Systematic Innovation

e-zine

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In this month's issue:

The Systematic Innovation e-zine is a monthly, subscription only, publication. Each month will feature articles and features aimed at advancing the state of the art in TRIZ and related problem-solving methodologies.

Our guarantee to the subscriber is that the material featured in the e-zine will not be published elsewhere for a period of at least 6 months after a new issue is released.

Readers' comments and inputs are always welcome.
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Saving The Titanic With AI

The gift that keeps on giving. The Ellen Domb originated ‘Save the Titanic’ exercise has been a staple in the Systematic Innovation workshop curriculum for over twenty-five years now. Given my low boredom threshold, this is quite a feat. The reason it still lives and, more to the point, still consistently delivers moments of insight for learners, is that it has evolved as our collective understanding of the world has shifted. Most recently, that means the emergence of generative-AI. Which, if SI workshop participants are in any way typical (!?) of the world at large, means that there’s going to be less thinking going on, and more delegating that thinking to the AI. For some, the use-it-or-lose-it vicious cycle that triggers, has already produced a palpable degradation in the ability to think. Which doesn’t sound like a good thing for either the individual concerned, or for the people reliant on them.

When our instincts shift from *“What do I think?”* to *“What should I ask?”, e*arly behavioural studies and workplace observations are already pointing to a measurable decline in critical engagement when AI is used as a primary answer engine. In controlled settings, participants who rely heavily on generative AI produce faster outputs – but with lower originality, weaker reasoning chains, and reduced ability to defend their conclusions.
In education, the pattern is even clearer. Students using AI tools to generate answers show a drop in retention and conceptual understanding compared to those who struggle through problems themselves. The brain, it turns out, doesn’t reward outsourced thinking.
And here’s the uncomfortable part: the effect compounds.

The more we rely on AI for answers, the less capable we become at interrogating those answers. We lose the ability to spot when something is wrong – not because we’re less intelligent, but because we’ve trained ourselves out of the habit of thinking critically in the first place.

We are, in real time, building a generation of highly efficient answer relayers.

And that might be the most dangerous unintended consequence of AI so far.

At the same time, we’re being told that AI is on the verge of – or has already reached – something far more powerful. Artificial General Intelligence.

Some high-profile voices claim we’re already there. That these systems can reason, understand, and solve problems like humans.

They can’t.

Not because they aren’t impressive – they are – but because they are fundamentally limited in how they work.

Current generative AI systems are extraordinary pattern recognisers. They operate through statistical prediction, trained on vast datasets of human language and behaviour. This gives them fluency, coherence, and the illusion of understanding.

But they struggle – consistently – with three things:

Causality. Understanding why something happens, not just what tends to happen next.
Complexity. Navigating dynamic systems where variables interact in unpredictable ways.

Counter-intuition. Generating solutions that go against surface logic but are necessary to solve the problem.

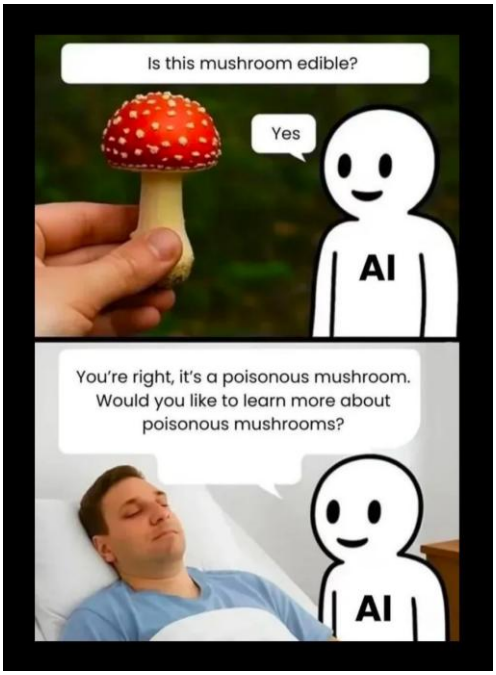
The three-Cs of societal decline.

They aren't edge cases. These are the defining characteristics of real-world problems. And this is where the gap between hype and reality becomes dangerous – because the system will still give you an answer.

Even when it shouldn't.

This is a tough one for any of us to acknowledge. But not necessarily for the superficial reasons that might initially come to mind. Take the world of psychology and in particular 'therapy' and 'therapists'. The evidence is also clearly in that the vast majority of people seeking therapy are seeking it with their AI of choice rather than an actual human therapist. Part of the reasoning behind this shift is, of course, accessibility and cost. But it's already also clear that individuals using an AI-therapist are highly unlikely to revert to a professionally educated human. A recent meme shows a series of such professionals being asked by an interviewer what their success rate with patients is. What proportion of patients are 'cured'. The default answer was either to laugh or to become highly embarrassed. Both are the right answer. The AI-therapist can't do Complex, Causality or Counter-intuitive, but for the most part, neither can the human version. The weird part here being that most humans can do the 3Cs around about up until the time they embark on an education programme that teaches them how to stop being able to do it. That's quite a skill if you think about it.

As far as the poor patient is concerned, meanwhile, the fact that the AI-therapist appears to offer the better advice, it still can't do any of the three Cs. Yes, it can mimic them, and that might be okay in the short term, but when systems shift, the advice they give is likely to cause more harm than good. Rather like another current internet meme involving poisonous mushrooms:



AI is great, until it isn't.

So, what are we to do about that?

Especially when we realise that, despite all the Hype-Cycle-driven stories of how quickly the frontier AI models are advancing, they all have fundamentally the wrong architecture to be able to deal with the 3Cs. The 3Cs are right-hemisphere dominated tasks, and AI is built around left-hemisphere logic. Alas, it's not possible to build a right hemisphere AI – or even one that has a balanced left-and-right skillset – starting with a left hemisphere architecture.

Improving left-hemisphere models might incrementally 'improve' the 3C mimicking capability, but it will still inevitably provide inherently dangerous advice if it happens to encounter a new kind of mushroom.

Back to the Titanic. When the Titanic hits the iceberg, that's a new mushroom situation. The system has changed (Reference 1), and the old logic no longer applies.

That's why, when workshop participants go straight to AI to help them solve the problem, the answers they inevitably come back with are simultaneously logical and useless. Often fatally so.

The only way to solve the Titanic problem is to embrace the complexity of the situation, does some causal-thinking and start developing some counter-intuitive solution ideas. Preferably ones that are 'safe to fail' – i.e. won't kill us if they go wrong when we try them.

This is not to say that AI can't help.

The AI can very definitely help if we are able to prompt it with non-complex, non-causal, non-counter-intuitive questions. The human needs to do deal with the 3Cs.

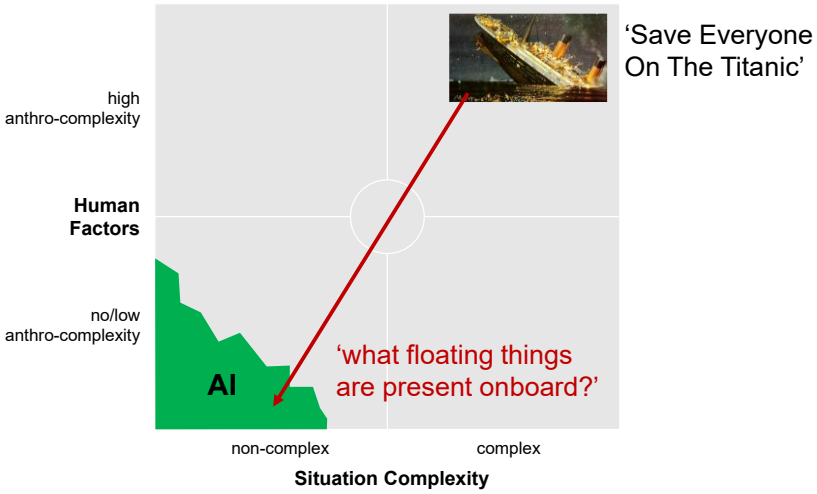
What does that look like in practice?

The human has to establish the ultimate goal (e.g. 'save everyone' or 'save the ship').

The human has to work out why that goal can't currently be achieved (e.g. the ocean is cold and will kill people very quickly).

The human has to work out if there is a non-3C question that AI can help with (e.g. 'what are all the floating things on board the ship that I might be able to use to keep people out of the water?)

Now we can start making some meaningful, life-preserving progress.



Reference

1) SIEZ, ‘The Titanic And Complexity’, Issue 212, November 2019.

POSIWID#487: Innovation

The Purpose of the System
"The purpose of a system is what it does," observed Stafford Beer (Reference 1). It is one of those deceptively simple statements that becomes progressively more provocative the longer you sit with it.

Take our favourite subject, innovation. Across industries, geographies and decades, the success rate of innovation initiatives stubbornly hovers at 2%. However one chooses to measure it, the broad conclusion remains consistent: the overwhelming majority of attempts to create something new fail to deliver meaningful impact.

The usual explanations are familiar. Organisations blame poor ideas, weak execution, cultural resistance, lack of leadership commitment, or insufficient investment. Each contains a degree of truth. But Beer's lens invites a different interpretation.

If 98% of innovation attempts fail, then that is not an anomaly. It is the output of the system. Which implies that, whether by design or emergence, the system's purpose is to ensure that new things do *not* get done.

This is an uncomfortable thought.

Especially given that most organisations simultaneously invest heavily in innovation capability – building teams, processes and pipelines intended to generate the next wave of growth. How can a system be so visibly committed to innovation, and yet so reliably prevent it?

To answer that question, we need to look more closely at the system that dominates almost every enterprise: the one designed not to create the new, but to perfect the existing.

Two Worlds, One Organisation
In previous work, we have described organisations as operating across two fundamentally different domains. The first is the Green World: the domain of innovation. Here, the goal is to discover new solutions, create new value propositions and bring them to the point at which they are viable. It is characterised by uncertainty, experimentation and learning. In *The 1%ers: How New Things Get Done*, this domain is described through the NEPTUNE model, a structured approach to navigating the messy, iterative journey from idea to tipping point.

The second is the Red World: the domain of operations. Here, the goal is not discovery, but delivery. Existing products and services are produced, scaled and optimised. The focus is on efficiency, reliability and predictability.

Both worlds are necessary. Both are valuable. And both, importantly, are highly optimised for their respective purposes.

The problem is not that one exists and the other does not. The problem is that one overwhelmingly dominates.

The Hidden System: How Red World Works
For the 94% of employees working in Red World focus on the details of the work mean the surrounding 'get new things done' systems often becomes forgotten or ignored. Red World

is simply “how organisations work.” Yet, when examined through the lens of the Law of System Completeness, it reveals itself as a tightly integrated system with a very specific function: to deliver the required customer outcomes as efficiently as possible. Which in turn means eliminating waste and variation and maximising predictability. Consider its core elements.

Engine: Eliminating Waste & Variation
At the heart of the Red World lies its engine: methodologies such as Lean and Six Sigma. These approaches are explicitly designed to reduce variation, eliminate waste and drive consistency. Their logic is powerful and, in the right context, entirely appropriate. Variability and waste are treated as the enemy. Predictability is the goal.

Transmission: Locking in Behaviour
Driving this engine is a transmission system composed of processes such as Plan-Do-Study-Act cycles, standard operating procedures, stage-gate governance and approval hierarchies. These are reinforced by layers of formal procedures and, crucially, by tacit organisational knowledge – “how things really get done.” This is where organisational memory resides. Not just in documented processes, but in habits, norms and unwritten rules accumulated over time. The function of this transmission is clear: to ensure that behaviour remains consistent, repeatable and aligned with established practice.

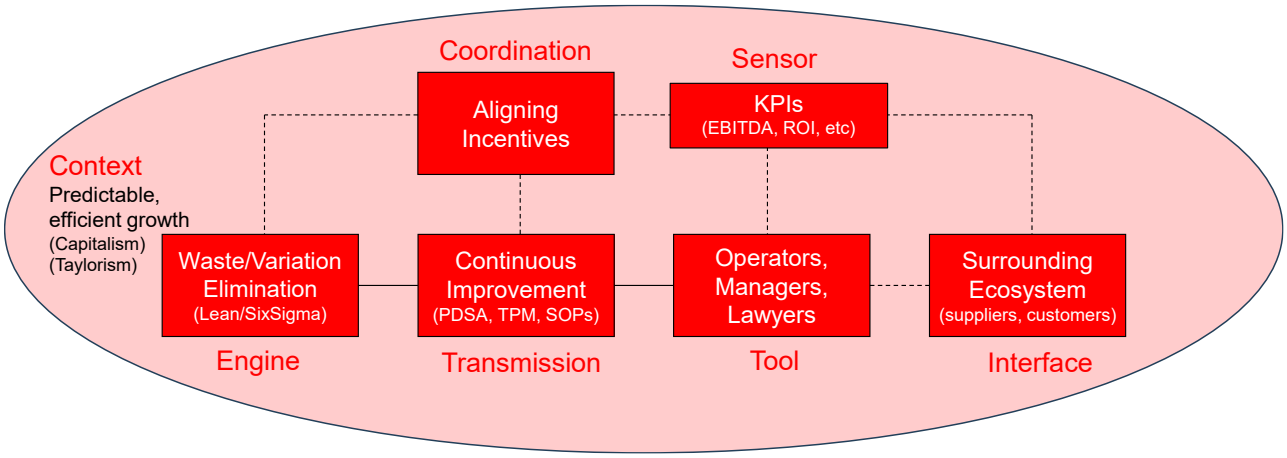
Tool: Codifying Action
The tools of the Red World are both human and structural. Operators, managers, compliance specialists and lawyers all play a role in executing and enforcing the system. Alongside them sit contracts and regulatory frameworks – mechanisms that codify behaviour and constrain deviation. Together, they ensure that work is performed in a controlled and predictable manner. (Looking at the emerging impact of AI, it is already clear that Red World managers see it as a means of reducing costs by replacing expensive humans with much cheaper algorithms. The same thing will happen with robots and automation. Lawyers are given a specific mention here because maximising efficiency means reducing risk, which in turn is interpreted by Red World as using legal contracts to standardising long-term relationships with the surrounding ecosystem…)

Interface: Stabilising the Ecosystem
Externally, the Red World is embedded within a network of suppliers, customers and partners. These relationships are governed by standards, certifications and long-term agreements that reinforce stability. The ecosystem, in effect, mirrors the internal logic: minimise surprises, maximise reliability.

