaged in the flow of information? Contemporary politics throughout the world has been profoundly impacted by the emergence of digital media as a replacement for printed media for many people. Resources such as food and automobiles become immediately available on a global basis as a result of air travel. The world has become flat (Friedman, 2005) or dangerously curved (Smick, 2008) because both information and resources are "flowing" in quite different ways than was the case even 20 years ago.

Donella Meadows is justified in suggesting that structural changes are more likely than changes in either parameters or buffers to be effective leverages in contemporary systems. However, in this book, I have been guided by Goodwin Watson who suggested that structural changes are rarely as powerful as changes in processes or attitudes. However, structures are easier to change. As with parameters and buffers, structural changes are typically first order. They bring about more of something or less of something. They speed up or slow down existing processes. They intensify or dampen existing attitudes.

By contrast, a second-order change requires introducing a new structure or significantly altering the old structure. For instance, automobiles are designed to travel at much faster speeds and are aided in their speed by multi-lane freeways. However, they are still automobiles and still need fuel (whether gasoline or electricity). This is a first-order change. Moving resources by trains or even airplanes doesn't really change things. There is still the matter of travel time and consumption of energy.

Along comes the ability to bring people together virtually and to build things via the Internet. Digital communication devices such as Zoom enable people to meet together without having to travel by plane, train or automobile. 3-D Printing enables companies to build prototypes of their newly designed products and in some cases to manufacture and mass produce the product virtually. Augmented reality provides an opportunity for people to visit faraway places without ever leaving home.

Second-order changes have taken place that do more than speed up or slow down an operation. It is not just quantity that is altered. It is the way that this quantity is transported. These second-order operations change in fundamental ways. Among other things, they alter the delay in the flow of information or resources (the fourth leverage point to which I am about to turn). They also shift the rate at which polystatic processes take place: baselines and predictions must be quickly altered. Slow thinking is easily replaced by knee-jerking fast thinking and heuristics.

In many ways, as a result of this demand for fast thinking, the structural changes being made in mid-21st Century societies are reinforcing rather than altering existing processes and attitudes. As we have recently discovered, there might be a regression back to old ways of thinking and acting while we search for the silver bullet and seek out a rabbit hole enabling our return to Serenity (SC²+). We must await Donella Meadow's identification of more powerful (but often more elusive) leverage points.

Delays

The fourth leverage point identified by Donella Meadows is Delay. She asks: What is the length of delay, relative to the rate of system change? If the system is changing rapidly then delays are that much more disruptive. Using Peter Vaill's metaphor, I have portrayed mid-21st-century life as a turbulent stream we must navigate. This white-water environment is created by rapid rates of change in the water. Rapidly flowing water is disrupted by obstacles (such as rocks and fallen tree limbs) and inevitable minor changes in water pressure and flow velocity. Unsteady vortices create drag, increase friction, and cause disruptions. These disruptions create delays. This leads to turbulence. As I have noted, the more rapidly the water moves the greater the turbulence. The same can be said of our mid-21st century world. Rapid movement and many disruptions create delays and turbulence.

In this book, I have devoted a considerable amount of attention (especially in Chapter Four) to the delay function as it operates in most systems. The concept of delay is one of the most important contributions to be made by Donella Meadows and her system dynamic colleagues. Delay plays a critical role in the polystatic process. Sometimes there are delays in our adjustment of baselines, alteration in our predictions, and decisions regarding action to take. These delays may be required, especially if we must engage in some slow, reflective thinking. However, delays can also create many problems. Our environment might have changed while we are re-thinking and re-adjusting, thus making our polystatic process less effective. Frequent delays can create "turbulence" in our own behavior. We are erratic and unpredictable, making it hard for other people to work with us.

All of this requires some second-order reflection on our polystatic process. How do we shorten the delay without becoming fast-thinking, heuristically constrained actors? Second-order change might lead to greater reliance on other people for assistance. We

stand at a busy four-way intersection and ask our companion to help us look in all four directions before crossing the road. We seek new sources of information regarding our environment or faster ways to process the information we have received about our environment. This might be an occasion when Artificial Intelligence can lend a hand. We might even wish to re-engage our Lens of Essentials. Perhaps we are looking at the wrong things or setting inappropriate priorities.

One final point, delays can create new issues or alternations in the current issue. A problem that contains many delays becomes a mess. Delays caused by several disruptive factors can transform a problem into a dilemma. There often are delays in our response to pulls within a polarity. We continue to swing back and forth between the positive and negative sides of each pole; however, these swings are delayed by distractions, dithering, and discouragement. As a result, the swings can become more severe and erratic. Polarity is joined by Turbulence. Our world becomes much more complex and ultimately more mysterious.

Moderators

A fifth set of leverages are identified by Donellla Meadows. These are the moderators that determine the strength of negative feedback loops, relative to the impacts against which they are trying to correct. One of the central principles of system thinking and system dynamics is that all systems must contain positive and negative feedback loops. Taleb's "power law" exemplifies positive feedback loops "running free" without any inhibiting negative loops. These unregulated positive loops can lead to disastrous outcomes whether we are looking at population explosions or corporate takeovers.

Moderators are people and organizations (or natural forces) that push against the power law. The people might be members of the judicial system or the voting public. Organizations might be regulatory agencies in government or advocacy groups. Nature forces might be a fever that raises body temperature to fight

infection, activating an immune system, and suppressing pathogens. It might also, tragically, be a virus that runs rampant in a crowded third-world country.

As Meadows suggests, a key decision to be made by a moderator concerns the strength of a negative feedback loop. We are returning to Goldilocks. The negative loop can be too strong and either kills the entity it is trying to save or leads to a state of stagnation in the system operating in this entity. The fever can burn out the physical resources of an ill patient. The virus can decimate the population of a third-world country. Stagnation is widespread in heavily regulated organizations where bureaucracy and protocol always snuff out innovation and risk-taking behavior.

The negative loop can instead be too weak and lose its battle against power-law-driven positive loops. We see this operating in societies where authority and power are unregulated. It can also be witnessed in the narcissistic behavior of fathers and mothers who run roughshod over their children or the narcissistic behavior of organizational leaders and political leaders who run roughshod over the people they are supposed to lead and serve.

A critical role is played by the polystatic process when it helps to brake a run-away system (where homeostasis is nowhere to be seen). Polystasis requires us to reexamine the reasons for and review the power being engaged by any negative (or positive) feedback process. As Miller, Galanter, and Pribram did in setting up the T.O.T.E. system, there is tight monitoring of outcomes and frequent correction of over-engaged accelerators or decelerators.

This tight monitoring often requires that we slow down a bit and consciously reflect on the operations of our moderators (whether these exist inside our psyche or exist outside in the judicial or legislative branches of our government). Our psychosocial template might have to be adjusted (first order change). Second order change may be required to increase or decrease the power of a negative feedback system. Are appropriate brakes being applied

or is the moderator over-regulating)? A new psychosocial template is engaged.

Regret re-enters the dialogue at this point. Regret is a dampener. It is one of the most powerful moderators in our personal psyche. It also operates in the public sector when we regretfully determine that the elected officials are not doing their job and should be thrown out of office. Fear of loss also serves as a brake and (for good or ill) can block the force of hope and aspiration.

I have suggested that a premortem be implemented before initiating a new project. Realistic expectations can be set that counter over-estimations (positive loop) of success that can deepen the downturn of a change curve. Moderator guidelines can be established to determine if a project is not working as planned and should be terminated (negative loop) or if there is sufficient energy and talent to stay with the project for a while longer (positive loop).

One other factor should be considered in setting up a moderator. This factor is the self-fulfilling prophecy. A negative self-fulfilling prophecy leads to undue pessimism and an overly powerful negative feedback loop. "I know this isn't going to work and I am just waiting for the first sign that it isn't working. Then I will pull the plug!" This negative perspective can be associated with an external locus of control: "There it goes again. fate has squashed it once again!" It can also be associated with an (internal locus of control: "We messed it up again. Can't we ever get it right!"

An equally disruptive dynamic operates with a positive self-fulling prophecy. While this can lead to success—optimism and hopefulness are always beneficial (Seligman, 1991/2006; Seligman, 2012; Seligman, 2018)—the positive prophecy can also lead to unrealistic expectations, a deep-dipping change curve, and ultimate disillusionment. As I have noted, the recalcitrant who opposes any new idea is often a former optimist who was burned out when initiating a project earlier in their life in the organization. Thoughtful and critical reflections on self-fulfilling prophecies during a premortem aid selection of appropriate moderators. These

polystatic-related processes also help to prevent the harm inflicted on those stifled by overwhelming negativity or burned out by unrealistic positivity.

Accelerators

The sixth change strategy resides on the opposite side of the leverage spectrum from modulation. Accelerators promote gain by driving positive feedback loops. I featured the concept of enablement in Chapter Four, suggesting that the often-overwhelming condition of complexity can be manageable at least in part through the systemic analysis of ways certain elements in a system are connected to and enable other elements to succeed.

While the interconnectedness of elements in a complex system can make it hard to discern where to begin and what to do, we can focus our Lens of Essentials on those elements (often nodes on a network) that offer these enablement properties. As accelerators, the enabling elements produce positive feedback loops which bring about "win-win" situations in which the success of one element positively influences the successful operation of a second element.

More broadly, certain attitudes tend to be accelerators. These include attitudes featured in the recent push toward positive psychology (Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi,2000). We can include Seligman's (1991/2006) focus on hopefulness, Vaillant's (2012) study of vibrant late lives, and Csikszentmihalyi's (1990) identification of Flow as a strong motivating (and accelerating) pull in the life of rock climbers, dancers, paper-clip twirlers (micro-flows) and the life led by many other people.

More generally, accelerators are often associated with a general attitude of optimism. We believe that sacred and/or secular forces operating in our world are ultimately benevolent and that we have considerable control over our life's outcomes (internal locus of control). This optimism not only "fuels" (accelerates) our actions, but also increases our physical vitality, our capacity to fend off

illness, and our ability to persevere despite encountering obstacles (Seligman, 1991/2006; Seligman, 2012; Seligman, 2018).

The role of hopefulness and optimism as accelerators plays out directly through the polystatic process. When we are hopeful and optimistic, our baselines are likely to be set at high levels because we perceive our environment as being benevolent and the outcomes of our actions positive. These connections suggest that Polystasis can be critical in initiating accelerators, Positive self-fulfilling prophecies can be in full operation. We may embrace an internal locus of control, believing that we are capable of achieving success. "I/we are on a roll. Nothing can stop me/ us now!")

As a result of this optimism, we persist in our efforts to achieve this success. While we may encounter roadblocks, they will alter our tactics and strategies but will not force us to change our baseline. We retain our aspirations and our optimistic perspective. Conversely, the positive self-fulfilling prophecy can be based on an external locus of control. "This was meant to be. I/we are indeed fortunate." Once again, the roadblocks do not deter us from our decision to move forward. As was depicted so many times in old Western movies, the cavalry will show up and run off our enemy.

We can reintroduce the concept of peremptory ideation when considering the dynamics of accelerator leveraging. Hopefulness and optimism might be contained in an ideation that is journeying through our unconscious psyche. As in the case of avalanches, this positive ideation picks up psychic debris (such as old memories of joy, general feelings of contentment, and self-perceptions of competence), thus increasing the force and richness of the positive ideation.

We think and feel that trust in our competence is justified and we elevate our polystatic baseline in anticipation of our success in doing something "big and beautiful." A self-fulfilling prophecy might contribute to the ideation. We believe that success is at hand. We ensure that what does occur is framed as success. This might even mean that we fail at achieving our goal but take note of

what has occurred. We believe that we have "learned our lesson" and can succeed the second time.

More can be done. We can employ the force field analysis and the cross-impact tools when considering the use of accelerators to bring about effective change in a system. These two tools not only direct us to identify the elements in our organization that can serve as accelerators (positive forces) but also direct us to determine how specific elements accelerate (enable) the activation and success of other elements (cross-impact).

These two analytic tools, in turn, are guided by an important assumption that the system we are trying to change is complex rather than only complicated. Elements connect and what seems a big, messy tangle of system elements is now optimistically seen as a setting where accelerating (enabling) leverage is fully available. A peremptory ideational train filled with hopefulness and a feeling of competence can itself be one of the forces that serve as an accelerator.

Information

One of the important and distinctive features of the system dynamics perspective that Donella Meadows embraces is the acknowledgment of both "hard" and "soft" elements in any system. The hard elements include physical resources (such as people, food, and construction materials) and energy sources (such as work to transform materials and electricity to run the transforming machines). The soft elements center on the shared information that influences the size, nature, and purpose of the physical resources and energy sources.

For Meadows and her colleagues, the flow in a system includes not just tangible entities but also intangible and information-based entities such as mailed letters (in the old days) and transmitted text messages and emails (in the current times). Also flowing in any system are first-level orders to increase or decrease production or delivery of services. There might even be a second-level change in

the mode by which information is transmitted, and orders are given. Or there is a second-level change in the people to whom information is sent. It is these second-level changes that Meadows identifies as potential leverage points in any system. These changes are often more influential than her previous six leverage points.

Meadows is particularly interested in the recipients of information. For her, the structure of information flow particularly pertains to who does and does not have access to the information. Today, we often ask who has been invited to the table (where the information is shared and discussed). The behavioral economists (such as Kahneman and Ariely) who I have frequently brought into the dialogue in this book are particularly keen on identifying who is and is not at the table. They want to know how the interpretation of information and decisions made at the table have been influenced by who is present and who speaks.

Along with complexity theorists such as Scott Page and the Medici theorist (Franz Johannson, 2004), behavioral economists believe that intersectional perspectives offered by diversified attendance at the table increase the chance that high-quality (and creative) decisions will be made. At the Polystatic level, Meadow's emphasis on information flow suggests that we should be mindful of the information we receive and use to alter our baselines, our prediction, and our actions. I have recommended the triangulation of information sources and methods as a vehicle for improving the polystatic processes. The lighthouse situated on the shore of a complex and dynamically operating bay can provide invaluable provided that the information it is emitting is valid (triangulation-based) and useful (directly related to our polystatic process).

Conversely, if we fail to build the lighthouse or ignore its information, we may smash up on the rocks. Alternatively, we never venture into the Bay. We probably don't even venture out into the turbulent sea. We remain on the dock or remove ourselves from the dock, journeying down a rabbit hole to reside in an information-barren world of Serenity (SC²). The organizations we

build in this wonderland of distortion and denial become Self-sealing silos that block out all discordant sources of information. At the personal level, we enclose ourselves in a bubble of belief that allows no dissonance (Weitz and Bergquist, 2024).

There is another source of information to acknowledge that impacts in a significant (though often unacknowledged) way on decisions and subsequent behavior. The source is our limbic system (and our Amygdala in particular) and the information is a feeling of anxiety or dread. As mentioned earlier, Sigmund Freud (1936) proposed that anxiety can serve as a signal warning us to avoid accessing certain unconscious content.

Turning to a more contemporary source, anxiety is triggered when we encounter real or imaginary lions (Sapolsky, 2004). Our polystatic process is engaged. We don't adjust our current baseline. Rather, we bring in a new baseline related to the three-fold nature of threatening entities (malevolent, strong, and active). Our leveraging of this "information" takes place when we either use the anxiety to motivate corrective action (fight), or we use the anxiety to motivate our escape from an untenable and potentially destructive situation (flight). There is an alternative. We can also leverage anxiety to induce freeze and inaction; however, as already noted, this is neither healthy nor beneficial to our community (if the freeze is collective).

Rules and Norms

While the flow of information, as a "soft" variable in a system, might be ignored when considering leverage points, the rules and norms of the system might be even more frequently ignored—for they are invisible until they are violated. Returning to the peremptory ideation train, we may find that rules and norms are being carried on a train built during our youth as we were learning (often painfully) about the "way" our society works. During our childhood or early adolescence, we were informally taught which formal rules (such as the "golden rules" of Christianity) are to be observed and which can be ignored. We also learn about the "real" rules and the

powerful norms that govern the actual conduct of those who have been "civilized" (socialized) in our society.

Past experiences related to shame, embarrassment, physical punishment, and retreat are seated on the train. Some social observers have pointed in particular to what we have learned from our society during our late childhood and early adolescent years. For late adolescents throughout the world who lived through the COVID-19 crisis during this critical period, the peremptory train in their psyche might be filled with norms regarding who is to be trusted, what dangers "other" people are carrying with them, and the resultant acceptance of or even preference for virtual rather than physical relationships.

The ideational train runs not only through individual psyches but also collective psyches. For instance, I have consulted with a Midwest college where new employees found entrance into the college community challenging. During interviews I was conducting, faculty members, administrators, and staff members often talked about the "trials and tribulations" of new hires. There were clear guidelines regarding how one should behave, with whom one was to associate, and what to share with others regarding attitudes about organizational operations. The ONE problem was that these guidelines were never shared with those newly hired.

One of the very observant faculty members I interviewed spoke candidly about the "initiation ritual" for new employees. Their formal orientation session is filled with statements regarding the values and formal rules of the college. None of these values and rules actually operate in this institution. The newly hired employee began working without problem until one of the ACTUAL norms and informal rules was violated. Then the new employee is placed in the "penalty box" (a phrase borrowed from the world of hockey).

The penalty was seated on the college's peremptory train alongside the real but unshared norms regarding "proper" conduct to engage at the college. The meted penalty was just as invisible as the norms and rules of this college. The penalty box consisted of the norm-

violating employee never being invited to lunch and never being asked to join others at a nearby Bar after work. Furthermore, the "shunned" employee was never included in conversations at the staff or faculty lounge about the college's operations.

Usually, the employee remained in the penalty box for four or five months—without knowing what they had done wrong. Then they are "released" and accepted into the community, told what they did wrong, and invited to help "socialize" the even more recently hired employees. Reports of a high turnover rate among new employees were not surprising. The "old-timers" remained in place and managed the penalty boxes. The new employees either left or "shaped up" when facing the powerful but invisible college norms and rules. The peremptory train raced through the collective unconscious life of those working at the college.

I share the penalty box story for three reasons. First, a long silence followed my report on this "initiation ritual" at an all-staff meeting. This initiation ritual was never supposed to be mentioned. The peremptory train was never to be acknowledged. This was one of the powerful, invisible rules of the college. I should have been assigned to the penalty box for mentioning the unmentionable. However, I was not a member of this college community. I was not a player in their ongoing game, so there was no penalty box for me.

It should be noted that my post-meeting conversations with several administrators, faculty members, and staff members were quite supportive. They felt "relieved" that this destructive ritual had been openly revealed. They mentioned that they were "tired" of "playing this game." It was time to get off the train or, better yet, get rid of the train. The challenge was now for them to do something about it—without being placed in the penalty box themselves.

As long-term employees, several of the people I talked to ponder whether or not they would be placed in the box if they began to speak up and promote change. The potential demise of this peremptory train was particularly timely given the problem of

finding replacements for newly hired employees who quit after several months of estrangement.

I share this story for a second reason. It illustrates the power of this seventh mode of leverage. It is no wonder that Donella Meadows assigned this mode a high ranking. As she noted, incentives, punishments, and constraints reinforce a system's rules (and norms). I think Dr. Meadows would agree that this reinforcement can take place formally through rewards (such as salary and promotions) and constraints (such as dress codes and reporting relationships) or even more forcefully through informal punishments (such as the isolation and estrangement engaged at my Mid-west college).

The power of informal reinforcement resides not just in the emotional damage done by altered interpersonal relationships but also in the impermeability of this reinforcement to any alteration in most settings. It might have helped that I commented on the informal ritual as an "outsider"; however, there was still the risky prospect of trying as an insider to eliminate this destructive practice. It is hard to derail or decommission a peremptory train occupied by powerful norms.

The third reason I offer this penalty box narrative is to illustrate the importance of organizational processes and attitudes. As Goodwin Watson astutely observed, the operations of any institution is determined not only by structures but also by the way people relate to one another (process) and how they think and feel about the structures and the relationships.

While the formal rules of an institution can be assigned to its structure, the informal rules and the norms of the institution determine and constrain its processes and strongly influence the attitude of those in the institution. Furthermore, taken together, the processes and attitudes of an institution provide the foundation for its overall culture. At the college where I served as a consultant, the processes included keeping useful information away from

"newcomers" (reinforcing the power and control of the 'old-timers').

