
Coherency, as it relates to thinking and planning

... he looks at the world, completely coherent, without a loophole, clear as crystal, not dependent on chance, not dependent on the gods. Whether it is good or evil, whether life in itself is pain or pleasure, whether it is uncertain ... but the unity of the world, the coherence of all events, the embracing of the big and the small from the same stream, from the same law of cause, of becoming and dying: this shines clearly from your exalted teachings. Hesse

Holistic thinking has as its underpinnings a trinity similar to Clausewitz's trinity of war. Coherency, combination, and continuity comprise our trinity for holistic thinking. To unleash the powers of holistic thinking, we must first understand its constituent parts then strive to keep these elements in balance.

Coherency provides meaning and harmony among interacting parts of a plan. Coherency begins with a vision, a leader's or planner's mental sketch of a state-of-continuity. A leader's intent, which flows from the vision, sketches the state-of-continuity. Thus, a lucid and well-thought-through vision is the *sine qua non* of holistic thinking and planning,

It is by means of strategic vision that the statesman shapes and controls projected change instead of simply reacting to the forces and trends that swirl without direction into the future. He accomplishes this by dint of imagination and creativity and by balancing idealism with realism.¹⁷

Each plan's state-of-continuity links with a future state-of-continuity, a whole interacting with a larger whole. To be coherent, a vision extends from the present to the future. In an abstract way, the planner always peers beyond the final curtain of the state-of-continuity to form follow-on activities or states-of-continuity. These states-of-continuity must relate to other states-of-continuity's shaping conditions for coherency.

Holistic thinking and planning needs vision that enables parts to come together at the right time and right place to achieve desired effects. Effects influence conditions and eventually desired states-of-continuity. Understanding, which emanates centrifugally from the creator of the vision, cements constituent parts of a plan. As an example, in the American Civil War, General Grant understood better than any other general how actions in widely separated theaters of war should complement each other. We can more fully understand Grant's strategic

vision and its relation to coherency and the theory of wholes with help from historian James McPherson,

Perhaps Grant's greatest qualities as a commander were his wide strategic vision and his fixity of purpose....Grant's perspective embraced the whole scope of the twin theaters of war, and he was never deflected by purely geographical objectives from his main purpose of destroying the Confederate armies.¹⁸

To use coherency in any planning endeavor, we must recognize and seek balance between moral and physical domains, tangible and intangible elements of a situation. Deception, for example, shapes images in the minds of opponents; it provides a framework for surprise, and it helps keep our opponent unbalanced and fearful of treachery. Those who use deception create physical conditions such as marshaling, combining, and putting resources in place to add credence to the suggestion growing in an opponent's mind. They create images in the opponent's mind through suggestion and hints often implanted through manipulation of tangibles.

Combination, as it relates to thinking and planning

Many things, having full reference to one consent, may work contrariously:
As many arrows loosed several ways, come to one mark; as many ways meet
in one town; As many fresh streams meet in one salt sea; As many lines close
in the dials' center; So many a thousand actions, once afoot, End in one
purpose... Shakespeare

To combine things, similar and dissimilar, is a significant mental challenge; yet, combination is the key in understanding, then reaching a desired state-of-continuity. Combining parts or wholes of resources and impregnating them with life-force, constitutes art in holistic thinking and planning. Artistically combining parts of a whole becomes a collage that the spark of creativity brings to life. The collage acts out its life, focused on its goal, full of sound and fury, on the stage of strife¹⁹ only to wither eventually in the face of succeeding evolutions of change. Sir William Slim had some thoughts about combinations,

...a painter's effect and style do not depend on how many tubes of colors he has, the number of his brushes, or the size of his canvas, but on how he blends his colours...²⁰

But he also strongly argued for the absolute importance of timing and sequencing, without which even the greatest combinations and synthesis of combinations fail.²¹

To combine effectively, we must first fragment existing wholes, ours and our opponent's. We have to know and understand the highly interactive strengths, weaknesses, and characteristics of both sides in a competition. We can then combine the fragments into aggregates that help us reach our envisioned state-of-continuity or that provide a comprehensive understanding of interlocking wholes stretching into the future. We also can imagine the steps we must take to reach the initial state-of-continuity and its subsequent relationship with the future. Clausewitz helps us understand the concept of combination:

The strategist must...define an aim for the entire operational side of the war that will be in accordance with its purpose. In other words, he will draft the plan of the war, and the aim will determine the series of actions intended to achieve it: he will, in fact, shape the individual campaigns and, within these, decide on the individual engagements.²²

Planners realize that environmental, political, physical, and intellectual constraints have a strong influence on their choices of combinations, aggregates, and sequencing. In such a mental process, knowledge evolves from simple knowledge to complex, which is understanding, relationship, and relevancy. With such an approach, analysis and synthesis form an interactive, constantly changing whole.²³ With this very abstract whole, planners can form combinations of resources capable of structuring conditions and creating effects conducive to a desired state-of-continuity.

