

# Harmonics Way

*Promote Peace of Mind for Me, We, and They*

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with Carrie Nickels*

Rob Keefer is a consultant interested in helping individuals, teams, and organizations promote peace of mind in the workplace.

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To “the Krew”



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## Preface

In the summer of 1994, I found myself working as a junior software developer in a research group of a large content publishing company. I have fond memories of the years spent working with smart people on complicated natural language processing and information retrieval problems.

I remember sitting at my desk for 10 hours a day writing complex computer code, rarely getting up to take a break. Coworkers would stop by to invite me to the cafeteria for lunch or to take a break, and I rarely went with them. I was engaged in the problems that I was trying to solve, and I didn't want to be interrupted.

It is no wonder that I enjoyed those years at work. For over three years, I spent every day engaged in my work and in the state of *flow*. Psychologists have found that being in this state of mind, in which one is wholly engaged in a task, to be some of the happiest moments in a person's life.

It wasn't until after I changed jobs that I realized the uniqueness of that experience. Too often, the typical work environment is full of distraction, missed expectations, and a lack of understanding of project status. As a consultant for over 20 years, I have worked with more than 30 different client organizations developing or guiding software product development. Unfortunately, one common characteristic these 30 clients share is pervasive dysfunction. The customers and users of the software products developed by these organizations suffer the consequences of this dysfunction.

Throughout this time as a consultant, I have hunted for tools and techniques that help me get into the state of *flow* and stay there for extended periods of time. Once I developed this skill, I began to seek out methods for promoting *flow* for others. As a web and mobile application designer and developer, I looked for strategies to help users achieve a state of *flow*. As a manager, I sought to create an environment for my team to be in *flow*.

As a consultant, I always strive to promote peace of mind for my clients. The principles I call The Harmonics Way are the result of this attempt to understand how to promote peace of mind or *flow*, for an individual, for teams, and for the clients or users who hopefully benefit from the work product these teams produce.

Rather than write a 200-page book, I decided to write a short, hopefully accessible, book with an accompanying website. Along with many articles that delve deeper into The Harmonics Way, there are tools available on the site for you to download.

If you approach work as a craft, and The Harmonics Way resonates with you, please reach out. We are a growing community of travelers sharing our experiences, encouraging others in the craft of work, and promoting peace of mind.

Rob Keefer, October 2020  
[www.HarmonicsWay.com](http://www.HarmonicsWay.com)

## Acknowledgements

As you'll soon discover, one principle within the Harmonics Way is that things go better when done with others. This principle is especially pertinent to writing a book. Thanks to Nadav Zohar, Lisa Douglas, and Amber Lewis for their comments, insights, and suggestions. Thanks to Cathy VanLierop for the hours spent editing and refining my writing. Special thanks to Carrie Nickels, who handled the photography and illustrations. A final thanks to Paul Spencer for the many long conversations that helped me solidify the thoughts shared here.







# FOUNDATIONS

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## Chapter 1

Mahatma Gandhi once said,

*"A man cannot do right in one department of life whilst he is occupied in doing wrong in any other department. Life is one indivisible whole."*

Unfortunately, we live rather fragmented lives. And although we work incredibly hard to arrange a harmonious life, it seems we are still surrounded by discord.

The problem, of course, is that life *is* one indivisible whole, and so problems in one area of life easily bleed into other aspects. For example, you have an argument with your life partner on the phone over lunch, and then find it difficult to focus on your work the rest of the day. Or, a client mentions during an onsite meeting that budgets may be tight next year, and you are anxious all weekend.

While it is true that life is one indivisible whole, it is made up of many facets. One facet of life could be considered *Me*. *Me* is very personal and, in this context, it is the state of being completely absorbed in a task or thought and not interacting or concerned with other people or events happening at the same time. *Me* can sit in a coffee shop with

headphones on and type out this paragraph, completely oblivious to the people and activity around *Me*.

Another facet of life could be considered *We*. This is the area of life where you are a member of a team or a family or a group. It isn't as personal as *Me*, but you are likely committed to the success of *We*. At work *We* (your project team) will need to complete a project by the end of the day on Friday. At home, *We* (your family), need to be at a surprise birthday party at 6:00 p.m. on Saturday. Finally, *We* (a group of your close friends) may have a volleyball game this weekend.

A third facet of life could be considered *They*. *They* have expectations of *Me* and *We*, but are not necessarily directly contributing to *Me* and *We*'s success. In this context, *They* may be our client or customer or business sponsor. *They* could also be the in-laws or friends across town.

With all the discord that spins around you, how would your life be different if you found harmony within these three facets of life (*Me*, *We*, and *They*)?

Let's begin with *Me*. While we would like to think that we can control *We* and *They*, the fact is that each of us only controls *Me*. *Me* may have influence over *We* and *They*, but we do not control them. Once you understand a few simple concepts that contribute to your peace of mind, you will see how these concepts serve as building blocks to support new ways of interacting with *We* and *They*.

The psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi spent many years studying what brings harmony to *Me*. In his book *Flow*<sup>1</sup>, Csikszentmihalyi outlines the components of an experience that facilitates flow: “the state in which people are so involved in an activity that nothing else seems to matter; the experience itself is so enjoyable that people will do it even at great cost, for the sheer sake of doing it.”

Csikszentmihalyi goes on: “The best moments usually occur when a person’s body or mind is stretched to its limits in a voluntary effort to accomplish something difficult or worthwhile. Optimal experience is thus something we *make happen*.”

People who are in *flow* report the feeling that time stands still. For a rock climber who is in *flow*, cracks and crevices are not obstacles, but a staircase. To a pianist, the piano keys are an extension of the hand.

These experiences are some of the happiest moments of our lives. Think about it. Can you remember a time when you were so engaged in an activity that time seemed to stand still and you felt like you truly enjoyed what you were doing? Wouldn't it be awesome to have as many of those experiences as possible?

The Harmonics Way is a guide to structuring your life, and your interactions with others, to do just that - to maximize the number of *flow* experiences in life. The Harmonics Way is a set of principles and practices collected by a fellow traveler spanning more than 20 years of working with *Me*, *We*, and *They*. It may be helpful to think of these principles as breadcrumbs left along the path by someone who is trying to discover how to increase the number of optimal experiences in life.

Before delving deeper into The Harmonics Way though, we need to explore the psychology of optimal experiences – the psychology of *flow*.

Csikszentmihalyi discovered that there are three basic components of an optimal experience: goals, clear and immediate feedback, and a balance between challenges and skills.

The first component of an optimal experience is setting clearly defined and articulated goals. Before a person can be completely absorbed in an activity, they must clearly understand the goal of the activity. This goal is very personal and may be dictated by the individual or by the activity itself. It does not need to be intensely ambitious; it just needs to be unique, personal, and meaningful to the individual. For example, Phil is new to mountain biking, so he should set a simple goal such as staying on the bike. Rachel, on the other hand, is a seasoned biker; she should set a more challenging goal of completing a course in less time than the previous try.

The second component of a genuine *flow* experience is clear and immediate feedback. Phil will have immediate feedback as each moment passes and he has not fallen off his bike. Rachel will also receive moment by moment feedback, but will interpret the feedback differently based on her overall progress through the course.

The final component of an optimal experience is a balance between challenges and skills. The diagram in Figure 1.1 below will help explain the general concept. The two dimensions of an experience, challenges and skills, are represented on the two axes of the diagram.

