

5 Quick Takes

Powered by the Agile Strategy Lab

A compilation of Ed
Morrison's latest blogs

1st Quarter 2023

AGILE STRATEGY LAB



University of
NORTH ALABAMA

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Dear Reader,

Welcome back to our second edition of the Quick Takes, blogs relating to Strategic Doing, and the University of North Alabama Agile Strategy Lab.

Please follow our team for upcoming opportunities to develop skills to move from talking to taking action.

We have several

Strategic Doing

Practitioner Trainings

coming up this spring.



www.agilestrategylab.org

1 CELEBRATE THE SMALL WINS

In our work, we emphasize the importance of small wins when generating solutions for big, complex problems. The reason: that's how you develop and leverage the power of networks.

WHY IT MATTERS

To accomplish something big, focus on something small: doing the doable.

The paradox grates on some.

When I was in Ecuador last year, a business leader posed a sensible question. "You ask us to use Strategic Doing to help us develop clusters and transform our economy. Yet, you emphasize the importance of going slowly at the beginning and focusing on small, doable projects. How will we ever transform our economy with these small projects?"

He needed an important insight: transformations emerge as we leverage expanding networks.

When you understand how to design and guide networks, focusing on small wins — relentlessly doing the doable — makes sense.



DIG DEEPER: HIERARCHIES TO NETWORKS

