

The Coaching of Anticipation III: Influencing Polystatic Cognition and Behavior

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This is the third in a series of essays concerned with the application of professional coaching to the assistance of a client in effectively anticipating what is about to occur in their environment, so that appropriate and informed action can be taken. I have proposed in the first two essays that one can be effective in providing this service as a coach if they understand and appreciate the vital role played by something called Polystasis in gaining a valid anticipation of what resides in the environment and governs the actions in which we are about to engage.

Essay Three concerns the ways in which, as a coach, we can influence the cognition and behavior related to the polystatic-based anticipation process. Before turning to the domains of behavior and cognition, I wish to provide a summary of the polystatic process that I more fully described in the first essay.

Polystasis

Recently, Peter Sterling (2020) offered a radical revisioning of the way our body operates. He proposed that we live in a world of allostasis rather than homeostasis. Allostasis refers to an organism's capacity to anticipate upcoming environmental changes and demands. This anticipation leads to adjustment of the body's energy use based on these changes and these demands. Allostasis shifts one's attention away from a homeostatic maintenance of rigid internal set-points to the brain's ability and role in interpreting environmental meaning and anticipating environmental stress.

In the first essay in this series, I introduced an expansion on Sterling's Allostatic model, which I labeled *Polystasis*. I created this word to designate multiple functions engaged by complex human systems in addressing the issue of stasis. As Peter Sterling has noted, it is not simply a matter of returning to an established baseline of functioning (stasis) when considering how actions get planned and taken in a human system.

As Peter Sterling proposed, the static notion of Homeostasis is inaccurate. A dynamic model of Allostasis (at the bodily level) and Polystasis (at the psychosocial level) is required, especially in our mid-21st-century world of volatility, uncertainty, complexity, ambiguity, turbulence, and contradiction (VUCA-Plus) (Bergquist, 2025).

Related in some ways to the perspective offered by Hawkins and Blakeslee (2004), who focused on the function of prediction in the operation of human intelligence, the polystatic process is embedded in the critical operation of anticipating the near future. While Hawkins and Blakeslee proposed that prediction requires the creation of a guiding map stored in memory, our polystatic model relies on the preparation of templates that guide both the emotional and cognitive elements of the anticipation process. As I noted in the first essay, we human beings (and perhaps all sentient animals) are living not in the present but in the near future.

Polystatic Appraisal

The Polystasis model incorporates three processes. First, there is Appraisal. We informally or formally predict the probability that our current desired baseline of functioning can be achieved. Is our current baseline viable, given what we anticipate? Is our current baseline even desirable? At this point, I introduce several concepts offered by another neuroscientist, Antonio Damasio (1994).

Damasio proposes that specific *Somatic Markers* are attached to specific images we generate. A specific somatic reaction is elicited when we consider an idea or recall an experience. Our “Gut” clinches up when we think about an embarrassing experience from our past. Our heart accelerates when reflecting on the elaborate dinner we are planning for our loved one. Damasio also introduces the concept of *Background Feelings*. At any one point in time, we feel “a certain way” that is created by not only our emotions and clusters of somatic markers related to ideas and experiences that are swirling around our mind, but also by our physiological state (levels of energy and fatigue, lingering illnesses or injuries, stage of one’s circadian cycle, etc.)

I propose that these various ingredients come together in what I call the *Somatic Template*. This template is more than a set of Damasio’s somatic markers. It is a general monitoring device that keeps us abreast of our overall physiological state. As I suggested in the first essay in this series, this template may play a central role in Sterling’s Allostatic process. Similarly, there might be a set of psychosocial templates that we frequently reference when making polystatic predictions and adjustments.

These templates offer a view of our psychological status and the status of our external world. As I noted in the first essay:

A psychosocial template might trigger our attention when something is threatening us. Elsewhere, I have suggested that we establish three threat categories in our Amygdala (Bergquist, 2011). I derived these categories from the semantic differential of Charles Osgood (1957). Is this threatening entity not aligned with our welfare (bad)? Is it strong (rather than weak and ineffective)? Is this threatening operating in an immediate active manner (rather than inactive or threatening at a temporal or spatial distance)? Our Amygdala is triggered, leading to an immediate change in our somatic template.

In the first essay, I suggested that when the Amygdala is triggered, we are likely to change our psychosocial template. Our anticipation is changed and “charged” by this appraisal of threat (or opportunity). While Damasio’s somatic template concerns how our body is operating and “feeling”, the psychosocial template associated with Polystasis concerns how we are seeing and “feeling about” the world in which we are operating. It seems that our amygdala provides much of the energy for the polystatic process to operate, while the psychosocial template provides much of the information (as acquired from one’s environment).

The distinction between energy and information is critical, as Rock and Page (2009, p. 21) note in setting the stage for tracing out the implications of neuroscience findings for the field of professional coaching. As they observe, our life “is a flow of energy and information.” I would specifically propose that the polystatic process is itself a flow of these two fundamental entities. While Energy comes primarily from the amygdala, and more generally, the Emotional Element of the polystatic process, it also comes

secondarily from the Cognitive Element. We get excited about an anticipated event, whether positive or negative. We are motivated by the positive (and negative) environment we are about to confront. The relationship we anticipate in the coming moments encourages us to become more closely involved with this person or to abandon this relationship as soon as possible.

Similarly, while Information comes primarily from the Cognitive Element of the polystatic process, and more generally from the environment in which we are about to operate, information also comes secondarily from the Emotional Element. It is particularly important to note that we must infer our Emotional information. Our feelings do not present themselves to us in a straightforward manner as do people or events “out there” in our environment.