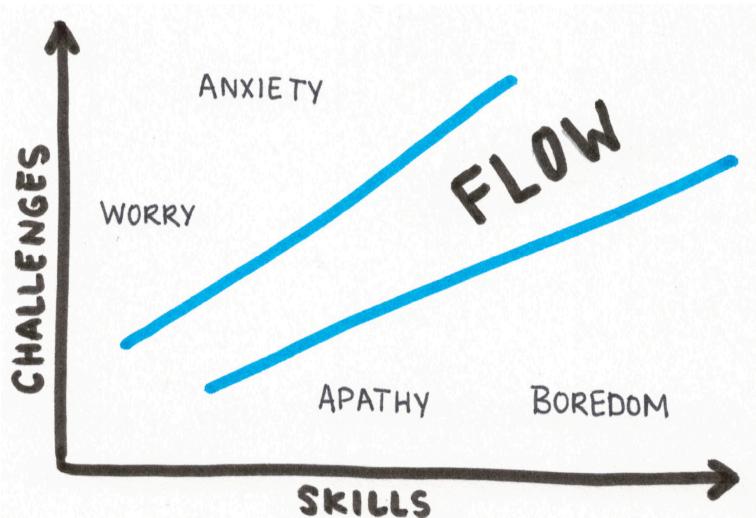


Figure 1.1: Balance between challenges and skills

Imagine that Phil sets an aggressive goal and attempts to beat Rachel's personal best. This challenge is high for him and his skills are low, so he is likely to be anxious about his ability to achieve this goal. Rachel, on the other hand, will be bored if she sets a goal of simply staying on the bike because her skills are high and this challenge would be very low for her. The optimal experience for each of them will only happen when they set a challenging, yet attainable, goal.

Consider how these three components of an optimal experience - goals, feedback, and a balance between challenges and skills, play out in your life. When was the last time you had an optimal experience? If

it's been a while, it may be time to find a way to have one. Remember, these are some of the happiest moments of your life.

Now that you know what it takes to have an optimal experience with *Me*, let's consider *We*. What does an optimal experience with *We* look like?

To create an environment for *We* to experience *flow*, there must be a goal for its existence. A family goal may be general and long-term such as planning a family vacation or supporting the education of your children. For a team at work, it is typically a mission to be accomplished within a certain time frame or a project deliverable. Regardless, all of the individuals in *We* must share a common goal, and the common goals should reflect the goals of the individual members as much as possible. Common goals serve to unify *We* and establish expectations and a framework for the individuals to evaluate both individual and team success.

As with *Me*, optimal experiences of *flow* for *We* will need to contain clear feedback. This feedback will not be as immediate as it is in the personal *flow* experience, but regular feedback is vital to determining whether the goals are being achieved – people want to know how things are going. A family playing a game may get so engaged with interactions and scoring points (feedback) that they have a collective *flow* experience.

While you can have *flow* experiences with friends or extended family (*They*), these experiences will be less frequent and more short-lived. These moments will be cherished and will tend to look a lot like those experienced with *We*, as the group will participate in an activity with a goal, clear feedback, and a balance of challenges and skills.

The balance of challenges and skills is the final necessary factor in developing optimal experiences for *We*. A simple change in performing an activity (skills) may be all that is needed to produce a slight increase to the challenge of the activity. At work, you may have your team members change the location of their workstations or have a different person lead a meeting. The goal is for your team to thrive

in the balance between challenge and skill, leading to the successful delivery of projects.

And finally, we need to consider *They*. There is always *They*.

For all the *They*'s in your work life - the customers, clients, patrons, managers, and business sponsors - it is doubtful that you will experience *flow*. These people are often caught up with the swirl of life and work, and generally are too distracted to experience *flow*.

Often, *They* need to be reminded of your goals and how your goals align with their expectations. The feedback you provide will only be pertinent in the context of your goal, and your goal is only relevant to them when it aligns with their expectations.

The Harmonics Way can serve as a guide for establishing expectations, providing relevant feedback, and communicating the challenges to the completion of a project and any gaps in the team's skills or resources required to meet the organization's goals.

The Harmonics Way is based on the philosophy summarized in the Gandhi quote at the beginning of this chapter:

*“A man cannot do right in one department of life whilst he is occupied in doing wrong in any other department. Life is one indivisible whole.”*

When we approach life as one indivisible whole, we are more likely to structure our lives so that we can have as many optimal experiences as possible.

The Harmonics Way is a set of seven principles that strive to make this philosophy and the psychology of optimal experience as practical as possible. Principles are not rules or processes. The seven principles of the Harmonics Way are not hierarchical. They are independent and interdependent at the same time. Following one principle is better than not following any, but together they form a strong structure to support harmony and promote peace of mind for *Me*, *We*, and *They*.

The 7 principles are:

- Things Should Work as Expected
- Always Know How Things are Going
- Quality is Baked In
- Always Know How the Parts Relate to the Whole
- Interaction should be Distraction Free
- Things Go Better when Done with Others
- Embrace Your Complexity and No One Else's

These principles will guide you in discovering optimal processes for *Me* and *We*, given your specific context. Ideally, you will regularly evaluate your processes in light of these principles, and adjust as needed. The ‘projects’ of life are dynamic and change over time. A supportive process will adapt. The Harmonics Way can serve as a guide to keeping your processes relevant, supportive, and adaptive throughout the life of a project.

The Harmonics Way is grounded in the psychology of optimal experience. It is an outgrowth of the desire to maximize those occasions when we are in *flow* and experience a deep sense of enjoyment that we cherish. These moments become the standard for what we want life to be like.





# THINGS SHOULD WORK AS EXPECTED

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## Chapter 2

Recently a friend of mine made a tuition payment for her son who was headed into his freshman year of college. When she checked to verify that the payment had gone through, the payment had not registered. Frustrated, she called a mutual friend wondering what to do. He assured her that the payment had likely gone through. “These things take time,” he said. “If it hasn’t posted in a few days, you should probably call them.” Sure enough, when she checked three days later, everything was correct.

Our mutual friend later explained, “It is likely that there are at least two systems at play here - one for accepting her payment and one for posting payments to the accounting system. Often in these situations, there is a process that runs at night that updates the accounting system with all the payments accepted during the day. It is clunky for sure and causes you to wonder about the stability of a lot of systems we interact with.”

Unfortunately, this is not an uncommon experience – the systems of everyday life often fail to meet our expectations. In the 21st century, it would seem reasonable to expect that two systems within the same institution would communicate with each other, appearing as one

seamless system to the outside user. From my friend's perspective, she saw the institution's payment system as one simple function that simply did not work.

This story is a real-life example of an organization not keeping a perspective like my friend's in mind when the payment system was designed. From the university's perspective, my friend is a part of *They*. She is a parent, a paying customer. She had a personal goal of paying the tuition. Her expectation of clear and immediate feedback was to see a confirmation that her payment had been accepted and had registered correctly. This assurance would give her peace of mind and promote harmony in pursuit of her goal. Unfortunately, that did not happen; things did not go as expected.

People often bring their own expectations to interactions only to be disappointed. The phrase "Expectations are premeditated disappointments" quite nicely summarizes too many experiences.

Expectations are often based on an implicit social understanding. Without verbalizing the expectation, the actors in the interaction tell themselves a story that legitimizes their expectations. It is as if there is a "deal" in which the specifics are never discussed.

It is important to realize that unspoken expectations are at great risk of going unmet. It is nearly impossible for someone to live up to an expectation that has not been discussed or agreed upon.

For example, Eric is a friend who has been a consultant for many years. He shared a story in which his team worked hard to deliver the first version of a custom software system, which he refers to as a Minimum Viable Product, or MVP, with his clients. When he demonstrated the team's first Minimum Viable Product to the client, *They* were disappointed and underwhelmed.

As the meeting ended, the client manager looked up and said, "Eric can you come over here for a minute?" Eric walked to the window with his client. They looked out over the employee parking lot. The client asked, "Eric what kind of cars do you see out there?" My friend

saw mostly logos of BMW, Mercedes, Lexus, and Porsche. Eric nodded and said, “Nice, expensive cars.”

Then the manager made his point: “We are a Lexus-driving company. We don’t drive Chevrolets. When you say ‘Minimum Viable Product’, you probably have a Chevrolet in mind, but we hear Lexus.”