In his writings, John Dewey shared a valuable point: We make progress when we abandon old paradigms. We can then embrace new paradigms to generate better results.

In the past, hierarchies provided the predominant paradigm in our organizational life. Hierarchies make sense with a defined process. Activities may be complicated, but they are relatively stable. We can create a logical flow and establish accountability for results. Within our corporations, for example, hierarchies work to manage financial accounting and similarly fixed business activities.

But hierarchies have their weaknesses. They do not adjust easily to rapidly shifting environments. They don't adapt. The routines that define hierarchies discourage learning.

Teams, collaboration, and networks work better in fast-changing environments.

SHIFTING TO NETWORK MINDSETS

Network mindsets are deeply different. They are more horizontal than vertical. More cyclical than linear.

More ambiguous than certain. More collaborative than competitive. More team-based, and less individually focused. More dependent on collective leadership, and less on heroic leadership. The process of collective visualization carries more impact than a singular vision statement.

DIVING DEEPER: THE EMERGENT POWER OF NETWORKS

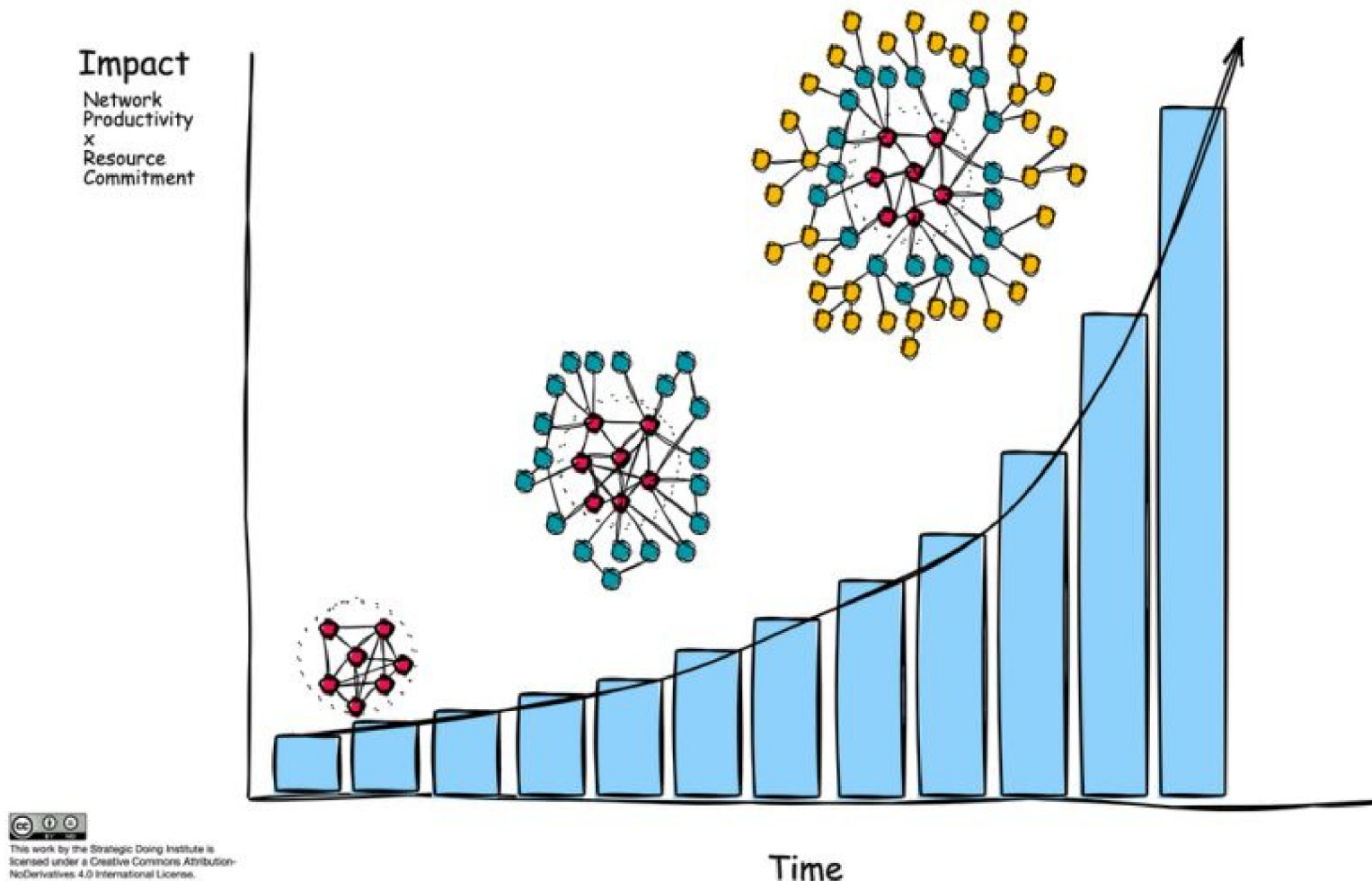
Network dynamics open new opportunities. As the power of the network grows, the definition of what constitutes a small win also grows. (Complexity scientists have a useful concept: the "adjacent possible". As the network grows, the adjacent possible also grows.)