In many instances, we only derive information from our Emotions by concentrating on our feelings via meditation or by gaining insight from some form of biofeedback or neurofeedback. We might even rely on assistance offered by a depth-oriented psychotherapist to gain access to and interpret our emotions. As professional coaches, we can also assist our clients in deriving information from their Emotional state, though we are not in the business of offering intense psychotherapy. We are more in the business of helping our clients identify and label emotions when they naturally emerge during a coaching session, rather than eliciting these emotions through intense probing of our client’s past history of abuse or neglect or current history of trauma.

Polystatic Adjustment

Having completed our appraisal, we adjust the current baseline of desired functioning if it is no longer appropriate. At the neurobiological and somatic template level, this has to do with what is called the brain’s “error-detection function” (Rock and Page, 2009, p. 153):

Our brains have functions to detect changes in the environment and to send strong signals to alert us to anything unusual. These error-detection signals are generated by a part of the brain called the orbital cortex. . . that is closely connected to the brain’s fear circuitry in a structure called the amygdala. These two areas compete with and direct brain resources away from the prefrontal region that promotes and supports higher intellectual functions. As a result of error detection and amygdala activation, we act more emotionally and more impulsively. Our animal instincts start to “take over.”

Given the origin of error-detection signals in the orbital cortex (the site of our seeing functions), it is almost as if we are “viewing” our emotions from inside our head (and heart). The so-called object relations theorists of the psychoanalytic school actually portray intrapsychic “objects” interacting with one another in what might be considered an internal theater of conflict and attachment. Our orbital cortex might somehow be observing this theatrical “production” and warning the amygdala of what is going on. Our anticipations would in turn be influenced moment-to-moment by what is being observed in the orbital cortex and reacted to in the amygdala. All of this might only exist in my own imagination. After all, this is nothing but neural tissue. But what happens when the vast number of neural entities in our brain get together and do some feeling, thinking, and organizing of behavior?

From a polystatic perspective, the error-detection signals provide a somatic level (and Emotional) corrective to the cognitively based appraisal. Aligning with what I suggested in the first essay, Rock and

Page identify the critical role played by the amygdala. I have expanded on what they have to say by noting that the amygdala may rely on three criteria originally proposed by Charles Osgood (1957), these being the valence (intentions) of the person or event creating change in the environment, as well as the person's or event's strength and level of activity. I also mentioned that assessments made by the amygdala can be both positive and negative. Detected changes may lead one to conclude that good, strong, and active things are happening in one's environment. They need not be bad, strong, and active threats.

While Rock and Page are focusing on the "animal" side of our assessments and anticipations, there is also the side offered by us as *homo sapiens*. At the psychosocial level, we adjust our planned actions based on predictions and anticipations regarding the probable success of these actions. The Cognitive Element of the polystatic process is engaged (operating primarily in the prefrontal cortex). I had this to say in the first essay regarding the operation of Emotional and Cognitive Elements in two different systems—one that is closed and one that is open:

While a homeostatic perspective on human operations is based on an assumption that these operations are being conducted in a closed system, the polystatic perspective is founded on the quite different assumption that human operations are being conducted in an open system. When operating in a closed system, one can anticipate that all of the relevant variables are locked in place. These variables include such important matters [Osgood's criteria], as the intentions, strength, and activity level of specific living entities the strength and consistency of nonliving but dynamic entities (such as weather and temperature), and the presence of permanent objects (such as chairs and buildings). We know what the variables are and can usually make an accurate assumption about the magnitude of each variable and its relationship to the other relevant variables. By contrast, an open system is one in which new variables enter the picture and change their magnitude and relationship to other variables. When operating in an open system, one will frequently experience a shift in their somatic template. Baselines often must be readjusted and anticipations modified.

An openness of space and needed adjustment of our psychosocial template is particularly likely, given the frequent appearance of volatility, uncertainty, complexity, ambiguity, turbulence, and contradictions (VUCA-Plus) in mid-21st-century society (Bergquist, 2025).

Polystatic Action

We act on behalf of the new baseline of desired outcomes as well as our new predictions regarding the relative effectiveness of potential actions to be taken. Our anticipations produce our new actions:

In essence, Polystasis represents a dynamic, highly interactive interweaving of appraisal, adjustment, and action. Clear and accurate feedback is needed to determine appropriate levels of adjustment. Open channels for the flow of information between these three phases are critical.

Both important benefits and significant costs attend Polystasis. Polystatic processes come alive when we recognize that this recursive process moves quickly. Polystasis is often not amenable to the slow

thinking described by Daniel Kahneman (Kahneman, 2013) nor to the reflective practice of Don Schön (1983). Polystasis also comes alive when we apply it to real-life situations:

For example, while my anticipation of losing money might be assuaged by a bank loan I have just received, my heart rate and level of anxiety might not return to “normal” if I am anticipating unpredictability in the stock market. A new “normal” is quite fluid--for I continue to appraise, anticipate, adjust, and act (moving through a dancing, monetary landscape).

At the same time, we must be cautious about becoming “trigger-happy.” . . . We must be sure that our anticipations do not lead to actions that do nothing more than justify the anticipation.

The quick engagement of appraisal, anticipation, adjustment, and action is not amenable to slow thinking--not to reflective practice. Our somatic and psychosocial templates are frequently adjusted in ways that might not align with reality. Imaginary lions are a specialty of modern humankind. Polystasis is aligned with noncritical, knee-jerk reactions:

We often use simplistic and outmoded heuristics when shifting our template, changing our baseline, and making predictions in a dynamic environment. We might, for instance, apply a Recency heuristic. Adjustments are the same as the last time we faced this environmental shift. Polystatic adjustments can also become habitual. A heuristic of Habit is applied. Then there is the matter of Primacy. The first action taken when facing a challenge remains with us. We messed up the first time and learned to avoid this situation at all costs.