For Eric’s team, the demo had met *We*’s expectations, but did not work as *They* expected. In this case Eric’s team may have avoided this disappointment through one of two approaches: *We* could have, (and maybe should have) noticed the luxury car mannerisms of the client and delivered a Lexus-like MVP. Or, *We* could have worked with the client to set lower first-time expectations. Regardless, the failure of both parties to clearly communicate expectations led to disappointment for all involved.

The expectations, or “social contract” between Eric and his client are similar to expectations we bring to products, services, and technology every day. The technology should have an apparent “social contract” that the user should be aware of, and not have to guess. The person making an online payment for college had an expectation, or “social contract”, that the system would respond a certain way and it didn’t. The social contract in her mind was that “if I pay you, you will confirm that I paid you.” The system did not set any other expectation for her, so she filled in the gap with her own story that the payment didn’t go through or she did something wrong. The other friend offered an alternative explanation.

While we often readily identify with unmet social contracts between people, we should consider the expectations that *They* bring to interactions with our product, service, or technology as a social contract as well. If the technology does not verbalize the social contract it is operating under, *They* (the users) will fill in the gap with a contract that legitimizes the expectation *They* have of the system.

This can manifest in even the smallest details of a user’s interaction with technology. Researchers discovered many years ago that:<sup>2</sup>

- an application should respond within one second to avoid interrupting a user's stream of thought
- users will become distracted and begin to perform other tasks if an application's response time exceeds ten seconds
- users expect to complete sub-tasks in less than a minute
- users expect to complete an entire task in less than ten minutes.

Because you are human, you bring these same expectations to any mobile app or website you visit. You probably aren't even aware of these expectations until you try to pay your bills online and the bank's website is slow. You get frustrated and find it difficult to verbalize why. The frustration stems from the violation of your unspoken expectations of interacting with technology.

Similarly, our team members, our customers, and our stakeholders all have expectations of *Me* and *We*. Since we know that meeting and managing expectations is vital to promoting harmony for *Me*, *We*, and *They*, how do we go about setting expectations with the *We*'s and the *They*'s of the world? Here are three suggestions to guide you in managing expectations:

**Research and discover unspoken expectations.** Unknown expectations often go unmet. To arrange for things to work as expected, it is important to uncover the unknown expectations *We* and *They* have of you (*Me*).

As a member of a team (*Me*), talk with your teammates (*We*), to establish a working agreement that ensures a common set of expectations and processes. A simple conversation can unify and focus the team on the goal at hand.

As *We*, research and discover the expectations *They* have of you. Interview customers and potential users of your product or service. Find out what is important to them. Schedule regular conversations with your managers and business sponsors to know what expectations *They* have of *Me* and *We*.

**Align expectations with use.** A processed food company once canned a beef stew that didn't sell very well. Customers were disappointed

because *They* thought it contained too much broth. *They* expected to eat stew with a fork. So, rather than change the contents, the company reset the customers' expectations by changing the label on the can from "Beef Stew" to "Hearty Beef Soup". The consumers loved it! The soup flew off the shelves because it worked as expected, whereas the stew did not work as expected and couldn't be given away. To achieve harmony and peace of mind in any project endeavor, it is vital to clearly communicate expectations, and strive to make your end product or service work as expected.<sup>3</sup>

**Understand that perception is reality.** A cheese producer once packaged cheese from the exact same cheese roll in two different ways. One was a block of cheese with a Big Brand label on the package, and the other was packaged in random sizes as though it had been freshly sliced in the deli. The company conducted a taste test and found that consumers overwhelmingly chose what they perceived to be the deli cheese over the block, Big Brand cheese.

In summary, it is important to keep in mind that whether it be social interactions, product interactions, or service interactions, *Me*, *We*, and *They* all bring their own sets of expectations, which may remain unknown. And remember, unknown expectations are guaranteed to go unmet. It is imperative that *Me* and *We* understand the expectations of our customers, users, and teammates; and that reasonable expectations are set and clearly communicated to all involved. *Me* and *We* do ourselves a huge favor when we work to ensure that "things work as expected."





# ALWAYS KNOW HOW THINGS ARE GOING

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## Chapter 3

The Boston Marathon is the oldest annual marathon in the world and, for everyday runners, the most prestigious. In 1996, the 100th year of the Boston Marathon, over 38,000 people signed up to run. In 2020, registration was limited to 31,500.<sup>4</sup> For many runners, simply completing the Boston Marathon is a highlight of their life.

In the context of creating an optimal experience for themselves, distance runners set goals for the race. Leading to this moment, the runners have likely trained and developed the skills necessary to meet the challenge of whatever goal has been set. Genuine competitors may set a goal of beating their personal record for a marathon, or even winning. For others, the goal may be to simply finish the race.

As a runner moves through the course, there are many opportunities for clear and immediate feedback. Three tools in particular can provide feedback, measure progress, and determine if any adjustments need to be made. These three tools are the stopwatch, the mile markers, and the finish line.

A runner's stopwatch is the most **tactical** tool as it provides moment by moment feedback on the time into the race. Runners make mental

notes of their time at certain distances and set expectations for future milestones based on their current progress.

Mile markers provide nice short-term goals. They serve as key **pivotal** tools that measure progress up to a given point, which informs any adjustments required to achieve the ultimate goal. The mile markers provide a point of comparison for the runner to gauge their progress, and alter their pace at precise moments when these changes would be most impactful.

For example, suppose a runner sets too fast a pace early in the race. If the goal is to keep an 8-minute mile pace, and the first mile is clocked at 7 minutes and 30 seconds, the runner knows to slow down a bit to conserve energy for future miles. Similarly, when it takes 8.5 minutes to run mile 16, the runner knows future miles will need to be run a bit faster.

Mile markers serve as great short-term goals, but the finish line is the ultimate goal of any race. The finish line is the **strategic** tool a runner uses to compare current progress against the ultimate goal. As the miles pass, the runner knows how much further they have to go, and can estimate how long it will take to finish based on their current pace.

All three of these data points: current time, past mile markers, and the finish line, are critical in supporting a runner's focus and energy level throughout a race. When all of this aligns, many runners experience what is called a "runner's high," also known as *flow*.

This understanding of one's progress toward a goal is vital for maintaining energy in *any* endeavor. Productivity researcher Bettina Wiese summarized the current understanding by stating "... empirical research has repeatedly shown that striving toward self-concordant goals strengthens the link between goal progress and well-being."<sup>5</sup>

Wise's principle applies to teams and project execution as much as it does to personal goal achievement. Simply understanding progress, regardless of the status, provides the clarity and situational awareness important for decision-making and ongoing personal well-being. If we

don't know the current progress of our project, we may be too optimistic and tell ourselves that everything is going fine, when in fact it isn't. Or, we may be too pessimistic and believe that the whole team will likely be fired, when in fact things are great. Understanding our progress prevents us from creating stories to fill in the gaps.

Admittedly, quite often *Me* lacks situational awareness and doesn't realize that *Me* doesn't know how things are going. Simply stated, *Me* doesn't know what *Me* doesn't know. *Me*'s lack of situational awareness is likely confirmed if *Me*:

- wakes up in the middle of the night and fires off a message asking about the status of a situation;
- is anxious about a situation due to a lack of information;
- is frequently asked about a situation and does not know why *We* or *They* keep asking

There are also times when *We* doesn't know how things are going either, but this is likely due to a different issue. Individual members of *We* may be doubtful of *We*'s current situation, but have a hard time verbalizing what their instincts are telling them.

Clearly, uncertainty abounds within organizations that have not adapted to the ever-changing world around them. To respond to the dynamic external world, organizations often look inward and apply familiar tactics that have worked in the past to try to solve new problems. When these old methods don't work, *We* attempts to force them to work by adding more vigor.