The potential for impact increases as a function of two factors: 1) more resources from a growing network; and 2) more efficiency in leveraging assets arising from collective learning and increasing levels of trust across the network. It all starts with building a collective set of habits. Focusing on small wins. Doing the doable, relentlessly.

We still need one essential component: an open-source operating system to speed up collaboration and network development.

(Think Linux for human networks.)

That's what **#strategicdoing** provides.



2

STRATEGIC DOING & POSITIVE DEVIANCE

In a turbulent world, strategy becomes everyone's business. Effective strategy requires us to link, leverage, and align resources to achieve shared outcomes. Collaboration can create new solutions to wicked problems. But we often face an obstacle: fear.

Moving from hierarchical mindsets — which emphasize protecting boundaries and routines— to network mindsets — which emphasize strengthening connections and flows — often triggers fear. And fear freezes us.

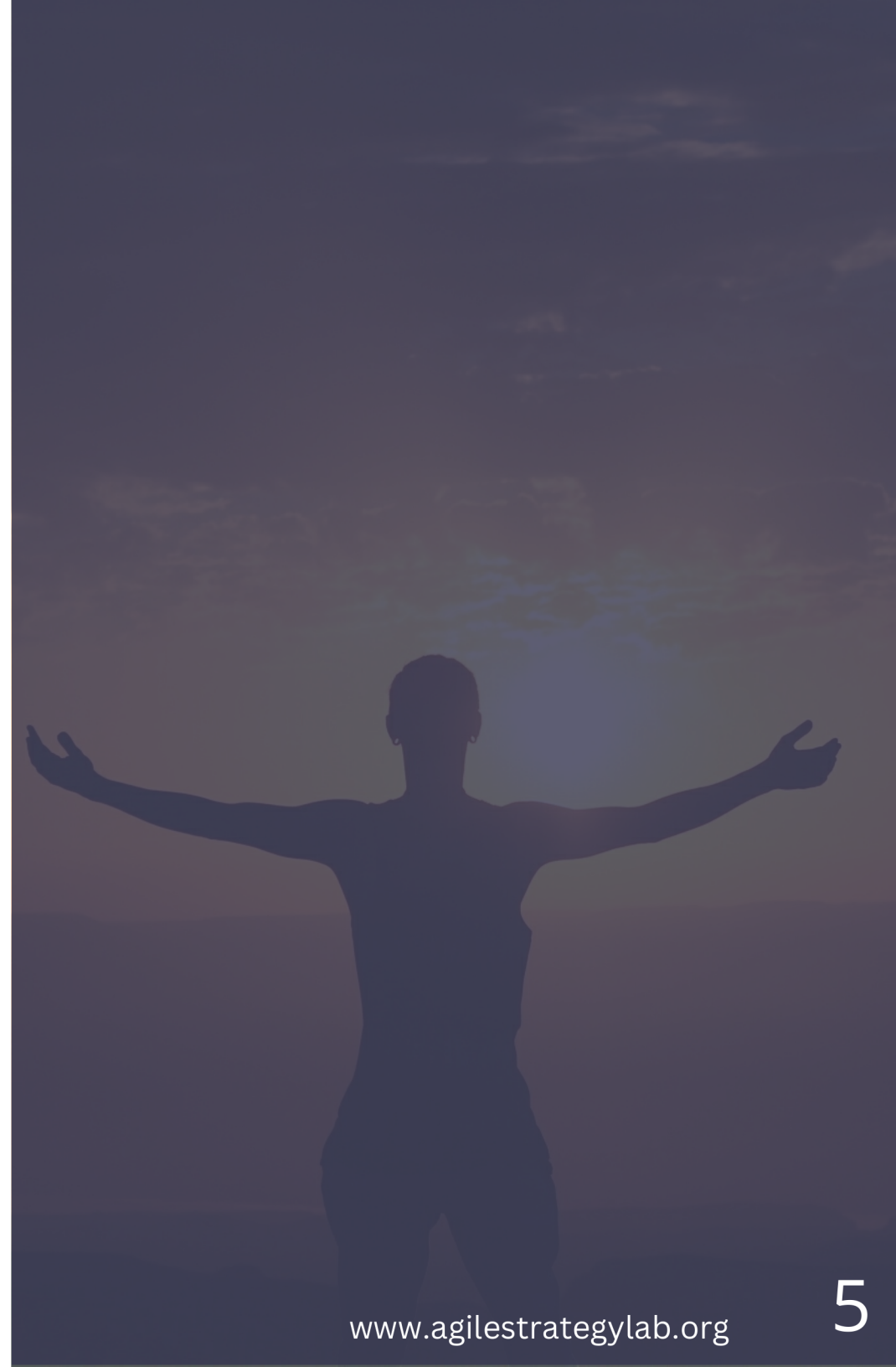
Strategic Doing workshops can help.

STRATEGIC DOING AND POSITIVE DEVIANCE

Strategic Doing aligns closely with a logic of social change called positive deviance.

The concept emerged from child nutrition and public health in the 1970s. Practitioners identified the idea and then replicated it in several settings in the 1990s to improve child nutrition.

In many communities of at-risk populations with malnourished children, a few individuals (positive deviants) followed unusual and beneficial practices to achieve better outcomes (Zeitlin, 1991; Marsh et al., 2004; Pascale et al., 2010).