Given this potential vulnerability of recency, habit, and primacy, we must ask: How do we adjust to a new or changing baseline? Adjustments will operate differently when we face a critical challenge and when motivations (and anxiety) are high. We are inclined to think very fast and be especially noncritical when the stakes are high. Emotions are intense. Furthermore, we might always imagine a threat when we are tired or distracted—we indeed become “trigger-happy.” Anxiety becomes a common experience. Retreat and isolation become common polystatic actions. All of this means that we need to be careful about the assumptions we make and the heuristics we apply under specific conditions of anticipation.

At this point, it is appropriate to introduce the professional coach, who can be of great value in helping their client reflect on their assumptions (Schön, 1983), avoid “knee-jerk” heuristics, and slow down their thinking (Kahneman, 2011). This assistance is particularly important as it focuses on the function of anticipation, which serves as the backbone of the polystatic process.

As I noted in the first essay, human beings live not in the current moment but in the moment that is anticipated in the immediate future. In my writing, I have often suggested that we must “lean into the future” as we navigate our world (e.g. Bergquist and Mura, 2011). Otto Scharmer (2009) has similarly suggested that we must “learn into the future.” The three domains of anticipation (behavior, cognition, and emotions) are all available to the influential work of a professional coach as they help their client lean and learn into their immediate future. Both energy and information are brought to the fore through the coaching of anticipation.

Before identifying coaching strategies related to these three domains, I wish to introduce a foundation concept related to the polystatic process and the ability to lean and learn into the future. This concept is Appreciation.

An Appreciative Perspective on Polystasis

The concept of Appreciation emerged during the early years of this century (Srivesta, Cooperider, et al. 1990), in association with the emergence of positive psychological perspectives (Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). As related to the process of anticipation, an appreciative perspective refers, first, to the assumption made by Peter Sterling that our body is always accurate in response to anticipation; it is our mind that messes things up. Rather than try to change our body (though the injection of a mood-altering drug), we must change our mind by focusing on our behavior, our cognition and/or the emotions that produce or are influenced by our behavior and thoughts (cognition). We are leaning and learning into the future when we make accurate anticipations of the near future, which enables our body to be effective in doing what it is supposed to do.

Appreciation refers, secondly, to the identification and full appreciation of an appropriate and valid anticipation leading to an adaptive response. We “catch ourselves getting it right” rather than dwelling on the times when our anticipation is inaccurate. As a coach, we should help our client identify and appreciate the moments when they got their anticipation right. Let me offer a hypothetical example of how we “get it right”:

Imagine serving as a performance coach working with Ludwig van Beethoven, the renowned 19th-century composer, during the later years of his life. This would be a difficult assignment not only because Beethoven was growing deaf, but also because he was a troubled man who was reportedly very difficult to engage in a positive and supportive conversation. However, Beethoven apparently had a few moments of positive anticipation while working on his 9th Symphony (the crowning composition of his career. In preparing Beethoven’s hypothetical “memoirs,” Caroline Sinclair (2012, p. 96) provides the following narrative:

[T]his was a new level of happiness; in the Ninth, the feeling was . . . profound, for I wished to rejoice in the love of God, and in the brotherhood of man - and what could be greater than these? I truly felt that God was nearer to me than to any other artist when I was writing the Ninth. Moreover, I associated with him without fear, and I felt, also, that in front of me was the possibility of infinite growth. It seemed that this was, perhaps, the first time in my life when I was in a mood where I anticipated good things to befall me, the feeling being not at all disagreeable. I was incited by such moods as this, which are translated by the poet into words, but by me into tones that sound, and roar, and storm about me, until I have set them down in notes. To me, language has ever been an inferior way of communicating; music is far superior, and has the power to express regions of the soul better than any words can do.

This would be an exceptional opportunity when working with Beethoven to provide coaching with a focus on anticipation. First, one would probably be very supportive of Beethoven’s anticipation. One appreciates Beethoven’s thoughts and feelings and helps Ludwig clearly discern the nature and depth of his newly found anticipatory perspective. Perhaps, one can even do a bit of spiritually based coaching regarding his relationship with God. As a coach, one can help Ludwig reflect on ways to sustain the feeling of happiness. Using coaching strategies, one can help Beethoven build on the anticipation of

good things about his work schedule, his physical and psychological health, and the setting in which he was to prepare his greatest symphony.

While Beethoven would have been “a tough customer/client,” our coaching quiver is potentially filled with many arrows (Bergquist and Mura, 2011). Some of these arrows are appreciative in nature and relate directly to the matter of anticipation. We can help our client both lean and learn into the future by helping them focus on the behaviors that inform and influence their anticipation of the near future. Our client can also benefit from appreciative coaching strategies that focus on cognition and help them appraise and adjust their psychosocial template and their specific anticipations.

Finally, there is the matter of emotions. Our body and mind together produce emotions (the primary energizing agency). Furthermore, we rely on our psychosocial template to generate information (the second critical agency). This information, in turn, helps us validate and/or modify our emotions. As I previously suggested, professional coaches can assist their clients at several different levels in helping them identify and trace out the nature of their emotional reactions to specific settings and specific actions they have taken. While emotions come from our past and linger in our present-day psyche, they can provide invaluable guidance regarding the most desirable state of our near future. We can “feel” into our future, accompanying our leaning and learning into this future.