Back in 1994, Charlie Munger, vice chairman of Berkshire Hathaway gave a speech titled, "A Lesson On Elementary, Worldly Wisdom As It Related To Investment Management & Business."<sup>6</sup> In this speech he called this tendency to use the familiar even in the face of a changing reality the "man with a hammer syndrome." He referenced the famous psychologist Abraham Maslow's quote: "I suppose it is tempting, if the only tool you have is a hammer, to treat everything as if it were a

nail." Too often *We* keeps hammering away, confused and disillusioned that this work isn't producing any results.

By contrast, a project team that utilizes a Lean approach has a built-in set of tactical, pivotal, and strategic tools to know how things are going:

- Tactical: Daily standup meetings and visible work in progress
- Pivotal: Cycle reviews provide insight into progress toward goals
- Strategic: Frequency of product releases and the growth of the To-Do List (Backlog)

A broader view of this set of tools is summarized by what is called the OODA loop - Observe, Orient, Decide, Act. This model, developed by military strategist John Boyd, is a method for dealing with uncertainty. It is an explicit representation of a process that people, teams, and organizations can use to learn, grow, and thrive in a dynamic environment.<sup>7</sup>

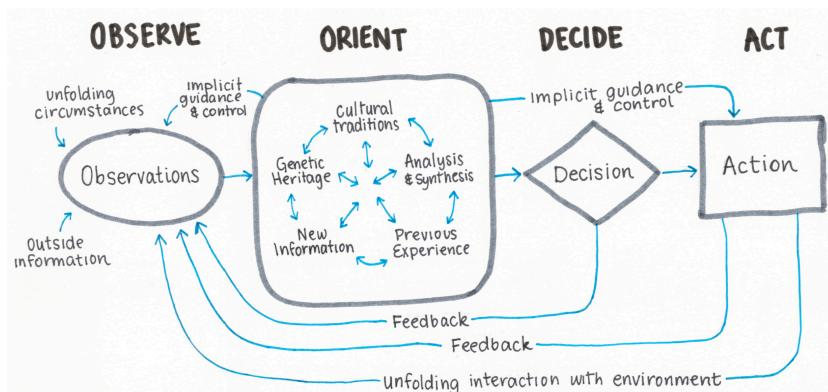


Figure 3.1: John Boyd's OODA Loop

**Observe.** Through observation and collection of new information about the changing environment, *We* becomes open to the possibility that the world has changed. *We* is then able to gain the knowledge and understanding crucial for accurate situational awareness. Openness to the dynamic world positions *We* to overcome confusion-inducing repetition.

**Orient.** According to Boyd, this is the most important step in the OODA Loop. Orientation is vital to *We*'s success because it is the point at which *We* compares existing views of the world with the new observations and identifies discrepancies. To reestablish harmony, *We* must adjust its view of the world to the new reality revealed through observation.

**Decide.** While Boyd used the term Decide, he also referred to this step as Hypothesis, suggesting the uncertain nature of the decision. He suggests that the decision is really movement forward based on the best hypothesis. This step is then tightly coupled with the next step, Act.

**Act.** Action is the only way that *We* can learn about the hypothesis and continue to adjust. If the new hypothesis proves to be off, *We* starts the OODA Loop over. *We* continues to iterate through the loop until a “new normal” is established - harmony between the organization and the outside world.

The more comfortable *We* becomes with this way of thinking and working, the more successful *We* will be in navigating the dynamic environment in which *We* exists. By regularly evaluating tactical, pivotal, and strategic metrics, *We* systematically takes the first step in the OODA Loop. This frequent observation provides input for *We* to cycle through the rest of the loop on a regular basis as needed.

When interacting with *They*, it is best to assume that *They* rarely know how things are going. For example, patrons of a restaurant delegate food preparation to others for a reason. Typically, business sponsors delegate projects to other teams so they can focus on their own project's priorities. So, almost by definition, *They* don't know how things are going because *They* delegated the task or project to *Me* and *We*.

With this in mind, it is up to *Me* and *We* to talk with *They* and discover what information is beneficial for their peace of mind.

For example, a children's hospital applied this principle when it developed a method of keeping parents and family members updated

on a child's status during same-day surgery. To honor the privacy of each patient, this system provided regular updates through a mobile app. Concerned family members around the world could receive information regarding the child's status.

Other examples include implementing countdown timers at airport terminals, which alert waiting passengers of the time remaining until the terminal doors close, or a good server at a restaurant who seems to instinctively know when to refill your drink or ask about the check.

Regardless of the situation, remember that when *Me* and *We* attempt to achieve a goal, understanding the progress toward that goal will increase overall well-being. If *Me* or *We* do not understand the progress, seek out and apply the appropriate tactical, pivotal, and strategic tools to determine the necessary information. Set the feedback at a frequency that helps *Me* and *We* always know how things are going.

And, don't forget about *They*. *They*, too, want to know how things are going. One way *They* evaluates the quality of a product or service is based on how well *Me* and *We* keep *They* updated with relevant information. Consider the message and the regularity that keeps *They* informed. A pertinent message at the right moment can go a long way towards promoting *They*'s peace of mind. This effort is worth the time; it will most certainly increase *Me*, *We*, and *They*'s situational awareness leading to the satisfaction that *Me*, *We*, and *They* "always know how things are going".



# QUALITY IS BAKED IN

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## Chapter 4

A “Killer Brownie” from Dorothy Lane Market (DLM)<sup>8</sup> in Dayton, Ohio is *not* an ordinary brownie. It contains chocolate and caramel and peanuts. It’s a 2” x 3” x 1.5” delight that costs \$5. Why do people pay \$5 for a brownie when they could buy a box mix for less money and have a whole batch of brownies? Clearly, there is something about these brownies that makes them just taste better.

A master carpenter who builds a fine cabinet does not use just any piece of plywood on the back, even though no one would ever see it. The carpenter would know the quality of the materials put into it, and because of the pride taken in the work, the master carpenter would make the whole cabinet consistent and excellent. An artisan knows that to sleep well at night, the entire cabinet must be exceptional.

Each of these examples demonstrates a commitment on *Me*’s part to produce and deliver a high-quality, excellent product. High-quality results produce harmony for *Me*, *We* and *They*; poor quality disturbs their peace of mind. The Harmonics Way provides a path or roadmap towards achieving high quality, ultimately resulting in excellence. To achieve this level of quality and excellence, we need to consider the *entire* product, service, or experience - it’s the whole thing.

The ultimate test of high quality for *Me* is the state of *flow* during the product creation or service delivery process. When *Me* is in *flow*, it is readily apparent in the attitude and approach to work. A programmer who is in tune with the code will recognize excellent code as it emerges. A writer who is in peace of mind knows excellent writing as it is written. If *Me* doesn't have peace of mind while producing the product or delivering the service, the problems *Me* brings to the experience will likely spill over into the overall experience.

Consider, for example, when a master carpenter is not in *flow* while constructing a cabinet, the issues that block *flow* may manifest in a saw cut that is slightly off or a drill hole that is a little too big.

There is one important caveat to this: the quality of the end result is highly dependent on the capability and experience of the individual. A recent college graduate may be in *flow* and produce her best work, but this will not be as good as a seasoned veteran who is in *flow*. People produce their best possible work while in *flow*, but it is important to recognize what is possible for one person may not be possible for another.

It is much easier to control the quality of ingredients, materials, and processes than it is people. Therefore, if you manage or influence *We*, work hard to create an environment in which *Me* can be in a state of *flow*. The quality of your product or service depends on it.

For example, many factors contribute to the superb quality and taste experience of DLM brownies including the ingredients, the recipe, and the employees (*We*) who produce them. The greatest source of possible variation in the process of producing exceptional brownies is the people - the *Me*'s who bring to work a myriad of issues that possibly block their peace of mind. These issues can turn into missteps in following the recipe or process.

The premise of the Harmonics Way is that if all of the *Me*'s are in *flow*, it is easy to assume that *We* will be in *flow* too. And when *We* has

a harmonic flow, excellent products will be produced and 5-star services will be delivered.

