

Finding What is Essential in a VUCA-Plus World III: Prioritization

William Bergquist

In the previous two essays and in this third essay, I introduce a diverse set of strategies and tactics which I believe provide a viable alternative to Serenity as a way in which to cope with pressing VUCA-Plus issues. This set of strategies and tactics concern the Essential concerns embedded in each of the VUCA-Plus issues. I turn in this essay to ways in which contradiction is transformed to prioritization.

A critical matter exists with regard to the process of Polystasis that I have introduced in this series of essay. We need to set the baseline as guide for predictions and actions. Competing priorities are often facing us. We don't know what is essential because each competing priority is Essential in one way or another. We may be able to eventually address both priorities but must do something right now with regard to 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 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.

Valuing and Sequencing

We prioritize in two ways. One way is through assigning a higher value to some options than to others. The second way is to assign equal values to all options but set up a sequential prioritization with some options being addressed before other ones.

Valuing

The first way is quite straightforward—but is often soul-wrenching given the importance (Essential-status) of each option. In making the difficult decision regarding this prioritizing, I return to the criteria of Essential that I introduced in the first essay in this series. I distinguished between those Essential matters that are aspirational (positive motivation) and those that are filled with apprehensive (negative motivation) (Bergquist, 2024):

That which is essential is situated at the top of any system. It can be represented as the tip of a pyramid of hopes and needs. From this perspective, that which is essential can be considered *Aspirational*. We believe that something good will be achieved which overrides everything else. . . . 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 in our life. Essential matters become existential. They receive our sustained attention because the future of our relationship, team or organization depends on our successful achievement of specific, essential outcomes.

I would go one step further than I did in the first essay. We need to be cautious about only prioritizing the Essentials filled with apprehension. When we are driven only by negative motivations (avoiding negative outcomes) then 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” that comes with addressing a crisis situation. Like Red Adaire, the famous oil well capper (who was played in the movie by John Wayne), we live as “Macho men” for the fire and the fury.

Conversely, we need to 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 often intermingle apprehension with aspiration. They frequently require a clear discernment between that over which we have control and that over which we have very little control. Slow thinking (Kahneman, xxx) 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 of this overlooking of the long-term 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 cost). 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 viewing of the game on TV or cable (thus bringing in money). From a short-term perspective, winning is Essential (bringing people to a winning team). From a long-term perspective, entertainment is Essential (bringing people to a competitive game).

Priority should also be given to Essential matters that involve problems, messes, dilemmas or polarities rather than puzzles. As I noted in the previous essay in this series (Bergquist, 2024), a puzzle is an issue that has clear answers, is provided in a direct, unidimensional format, and is easily accessed with regard to level of 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 level of success. Messes are to be found in settings where multiple 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 actually make it more difficult to address other parts. Finally, we have polarities—the challenging conditions which I address in the next section of this essay. Essential issues and parts of 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 often diverts our attention and energy from problems, messes, dilemmas and polarities that must be addressed before puzzles can be resolved on a permanent basis. Conflicting, confusing and intertwined priorities (which are common in a VUCA-Plus world) will make it virtually inevitable for everyday puzzles to repeatedly pop up. We must get on with the difficult work of addressing issues of greater complexity and scope than puzzles—otherwise we are wasting our time. I have tried to make this process of resolving issues a bit easier by recommending several

“transformational” processes in the first essay, in this essay and in the future essays in this series that make these issues somewhat more amenable to solution.

Finally, I suggest, as I did in the first essay, 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 and when the connection with many other parts of the system produces successful outcomes regarding this one Essential matter than much more like to Enable success regarding other Essential matters. For example, in the formation of plans to assist underserved populations in an urban or rural community, it is often of great value to identify the natural helping network(s) that already exist in this community. Typically, natural helping networks are sets of linkages among relatives, friends, and acquaintances, as well as informal and formal groups of service providers who interact at many different levels. These networks appear to revolve around a "central" person who is the focus of the network. 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 to take 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 really 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 going on.

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 tactics and strategies often reside in the head, heart and practices of those who serve as the invaluable Node of the network.

Sequencing

The usual—and “very polite”—mode of sequencing is for one of the parties to simply say “after you.” This is being gracious. We now know that this act of generosity 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 suggest that someone else speak at the present time while we remain quiet. This is all very nice—but not necessarily productive. The person who is being gracious might also be the one with the best idea. The person being invited to go first through the door might be feeling patronized by us. The person who is asked to speak first might actually be waiting to hear for us before speaking up (or they might simply not have much to say). Most importantly, graciousness should not serve as the foundation for thoughtful and 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 a meta-level conversation—especially when the matters being addressed concern Essentials. We should ask: “how do we best sequence our ideas and concerns?” Or we consider ways in which to identify immediate and long-term Essential priorities.