With this brief introduction of all three domains of anticipation, we are ready to launch into an exploration of several appreciative coaching strategies related to the domains of behavior and cognition. The third element (Emotions) will be given considerable attention in our fourth essay.

Behavior

The fundamental question that we might pose to our coaching client concerns: *Why?* We all know that in “polite society” one should never ask “Why?” However, professional coaching is not about being “polite.” It is about being helpful to our client by asking them provocative and insight-inducing questions. These questions often concern the reasons why one’s client has taken certain actions regarding other people. The answer to the “Why?” question often takes one of three forms that relate to the matter of anticipation.

One form of anticipation concerns what is often called “the theory of mind.” When we are young or when we are older and in a stressful setting, we are inclined to assume that other people think and feel like we do. Our client might respond to our “Why?” question by indicating that they have acted in a particular way and responded to this person in this way because they anticipated that this other person is thinking and acting in a similar manner:

I would be upset if someone said this to me, so I assumed that Susan would be similarly upset about what I told her. I would probably react by wanting to get away, so I anticipated that Susan would also want to leave the scene. So, I tried to block her exit.

A second form of anticipation relates to feelings. Once again, the theory of mind can be applied. This theory now applies to our client’s psychosocial template:

I anticipate that Kevin would feel this way, because this is how I think most people would act/react. I softened by approach to him because I anticipated that he would feel quite hurt by what I have to say.

Our client’s psychosocial template includes an assumption that people are “hurt” by any critical comment made about them.

The third common type of anticipatory assumption concerns past history. This person acted or reacted in a certain way in the past. They can be expected to act or react in a similar manner now and in the future. This third assumption resides in something I will soon address more fully. This is the theory of attribution. We are inclined to attribute the behavior of other people (but not our own behavior) to some underlying and unchanging personality trait. “They have always behaved in this manner and always will. Their actions are firmly embedded in their fundamental character.” This third assumption may be played out in the following way by a coaching client:

Geraldine is someone who is always angry about something. I anticipate that she will express anger about the proposal I am about to make. I must prepare for her forceful, negative response.

The concept of self-fulfilling prophecy is relevant here. If my client assumes Geraldine will respond in an angry manner and prepare himself for a negative encounter, then he is likely to act in a defensive and guarded manner. This may provoke Geraldine, encouraging her to question what is really going on and what is not being said. Geraldine might indeed express anger, but it is not regarding what has been said; instead, it is about what has not been said. A vicious circle has been created: anticipation of anger leads to defensiveness, which leads to actual expression of anger, which leads to further defensiveness, etc.

Given these three anticipatory dynamics that are revealed by asking the fundamental coaching question (Why?), what might be ways in which a coach can help their client move beyond potential behavioral traps associated with inaccurate and often self-fulfilling anticipations? I offer two strategies. One is based on the action science of Chris Argyris and Don Schön. The other coaching strategy is based on the model of self-efficacy presented by Albert Bandura.

Polystasis and Action Science

The dynamics just described concerning anticipatory dynamics was insightfully described by Chris Argyris and Don Schön (1974) in their collaborative work on the relationship between the theory that we espouse and the theory that we actually engage (theory-in-use). Reframed from the perspective of Polystasis, we can propose that what we anticipate is informed not by some psychosocial template that we can readily articulate; instead, it is informed by (even governed by) a psychosocial template that is often not one we can easily identify—or perhaps not one we are comfortable acknowledging. Our espoused psychosocial template might contain stated beliefs in remaining open-minded about other people whom we don’t quite trust or even like. Our psychosocial template-in-use, on the other hand, might be filled with assumptions about how “this kind of person” operates on a different set of principles than we do or that anyone we don’t trust should never have access to our true feelings.

For Argyris and Schön, the key to working effectively with other people resided in the engagement of a process first identified as “action research” by Kurt Lewin. Building on the work done by Don Schön (1983) on reflective practice as well as Kurt Lewin’s work, Chris Argyris (1985) described a process of taking action in the world (experimentation) and reflecting on what is to be learned from this action. Re-labeled “action science, the guiding principle was to learn from one’s involvement in the real world rather than relying on what one has read in a book or been told by other people.

As Don Schön repeatedly noted, the separation of research from professional practice has been destructive of both research and practice. Effective practitioners (whether in medicine, law or psychotherapy) should always be testing their hypotheses (espoused theory) against what they are experiencing in their daily practices. They are engaged in research just as much as those working in a chemistry laboratory or running a rat down a maze. I would suggest that this reflective practice is being engaged on an ongoing basis by all of us as we acquire feedback from our environment regarding the actions we have taken based on our anticipations.

Argyris and Schön provide an analytic tool that makes the process of reflective practice and action science fully accessible to us as we confront difficult challenges (especially those involving interpersonal relationships). They construct a table with a left and right column. On the left column, one places a segment of a set of behaviors that have taken place or are envisioned between oneself and the other person with whom one has a challenging relationship. On the right column, one places a statement regarding what each person is thinking and feeling in the midst of the enactment of their specific behavior.

For instance, we might prepare a left-right column table regarding our upcoming meeting with someone we will call "Susan". Our left column might include a statement we make to start the conversation ("I want to share my concerns with you about the speech you delivered yesterday.") The right column might include our anticipation regarding how Susan will react ("She is going to become very upset and angry regarding what I have to say"). The second item on the left column might be the statement that we anticipate Susan will make ("I look forward to hearing what you have to say. I always appreciate your feedback."). In the right column, we insert our anticipation (assumption) of what Susan is thinking and feeling ("This is going to be awful, and I should brace myself for some bad news!").

