

Finding Essence in a VUCA-Plus World IV: Trust, Optimization and Polarity Management

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Having explored an Essence approach to contemporary issues (Bergquist, 2024b, Bergquist, 2024c) and begun a consideration of how this approach might be applied to the Essence of Trust (Bergquist, 2024d), we are now ready to begin identifying ways in which to best manage 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 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? Optimizing means that 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.

Polystasis and Optimization

I find that this polarity management strategy is aligned with a concept and strategy that I introduced previously in this series of essays (Bergquist, 2024a). This is a concept and strategy that I have called *Polystasis*. This process differs from the traditional concept of homeostasis, in that the baseline is shifting as an assessment of one’s current environment is adjusted. By contrast, homeostasis leads one back to a stable baseline. As in the case of allostasis [a process described by Peter Sterling (2020) to account for the dynamics operating in the human body], Polystasis involves an ongoing, dynamic interplay between an individual (or group) (or society) with regarding to desired state, prediction and action. Under conditions of Polystasis, we are constantly making 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 is centered on ongoing feedback coming 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.

Human beings (and most other sentient beings) are inherently curious and playful--seeking to actively engage in and learn from interactions with their environment. In our interactions, we gain valuable information that enables us to make better Polystatic predictions. In that sense, Polystasis serves a highly adaptive function. 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 and the experience of competence (White, 1959) and the experience of Flow (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990).

Much as Barry Johnson is describing a process of optimization that is based on the ongoing and dynamic assessment of two polarities and modification of one's decisions based on this assessment, I am describing a process that incorporates "reasonable and flexible set points" 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 a desire for return to a stable state (homeostasis) is inadequate for addressing the challenges inherent in Johnson's polarities. Only a model that allows for flexible and changing "set-points" (baselines) and the search for "optimal responses" (effective actions based on valid predictions) can operate in an adaptive manner when faced with polarities—and the even more pervasive presence of volatility, uncertainty, complexity, ambiguity, turbulence and contradiction (VUCA-Plus) (Bergquist, 2020).

Susan's Optimization

I turn back to case studies that I offered in one of the previous essays (Bergquist, 2024d) in this series. These case studies concerned two protagonists (Susan and Rick) and 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) (Bergquist, 2024d). Susan is coming from a position of safety and security (S^2 /Home) and considering a move to a position of greater opportunity and openness (O^2 /Quest). Conversely, Rick is currently in a position of O^2 and considering the move back home to a position of greater S^2 .

We find that Optimization for Susan might begin with her review of the want ads in her local newspaper—or nowadays her looking on the Internet for job postings in her own community. For what type of job might she be eligible? How would the pay for a specified posted job compare with what Susan is now making? Most importantly, is there something about this advertised job that stirs up Susan's aspirations? Susan takes on the task of predicting how likely it is that she will be able to secure a "better" job. As she reviews several job postings, Susan will find that her prediction is changing, as is her baseline. She gains greater clarity regarding what kind of jobs 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 are likely to change based on this new baseline and prediction. She might decide to look at job postings in other nearby communities or might decide that she is making too much money as a long-time receptionist to consider any entry-level position. Instead, she might decide that job change is a viable option. And she begins to prepare a resume.

Yet another action might be taken. There are jobs that she might be able to take in her local community—how about a job in Chicago? She returns to the Internet and looks for job postings in Chicago. Obviously, there are many more postings. Her review of jobs in her own community enables Susan to do some sorting out of jobs in Chicago. Susan adjusts her baseline regarding compensation, knowing that the cost-of-living in Chicago will be higher than in her own suburban community. She has begun the process of

optimization. Rather than swinging from one polarity to another, Susan is eliciting feedback from the Internet and adjusting her expectations and further actions.

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. He is assessing his own feelings and testing out the correlation between his own fantasies of living again in his hometown with the realities of this life (especially given his sexual preferences and lifestyle preferences). Rick checks in frequently with his own baseline regarding job and life outside of the work setting.

Rick will be making a more informed prediction regarding how he will do and how he will feel about a move back to his hometown. His baseline will inevitably change based on his shifting prediction. Anticipated income is likely to drop significantly (and there might even be an extended period of time when he is unemployed). Rick also adjusts his baseline regarding what is reasonable to achieve in terms of theater attendance, savoring a great meal at a fine restaurant, and finding friends who share lifestyle preferences with him.

Rick does a quick check on his own feelings. These might be the most important predictions that he will make. Does he feel less stressful than is often the case in New York City? Is this lower level of stress likely to remain if he moves back home. What does he predict? Is there a certain "glow" (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 does some shopping at the grocery store where he hung out as a much younger man? Does Rick predict that this glow and lightness will still be there if he moves back to Vermont? What does he predict regarding feelings associated with the loss of New York City cultural opportunities?

Two subsequent questions emerge. 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 in order to find a new life in Vermont? Does an elevated baseline regarding comfort and joy (security and safety) make up 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.

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 where they are choosing to act. Like Barry Johnson, Forrester is recommending that we linger for a while when seeking to optimize the benefits of a specific polarity. Johnson's and Forrester's recommendation 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, type of organization, etc.) She must flesh out a plan regarding departure from her current job after obtaining a new job in her own 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, but instead is Cleveland (so that she can remain in her current home). What would be required in terms of transportation if she commuted to Cleveland? Rick would similarly have to optimize a move back to Vermont by setting up criteria for accepting a new job in his hometown, by becoming familiar with theaters and restaurants within a 50 mile radius of his hometown, and by spending some time on Zoom with some of his old Vermont friends in order to determine if they still have something in common with the now more "cosmopolitan" Rick?