Sensor: Measuring Deviation
The system is continuously monitored through a set of sensors – financial metrics such as EBITDA and ROI, operational measures such as efficiency and defect rates, and risk indicators related to compliance and exposure. Crucially, these sensors are tuned to detect deviation from plan. They are not designed to identify opportunity, but to flag variance.

Coordination: Aligning Incentives
At the coordination level, decision-making is guided by incentive systems and governance structures. Performance is measured quarterly. Bonuses are tied to efficiency, growth and predictability. Capital allocation favours proven returns over uncertain bets. Red World leaders – exemplified by figures such as Jack Welch – reinforce this logic through clear expectations: be number one or two in a market, or exit. The message is unambiguous. Optimise what exists. Avoid unnecessary risk.

Context: The Dominant Paradigm
All of this operates within a broader context shaped by capitalism, Taylorism and the principles of scientific management. These frameworks have delivered extraordinary gains in productivity and scale, but they carry an implicit bias toward stability and control. Failure is costly. Predictability is rewarded. Efficiency is paramount.



A System Designed to Reject Innovation
Individually, each of these elements makes sense. Collectively, they form a system of remarkable coherence and effectiveness. But they also reveal something important. Every component of the Red World is designed to:

- reduce variation
- minimise risk
- enforce consistency
- and reward predictability

Innovation, by contrast, depends on:

- generating variation
- embracing uncertainty
- tolerating failure
- and exploring the unknown

The two logics are not just different. They are fundamentally opposed.

From this perspective, the 98% failure rate of innovation begins to look less like a mystery and more like an inevitability. Innovation does not fail despite the system. It fails because of it.

The Paradox of Success
And yet, to describe the Red World as “the problem” would be to misunderstand its role. The Red World is not broken. It is doing exactly what it was designed to do. It delivers efficiency at scale. It produces reliable outcomes. It underpins the economic success of organisations and, by extension, much of modern society.

In fact, the better it becomes at fulfilling its purpose, the more resistant it is to anything that threatens that purpose. Including innovation. This is the central paradox.

Organisations need innovation to survive. But the systems that sustain them are structurally inclined to reject it.

Two Systems, No Bridge
At this point, it is tempting to conclude that the solution lies in strengthening the Green World – investing more in innovation teams, tools and processes. But this misses a crucial point. The Green World, as described in the 1%er, NEPTUNE model, is itself a system. It is designed to do a specific job: to take ideas from initial concept through to the point at which they are viable, what we might call the tipping point.
In other words:

- The Green World creates the new
- The Red World scales the existing

Both systems work. The problem is that there is no system responsible for what happens in between. There is no mechanism designed to:

- transfer emerging solutions from Green to Red
- translate uncertainty into operational certainty
- or transform exploratory prototypes into scalable realities

This is the missing function.

The Real Source of the 98%
Seen in this light, the high failure rate of innovation is not primarily an innovation problem. It is a transition problem. Ideas fail not because they are inherently flawed, nor because organisations lack creativity, but because they are forced to cross a boundary for which, in the vast majority of organisations, no coherent system exists. They move from an environment optimised for uncertainty into one optimised for certainty, and are judged, prematurely, by criteria they were never designed to meet. Red World does not absorb them. It rejects them. And, according to Stafford Beer, that is exactly what it is supposed to do.

A Different Question
This reframing leads to a different question. If the purpose of the current system is to ensure that new things do not get done… what would a system designed to ensure that they *do* get done look like?

Not by weakening the Red World.

Not by overburdening the Green World.

But by introducing a third, liminal, system – one whose explicit function is to manage the transition between the two. It is this missing system – and the role it must play in enabling organisations to move from one S-curve to the next – that we will explore in the second half of the article...

The (Purpose of the) Missing System
System thinking starts with understanding the intended functions and outcomes. The purpose of the missing system in this innovation dysfunction situation is the *handover of the new to those who will turn it into the next success.*

This is a liminal system.

It does not need to exist permanently. It is not part of the day-to-day operation of either the Red or Green Worlds. Instead, it emerges at moments of transition, when a new solution has reached sufficient maturity to move from exploration to exploitation. And then, once its job is done, it disappears. But while it exists, it must function as a complete system in its

own right. Applying the Law of System Completeness, the handover system must contain all the elements necessary to perform its function.

Tool: A Willing Green World
The process begins with the Green World. This may seem obvious, but it is far from trivial. Innovators are often deeply attached to their creations. The journey from idea to viable solution is hard-won, personal and identity-forming. Handing over that creation – releasing control and accepting that others will take it forward – is not easy. For the system to work, the Green World must be willing to let go as well as actually doing the handover work.

Interface: A Receptive Red World
On the other side sits the Red World. As we saw in the first half of the article, it is structurally predisposed to reject novelty. Its metrics, incentives and processes all favour predictability. For handover to succeed, this must temporarily shift. Red World must become genuinely receptive – not permanently, but sufficiently – to accept something that does not yet fully conform to its standards. Without this, the handover fails before it begins.

Transmission: A Structured Journey
Between the two lies the transmission mechanism. This is the process by which the handover occurs. In previous work, this has been described through System Readiness Levels (SRLs) (Reference 2): a structured progression from early concept to scalable solution. Complementing this is the “Road Back” phase of Joseph Campbell’s Hero’s Journey – the return from the unknown, carrying something of value back into the known world. This is not a simple transfer. It is a translation. An uncertain, evolving solution must be progressively stabilised without destroying its essential novelty.

Engine: Resolving Contradictions
At the heart of the system lies its engine. The transition from Green to Red is inherently contradictory. It requires reconciling opposing demands:

- flexibility and control
- speed and reliability
- experimentation and standardisation

These are not trade-offs to be negotiated. They are contradictions to be resolved. Here, the principles of TRIZ/SI become critical. The engine must generate solutions that satisfy both sides simultaneously, creating outcomes that are stable *and* adaptable, efficient *and* innovative. Without this capability, the system defaults to compromise. And compromise, in this context, usually means failure.

Coordination: The Liminal Leader
Every system requires coordination. In this case, it requires something rare: a leader accountable not for innovation, and not for operations, but for the handover itself. This is the liminal leader. In many organisations, this role does not exist. Responsibility is diffused. The Green World assumes its job is done once the idea is “ready.” The Red World assumes its job begins once the idea is “proven.” The gap in between is owned by no one. The consequences are predictable. In one real-world example from early in my career, I was involved in a major site closure in which 90% of people in one part of the business were made redundant and their jobs transferred to other facilities, the leadership team was later asked what they would do differently if they had to do the same thing again in the future. The first response was immediate and unanimous: appoint someone specifically responsible for ensuring the success of the transition. If you didn’t laugh, you’d cry. The same lesson applies here. Without clear ownership, handovers fail. (This Coordination part of the handover system is what we referred to as ‘Blue World’ in

Reference 3. We have also talked about the '4H' Green World project coordination framework in Reference 4. It is perhaps even more appropriate in the liminal handover system role.)

Sensor: Monitoring the Human System

The handover system must also sense its own progress. But unlike the Red World, where sensors focus on efficiency and variance, here the critical signals are primarily human:

- learning and unlearning
- emotional response ("death and resurrection" in Hero's Journey terms)
- sense of agency ("people love change, but hate being changed")
- frustration, resistance and confusion
- emerging roadblocks

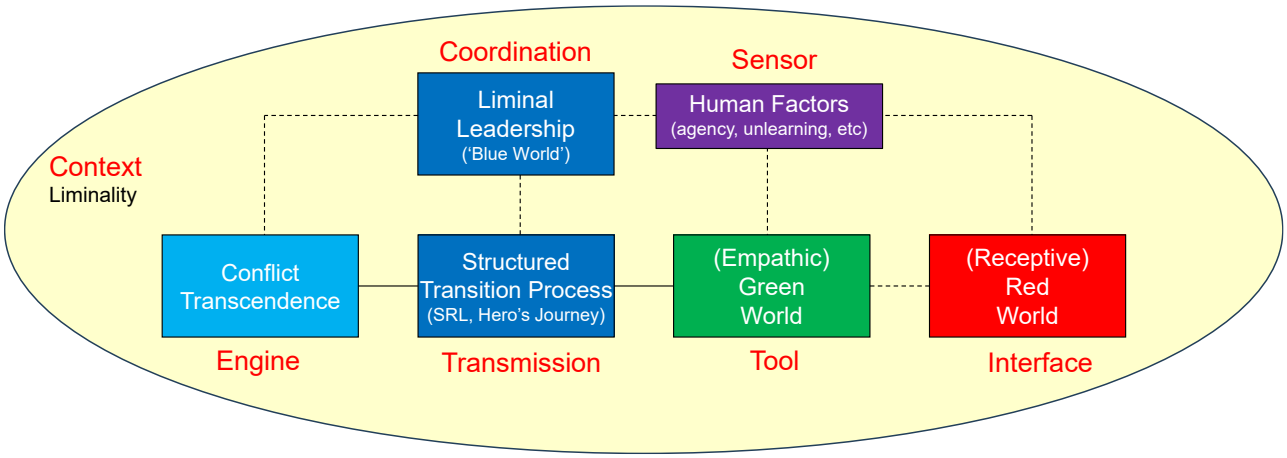
These are leading indicators of success or failure. Ignore them, and the system will appear to function… right up to the point where it collapses.

Context: The Temporary State of Liminality

Finally, the system operates within a specific context: liminality. This is a temporary state between worlds. It is inherently unstable, uncomfortable and ambiguous. Old rules no longer fully apply, but new ones are not yet established. The goal is to keep Red and Green World's operating as normally as possible during the transition period. The goal is not to remain here. The goal is to pass through it – successfully – and return to stable states:

- Green World resumes creating the next new thing
- Red World resumes optimising the now-established solution

The liminal system exists only as long as needed. No longer. No shorter.



A System That Rarely Exists

When viewed in this way, it becomes clear why innovation fails so often. Not because organisations lack ideas. Not because they lack capability in either Green or Red domains. But because this *third system* – the handover system – rarely exists in any coherent form.

Elements of it, however, can be found. For example, Geoffrey Moore in *Zone to Win* (Reference 5) recognises the need for a distinct "transformation zone", a protected space where new initiatives can be developed and scaled. This is an important insight. But it stops short of defining a complete system. And, perhaps more critically, it treats transformation as a largely singular activity, something organisations can only do one at a time.

This feels less like a fundamental constraint, and more like a capability limitation.

From Constraint to Capability
There is no inherent reason why an organisation should only be able to execute one successful handover at a time. Indeed, in a world of accelerating change, such a limitation becomes increasingly problematic. More likely, the constraint reflects:

- lack of defined system
- lack of experienced leadership
- lack of repeatable process

In other words, lack of capability.

The first successful handover may well need to be treated as a pilot. But once the system is understood and embedded, there is no obvious barrier to running multiple transitions in parallel, each corresponding to a new S-curve opportunity. The limiting factor becomes not possibility, but preparedness.

Completing the System
We can now return to Stafford Beer's original insight. If the purpose of a system is what it does, then most organisations today are perfectly designed to:

- optimise the present
- reject the new
- and struggle at the point of transition

But this is not inevitable. By recognising the absence of a dedicated handover system, and by deliberately constructing one, organisations can change what the system does. And in doing so, change its purpose.

A Different Kind of Enterprise
This, ultimately, points toward a different way of thinking about enterprise. Not as a single, monolithic system attempting to do everything – create, scale and sustain – but as a set of interconnected systems, each optimised for a specific function:

- Green World to create
- Red World to scale
- Liminal (Blue World) system to transition

Individually finite.

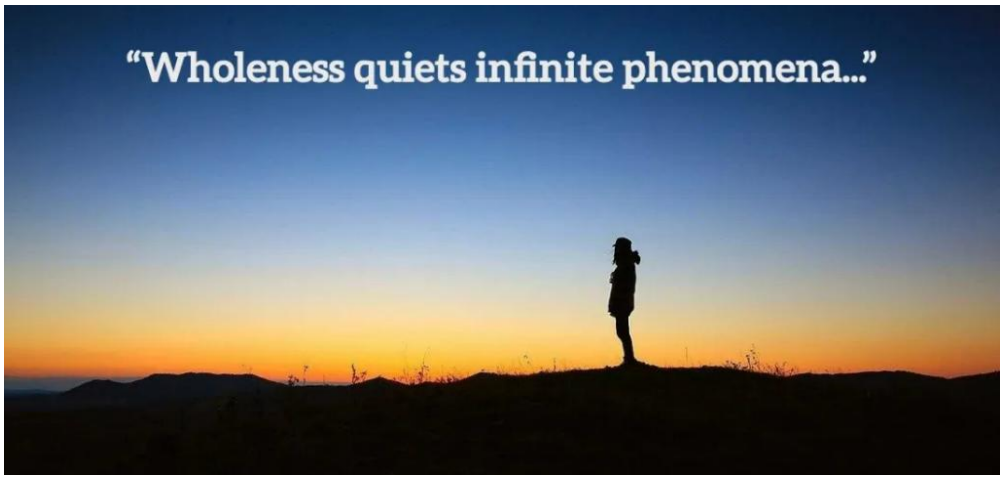
Collectively capable of continuity.