The processes also included finding ways to punish the norm-violating newcomer "without getting caught." No one could formally blame you for not inviting someone to join you at lunch or at the neighborhood bar. You have every "right" to choose the people with whom you affiliate (process) aside from formal reporting relationships (structure). You also can't be "required" to feel in a particular way about another person nor can you be "assigned the task" of sharing "forbidden" information—let alone breaking up existing patterns of behavior.

Attitude are protected just as informal processes are immune from formal authority. Self-sealing is in full operation. Donella Meadow recognizes these protecting forces. I would suggest that powerful leverage is available when altering rules and norms precisely because of these counterproductive protections. One rarely greets the arriving peremptory train with either joy or gratitude.

There is one final cautionary point. Along with the remaining leverage points identified by Donella Meadows, the formal and informal rules and norms (along with other elements of an organization's culture) provide the integration (glue) that holds the organization together. Real change can occur when tinkering with this integrative process and altering the processes engaged and attitudes held by those working in the organization. The tinkering and altering inevitably motivate strong polarizing opposition and considerable turbulence.

As I noted about navigating a turbulent environment, one must engage in centering and balancing while leveraging change in a polarized, whitewater environment. The matter of center and balance becomes even more important as we move on to the even more consequential and challenging leverage points identified by Donella Meadows. I turn again to Peter Vaill and Jack Gibb for guidance when considering these more ambitious leverage strategies.

Organization

We have arrived at Meadows' BIG FOUR points of leverage. In one way, these final four are obvious choices. The way an institution is organized is important, as are the goals that guide the actions of those leading this institution. The two highest leverage points are also widely cited in contemporary literature on leadership and organizational functioning. The first of these two leverage points, paradigm, is cavalierly thrown out as a "transformative" change to be made by any leader. Contemporary leaders are to "shift paradigms" on their way to more effective leadership.

Donella Meadow's highest-rated leverage point, transcendence, is even more easily tossed out in contemporary leadership literature – especially that literature that brings in the spiritual element of leadership. While I may fall into the trap of offering well-trodden and watered-down comments on these four critical leverage points, I will offer perspectives that are a bit different and that build on the analyses I have already provided in this book.

I first consider organization as a leverage point. Meadow indicates that powerful leveraging is found in one's ability (and authority) to add, change, evolve, or self-organize system structures. I find the fourth of these strategies to be particularly intriguing and important. This is the ability for leaders—actually all members—of an organization to Self-Organize. Coming out of literature on chaos and complex systems, the process of self-organization stands in contrast to the traditional assumption that systems must be governed by hierarchies.

I have introduced Prigogine's perspective on self-organization and mentioned the flocking of birds and swarming of fish. As I have noted, flocking and swarming are self-organizing systems. There is no lead bird or lead first. The neighborhood effect governs the ongoing, "well-organized" dynamics of the flock and school. Each bird and fish move in the direction of other nearby birds and fish. Similarly, in complex human organizations, the "real" operations are governed by what one's organizational "neighbor" is doing.

My conclusions regarding the powerful role played by informal norms relate directly to this neighborhood effect. Informal norms are established and reinforced by the repeated (and rewarded) behavior of those working alongside one another in the institution. The peremptory train continues to operate precisely because our neighbor's behavior is dictated by the contents of this train. To slightly change the metaphor, we are all riding on the ideational train. We can't get off the train because it is always moving down the tracks. To leap off is to risk (psychological) damage.

Meadows proposes that the self-organizing processes of an organization strongly influence its operations. If this self-organizing process can be influenced (leveraged) then these operations can be changed. The challenge is to find a way in which this influence can occur. While I can offer no silver bullet, I do think that an important perspective offered by Robert Simons (2005) regarding "spans" in an organization may prove helpful. While most span analyses focus on the span of authority (how many people are reporting a specific manager), Simons proposes that four spans play an important role in determining the effectiveness of teams: (1) control, (2) accountability, (3) influence and (4) support. I believe they also critically determine the specific effectiveness of each team member.

Each of these spans can be narrowed or widened. Leaders of an organization can formally provide more control (authority) or less control (authority). They can also assign greater accountability or less accountability. Control and accountability are the 'hard" elements of self-organizing leverages. The amount of support can also increase or decrease, depending on informal "neighborhood" assignment of this support. Similarly, one's group or team can be increasingly or decreasingly influential depending on the informal dynamics operating in the organization (and the norms travelling on the peremptory train). Support and influence are the two "soft" elements of this leveraging strategy.

Two spans measure the supply of resources the organization provides to project teams. The span of control relates to the level of direct control a team has over people, assets, and information. The span of support is its "softer" counterpart, reflecting the supply of resources in the form of help from people in the organization. The spans of accountability (hard) and span of influence (soft)—determine the team's demand for organizational resources.

The level of a project team's accountability, as defined by the organization, directly affects the level of pressure on team members to make trade-offs; that pressure in turn drives the team's need for organizational resources. The team's level of influence, as determined by the structure of the team and the broader system in which the team is embedded, also reflects the extent to which team members need resources.

We typically have substantial control (internal locus of control) over two of the four elements (Control and Influence) but have very little direct control (external locus of control) over the other two elements (Accountability and Support). Furthermore, two spans provide formal structural constraints and requirements (Control and Accountability), while the other two spans (Influence and Support) operate informally.

An immediate analysis suggests that self-organization is dependent on the interdependence of people and teams within an organization. This is the neighborhood effect and peremptory train in operation. In an organizational setting, this effect is founded on the availability of support from your neighbor (person or team) and, in return, on the support (influence) you provide them. Interdependence is achieved when Simon's span of support and span of influence are wide.

Reintroducing a concept from Chapter Seven, we can find high levels of support and influence in an enmeshed organization, while low levels of support and influence are found in an organization saturated with a culture of disengagement. Informal forces win the

day when building a foundation for self-organization. However, we should not forget the formal spans: control and accountability.

Control and accountability represent organizational hierarchy. They are formally assigned in an organization and would seem to operate counter to self-organization. I propose that this is not the case. Clearly articulated and enforced control and accountability can free up the informal self-authorizing and self-assuming responsibility that fosters self-organization. However, they only bring about this freedom if set at an appropriate level.

Goldilocks once again enters. Control or accountability spans that are too broad can dampen any interest in self-organization on the part of those members of an organization who are being controlled or are weighted down with excessive accountability. Conversely, the absence of control or accountability leads to a state of laissez-faire that turns the attention of members to basic matters of consistency and survival.

If these appropriate spans of control and accountability are augmented by appropriate informal support provided by others in the organization (including leadership) then self-organization looms on the horizon. Informal recognition must also be given to the critical impact (influence) this self-organization has on the overall climate and culture of the organization. Taken together, all four spans provide the "perfect (positive) storm" for a large wave of self-organization.

Stated in a somewhat different way, appropriately assigned spans create conditions for the emergence of Jack Gibb's Trust. Gibb himself experimented with the introduction of Trust into an organization. He persuaded the leaders of (at least) one organization to "trust" their employees on a production line. The "boss" gave the production line workers complete control over their operations. The workers could sit around if they wanted to do so. And that is what they did initially.

However, the workers got bored after sitting around for a short while. They set up a "competition" to see which team of workers could be most productive over a specific period. They then changed the teams around, tried different production strategies, and became fully engaged in their work. Production increased, morale improved, and the "boss" was delighted. Though "regular" production oversight was restored, the production managers were much less heavy-handed than before Gibb arrived. The managers increased their trust in the competence and intentions of those reporting to them. There was also an increased sharing of perspectives regarding the inherent worth of work done in this organization.

In many ways, Jack Gibb's experiment emulated the "workplace democracy" movement that arose from the socialist movement in Great Britain following World War II. This movement, in turn, has evolved into the socio-technical workplace designs of the late 20th and early 21st century. Featured in the self-managing system of the Volvo Automobile company (and the Saturn Automobile production facilities in Spring Hill, Tennessee), the workforce in an organization is given complete responsibility for operating a production facility. While there might be a manager of this facility, the manager serves more as a facilitator of team planning and problem-solving initiatives than as someone who "runs" this facility.

I witnessed a self-managed operation when my colleague, Don Jochens, invited me to a facility producing five daily newspapers. Controlled by those who ran the presses, all decisions were made by the workplace team about the operation of the presses. Team members also ordered newsprint, provided quality control, and managed personnel issues.

As Jochens (1998) noted, effective self-management requires not only trusting relationships among members of the workplace team but also trustworthy competence in measuring performance and projecting into the future. Authority and responsibility were clearly

established in this newspaper printing facility and the outcome was increased productivity, minimized production delays, and improved worker morale.

The third facet of trust was also evident in this production facility. I was teaching some master's degree students from Taiwan and took them to this facility. They met with team members and learned about the socio-technical process that governed their self-managing work. My Taiwanese colleagues were impressed with what they observed and were taught; however, during the coming day, they seemed quite cold in their interactions with me. I was confused. These mature students have always been warm and supportive.

I asked one of the leaders of this student group what was happening. He indicated that the students believed I had lied to them. These could not be "workers" in this production facility. They were thinking and acting like managers! I had to indicate that these dedicated men and women had begun to think and act like managers because they were now managing their operations. Appropriate levels of authority and responsibility had been assigned, and they were given substantial support in the form of education, training, and persistent sponsorship by my colleague, Don Jochens, as a resident of this organization's C-Suite.

By contrast, I offer my experience as a recipient of troubling tales regarding the operations of a major production facility in New England. Employees in this corporation (that will go nameless) are completely alienated from the work they are hired to do. I am told that many workers drink on the job or shoot up during their shifts. A significant amount of time is devoted to card-playing or simply sitting around getting high. When a "boss' comes by, everyone works for a few minutes and then resumes their nonwork-related activities. All quality control must be outsourced because there is no one to "trust" inside the organization.

A new employee is soon "taught" that they are not to work hard and quickly become alienated from the work they are assigned and from

the company that employees them. Minimal authority is granted to these workers (though they assume informal authority when enforcing the anti-work norms of their work team). There is little enforced accountability—which seems appropriate since there is also minimal authority and minimal support for the work to be done. There is considerable influence—and the neighbor effect is in operation. One might even say that the workforce in this production facility is "self-organized." However, self-organization in this case revolves around noncompliance with company rules, regulations, and responsibilities. A "destructive" perfect wave is created leaving those working at this facility alienated, drunk, drugged, and (no doubt) depressed.

Goals

System theorists speak of the leading part of a system and of the purpose for which the system exists. The leading part, in turn, is driven by and guided by the system's goals. These goals provide a reason for the system to survive and adapt to its shifting environment. Therefore, it is understandable that goals can serve as leverage points for organizational change. We bring about change for a specific purpose. This purpose relates to the system's goals. Since leverage is itself a metaphor (suggesting a lever), I propose that goals represent the fulcrum, which is the point around which a lever pivots. It acts as the support or balance point, allowing a lever to move or lift an object more easily.

More generally, "fulcrum" refers to something central or essential that supports or brings about action or change in a situation. I would call the fulcrum an "activating" goal that provides not only purpose and direction but also support and energy. Furthermore, the fulcrum as an activating goal enables us to establish that which is essential. The fulcrum also leads us to that which is the Essence of the system in which it operates.

As we begin addressing the role played by goals as points of leverage, I not only introduce the metaphor of fulcrum but also reintroduce the concepts of Polystasis and baselines. These

concepts lead us to the conclusion that we must be agile when using goals as leverages. T.O.T.E. must be kept in mind when using a goal as the fulcrum for leveraging our system. Our baseline and psychosocial template will shift as our environment shifts and as we learn more about how this environment reacts to our actions. The fulcrum itself will have to be moved—leaving us with no option but to adjust the lever (action) that pivots on the fulcrum. Polystasis is in full force.

We can return to another metaphor in describing the agile role to be played by goals and leverages. A surface anchor serves as a fulcrum for a ship that has left the harbor. Acting as a goal, the surface anchor keeps our boat headed into the wind and slow-moving. Operating as surface anchors, organizational goals provide stability and continuity. The organization will not veer very far from its stated purpose if the goal(s) of the organization is (are) clearly articulated and reduce any tendencies toward expedience.

Yet our ship will move, especially if the wind and/or the tide are strong. Given strong winds and tidal force associated with VUCA-Plus, the vessel must be able to do some moving. Furthermore, the surface anchor is pulled back into the boat when the journey re-commences. At this point, the goal(s) associated with the ship's journey are more likely to be guided by a compass and/or navigation chart. The fulcrum becomes the ship's rudder as controlled by the ship's captain. We might even find that Buckminster Fuller's trim tab becomes the fulcrum at certain points during the journey.

Yet another of my previous metaphors can be introduced to add further complexity to leveraging a goal. This metaphor concerns placing goals (as darts or arrows) on a target. As mentioned, targets encourage us to consider a set of goals, rather than a single goal. Most contemporary organizations have multiple goals and must be guided by the demands of those who serve as guardians (stakeholders) of these goals. I have suggested that our 21st-century

ship might have multiple surface anchors that tug in different directions, causing strain on the boat and its passengers.

If we must take many goals into account, then the distinction drawn by Daniel Kahneman and his colleagues (Kahneman, Sibony, and Sunstein, 2021) between Noice and Bias must be considered. High levels of Noise suggest that multiple divergent goals must be considered. Strong Bias indicates that the convergence of goals might be based on false assumptions or a distorted perception of the world in which action is to be taken. We must be wary of Bias If we use a goal as a fulcrum for leveraging change. Furthermore, goal-leveraging requires that we find an effective way to deal with the potential diversity of Noise—such as deploying the strategies identified in Chapter Nine: sequencing, enabling, and reframing.

Consideration must also be given to the condition of goals located on opposite sides of the target. These goals often represent the polarities that reside in one's organization. I have offered two case studies of polarity management (and provide a third case study in Appendix A).

I have provided these detailed descriptions because I believe this strategy is one of the most effective to engage when leveraging goals. What I have called "vibrance" is found in the polarity of goals. Activating goals often reside in a polarity. We take action to reach a particular goal because we have made a hard choice in selecting this goal rather than another one. We avoid being the donkey who can't decide between two haystacks or the Relativist who can fully appreciate several perspectives and courses of action (as a result this non-actor never commits to anything).

We make commitments in the midst of relativism. We find vibrance in the pull. A game of darts is exciting to play because multiple darts are thrown and often land on many parts of the target! We are energized by the challenge of making a difficult decision and are gratified by achieving this goal. Then on to another goal! We can leverage multiple levers (program initiatives) with multiple goal-based fulcrums.

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Paradigm

We have now arrived at Donella Meadows' favorite landing place: the fundamental frame of mind engaged when examining and seeking to change a system. While Jay Forrester set the stage for this landing spot, Dr. Meadows has provided the most commentary and exhortation concerning the profound challenge of shifting one's fundamental frame. While, as I've mentioned, many authors are cavalier in their use of the term "Paradigm", Donella Meadows is fully justified in proposing that a shift in one's way of looking at systems is paradigmatic in scope and importance.

I begin with Donella Meadows' conception when exploring and expanding on her consideration of paradigm-based leverage. Meadows proposed that one can leverage the mindset or paradigm from which arise a system's goals, structure, rules, delays, and parameters. From this statement, one can deduce that Meadows is scooping up the other high-leverage points and incorporating them all in her concept of mindset and paradigm. Donella Meadows is following in the footsteps of Thomas Kuhn (2012) the scientific historian who first presented this concept.

Like Kuhn, Meadows incorporates a variety of perspectives and practices in her paradigm presentation. Kuhn defines paradigm in multiple ways. He is often criticized for not being clear or at least consistent in using this term. The best way to think about Kuhn's paradigm may be to consider it a description of an epistemological community encompassing a wide range of perspectives and practices concerning the relativity of knowledge. We can similarly approach Meadow's paradigm as a community encompassing wide-ranging, system-based perspectives and practices.

My own consideration of Paradigm is more confined than that offered by either Kuhn or Meadows. In collaboration with my colleague, David Halliburton, I have proposed a three-tier epistemology pyramid: paradigms/models/practices. I have written about the "assumptive world" that emerges from the establishment of specific practices, models, and (ultimately) a specific paradigm

that focus on a complex societal issue – such as psychopathy (Bergquist, 2019a).

The epistemological pyramid emerged from a reflective session engaged by David and I following a curricular design workshop we conducted at a liberal arts college. David and I both noticed that diagrams drawn with magic markers on the flipchart pages were quite similar to diagrams we had drawn on many other flipcharts working with different disciplinary groups in other educational institutions. We began to realize that there were three fundamental ways in which issues were being addressed by the academics with whom we were working.

The first way was viewing their curriculum as a monad (a single theme or issue) from which the total curriculum emerged. The second way was based in dualism: identifying and building on a fundamental tension engaged in the field on which the curriculum was being built. The third way concerns a three-fold analysis (in the form of a triangle or lens) that led from clarity to diffusion and then back to clarity and then back to diffusion and so on. David and I came to recognize that these three ways in which to conceive and construct a curriculum were actually paradigms! It seems that paradigms exist not only in scientific realms, but also in areas of diagnosis and design. We went further in our analysis and identified a process for working with academic teams.

We noted that specific Models emanate from (or help to modify) the fundamental paradigm. Furthermore, the models are often imported from other fields. When imported these models bring with them some underlying assumptions, ideas, and perspectives from their original field. With the models in play and with one or more underlying paradigms informing and reinforcing these models, a community (such as an academic department) can produce specific Practices (what Kuhn called "normal science"). David Halliburton and I began to refine this Epistemological Pyramid by identifying and describing Three Assumptive Levels.

Paradigms in a particular field or discipline tend to be: (1) Few in number, (2) Quite simple in construction, and (3) Very powerful. This trinity of tenets speaks to the priority assigned by Donella Meadows to paradigms as effective leverages of change in any system. To illustrate its power as a leverage for change, I point to the analytically based paradigm that has traditionally guided the physical, biological, and behavioral sciences. We break things down into their fundamental parts to best understand them and then reassemble them.

David always pointed to the "smashed frog" critique in biology: when we dissect a frog in biology classes, we might find how the frog's leg works and how the frog's brain is connected to other parts of its body via the spinal cord. However, we can never bring the frog back to life. The parts can never be reassembled to create a living organism. This failure to create life remains a mystery. It relates to what some philosophers and scientists identify as "emergence" (the unexpected creation of new, higher-order phenomena by integrating several lower-order phenomena: the whole can't be predicted from the parts). The phenomenon of Emergence has served as powerful leverage (revolution?) in the re-thinking of laboratory methods, conceiving of living systems, and formulating of multi-disciplinary "Big History" (Christian, 2019).

Given the other leverage points that Meadows incorporates in Paradigm, I would note that Paradigms provide the framework for determining acceptable and nonacceptable goals. A dominant contemporary paradigm concerning the positivists' equation of verified reality with quantification requires that a goal be measurable. If not measurable then it is tossed aside as a hope or dream. Similarly, Paradigms determine what is and is not a viable structure. This determination is based in part on the dominant paradigmatic focus during our century on short-term durations.

We want structures to exist for the next five years (or ten minutes!). Little planning is done regarding the long-term survival of structures (or the institutions they support). I could also point to

dominant paradigms in our society that determine which rules are to be followed (formal) and which are to be ignored or made optional (informal). Other paradigms determine in what cultural settings delays are acceptable (mañana) and not acceptable ("now or never"), and which parameters are most important (such as taxes) and which are least important (such as standards).

Models are: (1) Based on paradigms (though the underlying paradigm might not be acknowledged), (2) Moderately large and diverse in number, (3) Moderately powerful and influential, and (4) Often borrowed from contemporary popular technologies. Typically, models are engaged when leverage points are based on structure, moderation, or acceleration.

These leverage points all involve tangible actions taken to alter an organization's operation. As noted in Model's fourth tenet, a technology that yields tangible, positive outcomes is often emulated when leveraging tangible change in some other domain. For example, Sigmund Freud leveraged change in the field of psychology when he introduced drive theory. This theory, in turn, is partially based on the late 19th-century invention of the pneumatic pump.