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. 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 levels of Trust help to determine appropriate baselines. The higher the level of Trust with regard to competence, intentions and shared perspective, the more ambitious can be the baselines. The potential for integration, in particular, requires 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. When Polystatic processes are engaged, there will be greater clarity regarding intentions (baselines) for these intentions are being repeatedly tested against predictions about the real world. The third facet of Trust is successfully employed when one is testing assumptions and predictions against real actions that are taken and results that are obtained. We can gain a level of clarity regarding untested assumptions and biased predictions by opening ourselves up to the ongoing feedback from an environment that resides independent of our Bubble of Belief (Weitz and Bergquist, 2024).

Optimization can be deployed not just by individual actors, but also by a group, organization or entire community. 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 by setting up laws and regulations that restrict the amount of money that can be poured into a campaign or by ensuring that nonprofit organizations that receive some of the "gold" via donations are truly operating on behalf of the welfare of all citizens (and especially those who currently are underserved). Rather than immediately decrying the role played by "gold" in the disruption of society (and thus reduction in security and safety), members of a community can focus instead on ways to maximize constructive use of available funds in order to ensure security and safety for all members of the 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. Those who are 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 can be offered of the personal damage done to a citizen who has been victimized by the gold.

The polarity management recommendations just made are not easily enacted—especially when the stakes are high and when stress is abundant. As Johnson and others engaged in polarity management have noted, effective management of polarities requires a constant process of vigilance, negotiation, and adjustments. Polystasis is required. We must continuously seek and refine a dynamic, flexible balance between the two polarities (in this case, home and quest). Each side's beneficial contributions can be enjoyed 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. Specific alarms will ring if we are off base.

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 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 the polarities 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.

S^2 (Home) Alarms

Certain alarms are likely to ring when Trust has not been established at home. Without adequate security and safety, one is likely to experience 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 life away from work. It is hard to stay alert when there are no new predictions to make 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. Actually, 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 realizes that they are being very stubborn. “No” is more often stated than “Yes.” There is little tolerance of 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 be a slowing down. We become “sloggy” in our appearance, in our gait and in our relationship with other people. We miss the jokes told by our friends, sit silently when invited to a friends' 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 very slow. Something must change!

Table One: S² Alarm Signals: Fear

The Fear	The Signal
Boredom	Sleepy
Rigidity	Stubborn
Stagnation	Slow

Often our fears are of secondary importance when we feel a loss or find that a regret is lingering. However, it is often much easier to smother our losses and regrets because they reside deeply in our head and heart. 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, it is particularly important that we pay attention to the signals that arise from the realization of these losses and 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, so the label “listless” is often assigned to young adults who are trying to figure out who they really 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 singing about her own 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 have to build a new vision of that to which we aspire. We are “listless” in waiting for the new message to arrive and feel a loss of vitality without a clear goal to inspire us.

Then there are the regrets. They can eventually overshadow the fears and losses. While settled firmly for many years in our home, we find ourselves regretting 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 S² life, Stewart is in deep despair over a life that may be “wonderful” but it is a life that is also filled with regret—to the extent that Stewart tries to take his life. Before he steps on the bridge (only to be rescued by a somewhat dysfunctional guardian angel), Stewart might have attended to his signal (restlessness) and done something about his regret (even if it is just to recreate some of the romantic scenes that Mary prepared earlier in their marriage).

Finally, there is the matter of regrets regarding a life of security and safety that is free of any risks. At times during our life, we may feel that we have been a “coward.” Opportunities appeared on our horizon, but we stayed put. One of our old friends announces that they have taken on a new job and are excited

about the prospects that will open up for them. In some way we are relieved that we “are not this person.” In other ways, we are envious. Our envy soon turns into a 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 there is nothing that we care about that is sufficiently great for us to take a big risk. We arrive at the conclusion that we don’t really care about anything important (other than a safe and secure home – and perhaps the welfare of our family). When we don’t care, then we become “care-less.” There is a sense that we are detached from the important things in life—and this means that we are also detached from our feelings. We are willing to sacrifice “care” in order to retain security and safety. This is very troubling—and 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

In sum, there are many alarms that can signal when we seem to be 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 given that we are sleepy, stubborn and slow. On the other hand, we are also a bit listless and restless. Furthermore, we are concerned about not seeming to care any more about much of 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 too long residency in the world of O² (Quest) have to be just as loud and just as 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 the lingering “blues” in our life).

We feel detached from the real world. We are playing a game that doesn’t seem to be related to anything of real importance. That new marketing campaign consumes all of our attention (while we ignore the damage done by the product that we are marketing). Our Skunk works is in the midst of inventing a new drug that will cure that nasty illness (but may have some major side effects). It is all about doing something new, something exciting, something that enables us to win! Regardless of the side-effects or long-term consequences.

We must pay attention to the alarms—for they uncover and signal underlying fears that we must not ignore. When we are anxious, when there is a lingering sense of overwhelm, and when we feel like our world is not being safely contained, then 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 O² can also serve to cloche chronic (clinical) depression or serve as a vehicle for the manic phase of a bi-polar mental illness. Even without the dramatic appearance of depression, the overstay and overreliance on O² (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 in our life.