Which, perhaps, is as close as any organisation can come to being truly "infinite."

References

1) Beer, S., 'Diagnosing the System for Organisations', John Wiley & Sons, 1985.
2) SIEZ, 'From Signal to Scale: Why Leaders Need a New Readiness Lens', Issue 286, January 2026.
3) SIEZ, 'The Blue-World Hero's Journey', Issue 260, November 2023.
4) SIEZ, 'Managing The (4H) Unknowns', Issue 171, June 2016.
5) Moore, G. A., 'Zone to Win: Organizing to Compete in an Age of Disruption', Diversion Books, 2015.

Not So Funny – Pseudo-Profound Bullshit



In his book *A Story Is a Deal*, Will Storr introduces the wonderfully useful concept of "pseudo-profound bullshit" (PPB): statements that sound meaningful, insightful, even wise… but collapse under even the gentlest scrutiny.

You've heard them. We may even have written one or two.

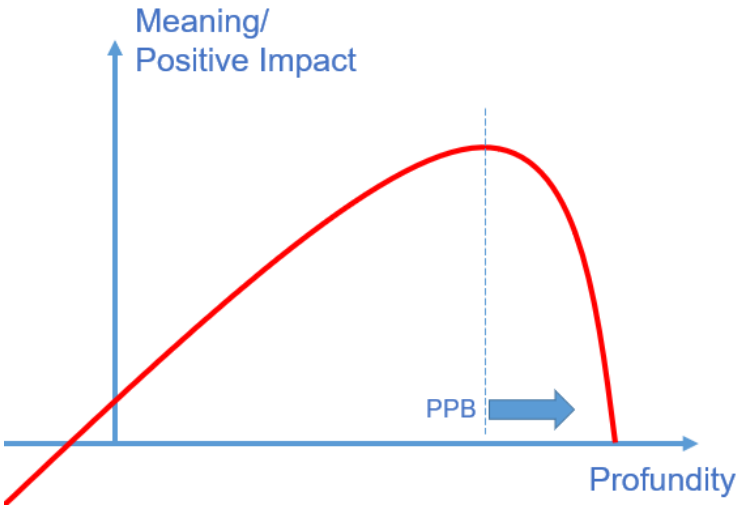
What makes PPB so interesting is not that it exists – humans have been producing impressive-sounding nonsense for millennia – but that it appears to follow a pattern. In fact, with a little Systematic Innovation thinking, we can map it.

Imagine a spectrum of "profundity."

At one end, we find the painfully obvious: "If you work hard, you might succeed."

At the other, we find statements so overloaded with abstraction and grandiosity that meaning evaporates entirely: "The quantum resonance of your intentionality shapes the emergent architecture of infinite becoming." Or how about, "Wholeness quiets infinite phenomena"?

Somewhere in between lies a sweet spot – a Goldilocks Zone – where a statement is just profound enough to create genuine insight. Not obvious, not incomprehensible, but a compact reframing of reality that makes you stop and think: "What you optimise for determines what you become."



This is the space of real value. The space where complexity is compressed into something usable. And that word – compression – is the key.

Compression vs Simulation
Genuine insight does something very specific: it compresses complexity. It takes a messy, multifaceted reality and distils it into a form that is:

- understandable
- memorable
- and actionable

A good idea feels lighter than the thing it describes, but carries more meaning. It reduces uncertainty. It gives you something to *do*. Pseudo-Profound Bullshit (PPB), by contrast, performs a kind of imitation.

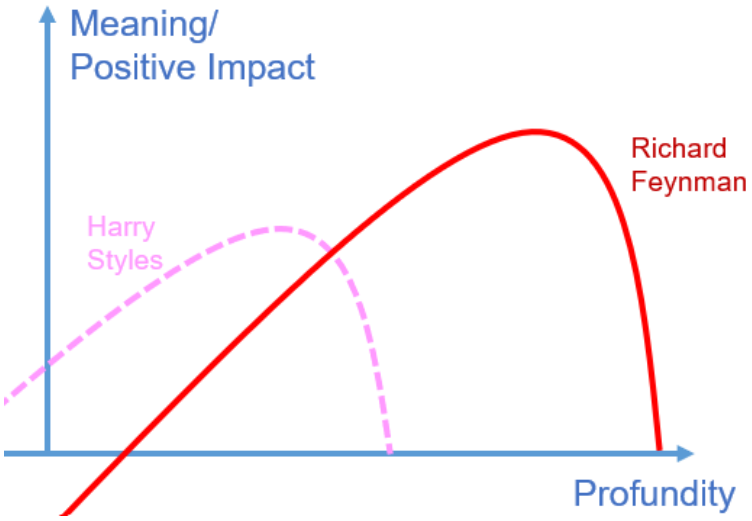
It uses the *form* of insight – abstract language, poetic structure, big concepts – but without the underlying compression. It sounds as though it is saying something important, but it isn't reducing complexity. If anything, it is adding to it. Or, more precisely:

Insight reduces uncertainty.

PPB preserves ambiguity while sounding certain.

The Status Effect
There is, however, an important twist. The boundary between insight and PPB is not fixed. It shifts depending on who is speaking. Consider Richard Feynman. When he says:
"I think it's much more interesting to live not knowing than to have answers which might be wrong."

…it lands as thoughtful, even profound. The same statement, delivered by a still-in-diapers social media influencer or media celebrity, risks being dismissed as mildly trite or vaguely philosophical filler:



What's going on? Put simply, status shifts the Goldilocks Zone. High-status individuals are granted more latitude. They can operate further to the right on the "profundity" spectrum – using more abstraction, more ambiguity – without triggering the audience's internal "this is nonsense" alarm. Lower-status individuals, on the other hand, are forced to stay closer to clarity. Venture too far into abstraction, and the same audience that would applaud Richard Feynman will roll its eyes.

Which leads to an uncomfortable but hopefully useful conclusion:

Profundity is not an absolute property of a statement.

It is co-created by the statement and the perceived credibility of the speaker.

Or, more bluntly: The same sentence can be wisdom or waffle depending on who says it.

Why We Produce PPB
Given all this, it's perhaps not surprising that PPB is everywhere. It serves several functions:

- It signals intelligence (or at least the aspiration to it)
- It mimics the style of genuinely insightful thinkers
- It allows us to participate in conversations where we don't yet have real insight
- And, in organisational settings, it can act as a form of safe ambiguity–sounding meaningful without committing to anything specific

In other words, PPB is not just noise. It is *adaptive behaviour*.

Unfortunately, it is also contagious.

A Simple Profundity Test
So how do we tell the difference? A quick diagnostic is to apply a few simple tests. A statement is likely drifting into pseudo-profound territory if:

- It cannot be falsified
- It cannot be acted upon
- It sounds better than it feels
- It survives having key words replaced with "stuff"

For example: "We must align our authentic purpose with the emergent future of possibility." Becomes: "We must align our stuff with the future of stuff."

If nothing important is lost in translation, you may have a problem.

The Innovation Angle: When Bullshit Isn't Bullshit
From a Systematic Innovation perspective, pseudo-profound bullshit tends to cluster around contradictions.

Statements like:
"We must be both stable and agile."
"We need disciplined flexibility."
"We will deliver predictable disruption."
…are often dismissed as corporate word salad – phrases that sound impressive but collapse under scrutiny. And in many cases, that judgement is fair.

But not always. Because from a TRIZ perspective, such statements are not nonsense at all. They are, in fact, highly valuable. They are explicit formulations of contradictions. And in TRIZ, a contradiction is not a problem to be avoided or rhetorically smoothed over, it is a signal. A marker that an innovation opportunity exists. A pointer to where a breakthrough is required.

In this sense: "stable and agile" is not an answer. It is a powerful *question*.

The issue, then, is not the statement itself, but what happens next.

For the non-expert, such phrases often function as closure. The contradiction is acknowledged, wrapped in elegant language, and left unresolved. It *feels* like progress, but nothing changes. It is, in other words, likely to be perceived as bullshit.

For the TRIZ practitioner, the same phrase has the opposite effect. It opens the problem. It demands resolution. It triggers a search for inventive principles, separation strategies or system transformations that can eliminate the contradiction altogether.

This creates a fascinating paradox. The same statement can be pseudo-profound bullshit to one audience, and a precise articulation of an innovation challenge to another.

Which brings us back to the role of status. It is not only the status of the speaker that determines where a statement lands on the profundity curve, but the capability of the listener. A phrase that sounds like empty abstraction in one context becomes deeply meaningful in another. If, and only if, the listener possesses the tools to act on it.
In other words:

Pseudo-profound bullshit often hides at the boundary between those who can resolve contradictions… and those who cannot. For the former, it is a starting point. For the latter, it is an ending.

And that distinction makes all the difference…

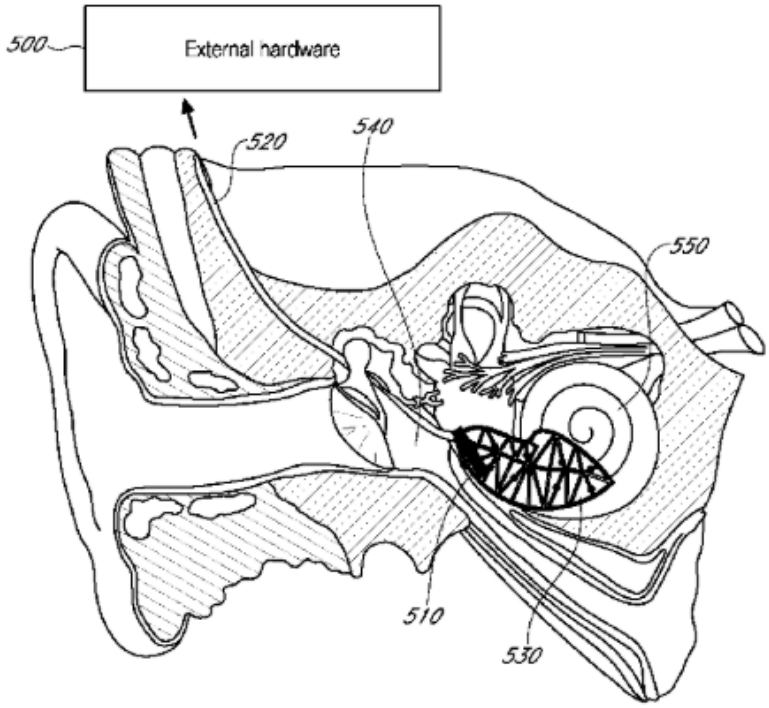
…In a world increasingly saturated with noise disguised as insight, the real skill may not be sounding profound, but knowing when to stop. When the job is not to decorate the contradiction, but to resolve it. Because in the end, genuine innovation does not hide inside contradictions. It eliminates them.

Or, *"It is within the embrace of our contradictions that we discover the harmony of our existence, for it is through the dance of opposing forces that the soul finds its greatest expression and the heart its deepest peace."*

(Or is that more PPB, auto-generated by an AI quote engine??)

Tricky, isn't it?

Patent of the Month – Extracochlear Stimulation



A 105-page monster of a patent for our Best Of choice this month. US12, 616, 837 was award to a sextet of inventors at Stanford on 5 May. Here's what they have to say about the problem needing to be solved, in the fortunately succinct background description section of the patent:

Sensorineural hearing loss is a condition estimated to affect over one third of US adults aged between 65 and 74, over half of adults over 75 years old, and over 460 million people worldwide. There are many causes of sensorineural hearing loss including aging, noise exposure, and drug-induced ototoxicity that may ultimately lead to dysfunction or loss of hair cells within the cochlea that are responsible for transducing acoustic waves to neuronal signals. It typically affects higher frequencies first and, for patients with the most severe degree of sensorineural loss where hearing aids are no longer effective, it severely impairs speech comprehension which has a profound effect on quality-of-life. These profound effects on quality-of-life include well established links to social withdrawal, isolation, depression, and dementia.

Currently, mild-to-moderate hearing loss is well treated with hearing aids, whereas severe hearing loss or severe-to-profound hearing loss is best addressed with a cochlear implant, which electrically stimulates the tonotopically arranged neurons within the cochlea. However, despite its effectiveness, a cochlear implant is considered an irreversible and invasive procedure that involves insertion of an electrode into the cochlea that often damages the delicate structures within the inner ear and carries a high risk of residual hearing loss. The only option for those with good low frequency hearing, but poor high frequency hearing, is to attempt a hybrid style cochlear implant. However, even this hybrid style comes with a high chance of residual hearing loss. This risk of residual hearing loss that occurs with placing an electrode inside the cochlea prevents many patients from considering cochlear implants as a treatment option, and so they continue to struggle with hearing aids that cannot work for their hearing loss.