The environment for *We* to be in *flow* varies across industries. Csikszentmihalyi describes factory workers, computer programmers, and musicians all achieving and working in the state of *flow* in their own respective industries. It is very likely that if you work at it a bit, you can discover the process and practices that will enable the *We*'s in your world to aspire to high quality while working in *flow*.

So, rather than prescribing guidelines for specific activities, the Harmonics Way provides principles that can guide you in discovering practices and processes that work for you, your project team and your environment. Each team and each project is individual and unique. Recognizing this fact, teams should strive to discover processes that work for their specific team and their specific project. The team will also need to be willing and able to constantly adjust as the environment changes.

A team may work on a new project and discover that the process used previously doesn't quite work this time. If you add a *Me* to the team, it is a new *We* and the processes may need to be slightly adjusted. If the project takes an abrupt turn, it may become an entirely new project, and *We* needs to acknowledge and accommodate the change. Again, it is important to keep in mind: continuously explore and discover the processes that support the team for each unique project.

While all of the Harmonics Way principles contribute to *Quality is Baked In*, three principles in particular serve as a starting point as you explore processes that work for your *We*:

**Always Know how Things are Going.** Each *Me* should know how *We* are doing in the pursuit of *We*'s goal.

**Always Know how the Parts Relate to the Whole.** Each *Me* should be aware of how their individual actions contribute to *We*'s goal.

**Interaction should be Distraction Free.** Each *Me* should be able to complete a task without interruption.

Creating an environment and a work process that supports these three principles will take your *We* to a new level of *flow* and with it, a new level of quality.

The pursuit of excellence is sometimes elusive, yet there are two telltale signs that one is on the path: invitation and trust.

Many customers (*They*) are willing to pay \$5 for a brownie from DLM. Or, another way of looking at this is that *They* regularly **invite** a DLM brownie into their lives. *They* invite the brownie to parties and personal indulgences because it is a high-quality experience. DLM knows it is delivering something of value because people keep inviting it back.

Similarly, when a computer programmer builds quality software components, more people want to work with that person and the opportunities to work on increasingly interesting projects grow.

While there are many factors that affect the opportunities a person or product is presented with, a pursuit of excellence definitely helps open the door to the unexpected. Only the high-quality candidates and experiences get invited to the next level.

Invitation is one sign that *They* like an individual or product or company. However, invitation alone paints an incomplete picture. *They* may repeatedly invite a product to do a job, not due to its high quality, but because it is the only one available on the market.

A more complete picture of quality must also include **trust**. Consider a new product that no one has heard of. Professor of communication studies Everett Rogers calls those willing to take a chance on the product “innovators” and “early adopters” in the market<sup>9</sup>. These customers don’t necessarily trust the marketing slogans, but they are curious enough to step out.

As people experience the product and find it beneficial, *They* begin to learn about the product and trust the early adopters. *They* only trust the company and its product because of the experience of the early

adopters. An excellent product will be invited into a growing number of *They* domains as the trust in the experiences of others grows.

This is true of physical products, software products, and services as well. Think of a software system you use at work or an app on your phone. Where does it fall on this trust continuum displayed in Figure 4.1?<sup>23</sup>

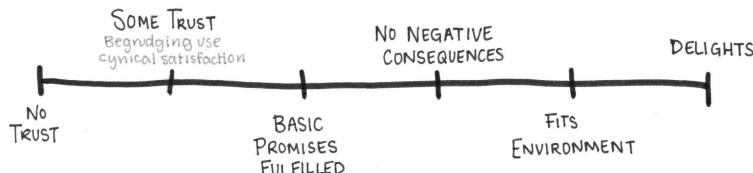


Figure 4.1: Trust continuum

Another useful tool to understand how others perceive your product, service, or team is the Net Promoter Score (NPS).<sup>10</sup> Originally developed to measure customer experiences and predict business growth, today this one proven metric is used world-wide in customer experience management programs.

While the NPS is typically applied to an organization's brand, it can also be helpful to measure any product, service, team, or even an individual. This metric is obtained through a survey comprised of one simple question: "On a scale of 1 - 10, how likely are you to recommend [product, service, team, person] to a friend or colleague?"

Respondents are grouped into three general categories: Promoters, Passives, and Detractors as illustrated in Figure 4.2:

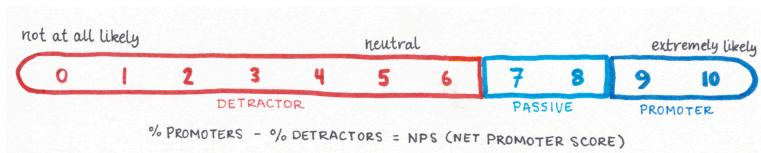


Figure 4.2: Net Promoter Score

**Promoters** (score 9 - 10) are fans. These loyal supporters will continue to utilize and/or refer others, which fuels growth.

**Passives** (score 7 - 8) are satisfied, but not fans. These people may choose to work with a different person/team or use a different product/service if the opportunity presented itself.

**Detractors** (score 0 - 6) are unhappy, and potentially adversarial. These people may impede growth through negative word-of-mouth conversations and social media posts.

The Net Promoter Score is calculated by subtracting the percentage of Detractors from the percentage of Promoters. The NPS can range from a low of -100 (everyone is a Detractor) to 100 (everyone is a Promoter).

This score provides a key measurement of the quality and overall perception of your product or team. This is vital, because as you may recall from Chapter 2, *Things Should Work as Expected*, perception is reality. The best way to understand this elusive measure of “high-quality” is to know how things are going. Ask *They* for feedback.

Asking your customers, patrons, or stakeholders this one simple question allows you to discover their perception of how well you are performing and to make any necessary adjustments. You may not have anticipated their feedback, but at least you will know how things are going. You may actually be surprised at what you learn that will ultimately impact the quality of the product or service you provide.

People continue to pay \$5 for Killer Brownies at DLM, trusting that the brownie will delight their palates like no other. It is very likely that they will recommend DLM’s “Killer Brownies” to a friend or colleague, giving the DLM Killer Brownie a consistently high Net Promoter Score. DLM has been able to successfully grow their brand because the “quality is baked in”.



# ALWAYS KNOW HOW THE PARTS RELATE TO THE WHOLE

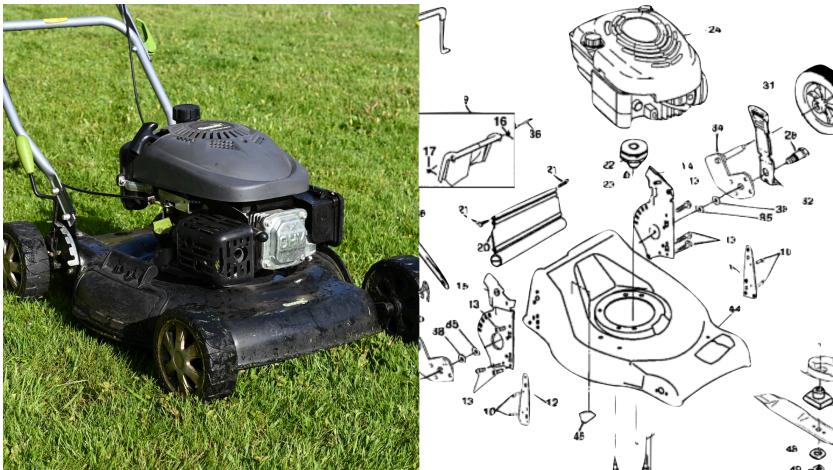
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## Chapter 5

Inevitably, each Spring thousands of people head out to mow their lawns only to find that they can't get their mower started. This leads to great amounts of frustration and potentially a trip to the lawnmower mechanic.

From a typical homeowner's perspective, a lawnmower either works or it doesn't. They expect to put gas in it, pull the starter cord, and hear a loud noise erupt. When the starter cord is pulled and no loud noise is heard, the homeowner is often at a loss and doesn't know what to do next. The lawnmower does not work as expected, leading to frustration. The homeowner is frustrated because they see the lawnmower as a single entity and do not understand how all the parts relate to the whole; all they know is the mower won't start. Without this insight, the homeowner cannot come up with questions to pose that might help solve the problem.