Table Three: O² Alarm Signals: Fear

The Fear	The Signal
Anxiety	Drug Use
Sense of Overwhelm	Depression
Loss of Containment	Detachment

As we did with S², the alarm signals regarding O² can be expanded beyond the domain of fear. Important O² 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 an abundance of 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 for the community we are serving. Ken Gergen (1991/2000) writes about the 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 for a moment to consider this loss of any 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” where regret is expressed regarding lack of quality time spent with one’s son.

Regret is also likely to serve in several other ways as an alarm. 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 amount of money they “should” be making 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 health care 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 back yard “seemed to be as large as a park!” After several months, his new friend indicated that 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 take a new job? What’s wrong with his current job? Here was a first glance of (and awakening to) upper middle-class life and values. The O² 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 the cost accruing to his family? Is he indulging in a quest for job advancement (and perhaps more money) at the cost of other priorities in life? Does either the MA student or ever-moving father pause when the alarm sounds? Does the alarm even sound for these two O²-inspired gentlemen?

Finally, there is the regret that comes with recognition that one has never really cared enough about that which is truly important in life. We keep a financial score card or a resume filled with many increasingly “important” job assignments. Does the score card or resume indicate anything about the difference we have made in our world. I recently wrote a book with Gary Quehl, a colleague for many years who led several major educational associations in Washington D.C. By all accounts, Gary was a “success” in life. However, now resident of a community in the foothills of the California 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 *Generativity* and deep caring. Gary and I wrote a book (Bergquist and Quehl, 2023) in which we identified four modes of Generativity. There is a mode that focuses on caring for children and specific projects that we conduct. A second mode concerns our mentoring of other members of our organization or community. The third mode is founded on a desire to expand our caring over time. We become “guardians” of the past (history, awards, ceremonies, etc.).

Finally, there is a fourth mode that concerns the extension of caring in space. We become “stewards” in and of our community. It is in this fourth mode that we find *Community Engagement*—a mode of Generativity that was particularly 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 an 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 O² opportunities and potential success resides in our past. The alarms might sound somewhat late in our life, but they do sound—and we must pay attention.

Table Four: O² 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 stages in our life. In making this final point, I have placed a hat on my head. This is the hat of 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 a very 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 of ideas and images picks up fragments of unconsciously held material (memories, feelings, and thoughts) along the way. This 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-psyche material—and gains increasing energy from this unconscious material.

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). It is because they are now connected to the internal ideation. Klein suggested that this ideation now takes priority with regard to what is valued, attended to and remembered 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—all clustered around the original (often primitive) ideation.

Catching the Train: While Klein focused on the internal dynamics of peremptory ideation, I propose that this internal ideation might find alignment with a similar external ideation that is coming from the challenging polarities we face. We can envision the internal ideation “hooking on” to the ideological “train” that is passing by outside ourselves. We are hitching our own train of thoughts and emotions to an external 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 is often swirling with the ghosts and goblins of regret that come from our own childhood and adulthood.

We are also “haunted” by the collective (unconscious) heritage of our ancestors and culture. Regrets are passed on from generation to generation. It can be quite a dangerous condition 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 “societal unconscious” (Hopper and Weinberg, 2019).

A common set of troubling images are held by members of this traumatized society. Citizens often report similar regret-filled dreams, as well as similar stressful bouts of regret-associated feelings that are easily triggered by events that in many other societies produce only mild stress. With this powerful alignment of internal and external material, we become victims of both personal and collective peremptory ideation. Attention is demanded by this new coalition: we are obsessed, closed-minded, passionate and regretful. Sometimes, we are driven to action.

Anxious Passengers: collective engaged of peremptory ideation might be escalated by collective regret. Everyone on the train is uneasy about what is now happening in their society or that has occurred in the past. Racism looms big and often unacknowledged in an American society—or in a society such as found in South Africa or Indonesia. The anxiety associated with this Regret, in turn, can be produced by a potential 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 shows up in our internal peremptory ideation. This being the case, then one can imagine that the alignment with external images being carried by an ideation train is likely to be quite common. Regret is likely to be a particularly powerful emotion—it is one that Behavioral Economists often consider to be more salient than either the fear of loss or prospect of gain.

Both the internal psyche and external ideological train will be holding the same social unconscious material. A “perfect” storm of prejudice, intolerance, fear of the “other” and (eventually) violence is created. New reasons are generated for members of a society 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 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 the peremptory

train as well as invigorate the energy which propels the train. They can also offer “acceptable” alarms in which passengers on the train might listen.

While I have focused on personal alarm systems, collective alarm systems are prevalent in society. 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 the silos that may provide superficial and often temporary security and safety for those living in these confined spaces (Weitz and Bergquist, 2024). Similarly, the alarms sound in a society that is enthralled with innovation and that which is new and shiny (O^2). These alarms are likely to take on the form of deeply felt collective exhaustion (Newport, 2016). In an O^2 saturated society, 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.

Alarms, Allostasis and Polystasis

The personal alarm systems impact not only on the behavior of those facing a polarity, but also their brain and body. Peter Sterling’s (2020) model of allostasis is certainly relevant. When faced with the downside of a specific polarity, our predictions are “alarming” with regard to what could happen in and to our body if we continue to do what we are now doing. If we fear boredom (S^2) or fear its opposite—this being anxiety (O^2)—then we can predict that our body will have to change.