The theory of containment illustrates combination in holistic thinking and planning. Containment was our post-World War II foreign policy to thwart Soviet expansionist tendencies. Containment espoused a shrewd, measured, and firm combination of resources emphasizing our strengths and downplaying our weaknesses while accentuating the Soviet's weaknesses and neutralizing their strengths. National leaders enacted those combinations; strategic vision, perseverance, will, and a long-term perspective glued the combinations.

The father of containment, George Kennan, had an extraordinary way of thinking with strategic vision, "...that knack for seeing relationships between objectives and capabilities, aspirations and interests, long-term and short-term priorities."²⁴ Kennan's theory of containment combined political, military, economic, and psychological wholes. The policy postulated that combining diplomacy or resources would, over the long-term, persuade the Soviets to be less aggressive and to join the world as a

peaceful nation. By wisely using combinations of resources to satisfy a long-term state-of-continuity (the containment of Soviet expansionism) the United States was able to check reckless Soviet expansionism without resorting to the damaging effects of war.

Continuity, as it relates to thinking and planning

There is a history in all men's lives, Figuring the nature of the times decreased; which observed, a man may prophesy, with a near air, of the main chance of things as yet not come to life, which in their seeds and weak beginnings lie intreasured. Such things become the hatch and brood of time.
Shakespeare

Plans have no end; they're only parts of new states of being, parts of the evolving future. Because plans aren't ends in themselves, the planner's job never finishes, though planners feel compelled to seek closure.

Because of a constantly evolving future, holistic planners must create branches and sequels. In a conceptual sense, branches of a plan resemble the branches of a tree. Branches enable planners to accept planned deviations from an original state-of-continuity to a slightly different one. Branches are important because of volatility in the enactment of parts of a plan, outside variables, and vagaries of environment. Holistic planners develop sequels to enable them to move toward follow-on states-of-continuity. The underlying premise of states of continuity, branches, and sequels, *a priori*, is that change is never finite and the future is infinite.

Continuity links our actions with the future. Continuity also couples activities and wholes within the framework of a plan. Planners aggressively seek continuity to exploit relationships between wholes, combine wholes, develop relationships (connections) between wholes, and to know how and when to sequence aggregates. Present states-of-continuity strongly relate to future states-of-continuity. Created effects of a plan, in reality, build bridges to follow-on plans, bridges to the future. Thus, while working toward something that appears permanent, holistic planners recognize the *temporary nature* of any state-of-continuity.

With process toward a state-of-continuity, holistic planners create sequels based on feedback from enacting the current plan, new leadership desires, and information about effects. As the follow-on plan unfolds, planners again strive to build coherency through vision. To this end, they create conditions nurturing the sought-after state-of-continuity, maintaining momentum, developing combinations that make the best use of resources, searching for combinations that create synergy, and seeking coherency to understand relationships and links. As a plan unfolds, planners adjust to changes in the environment and think about even more sequels.

Flexibility is the life-blood of continuity; it becomes manifest in a planner's mind through planning branches. At the simplest level of abstraction, planners can anticipate reaching a desired state-of-continuity in many ways. A state-of-continuity resembles a floating cube -- the sides of the cube show part of the same whole, but when rotated, its sides present slightly different views. Planners, therefore, seek to vary combinations so that movement toward the state-of-continuity doesn't stop because of an incomplete view.

When attempting to maintain continuity, the desired state-of-continuity can't be sacrosanct. If situational variables warrant, the state-of-continuity should change. When a force initiates violence against an opponent, for example, unexpected effects can cause unexpected outcomes.²⁵ These outcomes provide opportunists with ways to adjust goals leading to a desired state-of-continuity. Typically, outcomes aren't intractable; actual outcomes differ from those imagined.