Here's a conflict best mapped, first off, as one where the need is to restore hearing loss. We could choose to map this problem to the 'loss of information' parameter, but given that the other 104 pages of the patent spend all their time talking about vibration of the hairs in

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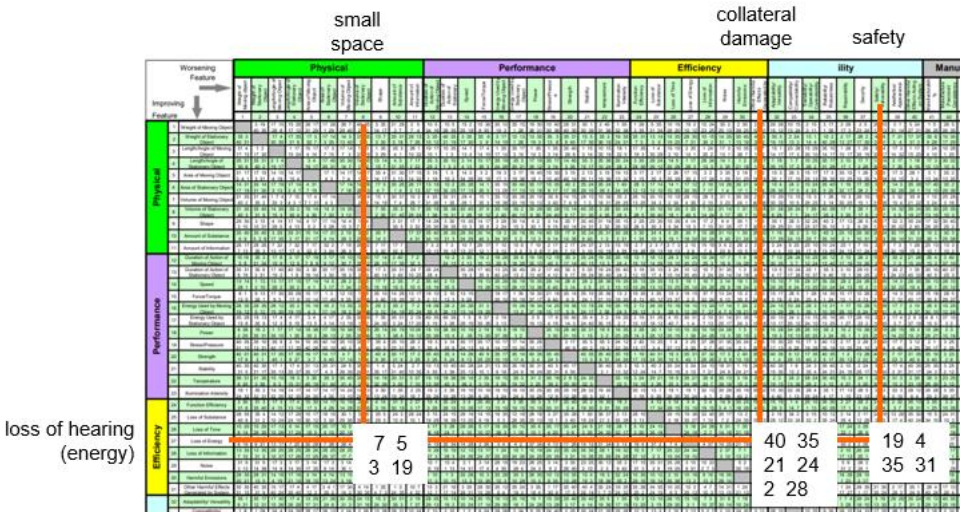
the cochlear of the ear, Loss Of Energy makes for a better choice. In terms of what's stopping us solving this problem, the prior art cochlear implant issues tell us, firstly there's a collateral damage problem, which in turn opens up the issue of patient safety. Not mentioned in the patent, but inherently a problem when we're trying to do anything inside the human ear, size is always a constraint on the possible solution options. Here's how we map that cluster of problems onto the Contradiction Matrix:



And here's how the team has resolved the problems, as described in the first Claim of the patent:

A method, comprising: using an energy delivery element for stimulating a spiral ganglion of a cochlea from a [Principle 2] *middle ear cavity, wherein the energy delivery element comprises: (i) a* [Principle 35] *flexible substrate configured to conform to a curvature of one or more of: a cochlear promontory, one or more* [Principle 3] *projections of a hypotympanum, a cavity within a round window niche, or a combination thereof within a middle ear cavity; (ii) one or more electrical contacts coupled to the flexible substrate and configured to deliver* [Principle 28] *electrical stimuli to activate a spiral ganglion of a basal turn of a cochlea; and (iii) characterized in that the energy delivery element further comprises one or more* [Principle 31] *perforations defined by the flexible substrate and configured to promote long-term electrical contact with one or more of: the cochlear promontory, the one or more projections of the hypotympanum, the cavity within the round window niche, or the combination thereof within the middle ear cavity; and delivering the electrical stimuli to activate spiral ganglion of a cochlea from a middle ear cavity and for improving high-frequency hearing while preserving a residual low-frequency hearing.*

Best of the Month – Mary Parker Follett: Prophet Of Management

When *Prophet of Management* was published in 1995, it arrived into a management world that, on the surface, seemed ready – perhaps even overdue – for the rediscovery of Mary Parker Follett and her pioneering thinking from the 1920s and early 30s. By 1995, 62 years after Follett's passing, thinkers like Peter Drucker had firmly established the importance of knowledge work, while Rosabeth Moss Kanter was articulating the need for empowerment, culture, and organisational adaptability. The legacy of W. Edwards Deming had already demonstrated that management philosophy – not just technique – could transform performance at scale. And yet, despite this fertile intellectual ground, Follett did not quite "take off."

Why? Because 1995, with hindsight, looks less like a moment of arrival and more like a *near miss*. The pieces were forming, but the system was not yet ready:

- Digital collaboration had not yet rewired how organisations communicate
- Systems thinking was still niche rather than mainstream
- Innovation had not yet emerged as a disciplined, repeatable capability

In other words, 1995 rediscovered Follett, but it did not yet possess the broader system required to *activate* her. Today, that may finally be changing.

Follett Through a Systematic Innovation Lens

Read through a Systematic Innovation lens, Follett's ideas feel not historical, but strikingly contemporary. Almost as if she were writing directly for today's challenges. At the heart of her thinking lies a set of principles that map cleanly onto modern innovation logic:

- **Integration over compromise**
  Follett rejected the idea of splitting differences. Instead, she advocated finding solutions that satisfy all parties – a direct parallel to contradiction-solving.
- **"Power with" rather than "power over"**
  This reframes the classic control vs autonomy contradiction. Rather than choosing one, she seeks a higher-order resolution in which coordinated autonomy becomes possible.
- **Circular response**
  Her view that cause and effect are part of an ongoing relational loop anticipates modern systems thinking and feedback dynamics.
- **Cross-boundary insight**
  Follett drew ideas from politics, community organisation, and business – an early example of horizontal knowledge transfer across domains.

What is most striking is not just the content of these ideas, but their coherence. Follett was not offering isolated insights; she was describing an *integrated system of thinking* about organisations, one that assumes interdependence, emergence, and the creative potential of conflict. Which raises an uncomfortable question that will follow us through the rest of this review: If these ideas are so insightful, why were they ignored? Was Follett wrong, or was she simply describing a future that had not yet arrived?

Why Follett Was Ignored: A System-Level Failure to Diffuse

The most common explanation is that Follett was "ahead of her time." While true, this is insufficient. Many ideas are ahead of their time; few disappear as completely as hers did for decades. A more useful explanation emerges when we view her work not in isolation, but as one component within a broader system that ultimately determines whether ideas diffuse or die.

A. Cognitive and Conceptual Barriers: Follett was operating with a level of conceptual sophistication that her contemporaries simply did not possess the tools to absorb. She thought in terms of:

- dynamic relationships
- interdependence
- integration rather than trade-offs

Yet the dominant paradigm, shaped by Frederick Winslow Taylor, was linear, reductionist, and control-oriented. Even more fundamentally, Follett was describing what we would now call *systems thinking. D*ecades before that language existed. Without the conceptual scaffolding, her ideas were not just challenging; they were, to many, unintelligible.

B. Structural and Institutional Barriers: Unlike many influential thinkers, Follett lacked an institutional base:

- She was not embedded in academia
- She did not operate within a major corporation
- Her work spanned multiple disciplines without belonging to any

As a result, there was no mechanism to:

- formalise her ideas
- teach them at scale
- build a community of followers

Interdisciplinary thinkers often fall between the cracks. Follett fell completely through them.

C. Practical Adoption Barriers: Even for those who understood her ideas, implementation posed a significant challenge. Follett excelled at articulating the *why* and the *what*, but offered relatively little on the *how*:

- No step-by-step methods
- No measurement frameworks
- No clear implementation playbooks

In an era dominated by stopwatch efficiency and quantification, ideas that could not be measured or operationalised struggled to gain traction. Compounding this, she lacked a "killer application" – no flagship organisation demonstrating that her principles delivered superior results at scale.

D. Contextual and Social Barriers: Follett was also working against the grain of her historical moment:

- The interwar period prioritised efficiency and stability
- The Great Depression shifted focus toward survival and short-term results
- Management was a male-dominated domain, limiting the visibility and acceptance of her voice

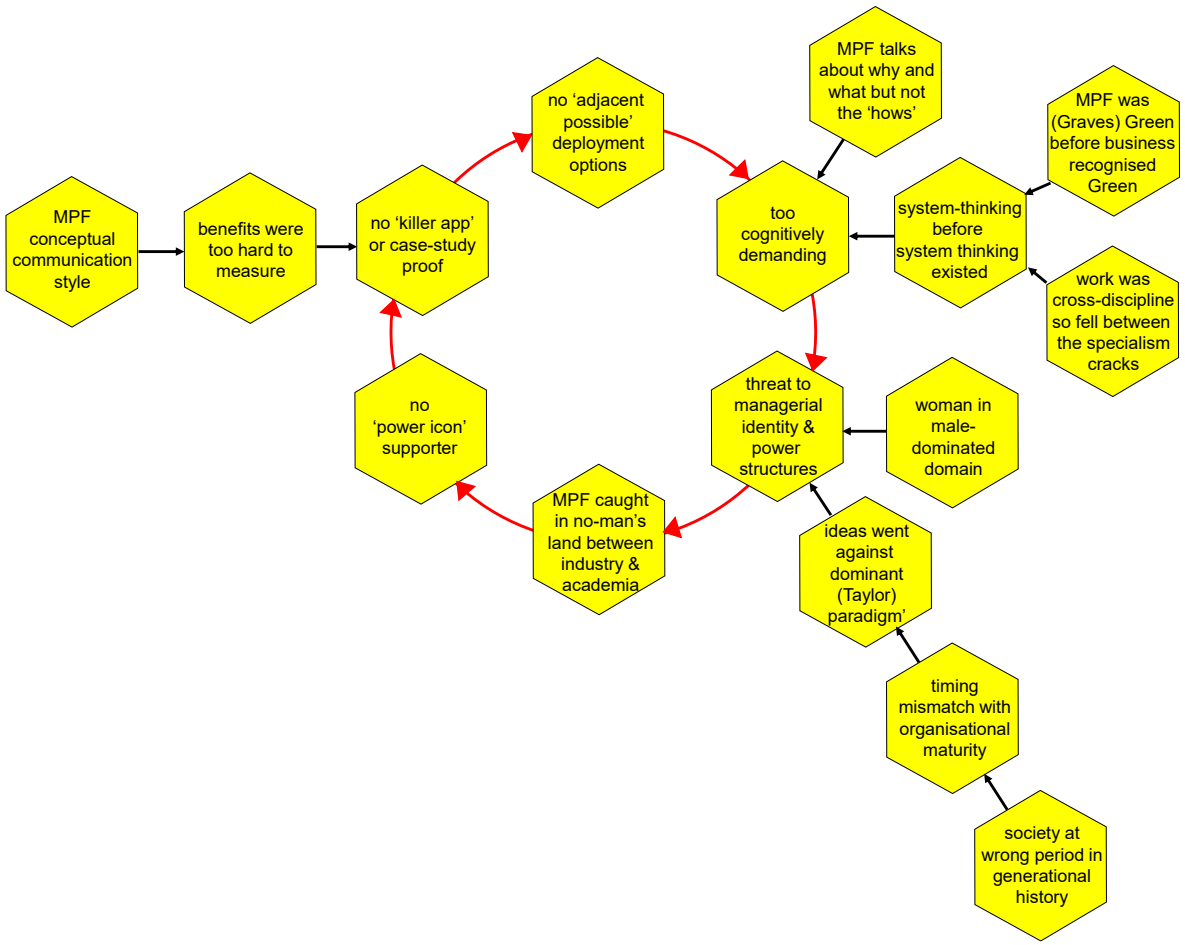
Her ideas – subtle, relational, and long-term – were simply not what the system was seeking.

E. The Deeper Issue: System Readiness: Across all these factors lies a deeper pattern: Follett's ideas required capabilities that organisations did not yet possess:

- the ability to engage constructively with conflict
- the maturity to distribute power
- the skills to facilitate integration rather than enforce compromise
- the mindset to think systemically rather than locally

In short, organisations lacked the *preconditions* necessary to adopt her thinking.

Here's the output of a quick Perception Mapping exercise drawing on an expanded version of these five themes:



The Follett Paradox: When the System Decides

This leads us to a final, and perhaps most important, insight. Follett's work illustrates a fundamental principle:

Good ideas do not spread on their own. The system decides.

And in her case, the system was not ready. We can express this as a meta-contradiction:

Organisations needed Follett's ideas to evolve, but could only adopt Follett's ideas after they had evolved.

Her thinking demanded:

- trust
- dialogue capability

- systems awareness

Yet these are not starting conditions. They are *outcomes* of organisational evolution. Which brings us back to the question running through this review: Was Follett wrong?

With the benefit of hindsight, the answer appears to be clear no.

She was not wrong. She was early. A hundred years early.

And perhaps more importantly, she was *systemically early,* arriving before the surrounding ecosystem of concepts, tools, technologies, and organisational maturity required to make her ideas actionable. Today, perhaps thanks to TRIZ/SI that ecosystem may finally be in place. Which suggests that the real story of Mary Parker Follett is not that she was ignored, but that we are only now becoming capable of understanding her.

Here's a selection of choice MPF quotes from the book, just in case you need any further persuasion that her work should be part of your TRIZ library…

"Conflict is a fact of life. Instead of being hidden or ignored, it should be acknowledged and made to work for us. Instead of being viewed as warfare, it should be seen as the legitimate expression of differences. After all, conflict is difference – difference of opinion and of interest. Without conflict, without difference, there would be no progress."

"The essential feature of a common thought is not that it is held in common but that it has been produced in common through the integration of differences. The core of the social process is not likeness, but the harmonising of difference through interpenetration."

"Fear of difference is fear of life itself. It is possible to conceive of conflict as not necessarily a wasteful outbreak of incompatibilities but a normal process by which socially valuable differences register themselves for the enrichment of all."

"We do not want to do away with difference, we want to do away with muddle."

"Just so far as people think that the basis of working together is compromise or concession, just so far as they do not understand the first principles of working together. Such people think that when they have reached an appreciation of the necessity of compromise they have reached a high plane of social development… but compromise is still on the same plane as fighting. War will continue – between capital and labour, between nation and nation – until we relinquish the ideas of compromise and concession."

"Compromise is not only a useless expenditure of time and energy but also a demeaning activity that never results in permanent resolution of a dispute."

"The traditional 'power-over' model is reductionist and self-defeating – increasingly severe measures must be imposed if domination is to be maintained, until eventually the cost of order becomes prohibitive."

"We cannot departmentalise our thinking… we cannot think of economic principles and ethical principles… Underneath all our thinking, there are certain fundamental principles to be applied to all our problems. I do not think we have psychological and ethical problems. We have human problems with psychological, ethical and economic aspects, and as many more as you like, legal often."

(against Taylorism) *"We can never wholly separate the human from the mechanical side… But you will see every day that the study of human relations in business and the study of operating are bound together."*

“A leader is one who sees the whole situation, organises the experience of the group, offers a vision of the future and trains followers to be leaders.”

“I do wish that when a principle has been worked out in ethics, it did not have to be discovered all over again in psychology, in economics, in government, in business, in biology, in sociology. It’s such a waste of time.”

“Our chief problem then is not how to get people to obey orders, but how to devise methods by which we can best discover what the order shall be.”