A more thoughtful suggestion is to begin with the “low hanging”. Which initiative is most likely to yield success. This can provide motivation to tackle the tougher initiatives. We are opportunistic. We go with the flow and make use of the existing momentum. This is an obvious suggestion and well-proven strategy. However, it risks “addiction.” We grow accustomed to the 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 our selection of 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 introduce in my previous essay on Essentials (Bergquist, 2024). In this essay, I considered ways in which we can transform complex issues and conditions into matters of systemic enablement. We engage a systemic analysis. We look at the interweaving of the issues we face and see that it is possible to leverage one or more of these issues by resolving these issues in a manner that benefits the resolution of the other issues. In other words, some outcomes can be valued not because of their inherent, isolated importance, but because successful achievement of these outcomes can lead to successful achievement of other important outcomes. Thus, in seeking to sequence action regarding several different initiatives, it is often appropriate to act first on the initiatives that impact several of the other initiatives. Making use of the network metaphor, we look for nodes and intersections so that these can first 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 there might be differences among us as to immediate priorities when seeking to sequence several initiatives, we might wish to slow down our work a bit and consider why we are engaged in this conversation. We make use of Peter Senge’s (Senge, 1994) five whys in order to move deeper into the purpose of our work. Often, the priorities will emerge when we become 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 because this will help us all get to where we want to be going collectively.

I offer a third 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 first engage something that is likely to provide the most immediate and clear feedback. That which is most “learning-ful” comes first. We are being appreciative. We appreciate the “kick-back” from a controversial move forward. We ascend one of the difficult peaks in the range, learn from this ascent, then move to 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 essay by suggesting that competing priorities are often facing us. They are often contradictory—this being one of the conditions of VUCA-Plus. We don’t know what is essential because each competing priority is Essential in one way or another. While we might wish to prioritize or sequence, there is also a way in which we manage and benefit from the contradictions that exist. We engage in the management of polarities—a novel and contemporary strategy.

In introducing this alternative way of managing two contradictory Essential pathways and outcomes, I turn to the work of Barry Johnson (1996), the “dean” of *polarity management*. Johnson’s perspectives and his related tools can guide our actions in the future. Johnson suggests that polarity management can be used in handling everyday dilemmas. It can also be of great value in addressing major societal challenges associated with the condition of 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 regarding the use of polarity management by turning to the ongoing personal and collective struggle regarding personal 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

Many of those involved already in the deliberation 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 associated with each Essential. The benefits in both cases yield both short-term (tactical) and long-term (strategic) outcomes.

BENEFITS: FOCUS ON INDIVIDUAL RIGHTS

Motivation to Achieve
Freedom to Innovate
Absence of Arbitrary External Control
Ability to Protect Personal/Family Interests/Property

BENEFITS: FOCUS ON COLLECTIVE RESPONSIBILITY

Motivation to Cooperate
Support for Innovation
Absence of Arbitrary Internal Control
Ability to Collectively Protect Both Personal and Community Interests/Property

The disadvantages I offer relate to what we don't know and what might be an unexpected and devastating outcome.

**DISADVANTAGES:
INDIVIDUAL RIGHTS**

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

**DISADVANTAGES:
COLLECTIVE RESPONSIBILITY**

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

Following are the typical actions steps taken to maintain and defend each of these societal positions:

**ACTION STEPS:
INDIVIDUAL RIGHTS**

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

**ACTION STEPS:
COLLECTIVE RESPONSIBILITY**

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

Following are the early warning signs that typically indicate that this societal policy is not working well or creating unintended problems (I will have more to say about this analysis a bit later):

