

Coaching of Anticipation: A Coda for Insights and Implications

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In bringing this series of essays on the psychology of anticipation to a close, I turn my attention specifically to the matter of coaching our clients regarding their anticipations. Specifically, what does the polystatic model offer as a way to guide this coaching process? And what else can be derived from the analyses offered in this set of essays for those engaged in professional coaching? I address these questions by providing a list of the insights and implications found in each of the four essays.

This Coda contains a summary of specific insights and implications I have presented in the four essays as they relate to the field of professional coaching. The list includes coaching insights and implications contained in the first two essays on the psychology of anticipation (essay one) and anticipatory differences to be found among the nine different personality types of the Enneagram (essay two). Additions to this list come from the third essay on the behavioral and cognitive functions of the polystatic process, and the fourth essay on the emotional functions and neurobiological factors related to Polystasis and the psychology of anticipation.

Essays I and II

From the first two essays on the psychology of anticipation, I extract the following Insights and Implications for use by Professional Coaches. Making use of these insights and implications, we can assist a client in addressing their anticipations:

Perfect Storm and Valence

An effective professional coach will assist their client in identifying the assumptions made and the heuristics applied under specific conditions of anticipation. Many conditions in mid-21st-century life hold the potential of threat. It is in these conditions and at these moments that our client must be particularly vigilant and reflective. We encourage our client to ask themselves: Is this situation really like the last one? Can I do a better job this time in coping with this challenging situation? I might have to consider differing points of view. Is this genuinely threatening, or am I imagining that it is threatening?

A perfect physiological storm takes place when our coaching client anticipates a threat. Adrenaline is coursing through their veins and sustaining their sympathetic state of arousal. Yet, our client often does nothing about draining off this energizing system. They remain in a sympathetic state. Their polystatic process is messed up, with sustained energizing of a body that remains immobile. Our client continues to anticipate the lion. This being the case, they continue to activate their body in preparation for a fight with or flight from the lion. They even reset their polystatic baseline. The dial is now set on the survival mode—as are their psychosocial and somatic templates. As Peter Sterling has noted, it isn't our client's body that is at fault. It is just doing, appropriately, what their imagination is telling them is the "reality" to which they must respond.

The most important (and often dramatic) change that can occur with a coaching client involves a shift in valence from positive to negative anticipation or from negative to positive. The baseline changes abruptly, as does the level and type of physiological arousal. Positive anticipation is often accompanied by a parasympathetic state. A very exciting positive anticipation (especially one involving action) can produce a sympathetic state; yet, even in this sympathetic state, our client is likely to obtain a squirt of dopamine when anticipating great outcomes (such as the gambler looking forward to positive results at the poker table). It is much more likely that the sympathetic system is aroused when anticipating a negative event, situation, or outcome. Whether anticipating a real or imagined lion, our body prepares for fight, flight, or freeze.

The strength (size) of a positive anticipation by our coaching client impacts the amount of dopamine being injected into their bloodstream. Do they imagine a small jackpot or a bonanza? Are they going to get a new, challenging job assignment or a major promotion at work? Either of these could shift our client to the sympathetic system; however, the major promotion might produce a bigger “high.” With the major promotion, there also might be a shift in our client’s psychosocial template, though this shift is likely to be gradual as they slowly embrace an altered perspective on their organization and their role and responsibility in this organization.

What if our client anticipates an event that they expect to be extended over time or a setting in which they are likely to dwell for a “lifetime” (or at least a few months)? Long-duration anticipations will inevitably require a major shift in our client’s polystatic baseline or even their psychosocial template. The challenge is one of sustaining attention to this event or setting over the long term. As human beings, we are skilled in “adapting” to changing conditions and soon begin taking them for granted.

Personality and Anticipation

There are many different models of personality types. Each of these comes with differing anticipations based on the specific personality (or character) being considered. One of the oldest and most respected models is the Enneagram. Our enneagram type leads us to differing anticipations. At the extreme, each Enneagram type anticipates a large amount of something (positive) or the complete lack of this something (negative). What this something is differs for each type.

The nine Enneagram types tend to cluster in several threes that relate to interpersonal feeling and the anticipation of specific types of interpersonal relationships. These feelings are Fear, Anger, and Shame. A psychosocial template that is saturated with feelings of fear will look quite different from one saturated with anger or shame. Baselines that focus on the state of fear in one’s psyche will produce anticipations that differ significantly from baselines primarily concerned with anger or shame. Interpersonal relationships that are dominated by concerns regarding the experience and expression of anger look quite different from relationships in which fear or shame are of primary concern.