From the mechanic's perspective though, there is a sense of peace and maybe even joy when a crippled lawnmower shows up at the shop. This is due to the mechanic's understanding of the underlying structure of the device and how each part contributes to the overall operation of the lawnmower.



*Figure 5.1: Two different views of a lawnmower*

The mechanic understands the lawnmower as a system - let's call it the lawnmower's **architecture**. The mechanic thinks about spark and fuel and air flow. When a lawnmower doesn't start, a good mechanic feels in control, and has many questions to ask to discover what is wrong. As the mechanic attempts to get the mower started, there is much to learn about the situation, many possible problems, and he or she can begin to invent possible solutions to get it started again.

Just as every product or service has a quality (good or bad), every product or service also has an underlying architecture. The architecture may not be readily apparent, but it does exist. Greater clarity of the elemental architecture will produce greater understanding of how the parts relate to the whole. This understanding leads to the same peace and feeling of control that the mechanic has when fixing a lawnmower.

When things go awry in business operations or organizational projects, it is helpful to have a similar perspective to know how to get things back on track again: You want to know how the parts relate to the whole.

A project can deliver the right thing in the wrong way, or a project can deliver the wrong thing in the right way. Successful projects deliver

the right thing in the right way. It is helpful to consider project delivery from three different perspectives: the implementation team (*We*), the benefactor of the project (*They*), and the client (*They*). Each perspective contributes to the project's ultimate success, and each has its own view of the underlying architecture of the final deliverable. To deliver the right thing, high-quality teams look to the benefactor (end user) to provide substantial input for designing the final outcome. To deliver in the right way, the implementation team must pursue excellence in the delivery. The client, (the one who finances and supports the development effort), must understand the overall business value of the project and create an environment for the project team to succeed.

Consider a software development project as an example.

There is an entire discipline within software development called **software architecture**; in fact, *Software Architect* is a job title in some organizations.<sup>24</sup> Software architecture focuses on the fundamental structure of a software system and its underlying components. The primary goal of software architecture is to ensure that the overall vision of a software system creates and delivers the right thing in the right way from the implementation team's perspective. Unfortunately, this pursuit may be constrained by the communication mechanisms of the organization. This constraint is called Conway's Law.

Think about the lawnmower example. Lawnmower engines require a few simple components to support spark, fuel, and air flow. If a mechanic described to you in detail how a lawnmower works and the interfaces between components, you may get lost in the technical details. This is Conway's Law applied to lawnmowers.

In order to minimize the constraints of Conway's Law, software architects (*We*) spend a great deal of time thinking about how all the components of a system are related and the best way to communicate those relationships to *They* (benefactors and clients). Once a software architect manages the complexity of the software system, and clearly communicates the architecture, there is enough understanding to

manipulate the system at an architectural level, invent possible solutions to new problems as they arise, and have a sense of control. The architects' ultimate goal is to preserve the integrity of the system design and to verify that the right thing is developed.

One of the *Theys* that cares deeply about the right thing being developed is the benefactor, the end user of the software system. End users aren't necessarily the ones paying for the system, but they are the ones who will use and interact with the system. Usability experts, user experience professionals, and human factors engineers specialize in engineering experiences for the end users. These experts and engineers rely on a primary tool to identify and understand how the system parts relate to the whole from a benefactor's perspective. The tool is called **information architecture**.

**Information architecture** is the structural design of an information system. It is a combination of the organization, labels, and navigation subsystems that support the usability and find-ability of a software product. The conceptual framework of information, the context, a user's awareness of location within the system, and a resilient structure all contribute to the information architecture.

Another *They* who is interested in the success of the project is the client, the person who will finance and support the development effort. The client's primary goal is to ensure a positive return on investment (ROI) and fulfillment of the greater purpose of the project within the organization. This purpose, or vision, is often referred to as **business value**.

A **business value architecture** focuses on the interrelationships between various stakeholders and those who define the value of the system. This group can be comprised of investors, customers, the development team, and even the system itself. It is important to keep in mind a balance between investors looking for an ROI, a set of features that a customer is willing to pay for, the capacity of the team, and constraints of the system itself (due to software and/or information architecture decisions). Important decisions are made based on the emphasis the various stakeholders place on business value.

When the architect of each perspective (software, information, business value) knows how the various components within their purview are related, they are more likely to:

- feel in control
- know why the components are structured the way they are
- see what is possible and invent special solutions to problems

These same benefits apply across different areas of life and work. There is very likely an architecture underlying your project deliverables as well. A deep understanding of this will take you a long way toward knowing how the parts relate to the whole.

It is also important to consider the processes *We* uses to complete a mission. If *We*'s process is not spelled out and the individual *Mes* do not fully understand how the parts relate to the whole, *We* will likely perform below capacity. A great way to develop a deep understanding of *We*'s process is to spell out the method by which any one step within the process is completed. Figure 5.2 illustrates a simple, yet thorough, exercise that can help with this.

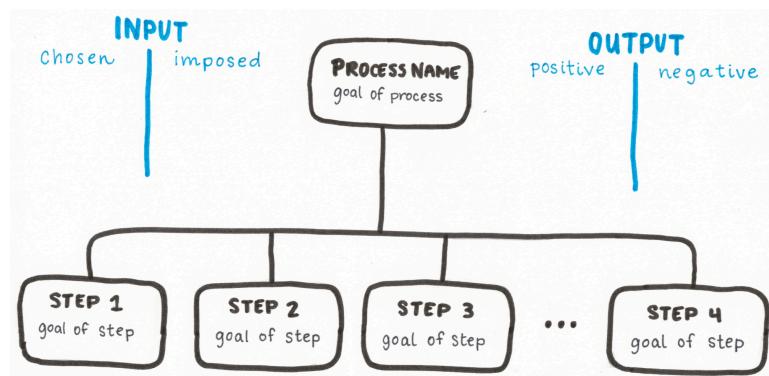


Figure 5.2: By What Method Process

To begin this exercise, gather *We* together in a room, draw a box at the top of a piece of paper or whiteboard, and write the name of the

process in the box. Add the goal or purpose of the process under its name.

To the left of the process box, separately list the chosen and imposed inputs into the process. Chosen inputs consist of contributions to the process that *We* controls or can choose, such as the salary range for a potential employee in a recruiting process. Imposed inputs that *They* introduce to *We* are also important in understanding where the process fits within the organization. An example of an imposed input to a recruiting process is the current job market. If the market typically pays \$15 per hour for a job, and your company has chosen to pay \$10 per hour, it will be much harder to find a viable candidate to complete the recruiting process.

To the right of the process box, list the potential positive and negative outputs (outcomes) of the process. Positive outcomes occur when the process is successful, but can also include those that are useful to process improvement, such as constructive feedback. Negative outputs may be consequences of operating the process itself, including waste or unproductive by products.

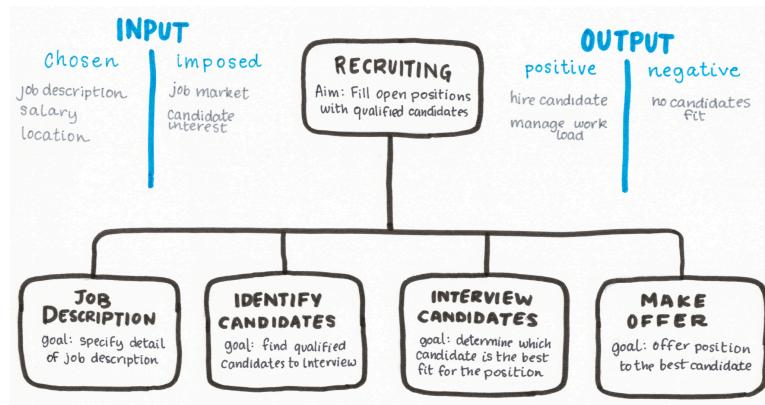


Figure 5.3: Recruiting Process

Finally, beneath the process box, spell out the steps to complete the process and analyze each step. Each step should be evaluated in the same manner: repeatedly drill down into each step until you arrive at a

simplified document or checklist that describes the step, in detail, and could be taught to another employee in less than 30 minutes.

