

PROFESSOR OTTO FRIENDMAN'S TRANSDISCIPLINARY FRAMEWORK
FOR PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE

Key Variables In Orientation, Diagnosis & Evaluation, Scope & Constraints
by Russell C. Baker from Course Notes

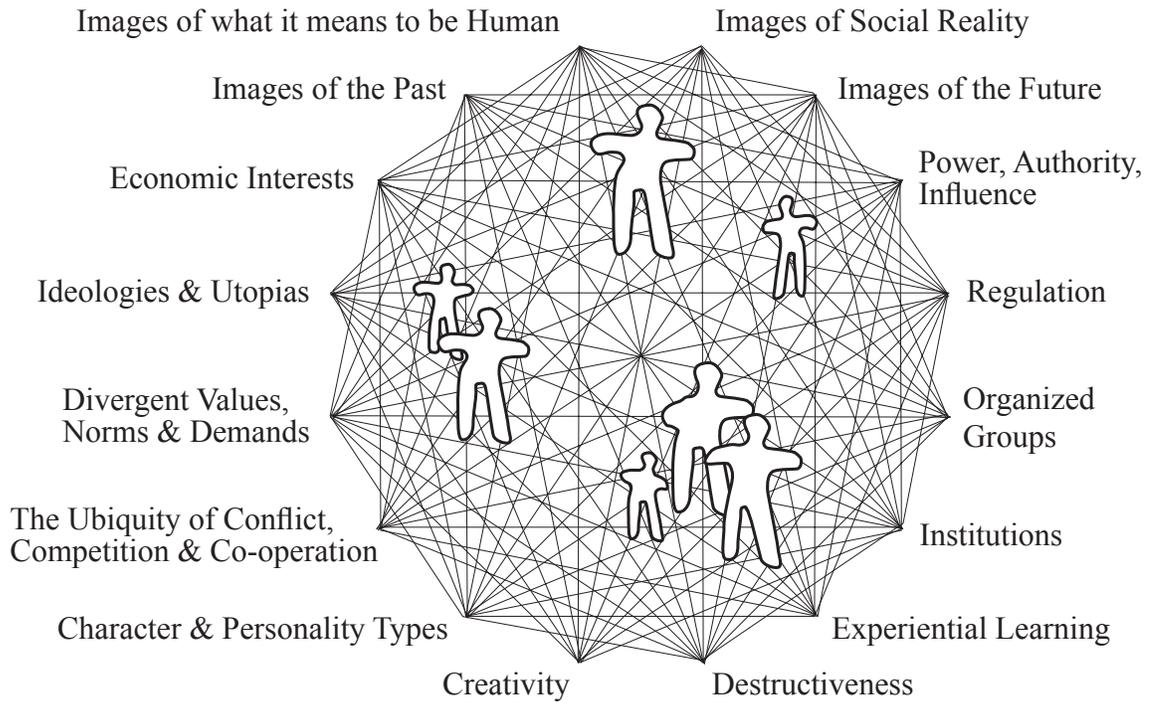


FIGURE 1
The Full Transdisciplinary Framework

There is always the problem of separating the inconsequential from the truly important or essential, and this problem is particularly crucial when it comes to working in the areas of Orientation (OR), Diagnosis & Evaluation (D&E), and estimating Scope & Constraints (S&C). What follows is a brief sketch of the fundamental features of any social or political situation that directly impact on these three activities. They are not absolute, by any means; nor are they meant to be used in any complete and systematic manner. Rather, these features refer to aspects of social reality that one may want to keep in mind, aspects that will vary from place to place and over time, aspects that will stress one set of features as critical in this or that situation, and aspects of human living that come into play whenever we interact with others to get things done—like “A stitch in time saves nine”, or “A penny saved, a pound foolish” or “Look before you leap.” This framework provides a general set of variables best kept in mind when it comes to working out a course of action or setting new policy.

As in any social discipline, there arises the matter of perspective. There are many ways to understand sociopolitical realities, with their respective advantages and flaws. This framework is built around the social science paradigm of social or symbolic interaction, an approach that focuses

on the way people interact with each other from their different perspectives or orientations, with different intentions, with different values, etc. The core of such interactions have to do with the forging, enhancing, maintaining and disengaging of friendships and alliances where the aim is to work with others in community to enhance the values to which one is committed.

The dynamics are quite varied and nuanced; human living is a work of dramatic art more than anything else. The love between mother and child, the gut feeling that others are as important if not more than our own lives, saving face, persuading and being persuaded, CYA (cover your ass), the pragmatic non-verbal “real” messages that lie behind the explicit words, status games, role playing, rationalization, deceit and deception, the tension in living with one’s limitation while called to transcendence, confrontation, propaganda, brainwashing, the expression of a religious calling—all these and more are features of social interaction.

So too are the vast range of human emotions that give depth and meaning to what otherwise would be a dull and drab “intellectual” existence: love of God, love of community, love of family, spite, resentment, jealousy, griping, anger, fear, compassion—all these and more, with their symbolic representations around which people gather and live out their lives.

For Christians, nothing is more powerful—at least in our own time—than the symbol of the cross. But there are other symbols as well: the image of the shepherd, the tale of Mary and Martha, the last supper, etc. Each of these are specific Christian symbols whose meaning has evolved and been distilled over centuries of use and misuse. Other groups have their own symbols, their own distillers of meaning, their own realm of understanding that sets their interests, their intentions, their own time-and-space-specific world mediated by meaning. The result is a sociopolitical situation that is multivariate, pluralistic, highly complex and ever-changing yet regulated through the existence and support of fundamental institutions that in effect define a culture or a civilization. It is when such fundamental institutional frameworks change that the conditions arise that require the type of analysis and synthesis put forward.

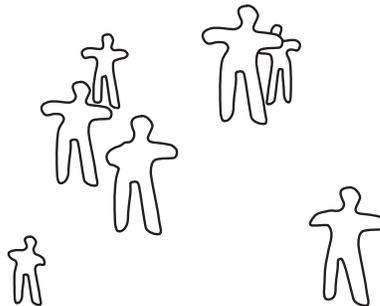


FIGURE 2
Coming Together

Social Interaction

Social life starts with individuals who then cluster together in organized or unorganized groups, communities, tribes, or families. (After all, to be human is to live in and be part of a group—or these days, a number of groups.) Conflict, cooperation, collaboration, sacrifice, power, status seeking, egotism, group interests, etc. are all part of this broad dynamic of multiple social interactions. So too is the constant socio-political dance of persuading and being persuaded.