“Never let yourself be bullied by an either-or situation. Never think you must agree to either this or that. Find a third way.”

“The common will never finds perfection but is always seeking it. Progress is an infinite advance towards the infinitely receding goal of infinite perfection.”

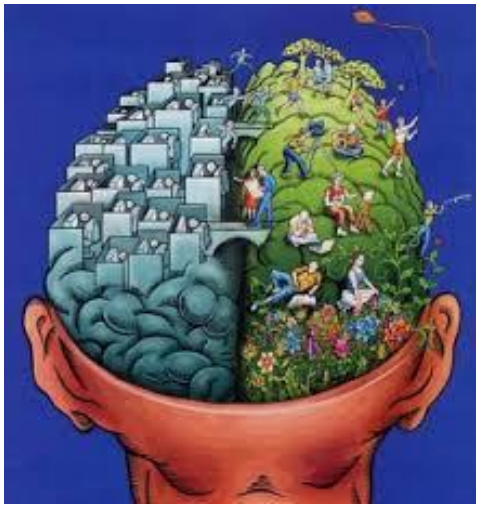
“Man cannot live by taboos; that means stagnation. But as one taboo after another is disappearing, the call is upon us deliberately to build our own moral life.”

“We are evolving now a system of ethics which has three conceptions in regard to right, conscience and duty which are different from much of our former ethical teaching: 1) we do not follow right, we create right, 2) there is no private conscience, 3) my duty is never to ‘others’ but to the whole.”

“When the ‘ought’ is not a mandate from without, it is no longer a prohibition but a self-expression. As the social consciousness develops, ‘ought’ will be swallowed up in will… morality is not the refraining from doing certain things – it is a constructive force.”

“Education, therefore, is not chiefly to teach children a mass of things which have been true up to the present moment; moreover it is not to teach them about life as fast as it is made, not even to interpret life, but above and beyond everything, to create life for themselves. Hence education should be largely the training in making choices. The aim of all proper training is not rigid adherence to a crystallised right (since in ethics, economics or politics there is no crystallised right), but the power to make a new choice at every moment. And the greatest lesson of all is to know every moment is new.”

“The test of our morality is whether we are living not to follow but to create ideals, whether we are pouring our life into our visions only to receive it back with its miraculous enhancement for new uses.”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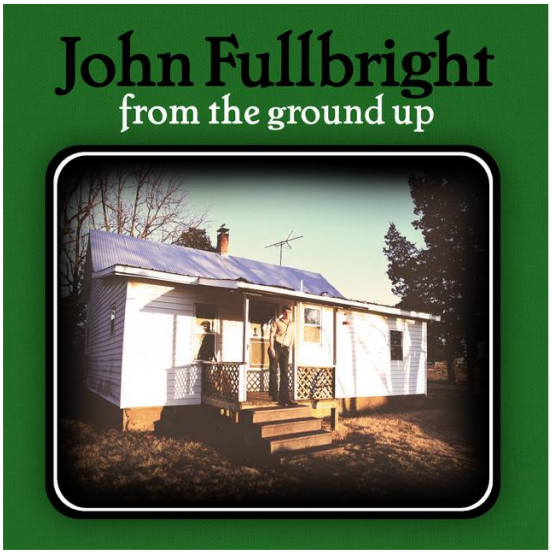
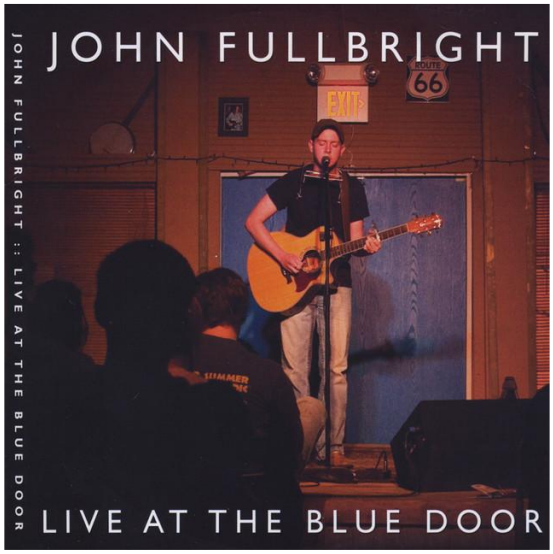
Wow In Music – Satan And St Paul





I came to John Fullbright the wrong way round, and then, for a while, lost him altogether.

It started for me with his second album, Songs. The reviews were too strong to ignore: thoughtful, intelligent, the kind of record that signals an artist of real substance. And it delivered on that promise. I liked it. Admired it, even. Enough to travel half way across the country to see him on what I think was his only UK tour. This was back in 2014, and I still remember he was extraordinary. The kind of performer who doesn't just play songs but seems to wrestle them into the room, hitting the piano with a force that makes each note feel like penance.

And yet, somehow, I let it all drift. The album stayed on the shelf; his name slipped out of rotation. Nothing actively rejected. Just quietly set aside.

It took a junk shop, a couple of months ago, to bring it all back. Sitting among the usual half-forgotten CDs was a copy of From the Ground Up, his debut. I bought it on a whim, more out of vague recognition than expectation.

That was the mistake.

Because *From the Ground Up* isn't just good, it's the record that makes you recalibrate everything you thought you knew about the artist. And at its centre sits Satan and St. Paul, a song that doesn't just stand out from his catalogue, but seems to exist on a different level entirely.

There are songs you admire, and then there are songs that feel like they've been excavated rather than written. "Satan and St. Paul" belongs firmly in the latter category. At its core is a deceptively simple image: "the corner of Satan and St. Paul." It's not a real place, of course, but it feels instantly recognisable. The phrase works as a compressed metaphor for moral paralysis. The moment where you're caught between who you are, who you pretend to be, and who you suspect you ought to become. It's a spiritual crossroads, but one stripped of romance. There's no triumphant decision waiting here, just the uncomfortable awareness of being stuck.

That sense of being trapped in one's own contradictions runs through the song's lyrical spine. When Fullbright sings, "Maybe when I'm a little older, I won't tell myself so many

lies," it lands with unusual force, not because it's poetic in a conventional sense, but because it is so disarmingly plain. There's no attempt to disguise the admission. It's an unvarnished acknowledgement of self-deception, and, more importantly, of complicity in that deception.

What makes this even more striking is the age at which it was written. In his early twenties, Fullbright somehow channels a level of existential fatigue more commonly associated with writers decades older. It's this "old soul" quality that has led many to compare him to figures like Townes Van Zandt and Bob Dylan, artists who made careers out of sounding as though they'd already seen too much. Yet Fullbright's voice is distinct. Where Dylan often intellectualises and Van Zandt mythologises, Fullbright confesses. Musically, the song reinforces that unease. Rather than leaning into the folk traditions that dominate much of *From the Ground Up*, "Satan and St. Paul" moves with a kind of slow, stalking blues energy. It's been described as "slinking," even "apocalyptic," and both feel apt. The chords don't resolve so much as circle, mirroring the lyrical sense of entrapment. There's a tension in the arrangement that never quite releases, as if resolution itself is being withheld.

But it's in live performance that the song fully reveals its power. Recordings capture the structure, the melody, the words. What they struggle to contain is Fullbright's delivery. Accounts of his live shows consistently return to the same imagery: a performer who seems to attack the piano, who leans into the song as though trying to break through it. The playing is percussive, almost confrontational; the vocals carry a brittle edge, as if they might fracture under the weight of what's being expressed. Intrigued readers might do well to dig out the pre-debut album live album, Live At The Blue Door, to hear an even rawer version of the song.

There's a "haunted" quality to his voice in this song, but it's not theatrical. It doesn't feel performed in the usual sense. Instead, it resembles something closer to a private reckoning made public by accident. The listener isn't being told a story so much as overhearing one.

All of which raises an awkward question. One that shadows Fullbright's career without ever quite defining it. How do you follow something like this?

It's tempting, perhaps too tempting, to draw a parallel with Orson Welles: an artist whose early work arrives with such authority that everything after it risks being measured against an almost impossible benchmark. *From the Ground Up* has, over time, taken on the aura of a modern classic, and "Satan and St. Paul" sits at its centre like a fixed point.

The albums that followed, including *Songs*, are by no means failures. They are refined, deliberate, often beautiful. But they feel different. Less burdened, perhaps, or less urgent. It's as if the "old soul" that powered his debut has, paradoxically, grown younger with time, shedding some of the weight that once made his work so arresting.

That shift isn't necessarily a flaw. Artists change; perspectives evolve. The danger lies more in the expectations we place on them than in the work itself. And yet, there remains something singular about "Satan and St. Paul", a sense that it captured a moment of clarity, or confrontation, that cannot simply be recreated on demand.

In the end, its power comes down to that rare alignment of elements: imagery that resonates without overreaching, honesty that refuses to hide behind craft, and a performance that feels less like interpretation and more like exposure. It doesn't offer

answers, or even the comfort of resolution. Instead, it leaves us standing on that same corner, recognising, perhaps uncomfortably, that we've been there all along.

And that recognition – that uneasy flicker of self-awareness – may be the most powerful "wow" of all.

Investments – Low Energy AI Chip

Solving AI's Energy Contradiction at the Material Level. One of the defining contradictions of the current AI boom is both obvious and largely unresolved:

We want more intelligence… but we can't afford the energy it consumes.

Modern AI systems are extraordinarily powerful, but they are also extraordinarily inefficient. Beneath the software breakthroughs lies a hardware architecture that hasn't fundamentally changed in decades. Data is constantly shuttled back and forth between memory and processing units, consuming vast amounts of energy in the process.

As AI adoption accelerates, this contradiction becomes more acute. More capability demands more computation. More computation demands more energy. And more energy brings rising cost, infrastructure strain, and environmental impact.

This month's Investment-of-the-Month recommendation comes from the University of Cambridge, where researchers may have taken a significant step towards resolving that contradiction. Not through incremental optimisation, but by changing the underlying system.

The Contradiction
At the heart of conventional computing is a structural separation:

Memory stores information; processors manipulate it.

This separation works well for deterministic, rule-based tasks. But for AI, it creates a fundamental inefficiency: the system must constantly move data to think.

From a TRIZ/Systematic Innovation perspective, this is a classic contradiction: we want high computational capability, but we also want low energy consumption.

Traditional approaches attempt to optimise within this constraint – faster chips, better cooling, improved architectures. But the underlying contradiction remains.

The Breakthrough: Collapsing the Separation
The Cambridge team approached the problem differently, drawing inspiration from the most efficient computing system we know: the human brain.

Instead of separating memory and processing, the brain integrates them. Neurons both store and process information simultaneously, eliminating the need for constant data movement.

This is the principle behind neuromorphic computing, and the Cambridge team has implemented it using a novel nanoelectronic device based on a modified form of hafnium oxide.

At the centre of the breakthrough is a component known as a memristor, a device that can both store information and adjust its behaviour based on past activity.

Unlike conventional memristors, which rely on unstable conductive filaments, this new design uses engineered interfaces – tiny “p-n junctions” – to control how the device switches between states. The result is far greater stability, much more predictable behaviour and dramatically lower energy requirements.

The reported performance improvements are striking. Switching currents up to a million times lower than conventional devices, potential energy reductions of up to 70%, and ability to support hundreds of stable states, enabling analogue, brain-like computation.

In TRIZ/SI terms, this is not optimisation, it is a shift in the operating principle. Rather than improving the efficiency of data movement, the system removes the need for it. The contradiction is not managed. It is eliminated.

There is, of course, a recurring pattern in breakthrough innovation: when a system hits a fundamental limit, the solution is often to merge previously separated functions.

Here, the separation of memory and processing – once a strength – has become a liability. The Cambridge work resolves this by recombining them at the material level.

This mirrors a predictably broader shift we are seeing across multiple domains:
Centralised → distributed systems
Sequential processing → parallel adaptation
Rigid architectures → adaptive, learning structures

In each case, efficiency gains come not from doing the same thing better, but from reframing how the system works.

What Still Needs to Be Solved
As with many early-stage breakthroughs, there are still significant barriers to overcome. The current fabrication process requires temperatures of around 700°C, which is not compatible with standard semiconductor manufacturing. Until this next contradiction is addressed, large-scale adoption will remain out of reach.

Then there is also the broader challenge of integration – moving from promising devices in the lab to full computing architectures that can compete with established systems. In other words, the contradiction has been solved at the device level, but not yet at the system level.

So why highlight this now? Because this is exactly the kind of development that signals a potential S-curve transition. Current AI hardware is approaching its limits, not because it cannot be improved further, but because each improvement comes at increasing cost and complexity. Breakthroughs like this suggest a different path forward:

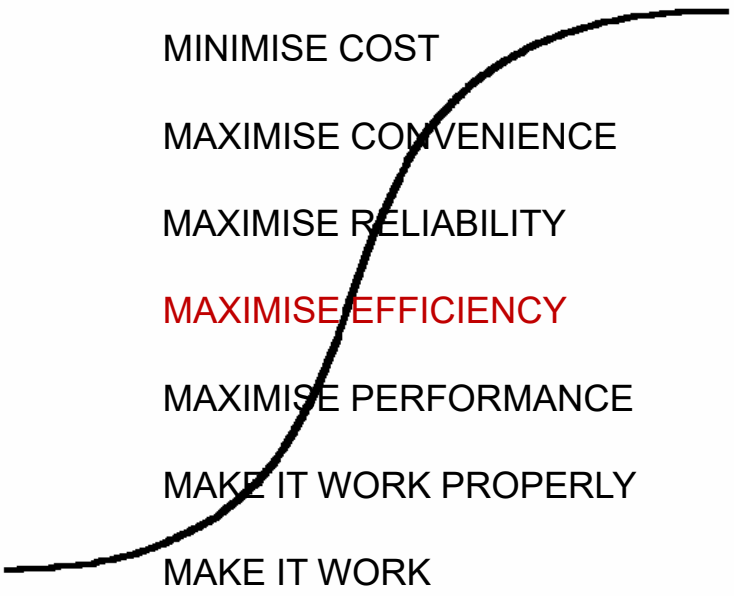
Lower energy consumption

More adaptive behaviour
Architectures aligned with how intelligence actually works

It is still early. The risks are real. But the direction and the contradictions needing to be solved are clear.