Figure 5.3 provides a simple example of this analysis exercise for recruiting a new employee to your organization.

To follow this approach, *We* draws a box at the top of the page and labels it ‘Recruiting’. Beneath the name of the process *We* writes the goal of the process. In this case, the goal is to fill an open position with a qualified candidate.

The inputs to this process are listed on the left of the process box. The inputs that *We* chose for the Recruiting process are a job description, a predetermined salary range, and the physical location where the new employee will work. Next to these chosen inputs are also external constraints imposed on the recruiting process, such as the current job market and candidates that are interested in the organization.

*We* also identifies potential positive and negative outputs (outcomes) of the Recruiting process. These outputs are listed to the right of the process box. One positive output of the Recruiting process would be hiring a new employee who can help balance the current workload. Unfortunately, there are also circumstances leading to negative outcomes such as wasting time and not finding any qualified candidates.

After the process and its goal have been identified, along with lists of inputs and outputs, *We* identifies the steps in the Recruiting process: create a job description, identify candidates, interview the candidates, and make an offer to a qualified candidate. Each unique step of the process has its own box located below the Recruiting process box.

This is *We*’s attempt at understanding the Recruiting process. Now it is time to drill further down in each step and iterate through the analysis exercise again. This time *We* will write ‘Job Description’ in the process box at the top, and identify the inputs, outputs, and steps of performing the Job Description process. Ideally, *We* will keep breaking the steps down until there is a checklist or some form of documentation that enables *We* to perform the entire Recruiting process with minimal specialized knowledge or coaching.

Evaluating and breaking down the processes your organization follows to deliver its product or service takes a bit of time, but it is well-worth the effort. Upon completion of this exercise you will know how all the parts of the organization relate to the whole.

Regardless of your role within an organization, there are at least three benefits you will derive from understanding how the parts relate to the whole. First, you feel in control; second, you know why things work the way they do; and finally, you have the ability to see what is possible in a given situation and invent special variations to solve problems.

Do you “know how the parts relate to the whole”?



# INTERACTION SHOULD BE DISTRACTION FREE

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## Chapter 6

Alex is a lead software developer at a large insurance company. Fifteen years ago he single-handedly wrote and developed an insurance agent portal as a side project. Since then, the portal has grown to be used every day by a majority of the company's insurance agents. Over the years his team grew from just Alex working by himself, to a team of 4 developers, 3 testers, and a project manager. Since Alex is the most experienced with the system, his teammates regularly consult him for help, his customer representatives routinely pull him into meetings, and even a couple of the agents call him directly for help when needed.

Fifteen years ago Alex was also pleasant to be around and greatly enjoyed his work. As a motivated junior developer, he was left alone to be creative and build what he thought would be most beneficial for the company. Now, as a Lead Software Developer, Alex always has a long To-Do list, but is consistently interrupted throughout his day, greatly challenging his ability to achieve *flow* and to even complete tasks on his list. Sadly, Alex's attitude has progressively deteriorated over the years, and now his responses are short and rough. Many coworkers perceive Alex to be a curmudgeon who they only interact with when absolutely needed.

How did this promising, creative Jr. Software Developer grow into someone people prefer not to interact with?

Alex's attitude decline is common among capable developers, and based on the research literature, is all too predictable. In one study of 50 participants, researchers found that for a person engaged in a task requiring moderate to high cognitive load, an interruption carries significant impact on the time required to complete the task. It is nearly impossible to pick up where the person left off and re-establish the same level of concentration, especially if they had achieved a state of *flow*. The study also demonstrated that interruptions bring on increased levels of annoyance and anxiety.<sup>11</sup> The results of a similar study indicated that interruptions promote waste of time, annoyance, and frustration.<sup>12</sup>

It is no surprise then, that after becoming the “go-to” problem-solver any time anyone had an issue with the system, Alex was not a pleasant person. He had spent the first few years of his career focused on building something useful, only to become overwhelmed with interruptions. These interruptions not only took him away from what he wanted to do, they also slowed down his attempts to be productive, leading to increased annoyance and anxiety.

Alex's manager, Melissa, also spends her days in a similar tornado of activity. Melissa's days are mostly consumed by meetings in which she ‘multi-tasks’ to keep up with email. Melissa rarely has a list of things to do because she is driven completely by interruptions. Melissa mentioned once, “I used to be really good at keeping a list of things to do, but once I became a manager, the list slowly disappeared, and now I focus on whatever is in front of me in the moment.”

In one study entitled, “I'd be Overwhelmed, but It's Just One More Thing to Do”,<sup>13</sup> the authors reported on interruptions' effects on managers. They found that managers tend to be interrupt-driven; they have learned to rely on unexpected encounters and interruptions as primary sources of information. One manager reported, “I have sort of come to rely on interrupts. If I'm not being interrupted, I don't know what to do. I have to generate an internal interrupt of some sort to get me going.”

Surprisingly, this report's findings suggest that managers experience an internal tension in their attitude toward interruption. On one hand, interruption can be disruptive to the task at hand, but an interruption might bring news relating to something that is important as well.

Managers need uninterrupted time to accomplish some tasks, but view interruptions as important to accomplishing certain goals. As a way to resolve this internal conflict, happier and more productive managers set aside uninterrupted periods of time to focus on a task, and provide time for the team to interrupt as well.

Not only do interruptions have an adverse effect on *Me*, but disruptions can also lead to negative outcomes for *They*.

Consider how users interact with an e-commerce website. In his now famous article “The \$300 Million Button”, usability expert Jared Spool reports how a client of his required users to register with an online store **as** they completed their checkout experience.<sup>14</sup> When Spool evaluated the usage records of the site, he noticed that people filled their virtual shopping cart with products, but abandoned the site when they began to checkout. At the point where the user was ready to “pay and go”, the step requiring them to either log in or create a new registration, interrupted their state of *flow*. They did not want a long-term relationship with the seller; all they wanted to do was buy their items and go about their day. The forced interruption caused them to rethink their purchase and go somewhere else. By simply adding a button (Figure 6.1 below) allowing users to checkout without registration, the company increased sales \$15 million in the first month alone!

Many customers didn't want a long term relationship with the seller. All they wanted to do was buy their items and go about their day. The interruption caused them to rethink the purchase and go somewhere else. By simply adding a button to enable users to check out without registration, the company increased sales \$15 million in the first month!