Emotions and Coaching

In working with a client, it is important to keep in mind that shame is an even stronger emotion than either the thrill of success or disappointment of failure. It is even stronger than the emotion associated

with regret. Shame will often dominate the somatic template and strongly influence the psychosocial template. Unlike Regret, which concerns behavior we did or didn't take, or guilt, which is about our behavior and reactions to our behavior, shame is about who we are. It is about permanent disconnection from other people. Shame is formed early in life, when we feel unwanted or unloved by significant others.

It is also important when working with a client, to keep in mind that when we anticipate love expressed by other people, there is a renewed (or new) possibility that we can begin to love or at least forgive ourselves. We are told that what we did is "alright" or "understandable" given the circumstances. This appreciation articulated by another person enables us to reframe, re-interpret, and re-appraise our own actions. Our psychosocial template is not filled with acceptance, appreciation, and support. We can "go bravely into our new world" without a sense of personal shame and worthlessness. This appreciative psychosocial template might be even more appropriate than a template that leads us to retreat in a mid-21st-century world that is filled with VUCA-Plus challenges.

Essay III

A second set of insights and implications are derived from the third essay on coaching to anticipations. First, the distinction between energy and information is critical for us to keep in mind as professional coaches. Our life is a flow of energy and information. The polystatic process is itself a flow of these two fundamental entities. Our work as a coach is to help our client observe and potentially modify the flow of their own energy and information. Energy comes primarily from the amygdala, and more generally, the Emotional Element of the polystatic process. Energy 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.

Cognition and Coaching

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, 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 recall as professional coaches 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. As professional coaches, we can assist our clients in deriving information from their Emotional state. We are 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.

From a polystatic perspective, the error-detection signals we generate in our body provide a somatic level (and Emotional) corrective to the cognitively based appraisal. It is important to keep in mind, as professional coaches, that a critical role is played by the amygdala. Furthermore, it is important to recognize that the amygdala may rely on 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. Detected changes

may lead one to conclude that good, strong, and active things are happening in one's environment. 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).

Heuristics, Appreciation, and Coaching

As a professional coach, we can help our client reflect on their assumptions, avoid “knee-jerk” heuristics, and slow down their thinking. This assistance is particularly important as it focuses on the function of anticipation, which serves as the backbone of the polystatic process. Human beings live not in the current moment but in the moment that is anticipated in the immediate future. We must “lean into the future” as we navigate our world, and 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.

The concept of Appreciation emerged during the early years of this century in association with a positive psychological perspective. As related to the process of anticipation, an appreciative perspective refers, first, to the assumption 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 that leads 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.

As professional coaches, we should keep in mind that 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. Professional coaches can assist their clients in identifying and tracing 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. With our assistance, a coaching client can “feel” into their future, accompanying their leaning and learning into this future.

Anticipation and Coaching

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.

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. 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 called 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.”

Espoused Theory and Theory-In-Use

When engaged in professional coaching, we can make use of a powerful tool involving the identification of theories we actually use rather than just espouse. From the perspective of Polystasis, we can propose to our client that what they anticipate is NOT informed by some psychosocial template that we can readily articulate; rather, 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.

Chris Argyris and Don 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. In 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. In the right column, one places a statement regarding what each person is thinking and feeling while enacting their specific behavior. 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).

They would challenge us to review and potentially revise our psychosocial template. For instance, 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.

Reflection on Anticipations

Engaging our polystatic perspective, the message might be: “Our anticipation might be inaccurate; perhaps we need to consider an alternative anticipation.” Argyris and 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 defensiveness. Our tentative presentation of the feedback could make the recipient of this feedback increasingly uneasy about what we have to say, which leads to us being even more tentative and the recipient being even more defensive. It gets even more complicated and destructive. The vicious cycle becomes “self-sealed.”

Argyris or Schön would also suggest that we test out scenarios that yield positive outcomes. They might offer one other suggestion. At some point, we may want to share our assumptions and anticipations with the recipient. We would engage in what is sometimes called “meta-communication,” where we talk about what we have just been talking about. 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.

The following set of coaching steps builds on what Argyris and Schön have offered and incorporates 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, Surprise and Coaching

Albert Bandura identifies four factors that affect self-efficacy. These factors are important for a professional coach to keep in mind when coaching about anticipation. 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.

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. When assigned major responsibility, we need comparable authority, as well as encouragement and assistance from other members of our organization. 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.