Variables and friction cause plans to unfold imperfectly. Furthermore, in every plan an opponent will oppose us. When faced with an unpredictable opponent, political variables, and normal friction, either surprise or obstacles will surface. If planners anticipated alternatives, or branches, that allow progress toward the state-of-continuity despite unforeseen events and have planned to adjust the state-of-continuity, the plan will be adaptive and effective. If planners haven't anticipated surprise or impediments to motion, the plan will be reactive and ineffective. Theorist Liddell Hart succinctly captures the need for flexibility by stating,

In any problem where an opposing force exists, and cannot be regulated, one must foresee and provide for alternative courses. Adaptability is the law which governs survival in war...²⁶

A holistic planner also has to think about linkages within a plan's framework. The planner has to create combinations of wholes, aggregates of partial wholes, strengthen their linkages, cause their activation, and

sequence them to promote continuity of movement toward the desired state-of-continuity. We can use Clausewitz's theory about war-thinking and planning to explain this continuity of linkages,

If we do not learn to regard a war, and the separate campaigns of which it is composed, as a chain of linked engagements each leading to the next, but instead succumb to the idea that the capture of certain geographical points or the seizure of undefended provinces are of *value in themselves* [italics mine], we are liable to regard them as windfall profits....By looking on each engagement as a part of a series, at least insofar as events are predictable, the commander is always on the high road to his goal.²⁷

Once again, if we continue to observe and construe events as isolated, with value only unto themselves, we'll forever fail to grasp the power of holistic thinking. We must be uncomfortable with solutions and we must constantly search for new combinations, more continuity, and greater coherency. We must strive to think and plan holistically.

Enlarging dimensions of minds: shaping the future

The world ... is not imperfect or slowly evolving along a long path to perfection. No, it is perfect at every moment; every sin already carries grace within it, all small children are potential old men, all sucklings have death within them, all dying people -- eternal life. Hesse

How can human beings change how they think and plan to shape the future actively? How can we learn to combine analysis and synthesis and think and plan holistically? The solutions I offer describe *how* to think, they do not prescribe *what* to think.

Simply put, the secret to holistic thinking and planning lies in something that has been around as long as man has breathed -- learning.

Three broad approaches form the principal underpinnings of learning.

- **First**, we must actively teach, coach, and counsel our subordinates, children, and students to learn how to engage in holistic thinking and planning. Such activity needs to take place at home and in our societal organizations. Learning of this type should complement, not compete with, traditional ways of teaching and learning.

- **Second**, we must accept the inevitability of the responsibilities organizations have for helping their people think and plan holistically. Along with improving the lot of humanity, businesses will improve their profits dramatically.
- **Third**, individuals must accept that they have a responsibility to think and plan holistically. Individuals must try to think and plan holistically to make sense of complexity and change, then excel in a complex and more than slightly deranged world.

We can call this approach *the triad of holistic thinking and planning*. The elements of the triad are leadership, organization, and individual; they must stay in balance, never tilting toward one element, always recognizing the interrelationships among the constituent parts.

We must also form a new paradigm for thinking and planning. Its foundations must be the imperative for attempting to achieve, in all we do, coherency, combination, and continuity. Our quest for **coherency** means we must strive for seeking the relationships of parts of wholes. These relationships are real and we need to make sense of them, to bring them to the surface of our collective consciousness.

We must also learn to combine pieces into wholes. Our efforts to combine must take into account bring together pieces that sometimes appear disparate along with combining those that are obviously related. Through effective **combinations**, we can achieve wholes greater than the sum of their parts. We can achieve synergy.

We must also realize there is never an end in anything we do. What we experience, even in death, is a state of **continuity**, connecting and stretching into the future with relationships much akin to the pearls of Indra.

We must adapt our attitudes to accept change as something positive. We must view change as a force that can help us shape the future. Author Frederic Brown has some interesting thoughts about the nature of change that currently confronts the United States:

Today, we peer into a future that promises increasing rates of change in all aspect of human endeavor. Knowing that, is it not prudent to plan and even to organize specifically to master change?...The salient leverage of the information age appears to be innovation and initiative...²⁸

When change becomes a positive instead of a negative force, its exploitation will come naturally. Change should cause neither paralysis nor muddling. Change can help us adapt to the environment and

accomplish goals. We also need to modify our *weltanschauung*. This change will be challenging but as physicist David Bohm explains,