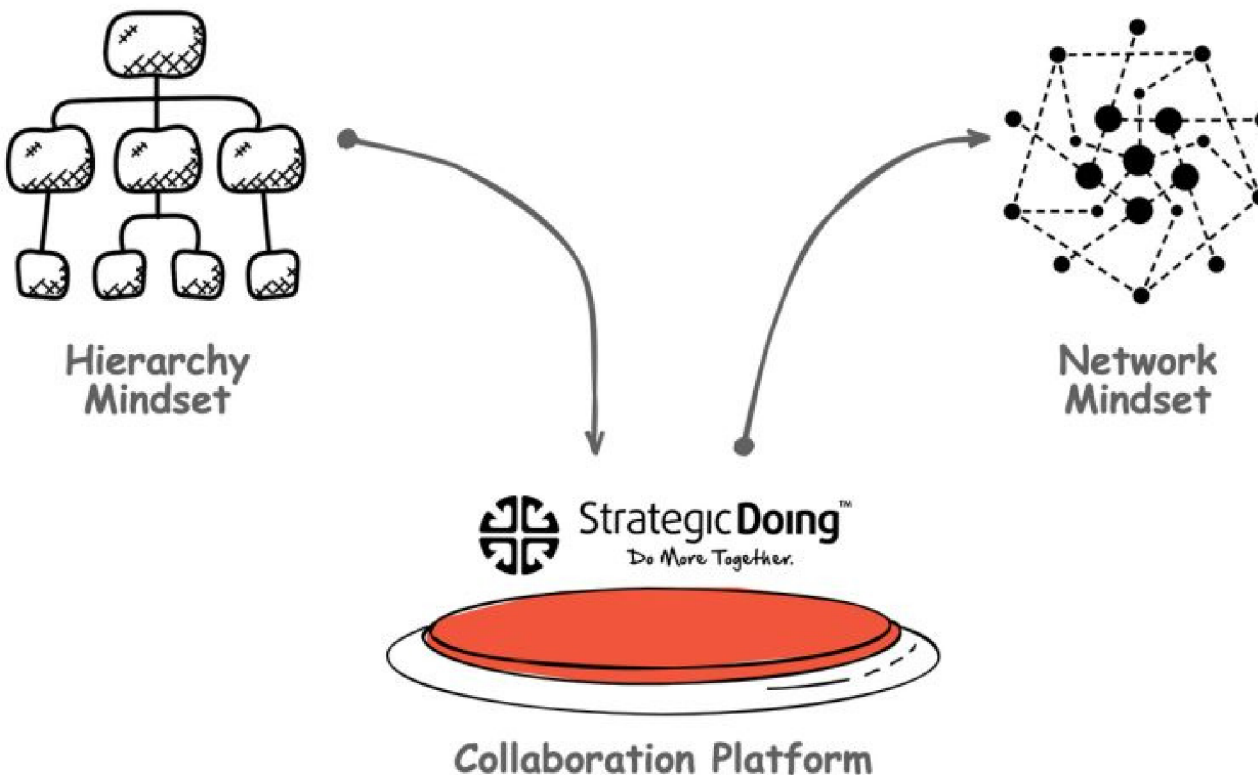
DIG DEEPER: BEHAVING OUR WAY TO NEW WAYS OF THINKING

An important insight emerged from this work:

Behaving differently in front of peers is the most efficient way to introduce new ways of thinking into a community.

This approach suggests that people inside an organization or a community can act their way into new ways of thinking (Pascale et al., 2010).

Research supporting positive deviance, primarily in organizations, is continuing to develop. At the same time, it has potentially useful lessons for organizations and for promoting more extensive social changes (Sternin & Choo, 2000; Mertens et al., 2016; Albanna & Heeks, 2019).



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THE INGENUITY GAP

Our ingenuity gap continues to grow. Our inability to design and guide “innovating networks” has led to the gap. But here’s the good news.

We can close the gap if we practice and master some new skills: designing deeper, more focused conversations that lead to double-loop learning. (I’ll explain that term below.) And even more good news: it’s not costly to make the shift. We can teach these skills to anyone.

WHY IT MATTERS

Over two decades ago, Canadian environmental scientist Thomas Homer-Dixon wrote an important book: *The Ingenuity Gap*. He pointed to the growing gap between the ingenuity we need and the ingenuity we produce.

Solutions to the accelerating complexity of our world demand more ingenuity from us: we need to generate more ingenious solutions. We can’t say that we weren’t warned.

DIVE DEEPER: DONALD SCHÖN, ADAPTIVE LEARNING

Thirty years before Homer Dixon wrote his book — over fifty years ago — MIT scholar Donald Schön delivered the Reith lecture for the BBC.

Schön set forth our challenge in clear terms. To adapt to constant change, we need to learn how both individuals and organizations learn.

Schön asked us to think of our organizations as learning systems.

Because organizations are human systems, we can design them to generate and diffuse innovations more productively. We can accelerate our collective learning, innovation, and adaptation. We can close our ingenuity gap.

THE BIG PICTURE: DOUBLE LOOP LEARNING AS THE PATH TO INNOVATION

Meeting this challenge requires a different type of learning. With his collaborator, Chris Argyris, Schön underscored the importance of “double loop learning,” or adaptive learning. It’s the type of learning that enables organizations to innovate, adapt, and evolve.

We can contrast adaptive learning with learning a routine: how to file an expense report, for example. Adaptive learning is different. Here, we need a deeper inquiry: more focused conversations tied to continuous experimentation.

We frequently need to question the path we’re on. Are our actions giving us the results we want? If not, we need to change course and change what we’re doing.

It’s the essence of what has become “agile” thinking and doing. What we call “strategic doing.”