You yourself as well as the group to which you belong are part and parcel of this complex social reality. A primary part of OR is to locate oneself within this constellation of powers and would-be powers, for each person, each group, has their own individual stance, their own set of intentions, unique to themselves but defined in terms of others. But we also share a common framework, a common world mediated by meaning to which each contributes and from which each draws.

There are people who play disproportionate roles. “Link” people, for example, are those whose large numbers of acquaintances link them with a wide variety of groups; hence they are the channels for much of the word-of-mouth communication that spreads beyond one’s own group. Then there are recognized experts, authorities in some aspect of human living, whose expertise puts them in positions of influence: if you have a problem or you want to find out about this thing or that, these are the people to go to. Then there are the enthusiasts, the salespeople, whose specialized social skills can change people’s minds and pull them together around a common idea.

Each group has its own intentional horizon, which is to say that no one is ever neutral. (Intentionality is very much a part of human existence, the only question being: what is it that one has chosen to value, to do?) Groups themselves cluster together, as parishes do within a metropolitan area. There are nation states, some dictatorial, some democratic, that hold within themselves a multitude of different and diverse groups. There are different levels of action, ranging from the small unorganized group to large multinational corporations, from special interest groups to municipal governments to provincial and national institutions. When taken all-together, one has the recognizable features of a culture or a civilization. Figure 1 shows all sixteen fundamental social science variables and their interrelationships that apply to our understanding of the social and symbolic interaction between the different participants and stakeholders. These variables apply at all levels, from the nuclear family up to and including the world collection of all existent human beings. Each variable is linked to each other in ways defined by the historical and geographical conditions of the actual sociopolitical system within which one operates.

Take two such variables, say personality types and organizations. There are a number of different types of personalities (there are different personality schemes that one can draw upon) and there are different ways in which organizations can be organized. Let’s suppose, for example, that your parish is the basic unit of analysis. Now, Roman Catholic parishes are not really democratic institutions, given the church’s Roman style institutional structure with its head the Bishop of Rome. Yet, it is not an authoritarian structure of the type that exists in business corporations, where each role is set and control structures are in place to enforce compliance. In other words, the parish priest as the primary representative of the institution of Church cannot dictate the specific tasks of his parishioners. In that, the church is far more democratic; negotiation is required.

But what happens when an ego-ridden, authoritarian and dominating personality, as opposed to a let’s-work-together-in-harmony personality, moves into the parish and starts throwing her weight around? This careful balance may be upset, with no easy organizational way to handle the situation. The resulting conflict may be the key factor not only in understanding what is going on but in working out a course of action. The relationship between these two variables of personality and organization structure may be the primary feature of this particular group and that particular time and place.

This is the way this framework is to be used, as a set of broad indicators that enable a person or group to better understand key issues and fundamental features of those with whom they will have to work.

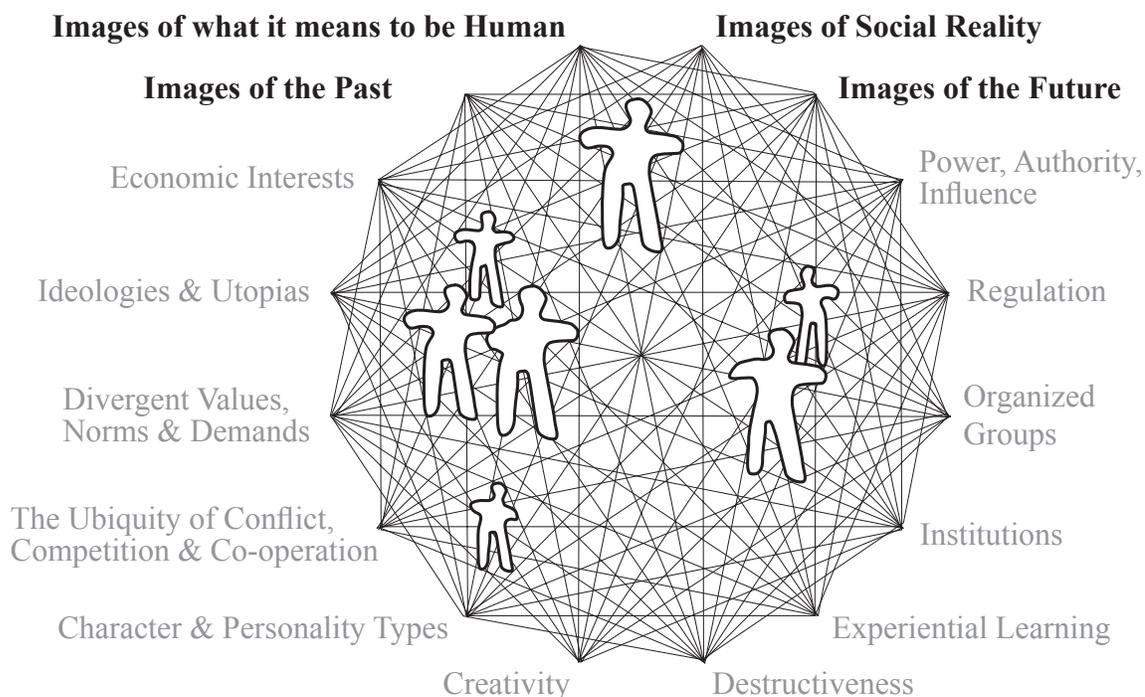


FIGURE 3
Primary Images

Four Primary Images

Figure 3 highlights four primary images that people consciously or more often unconsciously have in their minds when they interact with each other: a concept of what it means to be human, an image of the fundamental nature of social reality, and prevailing images of future and past.