If successful, this approach doesn't just make AI cheaper to run.

It changes the economics – and potentially the trajectory – of the entire field.



In a world increasingly defined by intelligent systems, energy may become the ultimate constraint. Solving that constraint is not just a technical challenge. It is a strategic one. And as this example shows, the most powerful solutions don't come from pushing harder against the limits of the current system… they come from changing the system itself.

Read more: Babak Bakhit, Xiao Xie, Simon M. Fairclough, Atif Jan, Ingemar Persson, Giuliana Di Martino, Bonan Zhu, Caterina Ducati, Quanxi Jia, Bilge Yildiz, Andrew J. Flewitt, Judith L. MacManus-Driscoll. HfO 2 -based memristive synapses with asymmetrically extended p-n heterointerfaces for highly energy-efficient neuromorphic hardware. Science Advances, 2026; 12 (12) DOI: 10.1126/sciadv.aec2324

Generational Cycles – A Theory of Adaptive System Elasticity

Why do some societies become dominated by rule-makers while others celebrate rule-breakers? Why do periods of social conformity alternate with periods of rebellion? And why do institutions that once seemed stable and effective suddenly come to appear rigid, fragile, and out of touch?

One of the most useful recent frameworks for addressing these questions comes from cultural psychologist Michele Gelfand, whose research distinguishes between tight cultures, characterised by strong norms and low tolerance for deviance, and loose cultures, where norms are weaker and behavioural variation is more readily accepted (Reference 1).

Tight societies produce rule-followers and rule-enforcers; loose societies produce experimenters and rule-breakers. Each mode offers advantages. Tight cultures tend to be orderly and coordinated, while loose cultures tend to be innovative and adaptive. Yet each also contains the seeds of its own failure: excessive tightness leads to rigidity and fragility, while excessive looseness leads to fragmentation and instability.

Tight Phases	Loose Phases
• Strong Norms • Rule enforcement • Order & Coordination • Low tolerance for deviation Rule-Makers dominate	• Norm flexibility • Experimentation • Innovation • Higher tolerance for deviance Rule-Breakers thrive

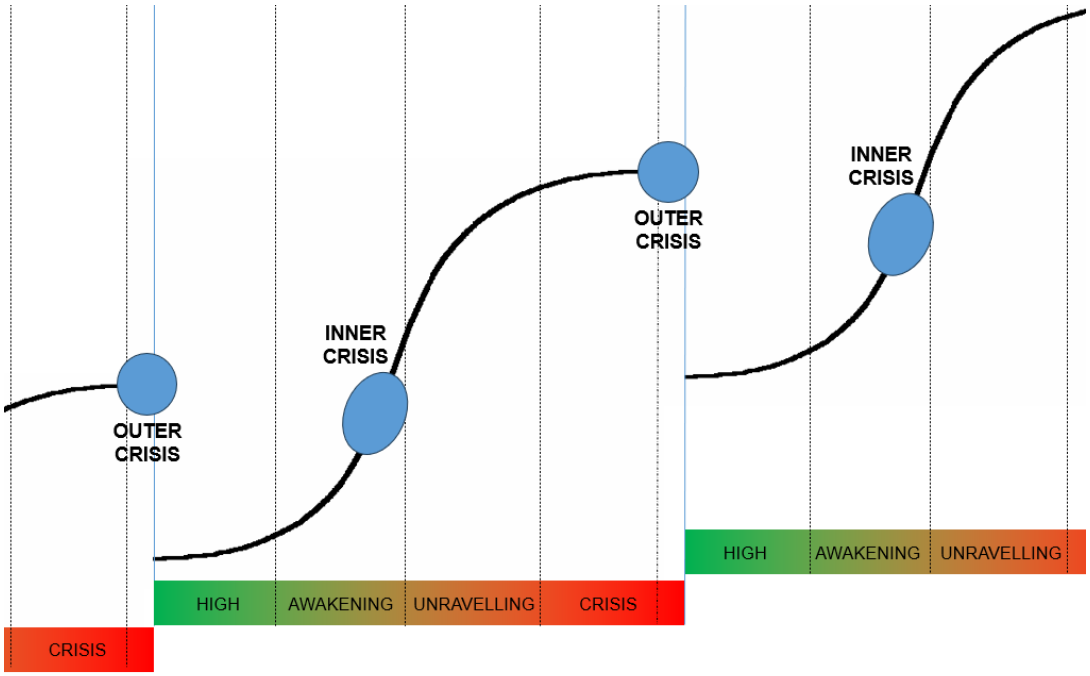
Gelfand's work explains how societies respond to immediate threats. External danger – war, disaster, or economic instability – typically produces tighter norms and stronger enforcement. Periods of safety and prosperity tend to loosen norms and expand behavioural tolerance. What the model leaves less explored, however, is the possibility that tightness and looseness may not merely respond to short-term conditions but instead oscillate in long-term cycles. Historical evidence suggests that societies do not simply move toward either tighter or looser norms and remain there. Instead, they appear to swing between the two states in a recurring pattern lasting roughly the span of a long human lifetime.

This oscillation becomes particularly visible when viewed alongside the generational cycle described in The Fourth Turning. Strauss and Howe propose that Anglo-American history has followed a repeating sequence of four social "turnings": a stable institutional High, a values-driven Awakening, a fragmenting Unravelling, and a decisive Crisis. While their model has often been interpreted in terms of generational psychology, it may equally be understood as a long-wave oscillation between tightening and loosening social norms.

From this perspective, societies depend on a dynamic balance between rule-makers and rule-breakers. Rule-makers stabilise systems by strengthening norms, coordinating behaviour, and reducing uncertainty. Rule-breakers destabilise systems in a constructive way, challenging assumptions, testing boundaries, and creating the variation necessary for adaptation. A healthy society requires both. Problems arise when one group becomes dominant for too long. Excessive rule-making produces rigid systems that cannot adapt to

change, while excessive rule-breaking produces fragmented systems that cannot coordinate collective action.

This article proposes that societies behave like elastic systems, periodically stretching between tighter and looser norm-states in order to maintain long-term adaptability. Two different kinds of crisis regulate this oscillation. The well-known Fourth Turning Crisis represents a breakdown in institutional function, forcing societies to tighten norms and rebuild coordination. Less recognised, but equally important, is the norm-legitimacy crisis that emerges late in the Awakening turning, when existing rules no longer make psychological or moral sense to the rising generation (Reference 2). Together these two crises form a self-regulating emergent cycle that – thus far – has prevented societies from becoming either permanently rigid or permanently chaotic.



Seen in this way, the alternation between rule-makers and rule-breakers is not a historical accident but a structural feature of adaptive social systems. Periods dominated by rule-makers create the stability required for growth, while periods dominated by rule-breakers create the variation required for renewal. The long-term resilience of a society depends not on choosing between tightness and looseness, but on maintaining the capacity to oscillate between them.

The Two Crises of Elastic Systems

If societies are elastic systems oscillating between tight and loose norm-states, then the question naturally arises: what forces drive the oscillation? Historical patterns suggest that movement between tightness and looseness is not smooth or gradual but instead occurs through two distinct types of crisis, each correcting a different form of imbalance. One crisis emerges when institutions become too rigid to function effectively; the other emerges when norms lose their legitimacy and no longer command voluntary adherence. Together these crises form the regulatory mechanism that keeps adaptive systems from becoming permanently frozen or permanently chaotic.

The best-known of these is the external or institutional (Fourth Turning) Crisis Period. This Crisis arises late in periods of cultural looseness, when weakened norms and fragmented institutions can no longer sustain effective coordination. Contracts become unreliable,

organisations become inefficient, and trust between social groups declines. In engineering terms, the system becomes under-constrained: too many degrees of freedom prevent coordinated action. External shocks – economic collapse, war, or systemic disruption – then expose this fragility and force a rapid tightening of norms. New rules are imposed, institutions are rebuilt, and collective discipline is restored. The end of the Crisis turning therefore functions as a re-tightening mechanism, re-establishing the shared constraints necessary for social coordination.

Less visible, but equally important, is the internal crisis that emerges near the end of the Awakening turning. This crisis is not primarily institutional but psychological and moral. It occurs when a rising generation begins to perceive inherited rules and institutions as arbitrary, unjust, or meaningless. The problem is not that institutions fail to function, but that they no longer make sense. Individuals comply outwardly while withdrawing inwardly, and legitimacy erodes long before institutional failure becomes visible. This phase can be described as a norm-legitimacy crisis: a growing mismatch between formal rules and lived experience.

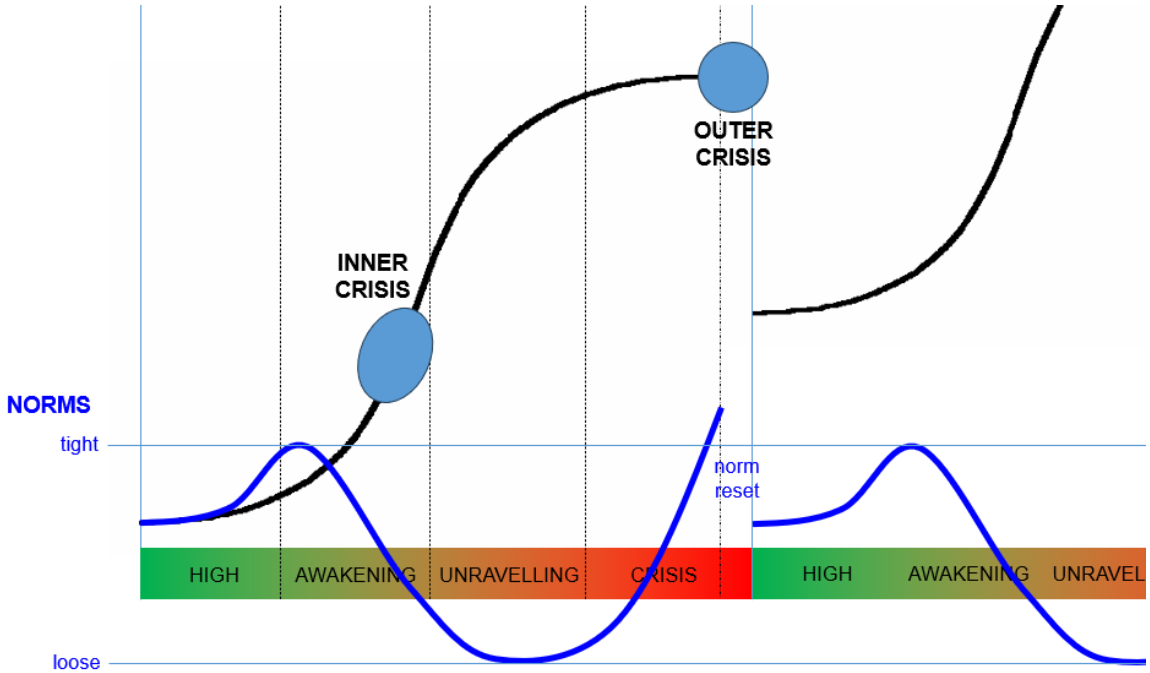
During a norm-legitimacy crisis, the cultural environment remains relatively stable and prosperous, which makes the crisis easy for established authorities to dismiss. Yet beneath the surface, conformity increasingly depends on enforcement rather than belief. The rising generation experiences the prevailing norm system not as a source of order but as a source of constraint. Moral language intensifies, ideological movements emerge, and social debates become polarised around competing visions of what society *ought* to be. Rule-breaking during this period is often framed as moral necessity rather than mere experimentation. The Awakening turning therefore functions as a loosening mechanism, weakening inherited norms and expanding the range of acceptable behaviour.

These two crises regulate opposite ends of the elasticity spectrum. The norm-legitimacy crisis prevents societies from becoming permanently over-tight by dissolving norms that have lost their meaning. The institutional crisis prevents societies from becoming permanently over-loose by restoring coordination when fragmentation becomes dangerous. One crisis attacks rigidity; the other attacks incoherence.

Seen together, the dual-crisis structure reveals an important asymmetry. The internal crisis begins with excessive rule-making, when institutions become psychologically suffocating even while they continue to function. The external crisis ends with excessive rule-breaking, when institutions become operationally ineffective even though freedom has expanded. The system oscillates because each solution eventually creates the opposite problem.

This dual-crisis model helps explain why societies repeatedly move through cycles of moral certainty followed by moral rebellion, institutional stability followed by institutional breakdown, and conformity followed by experimentation. Elastic systems do not achieve stability by remaining fixed at a single optimal point. Instead, they maintain long-term resilience by periodically correcting their own excesses.

In this framework, rule-makers and rule-breakers are not adversaries but complementary forces. Each group becomes dominant when the system moves too far in one direction. Rule-breakers emerge to challenge excessive constraint; rule-makers emerge to restore necessary order. The alternation between them is not a failure of social learning but the mechanism through which societies remain adaptive over long periods of time.



The Rule-Maker / Rule-Breaker Dynamic
If elastic social systems oscillate between tight and loose norm-states, the mechanism driving this movement lies in the interaction between two complementary social roles: rule-makers and rule-breakers. Building on Michele Gelfand's research into cultural tightness and looseness, these roles can be understood not primarily as personality traits or ideological positions, but as adaptive responses to perceived environmental conditions. When stability and coordination are threatened, rule-makers gain influence; when norms become overly restrictive or lose legitimacy, rule-breakers emerge to challenge them. The alternation between these roles forms the dynamic core of adaptive system elasticity.