LEARN MORE ABOUT INNOVATING NETWORKS, ADAPTIVE LEARNING, AND STRATEGIC DOING

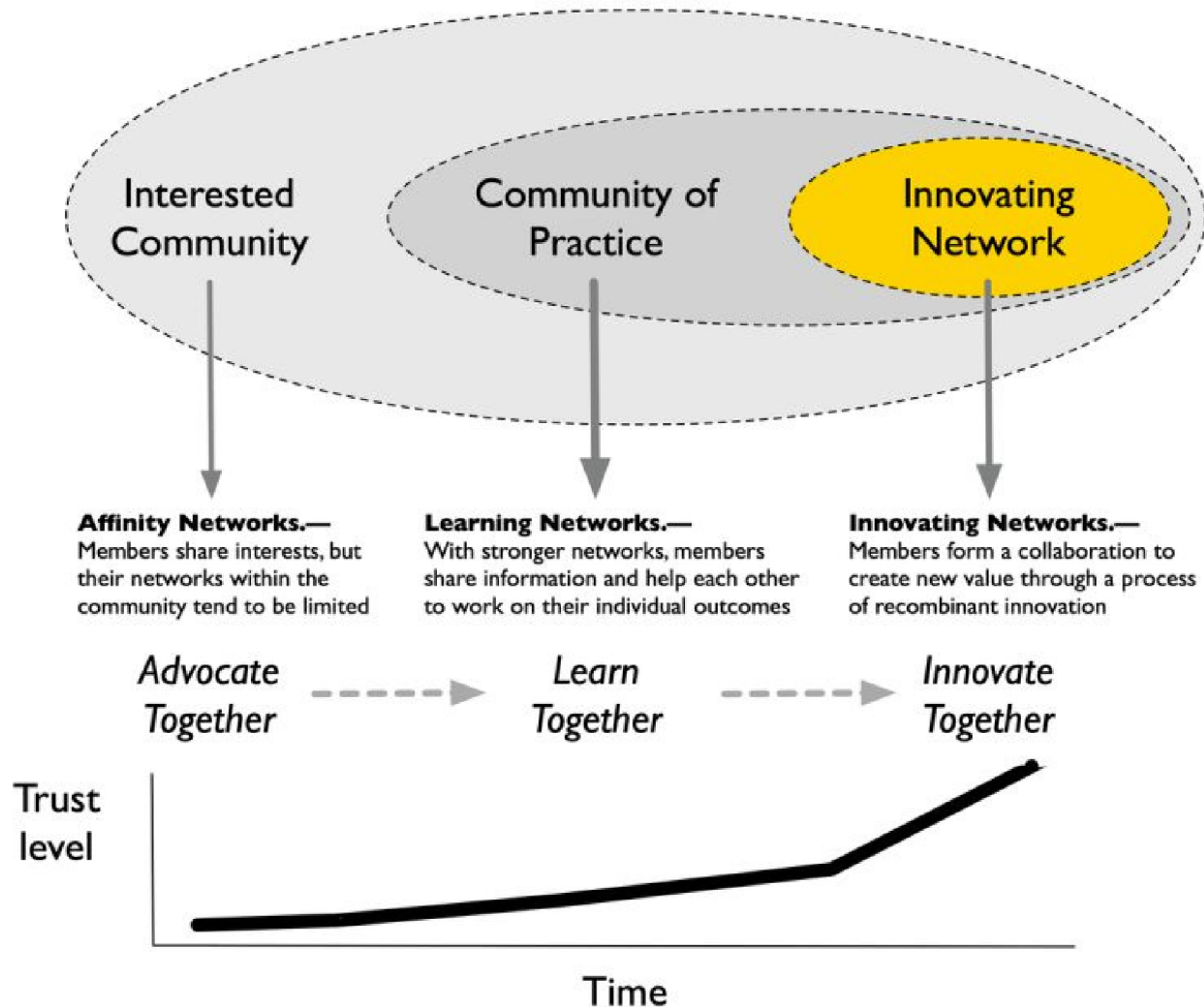
To learn more, explore the power of #strategicdoing, an open-source discipline to accelerate the volume and velocity of our collaborations.

You can start your journey with our book. Here's how Yo-Yo Ma begins his Foreword. "I've been waiting for this book all my life".

And CEOWorld Magazine has this to say: "Strategic planning is one thing – strategic doing is quite another. The authors of this book will redefine what real collaboration looks like for you. Smart and practical. This book is for you if you're looking for a well-defined leadership strategy for getting your arms around what's to come."

Check it out on Amazon:
<https://amzn.to/38fYa6d>

Not all networks are the same...
Strategic Doing provides a rigorous open-source discipline to develop "innovating networks"



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VISUAL & VERBAL STRATEGY PRACTICE

Strategy practice now requires both verbal and visual language. Both must be clear and simple. But here's the rub. Finding the simplicity on the other side of complexity is not easy.