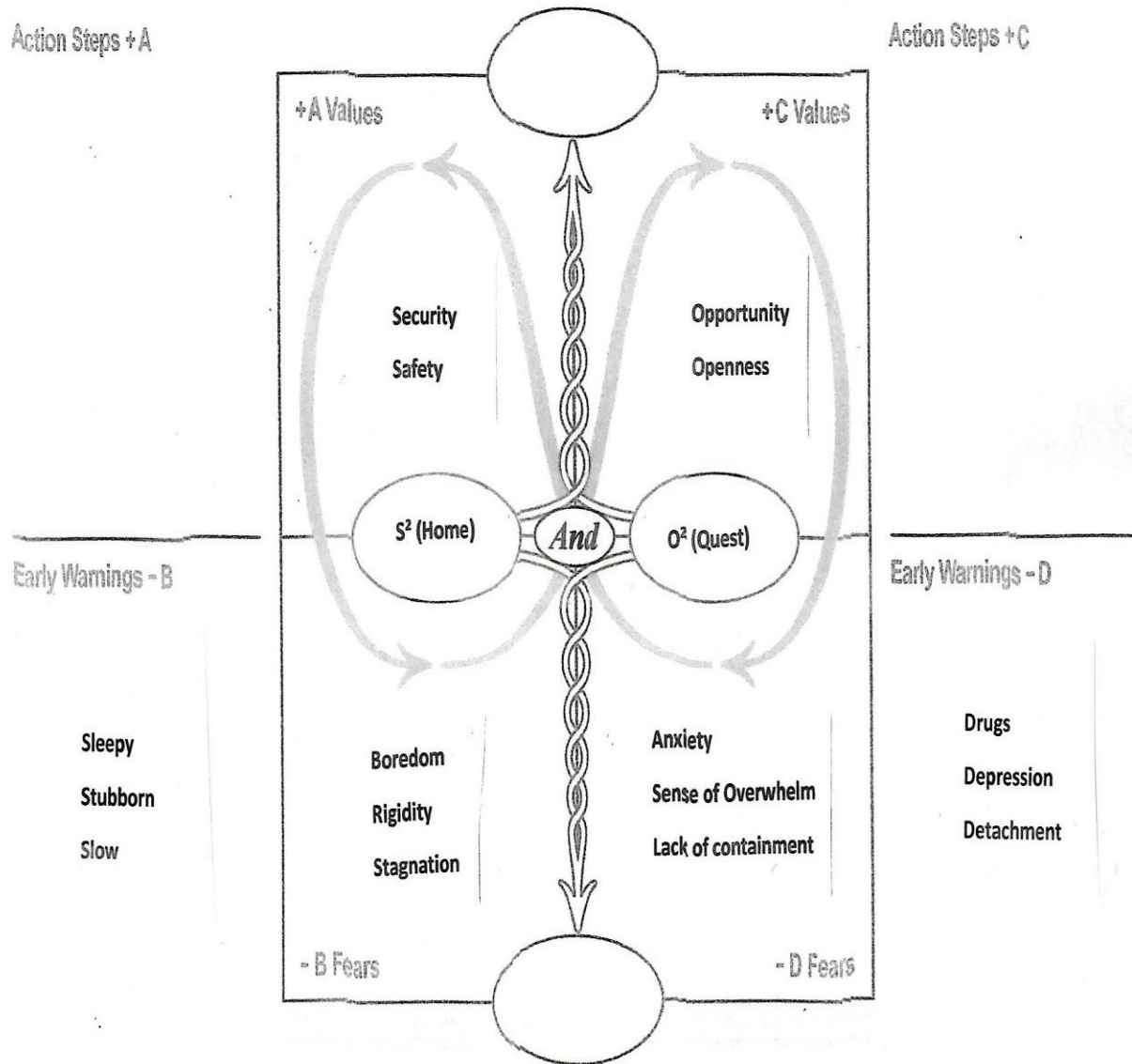
Boredom will bring about the need for activity, while anxiety will bring about the need for defensive action. Both of these predictions require that we mobilize our sympathetic system. Our baseline changes. We are no longer seeking parasympathetic rest but are now preparing for sympathetic action. But there is no direction in which we should direct our action. The alarm has signaled the need for action—but no one and nothing is pointing the way forward. If we then fail to take any action, the sympathetic system will be serving no important function. 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 and we pay attention. Our predictions are now challenged with regard to the current way in which we are operating. Our S^2 needs in life (security and safety) might not be easily met anymore. They come at considerable cost to our freedom and sense of self-respect. The ways in which we have been fulfilling our O^2 aspirations (opportunity and openness) might not be working. We are exhausted and overwhelmed.

Our baseline is also challenged. We grow restless and want to find more challenges in our life. We are anxious and wish for less challenge in our life. Given these challenges to our baseline and predictions, we re-visit the other 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 in order to reflect once again on the positive and negative forces operating on both polarities—and can possibly find ways to engage both polarities.

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 to be critical in the movement of one's attentions and preferences between the polarities. Here is the expanded representation:



I present this graphic portrayal using the template provided by Johnson in his second book (Johnson, 2020). You will note that Johnson 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 essay as “early warnings” (such as sleepy, slow, and perhaps detached and inconsistent), I would consider others to be quite serious signals that truly demand our attention (such as drug abuse, depression and guilt).

