

Ongoing Discussion “Thought Piece”

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Ongoing Discussion Host: **Bill Bellows**

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Thoughts and Thinking About Thinking - Personal AHAs and DUHs
(AKA *Various Epiphanies*)
Tim Higgins

What follows are brief descriptions of things that have occurred to me, some more or less instantaneously, and some more slowly easing into consciousness. They are in no particular order. The purpose of listing them is to share them with others and to stimulate discussion and thinking. Some of them may spawn an “Aha!” or all of them may spawn “Well, duh.” I don’t know where some of them came from; with others I know the seed. They are not immutable; they are my current perception which I hope is not immutable.

Try to make folks aware of their thinking; don’t try to change their thinking; they already think okay.

You can’t tell anybody anything; some you can lead to self-discovery.

When confronting a perceptual difficulty, logic is of no use.

People act rationally given their perception of the situation. When you see someone being irrational, ask “What is he seeing?”

Traits in people are similar to the particle-wave duality of light. Am I a particle? Am I a wave? It depends upon how you set up the experiment. Character traits might be an emergent property instead of something assignable to the individual.

Individual performance is heavily influenced by the social context. Visual acuity (eye test scores) can be improved by altering the social situation. How might we alter the social context to generate improved performance in other areas?

Black versus white; right versus left; up versus down. These are not polar opposites; they are inseparable wholes. Right cannot exist without left. Up cannot exist without down. They need each other.

Uncertainty is. Presuming certainty puts us at odds with the way the universe works. The universe works probabilistically. We need to work similarly.

Patterns in the mind and patterns in the world. We will find patterns if we look for them – even when none exist. Beware of the interaction with the paradigm effect.

Acting as owners of a piece and acting as stewards of the whole: we might ask are we acting as owners or stewards and such a question seems Blue Pen Company like. Yet, it contains a very Red Pen Company either or, a black white, a good bad, aspect; a discontinuous step function. We could improve upon the question by asking are we acting more like owners of a piece or stewards of the whole; more Bluish, part of a continuum of extremes. Yet, in any decision we are acting simultaneously as an owner of something and perhaps as a steward of something larger. So a better question is in what ways are we acting as owners and in what way stewards. Similar progression ought to apply to other questions.

Management style reveals how the manager views the organization – as a mechanical system, as a biological (single-mind) system or as a social system.

Differentiation (accomplished with rock logic) is useful. It seems as if the brain takes a next step all too frequently. We differentiate then separate, as if the differentiated thing is no longer associated with its context.

Feedback is a component of learning. Much of the most effective feedback is not external. Add: grades in school are external and that they are nearly useless as feedback for the individual.

The purpose of a for-profit company is development. Development (from photography) is the process whereby a latent (invisible) image is brought forth to an actual (visual) image. A for-profit company brings forth actuality from latency. It develops products and services from ideas; it develops an economic and a social community, it helps develop skills and talents of its workforce, it helps develop a better standard of living for many. . . .

Exploring subjects – thinking for the sake of seeing what we may find, not for the purpose of resolving, solving or decision making – merely for the joy in discovery.

Broke versus incapable – typically complaints are that the system is broken and needs fixing. Frequently, the system is a perfectly functioning Mercury Villager (nothing is broken) yet the expectation is performance of a Formula One race car. The Mercury is incapable, not broken. Better performance requires redesign, not a fix.

Our mechanistic language must affect our thinking. We use leverage point and alignment which are concepts from mechanical systems and apply them to social systems. We seem to lack the words to express concepts in terms of our (relatively) new knowledge of systems.

More language – instill (sounds as if we're pressing something into another or putting something into them from outside (like gasoline into an empty tank). Empower (sounds as if someone has power and the ability to bestow it or retract it from others – very feudal like). Contrast either of those words with inspiring.

It seems that our most competitive acts require cooperation. In the world today, competition requires cooperation. Perhaps it has always been so. The inability to notice the ubiquity of cooperation might be a cultural lens.

Biography

Tim spent nearly 29 years employed by service the company currently governed by United Technologies' Pratt & Whitney Rocketdyne (PWR) business unit in Canoga Park, California. He retired, and returned to the same Canoga Park location as part of the NASA Resident Management Office. Departmental assignments took him from engineering to manufacturing operations to the total quality management office, to quality in the position of focal point for cause and corrective action. He now represents NASA's interests from the System and Mission Assurance viewpoint. All was preceded by 8 years teaching high school English and mathematics.

Tim claims that the company paid him to mess with the frontal lobes of those trapped in the prevailing style of management, though they thought he had a different assignment. In support of PWR's Thinking Roadmap efforts, he conducts sessions in Six Thinking Hats, Lateral Thinking, Problem Solving and Decision Making and organizes discussions of Deming's last book, *The New Economics*, obtaining local participants as well as participants from the U.S., Canada, and the U.K.

Tim spends three days a week playing soccer, some portion of each day adoring a Brazilian wife who saves him a fortune shopping, and some time loving a trilingual-History-Channel-watching-19-year-old son. He is especially fascinated with books describing the probabilistic and downright weird behavior of the universe and the people in it. Tim has a Masters degree in English, has an A.S.Q. Certified Quality Engineer card, and a rather large collection of Brazilian soccer jerseys.