...man's general way of thinking of the totality...is crucial for overall order of the human mind itself. If he thinks of the totality as constituted of independent fragments then that is how his mind will tend to operate, but if he can include everything coherently and harmoniously in an overall whole that is undivided, unbroken...then his mind will tend to move in a similar way, and from this will flow an orderly action within the whole.²⁹

As members of organizations, we'll be involved with thinking and planning. To avoid the pitfalls of reductionism and reacting, and to shape the future, we have to adjust the way we usually perform. Instead of concentrating only on analysis, we must remember that with analysis there will always be another mental step -- synthesis. With synthesis, we can create. We also have to think about opposites, wholes, and states-of-continuity from our perspective and from those of our opponents. Thinking about opposites will always be difficult; most people don't normally think dialectically. Yet, dialectic thinking can help us attain the type of creativity needed to use holistic thinking and planning.³⁰

In our organizations, we should form matrix groups that could promote the ascendancy of holistic thinking and planning. Decision makers must purposefully populate these groups with people who think dissimilarly. Also each member of a work-group could have a particular functional expertise; however, each would work toward accomplishing a thinking and planning goal that transcends personal goals and the goals of their parent organization. Senior leadership would appoint a synthesizer responsible for developing the plan. Synthesizers would search for relationships with members of the group, identify linkages, and pull together fragments into wholes.

To reach a desired state-of-continuity, synthesizers would encourage group participants to engage in higher-level thinking by searching for coherency, combinations, and continuity. A synthesizer would foster integration by requiring planners to participate in in-process-reviews and would ask planners questions to promote synthesis. A synthesizer would help find meaning, relevancy, and short- and long-term effects in planner's intellectual energy.

Neither instructors nor seminar leaders in any institution should teach method, procedure, or fact without helping students learn relevancy and relationships to other methods, procedures, or facts. Instructors must continuously ask students: So what? Why? What does it mean? How

does it relate to other things? How can we combine things to create synergy? Examinations, presentations, and papers can't be simple regurgitation of facts -- students must relate facts to other things, display synthesis, and create, evaluate, adjust, and criticize combinations.

Thinking and planning sessions should promote thinking by using synthesis, thus serendipitously encouraging holistic thinking and planning. Leaders should confront planners and challenge them to rise above analysis and reductionism, think at high levels, and search for combinations, relevancy, and meaning. They should subtly promote synthesis, the key thinking skill in holistic thinking and planning, by searching for coherency, meaning, and closure after each thinking and planning session.

Members of our organizations need learning experiences in high-level thinking and planning where they have to deal with a volatile future and work with complicated resources and states-of-continuity that appear unrelated. Through such processes, people in organizations will discover relationships of obvious and disparate entities. Through the discovery of relationships, synthesis will occur. Through synthesis, planners will learn to combine pieces of things into wholes. Wholes will have meaning and will relate to an evolving future. People in our organizations should engage in thinking experiences in which they have to deal with long-term effects.

After developing holistic plans, in a wargaming sense, *planners should design ways to defeat their plans*. To do so, they should concentrate on identifying relationships, searching for links among wholes, and destroying their own plan's coherence. From the results of this conceptual assault, planners should design their own alternative states-of-continuity and branches and sequels. Planners also should seek and design ways to exploit patterns and shapes through fragmenting wholes, synthesizing those fragments, and developing and aggregating new, more meaningful wholes.

We need to find creative thinkers and innovators and involve them in developing holistic plans to shape the future. Creative people enjoy developing new ideas, seeking relationships, and searching for unorthodox solutions. I don't, however, advocate complete reliance on creative thinkers, because "Too many innovators, each marching to his own drum, produce chaos."³¹ Very quickly we would live in a world of wonderful dreams in which reality would always remain shrouded by intellectual fog. On the other hand, if we live in a world controlled only by analytic

thinkers, we would live in a dark world dominated by exigencies and limits of reality. We would always deal with what is, not what could be. I believe we need to combine creative with analytic thinkers and require them to produce wholes relevant to our new century. In such an approach, opposites would interact to produce fresh, creative ideas tempered by realism.

Mental capability, our most treasured asset, has positive and negative sides. The positive side shows human beings being endowed with a wondrous, brilliant inner light manifesting itself through thinking. Through thought, we have the potential to create, to heal, to save. The negative side can lead us to seeing things in isolation, to being solipsistic, to succumbing to passivity, to sublimating positive will to negative fatalism, and to adhering slavishly to the status quo. Simply put, I believe a crucial contest rages within us. In this contest, the negative competes with the positive for dominance. If the negative side dominates, people view change negatively. If the positive side dominates, people run the risk of being overly optimistic. If balance dominates, people can create their futures.