After 10 years of development in my consulting practice and 15 years of testbeds at Purdue, we've designed a strategy practice that achieves both: verbal and visual simplicity.

WHY IT MATTERS

Complexity demands that we simplify. When we confront growing complexity, the last thing we need is more complexity.

In designing a strategy practice for open, loosely connected networks, we needed to avoid the trap of traditional strategic planning practices, which are often ineffective, expensive, and complicated.

DIG DEEPER: NETWORKS AND THE OBSOLESCENCE OF TRADITIONAL STRATEGY PRACTICES

In 1993, I set out to create a new approach to strategy, one specifically designed for open, loosely joined networks.

By the late 1980s, it was clear that strategic planning models — born in the 1960s and deeply grounded in industrial economics — were too cumbersome and costly for a world of networks and accelerating change.

The emergence of networks was easy to miss. I was fortunate. In 1984, as a member of the first consulting team to dive deeply into the Japanese auto industry, I learned how Mazda leveraged a network-based manufacturing model: faster, more productive.

“SEEING” NETWORKS AND THE VISUAL-VERBAL CONTINUUM

In her marvelous book *Visual Thinking*, Temple Grandin provides an insightful perspective on how our minds work.

She introduces us to the verbal-visual continuum.
“Auditory sequential” thinkers are language based.
“Visual spatial” thinkers are picture based.

Each of us falls somewhere along that continuum
with most somewhere in the middle.

To define a new path for strategy in networks, we
needed to develop both a verbal and a visual
approach. The reason is simple. The networks we
seek to design and guide are invisible. We cannot
see them.

Strategy in networks, then, is not so much rocket
science as molecular biology.

Cancer researchers rely on pictures of signaling
pathways to understand the mechanism of
cancer’s spread. In the same way, today’s leaders
need to rely on pictures of our social networks to
understand how to guide organizations.

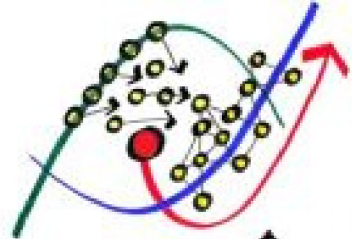
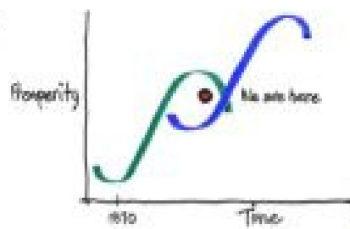
Learn more about the Agile Strategy Lab

We are at the forefront of research
in agile strategy and the science of
complex collaboration. Our action
research portfolio informs every
part of our work, helping us hone
our practices and identify new
opportunities.

AGILE STRATEGY LAB

... Theory of Change ...

- Grandfather's Economy
- Hierarchy
- Grandchildren's Economy
- Networks
- New Thinking
- New Behaving
- New Doing

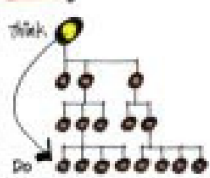


Scale
Civility Rules

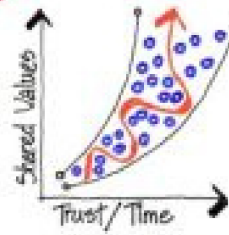
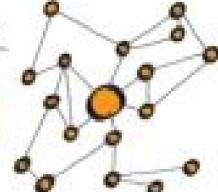


... New "Behaving" ...

- Trustworthy Actions
- Civility
- Guiding conversations
- Diversity & Collective Thinking
- Civic Spaces