The next statement, located on the left column, might include the first segment of the feedback to be offered to Susan, followed by a right column statement regarding my anticipation of how she will react. In the left column, we then prepare what we think Susan's statement will be upon hearing the initial feedback. A right column entry would then include what we think Susan will be thinking and feeling at the time when she offers her reaction to this initial feedback. The left and right columns are subsequently filled with further anticipated statements being made (left column) and further thoughts and feelings in reaction to these statements (right column).

This left column/right column exercise is being prepared precisely to set up a framework regarding what we are anticipating will occur during this specific upcoming conversation with Susan. Note that we "don't believe" Susan when she indicates that she looks forward to receiving the feedback. What if Susan is being honest? Have we set up conditions for Susan to change her mind regarding the benefit of our feedback? Assuming that Susan will be defensive and perhaps even hurt and angry regarding our feedback, do we offer the feedback in a way that increases her mistrust or suspicion regarding our intentions in providing the feedback?

For instance, Argyris and Schön observe that we often "ease-in" when offering feedback that we don't think the recipient will like. We don't directly deliver the feedback but instead cover it over with false praise ("this was a wonderful statement, filled with great insights, however . . .) or hesitant qualification ("I might be mistaken, but I think you did something . . ."). The recipient of our feedback is likely to assume that we are holding back because what we have to say is quite harmful. They become defensive.

We offer even more false praise or even more qualifications and defensiveness further increases. A “vicious circle” of increasing mistrust is created.

If Chris Argyris or Don Schön were to enter the picture at this point, they might suggest that we test out an alternative scenario, where we believe Susan when she indicates that she is looking forward to our feedback. They would challenge us to review and potentially revise our psychosocial template regarding how people in general react to negative feedback and how Susan, in particular, would react to what we would like to tell her.

First, Argyris or Schön might ask why we are giving Susan this feedback in the first place, if we anticipate that she will just get defensive and angry. They might bring up a comment they have often made in their books: Just because we get a bit defensive when receiving negative feedback does not mean that we are not open to learning from this feedback. It is always difficult to hear “bad news”; however, these are the occasions when we can learn most about our behavior and how we can do a better job in the future. Engaging our polystatic perspective, the message might be: “Our anticipation regarding Susan’s ‘real’ interests in our feedback might be inaccurate; perhaps we need to consider an alternative anticipation”.

Either Chris Argyris or Don Schön might also suggest that we are setting up a self-fulfilling prophecy if we set ourselves up to respond by “easing in” when anticipating Susan’s defensiveness. Our tentative presentation of the feedback could make Susan increasingly uneasy about what we have to say, which leads to us being even more tentative and Susan being even more defensive. It gets even more complicated and destructive. The vicious cycle becomes “self-sealed.” If Susan is very defensive, then we certainly can’t tell her that we think she is defensive. Susan, in turn, can’t let us know that she thinks our feedback is being delivered ineffectively or that she thinks we are holding back the “really bad news”. Nothing of real importance can be shared. The situation turns increasingly “ugly.” Both parties are holding on to anticipations that lead to future avoidance. We have decided to avoid Susan at all costs in the future, given her defensiveness. Susan is similarly determined to avoid future interactions with me and certainly will never request my feedback in the future.

We could turn the self-fulfilling prophecy on its head by beginning with the assumption (anticipation) that Susan is open to our feedback. Our willingness to share what we have to say without “softening it” might convey to Susan that our feedback is not intended to be harmful and is really not that “bad” and, even more importantly, that we trust (anticipate) Susan’s strength and commitment to ongoing improvement. We anticipate openness and success, which leads to actual openness (on Susan’s part) and success (our delivery of helpful feedback), which leads to further openness and success resulting from this interaction (and others in the future).

Argyris and Schön might offer one other suggestion. At some point, we might want to share our assumptions and anticipations with Susan. We would engage in what is sometimes called “meta-communication” (Bateson, 1972; Watzlawick, Beavin, and Jackson, 1967), where we talk about what we have just been talking about. With Susan, we reflect on our own concern about how she might take our feedback. Susan could then reflect on how she really felt when we offered to provide her with feedback and indicate what she has done with the feedback that was provided. Both parties learn from this process of meta-communication. While a modicum of trust must be established between the two parties before this powerful process can be engaged, it ultimately can be a source of important shared insight. Joint reflective practice has been engaged. Action science is in full operation.

While it would be nice to bring in Chris Argyris or Don Schön, this is not feasible, given the long timespan between their initial presentation of the left and right column exercise. There is also the long distance of most of us from the Harvard (Argyris) and MIT (Schön) campuses. Furthermore, we don't need their assistance, for we can effectively "coach" ourselves. Furthermore, we can use the left and right column exercise when serving as a coach to our clients. I recommend the following set of steps. They not only build on what Argyris and Schön have offered, but also incorporate concepts derived from the polystatic perspective.

Step One:

Identify the behavior you have enacted or expect to enact.

Identify what you anticipate would be this person's reactions to your behavior

Identify what your likely behavior would be following the other person's action/reactions

Step Two:

Why do you anticipate that this would be this person's actions/reactions?

What might be their alternative actions/reactions? How might your behavior influence the engagement of their alternative behavior?

Step Three:

What do you anticipate happening following this engagement?

Do you anticipate that this would result in good outcomes, bad outcomes or both?

On what do you base this anticipation?

At this point, it is often helpful to role-play the anticipated interaction, with the coach initially playing the role of the feedback recipient (after finding a bit more about this person's past behavior and even their "character" as assessed by one's client). As alternative behaviors are explored, the coach and client might even change roles, with the coach demonstrating actions that can be taken based on alternative sets of anticipations.