Integration

How then does one bring about the capacity of a personal or large-scale system to integrate two polarities? To begin with, one ensures that the safeguards are in place and the alarm signals are clearly articulated. Susan, Rick and contemporary societies can address the negative consequences of each option in a constructive manner. Optimally, this formulation could be thought through in a slow and thoughtful manner—with appropriate consideration being given to both home and quest. As a result, Susan and Rick might even be in a place to formulate an integrated vision of Trust for themselves. Home and Quest might walk hand-in-hand into Susan and Rick's future.

The fundamental recommendation to be made to Susan and Rick in managing this particular polarity is for each of them to remain in the positive domain of each 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 (in a slow and systemic manner) directed toward identification of potential ways in which the two policies can be brought together on behalf of an integrated response to the polarity each of them is facing.

Home and quest might potentially join together. Susan can take a new job in Cleveland and thereby retain her home while engaging in a quest. She might similarly invite her boyfriend to join her in attending a couple's workshop. Perhaps this "quest" for a better relationship can help to ensure that their relationship is sustained (home)—hopefully leading 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.

While these fundamental recommendations (derived from Barry Johnson's own analysis) may prove adequate for the fulfilling integration of two polarities, I wish to move beyond Johnson—or at least use his insightful analysis as a platform for bringing in other perspectives. I am particularly sensitive to the role played by polarity management in addressing the challenge of integrating polarities related to the six conditions of VUCA-Plus. I find that there are many polarities to confront when living in a VUCA-Plus world—as I have noted in my book on True Freedom (Bergquist, 2024e) and I have noted repeatedly in this series of essays about Essentials and Essence. It is critical, therefore, that we attend to these conditions and to the way they are manifest and managed under conditions of polarity. I begin with a perspective regarding integration under the condition of volatility.

Anti-Fragility

Volatility (V) stands alongside vulnerability and instability when we are standing on the edge of a polarity. Several decades ago, Nassim Taleb (author of the *Black Swan*) wrote about this volatility and the concurrent vulnerability and instability. Specifically, he noted the fragility that exists in most of our contemporary institutions (Taleb, 2012). They are not designed or prepared for the challenges inherent in a polarized system—especially when a crisis exists within this system. Whether it be the recent COVID-19 crisis in global health care or the weather-related crises associated with Hurricane Katrina or Typhoon Morakat, the institutions of our mid-21st Century world are fragile (Al-Azri, 2020). Yet, according to Taleb

(2012, p. 3), some things and 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.”

I propose that many polarities expose an institution as fragile. Things break apart because tensions between the polar opposites drain an institution of its energy and disrupt its focus. Especially in the case of Trust, there is rarely an unbroken institution if those working in the organization can't trust the competencies, intentions and perspectives of those with whom they work. An individual who is whipsawed between home and quest will soon find that they have neither a home nor the prospects of a successful quest.

Yet, Taleb would have us believe that stressful polarities can provide vitality and direction. As I have repeatedly noted in this set of essays, members of an institution can find that the tensions within an Essence such as Trust, can be of great benefit rather than being a source of disruption and ultimate demise. Taleb (2012, p. 3) puts it this way: “wind extinguishes a candle and energizes fire. Likewise with randomness, uncertainty, chaos: you want to use them, not hide from them. You want to be the fire and wish for the wind.”

While Taleb identifies a variety of strategies that help to make an institute less fragile and open to the opportunity of learning and growth emerging from the crisis, he mostly is encouraging a mindset that discerns those challenging conditions (the wind) that can enhance an institution's operations (the fire). Then one greets these conditions and leverages the benefits. For instance, we can use the crisis of a hurricane to learn how best to not only predict the severity and direction of future hurricanes but also build better barriers against future storm surges.

Most importantly, we can “learn a critical lesson” about climate instability. A similar 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 (they are Black Swans), but we can know for certain that they will occur and can plan for the leveraging. Most importantly, to bring in my own model of Polystasis, we can fully recognize that predictions will change, baselines must (and will) be adjusted, and new actions will be taken based on these modified predictions and baselines.

It is in the capacity of ant-fragile institutions to shift and adapt to changing conditions that we see Polystasis being fully engaged. While homeostasis is to be found in highly fragile institutions and objects, Polystasis is to be found in institutions and objects that are flexible and non-fragile. A beautiful bowl or glass goblet is highly fragile. It can easily shatter. There is only one (homeostatic) state in which the bowl or goblet can exist. While other fragile systems can sometimes be repaired and brought back to homeostasis, the shattered bowl or goblet can, at best, be stuck back together with glue—but 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 shaped on a wheel and fired in a furnace.

Similarly, the glass is composed of fine sand that was quite fluid in its original form. I am reminded of my work in Corning, New York. This is the headquarters of Corning Glass and was founded as a company that

produced high quality glassware (Steuben Glass) made from the prized sand to be found in the nearby Chemung River. It is a remarkable experience to have witnessed the creation of fine glass objects at the Steuben Factory—or to witness today 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 once again (with a focused source of heat). The fluid 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). While these large institutions are often quite impressive—like a beautiful work of art—they are often not inclined to dance (Kanter, 1989) nor to adjust well to a rugged, dancing landscape (Miller and Page, 2007; Bergquist, Sandstrom and Mura, 2023).