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. We must engage the Triad of Threat when reviewing our process of anticipation. We determine if specific elements in our environment are working against (blocking) our best interest (a negative valence), are strong, and are active. We also identify specific elements that are working on behalf of our best interest (positive valence), are strong and active.

Force Field Analysis

Mixed 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.

Cross-Impact Analysis

Cross-Impact Analysis can be of value to coaching 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.

Systemic Portraits

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 underlying 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 when focusing on anticipation during a coaching session. Several tough questions might be engaged: Are there any of your anticipations that 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 "O" 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 . . ."

Essay IV

A final set of insights and implications come from the fourth essay in this series on the coaching of anticipation.

Emotions and Coaching

In helping coaches be more effective, I often turn to the agency of the human psyche that is most closely associated with our Emotions. This agency is our neurobiological system, with its many levels of functioning, and a surprising lack of any central coordinating unit. As a self-organizing, highly adaptive system, our brain and its many adjunct parts provide ample resources for our successful engagement in a complex, feedback-based process of Polystasis (contrasting with the traditional model of homeostasis).

My coaching clients often tell me that they greatly appreciate our sessions, for they have no one else to talk with about the "personal matter" they shared with me. Matters such as considering retirement from his administrative position and fighting for the return of their division to independent status. My clients often struggle to discuss potential retirement with their intimate partner because this would disrupt everything in their lives. They certainly can't talk with other people in their office about any dreams regarding "corporate revolution." I often gently share something we know about the psychologically based challenges of leadership. We know that assumptions regarding the motives and abilities of leaders are increasingly devoid of reality, the higher one's position in an organization.

We pay a great price for our power. Our coaching clients can anticipate that there will be strong negative reactions if they vary their administrative practices very much to make these practices more gratifying for them or make them more successful in their administrative role. Even if people around our client might wish for these reforms, they are likely to find it hard to make the adjustments. Perhaps "everyone" wants our client to change, but "nobody" wants our client to change.

Character Armor and Coaching

Many people in formal positions of authority (such as police officers, judges, and physicians) wear uniforms not only to project this authority, but also to protect themselves. They are shielded in *Character Armor*. We don't know much about these people in uniforms; furthermore, even when a person in authority (who must be "responsible") wears no uniform, they must not say much about themselves or about how they are feeling at any one moment concerning their reactions to the person they are serving.

Even those providing professional services are to keep their feelings and personal stories to themselves. Many professional clients and clients in positions of authority have shared with me that I am the one

person with whom they can share their emotions and the basis for these emotions. They anticipate that disclosure at their worksite would be unacceptable.

The higher the position, the more power and the more authority one has, the greater is the possibility that anticipations will be based primarily on emotions, rather than on an accurate appraisal of one's setting. Feedback from other people is likely to be distorted and inappropriately motivated. Rewards that are anticipated from one's environment are often absent, while unanticipated kickback may frequently occur. As a result, accurate cognition and appropriate behavior are sometimes quite elusive. As a leader, one is likely to rely on Emotions, given the unreliability of either cognition or behavior. This is the opposite of what should be expected from those in a leadership role.

Emotional Anchors, Signals, and Coaching

As we bring anticipation into the picture, the concept of *Emotional Anchor* is important. There are points or events in our daily experience that bring us back to a fundamental emotion. The identification of emotional anchors can be of great benefit when we serve as a coach. Offering an appreciative perspective, we can help our client identify those moments and events that elicit deep emotions in them.

These moments and events can help our client identify not just their goals and aspirations, but also the baseline(s) that they use when anticipating something in their life. While a psychosocial template can be engaged to assess threat, it can also be used to assess potential pleasure and gratification. Working with a client, we can help them appreciate the emotional anchors in their life and the way(s) in which these anchors can be introduced into their psychosocial template.

Clearly, our Anticipations are often rooted in our emotions. The question to be posed is: How deep is this rooting, and how pervasive is the influence of emotions on our anticipations? One of Sigmund Freud's later conceptions concerns the role of anxiety as an emotion that signals the potential emergence of unconscious content that will be threatening to us if allowed to enter consciousness. A splash of anxiety across our face moves us to anticipate unacceptable urges that could get us in trouble. Our anxiety might even arise from our genuine sense of Guilt. Our potential actions are not aligned with deeply held values.

As a coach, we should be aware that our clients' emotions (and our own emotions) are strongly influenced when appraising our current setting by unconscious forces. While these forces may arise from some super-ego or God-driven condemnation of certain urges, they might also arise from our attraction to certain "shiny" objects, people, and events. We are animated in our anticipation of something we find attractive, compelling, and exciting.