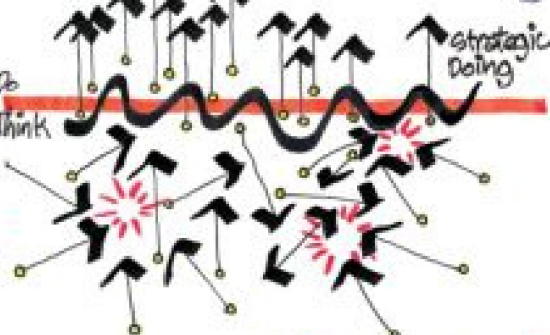
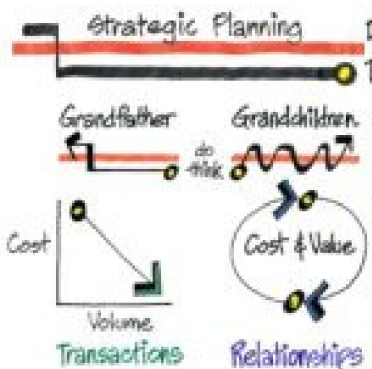
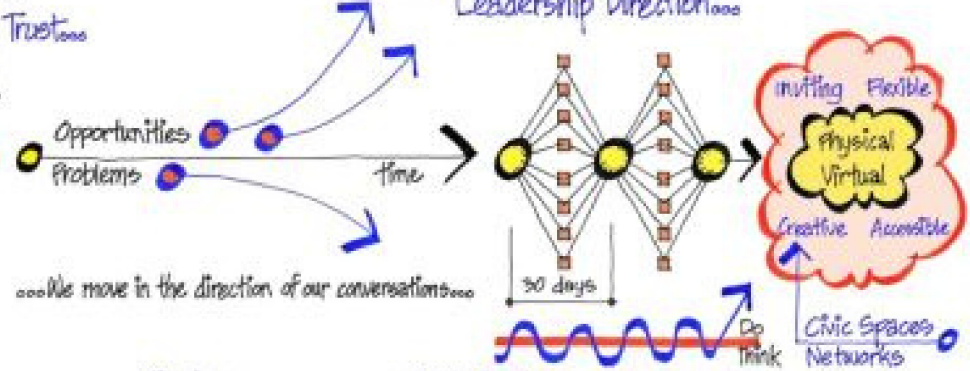


	Grandfather	Grandchildren
Thinking	Top	All
Behaving	C&C	Trust
Doing	Bottom	All



... Scaling Trust ...

... Balancing Leadership Direction ...



... We move in the direction of our conversations ...

... Strategy ...

Where are we going?

Outcomes Link, Leverage & Align

How will we get there?

Pathways

We are here

... Strategic Doing ...

What could we do?

What should we do?

What will we do?

What are we doing?

What are we not doing?

What are we not not doing?

What are we not not not doing?

What are we not not not not doing?

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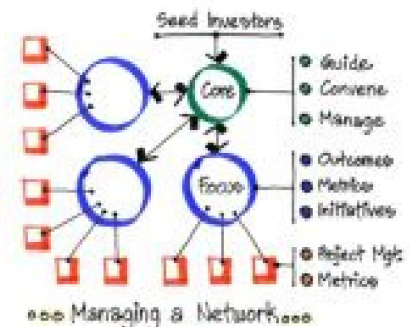
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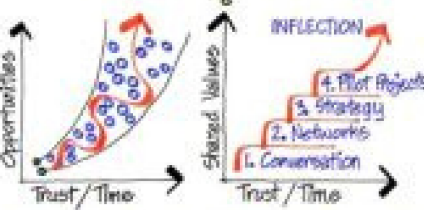
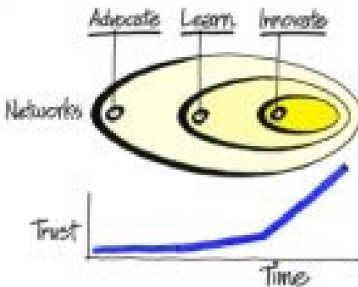


... Managing a Network ...

... Building Networks Strategy ...

... New "Thinking" ...

- Civic Economy
- Network Structure
- Types of Networks
- How Networks Emerge
- The Network Effect
- Strategy for building Networks



... Network Effect ...

Civic Economy

Networks Emerge

Market Economy

Good \$ Neutral \$ Bad \$

Flows of Money

Reset Realign Manage Money Flow Civic Portfolio

Creative People

Quality Places

Hotspots

Clusters

Brainpower Innovation

High Growth

Collaboration

Hotspots

... New Ways of "Doing" ...

- Strategy
- Strategic Doing
- Link, Leverage & Align
- Co-creating value
- Managed Networks
- Civic Economy Portfolio

ADAPTING THROUGH **KNOWLEDGE & LEARNING**

Let's start here: Knowledge and learning are critical to adaptation. Both guide our actions as we respond to our environment.

By learning by doing, we generate new knowledge. With a continuous process of designing and doing, we can continue to adapt and thrive.

Unfortunately, our current organizations frustrate this process. Unless we begin redesigning them, our capacity to adapt to new situations will continue to wither.

