The Way Forward
Beyond The Dysfunctions Of Modern Culture

Part 2: Skillful with Diverse Modes of Cognition

Dr Robert Gilman – November 16, 2021
The Stoa’s Philosopher in Residence series

© 2021 by Context Institute
The Way Forward with 3 New Capacities

• Savvy about psychodynamics
• Skillful with diverse modes of cognition
• Adept at the new strategy for success
Imagine a culture where the people and their institutions embody the harmony within, with others and with nature.
The Opportunity

Embody the 3 Harmonies

Within

Optimal Zone living and resilience
Increased joy, effectiveness and compassion
Diminished fear, greed and defensiveness

With Others
Deeper mutual understanding
Easier meaningful relationships
Skillful, creative collaboration

With Nature
Caring, practical partnership
Like a love affair
Coming home
The Opportunity

Imagine a world of such cultures
The Opportunity

The end of

• war as an institution
• dominance systems of government
• dominance organizational forms
• poverty
• systemic traumatization in all its forms
• all the Polycrisis issues
The Opportunity

The emergence of a truly compassionate and creative humanity
ushering in the Planetary Era
“The mental action or process of acquiring knowledge and understanding through thought, experience, and the senses”
Being Skillful with Diverse Modes of Cognition

Enables us to

• experience life more fully

• communicate more effectively

• think with more clarity and refinement

• find better solutions

• reduce and resolve conflicts

• accelerate the emergence of the Planetary Era
How Cognition Begins
Core Knowledge Systems

objects
- cohesion,
- continuity,
- contact

agents
- goal,
- cause,
- cost

persons
- shared experience

places
- distance,
- direction

forms
- relative length,
- angle

numbers
- order,
- composition

From Elizabeth Spelke
Core Knowledge Systems

- They are innate
- They emerge early and are present throughout life
- They are present in other animals and therefore ancient
- They activate specific systems in human and animal brains
- They are foundational for learning and cognition
- They are rudimentary

From Elizabeth Spelke
Infant’s Concept of “Object”

- **Cohesion**
  - continuous, enclosing edges
  - solid, can’t interpenetrate
  - associations connect to it as unit

- **Continuity**
  - all parts move together
  - continuity in time
  - ignores context and relationships

- **Contact**
  - only affect each other through contact
Object Permanence
Building On The Core
Categorization

Generalized Category

Category

Direct Experience

Direct Experience
Categorical Thinking

Category Level
- Assign to Category
- Identify Patterns

Instance Level
- Perceive Instance
- Apply to Instance
Categorical Thinking

It doesn’t work well when

• the individuality of the instance matters
• the context of the instance matters
• continuous variables can’t be categorized
• the wrong category is used
• no single category is sufficient
Which Category?

She is

doctor  mother  colleague  boss  ex-spouse

gardener  voter  singer  shopper  student
Metaphor

“Her ideas are brilliant”

Target
intangible, abstract

Source
embodied experience
Metaphorical Thinking

Source Concept

- Link to Source
- Identify Patterns

Target Concept

- Think of Target
- Apply to Target
Which Source?

Ideas are

- food  
  half-baked, meaty

- people  
  brainchild

- plants  
  budding, offshoot

- commodities  
  package, sell

- products  
  producing, generating

- resources  
  ran out of, pool

- money  
  my two cents’ worth

- cutting instruments  
  incisive, sharp

- fashions  
  old hat, avant-garde

- light-sources  
  brilliant, opaque
Language

Words + Grammar
Language

- Words
  - shareable labels on concepts/categories
  - open-ended stock
  - require shared definitions
Language

Fighting over the definition of God
Grammar

- Enables structured connections among words
- Enables the creation of novel concepts
- Complexity of expressions limited by four chunks of working memory
Language

• Builds on Core Knowledge innate concepts, e.g.
  * nouns mostly from objects
  * verbs mostly from actions of agents
  * prepositions from places
  * conjunctions from numbers

• The original technology for creating virtual reality
  * shared imaginary worlds
  * lots of opportunity for falsehood and deception
AoE/Modernist Dysfunctions

The *monopoly* of object perception

- Limitations of object perception
  - designed by evolution for quick identification and simple, categorical descriptions
  - encourages stereotyping
  - breaks down for anything that violates the principles of cohesion, continuity and contact
  - poor fit for persons, abstract concepts ("freedom"), systems ("climate") and internal experiences - the culture struggles to deal with all of these

The Polycrisis is the result
AoE/Modernist Dysfunctions

The *monopoly* of language-based thinking

- Limitations of language-based thinking
  * good for linear storytelling, poor for complex systems
  * complexity limited by four chunks of working memory
  * depends on simple, shared definitions
  * inherently categorical
  * for complex domains and challenges, more likely to generate conflict than understanding

The Polycrisis is the result
Breaking Out of the Monopolies
Using the Whole Brain

- **Motor Cortex**: muscle motions
- **Frontal Lobe**: executive functions
- **Sensory Cortex**: body sensations
- **Parietal Lobe**: “where” pathway
- **Occipital Lobe**: vision
- **Cerebellum**: coordinating motion
- **Temporal Lobe**: language, “what” pathway
Breaking the Monopoly of Object Perception
Territories And Maps