One pushes down on a piston in one part of the room and then a piston in another part of the room moves upward with great power. Power is transferred via air (or a liquid) from one domain to another. For Freud, a psychic drive is pushed down (repressed); however, it moves (unconsciously) and appears (finds expression) as some other time and in some other form (e.g. sublimation). The psychological concept of "energy flow" comes from this model. It is not the flow of electricity, rather the flow of air or a viscous liquid is referenced. Thus, we "push down" a disturbing thought or feeling, which travels to another location and reemerges with great power (as a physical symptom or self-destructive act).

A similar borrowing of tangible models and terms from computer technologies is now occurring. We use terms and models such as "interface" and "processing." The other very special technology of

our era is space travel. We borrow such words and related models as "module" and "launch" from this domain. The "ghosts" (assumptions, values, fears, hopes, conflicts) that emanate from these technologies unconsciously accompany the new model. We "mechanize" and "technologize" the operations of organizations. We treat human illness as if it is a broken machine that needs its broken part to be replaced.

Practices represent the third tier of the epistemological pyramid. Practices are associated with three tenets: (1) Based on models that are usually conscious (explicit knowledge): though the espoused practices (articulation of the model) might not align with the enacted practices, (2) Many in number, and (3) Much less powerful or influential than models or paradigms. Practices usually are not used as leverage points.

If we run into difficulty when engaging a practice, then we typically do not dramatically change or leverage what we are doing. Rather we engage in first-order change by doing more of what we are already doing. Or we do less or cease doing what we currently are doing. If there is any leveraging, it typically involves a shift in parameters. We use a different method to calculate our personal expenses or our national GNP. We alter the definition of smog or what "quality time" means when staying home with our family.

Social Construction: We can readily transfer this Three Level Pyramid to a three-level analysis of social construction. We see the world through a set of social constructive lenses that are paradigmatic in their depth and influence. These social constructions, like all paradigms, are simple and small in number. They frame the basic way we interpret and predict what is occurring in our world. These are the firm convictions that circle our Head and Heart, preventing us from being surprised by what we see in the world.

Our tri-partite categorization also leads us to consider a second level of social construction. This is the level of socially constructed models. Paradigmatic constructions are usually not readily

acknowledged. Like paradigms, they are tacitly held beliefs and frames of reference that are never examined or even discussed in a specific society. It should be noted, however, that some social constructions are acknowledged or at least pervade our language and portrayals.

The paradigmatic assumptions embedded in an analytic approach to studying biological systems ("the smashed frog") are assumed to be "obviously true" and need no justification. Conversely, a technology-based model such as "launch" or "processing" is subject to inspection and even criticism. For instance, we find that a model such as "teamwork" (borrowed by business from the domain of sports) is sometimes subject to critical review: "People working collaboratively on an important project are doing something much more important than scoring a touchdown." "There are no quarterbacks on this team, only co-workers and co-learners." While this kind of pushback is rare, it is done and is viewed as legitimate.

Socially constructed models, in other words, are not "God-given." (as are paradigmatic constructions). They are made by humankind and are contained in our everyday language. Models are discussable rather than being "self-sealing". Unfortunately, not all publicly available social constructions are so easily discussable (let alone criticized). We construct dominant and widely circulated narratives about upward mobility, outlandish wealth, crusading for the good, and living happily ever after. These narratives saturate our movies and podcasts with the protagonist often wearing a cape or relaxing on a yacht. Much as in the case of "smashed frogs," little sustained attention is given to the deeper implications of social constructions (and paradigms) depicting the benefits of violence and the goodness of greed.

The third element in our tri-partite pyramid is rarely to be considered a social construction. Practices are explicit and readily discussed. Alternative practices are always available, though the number of viable options might be limited if the underlying models and paradigm(s) are compelling. The story is a bit bigger than this.

The options are often limited, constrained, and strictly enforced under conditions of sustained anxiety--especially common, as we have already noted, when VUCA-Plus is pervasive.

Infrequently the fact can influence the paradigm. This fact becomes an "anomaly" that can't be fully absorbed in the existing paradigm. This becomes an either/or that can flip a paradigm ("turning point') Facts reside in and are produced within an "institution" -- the institution can be reputable (inside the existing paradigm) or it can be renegade (outside the existing paradigm). A cutting-edge fact is more likely to be produced in the renegade institution. However, this fact is more likely to eventually be accepted if it comes from a reputable institution.

Theory of Mind: Somewhere in the middle of the epistemological pyramid are thoughts and organized concepts we hold about other people with whom we interact. These thoughts and concepts are Models that are strongly beholding to one or two basic paradigms regarding the Essence of human existence and the Essential of Trust (in intentions, competence, and shared perspective). As I have already noted, psychologists wrap these thoughts and concepts together as an elementary "theory of mind."

Typically, somewhere in our middle to late childhood we abandon our primary narcissism (viewing the world exclusively from our own perspective) and come to a profound recognition that other people with whom we interact hold their own independent and unique perspectives on life. With a theory of mind in place, we not only come to appreciate that other people operate from their own mental state, but also come to better understand the thoughts, beliefs, desires, and emotions of other people, which allows us to accurately predict how others will feel, act, and think in a given situation.

While a clear and consistent theory of mind enables us to better understand and predict the behavior of other people, this theory can also come with considerable "baggage" as is the case with many Models. As is also the case with peremptory ideational trains,

theories of mind carry many passengers that are not known to or even appreciated by those adopting a specific theory. One might even consider theories of mind (and perhaps all models) to be peremptory in nature and force. Like the ideational train, our theory of mind will expand over time (boarding more passengers) and become even more influential (and resistant to change) as we grow older.

We acquire our theory in part from other influential people in our life who hold their own biases and history of human interactions. They are the passengers entering our ideational train. Frequently, our theory is self-fulfilling and self-sealing when based on the often inaccurate or outmoded theories of our parents and broader society. Everyone around us holds a similar theory. Our parents and neighbors are running the same train. Our espousal and enactment of the theory (Argyris and Schon, 1974) is encouraged and rewarded by these other people in our life. Virtually all of the leverage strategies identified by Donella Meadows are engaged within interpersonal contexts. As a result, one's theory of mind undoubtedly plays an important role in the content and character of Meadow's fourteen leverage points.

The determinative role played by one's theory of mind is obvious in the interaction-based leverage provided by rules and norms, organizational structures, and goal setting. This role might be less obvious, but probably just as influential in points of leverage concerning the flow of information, the moderation and acceleration of change, and even the formation and reinforcement of paradigms. It is important to acknowledge that the one common feature of Paradigm that emerged from Thomas Kuhn's initial description was the theme of Community.

Shared perspectives and practices ("normal science") evolve from sustained interactions among scientists in a particular field (who are often housed in prestigious, "mainstream" institutions). The existing dominant Paradigm is held and reinforced by these high-prestige practitioners (who become the "traditionalists").

Conversely, the revolutionaries tend to come from "marginal" institutions or are themselves "marginalized" (as a woman, racial or ethnic minority, etc.). These "marginalists" are isolated from the mainstream traditionalists. In their alternative approach to solving seemingly intractable "anomalies," they form their own paradigmatic communities and eventually become the traditionalists.

Given this interweaving of theory of mind with paradigmatic revolutions, I would suggest that the most important of Donella Meadow's leverage points is not just confronting and changing paradigms but also confronting the interpersonal and societal barriers that isolate a dominant paradigmatic community from alternative communities in which diverse perspectives and practices are being engaged. When any system opens its boundaries, the prospects of change and creativity increase. There is also the possibility that the system will destabilize and fail to survive when the fresh air becomes a destructive hurricane.

I propose that the possibility of destructive openness is diminished if consideration is given to all fourteen of the leverage points introduced by Dr. Meadows as they are contained within specific paradigms. When we consider the multiple interacting paradigmatic elements operating in a complex, dynamic system then we likely anticipate and effectively address the emerging challenges. We can navigate the whitewater and contradictions inherent in these systems. I would add one additional ingredient to the successful leveraging of a paradigm. This ingredient concerns the level of reasoning being engaged in planning for and using this leverage.

Fifth-Order Consciousness: I invite Robert Kegan once again to assist me in offering a clear portrayal of the additional ingredient. Kegan offers a five-order model of consciousness ("way of knowing") in conjunction with his introduction of postmodernism as a major cognitive and emotional challenge in contemporary life. While first and second order consciousness have to do with the

basic developmental stages originally described by Jean Piaget (movement from a sense that self is everything to a sense of an externally viewed concrete world), the third order concerns a sense of interpersonal relationships and one's membership in society (first appearance of theory of mind). At the fourth level, one finds the primary way mature adults deal with the modern world. Multiple realities are acknowledged, and one can find their own voice (self-authorship) in this world of diverse options. Rather than adhering to a traditional role, one can help to create a role for themselves.

All of this makes sense when seeking to "fit in" to the mid-20th Century world. There is a prevalence of first-order "adjustments and effective use of convenient heuristics at this stage of consciousness. However, another level of consciousness is required if one is to engage any of Donella Meadows leverage points (especially paradigm shifts). As Kegan notes, a second level of reasoning is required. He refers specifically to Gregory Bateson's learning that reflects on itself (Kegan, 1994, p. 232)) This level is founded on a relativistic perspective (no objective reality or eternal truths).

Given this perspective, the stage is set for reflecting on existing paradigms and being open to or even helping to create alternative paradigms (as Meadows suggests). This fifth order is also founded on the constructing of new narratives (and ultimately new paradigms) within relationships (and within the communities Kuhn identified as residing at the core of any new scientific revolution—or I (along with many others) would suggest at the core of any epistemological (way of knowing) revolution. More specifically, the fifth order of consciousness resides in dialogical relationships where reality is being examined and recreated through mutual construction. One might even go so far as to suggest, as Leslie Brothers (2001) does, that reality is ONLY created in and ONLY exists in relationships.

Meaning In Relationships: I invite Kenneth Gergen once again to my writing to amplify what his Harvard colleague, Robert Kegan, has proposed. Kegan (1994, pp. 262-263) focuses specifically on the nature of meaning. He begins by throwing out the origin of meaning residing in an individual's mind. Rather it exists in relationships:

> . . . the traditional view that meaning originates within the individual mind, is expressed with words (and other actions), and is deciphered with the minds of other agents is deeply problematic. . . . There is an alternative way of approaching the problem of . . . meaning. . . We may begin our analysis at the level of the human relationship as it generates both language and understanding. . . . Society is, in effect, held together through common participation in a system of signification. . . . [I]t is not the individual who preexists the relationship and initiates the process of communication, but the conventions of relationship that enable understanding to be achieved.

Kegan (1994, p. 264) proceeds to expand on the process of communication as it leads to the creation of meaning:

> An individual's utterance in themselves possess no meaning. . . . In the relational case . . . there is no proper beginning, no originary source, no specific region in which meaning takes wing, for we are always already in a relational standing with others and the world. . . . Lone utterances begin to acquire meaning when ana other or others coordinate themselves to the utterance, that is, when they add some form of supplementary actions (where linguistic or otherwise). . . .

The fundamental interpersonal proposition is now presented by Kegan (1994, pp. 264-265):

> We thus find that an individual alone can never "mean"; an other is required to supplement the action and thus give it

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a function within the relationships. To communicate is thus to be granted the privilege of meaning by others. If others do not treat one's utterances as communication, if they fail to coordinate themselves around the offering, such utterances are reduced to nonsense. In this regard, virtually any form of utterance may be granted the privilege of being meaningful or, conversely, serve as a candidate for nonsense.

In adding Gegan's perspective to our reflections on the leveraging of change, we discover that this leveraging must always be done within relationship and in community. Otherwise, the proposed parameter, rule, goal or paradigm will be deemed "nonsense."

As Thomas Kuhn noted, the perspectives and practices of scientific revolutionaries were considered "nonsensical" until these outliers demonstrated that they offered a viable answer to some elusive anomaly. As a relativistic and relational 'way of knowing" Fifth order consciousness is required to bring about successful leverage of change. Without relationships and community, leveraging becomes "foolish" and void of all "meaning."

At the heart of the matter, is the selection of the appropriate lens when seeking to leverage change by shifting a paradigm. Typically, it is not enough to shuffle the Essentials, one must move directly into the matter of Essence. As noted, paradigms embody the fundamental way that we see the world. This includes our perspective on interpersonal relationships and community, methods to find what is real, and outcomes we consider most valued in our world. Each of these fundamentals leads us to focus on the Essence of our concerns and commitments. So, we must pick carefully and wisely from the many ways to engage a Lens of Essence. Often this means moving to Donella Meadows's final leverage point: transcendence.

Transcendence

As Donella Meadows has proposed, the final and ultimately most important leverage point concerns the power to transcend paradigms. We are faced with the profound cognitive (and emotional) challenge of looking down on the way we look down on our thoughts, feelings, and actions. We are invited to reflect on our reflections and question our way of questioning. We are invited to look at our ideational train and its passengers. Perhaps we can even apply brakes to stop the train.

We pause for a moment to reflect on ways in which the passengers on this train are influencing us. The train resumes its psychic travel, but we retain some wisdom about our ideations. Thomas Kuhn might have stopped his own train. He might have reflected on his assumptions about paradigms and scientific revolution. Could his description of paradigms have been just one of multiple ways to view paradigms? Is the concept of paradigm itself a paradigm that will be succeeded by a quite different notion about science and the nature of facts and reality?

What about Meadows' concept of leveraging? Is her model subject to review and reflection? After all, leveraging is based on a metaphor regarding fulcrums and levers. As with all metaphors we engage as models, the assumptions, perspectives, and practices that come with this metaphor can (and should) be examined. For instance, levers and fulcrums are physical objects, and leveraging is mechanical.

Our efforts to leverage change in our lives or the organization we lead are not mechanical acts. The outcomes we hope to achieve rarely have anything directly to do with physical objects. I don't actually own any lenses that might be used when engaging in Essentials or Essence. My model of the peremptory ideational train is also subject to review. I don't see or feel any train running through my head. Have I pushed this metaphor too far. Would

George Klein be troubled by my use of his concept. After all, Klein didn't do much with this concept other than running a couple of interesting experiments regarding subliminal stimuli.

I wish to expand on the nature of this final leverage point. Ultimately, transcendence takes us out of the "profane" (secular) world identified by Mircea Eliade (1959) to a sacred world. If we are still on the peremptory train, it is carrying a new set of passengers. The train is filled with narratives, images and images of a compelling future. The sacred world is also one in which a higher order takes precedence. There is a more important purpose to be discerned and honored. We enter into an I/Thou relationship with other people on behalf of greater good. We are transiting from a secular world in which Essentials can be ordered and enacted to a sacred world in which a transcendent Essence can be discovered and embraced.

It should also be noted that we are likely to bump into one or more mysteries on our ideational train when we seek to leverage with transcendence. Our inquiries into that which is most important and of the greatest good will lead us to purposes that come to us from a source over which we have no control. Our environment, our wish for species survival, or some divine entity might decree the desired outcomes. Our transcendent leveraging might, as a result, focus not on what we can change (internal locus of control), but rather on what we can't change (external locus of control). We must adjust to and perhaps more fully appreciate the dictates coming from a wiser (and hopefully benevolent) source.

Many challenges face us in using this final leverage point and traveling on an ideational train with new passengers. In considering these challenges, I find myself returning to the wisdom offered by someone who helps us navigate a turbulent river. It is Peter Vaill (1996) who joins a secular narrative about living and leading in a white-water environment with a spiritual narrative about leading and learning in this environment.

Vaill (1996, p. 178) offers the following insight: "More and more, as white water increased, leadership consists precisely in leading in the creation of new meanings, new grounds and reasons for the organization to be doing what it is doing, new understanding of the torrents of change that inundate us." In this statement, we find not only a transcendent elevation of one's search for meaning and one's appreciation of the turbulent VUCA-Plus world but also a transcendent acknowledgment of the higher-order purpose ("reason") that can (and should) guide our individual and collective actions.

In his reflections on spirituality, Vaill reinforces the assumption that sacred matters typically reside outside one's immediate control (internal locus of control). They bring us to acknowledge and appreciate external forces and sources of meaning (an external locus of control): "Spirituality is a decision to search beyond what one can do to or on or within oneself. Spirituality perceives the inadequacy to lie fundamentally not in material props but in the self that would do the propping. Thus, to be spiritual is to turn away from material props and to open oneself to a transcendent source of meaning." (Vaill, 1996, p. 179)

Vaill focuses on what he calls "spiritual learning." As he (and I) did previously in this book, the wisdom offered by Paul Tillich is brought into this conversation. Once again, Vaill turns to Tillich's Courage to Be (Tillich, 1952/2000) as a guide for acknowledging, appreciating, and fully use (leverage) what we are "given" – a world filled with what I have identified as VUCA-Plus. It is in our courageous participation in this multi-challenged world that we find meaning and affirmation. Vaill (1996, p. 183) builds on Tillich's "courage to be":

> If Tillich is right, permanent white water is a blessing! It is our opportunity to rise above complacency and naivete, to confront the deeper dilemmas of our existence, to be tempted by cynicism and negativity and despair, but to see finally the truth that lies beneath our frustration: "The act

of accepting meaninglessness is in itself a meaningful act. It is an act of faith" (p. 176).

But "man is not necessarily aware of this source," says Tillich, that is, of the connection to being-itself. Perhaps the gradual forming and deepening of this awareness, of this connection to the ground of being, to the spirit, is the learning that permanent white water affords. The question is, what might that learning process look like?

The core argument is that the learning process should have the seven qualities of learning as a way of being. It should be self-directed and creative, be variously expressive and certainly involve powerful feeling of meaning, occur on-line in the many walks of one's life and continually throughout one's life, and definitely provoke reflexive learning. In the present context, that reflexive learning is about spiritual development itself.

Vaill (1996, p. 183) offers his own perspectives on spiritual learning and learning as a way of being:

> But what is the content of spiritual learning as a way of being? In considering systems thinking, leaderly thinking, and cultural unlearning, we are not moved to ask as we are so often with spiritual learning, "But what is it?" Tillich, I believe, would say that spiritual learning as a way of being is learning of the ways that our courageous daily struggles in white water connect us to the ground of being and ensure our participation in it. But is it possible to be more concrete than this?

At this point, Vaill (1996, pp. 183-194) does become more concreate, speaking to a sense of one's "feeling" of the "spirit" as this feeling relates to a "holistic" sense of spirituality:

> When we say we genuinely "feel the spirit" in or of some entity, what are we saying? We are making a statement about a presence or current of energy or palpable intensity in the entity that goes beyond its existence and normal operation. We are not describing a force from outside but

rather an intrinsic characteristic that has become manifest to us. We are not saying that the entity's "normal" reality and operation has no meaning but instead that we are seeing its normal meaning as profoundly enhanced, enriched, strengthened, and intensified by this spirit that we feel.

Vaill (1996, p. 194 is making an important point here regarding the presence of spirituality in our everyday life. Eliade's sacred space and secular space intermingle not only in primitive animistic-oriented tribes but also in our contemporary world:

We know we can have this experience of spirit inhering in all kinds of entities: in families; in sports teams; in institutions like schools, hospitals, armies, and corporations; in processes (when we speak of the spirit of inquiry, of the law, or of creativity, for example); in works of art and artistic processes; in individual persons (when we see deeply into the meaning of someone's life, for example); in the bonds of loyalty and love between individuals; and in nature, both as concrete systems and events and as abstract laws and relationships. In short, as humans we are capable of seeing and feeling the spirit in virtually anything.

With the presence of spirit in our daily life comes the opportunity to identify that which is the Essence. Our Lens of Essence belongs in the turbulent world introduced by Peter Vaill (1996, p. 183):

When we have these clear perceptions of the spirit "in" people and things, I believe we are seeing them in their essence. We are experiencing holistic perception. We are grasping all at once the details of their operations, their histories, their effects, their human significance. We are seeing them whole. Our learning about them has moved our awareness beyond their component parts and beyond their problems and instabilities. We are experiencing the beauty and the goodness running all through them,

inhering in their essence. We are letting ourselves feel wonder, awe, and astonishment. The effect on us is frequently physical: we tear up and speak chokingly, we have to get up and move, we suck our breath in and tremble.