**WARNING SIGNS ABOUT
INDIVIDUAL RIGHTS**

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

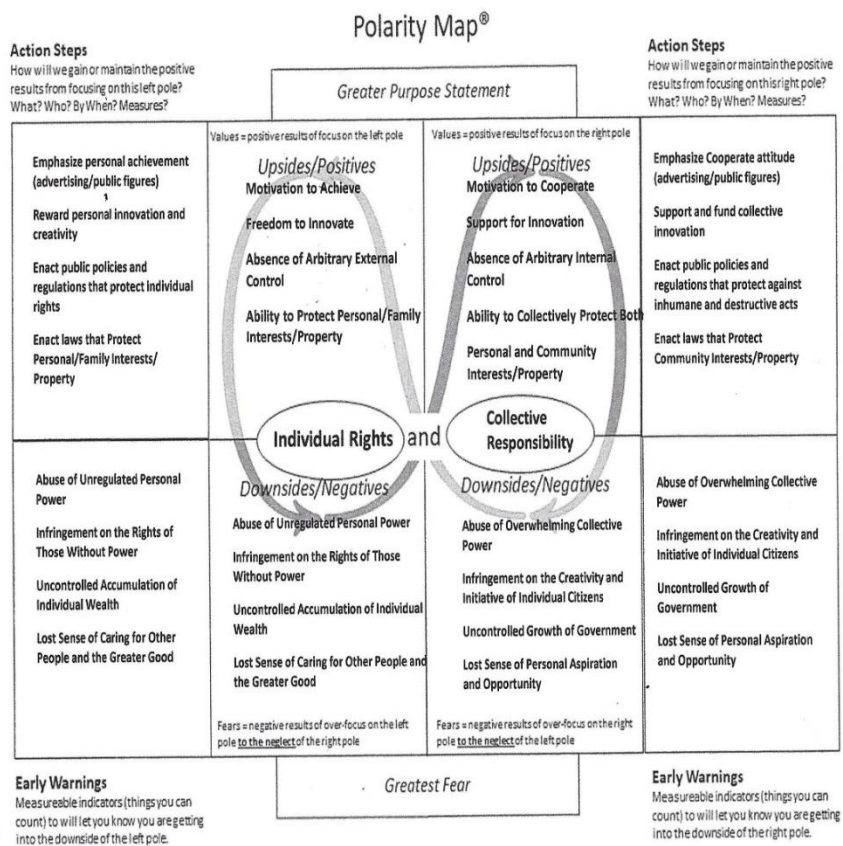
**WARNING SIGNS ABOUT
COLLECTIVE RESPONSIBILITY**

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 also 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 Polarity Graph

Here is what the polarity-based dynamics of our policy deliberations might look like if mapped on a polarity graph:



The swing has begun from left top to left bottom to right top, to right bottom, back again to left top. We are whipped back and forth. As concern (and even anxiety) increases regarding each perspective, the vacillation also increases in both intensity and rapidity. This is what the dynamics of polarization is all about. There is inadequate time and attention given to each option. We swing back and forth. This is the dance of polarity dysfunction.

A Polarity Analysis

With this preliminary framing and charting completed, we turn to what happens when we try to *maximize* the benefits of either Essential side at the expense of the other side. 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 an emphasis on personal rights does not inevitably produce increased desire to achieve or innovate. The “have-nots” are much more likely to fall into a state of despair and lethargy—alienated from the society in which they now live. We would soon witness societal disruption and even revolution as the power and wealth chasm grows wider. At some point, we might find some social reform (or at least increases in charitable contributions) but would probably find that it is too little and too late.

Conversely, if we completely override an Essential concern about personal rights and fully adopt the collective responsibility perspective, then we are likely to witness repressive and intrusive regulations that 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. 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 been in force for many years.

At the very least, there would be deeply felt (though often ill-defined) concern within a short period of time regarding the ultimate “heartlessness” of the collective responsibility perspective. Those advocating collective responsibility might have the best of intentions, but 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 about the potential number of people who would be served by new public policies and priorities become just this: numbers without a focus on the individual, distinctive needs of each citizen. 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 as well as the

duration of our stay with consideration and enactment of this side. How serious are we about focusing on this one side and how long are we going to sustain this focus? Under the best of conditions, we are living with a dynamic and highly productive tension. Can we live with and in this tension? Optimizing also means that we must find Polystasis—with a reasonable and perhaps flexible baseline as we act in favor of one side or the other. Finding these acceptable optimum responses and repeatedly redefining them is the key to polarity management and to the achievement of Polystasis.

The fundamental recommendation to be made 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 in a slow and systemic manner toward identification of potential ways in which the two perspectives can be brought together on behalf of an integrated response to the challenges of 21st Century life.

High Stakes

This polarity management recommendation is not easily enacted—especially when facing powerful Essentials. As Johnson and others engaged in polarity management have noted, effective management of polarities requires a constant process of vigilance, negotiation, and adjustments. The second option regarding collective responsibility seems to be aligned with this recommendation of dynamic 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 own personal silos. They must let in the world—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 to eventually find 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. 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 in 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 and truth “isn’t what it used to be” (if it ever was). An imprecise measure is the number of lawsuits being 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 the more indirect measure centering on the actual taxes being paid by those at various economic levels. We might declare it abuse and infringement if the wealthy are paying much less in taxes than the middle class. If nothing else, an alarm should be ready-and-waiting if there are many accounts being offered from many different constituencies regarding abuse.