Rule-makers play a crucial stabilising role. They define boundaries, establish predictable expectations, and create the institutional structures that allow complex societies to function. Tight norm systems reduce uncertainty and enable large-scale coordination, making them particularly valuable in periods of collective danger or institutional fragility. In these conditions, rule-making is widely perceived as responsible and necessary. Compliance becomes a civic virtue, and deviations from accepted behaviour are seen as threats to group survival. The social prestige of rule-makers rises because their activities visibly improve stability and order.

Over time, however, the success of rule-makers contains the seeds of its own reversal. As stability increases, the costs of constraint become more visible than the benefits of coordination. Rules accumulate faster than they are removed. Institutions optimise for efficiency and predictability, often becoming tightly coupled and resistant to change. Individuals increasingly experience norms as limitations rather than protections. When this occurs, rule-breakers begin to play an equally important adaptive role.

Rule-breakers introduce variation into the system. They test boundaries, challenge assumptions, and expose contradictions between formal rules and lived reality. In periods of excessive tightness, rule-breaking becomes a mechanism for restoring flexibility. Innovations that initially appear deviant or irresponsible often later become normalised as accepted practice. Many institutional improvements originate in behaviours that were initially considered violations. The loosening phase of the cycle therefore depends on the willingness of rule-breakers to question inherited constraints.

Crucially, rule-breakers rarely see themselves as destructive. During norm-legitimacy crises, rule-breaking is frequently framed as moral or rational necessity. Individuals challenge institutions not because they reject order itself, but because they perceive existing rules as inconsistent, unjust, or obsolete. From the perspective of rule-breakers, their actions are corrective rather than rebellious. What appears as deviance to rule-makers appears as renewal to rule-breakers.

The relationship between rule-makers and rule-breakers is therefore inherently paradoxical. Each group perceives the other as dangerous precisely when that other group is most necessary. When societies become too tight, rule-makers interpret rule-breakers as irresponsible disruptors even as those disruptors restore needed flexibility. When societies become too loose, rule-breakers interpret rule-makers as authoritarian even as new constraints restore needed coordination. Adaptive systems depend on both roles, yet each role tends to distrust the other.

This dynamic can be understood as a fundamental contradiction at the heart of complex societies:

Systems require stability in order to function, but they require instability in order to adapt.

Excessive rule-making produces rigidity and fragility; excessive rule-breaking produces disorder and incoherence. Long-term resilience emerges not from choosing one side of this contradiction but from maintaining a shifting balance between them. The oscillation between tightness and looseness can therefore be seen as a natural consequence of the impossibility of simultaneously maximising stability and adaptability.

Generational turnover provides a particularly powerful mechanism through which this balance shifts over time. Individuals who grow up in tightly regulated environments tend to experience rules as constraints and become more willing to challenge them. Individuals who grow up amid looseness and uncertainty tend to value order and predictability more strongly. As one generation replaces another in positions of influence, the cultural equilibrium gradually shifts. What one generation experiences as necessary discipline, the next experiences as unnecessary restriction.

This generational alternation helps explain why rule-maker and rule-breaker phases tend to cluster historically. Periods dominated by rule-makers produce the conditions that encourage the emergence of rule-breakers, while periods dominated by rule-breakers produce the conditions that encourage the return of rule-makers. The system thus evolves through a series of self-correcting adjustments rather than through steady linear progress. From the perspective of adaptive system elasticity, the critical insight is that rule-makers and rule-breakers are not opposing factions but complementary system functions. Healthy systems contain both. Dysfunction arises when one role becomes dominant for too long. Excessive rule-making produces brittle institutions that cannot respond to change. Excessive rule-breaking produces unstable systems that cannot coordinate effectively. Understanding this interaction reframes social conflict in a more functional light. Disagreements between advocates of order and advocates of change are not simply ideological disputes but signals that the system may be moving too far in one direction. Conflicts between rule-makers and rule-breakers often indicate that the elastic limits of the system are being approached.

In this sense, rule-breaking activity serves as an early-warning indicator of excessive tightness, just as demands for stronger enforcement serve as indicators of excessive looseness. Rather than viewing these signals as pathologies, adaptive systems can use them as feedback mechanisms guiding movement toward a more sustainable balance.

The next step is to examine how this dynamic unfolds across a full generational cycle, and how alternating periods of tightening and loosening produce the long-wave patterns observed in historical development.

The Full Generational Elasticity Cycle

The interaction between rule-makers and rule-breakers becomes most visible when viewed across a full generational cycle. The Strauss–Howe framework provides a useful descriptive structure for this long-wave oscillation, identifying four recurring social phases – High, Awakening, Unravelling, and Crisis – that together form a self-correcting pattern of tightening and loosening norms. Interpreted through the lens of adaptive system elasticity, these phases represent a continuous movement between increasing constraint and increasing freedom, with each stage preparing the conditions for the next.

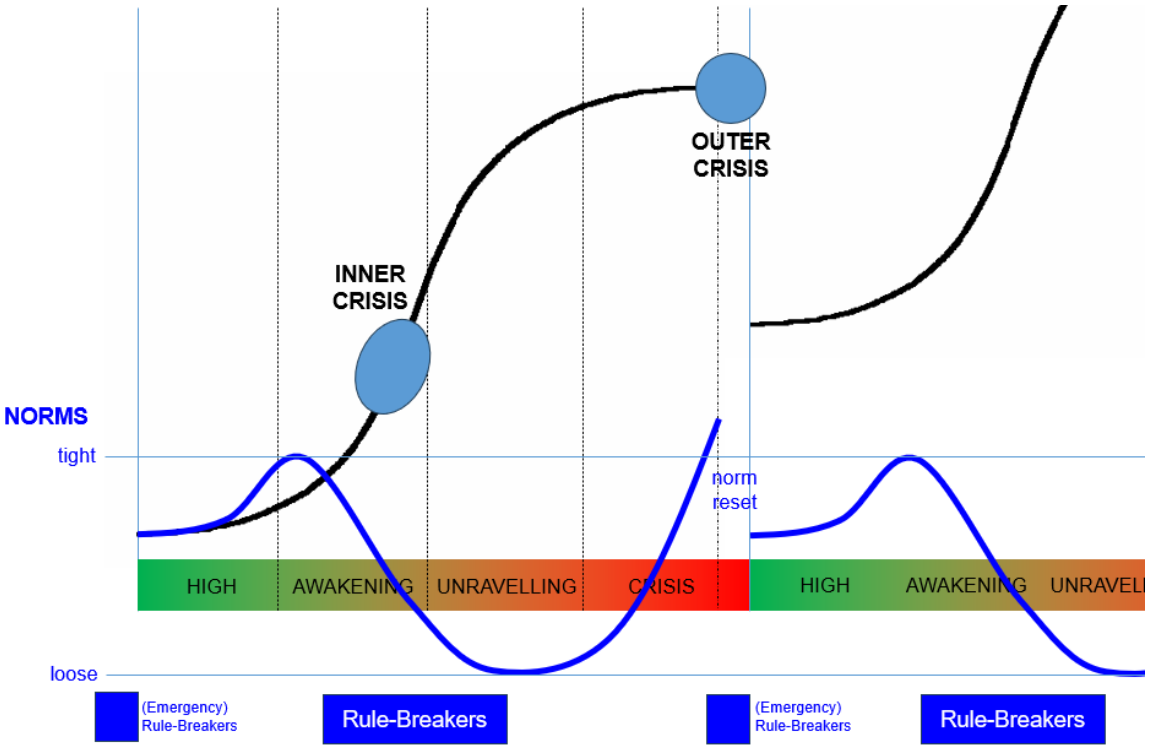
The cycle begins with a High, a period that follows an institutional crisis in which strong coordination has been restored. Norms are relatively tight, institutions are widely trusted, and social roles are clearly defined. Rule-makers dominate cultural life, but their authority is broadly accepted because institutions are perceived as legitimate and effective. Stability and predictability allow economic growth and organisational expansion. During this phase, tightness is experienced primarily as order rather than oppression. The cultural emphasis is on cooperation, discipline, and shared progress.

Over time, however, the success of the High gradually produces the conditions for a norm-legitimacy crisis, leading into the Awakening. A generation raised within stable institutions begins to experience inherited norms as overly restrictive or disconnected from lived reality. Rule-breakers gain cultural influence by challenging established authority and questioning traditional values. The Awakening phase is therefore characterised by increasing cultural looseness and expanding moral and behavioural boundaries. The dominant social energy shifts from institutional building to institutional questioning. Although institutions continue to function effectively, their legitimacy increasingly depends on persuasion rather than unquestioned acceptance.

As loosening continues, society enters the Unravelling, a period in which individual autonomy reaches its greatest extent and institutional authority becomes increasingly fragmented. Rule-breaking behaviour becomes normalised, and social norms grow more diverse and contested. Innovation and experimentation flourish, but coordination becomes more difficult. Institutions are still operational, but trust in them declines and their ability to enforce shared standards weakens. The system becomes progressively less constrained, increasing adaptability while simultaneously increasing vulnerability to external shocks.

Eventually, accumulated looseness produces an institutional crisis. External pressures expose the fragility created by fragmentation and weak coordination. The Crisis phase is marked by a rapid shift toward tightening norms and rebuilding institutional authority. Rule-makers regain influence as societies prioritise survival and collective action. Behavioural expectations become clearer and enforcement becomes stronger. Activities that were tolerated during the Unravelling may be actively discouraged or prohibited. The Crisis phase restores coordination but often at the cost of reduced individual freedom.

Once stability has been re-established, the cycle begins again with a new High. The norms created during the Crisis initially appear necessary and constructive, but over time they accumulate and harden, eventually producing the conditions for another norm-legitimacy crisis. The elasticity cycle thus continues not because societies fail to learn from experience, but because the conditions that make one norm-state effective inevitably produce the conditions that make it excessive.



Seen in this way, the four turnings describe not merely a sequence of historical moods but a systematic oscillation in constraint levels. The High and Crisis phases represent periods of relative tightness, while the Awakening and Unravelling represent periods of relative looseness. Each phase corrects the excesses of the previous one while creating the preconditions for the next adjustment.

This interpretation also clarifies why different generations often appear to misunderstand one another. Individuals shaped during tight phases tend to perceive looseness as irresponsibility, while individuals shaped during loose phases tend to perceive tightness as oppression. These perceptions arise not from simple value differences but from differing experiences of where the system stood relative to its elastic limits during formative years. The full-cycle perspective highlights an important feature of adaptive systems: the optimal level of constraint is not constant over time. What constitutes healthy tightness during a Crisis may become unhealthy rigidity during a High. What constitutes healthy looseness during an Awakening may become dangerous fragmentation during an Unravelling. Attempts to fix societies permanently at one preferred norm-state therefore tend to generate instability rather than prevent it.

Adaptive system elasticity thus reframes generational change as a regulatory process rather than a sequence of disconnected historical events. The oscillation between rule-makers and rule-breakers ensures that societies remain capable of both coordination and renewal. Tight phases consolidate gains and restore stability; loose phases explore alternatives and generate variation. The cycle persists because both functions are necessary, even though they cannot be maximised simultaneously.

From this perspective, generational cycles represent the long-term dynamics through which complex societies maintain resilience. Stability emerges not from avoiding oscillation but from allowing constraint levels to adjust as conditions change. The next question, therefore, is how these elasticity dynamics appear in real institutional settings and how they influence the design – and fragility – of modern organisations.

Elasticity, Fragility and the Failure of Over-Optimised Systems

If adaptive systems depend on a balance between constraint and flexibility, then one of the most important practical implications concerns the fragility of over-optimised systems. Periods dominated by rule-makers tend to produce highly efficient and tightly coordinated structures. Processes become standardised, contracts become longer-term, and variability is progressively eliminated in the pursuit of predictability and cost reduction. In stable environments these optimisations appear rational and successful. Yet the same features that maximise short-term efficiency often reduce long-term adaptability.

Tightly coupled systems function well only within the conditions for which they were designed. When those conditions change, the very constraints that once enabled efficiency become sources of rigidity. Organisations optimised for predictable demand struggle when markets shift. Supply chains designed for cost minimisation become vulnerable to disruption. Institutions structured around stable assumptions resist necessary transformation. The system becomes increasingly brittle as slack and redundancy are removed.

This pattern has become particularly visible in modern industrial supply chains. Large manufacturers frequently establish multi-year contracts with suppliers in order to achieve economies of scale and cost certainty. From a rule-maker perspective, such arrangements represent good management practice: uncertainty is reduced, coordination improves, and financial performance becomes more predictable. However, these same arrangements can prevent rapid adjustment when demand changes or new technologies emerge. Firms become locked into relationships and processes that no longer match their strategic needs. What once represented efficiency becomes constraint.

The fragility of tightly coupled systems is often revealed only when external conditions shift abruptly. Economic downturns, technological disruption, or geopolitical events expose hidden dependencies that remained invisible during stable periods. Systems designed to operate within narrow tolerances suddenly face conditions outside their design envelope. When adaptation is required, tightly constrained organisations frequently discover that change is slower, more expensive, and more disruptive than anticipated.

From the perspective of adaptive system elasticity, such failures are not accidents but predictable consequences of prolonged tightening. As rule-makers accumulate constraints in the pursuit of efficiency and reliability, systems move closer to their elastic limits. The resulting rigidity increases vulnerability to shocks even as short-term performance appears to improve. The institutional crisis associated with the Fourth Turning can therefore be understood not simply as a political or economic event but as the moment when accumulated rigidity becomes unsustainable.