I find Vaill's description of the "spirit" to be closely aligned with the "Numinous" of Rudolph Otto (1923/1950) and Carl Jung (1938). This 'Numinous' is the richly spiritual experience of confronting with awe, fear, and enthrallment that which is massive, impenetrable, or fully unexpected. While the numinous can drive us down a rabbit hole into a wonderland of distorting Serenity (SC²+), it can also motivate us to engage the transformative processes identified in this book. Given the awe-full presence of this spiritual Essence, there is an important opportunity to leverage transcendence.

If Vaill is correct, it is in the holistic moments of beauty and goodness that we can move "upward" (transcend) and reflect "down" on the life we are leading. We can be grateful in being given the challenging opportunity to live in and transform the conditions of a VUCA-Plus world. Making use of the Lens of Essentials we can find an anchor, curiosity, enablement, an appreciation of perspectives, learning, and prioritization.

The Lens of Essence, in turn, provides us with the opportunity to claim a sustained focus on patterns, self-organization, and illumination, alongside a sustained and integrated response to Vaill's world of white water and Johnson's world of polarities. Our ideational train is filled with insightful transformations that enable us to effectively navigate a mid-21st century world filled with turbulence and contradiction.

I personally am aware of the opportunity for reflection and even some transcendence when my wife and I sit on our deck looking across the cove at the setting sun reflecting on the boats and windows of homes and cottages on the opposite shore. I am not only immensely grateful for the "gift" of living at our home here in Maine but also use this evening ritual as an occasion for reflecting

and talking with my wife about important matters such as the activities of our children and grandchildren, my wife's volunteer work, my writing (including this book) and what it means to grow older. I have pulled out a Lens of Essence and am in dialogue with Kathleen about what I see through this lens and how I feel about what emerges.

I similarly experience a truncated version of the numinous when sitting in front of my living room fireplace, with a roaring fire complementing the music I am playing. The music of Bach, Hovhanness, or Sondheim might be swirling around my head and ears. Whatever the source of the music and unpredictable movement of fireplace flames, I find myself "transported" to a world of reflection and momentary transcendence.

I have engaged the Lens of Essence and reflected on many fundamental issues—such as learning-ful (and sometimes painful) life experiences and/or the way I reprioritize activities of my senior years. While my lens can reveal awe-some prospects (leaning into the future) as well as challenging current realities, I find that my lenses of Essence provide me with guidance (or at least objectives) in my efforts to move upward (transcendence) and look downward with appreciation at my place in a VUCA-Plus world.

While I felt it appropriate to comment on the ways I modestly seek to leverage transcendence in my own life, I wish to bring in the life of an extraordinary spiritual leader, Bruch Joy, who has conducted many workshops on consciousness and transcendence and written about his own spiritual journey. During the early 1970s, Brugh Joy was a successful physician living and working in Los Angeles. Finding that something was missing in his life and orthodox medical practice, Brugh Joy began a spiritual journey that led him to many locations including the Findhorn community in Scotland.

Several of my colleagues who are spiritually oriented have also spent time at Findhorn and found this to be a setting in which Meadow's leverage of transcendence is particularly accessible. Some people on a quest for transcendence speak of Findhorn as a

location where spiritual energy converges. Others suggest that spiritual energy exists not in a special place but in one's own sense of presence. Whichever perspective is valid, the history of Findhorn is replete with powerful personal stories of transformation and transcendence—including the story offered by Brugh Joy.

Findhorn is not the only spiritual location visited by Brugh. He traveled to the Great Pyramids in Egypt and many spiritual centers in India and Nepal. Places such as Sedona in New Mexico, Rishikesh (located on the Ganges River in India) and Machu Picchu in South America are destinations for spiritual questers. I encountered many people in Bali seeking a location conducive to spiritual enlightenment and transcendence.

This search for a spiritual location brings us back to our consideration of sanctuaries. Sanctuaries can be found at physical locations. I pointed to Zen centers, retreat sites, and The City of Refuge on the Big Island in Hawaii. I would add Jack Gibb's TORI community (created at the Torrey Pines Country Club) to this list. Perhaps Trust is best found in a sanctuary. Genuine trust in competence, intentions, and shared perspectives might only be found in a temporary sanctuary such as that offered by Jack Gibb—or created by Jack Gibb and his colleagues as the founders of sensitivity training programs at Bethel Maine).

Instead, we can turn to the alternative perspective that sanctuaries reside ("presence") inside one's Head and Heart. In a beautifully poignant song ("And So It Goes") Billy Joel suggests that a sanctuary exists "safe and strong" in one part of our heart. This is where we "heal the wounds from lovers past/Until a new one comes along."

In one of his gentle stories from the Prairie Home Companion Garrison Keillor (1985) speaks about the "storm home" that was assigned to him by his school when he was a small boy. To prepare for the possibility that a blizzard might strand him in town, the school gave Garrison (and other children living in the country) an alternative in-town home. Keeler never had to go to this home; however, he often walked by his "storm home" and reflected on the

loving, supportive nature of the couple who were his "storm parents." He thought of this man and woman and their house when things were going bad or when he was discouraged. He fantasized that this couple had specifically picked him out as their "storm child" and that they would welcome him with open arms during difficult times. Joel and Keeler are portraying a "presence" to be found in our Heart and Head.

Brugh Joy did find his own personal transformation and transcendence in his spiritual quest and brought the insights and wisdom he acquired back to the retreat site (the Ski Hi Ranch) he established in Arizona. We find facilitation (leveraging) of personal transformation and transcendence for those attending Joy's conferences at the ranch. Much as Peter Vaill suggested in his description of spiritual learning, Joy (1979, p. 7) promotes the expansion of (and intense appreciation for) the reality existing outside us and inside us:

> Transformation enlarges the context of reality. The awareness is lifted up into states of consciousness where the multi-dimensional nature of existence is perceived, not just conceived; where it is experienced, not just imagined; where each dogma and each absolute truth is seen as but a single facet of a superconscious whole called Beingness. In the totality of Beingness there is no absolute anything—no rights or wrongs, no higher or lower aspects—only the infinite interaction of forces, subtle and gross, that have meaning only in relationship to one another. Absolutes are concoctions of our rational minds. Reality must never be confused with concoctions. The Transformational Process, the release from fixed beliefs, allows the fragmented awareness to meld into universality.

We find the Essence of Meadow's transcendent leveraging in this breathtaking challenge to our usual way of seeing and being in reality. The other leveraging challenges—ranging from parameters

and delays to goals and paradigms—all merge into Brugh Joy's transformation process.

Is this transformative process only available to someone participating in a Brugh Joy conference, or lingering for a while at Findhorn or Sedona? Can this kind of spiritual learning and enlightenment be found in places other than major sanctuaries and places where spiritual energy converges? Are mini-sanctuaries, safe and strong places in our Heart, or "storm homes" available for major transformations—or perhaps a mini-transformation (if such a thing exists)?

Perhaps, as Brugh Joy (Joy, 1979, p. 20) suggests, it is just a matter of abandoning our "grown-up" sense of reality ("normal science") and returning to a fresh, pre-socialized (pre-paradigmatic) sense of wonderment about reality:

> . . . as we begin to use the beginner's mind to see things the way they are rather than the way we have been conditioned to see them, we can also begin to understand . . . fundamentally, our all-too-human habit of taking our belief systems as real. . . . [W]e can also learn to see the magnificence of our creative potential in the rich variations of themes called life, religion, government and so on.

At this point, Brush Joy brings us back to the fundamental distinction I offered earlier in this book between an objectivist and constructivist perspective on "reality." Joy (1979, p. 2) opts for a constructivist perspective:

> The difference between the awful insanity and the creative glory is nothing more than the recognition that belief systems are only belief systems and not realities. At this level of consciousness we can create anything we desire, and once we realize that we live only in an idea level of existence that is not based on any intrinsic realness, we may consider the possibility that there are options to our experience and expression of reality. The questioning

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process brings us naturally, easily and inevitably to the threshold of higher states of consciousness.

Meadow's leveraging of transcendence is fully evident in Joy's proposal that we engage a "beginner's mind" when discerning what is actually "real." I would suggest that a Lens of Essence be applied alongside Brugh Joy's beginner's mind. We should not only re-enter our world without a pre-existing frame of mind (paradigm) but also with a focus on that which is particularly important for us.

We are not living on Brugh Joy's ranch or residing in a Hawaiian refuge; rather, we are living in a VUCA-Plus world that requires us to focus on our "ultimate concern" (Tillich,1957/2009) We are to transform the VUCA-Plus conditions on behalf of this concern. Transcendence is not for the "faint of Heart" and must be used to leverage only those changes in perspective and practice at the Essence of our "Beingness."

Conclusions

The spiritual matters associated with transcendence are difficult for many of us to address. It is hard to spend time in an ideational train that is filled with passengers we don't really know and might find it hard to understand. They often seem to be speaking a different language and to be viewing the world passing by in a unique and challenging manner.

Spirituality is particularly elusive for those of us who live in the highly secular (and troublingly profane) world of the mid-21st century. I struggle mightily with these matters myself. Spirituality eludes me even with a deck and setting sun (or fire and music) that provide a mini-sanctuary for potential mini-transcendent reflection. An opt-out option awaits each of us. We can scramble down the rabbit hole and dwell in a wonderland that requires (and allows for) no transcendence. However, this option provides us with no long-term relief or refuge.

We must instead acknowledge and address the sacred foundation of our world if we are to live with and transform the VUCA-Plus conditions of our contemporary world. This often requires that we "get a little help from our friends" Collaborative dialogue is of great value. We also might look to the wisdom offered by some of those who have written about these matters over the past century (or perhaps the last 1,000 years).

My own reflections on secular and sacred aspects of our new (ab)normal have benefited from the wise counsel offered by many thinkers and doers. I offer my deep gratitude to Donella Meadows. I only knew you for a short period of time but recall vividly the time spent at your home as you produced yarn on your spinning wheel and wisdom in the thoughts you shared about the dynamics and leverage points of complex systems. You spoke of secular matters, yet the Essence of Spirit and Sacred spun from your wheel and words.

Now out to the deck. It is Spring in Maine and the sun will soon drop below the horizon . . .

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Appendices

Appendix A

Revisiting COVID-19 Policy: A Psychological Perspective on Consideration and Compassion

[Note: early in 2020, I published an essay concerning policies that were being or could be enacted in response to the emerging COVID-19 healthcare crisis. I focused in particular on policies in the United States but considered the issues relevant in all countries. One year later, I reviewed the ways policies were and were not engaged. We had, and still have, much to learn from this brief history, as we continued to address the COVID-19 challenge—and prepare to manage pandemic crises in the future in a more effective manner.

The millions of infections and many hundred thousand deaths related to COVID-19 speak tragically to the failure of countries throughout the world to deal effectively with the current virus. From this failure, we can choose to sit back and hope either that there will be no future virus or that somehow things will be better the next time. Instead, we can devote time and energy to identifying the people who made the mistakes. We can blame them and punish them for their arrogance and ignorance.

There is a third option. We can choose to learn from our collective mistakes. As those who are advocating the creation of learning organizations and learning societies have noted, we are not "stupid" when we make a mistake, but we are "stupid" when we continue to make the same mistake. There is no way to avoid making mistakes in a world filled with volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity—along with turbulence and contradiction (VUCA-Plus). The issues surrounding COVID-19 certainly qualify as VUCA-Plus challenges and it is naïve to assume that mistakes would not be

made. This essay is based on the conclusion that our third option must be chosen. We must learn from our mistakes, rather than live in a world of denial--one filled with action-less hope or blame.]

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> *"What if this virus . . . can teach us a little about holding contradictory ideas once again? What if it can allow us to see that we're not as stupid as our political parties want us to be, or as unidirectional as our TV channels seem to think we are? A purple America is a far more interesting one than the red or blue one that some insist on.*
>
> *What time demands now is a new form of contrapuntal thinking. We do not need to simplify. We need to scruff things up. We need to be brave enough to reach across the aisle. And the voices that really matter will be the ones that come from underneath, not above."—Colum McCann*

When the virus first hit, early in 2020, we tended to ignore what was happening right before us. In part, ignorance was easy to engage because the virus produced very few noticeable symptoms. As Nicholas Christakes (2020, p. 204), a quite knowledgeable documenter of COVID-19 has recently noted, this virus produces no grotesque physical symptoms (such as diarrhea, vomiting, odors, and discoloration of skin). Furthermore, most of the early victims of this virus were outside of public view. Many sick people were sequestered in rest homes, and other health-care facilities or were alone at home with no one to witness their suffering.

Christakes (2020, p. 205) observed a divide early on "between those who know someone who has died and those who do not". As the virus became more widespread this divide went away. Furthermore, COVID-19 seemed to become more "democratic"—it seemed to infect and kill without regard to socio-economic status or race. More recently, epidemiologists have provided us with less convenient truth. We have come more recently to the painful

recognition that there are major differences in the rates of infection and death resulting from income and skin color.

Basic Assumptions

By the middle of 2020, we were coming in many societies, to the collective realization that COVID-19 was a much more challenging enemy than many other viruses. While other viruses in recent years (including an earlier version of the current virus) have had a major impact in some countries, COVID-19 was having an impact in virtually every country—including the United States. Several important decisions needed to be made individually and collectively.

At one level, the decision was quite easy. It was guided by a basic, shared assumption: we had to act thoughtfully and compassionately. We all knew that the correct thing to do was to engage in a series of actions (or inactions) that would assist in ameliorating the impact of COVID-19. We were to observe social distancing when going out in public. We were to stay at home whenever possible, wash our hands, and engage in other sanitizing practices. All of these were deemed important. A simple term was even coined to subsume all these practices: "nonpharmaceutical interventions" or NPIs.

Social Distancing and NPIs

We all knew that only through social distancing (and other preventative actions) could we flatten the COVID-19 curve and bring our society (and other societies) back to normal. But was this assumption about NPIs valid? Could these socially based interventions do the trick in blocking the invasion of the virus? Some epidemiologists from respected universities (such as Harvard University) offered some "inconvenient truths", based on their careful modeling of future trends in the infection and mortality rates. In a *Boston Globe* article titled "There's only one way this ends: herd immunity", Jeff Howe (April 12, 2020) offered the following sobering observation:

> It's easy to forget that if a disease can't be contained – and its' too late for that in the COVID-19 pandemic—then there's only one possible ending to the story: We must collectively develop immunity to the disease. In lieu of a vaccine, that means most of us will need to be exposed to the virus, and some unknowably large number of us will die in the process. (Howe, 2020, p. K1)

The epidemiological experts introduced several different public policies to see what the impact of each policy would be on the rates of virus-related infection and death. Shockingly, it seemed that if a society consistently practices NPIs then rates of infection and mortality would drop off for only a short period and then rise again.

What was the reason for this potential trend? As Howe notes, it has to do with the inevitability of infection. We will all eventually become infected, so NPIs only delay the inevitable. Worst yet, this means that many of us would never build the antibodies created when we are infected and then come through the infection with built-in protection against the virus. What was to be done with this set of inconvenient truths? And did these truths influence the policies formulated and actions that were taken? Perhaps most importantly, as we reflect on the past several years, we must ask: was the influence that took place helpful or harmful?

Herd Immunization

The health experts who provided the dire predictions offered a radical alternative solution that most of us did not want to hear. They suggested that we alternate NPI policy with an "open up" policy that allows us to go out in public without protection. We get infected. Most of us survive the infection and build the necessary antibodies. This is called *herd immunization*.

When we all are self-immunized, the virus will cease to be a major threat. It will go away (coupled with immunizing injections for young people). Many people will die—but many people will live and rebuild our societies. It is a horrible option that was received

with little support by those of us who were living with the basic set of assumptions about doing "the right thing" (NPI). Based on this set of assumptions, only uncaring people who live by numbers (statistical projections) would ever propose herd immunity. We must throw out this option-–and perhaps dismiss scientists making this inhumane proposal.

The problem was that they might in some way be right. They might ultimately be more caring than the rest of us. At the very least, they are quite brave in articulating this "inconvenient truth." Perhaps, careful consideration should be given to the truths that might be embedded in the herd immunization policy.

Such a consideration never took place in the United States nor most other countries during 2020. Herd immunity became politicized (as did many other complex societal issues of the 2020s in the United States). Americans were either for or against herd immunity and those advocating the other side were assigned labels that led to frozen, polarized positions. Civic discourse regarding herd immunity was rarely found in most corners of our world.

The Outcomes

 What does it mean that no serious attention was devoted at any level to herd immunity? A serious proposal should have been offered and deliberated. It would include realistic appraisals regarding the virus's staying power which is at the core of a herd immunity policy. Embedded in this appraisal is an assumption that the virus will continue to linger, and outbreaks will occur at least sporadically—even with an effective vaccine and continuation of social distancing. While this assumption might be too pessimistic, it is important to keep the "worst case" scenario in mind—what behavioral economics call "premortem" planning (Kahneman, 2013).

The proposal would also include policies and funds that intensify research efforts in discovering one or more vaccines that continue to combat the virus even as it morphs. The proposal would

incorporate a third, critical element: procedures for distributing the vaccines so they would be universally and equitably available in all countries. A continuing commitment to NPI (social distancing and other effective preventative measures) would accompany this proposal. Effective and widespread testing and contact tracking would also be essential, especially to gain greater insight into the virus's spread and the ongoing extent to which self-immunization is occurring.

While this proposal was never offered (or at least never given serious consideration) in the halls of government (such as the US Congress, or the White House), we can tabulate the extent to which elements of the proposal were effectively engaged in 2020. First, the vaccines did arrive before the end of the year, and this is an exceptional accomplishment—exemplifying the way private and public enterprises can work together to solve problems.

Second, there was effective testing and tracking in some countries—though not in the one country (United States) where one might expect this to occur. Third, the widespread engagement of NPI practices was to be found in most countries—though again not in many regions of the United States. Finally, we did witness the thoughtful enactment of both enforced NPI policies and equitable inoculation distribution plans in many countries.

With these noteworthy (and perhaps optimistic) examples of successful COVID-19 response in 2020, it is also important to note that a realistic appraisal of the perspective offered by advocates for herd immunity never took place. Politics and polarization overwhelmed any thoughtful or comprehensive dialogue. Ironically, many of the actions suggested by the Herd Immune advocates were engaged – but through thoughtlessness and defiance (a blending of arrogance and ignorance). Many US citizens did not comply with social distancing norms—flaunting the request for civic responsibility in favor of individual liberties.

As a result, a significant percentage of the population in the United States was infected, leading to what the herd immunization

advocates hoped would be a baseline of immunity. This baseline would, in turn, leave the virus with nowhere to turn and, like many other viruses, COVID-19 would simply fade away (with the occasional appearance I already noted). Tragically, this fading away has not yet occurred. This is perhaps because horror attending the herd immunity policy prevents citizens (at least in the United States) from collectively allowing it to happen.

Why were there mostly negative outcomes? First, we know that any considered decision about adopting a viable proposal and ongoing monitoring of its enactment requires valid information about who has been and has not been infected. There must be broad-based (if not universal) testing—and this testing was not widely or consistently available in the United States or many other countries. The real challenge was even greater. There must also be contact tracing after testing has revealed a positive COVID-19 result. With whom has this person been in contact and have they been tested?

This tracing was absent in most communities in the United States and elsewhere. Without this tracing, the hit-and-miss of herd immunity would be completely untenable. Issues concerning the cost of tracking were prevalent. Concerns about confidentiality and the disruption of work forces were expressed. Perhaps of greatest importance was the psychological factor: a general fear of other people emerges when tracing is implemented. "I don't want to know that other people might be infecting me!" Perhaps these diverse factors account for the absence of tracking—as does the politicization and polarization that accompanied virtually every aspect of the COVID-19 response in the United States (and many other countries).

We also know that herd immunization must include both the "artificial" immunity that comes from inoculations and the "natural" immunization that comes from being infected with and successfully recovering from a virus. Unfortunately, history suggests that "medicine [inoculations] has actually played a surprisingly small role in the decline of most infectious diseases

across time." (Christakos, 2020, pp. 86-87). Socioeconomic improvements and public health policy measures have been much more important, as has the successful implementation of NPIs. Socioeconomic and pharmacological (immunization) factors must play a complementary role in addressing future pandemic virus challenges—and effective NPI policies must be engaged alongside these two factors. In its pure form, herd immunization will not work.