WHY ORGANIZATIONAL OBSTRUCTIONS MATTER

Corporate America's inability to implement effective learning processes helps explain why companies have run into trouble in more volatile environments.

No wonder "creative destruction" became a hot topic over the last few decades.



We only need to look at major stock indices. “The average duration of a company’s tenure on American indices has been trending down for decades” (Visual Capitalist: <https://bit.ly/3FlipMV>).

Companies that don’t adapt disappear.

Think Blockbuster. Or, on the eve of its major restructuring: General Electric (See <https://bit.ly/3iVyfeg>).

DIG DEEPER: ROUTINE v. ADAPTIVE LEARNING

We are all familiar with routine learning. We start with a plan, act, and evaluate our results based on the plan.

If our results deviate from what we expect, we make adjustments in what we do. We don’t question the plan.

We question whether we followed the plan. Our organizations are stuffed with standard processes that rely on routine learning. “It’s how we do things around here.”

Adaptive learning is different.

We start with a plan, we act, and we see our results. If our results deviate from what we expect, we ask a different question. Do we need to change what we are doing? Do we need to redesign our system?

STRATEGY AS A ROUTINE PROCESS

When we understand the difference between routine and adaptive learning, we can see why traditional strategic planning has become less productive.

Most strategy planning processes follow a linear logic. They rely on single-loop learning. Metrics measure deviation from the plan, but the plan doesn’t change. There is no room for learning by doing.

It’s not surprising that in many organizations, strategic planning has become a stale budgeting exercise.

STRATEGY AS AN ADAPTIVE PROCESS

Strategy as an adaptive process is designed differently. It is based on adaptive learning in which teams regularly convene to assess what they have learned by doing.

As they distill their learning, team members adjust to what they are doing. They redesign their strategy.

THE CORE QUESTION

So here's the core question: is your strategy process designed to be routine or adaptive?

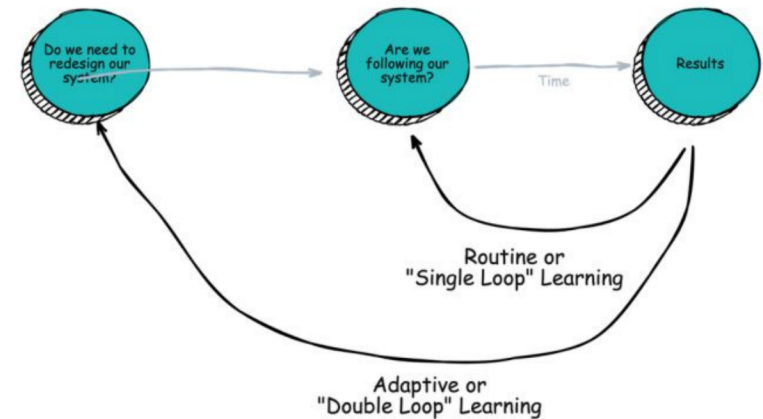
FURTHER READING

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Nonaka, I., & Konno, N. (1998). The concept of "Ba": Building a foundation for knowledge creation. California Management Review, 40(3), 40-54.

Nonaka, I., & Takeuchi, H. (2007). The knowledge-creating company. Harvard Business Review, 85(7/8), 162.

Adaptive learning requires "double loop" learning. This type of learning requires a continuous questioning: "Do we need to redesign what we are doing?"



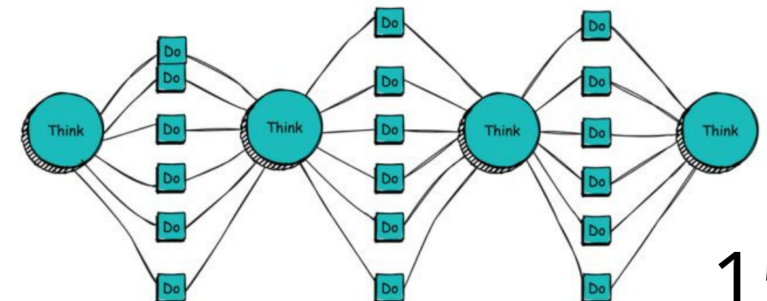
Over time, adaptive learning is iterative "learning by doing".



Traditional strategic planning is based on "single loop" learning: Draft and plan and then follow it.



Strategic Doing provides an alternative: an open-source strategy design that teaches a simple protocol of "double loop" learning.





To find out more about our work and training opportunities, please visit the Agile Strategy Lab

www.agilestrategylab.org

Read more blogs by the ASL Team [HERE](#)

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