We are also animated by the unconscious pull toward or away from other people. Our attractive and our troubled relationships with other people are subject to such dynamics as *psychic splitting* (this person is either all good or all bad), *projection* (moving part of oneself that is unacceptable or disturbingly powerful to the other person), and/or *containment* (looking for someone who can help contain our anxiety).

We can apply our Polystatic perspective to an appreciation of these dynamics. We might suggest, for instance, that our anticipation of impact regarding a potential action is determined by whether or not we think the person we are planning to engage is good or bad. We might instead anticipate that the person we are engaging will react to us in a way that we might if fully aware of our own perspectives and motives. The process of projection involves the unconscious generation of assumptions about other people that relate to our own psyche. We don't realize that these assumptions are really all about us—not them!

Neurobiology and Coaching

Most of our cortical functions are dependent on information derived from external sources. This is particularly the case regarding forebrain (prefrontal) functions. Information from the external world is “channeled.” The “state” functions operate in a completely different manner. They are dependent on internal sources of information. The somatic template and psychosocial template are closely associated with the “state” functions. Furthermore, most of the internal sources of information are likely to be related directly to our Emotional state.

Most importantly, just as our polystatic anticipations are holistic rather than focused on a single element in our environment, it is probably required that our primary source of information on which we base these anticipations is general and holistic in nature. Thus, it is likely that our anticipations and appraisals are closely related to our State operations and deeply invested in our Emotions. “Channel” information certainly provides important cognitive correctives to these Emotion-based anticipations, but might not play the primary determining role.

Given this distinction, I suggest that the somatic template and psychosocial template are closely associated with the “state” functions. Furthermore, most of the internal sources of information are likely to be related directly to our Emotional state. Most importantly, just as our polystatic anticipations are holistic rather than focused on a single element in our environment, it is probably required that our primary source of information on which we base these anticipations is general and holistic in nature. Thus, it is likely that our anticipations and appraisals are closely related to our State operations and deeply invested in our Emotions.

We now know that we operate primarily with two memory systems. One of these systems helps us navigate daily, habitual operations. Often called the *Procedural (Implicit) Memory System*, this is the cortical function that operates when we are driving a car, hitting a golf ball (if we are a skilled golfer), or simply walking down the stairs (if we are not neuro-damaged). We easily retrieve memories that guide our skillful operations of these procedures.

Most of our heuristics (fast thinking solutions) operate out of our procedural brain. Our “knee-jerk” reactions exemplify procedural heuristics. The second system is usually called the *Episodic or Expository (Explicit) Memory System*. Specific memories of past events, as well as memories of potential problem-solving and decision-making processes, are brought to the fore when dealing with a new, complex, or elusive issue. While procedural memories are usually engaged without any conscious

awareness of their application, episodic memories are engaged in a fully conscious manner. These memories are not just stored and retrieved. They are lived!

As a coach, we can provide valuable assistance to our clients as they consciously review their psychosocial template (what are you thinking?), and to the extent possible, even their somatic template (what are you feeling?). Most importantly, we must encourage our client to avoid the use of fast-thinking heuristics when addressing multi-tiered issues – as tempting as it is to escape into a rabbit hole of procedural serenity. As a coach who is focusing on assisting their client to accurately and flexibly anticipate the near-future world they will engage, the advocacy of consistently implemented *Slow Thinking, Reflective Practice, and Appreciative Perspectives* is critical.

Social Neurobiology and Coaching

Several important points emerge from the contextualist perspective offered by social neurobiology. First, powerful interpersonal relationships produce strong emotional reactions that, in turn, strongly influence the nature and quality of these relationships. Second, our amygdala might be sorting out the threatening and non-threatening elements to anticipate in our immediate environment. In our role as coach, we can be of great value in helping our client identify their own Amygdala-driven anticipations and find ways to address these strong anticipations.

A social neurobiological perspective can even lead to the conclusion that we create reality in our relationship with other people and that our mind is actually embedded in a collective enterprise with the people with whom we relate. We think in connection with other people, much as we create our values and guide our behavior in connection with other people.

When anticipating an event or a relationship without the engagement of other people, we are likely to be projecting specific attributes onto this event or relationship. We create reality on behalf of emotions and thoughts that exist in our own mind, and the projected emotions and thoughts to be found in the projected mind we have created.