There is yet another troubling point regarding herd immunization. This point concerns the projection of future trends. We are faced with the unknown about whether self-immunization is permanent—and if any vaccine can promise life-long (or even long-term) immunity. Can the virus transform itself and successfully assault one's body once again? And what about the false positives? These are the occasionally false assessment of one's immunization. We faced many complex problems regarding COVID-19 testing. VUCA Plus is fully present in the world of COVID-19. Decisions regarding how best to monitor this virus and the ways that the virus is best defeated are not easily made. Blame is easy to assign. A sense of helplessness is readily evoked.

What have we learned during the past year? In the future, how do we address complex, multi-tier pandemic issues? At the very least we know two things. First, we know that critical data must be generated and pondered regarding the ongoing status of the virus. Second, forums must be convened in which important debate regarding options can occur. As I have already noted, the data is not easy to acquire. The forum will be even harder to enact— especially if it is to be international in scope. The difficulty thus resides not only in the procurement of valid and useful information but also in the thoughtful consideration of the implications embedded in this data.

As human beings, we prefer not to consider negative options—for they create collective stress. We would rather isolate (censor) the inconvenient truth and demonize those who are conveying this

truth. The challenge is great for convening an international forum filled with constructive dialogue. To successfully convene this dialogue regarding future pandemic policies, we consider several factors about the human psyche. As psychologists, we might have something important to say about the process of collective (inter-societal) policy formulation. We have learned (and perhaps have always known), that medicine, mind, and heart must always dance together, especially when it comes to the exceptional challenge posed by a pandemic virus.

Slow Thinking in Systems

While we, *homo sapiens*, are among the brightest members of the animal kingdom, there are some major limits in our capacity to think clearly and systematically about the challenging conditions we face. First, we are inclined to view our complex world in single dimensions: it is hard for us to take multiple, interacting variables into account. Our colleagues at M.I.T. (just down the road from the Harvard epidemiologists) have created a powerful modeling tool called system dynamics that enables us simultaneously to consider multiple variables (Meadows, 2008). The modeling tools used by their colleagues at Harvard and other universities and research centers similarly enable multi-variable analyses.

Power, Delays and Butterflies

What are the outcomes of these analyses? Two particularly relevant insights are generated regarding the spread of COVID-19. First, there is the matter of rapid expansion in the outbreak. Something that is often called the *Power Law* is operating. As in the case of many systemic phenomena (such as birth rates, global warming, and nuclear explosions), the spread of viruses is exponential. There is a rapid doubling of infections as a virus spreads out (Christakis, 2020). The impact of a virus rapidly spreading is just as tragic as that of a nuclear weapon being detonated. The Nuclear Effect of a virus can't be underestimated. One day we look out at our world, and nothing appears to be amiss. The next day we find that our world has changed forever.

The second insight concerns delay. System dynamic theorists suggest that delays in any complex system often have the greatest impact on the way this system operates. It is more influential than other properties—such as the nature and size of entities operating inside the system. Delays can occur in the movement of entities inside a system, as well as the movement of information about these entities.

In the case of COVID-19, there were clear delays during 2020 in the flow of information about the virus between countries, and major delays in the production and distribution of testing equipment, medical supplies, and vaccines. Even more profound delays occurred in formulating and implementing public policies in many other countries regarding such matters as the tracing of infections and enforcement of NPI policies. The Delay Effect might be just as important as the Nuclear Effect in coming to terms with our failure to meet the COVID-19 challenge.

The results generated by system-based analyses are often counter-intuitive. That is to say, the models come up with outcomes quite different from what was anticipated. We are doing what is intuitively and humanely "the right thing". However, our caring actions may produce destructive (even catastrophic) outcomes. We might be finding that well-intended actions taken to meet the COVID-19 challenge have been way off the mark because we have not engaged in the system-based analyses advocated by system dynamics modelers. Our basic assumptions about compassionate acts might have to be questioned.

There is a second set of systemic insights that are equally disruptive of how we think about and reason through challenging (often VUCA-Plus) issues. These insights come from the application of *Complexity Theory. This e*merging interdisciplinary field of study focuses on systems that are not just complicated (many parts), but also complex (many interdependent parts). It is in their complexity that many systems become chaotic (Miller and Page, 2007).

While there are many troubling and unanticipated insights emerging from this field, the one that has received the most public attention is the *Butterfly Effect*. First offered by Edward Lorenz in his meteorological research, this effect concerns our inability to make valid predictions regarding the outcome of complex events given that a single (often quite small) event somewhere in the world (the fluttering of a butterfly's wings) can have a profound, widespread impact. It is because complex systems contain many interdependent parts that one small part can have a major impact on the entire system. Something like this effect might be operating in the case of COVID-19 and other epidemics.

We know, for instance, that the spread of SARS-1 in 2003 can be traced back primarily to one gentleman in China (Christakis, 2020, p. 37). This man, as a fishmonger, seems to have been a super-spreader of this virus. He was the butterfly of SARS-1. Similarly, the major culprits in the vast spread of Spanish Flu in 1918 were the citizens of Philadelphia. They ignored the warning signs and engaged in many events (including parades) that led to the spread of this virus (that had come to Philadelphia from a merchant ship) (Christakis, 2020, p. 72). Philadelphia was also a butterfly. On the one hand, the Fishmonger Effect came from the actions of one man, while the Philadelphia Effect came from the actions of an entire urban population. Both of these effects could be operating in the spread of COVID-19.

Jay Forrester, the original architect of System Dynamics, often declared: "Don't do something—just stand there!" One of Forrester's esteemed students and colleagues, Donella Meadows (2008, p. 171) has put it this way: "[There is a broad-based and compelling tendency] to define a problem not by the systems' actual behavior, but by the lack of our favorite solution." Meadows (2008, pp.171-172) goes on to describe a typical decision-making process:

> Listen to any discussion in your family or a committee meeting at work or among the pundits in the media, and

watch people leap to solutions, usually solutions in "predict, control or impose your will", without having paid attention to what the system is doing and why it's doing it.

Forrester, Meadows, and their colleagues strongly suggest that we need to reflect on our assumptions before taking any action. This might be what we should have done in 2020 regarding the COVID-19 virus—and what we must do when facing other pandemics in the near future. We must consider the Nuclear, Delay, Fishmonger, and Philadelphia Effects. This is quite a challenge—but we do have the modeling tools needed for this systemic consideration. But what do we do with the often counter-intuitive outcomes of these considerations? We must slow down our thinking when doing this work.

Slow Thinking

We need not travel far (just to a nearby building at M.I.T.) to find a complementary perspective on decision-making. I have already briefly cited the work of MIT's Daniel Kahneman. He is the Nobel Prize-winning author of *Thinking Fast and Slow* (Kahneman, 2013) who focuses on decision-making processes. Kahneman suggests that we are inclined to think fast about a pressing (and complex) issue, especially one that is filled with anxiety.

Instead, we should slow down our thinking to better understand what is happening and identify often untested underlying assumptions embedded within the issue. Like Forrester and Meadows, Kahneman urges us to stop for a few minutes (or a few days) before deciding and acting when we are anxious or when there seems to be social pressure to arrive quickly at a decision.

Kahneman and his behavioral economics colleagues write about the frequent use of *Heuristics* (simple, readily applied rules) that enable fast thinking to occur. Many heuristics serve us well in addressing daily problems. They make sense when we decide about mundane and often reoccurring matters. However, heuristics get us in trouble when we face a problem that is unique and multi-

tiered, such as formulating policies regarding the COVID-19 pandemic. We might be inclined to engage a simple values-based heuristic about saving a single life: "Your failure to social distance is endangering my mother's life!" The herd immunization option is immediately rejected, even in its more benign form: "This is nothing more than a Nazified decision to 'let them bleed!'" We have polarized the discussion and sped up the response being formulated by our "opponent."

In applying this heuristic to the virus epidemic, we move immediately to social distancing (and other preventative actions). We immediately decide to "stop the bleeding!" We make it quite personal: "People [including my mother] will live if we all stay at an appropriate distance from one another." Or "You don't really give a damned about other people or about me when you refuse to wear a mask!"

We won the day in many countries through our fast thinking and uncritical acceptance of the basic assumption of compassion. Widespread support for the NPI policy grew during the middle months of 2020. The NPI heuristic was temporarily effective in some countries –-such as China, Singapore, and New Zealand. Unfortunately, in many instances, this heuristic required a strong authoritarian mandate: "Everything must close down—and this is an order from your government!"

As Christakis (2020, p. 11) notes, a "social nuclear" weapon was engaged in China and emulated by other countries—though often with some variants. For instance, a "softer" and more humanitarian approach was taken in New Zealand that made implementing this policy more palatable. A culture of compliance in Singapore and China made implementation more feasible. The small size of Singapore also made implementation somewhat easier, while in China the NPI policy was implemented and enforced at all levels of government (Christakis, 2020, p. 10).

The rate of infection was soon creeping back up in each of these countries, especially among members of their communities who

are marginalized. Requirements regarding lockdown were eased at times. Citizens were spending more time out in public. They were social distancing, but this was not enough. The NPI restrictions were often re-instituted as infections and deaths once again rose. COVID-19 infections would come and go—as predicted by many advocates of herd immunization.

Restrictions also came and went—with citizens uncertain about what to do. This uncertainly, in turn, increased levels of anxiety— and this increased anxiety produced stress, which made citizens more vulnerable to many diseases (not just COVID-19). Christakis (2020, p. 143) identifies this as *Psychogenetic Illness* and offers the following disturbing description: "Fear can itself be contagious, forming a kind of parallel epidemic. Contagions of germs, emotions, and behaviors can act independently or intersect [as with all complex systems]."

Christakis noted that fear has an advantage over even the most contagious pathogens. People can contract a disease only through contact with other infested individuals. However, they can contract fear through contact with either those who are infected or those who are profoundly afraid. It is when fear is introduced into the 2020 drama of COVD-19 that we find not just psychogenetic illness, but also the inability of citizens to make slow, thoughtful decisions.

Regression and Search for a Silver Bullet

What then is the solution? How do thoughtful, systemic thinking and decision-making operate to help us effectively address future pandemics? Let's cut immediately to the chase. No immediate solution—no silver bullet--was available in 2020 to solve the problem. No social policy could bring the death rate down to an "acceptable level." Even though several vaccines were produced by the end of 2020, the major challenge of distribution remained— given the widely differential levels of economic vitality and availability of health-related infrastructures from country to country.

Dire predictions made by the epidemiologist may be coming true. We might need to slow down our thinking and challenge our humane, short-term perspective on confronting the virus with a broad-based application of social distancing public policies, complemented by vaccine-based immunization. Good intentions might not be enough. As Forrester and Meadows proposed, we must do a better job of thinking systemically. However, this might also not be enough.

For a moment we need to stand still rather than act—especially as we get ready for future pandemics. The herd is staring at us from not too far away. Our slow thinking might lead us to the difficult and anxiety-provoking conclusion that our policy must change. This recognition, in turn, creates more anxiety and pushes us back to fast thinking. Our rational system of thought and problem-solving will easily collapse. The movement to slow, systemic thinking will not be easy.

In many ways, the outcomes of our attempts to cope with COVID-19 could have been predicted. We know that all VUCA Plus issues are usually not handled thoughtfully by Americans (or virtually anyone else). These issues tend to be heavily ladened with anxiety—and this anxiety not only makes us vulnerable to disease (psychogenesis). It also impacts the way we think and feel about the source of the anxiety—in this case, COVID-19. Anxiety must be metabolized (transformed) in a way that contains and reduces this troublesome feeling.

Typically, metabolism only takes place by regressing to a lower level of thought and feeling. We turn "primitive" in assessing the lurking force or entity that wishes to do us harm. For instance, Christakis (2020, p. 21) notes that bats are often the ultimate culprits in the transmission of viruses (for some reason pathogens move easily between bats and humans). They are perfect sources of evil, having often been the source in many societies of profound villainy and horror (Dracula?). We envision bat-like, shadowy

viruses lurking in our closets, ready to bite us in the neck and turn us into flesh-eating zombies – or worse yet into political opponents.

In seeking to metabolize our anxiety, we not only identify evil forces and figures but also seek out safe refuge from this evil, by looking for a leader who can fight against or flee from this evil. This leader will offer simple ways to reduce anxiety. These ways often include not only identifying the evil enemy who "caused" the underlying problem and/or blocked its solution but also providing a simple portrayal of the problem itself. Such has been the case with "deliberations" regarding herd immunity.

As Daniel Kahneman (2013) and other behavioral economists have noted, we are likely to engage in "fast thinking" when confronting immediate, anxiety-filled challenges. The "slow thinking" required to sort through the VUCA-Plus labyrinth of COVID-19 infections and immunity was not widely engaged in the United States during 2020. USA citizens were not alone. Anxiety-provoked regression in thought, feelings, and actions pervaded the world. Authoritarianism emerged and reigned supreme in many societies. Leaders were obeyed even though they had no business being in this role. Stupidity filled the cracks and crevices of COVID-19 deliberations.

We know now that an effective policy should include NPI and carefully planned testing, tracing, and inoculations. We must account for the speed at which a virus spreads, as well as for inevitable delays in the flow of both resources and information. We must recognize that a virus can begin in the home of a fishmonger or spread in a city like Philadelphia. Butterflies are everywhere when it comes to pandemics.

We also know that all these matters are contentious and subject to conflict-filled deliberation. Truth and reality can be quite elusive. It is easy to regress individually and collectively when anxiety is saturating our thoughts and actions. As I have mentioned, we have tools that can aid our slow, systemic analysis of pandemic problems—despite the challenges we face in confronting these

problems. I am about to recommend a process that can help us make balanced decisions that are based on this analysis.

Managing Polarity

We must leave the confines of Cambridge Massachusetts so that I might introduce a new perspective on the best way to learn from the COVID-19 crisis of 2020 and to make decisions when faced with future pandemic crises. Specifically, I turn back to a model and process offered by Barry Johnson (1992/1996). His perspectives and related tools can guide our actions in the future. Specifically, I envision a hypothetical forum or series of forums convened to slowly and thoughtfully formulate a viable pandemic policy for the future.

Johnson suggests that polarity management can be used to handle everyday dilemmas. It can also be of great value in addressing major societal contradictions—settings where there are two or more legitimate but opposite forces at work. Can polarity management help us gain a purchase on a pandemic policy? I believe the answer is "yes". Along with systemic perspectives and slow thinking, polarity management might provide important guidance in the convening of a forum for constructive dialogue.

Both/And Rather Than Either/Or

Many of those involved in the deliberation regarding a pandemic policy have framed the policy as an either/or option. To quote Howe again, those offering the herd option are taking the following stand: ". . . the fact remains that herd immunity isn't merely a possible strategy. In the long run, it is the only strategy. The question, then, is how to get there responsibly." The proponents of NPI and social distancing offer an even more absolutist stance: "Withdrawing a social distance policy is unethical and immoral. It is counter to everything we hold precious as human beings."

I will frame our analysis around these two polar opposite stances and begin by identifying some of the benefits and disadvantages of

each policy. The benefits in both cases yield short-term (tactical) and long-term (strategic) outcomes. The disadvantages I offer relate to what we don't know and what might be an unexpected and devastating outcome.

BENEFITS: NPI/SOCIAL DISTANCE POLICY

- Preserve commitment to focus on welfare of each individual person
- Reduce pressure on health care workers and facilities
- Establish new social norms and interpersonal behavior patterns that can endure for a long time.

BENEFITS: HERD IMMUNITY POLICY

- Build a sustainable world community with most if not all people being immune
- Set realistic expectations regarding short-term impact of virus on human health.
- Set hard but realistic policies regarding health priorities with specific populations.

DISADVANTAGES: NPI/SOCIAL DISTANCING POLICY

- May lead to recurrent outbreaks of the virus and ultimately more deaths
- Will sustain global uncertainty about long-term status of human health
- We don't know if social distancing can be sustained by most societies
- May set precedence for short-term solutions to pandemic outbreaks in the future

DISADVANTAGES: HERD IMMUNITY POLICY

- We don't know if human societies can really tolerate large scale death rates without reverting to short term actions.
- We don't know what this policy would do in terms of its impact on the ethics and soul of human societies.
- Who would make the decision about who lives and who dies?

These initial summary statements regarding the pull between two public policies can be framed as polarity. What tends to occur is that we linger briefly on the advantages inherent in one of the options (in this case the NPI/social distancing policy). Then we begin to recognize some of the disadvantages associated with this option.

We are pulled to the second option. If social distancing and other preventative actions are not the answer, we must embrace a herd immunization policy. Yet, as we linger on this second option, we

discover that this policy has its flaws and disadvantages. We are led back to the first policy—and must again face the disadvantages inherent in this first option.

The swing begins from left top to left bottom to right top, to right bottom, and back again to left top. We are whipped back and forth. As anxiety increases regarding the COVID-19 virus and future pandemic viruses, the vacillation also increases in both intensity and rapidity. This is the dynamics of polarization in full operation. Inadequate time and attention are given to each option.

The Polarity Graph

Here is what the polarity-based dynamics of our policy deliberations might look like if mapped on a polarity graph:

Compassion AND Consideration

Action Steps
How will we gain or maintain the positive results from focusing on this left pole? What? Who? By When? Measures?

FORMULATION OF A VIABLE PUBLIC POLICY

Action Steps
How will we gain or maintain the positive results from focusing on this right pole? What? Who? By When? Measures?

Values = positive results of focus on the left pole

Values = positive results of focus on the right pole

A. Establish uniform public policy regarding social distancing when around other people.
B. Identify ways to effectively monitor conformity to this policy.
C. Clearly identify the conditions under which it is appropriate to leave one's home.
D. Accurately test all citizens to see if they are infected or free of infection to determine when social distancing policy can be withdrawn.

Upsides/Positives
1. Preserve commitment to focus on welfare of each individual person
2. Reduce pressure on health care workers and facilities.
3. Establish new social norms and interpersonal behavior patterns that can endure for a long time.

Upsides/Positives
1. Build a sustainable world community with most if not all people being immune.
2. Set realistic expectations regarding short-term impact of virus on human health.
3. Set hard but realistic policies regarding health priorities with specific populations.

1. Reduce or eliminate the social distancing policy.
2. Accurately test all citizens to determine the infection status for everyone. Carefully monitor status of the virus infections in terms of specific populations
3. Provide caring, palliative care to all citizens who are infected and are likely to die.
4. Prepare studies of the infection patterns and identify lessons to be learned regarding future pandemics.

COMPASSION and **CONSIDERATION**

1. Growing debate about the failure of the social distancing policy.
2. Vascilation with continual refinement the policy followed by continuing failure.
3. Growing wide-spread sense of helplessness and hopelessness.

Downsides/Negatives
1. May lead to recurrent outbreaks of the virus and ultimately more deaths.
2. Will sustain global uncertainty about long-term status of human health.
3. We don't know if social distancing can be sustained by most societies
4. May set precedence for short-term solutions to pandemic outbreaks in the future

Downsides/Negatives
1. We don't know if human societies can really tolerate large scale death rates without reverting to short term actions.
2. We don't know what this policy would do in terms of the impact of the ethics and soul of human societies.
3. Who would make the decisions about who lives and who dies?

1. Growing debates about who should receive care.
2. Major social unrest among those receiving the least care.
3. Centralization of health care policies (with questionable vested interests).
4. Growing wide-spread fear that social fabric is being ripped apart.

Fears = negative results of over-focus on the left pole to the neglect of the right pole

Fears = negative results of over-focus on the right pole to the neglect of the left pole

Early Warnings
Measurable indicators (things you can count) to will let you know you are getting into the downside of the left pole.

Stuck in Current State/Stasis

Early Warnings
Measurable indicators (things you can count) to will let you know you are getting into the downside of the right pole.