Rule-breakers play an essential role in revealing this fragility before systemic failure occurs. Experimental practices, unconventional organisational structures, and boundary-testing behaviours often expose hidden assumptions embedded in established systems. What may appear inefficient or undisciplined in the short term may represent the exploration necessary for long-term resilience. Organisations that suppress all forms of rule-breaking frequently eliminate the very mechanisms that would allow early adaptation. This dynamic reflects a familiar contradiction in system design:

The same constraints that maximise efficiency reduce adaptability.

Attempts to optimise one dimension inevitably degrade the other. Adaptive systems cannot permanently resolve this contradiction; they can only manage it over time. Periods of tightening emphasise efficiency and coordination, while periods of loosening emphasise

exploration and flexibility. The generational elasticity cycle provides the broader context within which these shifts occur.

This perspective also helps explain why institutional crises often produce sudden shifts in management philosophy. Practices that were previously regarded as best practice may be abandoned rapidly once their limitations become visible. Long-term contracts give way to flexible arrangements, centralised control gives way to decentralised decision-making, and standardisation gives way to experimentation. These changes are frequently interpreted as management fashions, yet they often reflect deeper adjustments in system elasticity. Importantly, elasticity requires not only variation but also memory. Systems must retain the ability to tighten again once coordination becomes necessary. Organisations that move too far toward looseness risk losing the structures required for effective action. The challenge is therefore not to eliminate constraints but to maintain the capacity to adjust them.

From a Systematic Innovation perspective, elasticity can be understood as a property that must be deliberately designed. Systems require both stabilising mechanisms and mechanisms that enable controlled variation. Slack resources, modular architectures, reversible decisions, and short feedback loops all contribute to elasticity by allowing adjustment without catastrophic disruption. Conversely, irreversible commitments and tightly coupled dependencies reduce elasticity and increase fragility.

Seen in this way, the oscillation between rule-making and rule-breaking is mirrored in the evolution of organisational design. Periods of optimisation reduce variation and increase efficiency, but they also move systems closer to their elastic limits. Periods of experimentation restore flexibility but may temporarily reduce coordination. Long-term resilience depends on the ability to move between these modes without losing coherence. Adaptive system elasticity therefore provides a framework for understanding why apparently successful systems periodically encounter crisis. Failure often arises not from poor management but from the cumulative effects of optimisation carried beyond the point where flexibility remains possible. The institutional crisis that closes each generational cycle can thus be interpreted as the moment when accumulated rigidity forces the system onto a new developmental trajectory – the transition from one societal S-curve to the next.

Adaptive System Elasticity

Human societies face a permanent design contradiction. They require stability in order to function, yet they require instability in order to adapt. Attempts to eliminate either side of this contradiction eventually produce failure.

Research into cultural tightness and looseness shows how societies regulate behaviour through norms, while generational cycle theory reveals the long-wave pattern through which constraint levels change over time. Viewed together, they point to a deeper principle: resilient systems must remain elastic.

Elastic systems experience two different kinds of crisis. A norm-legitimacy crisis occurs when rules still function but no longer make sense. An institutional crisis occurs when freedom has expanded beyond the point where coordination remains possible. Each crisis corrects the excesses of the previous phase. One loosens; the other tightens.

This perspective helps explain why rule-makers and rule-breakers repeatedly appear to be in conflict. Each group tends to dominate precisely when the system most needs the other. Rule-makers restore coordination when looseness becomes dangerous. Rule-breakers

restore flexibility when constraint becomes excessive. Suppress either group for long enough and fragility inevitably follows.

From a Systematic Innovation perspective, elasticity is not an abstract sociological concept but a design requirement. Systems optimised for efficiency eventually become brittle. Systems optimised for freedom eventually become incoherent. Long-term resilience depends on maintaining the ability to move between these states.

Seen in this light, generational cycles are not mysterious historical rhythms but the visible signature of a deeper mechanism. Societies survive not by avoiding oscillation but by oscillating before their structures break.

Or more simply: Healthy systems need both rule-makers and rule-breakers… just not at the same time.

References

1) Gelfand, M., (2018), 'Rule Makers, Rule Breakers: How Tight And Loose Cultures Wire Our World', Scribner.
2) SIEZ, (2024), 'The Grey Champion', Issue 262, January.

Biology – Long-Horned Orb Weaver (Macracantha arcuate)

One of the simplest ways to survive in nature is to be either big enough to fight back or well hidden enough not to be noticed. Most animals fall into one category or the other. The long-horned orb weaver spider chose neither. Instead, it solved a much more interesting problem: how to appear large and difficult to eat while remaining physically small and economical. The result is one of nature's most elegant pieces of evolutionary engineering.

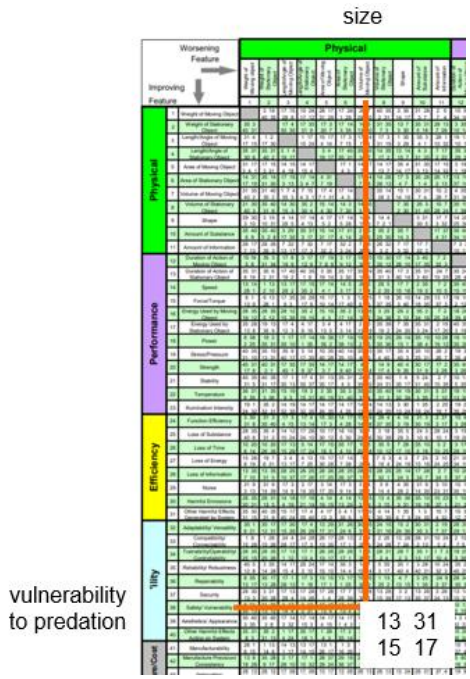
A Spider Built Sideways
Long-horned orb weavers are small spiders that spin classic circular webs in exposed locations. Unlike many spiders, they do not hide in retreats or camouflage themselves particularly well. They sit openly in the centre of their webs, making them highly visible to predators such as birds and wasps. Under normal circumstances this would be a poor survival strategy. Yet long-horned orb weavers possess one extraordinary feature: a pair of dramatic lateral spines extending from the abdomen. These "horns" can make the spider several times wider than its body length.

At first glance the horns look extravagant, and almost absurdly oversized for such a small animal. But their function becomes clear when viewed as a solution to a contradiction:

The Survival Contradiction
The spider must build large exposed webs in order to catch enough insects to survive. But exposed webs make the spider highly visible to predators. The usual solutions create new problems:

- Camouflage reduces visibility but limits web placement
- Hiding reduces predation risk but also reduces feeding efficiency
- Growing larger improves defence but requires far more energy

The spider needs to remain small and lightweight, but it must also appear large and difficult to eat. Small spiders are easy prey. Large spiders are expensive to build and maintain. Here's what that contradiction looks like when mapped onto the Contradiction Matrix:



The Geometric Solution
The long-horned orb weaver resolves the contradiction by separating physical size from apparent size. Instead of growing heavier, it grows (Principle 17) wider.

The extended horns dramatically increase the spider's apparent size without significantly increasing its mass (especially since the horns are highly porous (Principle 31)). To a predator, the spider appears awkward and difficult to swallow. Attacks become more complicated and less reliable. The spider remains physically small but geometrically large. In engineering terms, the spider has replaced mass with structure.

The Deeper Contradiction
At a deeper level, the spider faces an even subtler problem. It cannot afford to hide completely, because it must remain in the centre of its web to detect prey. But neither can it afford to fight predators directly. Instead, it adopts a third strategy:

Convince predators that attacking is not worth the effort.

The horns create a signal that the spider is:

- Too large to swallow easily
- Too awkward to handle
- Too uncertain a target

The goal is not invisibility and not defence. The goal is discouragement. Predators do not need to be defeated, they only need to move on to an easier meal.

The long-horned orb weaver demonstrates a powerful innovation principle: problems that appear to require *more material* can often be solved instead with *better geometry*.

Engineers repeatedly rediscover this lesson:

- Truss bridges achieve strength with minimal mass
- Aircraft wings maximise area while minimising weight
- Satellite structures unfold into large but lightweight forms

The spider uses the same strategy.
Instead of becoming a large spider, it becomes a small spider with a large outline.

What the System Measures
Predators do not measure body mass. They respond to perceived size and handling difficulty. The long-horned orb weaver survives by exploiting the difference.

Innovation often works the same way. Success rarely comes from maximising the thing we assume matters. It comes from understanding what the system actually measures… and then finding a way to influence that instead.

Short Thort

Cultures as Contradiction Systems: How Societies Solve the Same Human Conflicts Differently: what different cultures teach us about life:

Argentina – Passion without apology is the only way to truly live
Australia – Life is too short to take yourself too seriously
Brazil – Joy is not earned, it is chosen every single day
China – Patience across generations builds what one lifetime cannot
Colombia – Transformation is possible for a people, a city and a person
Cuba – Music and survival have always walked hand in hand
Ethiopia – Ancient pride reminds you that greatness did not start with the west
France – Self-respect is non-negotiable and style is a state of mind
Germany – Systems and discipline create real freedom
Ghana – Celebration is not reserved for big moments, every day deserves one
Greece – Food and conversation are never meant to be rushed
Iceland – Silence is not empty, it is full of answers
India – Chaos and beauty can exist in the exact same moment
Italy – Slowing down is not laziness, it is living
Jamaica – Rhythm, faith and roots will carry you further than pressure ever will
Japan – Patience and precision are a form of deep respect
Kenya – Community is not a safety net, it is the foundation
Mexico – Family is not an obligation, it is the whole point
Morocco – Hospitality is not a gesture, it is a philosophy
Netherlands – Equality is not an ideal, it is a daily practice
New Zealand – Nature is not a backdrop, it is the main event
Nigeria – Resilience is not a trait, it is a birthright
Norway – Simplicity is the most underrated form of wealth
Peru – Ancient wisdom does not expire just because the world moved on
Philippines – Warmth is a superpower and Filipinos wield it effortlessly
Poland – Dignity in hardship is one of the rarest forms of human strength
Portugal – Nostalgia is not weakness, it is how you honour what shaped you
Saudi Arabia – Tradition and ambition are not opposites, they are partners
South Korea – Reinvention at any age is not just possible, it is expected
Spain – Rest is not a reward, it is a right built into the culture
Switzerland – Precision and peace can absolutely coexist in the same life
Thailand – Kindness given freely costs nothing and changes everything
Turkey – Every city has layers and so does every person you meet
Ukraine – Strength is quiet until the moment it has no choice but to roar
UK – The less directly something is said, the more clearly it is understood
USA – Ambition is a language everyone around you speaks fluently

A culture can be understood as a *repository of resolved contradictions*. Each line in the list is like a compressed “design principle” for living in that environment. They are idealised archetypes, not full realities. Every culture contains internal contradictions and tensions. Many of these “resolutions” are partial or context-dependent. So more accurately, these are *aspirational equilibria*, not fixed truths.

Individuals struggle with contradictions. Organisations struggle with contradictions. *Cultures stabilise them.*

Which suggests, the solutions that feel “natural” to people are often pre-solved by their cultural system. And conversely, what feels like a hard contradiction in one culture may already be resolved in another. Each is an example of mature, system-level resolutions of enduring human contradictions. And that’s why they read as wisdom rather than opinion: the contradiction is still visible, but the tension has been rendered *livable.*

News

1%er Workshop

If you're reading this News section before 2 June, it's not too late to enrol on what will be the last public 1%er workshop of 2026. Two four-hour sessions, the first on 2 June and the second on the 9th. The workshop will definitely be running, and we're happy to say that Shana Finnegan – the main author of the 1%er book – will be joining us on the 9th. Specifically, to allow participants to access and have a play with our impending VELA multi-agent AI… the world's first AI that a) won't rot your brain, b) won't hallucinate, and c) will actually help you get new things done. Enrol at the usual place - https://si-shop.org.uk/june-2026-the-1-ers-how-new-things-get-done/

ITC2026

Not sure whether it will get accepted or not, but we're happy to say that Darrell managed to find time to submit a paper for consideration at this year's International TRIZ Conference. 'The Real IFR: Truth, Beauty & Goodness In The Value Equation' is the title… if the conference organisers don't like it, no doubt it will find its way into this ezine sometime before the end of the year. In the meantime, ITC is shaping up to be the biggest TRIZ conference of the year.

Everythink(DE)

We're very happy to announce the imminent publication of the German translation of our 2020, Everythink book. We're working with good friend, Jürgen Moosburger, and his co-translators to make the German edition available in a variety of different formats. Purely because it is easiest, the first home for the book will be the SI online shop. No doubt Darrell will be tweeting the moment the page goes live. Meanwhile, early June is the deadline we're working towards – ideally before Darrell's next session at the TRIZ Mastery Hub on 8 June.

TRIZ (Failure) Case Studies Workshop

One of the reasons the June 1%er workshop will be the last public one of the year is that we're planning to launch at least two of three new online workshops during the last quarter of the year. The first one will be an expanded version of the 1hr session at the TRIZ Mastery Hub on 8 June, looking at twenty-five years of 'failed' case study projects. The general idea being that we can often learn more from the failures than we can from the successes. 7 and 14 October are the dates to pencil into your diary. With a following wind, we might even get the long-awaited Case Study book published in time for Christmas…

IOM3

We've been commissioned to run a bespoke TRIZ Introduction workshop, 'De-risking Innovation - Finding the right problem, generating the perfect solution', for the Institute of Materials, Minerals & Mining. It will happen on 21 October. Details on the iom3.org website in the coming days for anyone thinking of joining.

SYSTEM ·ATIC INNOVAT· ION

New Projects

This month's new projects from around the Network:

Government – Innovation Support System Design Project
NGO – Resilience-building Project
NGO – Transformation Project
Technology – VELA Beta-Test Deployment
Electronics – AI-Supported Innovation Workshops
Healthcare – Innovation Process Improvement Project
Creative Arts – Creativity Metrics Project
Construction – TRIZ/SI Workshops