Images of what it means to be Human. Such images have varied quite a bit during our brief span of written history. We have, for example, Aristotle’s comment that “all men by nature desire to know” (*Metaphysics*), a quest for understanding always associated with wonder and the delight of contemplation—unfortunately marred by moral conflicts involving doing and making: hubris, man’s overreaching pride. Then there is the voluntarist view of human kind, where in its ultimate form human beings make themselves out of their own freedom and autonomy; we are masters of our own fate. At the other extreme, determinist views reject this belief that people are free to choose. Freud, for example, held human beings to be driven by forces hidden in the unconscious. Or Skinner, whose concept of an indefinitely malleable human being denied any form of human spontaneity, creativity or purpose.

On a less determinist note, Marx’s humans were creatures defined by their ability to make and use tools; production was the be-all and end-all of human existence, both for the individual and for society. This led to the concept of economic man, where material abundance is seen to be the ultimate good, expansion the prime duty and consumption the highest purpose—exaggerated of course, and now a little out of date. A number of other images have emerged in recent times: human beings as inventors, where the imagination is conceived as the power to envision different possibilities, or humans as symbol-makers, i.e. as the creator and user of language. Finally, we have man in search of meaning, the species that distinguishes itself by our continual search for something to believe in.

Images of Social Reality. The same diversity holds true for different images of social reality, including the 20th century creation of totalitarian societies where all individual needs, wants and desires are subordinate to the state—a state that is usually represented by one person, e.g. a Hitler or a Stalin. There is the “survival of the fittest” image of the Victorian era that still lingers to our day. Christians have their own image, that of community given its full expression in the Trinity. Romantic society had its “noble savage”, whose essential goodness was crushed by society’s institutions. Despotism conceptions of the natural order of social life has their place in understanding the politics of the Middle East, as does the liberal democratic society of Great Britain or the now nearly extinct “divine right” of kings and queens. There are warrior societies such as Sparta in ancient Greece or fundamentalist Islamic terrorists of today, where military might and warfare are the great social ideals. In contrast, we have the Hopi, where conflict is minimized and social life governed by the need for consensus.

Images of Past and Future. Both images of the past and future are crucial in orientating ourselves in history. When societies collapse, they lose their past—as did the feudal period in European history, which lost its collective memory of the Roman Empire after that Empire collapsed, or the sharp break in history that took place in Amerindian history, the past only now being reclaimed. Images of the past can cripple, as was the case with thousands of years of great Egyptian pharaohs; they were a hard act to follow. Americans have their own history of the Revolution against the British, given real and symbolic form in their flag and Declaration of Independence. The British have the monarchy as well as Magna Carta—not to mention the British Empire and a tradition of liberal democracy—that together sets the form of British culture.

It’s important to keep in mind that there are two kinds of history: history based on a careful establishing of historical fact, and history constructed around current political and social needs and desires used to regulate and coordinate large groups of people. (The latter will be covered in the two fundamental variables of ideologies and utopias.) However, even if real history is lost, which happens when a society collapses or new rulers erase all records and impose their own self-serving vision of historical reality, the real still exists as part of the evolved pattern of interaction between people. This can be seen in the observation that different areas of the world have their own character, their own “personality”, even when society itself has been fragmented and nearly destroyed. Despite the Russian Revolution, which overthrew the Tzars and in doing so remolded history around Marxist ideals, the Russian character remained much the same: Russia was still Russia, even with a regime change.

Images of the future stem from our ability to image different ways of being. Whereas images of the past have some basis in verifiable historical facts, e.g. records of the Holocaust or the great pyramids of Egypt or South America, images of the future are projections of what might, could or should be. One such shift came with the early Israelites where, for the first time, history was conceived not as an eternal cycle of the same-old, same-old, but as a line with its start in the past and its ultimate final development yet to come. This is an image that we Christians have taken over in different ways, from the medieval belief that our earthly lives were but a veil of tears while we wait for a gorgeous future in the beyond, to a creative joy in the here and now based on the notion that the world and all that is in it, because it was created by God, is good. Hence the notion of pilgrimage, of Christians embarking together on a holy journey. Hence the importance of both salvation and redemption, for both derive their meaning from this concept of linear time that has its origin in an imperfect past and its end in a perfect future.

There are groups that have no future, as the last remaining member of a tribal society will tell you or a culture so shocked with changes that it can no longer cope in any meaningful way. Extinction at our own hands is one such future faced by contemporary Western society, as the threats of global warming, mass species extinction, environmental collapse and nuclear winter grow in the public mind. On the other hand, one can rejoice in a world given to us by God and work with

the Spirit to redeem ourselves in light of the mess we have made of our divine gift of a moral conscience—a future based in part on an image of humankind as basically flawed, a past record of sinfulness through wars and other man-made disasters, and the corresponding strong image of community.

Each of these four basic images have their role to play in any time-and-space-specific social and political setting, although the precise ways they are given expression will vary to a considerable extent in ways that are quite unique. The important point is that any OR, D&E, S&C will involve our awareness and understanding of these factors. The assumption of a prophetic voice on our own part, for example, takes its meaning not only from the prophetic voice itself but from the constellation of groups and communities, cultures and civilizations, with which we interact.

Furthermore, these variables are all interrelated. One’s image of who people are influences our conception of social life, which in turn affects our understanding of the past and projections of our hopes and fears into alternative possible futures. Needless to say, such complexities place demands on our ability to sort through the alternative positions in any reasonable way. But this does not mean that we cannot heighten our awareness of these facets of human life that we encounter but may not recognize in our daily discourse.