A Polarity Analysis

With this preliminary framing and charting completed, we turn to what happens when we try to *maximize* the benefits of either side at the expense of the other side. In the case of sustaining the NPI/social distancing policy, the maximization of social distancing and related preventive measures would (as the epidemiological models indicate) tend to delay but ultimately accelerate the rate of infections and virus-related deaths.

Furthermore, we now know that the masks don't necessarily prevent the virus from spreading. The virus comes in through the sides of the masks most people wore during the COVID-19 crisis (much as water comes in through the edges of our goggles, not through the glass). We would soon be in despair regarding the failure of this NPI/social distancing policy. At some point, we might adopt the herd policy but would probably find that it is too late.

Conversely, if we completely override the NPI/social distancing policy and fully adopt the herd infection policy, then we would witness massive death rates and would be deeply concerned within a short period (throughout the world) regarding the "heartlessness" of this policy. We would inevitably find that projections about the potential number of people who would die before herd immunization was established are staggering.

We would feel deeply wounded by the decisions being made. If we are religious and view ourselves as culpable, we might ask our deity for forgiveness. Other members of our society would be inclined to launch a vitriolic attack against those who enacted this grotesque policy. As a result, we are likely to return to the NPI/social distancing policy—though only after many deaths. And the NPI/social distancing policy would still be flawed.

Barry Johnson warns that we must not try to maximize the appeal of any one side. Instead, we must carefully *optimize* the degree to which we are inclined toward one side or the other, and the

duration of our stay with consideration and enactment of this side. How serious is our focus on this one side? How long are we going to sustain this focus? Optimizing also means finding a reasonable and perhaps flexible setpoint as we act in favor of one side or another. Finding these acceptable optimum responses and repeatedly redefining them is the key to polarity management. This strategy is aligned with the suggestion made by many health policy experts that we should periodically adopt the NPI policy when confronting new viruses rather than abandoning it.

The fundamental recommendation to be made in managing this particular polarity is to remain in the positive domain of each policy option long enough to identify all (or at least most) of the key benefits and potential actions to be taken that maximize these benefits. Time should also be devoted to and attention directed (slowly and systemically) toward identifying potential ways the two policies can be brought together on behalf of an integrated response to the pandemic challenge. Consideration and compassion potentially join hands.

This polarity management recommendation is not easily implemented, especially when the stakes are high (as they certainly were in 2020 regarding COVID-19 and will be with any future pandemic crises). As Johnson and others engaged in polarity management have noted, effective management of polarities requires constant processing of vigilance, negotiation, and adjustments.

The second option regarding future pandemic invasions that public health policy experts offer seems to be aligned with this recommendation of dynamic vigilance. In agreement with the polarity management experts, those advocating the second option suggest that we must continuously seek and refine a dynamic, flexible balance between consideration and compassion. Each side's beneficial contributions can be enjoyed without engendering serious negative consequences. We must accompany this balance with immediate, tangible correctives, such as wide-spread

distribution of better-designed masks, increased testing, and improved tracing.

Policy Alarm Systems

Johnson makes one more important point regarding the management of polarities. He identifies the value inherent in setting up an alarm system as a safeguard against overshooting either side of the polarity. It would be prudent to install an alarm system that warns us when we may be trying to maximize one side and are on the verge of triggering negative reactions.

The alarm signal for the NPI policy might be a growing debate regarding this policy's failure and the continual refinement of this policy by leaders in politics and business. We would observe a struggling system: abundant vacillation, frequent reversal of existing policy, and very short-term implementation, criticism, and abandonment of revised social distancing policies and stay-at-home orders. The signal might also be apparent at a deeper, psychological level. There would be a growing sense of helplessness and hopelessness.

The alarm system for safeguards against the herd immunization policy might be increasing debates about which people should receive the most care and who should "tragically" be allowed to die (for the sake of the "herd"). Major social unrest might arise among those populations receiving the least care and witnessing what seems to be cavalier societal disregard for their welfare. Control of health care policies might become more centralized and embedded in vested social and economic interests. At this point, the herd policies might save lives in the long term—but destroy (forever) the social fabric of the communities where these policies are being implemented.

Hopefully, with the safeguards in place and the alarm signals identified, we can constructively address the negative consequences of each option. As a result, we might even be in a place to formulate an integrative, global policy regarding the

handling of recurrent global pandemics (which will occur inevitably in our boundaryless world). Optimally, this formulation could be thought through slowly with consideration of broader (often counter-intuitive and systemic) dynamics. Johnson's polarity management would be joined with the wisdom of Forrester's systems thinking and Kahneman's slow thinking.

Consideration and Compassion: An Integrative Strategy

What are we to do when confronted with new pandemic outbreaks? A cursory analysis would suggest that we have three options. Meadow's systems-thinking and Kahneman's slow and fast thinking are relevant to each option. Each choice we make also involves the polarity of consideration and compassion.

The First Option: Denial or Disillusionment

The first choice is to do nothing and avoid making a tough decision. We won't even engage in polarity analysis when considering this option. This choice, like that made in many countries during the first months of the COVID-19 virus, is filled with denial and underestimation of the virus' impact. It is a form of freezing—the behavior our ancient ancestors learned to engage as one of the slowest and weakest animals on the African Savannah (Sapolsky, 1998). The threatening entity (lion) may leave if we do not move. We similarly are very slow and weak when somehow escaping or fighting the virus. However, unlike the lion on the Savannah that might overlook us or lose interest in us if we remained frozen, the COVID-19 virus knew where we were and had no intention of leaving us alone. The same will undoubtedly be the case with any future viruses.

Freeze can take on several different forms in response to mid-21st-century realities. We might remain at home, escaping into reality TV, watching the televised replay of some sporting event, or getting absorbed in a warm and soothing "escapist" novel. Alternatively, as one of my colleagues in China reports, we can become disillusioned

with what is happening (or not happening) in the world: "In the past [2020] we tried one of the other options and found it useless or found that no one else was dancing to the same tune. Why should I do anything, when no one else seems to be doing the right thing? Why trust my government, when they botched it with COVID-19."

This choice is what Dr. Michael Osterholm (2020) of the University of Minnesota calls the *Fool's Position*. It requires massive denial of the reality we now face—or a pervasive sense of helplessness. This denial and sense of helplessness, in turn, yield disillusionment, dysfunctional public policy, and dangerous collective action. These are also key ingredients in a toxic brew of stress, depression, and illness. In sum, freezing leads to horrible health and societal outcomes since individual and collective freezing produces highly stressed physical and societal systems.

The Second Option: Doing the "Right" Thing

We can choice to engage in fast thinking by embracing the basic assumption about being "good". We are compassionate. We are caring. At one level, this basic assumption makes evolutionary sense. We have survived as humans not because we are fast or strong – or smart. It is because we care about one another. We are saturated with a chemical called oxytocin that pulls us toward bonding and nurturance. It makes us feel good when we help other people and makes us feel horrible when we sit back and watch other people suffer. The triggering of oxytocin requires none of the systemic and often counter-intuitive thinking espoused by Forrester and his system-dynamic colleagues. Why create a computer-based model when everyone around us is crying for help?

We do what we immediately know is proper. We win approval from our family, friends, and fellow citizens (and win elections). Perhaps of greatest importance is our self-approval. We do the "right" and "decent" thing—based on what the media and our chosen political leaders encourage us to do. In 2020, we made sure our masks were

in place. We remained at an appropriate distance from other people when going to the supermarket. We were the perfect practitioners of NPI. Other people at the supermarket nodded their appreciation for the sensitive way in which we were looking after their welfare. There were wonderful short-term benefits for us. However, these NPI actions do not necessarily lead to long-term systemic benefits for our society.

We are wonderful people—but we might soon die alongside those who admire us. Our actions may lead to unanticipated outcomes. Perhaps we should remain frozen—so that we do not harm. This might be the state of widespread disillusionment in her own country that my Chinese colleague identified. The system is not responding as it should to our generous actions. We are kind, but the virus is persistent. As an experienced clinical psychologist, my Chinese colleague warns that this might be an inevitable stage in the psychological reaction to pandemics. I wonder if her reflections on reactions in Chinese are applicable elsewhere in the world (including the United States).

If we wish to avoid disillusionment, then we might try hope. We can engage in fast thinking by hoping that a cure or source of prevention will come soon when the next pandemic arrives. Hope is certainly a good thing—we know that hope can be healing. Furthermore, hope might be warranted. Scientists achieved miraculous results in 2020 concerning the production of vaccines. Cures were on the way within one year. Perhaps we will only have to hunker down and engage in proper social behavior when the next pandemic arrives.

Is this a viable option? Can we rely on hope and optimistic anticipation as a public policy? Our COVID-19 enemy has been agile and widely present. It has not easily succumbed to human intervention. The virus is too widely distributed to prevent re-occurring outbreaks in remote global regions (where preventative or curative measures are absent). This could happen in the case of any future virus. There are likely to be repeated struggles with

containment throughout the world. The epidemiologists of 2020 might be right: there could be a long-term, drawn-out struggle against future viruses. We must be engaged in painfully realistic assessments of future viruses.

The Third Option: Humane or Defiant Herding

The third option leads us directly to this painful assessment. We become considerate realists. Fast thinking occurs when we make the third choice—just as it does with the second choice. This leads to the absolute abandonment of any individual behavior related to recommended social behavior. "Why bother with social distancing and other preventative actions when they don't make much difference in the long term."

We abandon all compassion and sense of collective responsibility. We turn away from NPI and any recognition that recommended norms regarding social behavior can be humanely managed. We could blend consideration with a pinch of compassion by supporting a public policy that allocates caring resources to those many citizens who must become infected to gain immunity. Instead of focusing on testing and contact tracing or sitting around hoping for a cure, waiting for the eventual global immunization (as happened with many other illnesses and pandemics in the past, such as the Spanish Flu in 1918).

At its extreme, we redirect our primary attention and resources away from finding new curative drugs and preventative inoculations. We focus on the reinforcement of existing healthcare services. Those who are infected should receive the best possible care. We are hunkering down in a way that differs from that involved with the second choice. We turn with this third choice to the caring and thoughtful treatment of those who suffer and are most afflicted. We become good Samaritans through our thoughts and actions. In the long run, it is a choice that is just as compassionate as the second choice. In the short run, however, the outcomes of our car can be quite brutal. Many people about whom we care will die. This can lead us individually and collectively to a

polarity response--a swinging back to the second choice or freezing in place (choice one).

This third option requires that we make hard decisions regarding who we think should receive caring attention (and who should not receive attention). Important questions arise. What about racial minorities? What about those who are poor or incarcerated? Do we ignore those involved in occupations requiring close contact with other people—such as those in the meat-packing industry or restaurants? And what about the healthcare workers themselves? Who do we save and who do we lose? Who makes the decisions, or does no one take responsibility for the horrible choices that must be made? We could end up with a Darwinian survival of the fittest scenario.

It becomes even more troubling. While Darwinian survival could be with us for a lengthy period, there is a potential reality from which most (if not all) of us will want to escape. It is not clear that we will eventually win the battle against the virus. Globalization gives the virus an edge in its capacity to spread quickly (Christakis, 2020, p. 298). While we gain an edge with our advanced medical expertise and knowledge about human behavior (the NPI factor), the virus can counter. Many mutations are manufactured (Christakis, 2020, p. 307). At best, there might be a standoff, with the virus resembling a nasty cold. We would end up in a lingering "cold war" (to offer a horrible pun).

This is a "nice try" but a feeble attempt at Hope. The virus will produce much more than sniffles—it will continue to kill many people. Christakis (2020, p. 297-298) forces us to consider the cold reality of potential defeat or at least our engagement in a never-ending war:

> . . . it is not clear why human beings should be favored to win against microbes in an evolutionary arms race. Microbes have been around a lot longer than humans, are more numerous, do not mind dying, and can mutate rapidly, evading our defenses. . . . While we can use our

wits to win, perhaps against a pathogen causing a particular outbreak, and while we can occasionally eliminate a pathogen . . . it is extremely doubtful we can win against all pathogens. Infectious disease care and control seem more realistic objectives than eradication.

Thus, even with equitable policies in place, we have to prepare ourselves (with this second choice) for the ongoing death of many people—including those we love. Religious institutions and other faith-based communities might have to play a major role as we seek to find some purpose or meaning in the afflictions that will become rampant with the next pandemic. We would have to allow our public policies and careful consideration of the long-term outcomes of a social distancing policy to temper (and sadly often replace) our compassion.

Our grieving and sense of guilt could overwhelm us as we engage in an unwinnable war—much as we have done many times in our history when engaged in physical warfare. As I noted, we might be propelled individually and collectively to the second option when faced with these prospects and the associated deeply felt emotions. Polarity vacillation could replace consistent consideration and compassion. We would certainly be tempted to refreeze (and turn to the first choice). We would become disillusioned as my very caring colleague in China observed.

Perhaps the Only Options: Fight, Flight, or Freeze

Before leaving the third option, we must acknowledge that it has become more complex. There is another way in which the third choice can play out. It might not just be a matter of thoughtful and compassionate treatment of those afflicted. It might also be a matter of actively challenging widely held beliefs regarding the virus and social NPI policies. We might fight. This is an important variant on the third choice. Like the engagement of humane treatment, this variant eliminates the freeze and moves us to action. As found in many countries during the COVID-19 pandemic, we become defiant protestors. Our adrenaline-based

push toward fight replaces our oxytocin-based yearning for nurturance and bonding. If this doesn't work, we are pushed toward flight and a sense of profound powerlessness and alienation.

Fight occurs when we demonstrate outside the offices of our elected leaders. We prepare signs that say: "Give me liberty/freedom or give me death!" We produce YouTube videos that question the validity of a social distancing policy. "What are the real intentions driving this policy?" "Who started it out? Was this pandemic embedded in a plot hatched by government officials in some enemy country that was intended to destroy us? Were some major corporate leaders producing the virus to make money by creating the vaccine to defeat this virus?" "I want to know what really is happening!"

In many ways, these defiant actions are a form of flight rather than one of fight. We are scared and run away to a world not based on reality. In declaring that the next pandemic is something of a conspiracy that benefits political leaders or the medical establishment, we flee from the scene of the actual infection to a scene that is less immediate but ultimately more fearful. We shift attention from health and medicine to politics and business practices. At the very least, we declare that social distancing policies (or other changes in recommended social behavior) violate our freedom. This freedom, in turn, is not based on reality, for freedom without shared responsibility is nothing more than anarchy.

If we can't win a fight, and if flight leads us to a world that doesn't exist, then the only real option is freeze. Without the viable option of confronting the virus with either fight or flight, we remain still and quiet—like the African Savannah rodents. Weak and small, when faced with the virus, we refuse to do anything different from what we have always done. We give up. We wait for things to be less threatening. We freeze in place.

Unlike the rodent, who unfreezes after several moments and shakes off the adrenaline coursing through its body, humans remain

frozen for a long period and rarely shake off the freeze once we are unfrozen. The tragic (and ironic) outcome of sustained freeze is that our body is stressed and increasingly vulnerable to many disease entities –including viruses. Thus, by doing nothing, we are doing something: each of us is exposing our body to the virus that threatens us. We are inviting the Lion to enjoy us for lunch.

These fight, flight, and freeze variants on the third choice are represented in the work done in 2020 by two Southern California physicians. They posted several YouTube videos that created major controversy—noting that many deaths reportedly caused by COVID-19 were attributable in fact to other causes (such as heart disease). They suggested that the reasons people who are infected with the virus die can often be traced back to poor lifelong health habits (such as smoking and obesity). These physicians proposed that the virus only accelerates a decline in health that has already taken place. Hospitals, according to these two physicians, were being encouraged (perhaps even forced) to ascribe the death to COVID-19. As with the herd immunization advocates, these physicians declared that social distancing was delaying the inevitable.

Will similarly credentialed healthcare "experts" appear on social media during the next pandemic? They might very well be effective. Our two Southern California physicians have engaged all three adrenaline-based responses: fight, flight, and freeze. They are fighting against the COVID-19 experts who they believe are nothing more than liars and opportunists.

Flight is also involved, for those who read their statement can escape to this new reality. We can readily believe the virus is nothing more than a blip on the healthcare radar. Freeze is engaged when we do nothing but sit back after reading the social media post. We wait for the various Lions (competing experts) to fight it out rather than eat us—without acknowledging that these experts aren't the real Lions. The virus is waiting to attack us when we become more vulnerable. Our two physicians are correct in noting

that COVID-19 is aided by our existing physical (and mental) conditions.

The story gets even more interesting and complex. The challenging perspectives of these physicians led the YouTube staff to shut down their YouTube presentations. Was this decision by YouTube appropriate and justifiable? Most of us (who are not radical social libertarians) would agree that there should be screening of inaccurate or inappropriate content (such as pornography) or blatantly misguiding information. However, should the observations made by these two physicians be considered harmful? Do we know that what they declared is inaccurate? What should be the policy regarding future challenging presentations regarding a pandemic?

As one might imagine, the uproar about this "censorship" was widespread and passionate. Fight was soon engaged by many people. As one of those commenting on the censorship declared: "If you stomp on our freedom—that has one ending and its violence. Spoken like a true American!" At the very least, the actions taken by YouTube speak to the major challenge of establishing an open forum for considering various options. What should we make of these variants on the third choice? Don't we want a forum that welcomes the sharing of diverse perspectives regarding something as complex as a global pandemic?

Do we instead wish to continue fighting against these inaccuracies? Instead of the forum do we flee from the disturbing reality ("these are quacks who will soon be ignored")? We can always freeze in place ("there is nothing to be done—we are helpless and ignorant consumers of misinformation"). Forums are hard to convene when the anxiety of COVID-19 compels us to fight, flight, or freeze.

On the one hand, those declaring "Give me liberty/freedom or give me death" may be opening the door for deadly misinformation. They actually may be choosing their death (from the infection). At the very least, they may endanger lives and add greater stress to the healthcare system by sharing or accepting misinformation. They

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are declaring their freedom—but are constraining the freedom of others in our society.

On the other hand, we are remaking a fragile democratic society if we block out all discourse about the validity of specific pandemic policies. The compelling tendency to fight against, flee from, or freeze in the face of misinformation and inconsiderate (non-NPI) social behavior may lead us to a society without the fourth "F" – which is freedom. Fight, flight, and freeze not only make forums difficult to convene. They also lead us to the creation of a society without freedom. This is a society in which very few of us wish to live.

The polarity has been fully and passionately engaged with the presence of these three variants on the third choice. Fight, flight, and freeze may win the day—and help viruses eventually win the war. In the future, how do we transform the polarity between compassion and consideration into a constructive act that yields a viable social policy regarding a pandemic virus? We need an open forum for system-based, slow-thinking dialogue. This forum potentially leads away from fight, flight, and freeze to the identification of a fourth option.

The Fourth Option: Integrating Consideration and Compassion

We can choose a fourth option. We become realistic about the spread of future viruses and the interplay between induced immunity (via vaccines) and natural immunization (a herd immunity variant). This considered acceptance of reality is coupled with the compassionate enforcement of strong social behavioral practices (NPI) and with the development and efficient (and equitable) distribution of effective vaccines. This choice requires that we be quite thoughtful in formulating policy.

Can we construct a set of contingency plans that account for (but don't rely on) the potential of curative or preventative breakthroughs in response to the variants in pandemic viruses we

are likely to encounter? Slow and systemic thinking must be in place for this fourth option to be engaged successfully. This will not be an easy journey.

This journey requires that we become rational and caring citizens even though we will be anxious and prone to disillusionment and the uncritical acceptance of misinformation. We must become fully acquainted with the habits of our Lion (virus) rather than engaging in fight, flight, or freeze. After all, we are among the smartest (considerate) and most caring (compassionate) animals inhabiting the Savannah. This is our adaptive advantage—let's make use of this advantage.

From the perspective of this fourth choice, the best pathway requires that we bring about the integration of compassion and consideration—rather than these values and accompanying perspectives being framed as a non-reconcilable polarity. This fourth choice requires that social distancing (and other preventative actions) be consistently engaged.

We need to learn from what did and did not work in various societies during 2020 regarding NPI social behavior policies. The (at least temporary) acceptance of the social distancing policy (the upper left side of the polarity map) will only be effective if it can be applied flexibly and adaptively without a polarizing vacillation between this policy and the herd policy (the upper right side of the polarity map). The fourth choice also requires effective and widely accessible testing and a labor-intensive contact tracing system.