We can purchase an expensive Chihuly sculpture made of finely crafted glass but don’t want other people handling this prized fragile object. We also don’t want innovators to mess around with our long-standing, high-prestige organizations. They are fragile and often only remain unbroken because of their command of the marketplace or their benefiting from government-enforced trade restrictions. Those who lead these large organizations, and those who teach in large, prestigious Business schools about traditional management practices, certainly do not appreciate the critique offered by Nassim Taleb. For these folks, homeostasis is foundational—and the twin management prongs of prediction and control 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. We can also identify those institutions that are likely to be anti-fragile. He based his assessment regarding fragility on the way in which 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 does not show as a straight line ("linear"), rather as a curve. 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). In my book on *The Postmodern Organization* (Bergquist, 1993), I offered a parallel between this compounding effect (often labeled as “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) produces movement of 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 this description of what I have identified as the avalanching system:

Man-made complex systems tend to develop cascades and runaway chains of 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 a lot 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 to a new disease, called in this book *neomania*, that makes us build Black Swann-vulnerable systems—"progress".

Here is where Taleb's description of Black Swans comes in direct contact with his introduction of the distinction between fragile and anti-fragile (Taleb, 2012, p. 7):

An annoying aspect of the Black Swan problem--in fact the central, and largely missed, point--is that the odds of rare events are simply not computable. 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.*

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 with regard to establishing anti-fragile mind-sets and systems.

It should be noted that Taleb identifies not only systems and institutions that are fragile. He also identifies those that occupy a position of anti-fragility. There is a third category of institutions that Taleb includes. These are robust institutions who are typically immune with regard to the conditions of volatility (and I would suggest the other five VUCA-Plus conditions). Some of the very large institutions that are unable to dance might be assigned to this third category—though I would suggest that many robust institutions might not remain for long in a state of immunity. VUCA-Plus conditions are creating a storm that can't readily be ignored by those living and leading in these robust bastions of indifference.

Taleb offers a rich and provocative list of institutional characteristics related to Fragile, Robust, and Anti-Fragile (Taleb, 2012, pp. 23-27) The institutional characteristic that are 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 the polarizing forces operating in (and energized by) the crisis.

With the COVID-19 crisis we find the 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 in which these policies can be interwoven with one another (Bergquist, 2021). Similarly, we can find a pull between short-term solutions (dealing with the immediate crisis via disaster relief and building of more effective barriers) and long-term solutions (prevention or at least slowing of global warming) when faced with a “natural” disaster.

Sequencing

We can move beyond the specific polarizing challenges and opportunities facing Susan and Rick, to consider the various ways in which integration of polarity might be achieved. First, there is the potential sequencing and leveraging of the polarities. For instance, when seeking to integrate the two polarities of Trust, we might engage in a quest when seeking to find our “home” (identity, profession, enduring intimate relationship). As a young person we might try out several summer jobs to determine what we “really” want to do in our life. We might date a variety of people to determine 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 take a 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 and begin to apply for jobs in a quite different field—but first check to be sure we have sufficient savings and insurance. We know that our loving life partner will be there even if we “crash and burn” with our new venture. Perhaps Odysseus was able to embark on his very 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 two book ends. We first ensure that there is adequate Trust at home before debarking on the quest. We then return from the quest with new skills and knowledge to further ensure that our home is secure and safe (S^2). These bookends of Trust not only provide stability. They also establish an integrated foundation for both home and quest.

Enablement

A second pathway to Integration is found in the process of Enablement that I identified in one of my previous essays. We engage in a systemic analysis (such as that engaged by Jay Forrester and other members of his MIT group) that entails discovering how various factors (forces) in a system impact one another (Meadows, 2008). Specifically, we identify those forces that are most likely to enable other forces to have a strong, positive impact on the desired outcomes. When we are successful in achieving XYZ then opportunities open up and resources become available to initiative ABC. While XYZ might not be very

important in and of itself, it might be of great value because of its capacity to enable other components of 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 on each force listed across the top of the matrix. Does the left forces help or hinder the effective engagement of the topside force. After completing the matrix, attention is directed to those forces that most often enable other forces to be effective in achieving a specific outcome. In the case of a Trust-focused matrix, some of the forces will relate to the establishment and maintenance of security and safety (S^2), while other will relate to the enhancement of opportunities and openness (O^2). The systemic focus on enablement will help to bring about integration of S^2 and O^2 forces.

Reframing

A third strategy can be engaged in bringing about the integration of two polarities. This is the *Reframing* strategy that is commonly associated with Gregory Bateson and members of the Palo Alto group (Bander and Grinder, 1983). Reframing can be engaged in a variety of ways—some of which I have identified in one of my previous publications (Bergquist, Sandstrom and Mura, 2023). I offer two examples of reframing as they would be engaged in bringing about the 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 on our back. An RV (home) can serve this purpose as we engage our Quest. For the younger crowd (and some older folks), there is the “fantastic” world to be found 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 even allows us to change our own identity (avatar) and engage with other Internet users in a collaborative journey (as friends or foes). Most importantly, we have journeyed far away without ever leaving home. Obviously, this Internet journey can be addictive and can distract us from actually leaving home and engaging in the real world. We have to ask ourselves as Internet addicts or as parents of an internet-addict an important question: is this faux quest is contributing to the quality of our life and to 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!”) Similarly, our home might be 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 own head, heart and soul. We don’t need a computer or the Internet.