- “Territories” use “place” as their metaphor
- They are an alternative to “object” as a basis of perception
- Can be used for non-physical things/domains
- They are identified by their “boundary”
- You assume you don’t know all of what’s inside
## Objects vs. Territories

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Objects</th>
<th>Territories</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Core metaphor</strong></td>
<td>object</td>
<td>place</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Focus</strong></td>
<td>thing as a unit</td>
<td>inside the boundary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Useful for</strong></td>
<td>simple inanimate things</td>
<td>people, systems, concepts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Thinking mode</strong></td>
<td>fast</td>
<td>slow</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Description via</strong></td>
<td>categories</td>
<td>maps</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Thinking type</strong></td>
<td>categorical</td>
<td>system</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Switching from object-perception to territory-perception is a case-by-case choice.
“Maps” are derivative, created by people using selective information about a territory to serve some purpose.
Every map is partial, selective and provisional
Any single territory can have many valid maps serving diverse uses
We don’t have to fight over which map
Seeing people as territories is core to ending racism, sexism, etc.
Territories And Maps

Times you might switch to territories and maps:

- For people, systems and abstract concepts
- When the thing’s uniqueness matters
- When the thing has parts, relationships and/or context that are important
- When a shared understanding about something is important and not obvious
More Alternatives to Object

- composites
- layers
- sliders
- spaces
- fields
- systems
Categorical vs. Continuum

vs.

signal vs. noise

context.org/crossfade
Skillful Take-aways

• Be quick to distinguish between
  ✴ simple, mundane, non-controversial situations in which object-perception and categorical thinking work well
  ✴ complex and/or controversial situations in which the extra effort of territories, maps and slow thinking are worth it

• Be skillful at switching to and using territories and maps

• Hold your maps lightly, with humility - but still use them!
Breaking the Monopoly of Language-based Thinking
Visual/Spatial Cognition

- Uses massively parallel processing, like the subconscious
- Accesses much more simultaneous info than language
- Directly includes relationships and context
- Breaks out of linearity; 2+ dimensions
- Doesn’t impose a narrative
- Can use symbol systems – or none
- Can be shared directly thru visuals without the abstraction of language
- Can still use words to identify concepts
Visual/Spatial Cognition

- Parietal Lobe: "where" pathway
- Occipital Lobe: vision
Visual/Spatial Cognition

Worth more than a thousand words
Skillful Take-aways

• Anything that merits slow thinking merits visual/spatial support

• Expand your toolkit – diagram, whiteboard, etc.

• Use whatever tools support your creative flow and clear communications
Kinesthetic/Somatic Cognition

- Involves a close interaction with the subconscious
- Involves massive parallel processing
- Connects to deep roots of metaphorical sources
- Doesn’t need any part of language
- Communicates through neuron mirroring
- Increases attunement to the body
- Increases overall cognitive agility
Kinesthetic/Somatic Cognition

Motor Cortex
- muscle motions

Sensory Cortex
- body sensations

Cerebellum
- coordinating motion
Kinesthetic/Somatic Cognition
Kinesthetic/Somatic Cognition
Kinesthetic/Somatic Cognition
Kinesthetic/Somatic Cognition

Improv Dance
Kinesthetic/Somatic Cognition

Bodystorming
Kinesthetic/Somatic Cognition

Somatic Awareness
Kinesthetic/Somatic Cognition

Muscle Testing
Kinesthetic/Somatic Cognition

Self-Muscle Testing
Skillful Take-aways

• Fast thinking always involves the body – be aware of it

• Anything that merits slow thinking merits kinesthetic/somatic support

• Expand your toolkit – movement, somatic awareness, etc.

• Use whatever tools support your creative flow and clear communications
Optimal Zone Intuition

• Most of what we think arises out of the subconscious
• Novel thoughts are everyday intuitions
• Our defenses introduce a lot of “noise”
• Optimal Zone living improves the quality of normal thinking
• To the extent that intuitions come from a wider field, Optimal Zone living supports a clearer signal
• Quieting your defenses may be at least as important as quieting your mind
Knowledge Systems

• Western Science
  • Seeks reliable properties of categories
  • Aims for timeless, context-free truth
  • Works well in the objects-categories-categorical-thinking paradigm

• Pattern Languages
  • Accumulate common patterns among similar instances
  • Apply custom constellations of patterns to individual situations
  • Work well in the territories-maps-system-thinking paradigm
Skillful Take-aways

• Territories and maps break the monopoly of object perception – use them

• Visual/spatial and kinesthetic/somatic thinking break the monopoly of language-based thinking – use them

• Breaking those monopolies is core to the emergence of the Planetary Era
“We can not solve our problems with the same level of thinking that created them.”

Albert Einstein
• Adept at the new strategy for success (Nov 30)

• Weaving the threads of the 3 capacities (Dec 7)
Want To Go Deeper?

Next Bright Future Now

Community-building and self-study begin as soon as you register

Experientials and group interaction run Jan 8 - Mar 5, 2022

Early-Bird registration ends Nov 27

ccontext.org