The continuing engagement of NPI in the future probably makes sense. A strict herd immunization policy does not make sense—for several reasons. First, we have not acquired sufficiently valid and useful information to make critical decisions about vulnerability in the future. Who is most likely to live and who is most likely to die? Epidemiologists now know more than they did before 2020—but the information isn't complete.

Second, many of us lack confidence that any governmental (or nongovernmental) institution can fairly handle such a difficult decision-making process (operating without prejudice or vested interests). Third, in 2020, we painfully discovered in most countries that there are not enough health workers, nor adequate facilities, to handle a significant increase in hospital admissions. It is unlikely that most future governments can fully fund these operations.

The NPI policy can be abandoned –even temporarily--only when there is valid information, trust in the government, and sufficient health resources. We will probably be positioned to adjust this policy when conditions are satisfactory. Writing in the middle of the COVID-19 outbreak, Howe (2020, p. K4) relied on the expertise of the epidemiologists when he suggests that "once more wide-spread testing is in place and hospitals have the resources they need to treat COVID-19 patients, then we could switch gears and allow for more exposure than we are allowing now." This perspective is probably appropriate when we face future pandemic challenges.

We can move even closer to the source of epidemiological expertise—the aforementioned Dr. Michael Osterholm (2020). As one of the experts who engaged in slow, systemic thinking when considering the best way to address the COVID-19 virus, Osterholm moves well beyond the domain of medicine and virology. He suggests that the fundamental question be framed as follows: *How do we maintain (preserve) our society*?

Along with many other epidemiologists, Osterholm came to the sobering conclusion that 60 and 70% of the people in the world ultimately will have to be inoculated or infected. They will either become immune to the virus or pass away. Furthermore, we will face the challenge of COVID-19 (and other viruses in the future) for many months (or even years). If Osterholm is correct, viruses will become a lingering factor in all societies, erupting in one community after another and bringing about social and economic disruption.

Many other medical and epidemiological experts have joined Osterholm in declaring that this will be a war--not a battle. Just as American (and other nation's) armed forces have been in Afghanistan for many years, so we must acknowledge that the COVID-19 virus –and many future pandemic viruses—are strong and persistent enemies that will not easily be defeated.

For us to somehow bear the weight of these long-term healthcare wars Osterholm insists that we engage near universal testing and tracking procedures that yield high-quality (valid) results. Medical leaders in all societies must know how to use high-quality testing procedures. They must avoid inequitable distribution of these tests or inferior tests that yield invalid results. A system-based contact tracing process must be engaged.

Appropriate NPI behavior is required. We now know that the COVID-19 virus can (and will) mutate. This virus (and future ones) learns how to adapt to the human organism. Our enemy is fleet-of-foot and capable of change. However, we have a defense against the virus to which it cannot adapt. We can be just as agile and capable of change as the virus.

This adaptive defense is our modification of social behavior. The virus can't move from person to person if the second person isn't nearby or if the second person is protected with an effective, "leak-proof" mask. The virus must knock on our front door if we remain at home —and we don't have to let it enter. The virus can't swirl around an unmasked crowd if this crowd is never convened.

With good and fair testing and tracing procedures engaged universally and with appropriate social behavior in place, leaders of our global communities can make difficult but informed decisions about where to allocate resources. They can determine which sub-populations in particular need to be protected and sheltered.

Only when effective testing protocols, tracing procedures, and social distancing policies are fully in place can we selectively answer the short-term question: how and when do we "open up"? Only

when we have valid and useful information can we answer the related question: to whom do we direct and how do we direct scarce medical resources when a new pandemic virus spreads worldwide?

As a slow, thoughtful analyst, Osterholm envisions a systems-based approach to addressing the COVID-19 crisis. He declares that this approach will only be effective if several other foundational elements are in place. These elements are required for societies around the world to survive. First, healthcare workers must be provided with functioning protective equipment. Greater attention must be given (and higher priority assigned) to production (and stockpiling) of this equipment.

Second, the healthcare systems they serve must not be overwhelmed. This means that communities must periodically issue stay-at-home orders. The opening-up question will be answered differently from one community to the next. The answer will change from month to month depending on up-to-date testing data and results of ongoing contact tracing. Healthcare resources must be greatly increased (and held in reserve) so that healthcare systems are not readily overwhelmed.

Osterholm offers a third foundational element which is much more psychological. He believes that a carefully crafted and implemented realistic pandemic-response policy will only work if leaders communicate in a way that is not only knowledgeable but also comforting. Osterholm points back to the "fireside chats" that Franklyn Roosevelt brought to the American people during the high-stress periods of World War II.

What would a digitally mediated fireside chat look like in the mid-21st Century? Who would deliver this chat? Would it be delivered by a different respected leader in each nation or is there some credible leader in virtually all countries? Is the world sufficiently "flat" (Friedman, 2005) that a truthful yet reassuring message can be delivered in a universally compelling manner by a globally acknowledged person of wisdom and integrity?

Collaborative Creation of the Future

While I agree with Osterholm regarding the need for competent and well-intended leaders who offer fireside chats (or the 21st-century equivalent), I think another foundational element must be in place to negotiate long-running pandemic wars while preserving our global societies. We need collective processes of wisdom and integrity that lead to benefits from both sides of this polarity. Caring compassion and thoughtful consideration must go well beyond the head or heart of an individual leader.

Ultimately, I would suggest that it is about *trust* in leadership accompanied by trust in collective wisdom and integrity. Furthermore, whether one is focusing on the actions taken by one person in a leadership position or many people operating collaboratively, it is about trust in competence (consideration) along with intentions (compassion) (Bergquist, Betwee, and Meuel, 1995). Effective leadership coupled with effective collaborative action is a tall order—but it is essential if our global society is to combat future pandemic invasions.

Social Constructive Dialogue

I would go even further. Something even more fundamental must be in place—and this additional condition is truly psychological. We must do something more than slow down our thinking and be both considerate and compassionate. We must collectively engage in extended, constructive conversations about policies and policies related to future pandemic challenges.

What Osterholm suggests is fundamental: how do we maintain (preserve) our society? These conversations must include members of our communities with diverse perspectives and expertise. Ultimately, we must engage an even broader, global set of communities—so the conversation is truly "flat" and global. With this conversational format in place, we can successfully confront a virus that is itself beholding to a world that is becoming "flat."

When this global forum has been convened, we must engage in what Ken and Mary Gergen (2004) describe as social constructive dialogue. This dialogue is required if we are to create a shared narrative (social construction) filled with both reality and hope—with both consideration and compassion. We cannot rely on our leaders to solve the virus problems. This would be nothing more than regression to an old (and highly authoritarian) reliance on other people to solve our collective problems.

We must avoid other people constructing our collective narrative about the cause and cure of COVID-19 (and other future pandemics). The social construction of a dominant collective narrative that is valid (consideration) and hopeful (compassion) requires that we do not leave the policy formulation or narrative construction to the designated leaders.

We must participate (and encourage our leaders to join us) in the engagement of a polarity-based analysis of not just the various options available to us in coping with the continuing crisis of COVID-19, but also new options available to us in addressing future pandemic challenges.

The Nature of Collaboration: Together and Apart

The challenge of convening a collaborative forum takes on an additional dimension in a world threatened with future virus outbreaks. The challenge resides at the very heart of who we are as caring and collaborating people. The virus has pulled us and our societies in two directions. It has driven us both toward one another and away from one another.

A successful convening of policy forums must address this bifurcation. I offer a brief description of this bifurcation, and turn to Robert Sommers, a keen observer of social behavior, as well as Nicholas Christakis, our often-cited physician and sociologist, for insights regarding the tendency of people under conditions of stress and anxiety (brought about by some threatening entity such as COVID-19) to move toward or move away from other people.

Sommers (1969) used the term *Sociofugal* to describe social spaces that pull us apart. I would suggest that the virus has created *sociofugal* conditions in many societies. Christakis (2020, Chapter 5) proposes that the anxiety induced by COVID-19 leads us to become suspicious of people who in some way threaten us with disease or social unrest. These "other" people leave us alone and fearful—in a state that Christakis (2020, pp. 143-144) equates to mass hysteria (such as what occurred with the Salem Witch trials).

For Christakis, this fear of the "other" relates directly to the anxiety-induced processes of psychogenesis that I identified earlier. When we are fearful and anxious, then we are more vulnerable to disease. When vulnerable, we are likely to fear other people and restrict our interaction with other people.

As we pull away (taking a sociofugal stance), we become even more fearful while seeking less interpersonal support. This, in turn, makes us even more vulnerable. We are suddenly trying to survive amid a perfect storm. Anxiety, disease, and interpersonal isolation are swirling around our Head, Heart, and Soul.

Conversely, Christakis suggests that the COVID-19 virus has drawn us together. This condition would seem to align with Sommer's description of *Sociopetal* space that encourages interactions and collaborations. As Christakis (2020, p. 211) notes: "Love and connection can make suffering more bearable". We take care of one another not only to heal the other person but also to heal ourselves. We wear masks not primarily to help ourselves, but to help one another.

Christakis (2020, p. 216) observes that it took us a while to recognize that we want to assist other people so that we might help ourselves. The virus may have taught us that we can be caring and compassionate beings. Our nurturing oxytocin might be kicking in and motivating us to confront the virus from the health-producing perspective of sociopetal caring. Psychogenesis can be a two-way street: our psyche can either help or hurt the processes of

protection and healing. We can run away or hang around to assist one another and ourselves.

Conclusions: A Compelling Image of the Future

As Osterholm has noted, the core question is: How do we preserve global societies while addressing the virus challenges? As compassionate and considerate people, we can address this core question. As people drawn toward a sociopetal stance of collaboration, we are motivated and positioned to take on the challenge of constructive dialogue. Taking this optimistic stance, I would offer a second, even more ambitious version of Osterholm's core question.

We might pose the following question: What is a compelling image of the future for each of our societies that should emerge from the COVID-19 crisis? This version of the key question arises from the work of Fred Polak (1973) who proposed many years ago that a viable society must always hold in mind (and heart) a compelling image of its future –a future to which members of society are willing to commit their talent, wisdom, and energy in a sustained manner.

We must invite people with multiple perspectives to the narrative-constructing and decision-making table if we are to address this bigger question. It is only through the sharing of diverse visions and ideas that we can build a compelling—yet realistic—image of a future existing post-COVID-19. We should listen to our learned colleagues, like Drs. Osterholm and Christakis, who are engaged in epidemiological modeling of the virus's behavior, documentation of the way we have responded to the virus, and identification of policies that are required to confront the virus. We must hear and appreciate their "inconvenient truths." We must respect how multi-tiered data can be processed and interpreted as a dynamic system. The contemporary system dynamics inheritors of Jay Forrester's and Donella Meadow's wisdom might lend a hand.

I propose that this is not enough--if we are to address this broader question about our collective future. We should recognize that epidemiologists and system modelers do not have all the answers. Christakis (2020, Chapter 7) notes that COVID-19 has had an impact that spreads far beyond the domain of medicine. We should bring many other people to the table—including ethicists, historians, economists, and sociologists.

This virus has taught us about our environment. It has forced us to notice what happens when humans aren't pumping as many toxins into the air. The virus has also encouraged us to learn about home cooking and sanitization. We are learning to be more comfortable disclosing the status of our health. We more fully appreciate the important role played by many "essential" workers--who were previously ignored. Perhaps most importantly, the virus teaches us about the fundamental nature of mortality. These are lessons that extend far beyond medicine and the human body.

We need yet another set of experts at the table if we are to be successful in not just formulating a compelling vision of the future but also implementing this collective vision. We should welcome communication experts who know how to help leaders conduct fireside chats in a considerate and compassionate manner. We should knock on the door of religious leaders to help us make sense of a God who both gives and takes—and to help us find the best way to wed our secular and sacred perspectives, concerns, and actions regarding future pandemic viruses.

Perhaps, the invitation should be extended to psychologists and behavioral economists. They do know something about human decision-making (at its best and its worst), as well as ways in which we, as human beings, change our perspectives and practices. As experts on the dynamics of groups operating under intense anxiety, human relations experts and consultants might help design and facilitate dialogues occurring at the table.

Together, we might be able to create an image of the future that is both realistic and compelling. This would be an image that is

saturated with both consideration and compassion. We hold the opportunity in our hands to create such an image of the future for all societies in our world. In anticipation of future pandemics, we can produce this image while addressing the more immediate lingering COVID-19 challenges. With this compelling image in place, we might be able to not only preserve our global societies but also enrich them.

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Appendix B

The Task-Method-Relationship Model of Group Functioning

A group of individuals convened to accomplish a specific task must fully appreciate the complexity of their dynamics. In addition to completing the task, group members must successfully address issues in the group that initially may seem unrelated to the task or decision at hand. These concerns may be seen as internal to the group's functioning, as distinct from those associated with accomplishing the task, and may seem unrelated to the task. Two kinds of issues may develop in a task group: those which focus on the method the group uses to work at the task, and those which emerge from and are related to group process and interpersonal relations. Proficiency in both is needed.

Task, Method, and Relationship Issues

Task issues are directly related to accomplishing the goals mutually and explicitly defined by members of the group as the reason for the group's existence.

Examples of task issues include:

1. What information do we need to prepare a realistic proposal?

2. Which of these proposals solves the problem most effectively?

3. Shall we approve this new course?

4. What will be the criteria for judging whether this project is successful?

Method issues focus specifically on ways the group will work on the task.

Examples of method issues include:

1. How are we going to make decisions in this group?

2. How do we ensure that the opinions of each member of the group are given an adequate hearing?

3. How long should this meeting last?

Relationship issues related to both the relationships developed through working on the convening task and relationships between members of the group and the total group itself, which members may have brought to the group or developed during its meetings.

Examples of relationship issues include:

1. I feel isolated from the group and hurt by the apparent lack of concern of other members.

2. I enjoy working with members of this group.

3. Jim and Susan never seem to be paying attention to me when I express an opinion with which they don't agree.

Task, method, and relationship issues are closely interrelated and tend to stimulate one another. For example, a group may experience considerable trouble arriving at a satisfactory decision-making procedure; this looks like a method issue. However, if what is blocking the group is a contest for leadership and influence between two group members, the group is faced with a relationship issue and no amount of work at the method level will resolve the difficulty. Both method and relationship concerns may be disguised as task work, with the group struggling to arrive at a task-related decision while process difficulties build up and multiply.

Mechanistic Analogy

The functioning of a decision-making group is comparable to the functioning of any other task-oriented system. A mechanical system, for instance, exhibits dynamics similar to those of task, method, and relationship. Like a group, a machine is designed initially to accomplish a specified task; for example, producing an automatic transmission. This design stage is similar to the state of group development in which methods are considered. The group must be designed to accomplish the assigned task.

Once a machine is designed and built, it should generate a minimum amount of friction- for in the short run, friction will reduce efficiency and in the long run, excessive friction will require considerable maintenance to keep the system operating. Similarly, a group must be designed in such a way as to accomplish its task with a minimum amount of disruptive interpersonal friction. Negative relationship issues, such as hurt feelings, anger, fear, mistrust, or poor communication, have been shown to reduce immediate efficiency. Eventually, it necessitates costly, time-consuming maintenance.

Of course, a group, like any human system, differs significantly from a mechanical system in that it incorporates emotional components, memory, and the capacity to learn. These factors combine to make the specific functioning of a task group significantly less predictable than that of a well-designed machine. In practice, this requires the method or design issues to be approached tentatively and experimentally. What appears to be a satisfactory decision-making procedure at the first meeting may turn out by the third meeting to be inappropriate for the task.

For instance, the group members may decide initially to make all decisions by consensus—but discover as they work on their task that the task is just too large and the time too short to permit effective consensus decision-making. The group may use that

information to revise its decision-making, subdivide the task, and form small task forces. Or, the initial method decision may generate process problems, like feelings of exclusion or not being heard; and the procedure may have to be adjusted to a more equitable one. The spirit of *tentativeness* that is recommended in dealing with method issues is less appropriate for task and relationship concerns.

Use of the T-M-R Model in a Decision-Making Group

An empowered decision-making group usually will begin work at the method level. It will decide how it wants to decide. Consideration, in this appreciative context, will be given to immediate relationship issues, although these may not surface until the group has moved into its "storming" stage. Very self-aware groups with high levels of previously gained trust may be able to deal early with personal goals related to the task, with interpersonal difficulties some members bring into the group from previous contact with the same people, and with issues of inclusion and influence. If method decisions are appropriate to the group and task; and once the relationship issues are dealt with, the group will spend most of its time working effectively at making decisions. Most decision-making groups, however, tend to begin their work at the task level and to remain there until serious conflicts or breakdowns (intense "storming") engender a stop-action review.

As they emerge, method and relationship concerns are misinterpreted as disagreements over the decision, because people's thinking is limited to the task level. As a result, the response is frequently one of pushing harder to make the decision. As the group continues to beat its head against the task wall, process issues emerge in more or less undisguised form: "That's what you said the last time and look what happened!" "*You* guys just won't accept any idea from a woman, will you?" At this point, without rapid group attention to the neglected process and method issues, the group is dangerously near dissolution.

An effectively operating group will tend to work at all three levels at different times. They will learn to appreciate the need for work at each level. When issues cannot be resolved easily at the task level, the group will move rapidly to consideration of its methods, to determine if those methods and procedures are impeding making a decision. Inadequate problem resolution at this level may indicate a need for the group to shift its attention to the feelings, personal goals, and relationships in the group. This underscores the need for someone to always play the facilitator (process observer) role in the group – even if members take turns.

This moving through task, method, and relationship issues occurs during several hours, days, or even years. Initially, this appreciative process is self-consciously engaged and feels artificial to group members. Over time, as the group develops, the process becomes more natural and efficient; members acquire skills at diagnosing the level of group difficulty and directing the group's attention to their perceptions. In a decision-making group with a very long life, like a project team working together over several months or years, effective group methods become fairly stable so that unless the composition of the task or the group changes radically, there is less need for constant reexamination. When needed, it is rapid and effective.

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Appendix C
Active Listening

I have borrowed from John Wallen's guidelines regarding the process of active listening. This summary of John Wallen's insightful guidance is a revised version of that offered in a book on coaching that I authored more than a decade ago with my colleague, Agnes Mura (Bergquist and Mura, 2013).

We might reflect on active listening skills and strategies in response to the challenges we now face collectively in the mid-21st century. These skills and strategies (as the list below) illustrate much more than just trying to "pay attention" to the speaker or, on occasion, offering a few words of encouragement. An active listener shares responsibility with the speaker regarding the clarity and mutual understanding of what the speaker is trying to convey.

It is not enough for an active listener to be present when someone is trying to communicate something, active listening requires the full engagement of both parties in the sending and receiving process. The following statements (we might call them "dictums") regarding active listening can prove helpful when reflecting on and engaging in active listening.

1. Stop talking: You can't listen while you're talking.

2. One conversation (and task) at a time: Don't try to engage yourself in two simultaneous conversations or activities. You may hear two people at a time, but you can't effectively listen and respond to each.

3. Seek out the speaker's perspective: Put yourself in his or her place to see more clearly where the speaker is going.

4. Ask questions: When you don't understand or need further elaboration or clarification, ask questions.

5. Don't interrupt: Give the speaker time to say what s/he has to say. Then and not before, ask your questions and/or take issue with what the speaker has said.

6. Show interest: Look at the speaker's face, eyes, mouth, and hands. This effort will help the speaker be more effective and enable you to concentrate.

7. Concentrate on what's being said: Focus your attention actively on the speaker's thoughts and feelings. Distinguish between irrelevant or insignificant data that is not central to the speaker's main thrust.

8. Don't jump to conclusions: Be fair to the speaker. By reaching conclusions prematurely, you may be off base, and the speaker may not have the opportunity to correct your erroneous conclusion.

9. Control your emotions and body language: Take responsibility for not losing emotional control as a reaction to the speaker's statement. Often your emotions (such as anger) will prevent you from understanding the speaker's true message.

10. React to ideas, not the speaker: Don't allow gut reactions to the speaker to influence your interpretation of what s/he says. The speaker's ideas may be good even if you don't like the way they are presented.