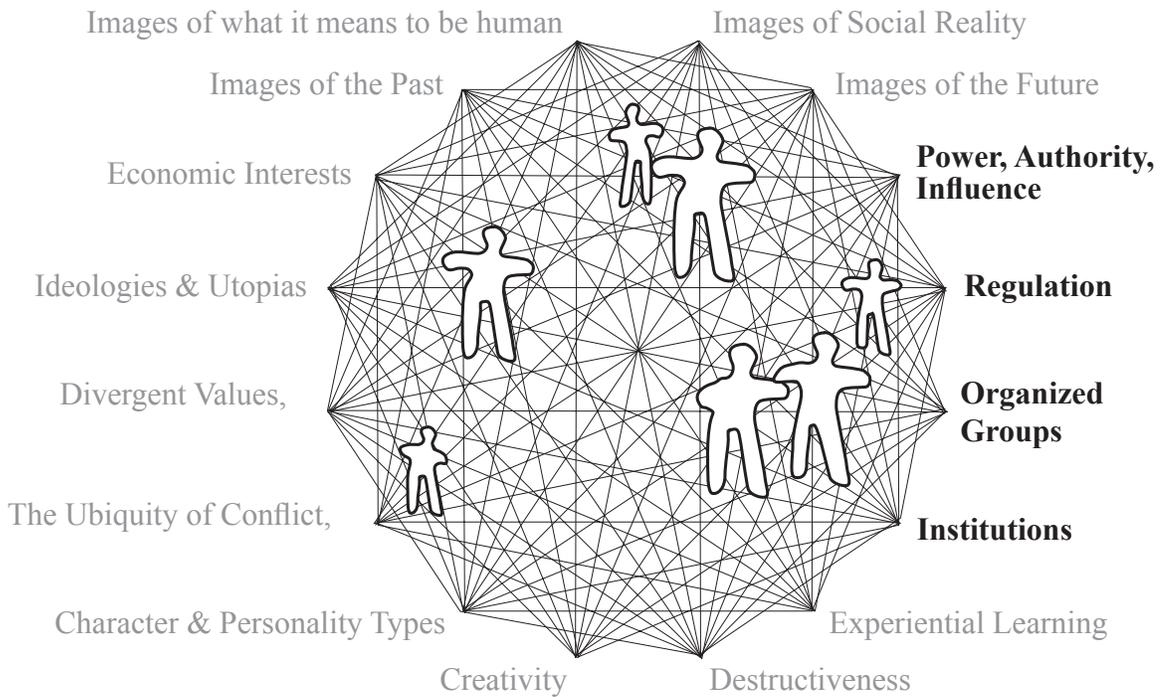


FIGURE 4
Structures of Power

Structures of Power

Figure 4 shows a second grouping of four fundamental variables, all of which involve the ways power, authority and influence are structured in a given community or society. The first is that of power, authority and influence—all factors present in any social grouping. The second is regulation, for the application of power, authority and influence is not to achieve any one specific goal, e.g. to create a new institutional role for the elderly, but to regulate a new system once created. Creating such an institutional role that makes the gifts of the aged available to all is far less important, even though necessary, than the task of maintaining that role over time—and that is a problem of regulation. The results of all these efforts are organized groups devoted to at least one primary value such as education or financial regulation and themselves regulated through the combined exercise of power, authority and influence on the part of its members. Institutions are the highest form a group can take. Groups come and go, usually with none other than their members paying attention. But institutions are groups that are so vital to the workings of society or civilization that their existence must be protected. Institutions are not allowed to fail. Thus, the key area within which fundamental change takes place is at the institutional level.

Power, Authority and Influence. These are three terms that refer to different language-based modes of interacting with others to affect their behavior, attitude or values. Each mode has its own language, its own style: in terms of power one can speak of threats, bribes and extortions; in terms of authority, one speaks of commands, orders or instructions; influencing others takes the form of suggestions or advice. Individual instances are significant only to the extent that they provide data for assessing the overall strategies of other participants. Furthermore, there is a structural element to such patterns, for social roles are defined in part by the kinds of interactions considered legitimate.

Listening to the feel of such interactions is crucial. The comfortable illusions and hypocrisies that are part of any middle-class discussion of race, sex or war are supported by the kinds of non-verbal interactions that hide the naked use of power or coercion by not allowing the other to be heard. Silence may be confused with agreement or even acquiescence, when such silences only mask oppression or the dismissing of the concerns and values of others. We are all political beings constantly interacting with each other on a moment-to-moment basis. When we interact with other members of our family to get them to do us a favor, we are being political. When we communicate with students, we “teach” them—another form of political interaction. When we engage with other people at work or in the church to get them to adopt a new policy or a new plan of action, we are engaging in politics.

Many of the strategies that we use in this dance of persuading and being persuaded, in building alliances and friendships, in disengaging ourselves from those that no longer work, are devoted to the regulation of complex systems. Regulation is a control function that involves power. However, the possession of power in itself does not guarantee control. A person may have the power to make changes but be unable to bring all the other players to heel. Although the values and intentions of groups may well differ, their respective strategies involve creating, maintaining or enhancing value while avoiding value loss. For example, the goal in getting married is not to get married but to live in a marriage, a process that requires not power or control but the careful correcting and enhancing regulation of human behavior.

Regulation. There are two fundamental forms of feedback that regulate any system. The first, negative feedback, serves to correct any deviation from the existing norm. For example, earthquakes or tsunamis activate preexisting national and international response schemes to restore order in the stricken area. The second form, positive feedback, acts to reinforce a deviation. And groups respond in different ways to each type of feedback. For example, governmental organizations respond to negative feedback, so that deviations from the norm are soon stamped out; it is more important for them to avoid criticism than seek rewards. Businesses are exactly the opposite:

businesses respond to the kinds of positive feedback that provides profit or gain—hence the lure of growth restructures a business as, at least in theory, non-productive departments are dropped and resources allocated to more promising endeavors.

Organized Groups. Groups are at the center. Now, there are many different kinds of groups, some formal some informal, some organized some unorganized, and the kind of group that one is a part of and the kinds of groups that one will deal with makes a great deal of difference: each kind provides its own opportunities as well as constraints on what can and can't be done. In a way, each represents a particular instance of the good of order as a value in itself, for order provides a common known structure of roles and relationships, values, norms, images—all of which come together not only to provide order and direction to our social and political lives but to enhance the planning and policy making of individuals and smaller groups in society.

At its most fundamental, intersubjective level there exists the family. Now, there are many types of families, ranging at their most extremes from the nuclear family of two parents and two point three children (now often a single parent with one or two children) to the extended family where generations live together under the same roof. How one uses one's power, authority or influence varies considerably: in a single parent family there is only one person to whom one can appeal; in an extended family, one knows that an aunt may be sympathetic to one's desires and building alliances against those who would object becomes the standard way of getting things done.