As documented in his *Red Book* (Jung, 2009), the noted psychoanalyst, Carl Jung, journeyed far and wide within his own 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 who reside far away from our physical home. As observers of (rather than participants in) cross-cultural journeys, we expand our own perspectives and learn to appreciate differing value systems and cultures. At some point we ask: are these faux journeys to other lands that are as “good” as, rich as, personally impactful as the “real thing”? 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 process of integration helps to further enhance (distill) the Essence of Trust. Trust becomes more secure and capable of adjusting to shifting VUCA-Plus circumstances because it contains many interwoven elements. The Essence of Trust involves not just the dynamic tension between home and quest. The Essence of Trust also involves the integration of all aspects of Trust and the ultimate unity to be found in this Essence. As in the case of all distillations the pure Essence of the distilled elixir remains to be savored and celebrated. When full integration occurs, the Essence of Trust gains further depth and becomes much richer. It is to this deepening of Trust that I turn in presenting the final section of this third essay concerning the search for Essence.

The Nature of Trust (and Mistrust)

Up to this point, I have concentrated on the dynamics of trust—the push and pull between S^2 (Home) and O^2 (Quest)—two polarities of Trust. I have represented these two polarities on a horizontal plain with the movement between them being represented by figure 8. I am now going to move from the horizontal dimension to a vertical dimension. I will now push down to a deeper level regarding the fundamental nature of Trust.

Four Facets

Any Essence resides ultimately in both the tension that exists between different aspects of this Essence and in the depth of its etiology and structure (facets). I begin this exploration by returning to the distinction I drew in one of my previous essays on Essence (Bergquist, 2024c) between four facets concerning the viewpoint being taken (in this case viewpoint regarding Trust), and the facets I identified at the start of this essay concerning the representation of Trust (competence, intention and perspective).

What would be differing viewpoints regarding Trust? First, there is an appreciative facet (what I call the zero-order viewpoint). We assume that Trust already (and perhaps always) exists in the particular system we are examining. We have only to uncover (appreciate) this Trust and engage our world and our interpersonal relationships with the assumption 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 enactment of 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, 2023).

The third facet directs us to an assumption that Trust is not easily won. We must engage a second-order viewpoint. Our relationship with the world or with another person in our life must be altered in a significant manner. We must engage in a transformative process. This might mean that we engage in a “remarriage”—with fundamental changes being established in our relationship with an intimate partner (Bergquist, 2023). We may similarly engage in a “remarriage” with our organization or with our way of being with many other people in our life.

Finally, there is a fourth facet that brings us to a realization that Trust simply does not exist in the environment where we now work or where we now establish important relationships in our life. This third-order viewpoint leads to moving to another location, getting a divorce, finding a safe place to renew ourselves, or simply turning away from a VUCA-Plus world that requires multiple demands of Trust.

TORI

I wish to engage a second perspective regarding Trust. To access this perspective, I turn to insights offered many years ago by Jack Gibb (1978)—who was one of Barry Johnson’s mentors. Gibb was one of the founders of the T-Group (Sensitivity Training) movement in North America and offered a program for many years that focused 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 the 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 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 (that became known as “action research”): if you want to truly understand something then give it a kick and see what happens. Try to change something and you will gain a true appreciation for how it really works. Sadly (in many respects), the excitement of new learning and discovery was soon lost in the original T-Group book. They were still doing the 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—held more than a decade after the original T-Groups were first being held in Bethel Maine—retained some of this spirit of discovery and some of the unpredictability to be found in “genuine,” “unscripted” interactions among people who find themselves in a safe environment. 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—and perhaps 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 that which is terribly naïve, TORI groups brought the matter of Trust to center-stage. 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” as a viewpoint regarding the inherent goodwill and competence to be found in any group that is seeking to establish a secure environment in which to work on their own interpersonal relationships and their own personal growth.

On the other hand, Gibb is fully aware of the barriers that exist regarding the appearance of Trust. His most widely read essay concerns defensive communication and ways in which 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 defensive climates, whereas description, problem-orientation, spontaneity, empathy and provisionalism are conducive to open and supportive communication. I would suggest, on the one hand, that these latter factors contribute to the formation of trusting relationships. On the other hand, when evaluation and control are prevalent then mistrust is likely to emerge. Mistrust, in turns, requires that control become even more pronounced. This leads to even greater mistrust. A vicious cycle of mistrust emerges. Mistrust begets mistrust.

I wish to add further to what Gibb has noted about defensiveness and trust. The second set of perspectives and practices 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 description what is now occurring is invaluable. A problem-orientation is required that allows for flexible, contingency planning. Most importantly, spontaneity and provisionalism are prerequisites to effective polystatic processes. Finally, regarding the application of Polystasis to interpersonal relationships, we must be empathetic regarding the comparable VUCA-Plus related challenges being faced by other people with whom we interact. They are dancing just as much as we are. 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; Bergquist, 2020).

Gibb is fully aware of 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 and superiority was assumed to exist in the role played by management in leading their direct reports. Yet, Jack Gibb believed that Trust can be established and defensiveness can be minimized in a TORI setting. Furthermore, he wrote about the ways in which Trust can meet multiple needs. I would propose that he has specifically addressed 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 setting where Trust does not exist is even more telling with regard to the search for security and safety—and the stirring of defensiveness and alternative modes of security and safety (Gibb, 1978, p. 14):

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.