Self-Efficacy and Attribution

Another approach to addressing behavioral change that relates to anticipation comes from the noted behavioral psychologist Albert Bandura (1997). He introduces the concept of *Self-Efficacy* and relates this concept to one's belief in their ability to succeed in specific situations or accomplish a task. From a psychology of anticipation perspective, Bandura's self-efficacy could be manifest in one's anticipation of success and fulfillment in meeting a specific challenge. Much as Beethoven anticipated artistic success in completing his Ninth Symphony, one can anticipate learning from a difficult task, finding support in one's attempt to achieve an ambitious goal, and receiving recognition and reward in reaching a major goal.

Applying a social learning model to the study of human behavior, Bandura proposed that an individual's actions and reactions, including social behaviors and cognitive processes, in almost every situation are influenced by the actions and outcomes they have observed regarding other people. This social learning

perspective suggests that our anticipations of what immediately lies in front of us are strongly influenced by what has occurred in the lives of other people with whom we affiliate. Our psychosocial template is founded on the amount and type of learning we have gained in our world of interpersonal relationships.

Bandura identifies four factors that affect self-efficacy. The first is **Experiencing** success in one's life and work. You can't fake the achievement of outcomes. Taking an appreciative approach, we assist our clients as a coach to identify moments and times in their past when they have been successful at completing a task. We help Beethoven identify other occasions in his life when he anticipated the successful completion of a musical composition. What enabled Beethoven to sustain this anticipation—and what barrier(s) did Beethoven enact to block this sustained anticipation.

The second Bandura factor is **Modeling**, or "vicarious experience." Bandura is particularly noted for this form of social learning. We acquire knowledge and skills by watching other people doing something successfully. I would suggest that we not only learn from this observation but also increase our own positive anticipation of being successful. As a coach, we might suggest that our client watch someone else complete a task that they must themselves soon engage. We might encourage them to find a mentor (even if they are "senior" members of their organization) or pick up a book providing directions on how to be successful or watch a recording portraying the successful performance of a relevant task.

The third factor is **Social persuasion**. This factor for Bandura is about how we are "persuaded" that we can be effective. We seek to match the challenges we face with support from other people (Sanford, 1980). When assigned major responsibility, we need comparable authority, as well as encouragement and assistance from other members of our organization (Simons, 2005). When serving as a coach, we can not only offer our own encouragement and assistance but also help our clients find other sources of support in their work setting. We often need to be persuaded that we can be effective and that our positive anticipations are justified.

Finally, there are **Physiological factors**. This brings us to the first elements in a polystatic process: our somatic template and our emotions. As Bandura notes, it is hard to feel self-efficacious under conditions of stress. When feeling "lousy" about our body and mind (as manifest in a disturbed somatic and psychosocial template), one is likely to feel "lousy" as well about the prospects of being successful regarding the challenges we face.

As often reiterated in our Polystasis model, our anticipations are strongly influenced by our bodily condition, regardless of any "realistic" prospects of being successful. Beethoven often felt discouraged about his work on symphonies that were to become widely acclaimed. His negative anticipations often resulted not just from the high standards he set (mental factor), but also from his poor health and, in particular, his loss of hearing (physical factor). We "feel" into the near future as much as we "think" into this future.

Attribution theory is closely related to the self-efficacy model offered by Albert Bandura. This theory is concerned, as the title implies, with how people attribute the cause of specific events and how these attributes influence one's sense of self. From one perspective, one assumes responsibility for all of their actions. They retain an internal locus of control. This means not only that one's successes and failures have a major impact on one's sense of self-worth (and self-efficacy), but also that their

anticipation of this success or failure will strongly influence their actual level of accomplishment. High levels of self-fulfilling prophecy are found among those who assume high levels of self-control.

Conversely, from another perspective, one assumes that most causes reside outside themselves. They attribute success or failure to other people, other institutions, the environment, or some form of fate or divine judgment. Self-esteem and self-efficacy are minimally influenced by outcomes, for with a strong external locus of control, one will often feel powerless and unaccountable for any outcomes. A strong external locus leads one to look to other people and institutions for guidance regarding what to anticipate when engaging their world.

The matter of attribution also concerns how we view the behavior of other people. While we tend to believe that our own behavior is determined by external factors (especially if we have an external locus of control), we are likely to believe that other people operate from a consistent set of beliefs (personality). Many of us hold this bifurcated theory regarding human behavior. A state (environmental) theory explains our own behavior, while a trait (character) theory explains everyone else's behavior.

This bifurcated theory is useful when we want to believe that the behavior of other people will be predictable, and that our own behavior is flexible and adaptive; however, this bifurcation also gets us in trouble when we fail to acknowledge the variable behavior of other people and/or the consistency of our own behavior. Similarly, we are likely to be surprised when our anticipation of another person's behavior doesn't fit with our expectations regarding their usually "consistent" behavior. When we are often surprised and must frequently adjust our interpersonal anticipations, then we may be forced to adjust our fundamental psychosocial template. We begin to acknowledge the way in which events and environments influence other people's behavior and ways in which attributions must be viewed as complex and variable--much like the VUCA-Plus world in which we now live (Bergquist, 2025).

Cognition

A polystatic approach to the processes of anticipation is inherently systemic. It is based on the assumption that our appraisal of the environment in which we are about to operate is wholistic in nature. We don't focus on one segment or aspect of our environment when anticipating what is about to be the nature of this environment; rather, we focus on the entire entity when making the appraisal, when adjusting our anticipation, and when taking action based on this adjustment. Not unlike Kurt Lewin, in his formulation of field theory, I propose that we continually construct systemic portraits of the environment in which we are about to act. Lewin calls these "topological maps" and offers tools for the construction of these maps.