Without the input of other people, our near future is an “ink blot” that we choose to “interpret” on behalf of our own hopes, fears, and needs. We refuse to live in the present and are determined to anticipate the near future, even if this means fabricating elements of this future in our own mind. As a coach, we can become that connecting mind that alleviates the need for a fabricated and projection-based mind. This might, quite simply, be the primary function we serve as a professional coach

Polystasis and Coaching

Habitual behavior requires the shifting of knowledge and skill sets from focused, intentional, and explicit (conscious) memory systems to another memory system located in a different part of the brain. As noted, this system is often considered our “procedural” memory. This second memory system is holistic, much less accessible to intention. It is implicit (unconscious) in nature. We are likely to find that the psychosocial template is composed primarily of procedural memories. The template contains untested assumptions about what people in general believe and want, as well as a wealth of often-distorted past experiences regarding relative success or failure in working with other people.

When coaches try to “break up” the habitual behavior of their clients, they may be trying to move stored material between two different memory systems. Resistance to the disruption of habitual behavior and the challenging of an existing psychosocial template may be based not only on our fear of changing established behavior patterns, but also on the profoundly difficult task of moving stored memories back from the implicit system to the explicit system where these memories were first formed.

Our social/psychological constructs (paradigms, schemata, left-column beliefs and assumptions) may be much more deeply embedded in and reinforced by and through complex, highly redundant and multiple-level neural connections and networks than we had previously thought to be the case. While our psychosocial template will shift a bit from moment to moment, given new information arriving from the changing environment and feedback we receive from actions we have taken in this environment, there is an underlying set of neural networks that are much less likely to be modified by any one change in our environment. While Polystasis speaks to our capacity to be flexible and adaptive (the accommodating aspects of our learning process), the constructs contained in our neural networks speak to our desire for stability and continuity (the assimilating aspects of our learning process).

To examine (let alone attempt to “break up”) these constructs as a coach working with clients may be quite difficult. The outcomes of such a disruption may be difficult to predict. What does this mean for the coach who is encouraging her client to see things “in a different way”? First, it means that there is likely to be some initial resistance. This is not a “bad” sign; rather, it is a sign that this “different way” is being taken seriously by her client.

Second, the coach might want to consider a “different way” of presenting the “different way.” For example, the coach might want to couch what they say in a metaphor or analogy: “it is as if you were . . .” Third, the coach might use the resistance as an opportunity to assist her client in exploring his cluster of assumptions that are motivating the resistance: “let’s spend a few minutes exploring the source of your resistance.” This approach only works if the coach is not herself being resistant to her client’s resistance. This can be a “learn-able” moment for the client and can actually yield greater benefit for the client than any adoption of the coach’s way of seeing things.

Amygdala and Coaching

I would suggest that the amygdala plays an important role not only in the assessment of possible threat but also in the anticipation of pleasure. We look forward to a pleasant interaction with a specific person based on past experiences with this person and input from our psychosocial template. A shot of dopamine might accompany this anticipation—just as it does when the addicted gambler enters the casino or when our lover removes their clothes (or our clothes). There might be no more powerful engagement of the polystatic process than in the anticipation of threat or pleasure. This power might often relate not only to the squirt of a feel-good neurochemical but also to the triggering of a deeply held and fundamental archetype related to an evil figure or force, or to a benevolent, seductive and pleasure-evoking siren.

What occurs when a coach is working with her client on difficult issues that may evoke fear-based templates arising from the Amygdala? How does a coach either bypass or counter the emotional impact of these templates? First, I would advise the coach to be thoughtful, caring, and patient. Once a threat template is activated, it can be engaged indiscriminately to include the coach himself. Second, the coach should “appreciate” the fear manifested by his client. “I can certainly appreciate why you might feel anxious at this point, for there are several good reasons to worry about what might occur.” The coach can then articulate some of the “good reasons.”

The coach, at this point, is not only being empathetic, they are also being a bit rational and objective regarding their client’s fears. At this point, the client can themselves become a bit more rational and objective. As a coach, I often increase the “objectivity” by listing the “good reasons” on a flip chart or at least on a piece of paper. It is then possible to identify some of the “good reasons” not to be quite so fearful and some “good ideas” regarding how best to address these fears. What actions can be taken that reduce the sense of helplessness and hopelessness that often accompany the activation of the amygdala’s fear-based template?

Third, it is important to recall that the role of a coach does not include exploring the initial source of any emotion. The coach is not in the business of somehow “correcting” the emotion; rather, she is in the business of helping her client manage the emotion as it has been elicited in the present situation. This “at-the-moment” managing of emotions can be just as beneficial as an in-depth analysis of the emotions’ etiology.