11. Listen for what is not being said: Sometimes you can learn as much by determining what the other person leaves out or avoids as you can by listening to what actually is said.

12. Share the responsibility for communications: Only a part of the responsibility for ensuring the message is clearly communicated rests with the speaker—the other part depends on the listener. Ask questions for clarification.

13. Organize the speaker's main thoughts and supporting ideas as the speaker proceeds: Don't wait for the conclusion. Keep summarizing mentally, then articulate the essence and subject it to verification.

14. Evaluate facts and evidence: As you listen, identify the significant facts and evidence and see how they relate to the point the speaker is trying to make.

Some people find that active listening is very difficult. They want to say something and wait for a lull in the conversation. They are (apparently) way ahead of the speaker in their thought processes and want to leap to the conclusion. Several techniques are useful for those who struggle with the discipline of active listening. First, while it is preferred that an active listener concentrates on the speaker and not take notes, anyone who finds active listening to be a challenge might decide they should take notes. In this way, they focus on what the speaker is saying, rather than on what they (the note-taker) want to say.

If privately taken, these notes can even contain some of the active listener's own thoughts and reactions. Rather than interrupting the speaker, the listener records reactions as notes. Notes can also be public. The listener can record them on a flip chart or on computer screens that are seen by both the speaker and listener. This public notetaking is aligned with the twelfth (shared responsibility) and thirteenth (organize while the speaker proceeds) dictums listed above.

A second, even more radical, tool—often called "shadowing" or "echoing"—is used by actors as they prepare for a new play. When a person is speaking, the active listener silently repeats the words just spoken in their own head. In this way, the listener remains focused on the speaker. They are distracted from their own thoughts and are less likely to interrupt. While this second tool tends to be closely aligned with many of the dictums listed above— particularly the seventh (concentrating on what's being said) and eighth (not jumping to conclusions) dictums, it does make it more

difficult to organize the speaker's thoughts (dictum thirteen) or to evaluate facts and evidence (dictum fourteen).

Regardless of the techniques or tools we use to become and remain active listeners, we must recognize that it is a skill set and an attitude that is not easily acquired and readily lost amid a conversation where there is a lot at stake, and we feel constrained by time. Active listening is also frequently lost when the speaker introduces something about which we believe we have the most expertise or experience. Or it might be something about which we don't think the speaker is knowledgeable. Perhaps the most difficult interpersonal engagement (where active listening is readily lost) concerns biases: we believe the speaker approaches a topic with a definite bias and it is a bias we don't share. Get out the notepad or begin echoing—and start listening! In the long run, you will find that the investment of time and attention pays off handsomely in avoiding confusion and misdirection.

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Appendix D
Empathic Listening

Agnes Mura and I (Bergquist and Mura, 2013) turn once again to the guidance offered by John Wallen regarding a specific interpersonal skill known as Emphatic Listening. Here is a revised version of the guidance we offered in our book on coaching.

While active listening is critical to effective interpersonal engagements, there is also the need for a second skill set and attitude. Empathy concerns grasping or understanding the other person's point of view—putting oneself in the other person's shoes or viewing a situation or idea through his or her "filter." It is one of the most valuable, powerful characteristics one can develop to strengthen interpersonal engagements, communications, and the ability to get things done through people.

Active Listening is directly aligned with an appreciative perspective. From this perspective, one is seeking to identify and support the distinctive strengths found in those with whom we relate. This includes the strength to be found in their ideas and own views of the world.

Everyone who associates with anyone, which includes all of us, practices empathy to some degree. However, our propensity varies by personality type and training. This is both a natural and a learned skill. Most of us can profitably extend the use of Empathic listening to all areas of our lives and make it an increasingly automatic and more effective habit.

Empathy does not involve voluntary or involuntary acceptance of the other person's viewpoint, but rather the development of an increasingly clear understanding of how that person sees the situation. In some cases, empathy may be confused with sympathy, which is accepting and identifying with the other person's ideas or

feelings. However, these two processes (empathy and sympathy) are distinctly different. Either process may be observed in isolation, or they may be (and often are to some degree) in action simultaneously.

There are three steps in the practice of empathy. As it becomes a more automatic habit, the three steps flow in a smooth fluid sequence, but it helps to recognize and understand each stage. The three steps are:

1. Recognize that every person in the world has a personal, unique, individual filter through which that person perceives reality. Certain hereditary factors, educational experiences, childhood training, attitudes, prejudices, and countless experiences comprise this filter.

2. Embrace this fact as useful and valid. Be willing to allow the other person the right to be their own self and to see reality in their own distinctive way – thus enriching the idea pool. This doesn't mean you should necessarily like the other person's point of view –just that you do not insist that everyone think exactly as you do and acknowledge that nobody sees the full spectrum of reality. While this is an easily espoused idea, it requires a lot of emotional and mental maturity to implement at any moment.

3. Only to the degree that the first two steps have been taken can one crawl behind another's filter and see how the world looks from this perspective. Of course, this can never be done perfectly because we can never completely set aside our own point of view. But the entire human communication process can be strengthened and enriched to the degree that those communicating do grasp or understand the various elements of the filter mechanisms with which they are dealing... first in themselves and then in their dialogue partner.

You will find that as empathy becomes a habit, your ability to relate effectively to others will substantially increase, the decisions arrived at jointly will be of higher quality and more readily implemented, and exhausting friction will be much reduced in the workplace.

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Appendix E
Paraphrase and Perception Check

John Wallen offers two strategies that should accompany effective listening. Featured in the book about effective coaching that I co-authored with Agnes Mura (Bergquist and Mura, 2013), these two strategies are Paraphrase and Perception Check. Here is a revised version of the descriptions we offered.

Paraphrasing

Tell people your phone number and they will usually repeat it to ensure they have heard it correctly. However, if someone makes a complicated statement, most people will express agreement or disagreement without trying to ensure that they are responding to what you said. How do we know that the remark being made means the same to us as it does to the sender?

Of course, we can ask the other person to clarify the remark by asking, "What do you mean?" Or by saying "I don't understand." However, after the other person has elaborated, we still face the same question: "Am I understanding this idea as it was intended to be understood?" A feeling of certainty is no evidence that understanding has taken place. And none of us are expert "mind-readers"!

If we state in our own words what the other person's remark conveys to us, then they can begin to determine whether their message is coming through as intended. Then, if there appears to have been a misunderstanding, the two of us can directly address that specific problem. We paraphrase to show someone what their idea or suggestion means to us. It is a way of revealing an understanding of our colleague's comment so that we might test that understanding.

Paraphrasing has additional benefits.

- It lets our colleague know that we are interested in her; it offers clear evidence that we want to understand what she has said.

- If we can satisfy our colleague that we do understand the message, our colleague will be more willing to attempt an understanding of what we have to say.

- It can move the comprehension of the conversation along for both parties by highlighting the essence of what is being said.

The process of testing for understanding through paraphrasing can take several different forms. To illustrate this point, we will begin with a simple statement: "Don is certainly not doing what I expected him to do on this project." The paraphrase can be a restatement by the recipient in her own words: "I heard you say that you are disappointed with the quality of Don's work on this project. Is this accurate?"

A second approach is based on past experiences or hypothetical situations. The recipient tests her understanding by offering an example: "Would Don's delay in getting the report to you be an example of what you mean when you say that Don isn't doing what you expected?"

A third approach involves testing limits: "Does this mean you are ready to fire Don from this project?" This third approach can be particularly clarifying for someone being coached, as they test the limits of their thoughts and feelings. It also requires considerable trust between the coach and client, given that the coach is pushing the limit and must not seek to use this form of paraphrasing to offer advice or promote a specific agenda indirectly.

The fourth approach can also be quite provocative and limit testing. It involves negative examples: "Does this mean that Don would be

doing what you expected if he never complained or stirred things up?" Like the third, this fourth approach requires interpersonal trust if it is intended to be constructive.

Perception Check

A paraphrase is only a check on the literal content of what the other person has said. If I paraphrase something you have said, I am attempting to understand the *literal* meaning of what you are trying to say. However, many messages also convey meaning related to *feelings* and *context*. In many cases, the literal content will be quite clear, while the feeling behind the content will be less clear but all the more important. Furthermore, the context (setting) in which the message is being delivered might alter the way it is being received. A perception check (sometimes called paraphrasing-for-feeling) is a way of being sure that understanding has taken place at all three levels.

The emotional content of most messages will be communicated non-verbally and, often, unconsciously, which makes that content particularly difficult to understand and describe. The context is also elusive and not easily discussed. Just as a paraphrase puts into someone's own words their understanding of what the other person has meant, a perception check can express their understanding of what the other person is feeling right now: "You seem to be feeling angry right now. Am I correct?" Perception checks can also provide valuable information regarding the impact that settings have on what has been said: "You seemed to be quite uncomfortable sharing your ideas during the meeting today. Is this an accurate assessment?"

A paraphrase may reveal a misunderstanding at the literal level ("No, that's not quite what I meant. What I intended to say was YYY."). A perception check may reveal a similar misunderstanding at the emotional level: "No, I'm not really feeling angry right now, but I am a little confused." It might also reveal an inaccurate reading of what occurred in a complex setting: "No, I didn't share

my ideas because I didn't think the committee was discussing anything important."

Alternatively, the perception check can generate an important conversation regarding feelings: "You thought I was angry. I wonder what led you to this conclusion—and I wonder if other people arrived at the same conclusion." Reflections on what occurred in this specific setting might also be provoked: "I wonder if my silence was interpreted by other people as a sign of discomfort? I was feeling a bit tired and perhaps uninterested in what was going on. Do you think my silence impacted what was going on during the meeting?"

When used independently or together, paraphrasing and perception checking can ensure that we have more fully understood the presenting perspectives and concerns of the other person.

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Appendix F
Description of Feelings

I offer a revised version of another valuable communication strategy presented by John Wallen. This strategy was also featured in the book on coaching that I wrote with Agnes Mura (Bergquist and Mura, 2013).

When we seek to improve our interpersonal relationships (especially those that have been problematic) it is often helpful to explore ways in which we might effectively describe our feelings as they relate to this relationship. It is important to distinguish between the expression and description of feelings when exploring ways to convey how we feel. The *expression of feelings* usually occurs at the moment of an emotion-filled interaction. Conversely, the *description of feelings* usually takes place at a slightly later time, when the two people engaged in the emotion-filled interaction seek to understand what occurred.

Most people think of themselves as eminently logical, especially in work situations, often denying (to themselves and others) the emotional coloring of their statements and actions. However, because emotions can never be eliminated from intense interactions, we must *identify and describe feelings* rather than act them out. This is especially important in a professional context, where decisions to be made are often complex, impactful, time-pressed... and therefore stressful.

Any spoken statement can convey feelings. Even a factual report such as "It's three o'clock" can serve as an expression of anger or disappointment. However, as we all know, it is not just the words that convey the feelings. What determines whether the statement is perceived as a factual report or a message of anger or disappointment? The key factors are often the speaker's tone,

emphasis, gestures, posture, and facial expression. Nevertheless, verbal statements can be used to communicate feelings. These verbal statements are critical when we face a complex, emotional, or critical engagement with another person.

We all have experienced feelings being conveyed by words. We know what it is like to be the recipient of feelings communicated by people who are:

(1) *issuing commands* ("Get out!" "Shut up!"),

(2) *asking indirect questions (*"Is it safe to drive this fast?"),

(3) *making accusations* ("You only think about yourself!")

(4) *offering positive judgment* ("You're a wonderful person.") or

(5) offering a negative judgment ("You're too bossy").

Notice that although each example conveys a strong feeling, the statement does not say what the feeling is. None of the sentences refer to the speaker or what they feel. By contrast, the emotional state of the speaker is precisely the content of some sentences. Such sentences will be called "descriptions of feeling." They convey feelings by naming or identifying what the speaker feels. "I am disappointed." "I am furiously angry!" "I'm afraid of going this fast!" "I feel discouraged."

How do we discern the difference between expression and description of feelings? When are we describing our feelings and when are we conveying feelings without describing them? Trying to describe verbally what you are feeling is a helpful way to become more aware of what you do feel. A description of feelings conveys maximum information about what you feel in a way that probably will be less hurtful than commands, questions, accusations, or judgments. Thus, when you want to communicate your feelings more accurately you will be able to do so.

To illustrate and provide a framework for discussing the differences between the expression and description of feelings, we offer a few statements that all convey feeling. Any of them could have been

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offered by the same person in the same situation. Each sentence, however, illustrates different ways of communicating feelings by words. Let's start with an obvious statement: "Shut up! Not another word out of you." Commands such as these convey strong emotion, but do not name what feeling prompted them. What about the following: "I'm really annoyed by what you just said." She is describing her feelings, rather than just expressing them—though we still don't know what is annoying or why she feels annoyed. The description of feelings, however, at least opens the door to this further discussion.

What if we turn to three statements that seem to be conveying the same feeling: "Can't you see I'm busy? Don't you have eyes?" "I'm beginning to resent your frequent interruptions." and "You have no consideration for anybody else's feelings." The first of these statements (framed as questions) expresses a strong feeling without naming it. The second statement is a description: the speaker says he feels resentment. The third statement again is expressive but not descriptive. These accusations convey strong negative feelings; however, because the feelings are not named, we do not know whether these accusations stem from anger, disappointment, hurt, or another feeling.

A third pair of statements concerns a different source of feelings: "I feel discouraged because of some things that happened today." and "This has been an awful day." In the first of these statements, the speaker says she feels discouraged. While the second statement appears to describe what kind of day it was, it expresses, in fact, the speaker's negative feelings without saying whether she feels depressed, annoyed, lonely, humiliated, or rejected.

The fourth pair of statements convey more positive feelings: "You're a wonderful person." And "I really respect your opinions; you're so well- read." The first of these statements represents a value judgment. It reveals positive feelings about the other person but does not describe what these feelings are. Does the speaker like the other person? Is it a case of respect, enjoyment, admiration, or

perhaps love? By contrast, in the second statement, the speaker describes his positive feelings as respect.

Similarly, in a third set of statements we again can discern the difference between expression and description of positive feelings: "I feel comfortable and free to be myself when I'm around you." versus "We all feel you are a wonderful person." and "Everybody likes you." The first of these three statements is a clear description of how the speaker feels when with the other person.

The second statement is an example of expression, not description. The speaker does not speak for himself but hides behind the phrase "We feel..." Furthermore, "You're a wonderful person" is a value judgment and not the name of a feeling.

The third statement does name a feeling (likes), but the speaker attributes it to everybody and does not make clear that the feeling is her own. A description of feeling must contain "I," "me," "my," or "mine" to make clear that the feelings are the speaker's own—are within him or her. Does it seem more affectionate for a person to tell you "I like you" or "Everybody likes you"?

A sixth set of statements moves even further into the challenge associated with description rather than just expression of feelings: "If things don't improve here, I will look for a new job." "Did you ever hear of such a lousy place to work?" and "I'm afraid to admit that I need help with my work." The first of these statements conveys negative feelings via a conversation about the condition of things in this organization, but does not describe the speaker's inner state.

The second statement is a question that expresses a negative value judgment about the organization. It does not provide a description of what the speaker is feeling. Only in the case of the third statement do we find a clear description of how the speaker feels in relation to his job. The first two statements are criticisms of the organization that could come from the kind of fear described in the third statement. Negative criticisms and value judgments often

sound like expressions of anger. Frequently, the speaker's fear, hurt feelings, disappointments, or sense of loneliness are the primary sources of these negative value judgments and accusations

A seventh pairing of statements reveals a communication trick we often play on ourselves and one another: "This is a very poor policy" versus "I feel this is a very poor policy." The first statement is clearly a negative value judgment that conveys negative feelings but does not say what kind they are. What about the second statement? Although the speaker begins by saying "I feel," she does not then name that feeling. Instead, the speaker passes a negative value judgment on the exercise.

Merely tacking the words "I feel" on the front of a statement does not make it a description of feelings. People often say "I feel" when they mean "I think" or "I believe." For example, "I feel the Yankees will win" or "I feel you don't like me." Many persons who say they are unaware of what they feel or who say they don't have any feelings about something habitually state value judgments without recognizing that this is the way their positive or negative feelings get expressed. The speaker could have said that she felt confused, frustrated, or annoyed by the policy. She would then have been describing her feelings without evaluating the policy itself.

Many arguments could be avoided by describing our feelings carefully instead of expressing them through value judgments. For example, if Joe says the policy is poor and Fred says it is good, they may argue about its value. However, if Joe says he was frustrated by the policy (and why) and Fred says he was interested and stimulated by it, no argument should follow. Each person's feelings are what they are. Of course, discussing what it means that each person feels as he does may provide helpful information about each person and the policy itself.

An eight pair of statements concern feelings conveyed in a group setting: "I feel inadequate to contribute anything in this group." and "I am inadequate to contribute anything in this group." In the first statement, the speaker clearly says he feels inadequate. We must

be careful when categorizing the second statement. While this sounds much the same as the first statement, it says the speaker *is* inadequate—not that he feels inadequate. The speaker has passed a negative value judgment on himself.

This subtle difference is introduced because many people confuse feeling and being. A person may *feel* inadequate when contributing to a group and yet make helpful contributions. Likewise, he may *feel* adequate and yet perform very inadequately. A person may *feel* hopeless about a situation that turns out to be filled with hope. One sign of emotional maturity may be that a person does not confuse what he feels subjectively with the objective nature of the situation. Such a person knows that he can perform adequately in *spite of feeling* inadequate for the task. This person does not let feelings keep him from doing as well as possible because he knows the difference between feelings and performance. He is aware that the two do not always match.

A ninth set of statements furthers our understanding of the important distinction between expression and description of feelings: "I am a failure—I'll never amount to anything." "My supervisor is awful—he hasn't helped me at all." and "I'm depressed because I did so poorly on that performance review." In the first of these statements, the speaker has evaluated themselves as a failure. In the second statement, the speaker blames her supervisor rather than sharing her feelings. This is another value judgment and not a description of feelings. It is only in the third statement that we hear the speaker say that she feels depressed. The first and second statements illustrate the important difference between passing judgment on oneself and describing one's feelings.

Feelings can change and do change. To say that I am now depressed does not imply that I will or must always feel the same. However, if I label myself as a failure—if I truly think of myself as a failure—I increase the probability of acting like a failure. One woman stated this important insight for herself. "I have always thought I was a shy person. Many new things I really would have liked to do I avoided—

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I'd tell myself I was too shy. Now I have discovered that I am not shy, although I *feel* shy at times." Many of us avoid trying new things by labeling ourselves. "I'm not artistic." "I'm not creative." "I'm not articulate." "I can't speak in groups." We could recognize feelings that reside beneath such statements and realize that these feelings need not determine our actions and behavior. Maybe then we would be more willing to risk doing things of which we are somewhat fearful.

Finally, we turn again to statements about feelings generated in a group setting: "I feel lonely and isolated in my group." "For all the attention anybody pays to what I say I might as well not be in my group." And "I feel that nobody in my group cares whether I'm there or not." In the first statement, the speaker clearly is trying to describe his feelings. He feels lonely and isolated. The second statement conveys negative feelings but does not indicate whether the speaker feels angry, lonely, disappointed, or hurt. In the third statement, the speaker should have said "I believe" instead of "I feel" The last part of the statement tells what the speaker believes *other people feel* about her and not what she feels. The first and third statements relate to each other. "I feel lonely and isolated because I believe nobody in my group cares whether or not I am present."

These examples suggest ways in which the description of feelings can help ensure a constructive interpersonal engagement, as well as suggesting ways in which we sometimes deceive other people (and ourselves) by seeming to describe feelings but only expressing them. There is nothing wrong with the expression of feelings. This is part of what it means to be human and engaged in a dynamic interpersonal relationship. However, it is when we describe our feelings that a constructive dialogue can begin regarding the sources of these feelings. The door is open for conversations about ways our relationships with other people can be further enhanced--leading to improvements in our work and home life. Our relationships and conversations can be transformative if our language is "clean." With "clarity" we can help ourselves and people

with whom we relate re-state positions and feelings more specifically, descriptively--and therefore more productively.

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