Polystatic Force Field Analysis

Lewin's most widely used tool is Force Field Analysis. One first identifies a specific goal or desired outcome in the field one is about to enter and then identifies forces in this field that enhance and those that block our movement toward this goal. The analysis then moves to an assessment of the relative strength of each force, and to consideration of ways in which to add more positive forces or strengthen those already present. Finally, attention turns to the negative forces and determination of ways in which to reduce or isolate each of these forces. Most importantly, Lewin noted that with the addition of each new positive force, there will be the addition of a new negative force or strengthening of an existing negative force.

I similarly have suggested that we must engage Charles Osgood's triad of threat when reviewing our process of anticipation. Building on Osgood, we determine if specific elements in our environment are working against (blocking) our best interest (a negative valence), are strong, and are active. Moving beyond Osgood, we also identify specific elements that are working on behalf of our best interest (positive valence), are strong and active. Mixed together and interacting, these positive and negative elements comprise our immediate systematic portrayal ("topological map"). Most of this appraisal process aligns with Lewin's force field analysis; however, I add the level of activity to the analysis alongside strength. I would suggest that one of Lewin's forces has an impact on our movement toward a goal, not only because they are strong, but also because they are actively involved in the field (rather than remaining passive or inert).

I also consider another factor regarding the elements in an anticipated environment. We must take into account not only valence, strength, and activity, but also the expected duration of each element. Returning to Lewin's force field analysis, this would mean that consideration is given to the "staying power" of each force. Lewin does take this factor partially into account when he considers the amiability (or vulnerability) of each force to being changed. How stable are the positive forces, and can they readily be eliminated or reduced in strength?

How resistant are the negative forces to being eliminated or reduced in strength? In the case of a polystatic analysis, one looks not just at the 'staying power' of a specific element if subjected to changing conditions, but also more simply to the probability that this element will "hang around" for a while, whether or not pressures of change are impinging on this element. When we are anticipating the environment that we face in the coming moment, we might not have time to assess its "changeability" but we do want to know if it is likely to still be present for some time.

As a coach, we can be of value to our client in helping them engage in a polystatic force field analysis that begins with the identification of an upcoming challenging situation and a desired outcome when facing this challenge. The analysis then turns to identifying positive and negative elements, levels of strength and activity, and, finally, the anticipated duration of each major element. With this cognitively based analysis in hand (and mind), one's client is prepared to make appropriate and accurate appraisals of the actual environment in which they are about to operate. Their anticipations are likely to be reliant on these appraisals rather than the inevitable emotional biases the client holds when preparing to face the challenge.

Let me offer a brief example, based on a real coaching engagement I had with a religious client (with some of the facts being slightly modified to preserve anonymity). This client was a liberal Rabbi who was about to make a presentation at a meeting with other leaders of his particular Judaic persuasion. He was going to propose some modifications in Jewish dietary restrictions—a big deal! He anticipated major opposition to his proposal and knew that he would be entering this meeting with a heart filled with both conviction and fear.

We conducted a polystatic force field analysis, beginning by identifying his desired outcome (acceptance or at least willingness to consider modification in the restrictions). We then identified both the positive and negative elements (forces). These included both some frustration with the various ways the current restrictions are interpreted (positive valence), and resistance to any change in long-standing traditions (negative valence). I helped him identify additional elements (both positive and negative), following

which we assessed the strength and level of activity of each element. Specifically, we focused on the duration of concern about the frustration and the duration of traditional resistance.

My rabbinical colleague concluded that concern about widespread frustration is probably short-lived, while resistance to modifying a religious tradition is undoubtedly long-term. However, he also noted that some of his fellow rabbis, who are young and open-minded, are anxious to “stir things up.” They are impatient about the enduring barriers to necessary reform. This impatience is likely to endure, and the liberal faction of his rabbinical community is not going away. The members of this faction are young and committed to reform. They represent a positive, strong, and active element in the setting he will soon enter.

As a result of our coaching session, my rabbinical client went away from our session holding on to a more positive anticipation regarding reactions to his proposal. He also formulated a new plan of action based on his reframed anticipations. He decided to communicate by email with his liberal colleagues, requesting that they join him in offering the proposal, or at least be actively supportive of his request for consideration of dietary reform.

It should be noted that the force field analysis I conducted with my rabbinical client was represented on a flip chart, rather than just being discussed orally. I find that polystatic dynamics are often best presented in graphic form. Arrows are drawn. Springboards and barriers are drawn that activate or block the arrows. A goal or desired outcome is placed above or to the right of “all the action taking place.” Most importantly, a graphic portrayal on a flip chart enables a coaching client to get “some distance” from the challenge they are facing. The powerful forces and elements that are identified can be seen and modified from a more “objective” point of view. If no flip chart is available, then a whiteboard might be engaged or the analysis might be conducted on a computer screen using graphic tools, with the resulting portrayal being projected on a wall.

Polystatic Cross-Impact Analysis

As a coach, I not only modify the force field processes proposed by Kurt Lewin by bringing the dynamics of anticipation. I also find that a systemic polystatic-based analysis requires consideration of the interrelationships between the various elements of the environment in which one’s client anticipates working. As Miller and Page (2007) have noted, important systems are not just complicated (many elements) but also complex (these elements related to one another). I find that my coaching clients are much more likely to request my assistance in managing a complex rather than just a complicated issue. Anticipation of complexity requires a more systemic analysis than is the case with a force field analysis. While the elements in a Lewinian analysis are considered to be operating in isolation from one another, the elements in something called a cross-impact analysis are all interacting with and jointly influencing the strengths, activity level, duration, and (sometimes) even the valence of this element.