Then there are informal perhaps even temporary groups that disappear when their purpose has been achieved or whose sun-set clauses prevent them from extending their life. These vary from those that form around a water cooler in an office to share gossip to football crowds that go on a rampage, from chance conversations around a card game on a cruise ship to a quick alliance to put on a benefit concert. There are formal groups, often with their own constitution, rules of order and financial arrangements that exist to fulfill a particular function, groups like the War Amps, PTAs, fraternities, glee clubs, Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and little league teams. Groups can be local, regional, national or even international. They can be closed, restricting membership only to those who fit, as in the case of the Knights of Columbus or Wahabi sect mosques, or open, where anyone who shows an interest in being a part of things can join without having to be vetted. Groups can rely on a top-down authority to regulate their affairs, as is often the case in large corporations, or depend upon good will and a sense of equality, as in more democratic organizations where membership is voluntary and everyone is roughly of equal value.

Groups, especially formal organized groups, tend to focus on actualizing certain values. There are groups that specialize in politics (fund raisers), education (universities), government (cities), wealth (multi-national corporations, banks), religious values (Churches, Monasteries), health (hospitals, clinics), social well-being (Amnesty International), and so forth. What this means in practice is that the aspiring practitioner can join in the activities of an already existing group, in which case he or she takes on the values and norms of that group, work to form alliances between groups whose value orientations are similar, or to form alliances between groups whose values differ yet can be brought together in a common cause or issue.

The law has its own set of recognized groups with associated rights and obligations, from that of partnerships to associations, from non-profit enterprises to corporations. Of these, limited incorporated companies hold the strongest and strangest position: a social innovation created during the Victorian era in order to limit the risk of investors, limited corporations are based on the legal fiction that a business company has the same legal existence and status as a person. It is important to keep in mind the legal status, purposes and obligations of each legal entity, for its position within the law defines in broad terms what such a group can or cannot do.

Institutions. These are formal organized groups that derive their support from a privileged place in society. They are defined by what happens when they are under threat. Most groups come and go without public notice or fanfare. Each day, hundreds of businesses are set up; each day hun-

dreds fail, and no one outside of an economist much cares. But let an institution threaten to fold, and quickly public money is spent, resources brought to bear. In other words, institutions are groups that have become so built into the fabric of social, economic and political life that their disappearance would necessitate massive changes.

In the United States, General Electric is so important to the military, the government, and the economy that it cannot be allowed to fail; failure would mean the loss of production expertise upon which the military depends as well as the loss of a major component of what Eisenhower called the military/industrial complex. Stock exchanges cannot be allowed to fail, for if they do the economy would grind to a halt for the lack of a mechanism to distribute capital. The same holds true for nation states that threaten to default on loans: the World Bank and the International Monetary fund—among others—quickly step in.

As these examples suggest, one of the key values in Western society is that of economic development; the motivation for this may lie in the devastating experience of the great depression of the 1930s, when much of North America's economy ground to a halt. Many of our key institutions are institutions because of the role they play in regulating economic development. But values change over time as civilizations come and go or are transformed to meet new conditions or new possibilities. The fall of the Western Roman Empire involved a shift from Roman institutions to the manorial institutions of the feudal system. The subsequent rise of the great mercantile empires gradually closed down these feudal institutions, replacing them with the great banks and other commercial interests, English and Dutch merchant fleets, and urban rather than solar based rural economic centers. Orientation becomes an issue when traditional institutional structures are in decline and new ones emerging, as does the evaluation of society's well-being. Feudal and mercantile institutions have very different moral systems: under feudal mores, it is perfectly reasonable to lie and cheat other nations or princes for the sake of one's own, while under a mercantile ethical system, legally binding and mutually respected contracts are required. In the former, cheating one's rivals is a virtue; in the latter, a sin.

It is necessary to understand contemporary fundamental institutional shifts, for these broad social changes will make nonsense of local initiatives unless they are taken into account during the planning stage. Say an architect designed a house using only one summer's experience of the weather. Such a design may prove impracticable when seasonal weather changes are taken into account, or even the long term possibilities of earthquakes or major flood storms. One fundamental shift is the de-institutionalization of the church: no longer are formal church groups considered essential to the well-being of society; churches are now only one voice among many. When threatened, the political and economic powers that be will not come to their support. While this is no doubt traumatic to many, this institutional shift also offers opportunities—opportunities that take advantage of this “prophetic voice” siting churches “outside the city walls.”

Another key institutional shift is the requirement in Western societies that our plans and policies, our institutions and organizations, must be based on some rational explanation or purpose. Authority, tradition or even the naked exercise of power on the part of dictators-for-life are no longer considered sufficient to justify any course of action. This shift can be seen in the rising standards we now apply to all nations: governments are expected to work for the betterment of their people and not strip the people for their own aggrandizement. In some societies, this is a radical and counter-intuitive notion.