Our minds need the balance that the negative side provides. The negative must interact with the positive to form a whole, maintaining a delicate equilibrium between positive and negative. Reducing the contest to its simplest state, failure to balance and exploit the wholeness of our minds means that change could cause reactive behavior, a philosophy of the righteousness of muddling along, or the deadly stultifying effects of mental paralysis.

Through these subtle yet real interactions of opposites a new, wonderful, higher-order, and creative synthesis can emerge. Thus, a 21st-century planner's greatest challenge will be encouraging that creative synthesis and holistic thinking and planning by controlling the mind's negative side while enabling the positive side to spring forth. This interaction of opposites and attendant balance will provide the brilliant ideas needed for creation and the pragmatism for these ideas to survive.

Our individual and collective intellectual strength is the quintessential element of the new century. Our intellects, individual and aggregate, constitute unexploited dimensions of potential power. To unleash or not to unleash the potential lying in our minds is our choice. We can change the way we think and plan and move into the next century in a positive way.

NOTES

- ¹ "Stars and Stripes," 8 October, 1994, Associated Press, p. 3.
- ² Goethe, introduced and edited by David Luke, (New York: Penguin Books, 1964), 280.
- ³ Webster's Third New International Dictionary 77.
- ⁴ Webster's Third New International Dictionary 2321.
- ⁵ Jane Henry, Creative Management, ed. Jane Henry (Newbury Park: Sage Publications, 1991) 3.
- ⁶ Peter F. Drucker, Managing for Results (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1964) 191.
- ⁷ Fyodor Dostoevsky, "Notes From Underground," Existentialism From Dostoevsky to Sartre, ed. Walter Kaufmann (New York: New American Library, 1975) 77.
- ⁸ Webster's Third New International Dictionary, 1905.
- ⁹ William Slim, Defeat Into Victory (London England: Cassell and Company LTD, 1956) 311, 537.
- ¹⁰ David Bohm, Wholeness and the Implicate Order (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1980) 172.
- ¹¹ Fritjof Capra, The Tao of Physics (New York: Bantam Books, 1975) 310.
- ¹² C. Eliot, Japanese Buddhism (New York: Barnes & Noble, 1969) 109-110.
- ¹³ Sun Tzu The Art of War, trans. and ed. Samuel B. Griffith, (London: Oxford University Press, 1963), 92.
- ¹⁴ Gary Zukav, The Dancing Wu Li Masters (New York: Bantam Books, 1979) 95.
- ¹⁵ Carl von Clausewitz, On War, trans. and ed. Michael Howard and Peter Paret (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976), 177.
- ¹⁶ Clausewitz 89.
- ¹⁷ David Jablonsky, "Strategic Vision and Presidential Authority in the Post-Cold War Era," Parameters XXI, No.4(1991): 3.
- ¹⁸ James M. McPherson, Battle Cry of Freedom (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988) 722.
- ¹⁹ William Shakespeare, Macbeth (New York: Bantam Books, 1988) 87.

²⁰ Slim 535.

²¹ Slim 294.

²² Clausewitz 177.

²³ William James, Psychology, ed. G. Allport (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1961) 120.

²⁴ John Lewis Gaddis, Strategies of Containment (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982) 27.

²⁵ Thomas Schelling, Arms and Influence (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1966) 75.

²⁶ B.H. Liddell Hart, Strategy (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, Publishers, 1967) 343.

²⁷ Clausewitz 182.

²⁸ Frederic J. Brown, The U.S. Army in Transition II, (Washington: Brassey's (US), Inc., 1993) 162.

²⁹ Bohm xi.

³⁰ Albert Hofstadter, "On The Dialectical Phenomenology of Creativity," ed. Stanley Rosner and Lawrence E. Abt, Essays in Creativity (Croton-On-Hudson: North River Press, Inc. 1974). Hofstadter writes on page 116 in this superb article about creativity, "The essence of dialectical thinking is to find in each case what are the oppositions, conflicts, contrasts, contradictions, the othernesses, estrangements, alienations, that are possible in the context and to find the notion that unifies them by incorporating and using rather than destroying their tension, a notion that brings them together to belong with one another in a mutual ownness, so that for the first time they can attain to a truth of being that is open to them."

³¹ Brown, 163.