Originally developed by Theodore Gordon and Olaf Helmer to help determine how relationships between events may impact resulting events and reduce uncertainty in the future, I have often used Cross-Impact Analysis to assist clients in anticipating their own future. I have modified this analytic tool to make it compatible with a polystatic perspective. Along with my coaching client, I prepare a matrix on which all the major elements in a system are placed on both the left side and at the top of the matrix. Together with my client, I then examine the relationship between one element and each of the other elements to determine the extent to which the valence, strength, activity level, and duration (VSAD)

level of the first element influences the VSAD of the second element. Does the first element assist (up arrow) or block (down arrow) the second element—or do they operate independently of one another (“0”)? And how strong and sustained is this assistance or blockage (multiple arrows)?

This same analysis is conducted with each of the other elements as they relate to all of the other elements in the matrix. Not only does the cross-impact consideration of each element with the other elements provide a client with a clearer sense of the interdependence of the system’s elements, a cross-impact consideration also provides an even broader, systemic portrait. If the matrix is filled with up-arrows, then we find the portrayal of a highly “enmeshed” system in which action taken about any one element in the system will spread quickly to other elements—a “pinball effect”. Conversely, if the matrix contains many down-arrows, then a condition of “win-lose” is being portrayed. The elements operate in opposition to one another. As a result, one must carefully prioritize one’s actions, for whatever actions one takes, it is likely to negatively impact other parts of the system.

There are also matrices in which many “0s” are prevalent. This matrix represents a “disengaged” system. Nothing relates to anything else. This system can be treated as complicated rather than complex. In such a system, planning requires a set of independent actions, as well as careful consideration of the action that should be of the highest priority. The “disengaged” status of this system also suggests that some work might need to be done that yields good reasons for cooperation among the elements and provides a heavy dose of integrative thinking regarding the overall purpose and welfare of the system.

Conclusions

The systemic portrait that a force field analysis and cross-impact analysis yield is likely to reveal something about the emotional life, psychosocial templates, and dominant anticipations that underlie the operations of this system. If many forces (both positive and negative) are found on the force field chart, then one must wonder about the potential dominance of an external locus of control. Having completed the analysis, one imagines standing on the bow of a ship that is being tossed about in a stormy sea. Fair weather and a favorable wind are anticipated, but they have not yet arrived. We feel powerless and dependent on the weather. Perhaps another ship will come to our rescue.

On the other hand, a chart that contains few positive or negative forces suggests that movement is in ‘your hands.’ This means that one might not need to do anything more at this point than “get on with” movement to the desired goal. However, there might be some hesitation in moving forward (which probably helped to motivate the engagement of this analysis in the first place). Under these conditions, a new analysis might be conducted that focuses on forces that are operating inside one’s head and heart.

A polystatic perspective is particularly valuable in this regard. Several tough questions might be engaged: Are there any anticipations that you have which could block your movement forward to your desired goal? Are the blocks you anticipate based in large part on a valid assessment of what is out there in the environment? If so, then perhaps a return to the original force field analysis is required. Are the anticipated blocks instead based primarily on something that you “feel” or some powerful emotions that are associated with movement toward (or achievement of) the desired goal? If so, then the new Head-and-Heart force field analysis should be conducted.

The cross-impact analysis generates similar insights (or at least questions) regarding emotions, templates, and dominant anticipations. Many up-arrows suggest that members of this system are likely

to retain an optimistic psychosocial template, feel good about working in this system, and anticipate positive outcomes resulting from whatever actions are to be taken. Conversely, a matrix in which negative arrows are abundant portends a pessimistic psychosocial template (“dog eat dog”), negative feelings about working in this system, and anticipation of negative (or unexpected) outcomes regardless of the actions being taken.

Finally, we find the “disengaged” (“0” filled) cross-impact matrix to be indicative of a system in which “there is no there, there.” Glue is lacking that binds members of this system to some greater purpose. Feelings of alienation or indifference are likely to prevail, accompanied by a psychosocial template that is devoid of much content. Members of the system often don’t even bother to anticipate any outcomes because they don’t feel like their actions will make much of a difference anyway. A sense of powerlessness and hopelessness leaves one without appreciation for any polystatic perspective regarding a specific “0” filled setting. In such a setting, homeostasis might provide a valid perspective. Everything does fall back to some stable state when no one really “gives a damn . . .”

All of this suggests that Emotions show up whenever we are using the force-field and cross-impact tools. We are also likely to experience the activation of our orbital cortex and amygdala when “viewing” and “feeling” our cognitive processing of anticipations and reflecting on behaviors elicited by these moments of anticipation. It seems that we can’t leave our body behind when we live into the near future. Our neurobiology taps us on the shoulder and suggests (often forcibly) that membership in the anticipatory decision-making body should never be restricted to rational, thoughtful, and information-based elements in our psyche.

There is much that emotional and intuitive elements in our psyche can contribute in a positive and creative manner (Lehrer, 2009). Our prefrontal cortex should never run the show. If it does, for a short period of time, then other parts of our neurological system will soon demand a hearing and divert energy away from current behavior patterns to behavior that is primarily protective (fight/flight) or non-existent (freeze). All hell breaks loose. We have created our own ship that is wallowing in an Emotional, Cognitive, and Behavioral storm. . .

So, stay tuned for our consideration of these “stormy” issues in our fourth (and final) essay.

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