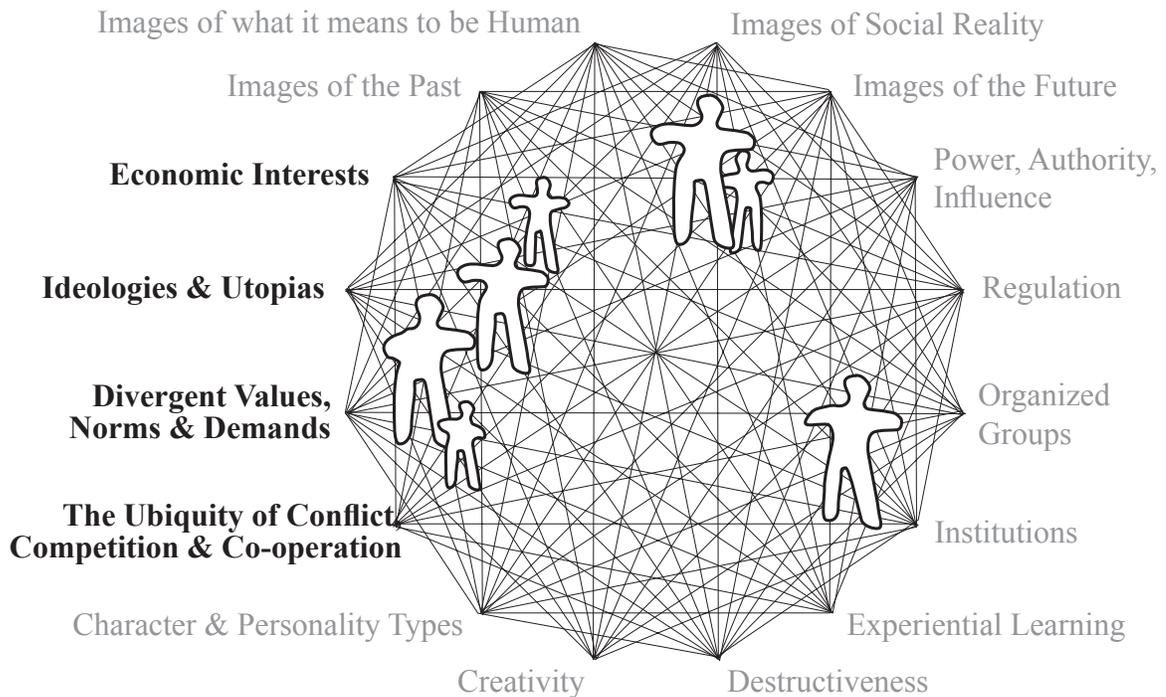


FIGURE 5
Social Drivers

Social Drivers

Figure 5 highlights a third set of four fundamental variables: economic interests; ideologies and utopias; divergent values, norms and demands; and the ubiquity of conflict, competition and co-operation. In their own way, each acts as a social driver or motivator. Each taps into its own source of socio-political energy.

Economic interests. Economies involve more than just money; they involve the many ways people have worked out to sustain and support the life to which they have become accustomed—or for which they seek. To the government official whose economic well-being depends on political patronage, any threat to this patronage will evoke at best passive resistance (if that person has little in the way of power, authority or influence) or active counter-attacks (if they do). To a large extent, these myriad interlocking economic interests require anyone seeking change to find corridors of indifference, i.e. avenues for new plans or policies that do not threaten existing holders of power, authority or influence. Of course, if one is a power-holder, then the situation is a little different: one can to some extent make things happen against the wishes or desires of those who lack power.

Economic interests also provide opportunities on the part of those seeking power (power understood in its prior political sense of persuading others): anyone who can add to the well-being of another person or group acquires not only a certain degree of power, authority and influence but promotes their own terminal values as well. But there are complications. For example, churches have their own economic interests and thus compete with other groups for resources. Unfortunately, the norms of church life often hide the exercise of power, authority and influence while at the same time exerting power, authority and influence—with the result that what is actually being

done never reaches consciousness and destructive practices continue unnoticed.

Economic interests also blind, and usually with good reason. If global warming means the loss of one's livelihood, then the pressure is on to deny global warming. Or if building a dam is your way of making a living, then one's horizon restricts itself to that—and so we have the economic distinction between what is intended and what are “side effects” when any unbiased intelligence conceives both benefits and unexpected drawbacks as the natural consequences of the same plan or policy.

Ideologies & Utopias. When the number of people is such that coordination becomes a major social and political problem, then economic interests—understood in this broad fashion—lead to the formulation of ideologies and utopias as communal motivators and regulators. Propaganda emerges along with the exhausting, sloganeering and repetitiveness associated with brainwashing. Marxism, which started with an explanatory theory of human history, became the ideology of Communism when its central features were used by would-be power holders to persuade or coerce others. Darwin's scientific theory of evolution became an ideology when transformed into the Social Darwinism of the Victorian era. In both cases, theory came second to economic interests and in so doing lost its grounding in science. In general, ideological and utopian thinking are grounded in human interest, specifically the need or desire to co-ordinate the work of large numbers of people.

Ideological thinking serves to co-ordinate people by providing a common meaning to all they think and do; utopian thinking sets aside the existing state of affairs for an ideal desirable state that has yet to be brought into being. Terminal values such as Truth, Justice and Equality, which arise out of the dilemmas and paradoxes of our daily lives, can be used by power-holders or would-be power holders to give emotional weight and depth to what otherwise would be a simple or simplistic theory. The image of a lion lying down beside a lamb, or the Marxist ideal of a simple equality among all people, are both utopian in nature.

It is not that ideological and utopian thinking are bad as such, for there is a need to manage human behavior beyond what is possible in small groups or communities. Indeed, such thinking may be found in all groups, including our own. What is important to realize is that we often do think in these terms without checking our beliefs against what is actually known; we may get carried away by an unverified theory that is more illusion than reality, with the result that what we do will have unexpected often undesirable consequences.

Divergent Values, Norms & Demands. Ideologies and utopias give expression to divergent values, norms and demands. Values emerge through the process of trying to decide upon the right course of action, given existing conditions. In deciding what to do, we shift our attention to the criteria used to separate the valuable or desirable from the less valuable, less desirable. Ultimately, we determine what is valuable for us. In a rather simplistic way, when we choose to walk up the stairs rather than take an escalator, we value health over convenience—if health is what we value. What value do the aged have in our society? Not much, according to the mores of the day; but they should, according to this prophetic voice. So we have a particular instance of differing values. As for church goers, there may be many personal reasons for getting active in parish affairs, from the social life to the pleasure of being able to help others. But behind them all lies a value choice that places God as the ultimate good, our final terminal value.

At more complex levels, we talk about conversion—not the kind of conversion that involves joining an established religion or being born-again, but the kind of conversion that shifts our basic orientation away from our own self-interests and toward transcendence. Should we fall in love with this Divine Mystery, our values shift. Like any married couple who know each other's tastes very well, we take on as our own the values of this transcendent being. We decide to live as God would have us live, which means a fundamental shift in what is important for us. Then we value acts of generosity, charity, love and reconciliation over enjoying a good meal or even a warm bed. Truth and justice can guide our lives, as can the values found in being open to experience, intelligent in

understanding, reasonable in judging what is true or real, and responsible when it comes to deciding what to do.