Stress Ruts, Self-Addiction, and Coaching

We establish “stress ruts” when exposed repeatedly to real or imagined threats. These ruts are grooved deeper with each stressful event and lead to permanent structural changes in our nervous/hormonal systems. We become increasingly vulnerable (“trigger-happy”) to stress. “Trigger-happy” somatic templates dominate the polystatic process. Anticipatory reactions are warped and focused on events and people out in the world who can justify our emotional reactions. Most importantly, we must acknowledge that stress-ruts do not go away over time. Permanent links are established between our prefrontal cortex and our limbic system. We must avoid establishing these strong links rather than assuming that these links will go away or that some drug (alcohol, tobacco, tranquilizer) will provide a stress-related roadblock.

How might a coach assist her client in identifying and even seeking to avoid or reduce the impact of these stress ruts? First, the coach can encourage his client to reduce the number of stress-producing events in her life. Obviously, this is not a simple assignment. The stress is often associated with a client’s job. As a coach, one can at least suggest that a client set aside their work when at home, take more frequent vacations, or plan for more “coffee breaks” (preferably drinking something other than heavily caffeinated coffee).

It is important to keep in mind the possibility that one's client might be addicted to the "high" that comes from successfully confronting a stressful event—or even (like the gambler) anticipating this success. When addicted to one's own adrenaline, there is a painful process of withdrawal that can be just as severe as that experienced by someone withdrawing from alcohol or an opiate. The withdrawal from one's own adrenaline will often be manifested as depression or unregulated anger toward other people or toward one's job.

As a coach, we can assist our client in anticipating that this withdrawal can occur when they reduce their exposure to stressful situations. It is not unusual, for instance, for an "addicted" workaholic to experience depression rather than relief when finally taking a vacation or spending a weekend with their kids. Second, as a coach, we can encourage our client to engage in activities that help to "burn off" the neurochemicals that have been activated by the stress. Physical exercise is often the best vehicle for this "burn off."

Third, activities are engaged that reduce stress impact more gently. These include medication and other forms of mindfulness, as well as a stroll through the park with a dear friend or spending time playing with one's own child or a grandchild. A fourth coaching approach involves some life planning that may involve identifying personal values and life purposes weighted against the health-related costs associated with ongoing encounters with stressful events.

Physiological Priming, Intimacy, Actions, and Coaching

Our daily behavior is profoundly impacted by our patterns/decisions regarding sleep, exercise, exposure to light, and the consumption of alcohol, tobacco, and other mind-altering drugs (including caffeine). We not only create stress-ruts but also alter our polystatic anticipations. From a polystatic perspective, we are likely to find that the anticipation of events in our immediate future is saturated with emotions if we are "hyped" up with a strong dose of caffeinated coffee or if we have not slept soundly for several days.

It may be hard to assist other people until they are "physiologically primed" or prepared for this assistance. If we are "trigger-happy" then we are likely to find it hard to address anxiety-provoking issues in our life. It will be difficult to concentrate on a difficult issue if we continue to focus on meeting an addictive need. Should a coach insist that her client be physiologically prepared for the challenges of coaching prior to beginning the coaching process?

Apparently, the neurochemistry associated with the formation of intimate relationships is quite different from the neurochemistry associated with the formation of friendships. In both cases, powerful, chemically based bonds are formed. These bonds are reinforced whenever our intimate or friend appears before us – our body literally "lights up" with neuro-chemical responses – but quite different when the other person is considered a friend rather than an intimate. From a polystatic perspective, it is as if we are playing a trick on our body when we enter into a deeply therapeutic relationship. We begin to "believe" that this is an intimate relationship (transference) and anticipate that romance is soon to

ensue. Our body prepares for this romantic encounter, believing what our brain has indicated is about to occur.

Conversely, the anticipation in a counselling relationship is that this will more closely resemble a friendship than an intimate relationship. Our body prepares for friendship, much as it does when we meet with a colleague for lunch. What about the coaching relationship? Is it more like a friendship than an intimate relationship? What if coaching, like therapy, releases neurochemicals that replicate intimate relationships? What are the implications for the profession of coaching? I have already mentioned that we must remind ourselves as professional coaches that we are not psychotherapists; yet our neurobiological system might be declaring that we are doing therapy and are “in love” with our client. Boundaries are suddenly important.