There is the other side of Trust (O² Quest) which Gibb also acknowledges. This side 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”—which is a search for and creation of one’s identity (Gibb, 1978, p. 23). Given the challenge identify by Ken Gergen (1991/2000) regarding the appearance of multiple identities in our “saturated self,” this potential achievement of a clear sense of identity (being) might be particularly important

Gibb tends to bring these two valued outcomes of Trust together in the form of an intimate interpersonal relationship. He acknowledges that vulnerability comes with intimacy. Trust must be present for any of 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.

Barry Johnson might put it this way. The engagement of both S² (Home) and O² (Quest) come with the risk of vulnerability. 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 Ss doesn’t exist or comes at great cost. I am also vulnerable to finding that my dreams of success (opportunity) can’t be fulfilled or that my openness is not reciprocated. With the establishment of Trust, the risk of either form of vulnerability is reduced. I believe

that Johnson would respectfully suggest that caution needs to be introduced at this point. He would probably suggest that we still need to visit both conditions of vulnerability and risk (to ensure that we are not deluding ourselves). However, when there is genuine trust (and intimacy) the time spent with the two positive conditions is likely to be longer and there will be a greater potential for the integration of S² (Home) and O² (Quest). With this integration comes a cycle of Trust (“trust begets trust”) (Gibb, 1978, p. 16).

It should also be noted that there are several cautionary notes to be addressed 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” (breaking up the positive loop by providing negative feedback). Mistrust is likely to emerge if members of a group try to “push” trust beyond that which is acceptable (safe) for hesitant members of the group. 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 noted in my previous essay on Trust (Bergquist, 2024d), 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 have also noted elsewhere that unrealistic promises and expectations can lead to a downturn in morale and productivity when the “hyped-up” project is actually underway (Bergquist, 2014a). What does all of this mean? Basically, it means that we must be cautious about “floating on wings” when leaving a TORI workshop or any other “temporary setting” (Miles, 1964) that provides us with the “high” of Trust but leaves us vulnerable to the “lows” (blues) of post-workshop reality.

Conclusions

I conclude this essay by posing several questions: Is there a role to be played by TORI workshops during the mid-21st Century of VUCA-Plus challenges? Do we have any room in our collective head and heart for Jack Gibb’s somewhat utopian vision? Are the TORI workshops conducted by Jack Gibb just a remnant of the past? Are they merely a manifestation of the naivety of this time in American history (1960s)? Perhaps Gibb’s programs are nothing more than a symptom of Christopher Lasch’s culture of narcissism. In other words, is there any role to be played by TORI workshops today?

I suggest that there is a role to be played. I am optimistic. I believe that TORI is relevant. The matter 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 even more important. We can still benefit from engaging the process of TORI that Gibb introduced—but 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 the model of polarity management that was introduced by Barry Johnson, one of Gibb's mentees. I have personally worked with workshop participants who move through each of the four polarity conditions and spend time in a small group composed of those who are reflecting on this condition with regard to their own polarity. One group works on the positive side of their left-hand polarity, while another works on the negative side of their left-hand polarity. Yet, another group works on the positive side of their right-hand polarity, as the fourth group works on the negative side of their right-hand polarity. The conversations and dialogue are often quite intense in each of these four groups, for the participants often share similar feelings of hope, despair, optimism, pessimism—even love and anger.

Members of the four groups now shift to one of the other conditions. Each group can remain intact so that each member joins the same group under each of the four conditions. They often share a similar shift in perspective and practice given the specific condition in which they find themselves. Alternatively, some members of each group join one another in going to one of the other conditions, while other members of their group go to other 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 journey through all four conditions, workshop participants join small groups (usually not the same as the group they traveled with through all four conditions—if this design option was used). The small groups are lightly facilitated (TORI-like) with attention being 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, Labyrinth and TORI

Effective use can also be made of the Balint Method. This involved enactment by workshop participants of various internal “voices” (hopes, fears, doubts, outside advice, et.) that have been identified by a specific participant who is facing a specific problem. (Bergquist, 2014b). Each participant serves as a protagonist (focus of the group's attention) and “witnesses” the dialogue occurring among those offering specific voices (perspectives) on their problem. Each participant also serves as a “voice” for several of the other participants (and gains personal insights from temporarily embracing these “voices”). A full group conversation occurs after the protagonist shares what they have learned from the enactment of their voices. Additional insights are often gained by other members of the Balint group based on this conversation. Small TORI-like groups are then formed for further in-depth processing of these powerful Balint experiences.

I would also suggest the use of Labyrinth journeys (Pattakos, 2021) as a complement to small group dialogue. A specific Essence is identified by each participant prior to entering a labyrinth. This Essence 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 which can be shared in the subsequent small group. I sometimes couple Progoff-related journaling (Progoff, 1992) to the Labyrinth journey. Life and Career Planning can also accompany the labyrinth journey and small group (TORI-like) dialogues. I tend to be “picky” about the site I chose for the labyrinth journey. I am particularly partial to the labyrinth located inside the Grace Cathedral on the top of Nob Hill in San

Francisco. I find that the site of a workshop makes a difference. Certain settings seem to be particularly conducive to creation of an environment of Trust. The site of NTL in Bethel Maine might be placed on the list of Trust-ful sites – as might the Torrey Pines Golf Course that Jack Gibb frequented.

These are only three of many workshop designs that can be used to produce a setting in which Trust can be discovered or created—and in which elements of the design (such as the polarity, Balint voicing or labyrinth journeying) tend to produce valuable insights which are then shared with others in a setting of Trust.

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