Each social group has its own norms for behavior, norms that also vary as the situation changes. Acceptable behavior in a biker gang differs from what is expected in church. Being initiated into a gang has its own norms, as does initiation into the life of a formal religion through baptism. There are norms for public speaking, if one is to be listened to, and norms for proper behavior at the dinner table. Norms are used to distinguish one group from another, as any would-be snob knows. They are also used to determine who is part of our group, for to fall outside the norms is to be viewed as being touched, eccentric or even down-right mad—certainly not to be trusted. Then there are the fundamental clashes in norms, when for example warrior meets merchant: the norms for proper combat readiness and actual warmongering—even if defensive—differ from what is normal practice in negotiating contracts and making business deals. Like the values we choose, norms change over time.

Norms may refer to low moral standards or an elite refinement. But no matter what the situation, it is important to know what the general expectations are concerning “normal” behavior, otherwise no one will give you the time of day. No matter where or when people live, there are always behavioral norms that guide social and political interactions in legitimate ways.

Then there are the diverse demands people make, demands that can easily contradict each other. There are demands terrorists make. There are the demands that large multinational banks make. There are the demands of government, or businesses, of special interest groups, of colleagues and friends—and of enemies. We demand our rights. We demand that we be at the center of things. We demand this and that, and all the while politics comes into play as power, authority and influence are brought to bear. There are demands for liberty, for social justice, for good food and clean water. There are demands for wage increases or corporative down-sizing, for a clean shirt or a moment’s attention. There are demands for economic growth and the reduction of urban sprawl, for the prevention of species extinctions and the use of nuclear power. Managing such divergent demands becomes a real problem in regulating human behavior.

The Ubiquity of Conflict, Competition & Co-operation. Not all demands can be met or contained despite one’s best efforts. This leads to another fundamental feature of social and political life: the ubiquity of conflict, competition and cooperation. No matter the size of the group, be it a nuclear family or a mega corporation, there will always be areas of conflict that may range from mild disagreements to outright war. Competition will always exist, be it for social status, resources or political power. And there will always be a certain degree of cooperation, if only for the fact that no cooperation means no predictability and hence no good of order. Lack of order defines anarchy—and in areas of the world no longer governable, the level of order is indeed low.

Even in religious communities, conflict, competition and cooperation exist. Social norms may set very high standards of behavior, but behind these standards lie the realities of different values and norms with their associated different demands. Group fragmentation seems to be the norm, for any group finds after time that there are divergent views that necessitate the breakdown into a different political party or a separate communal meeting place. Recognizing such behavior is essential when it comes to understanding what is going on behind the scenes. It is also essential when it comes to regulating common behavior, for any regulatory system needs to take into account the fact that individuals and groups are constantly engaged in some form of conflict, or competing with groups dedicated to the same values or resources, or building alliances to combine resources and thus build up one’s power base.

There is even cooperation in conflict. The Geneva Convention, for example, sets the basic norms for engaging in modern warfare (or at least warfare up to the current empowerment of terrorist groups, a shift that demands a change in our institutional framework)—participants cooperate in maintaining this good of order that allows them to get on with the business of fighting each

other. The reverse is also true, as any family member knows: family members cooperate with each other—otherwise there wouldn't be a “family. But they also fight with each other, sometimes to the point where no one will talk to each other for decades. And there certainly is competition among siblings.

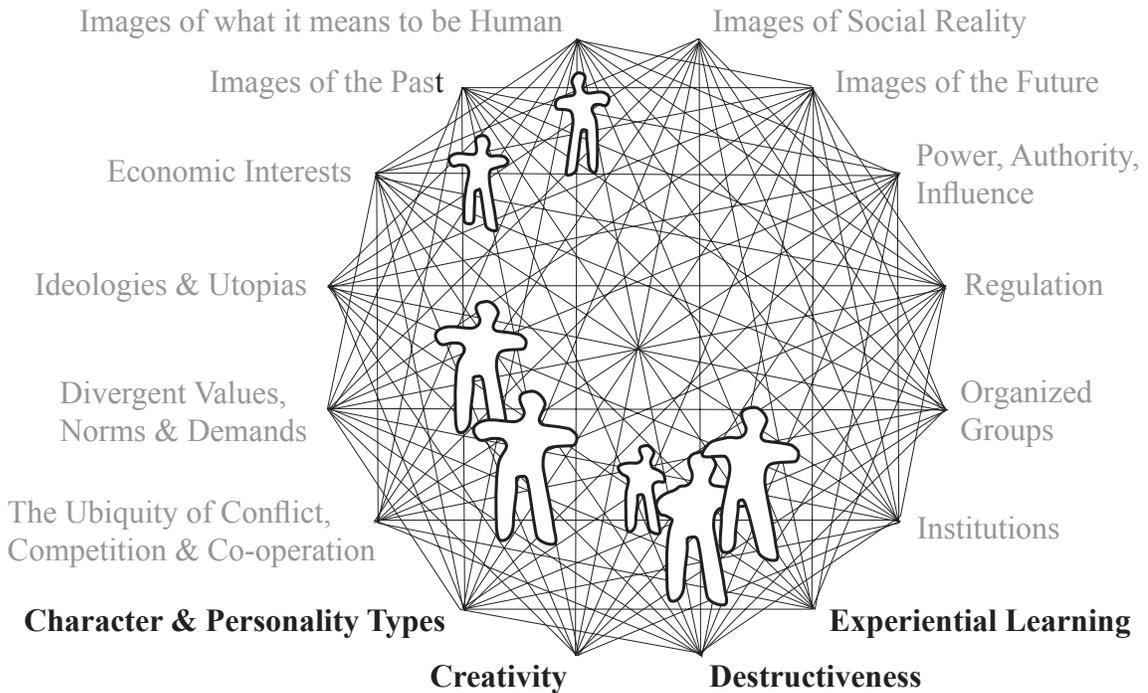


FIGURE 6
The Individual

The Individual

Figure 6 shows the final set of four variables, now operative at the individual rather than group level.