Emotions not only provide us with feelings about the world in which we live, they also provide us with the “get-up-and-go” that we need when getting out of bed in the morning or taking decisive action regarding a pressing matter at our worksite. Apparently, one of the most difficult things for human beings to do (concerning neuro-processing) is to move from thought to action. A large portion of our brain “lights up” when we decide to do something (what in the old days we would call “will power.”)

I suspect from a polystatic perspective that the assemblage of multiple parts of the brain to produce action is often (if not always) experienced as an anticipatory emotion (such as “looking forward” to breakfast or receiving praise for taking “courageous” action). It would seem, given these neuroscience findings, that some of the most difficult (and perhaps most important) work that coaches do is assist their clients in moving from thought to action—in helping them “fire up” these multiple portions of their brain.

Empathy, Mirror Neurons, and Coaching

Another major finding that may hold major implications for the field of professional coaching concerns the apparent presence of mirror neurons in our neurophysiological system. Certain neurons will fire when a person is observing someone else doing a task. These neurons tend to mimic the neuronal firings of the person being observed. Thus, when we watch someone performing a physical act, mirror neurons will fire that mimic the neuronal firings in the person being observed. Some of these mirror neurons seem to teach us how to carry out actions by simulating an observed action and creating a neural template/map for how it’s done.

But much more than this, many scientists believe that mirror neurons help us develop our “theory of mind” regarding other people. This is a theory we develop over time during our youth that enables us to understand the intentions behind the actions of others, and possibly the social meaning of their behaviors and emotions. Our mirror neurons may be activating our appreciation of other people and the culture we have created together because we have observed other people appreciating one another and the artistic productions of our culture.

Beyond the matter of language and art, mirror neurons influence the fundamental way in which we feel about and interact with other people. Specifically, there are many implications for professional coaching regarding the social neurobiology of mirror neurons. What do mirror neurons have to do with the formation of empathy (both in the client and coach)?

To what extent does an effective coach “understand” her client in part because some of her own neurons are firing in ways that mirror the experiences and actions of her client? Are there ways in which effective coaches help a client acquire a new skill set by observing other people (and even the coach herself) provide leadership, solve problems, make decisions, etc.? And is this skill set acquisition based at least in part on the activation of mirror neurons in the client?

Polystasis as a Self-Organizing, Emergent System

As we expand on the model of polystasis, it is important to remind ourselves that our brain has no central operating system. Like many complex and dynamic biological systems, our brain is a “self-organizing system” that is led not by some leading part but rather from the interactions between parts of the system that exist side-by-side (the “neighborhood effect”).

Just as a flock of birds or swarm of fish move in a remarkably coordinated manner as a result of each bird’s or fish’s immediate reaction to the bird or fish right next to them, so we find that human systems also move in a remarkably powerful and coordinated manner because each participant in this system tends to immediately react to the movement of the person next to them.

Furthermore, it seems that surprising reconfigurations of a system often occur as this self-organizing system becomes more complex (often when an additional element is added to the system). Called *Emergence*, this reconfiguration is represented in the simple (but surprising) emergence of water from the combination of two gases (hydrogen and oxygen), as well as in the profound reconfiguration of various lifeless chemicals, some hot water and other yet-unknown elements to produce something that we call life.

I propose that Polystasis operates as a self-organizing system and that Emotions provide a tagging function that enables us to quickly anticipate that something is about to be good or bad, strong or weak, or active or passive. Our somatic and psychosocial templates provide us with internal models that help guide our actions in response to environmental conditions, while our dynamic polystatic-based feedback process enables us to quickly and frequently recombine the components based on altering baselines and shifting anticipations.

Co-evolution, Self-Fulfillment, and Coaching

Another important feature of complex, self-organizing systems is that they co-evolve with other systems that they encounter. In the world of Polystasis, this co-evolution dynamic would play out in shifts regarding our anticipation of features in the environment we encounter from moment to moment. Our interactions with this environment bring about changes in this environment, resulting in modifications of our anticipations regarding this environment. At times, this co-evolution can lead to self-fulfilling

prophecies, with changes in the environment being created by our anticipated vision of this environment. We anticipate “hell,” prepare for ‘Hell’ and create “hell” through our actions. Conversely, we anticipate “heaven,” prepare for “heaven” and create “heaven” through our actions.

More often, the self-fulfilling prophecy is not dominating our actions and reactions. Rather, we are attuned to a world “out there” that is operating independently of our anticipations. As a professional coach, we can be of great value in this regard when working with a client who is deeply, emotionally attached to a specific version of their world and to specific outcomes. We can help them discern what is a world of their own making and what is a world to which they adapt (as a self-organizing system) – and about which they learn for the future.