A somewhat easier and more creditable metric can be used when considering accumulation of individual wealth. One need only look at the income gap. If it is widening, then there is cause for concern. The term “accumulation” is particularly important here. It is not just a matter of income gap. It is also a matter of a very small number of people holding great wealth. The super-wealthy possess power as well as wealth. They signal the flaw in any consideration of personal rights as being a recipe for the “democratization” of wealth. When wealth is centralized, then power is centralized.

There is another signal which is most elusive and perhaps ultimately of greatest importance. The signal might be apparent at a deep, psychological level. There would be a growing sense of helplessness and hopelessness—resulting from (and contributing to) an isolationist stance regarding societal welfare. Do many members of a society lose any sense of caring for other members of their society. Is it inevitable that tribalism is afoot in the land 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 decline regarding concern for other people is occurring? At some level we all “know” when inequity and indifference is abundant. Do we really 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 (using 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 that have been passed during the past year restricting citizen behavior, as well as the number of patents being offered for new inventions. If the rules are growing and the patents are declining, then the alarm might be triggered.

As in the case of financial signals for those advocating personal rights, there is a tangible metric that 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 the national wealth (GNP) that is to be found in governmental agencies. 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 a society to be government-dominated? It is something 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—and on the other side, when is private enterprise as being more effective no longer questioned? 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. Quite 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 the 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 accompanying loss of vision. It is a systemic, “chicken-and-egg” dynamic—a “poverty cycle.” No jobs are available nor are adequate education and training available to those living in poverty. As a result, these men, women and 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). No need for education or training if people in a state of poverty are inadequate or afforded no opportunity. 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.

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. True freedom is nowhere to be found in either the psychology or cycle of poverty. Alarm signals should be sounded for those advocating a pure form of collective responsibility. Hopefully, with safeguards in place and alarm signals clearly articulated, we can address the negative consequences of each Essential option in a constructive manner.

Conclusions

We have arrived at the end of this three-essay series regarding how to remain with the VUCA-Plus challenges and find ways in which to embrace and find both energy and partial solution within each challenge. I have suggested that it is critical to be guided by that which is Essential when engaging this transformation. We identify what is most important and focus on ways in which to keep that which is Essential when engaged in the ongoing Polystatic process of review, adjustment and action that is required when operating in a VUCA-Plus environment.

Clearly, many over-arching challenges face us in this environment. Peter Vaill (1996, p. 178) has suggested that this is a white-water world that is inevitably confusing. We are like the hawk swooping in on the flock of birds. There are so many birds and so much movement of the birds that it is hard to focus on any one bird. We swoop and through the flock, not finding the ability to latch on to anything. We are bewildered and in Awe of everything that swirls around us (Keltner, 2023). Like the donkey who stand between two stacks of hay, we move back and forth between the two stacks and end up choosing neither one. We oscillate between polar opposites and don't know how to lead or manage in this world of competing haystacks.

How do we respond to these conditions. I have offered six transformations that might be of assistance. More generally we must respond in one of three ways:

“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. Thinking is required that is slow and reflective.

“I might be wrong and am willing to reconsider.” We must frequently re-examine our perspective 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 own mind and heart. They each lead to engagement of the second major Lens to engage when navigating the world of VUCA-Plus. This second lens is one concerning the Essence of this world. I propose that Essence complements Essential. The two lenses together enable us to lead and learn—without having to escape down the rabbit hole to the distorted world of Serenity.

References

Bergquist, William (2024) Finding What Is Essential in a VUCA-Plus World II: Enablement, Perspective, and Learning. Library of Professional Coaching. Link: [Finding What is Essential in a VUCA-Plus World II: Enablement, Perspective and Learning | Library of Professional Coaching](#)

Dewey, John (1929) The Quest for Certainty. New York: Putnam.

Johnson, Barry (1996) *Polarity Management: Identifying and Managing Unsolvable Problems*. HRD Press.

Keltner, Dacher (2023) *Awe*. New York: Penguin.

Moynihan, Daniel (Ed.) (1969) *On Understanding Poverty. I. Perspectives from the Social Sciences*. New York: Basic Books.

Scharmer, Otto (2009) *Theory U: Leading from the Future as It Emerges*. San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler.

Senge, Peter and Associates (1994) *The Fifth Discipline Field book*. New York: Currency Book.

Vaill, Peter (1996) *Learning as a Way of Being*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.