Character & Personality Types. Astrology, which has its roots in the classical Greek notion that one looked to the heavens for eternal truths, is a system of classifying personality types from the dominating Ares to the philosophical Pisces. So too is the Sufi inspired Enneagram with its nine fundamental ways of categorizing human compulsive ways of living in the world, from the success-driven three to the “I am powerful” of the eight. One of the most popular measuring tools is the Myer-Briggs Type Indicator, an instrument that describes a person’s preferences along four dimensions: extraverted vs. introverted, sensing vs. intuitive, thinking vs. feeling and judging vs. perceiving. All these recognize the fact that all social life involves interactions between different personalities—some compatible, some so different that extreme types will not be able to talk to each other in any meaningful way. Personality clashes can have significant impacts on planning and policy-making, especially when the clash is over who is to head a large company or even the government of a nation. No matter what, differentiating between different personalities in your so-

ciopolitical milieu, when accompanied by an increasingly diverse set of strategies for dealing with them, is a useful skill to have when it comes to making a difference.

Personalities we are born with; character we develop. Character emerges over time, through the ethical choices we make. Such choices, such commitments, provide a long-term anchor for our emotional experiences. Often, character is expressed through loyalty, consistency, resiliency, mutual commitment and the pursuit of higher values such as truth or justice. These and others like them are the personal traits that over time we come to value in ourselves and for which we seek to be valued. Toward the end of our life, they define the meaning of our life.

While extroverts are not likely to change into introverts or the compulsive helper into an equally compulsive thinker, character does change—and does so in ways strongly linked with religious, moral, intellectual and psychic conversion. What greater mutual commitment than that relationship between a human being and God? What greater desire than the desire to follow in the moral footsteps of this Divine Mystery? What greater need than to know the world as it is and not as we would wish it to be, spending the time and effort in a dispassionate search for truth? Reaching up to such challenges builds character. Avoiding such challenges retards the individual's natural development, keeping him or her in the more infantile state of egotism, group bias or even the desire to avoid hard choices and demands by sticking to what can be done rather than what needs to be done.

Experiential Learning. There are lessons learned through listening to others, and then there are those lessons that can only come through reflecting on personal experience. The latter is very much a part of character development, for experiential learning involves the testing and verification of our own orientation, our own diagnosis and evaluation, both of ourselves and the world. It is through experience we learn to evaluate the practical side of a scientific theory, noting when they apply and when they should be laid aside. It is through experience that one learns to distinguish between over-optimistic claims and realistic appraisals, between wishful thinking and the practical realities of human life, between true and only illusionary value. Educated people may frown upon a mere floor mopper, yet that cleaner may have accumulated a body of personally verified skills and operations that is a valuable source of insight, understanding and wisdom. The same goes for each and every person. At the very least, each person is an expert in their own particular place, in the things and events that occupy their lives. Furthermore, to the extent that person is open to experience, intelligent in understanding, reasonable in judging and responsible when it comes to acting, we may suspect that what they know is truly valid—especially for people who have lived long and rather difficult lives. Such people have survived and prospered amid many ups and downs, periods of stability and periods of unpredictable chaos or catastrophic change. There are personal lessons learned through all this, lessons encapsulated in the phrase “experiential learning.”

Destructiveness. Finally, we end with two of the greater (but not greatest) mysteries of human existence: creativity and destructiveness. When we create, we bring something new into the world. When we destroy, we take something out of the world.

Human destructiveness is as much a part of human living as the creative impulse. To ignore those who wish to tear down the good, who work to destroy what others have created, that enjoy destructiveness perhaps even for its own sake or out of rebellion against a good that can never be achieved and hence resented, is to ignore an important part of what it means to be human. This has important implications for regulating human behavior, for the presence of such destructive personalities or inhumane character types requires some way to limit their destructiveness. People who, when they can't get their own way prevent anyone else from getting theirs, are acting in a destructive manner. When an extreme egotist gains power and does not prepare for a future without him or her at the helm, this is destructive behavior. A particularly subtle form, equally destructive yet not obviously so, are those who go with the mere practical, the easily do-able. These are the sins of those who take the expedient path without considering deeper theoretical implications. Such

willfulness is as destructive as a rebel with a torch.

Creativity. Creativity is also fundamental to the human experience. Indeed, a survey of basic history shows how much we are indebted to the creative work of those who have come before. Everything that you see around you at this very instant is there because of someone's creative effort: food preservation in tin cans, electric lights, buildings, temples, the notion of limited companies, insurance, parks, universities, health care, musical instruments, the music itself . . . well, the list is practically endless, and the process of creation, of giving birth to something new in the world, still goes on.

Creativity cannot be produced upon demand; new insights cannot be manufactured like cars on an assembly line or PhD's in a university. New insights are by their very nature unpredictable, for if they were not they would no longer bring something new into the world but merely be the logical extension of what exists. Furthermore, insights tend to be cumulative and progressive, bringing different realms of knowledge together in a coherent manner that shows clear signs of progression. Development depends upon creativity; decline rests on its non-existence, for decline is the symptom of intelligence no longer meeting the demands of the time. For whatever reason, groups in decline block those creative insights that would reverse decline and restore some degree of progress.

- Images of what it means to be Human
- Images of Social Reality
- Images of the Past
- Images of the Future
 - Economic Interests
 - Ideologies & Utopias
 - Divergent Values, Norms & Demands
 - The Ubiquity of Conflict, Competition & Cooperation
 - Power, Authority, Influence
 - Regulation
 - Organized Groups
 - Institutions
 - Character & Personality Types
 - Creativity
 - Destructiveness
 - Experiential Learning

These then are sixteen fundamental transdisciplinary variables, loosely grouped into four sets of four. They cross all disciplines and cover most if not all the important aspects of human behavior that relate to the three primary tasks of orientation, diagnosis & evaluation, and estimating scope and constraints on rational behavior during times of fundamental institutional change. These are the critical variables when it comes to operating in time-and-space-specific sociopolitical situations, where socio/symbolic interaction plays a dominant role in creating new responses that promote progress while avoiding decline. They point to the things we need to keep in mind when it comes to expressing a prophetic voice and a call to conversion, for we are in the world, part of the emerging reality, and not some imaginary outside observer. This framework helps to heighten our awareness and broaden our understanding of what it means to be a human being, an actor, a creator—or even a destroyer. It guides us through the social sciences, helping to organize the significant features of each so that what is known can make its way into practice. It represents one way of organizing key insights into human behavior that we have acquired through centuries of dispassionate observing and recording human behavior.