Self-Referencing and Coaching

Self-referencing is one other theme that plays a central role in any human self-organizing system. A strong organizational identity can provide independence from environmental change and can serve as a guide to the organization's evolution. When the environment demands a new response, there is a reference point for change. This use of self-referencing as a way to guide organizational evolution relates directly to the polystatic concept of varying baselines.

Anticipation always requires that what is expected in the immediate future is tested against the established baseline. We are frequently altering the baseline as we appraise the shifting environment in which we are operating. This feedback-based process of appraisal and adjustment is self-referencing and is often engaged at an organizational level by the organization's leadership.

Self-referencing at the broad organizational level enables those working within the system to engage in their own self-directed, polystatic adjustment to the changing environment in which they operate. Having incorporated the organization's own baseline within their personal baselines, those helping to move an organization forward will be guided by goals and purposes that are shared by all (or at least most) members of the organization.

Shifting Polystatic Baselines and Coaching

As a professional coach, we can be particularly effective if we help our clients discern the various levels of their polystatic baseline. Which elements of this baseline come from the sharing of purpose and goals with other members of the organization, and which elements are held at a more personal (or team) level?

Having discerned these different elements, our clients will become more discerning of the different sources of environmental feedback that will (and should) influence their baseline. Some of the environmental changes impact the collective elements of the baseline—elements such as bottom line, productivity, and organization-wide morale. Other changes in the environment produce an impact that hits at more personal elements—elements such as level of personal performance, relationships with co-workers, and personal motivation.

We are likely to find that distal shifts in collective baseline elements are infrequent, given the complex, often turbulent (and even contradictory) way an environment operates at

contemporary organizational levels. Forces in one direction are muting forces operating in a different direction—leading to a standoff. Much more frequent shifts are likely to take place at the proximal, personal level as our emotional reactions to ongoing organizational events require adjustments in our polystatic baseline.

Thus, in many complex organizational settings, we are likely to retain a “hybrid” baseline that is always both changing and remaining surprisingly stable. As a thoughtful and effective coach, it is often of great value for us to help our client identify and learn how to ‘live with” hybrid baselines that may lead us to contradictory anticipations: “everything is changing and nothing has really changed!”

Attention Density and Coaching

The self-referencing process serves one other important function in the creation and maintenance of a self-organizing system. When we have gained a clear sense of both personal and collective purpose, then we have a better sense of what we should focus on in our often-complex environment.

In appraising the probable shifts in our immediate environment when determining what to anticipate, it is clear that we can’t focus on everything. We have to be selective in our attention to this environment. This focused attention, in turn, not only influences how we manage our baseline and adjust our anticipations, it also alters the fundamental operations of our brain from moment to moment.

If we could somehow record the attention density process at any one moment and play it back in slow motion, we would find that information from the environment is being assessed to determine if this environment has shifted in some way from what it was a moment before. If a shift has occurred, then the “new” environment is compared to internal information (words, pictures, experiences, concepts) that is organized and presented in part as the psychosocial template and as the self-referencing polystatic baseline.

A quick appraisal is made regarding the extent to which anticipation of what is to occur next in the environment needs to be altered. This very quick process occurs in a specific neural circuit or the tight clustering of neurons in our brain. This circuit may involve centers throughout our neural system. The speed as well as the density of this attentive process is exceptional. It is repeated many times at each stage of feedback-based Polystasis. Multiple adjustments and actions follow the initial appraisal.

As a professional coach, we can assist our clients in determining where they want to focus their attention. Attention density impacts the way in which we are integrating and “making sense of” those aspects of the environment to which we are attending. We see the world differently depending on the density and varied internal and external properties incorporated in our attention.

What we attend to influences (and often determines) our anticipation of what is about to happen in our world. That to which we attend also influences (and often determines) what action, if any, we take in this world. We attend, anticipate, feel, and act into our immediate future. This is what it means to “lean into our immediate future.” And what it means to “learn into our near future.” This concept of attention density also holds major implications for how we lead into the more distant future.

Conclusions

As I mentioned when concluding the fourth essay in this series, the preliminary perspectives I have offered regarding Polystasis and the psychology of anticipation are still ill-formed and lacking in the precision that a theory or model acquires after many years of articulation, amendment, and application. Still, I hope you find what I have summarized in this coda to be of value when engaging professional coaching with clients who face the daunting prospect of leaning, learning – and leading—into the near future.