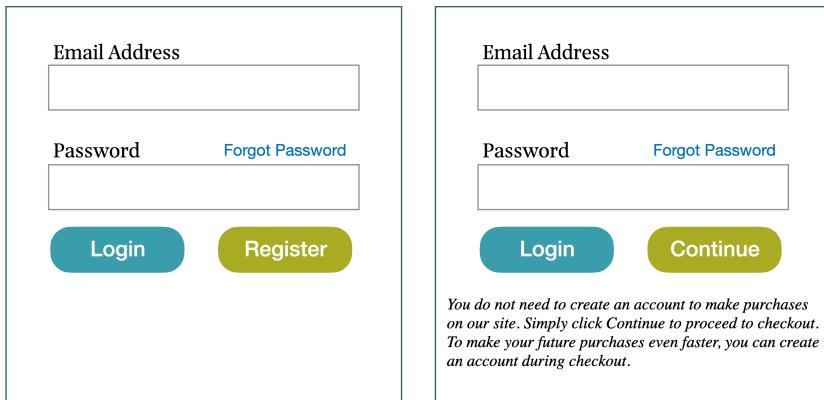


Figure 6.1: \$300M Button

Recall that some of the happiest times in life are when *Me* is fully engaged. A little self-awareness can help *Me* identify interruptions and distractions that prevent full engagement in life. With that in mind, *Me* should work to create an environment as interruption-free as possible. To assist *Me* in reducing interruptions and distractions, following are a few helpful practices to consider:

- **Reduce or turn off phone/device alerts.** Countless mobile apps use notifications to provide *Me* with information that may or may not be important. Try to reduce the number of apps that provide a notification to three or less.
- **Make use of Do Not Disturb Software.** There are a few different software packages that *Me* can install on a computer to curb the temptation to spend time in unproductive ways. Some block applications on the machine itself, while others block specific websites. Some provide a simple “on/off” switch, while others support a timer that prevents the blocker from being turned off for a period of time. Find one that works for you.
- **Take a pad of paper to meetings rather than your laptop.** There is a lot of research that challenges the myth of effective multi-tasking. Rather than trying to do two things at once in meetings, focus on really engaging. The value of the meeting (or lack thereof) will become readily apparent without a laptop to distract *Me*. If *Me* finds the meeting to be unorganized or

unproductive, graciously leave the meeting and work in a more focused environment.

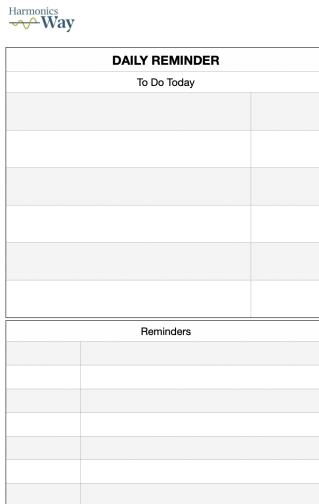
- **Look people in the eye and really listen.** When *Me* interacts with *We* or *They*, remove the distractions, focus on the speaker, and really listen. It is surprising what *Me* may hear.

While these simple practices increase engagement, there is another tool, called the Pomodoro Technique, that can have a huge impact on engagement of *Me* with *We* and *They*. The Pomodoro Technique was developed by Francesco Cirillo in 2006 and has become popular among high performers over the last few years.<sup>15</sup> The primary goal of the technique is to improve productivity and focus. It is a very practical tool to help *Me* get into *flow*, even when motivation may lag.

A basic implementation of the technique only requires a simple timer, a prioritized to-do list, and a place to record unplanned or urgent activities. When Cirillo first developed the technique, he used a tomato shaped kitchen timer. Pomodoro is the Italian word for tomato, thus the name Pomodoro Technique.

Figure 6.2 presents an example of a form *Me* can use for recording the prioritized list of things to do and the unplanned or urgent activities (interruptions or distractions). The To-Do List is comprised of tasks that *Me* believes can be completed in a 30 minute to 4-hour time period. This is not the to-do list for simple tasks that only take a few minutes. It is best suited for tasks of engagement such as clearing out email, thinking, studying, writing, and designing. The tasks should be small enough that *Me* can confidently expect to complete them in the time allotted.

Of course, there will be times when *Me* has a task that will take longer than 4 hours, or a task *Me* does not know how to accomplish at all. The Pomodoro Technique is great for this situation as it encourages *Me* to plan out a method of attack. Rather than planning to accomplish the entire task, break the task into smaller subtasks that can be completed within the 4-hour window. Some of those subtasks may include a list of topics to learn more about in order to accomplish the primary task at hand.



*Figure 6.2: Maker Pomodoro List*

For example, imagine that you have to write a report at the end of a project. This large task will take longer than 4 hours to complete, but it is comprised of many smaller subtasks that *could* be completed in the 30-minute to 4-hour timeframe. One of these sub-tasks may be to calculate the time and resources spent on the project. Other sub-tasks might include writing the project summary, collecting facts on the progress of the project, assessing target vs. actual accomplishments, assessing risks and issues, and describing the resources spent on the project. Each of these sub-tasks could possibly require more than 30 minutes to complete yet be completed in less than 4 hours. So, it's important to write out each task on the To-Do List.

As you begin to work on the first task, set the timer for 25 minutes and focus only on that task. Assuming that you were able to focus for the entire 25 minutes on the task, place an X next to the task, and set the timer for 5 minutes. Take a 5-minute break to get a drink, use the restroom, or sit quietly. Do not open email or check your phone, or engage in any other activity during this break. At the end of the break, set the timer for another 25 minutes, and continue working on the task. Repeat this 25-minute work/5-minute break cycle for 4 repetitions (2 hours total). At the end of the 2 hours, take a 15-minute break.

Continue this process until the task is complete. Once the task is finished, move on to the next one. Sometimes you will wrap up a task in the middle of a 25-minute session. Cirillo suggests that you take the remaining time to calmly recheck your work, however many Pomodoro users just move on to the next task.

The Pomodoro Technique will help you get into *flow*, but it also helps with overcoming procrastination. As we all know, sometimes it's hard to get started on a project. By telling *Me* to work on the project for just 25 minutes, *Me* is more apt to get started. Once started, and *flow* kicks in, *Me* may be able to work on a project for hours.

While *flow* and help with procrastination are huge benefits of the Pomodoro Technique, the real power comes from managing distractions. The bottom portion of the Pomodoro List (urgent and unplanned activities) focuses on this area.

Distractions can come from many different places, internally and externally. An internal distraction may be remembering to do something that you had forgotten or corralling an unrelated thought that pops into your head as you are working. When these distractions come along, simply write a short reminder for *Me* at the bottom of your list and immediately refocus on the task at hand.

External distractions may be mobile phone or device alerts, a phone call, or a visitor to your office. You can turn off your phone and device alerts, but what about when a visitor comes to your office? Politely let the visitor know that you are focused on a task and that you will get right back to them at the end of your Pomodoro (25 minutes). Then, make a note at the bottom of your list to follow up with the person.

To illustrate, suppose you have written your To-Do List, have put on your headphones to give off the "I'm focused" look, and are ready to go. Fifteen minutes into your work session, Byron stops by to ask a quick question. He doesn't take the hint from the headphones and taps on your desk. You look at him, pull down your headphones and ask how you can help. Byron begins to ask a long question. You politely interrupt him, look at your timer, and say, "Let me finish what I'm doing here. I'll come find you in 9 minutes. Ok?"

If Byron persists, try to be firm. “Seriously, 9 minutes and I’ll come see you.” As Byron leaves, make a an urgent/unplanned note at the bottom of your list to follow up with Byron. In 9 minutes when your timer goes off, be sure to follow up with him.

This process will take some courage on your part and some training on the part of *We* and *They*, but it will pay huge dividends. If you are faithful to follow up, *We* and *They* will increasingly trust you, and will be more apt to believe that you will indeed be true to your word and follow up with them.

If you are curious about the number of distractions and interruptions you have during a day, you easily track them by marking internal interruptions to a task with an apostrophe ', and external interruptions with a dash -. When you get an internal interruption, mark the task you are currently working on with an apostrophe and write a reminder in the Unplanned and Urgent section at the bottom of your list. Do the same for external interruptions, except use a dash to designate external. After a full day of working on the report, your To-Do List may look something like what is illustrated in Figure 6.3.

Harmonics  
Way

DAILY REMINDER	
To Do Today	
Calculate time / resources on project	xxx '
Write project summary	xx
Describe targets vs actuals	xx
Describe risks / issues	xxx
Reminders	
Call about the car engine light	
Lunch with Robin	
Follow up with Byron	
Schedule meeting with Sarah	

Figure 6.3: Pomodoro Example

Recording the occurrences when *We* or *They* distracts *Me* is the first step in creating distraction-free interactions. Tracking this information may reveal distractions that *Me* was not aware of and clarify issues. This will lead to solutions that minimize interruptions

Remember, optimal experiences during times of complete engagement in an activity are some of the happiest moments of our lives.

Distractions diminish the opportunity to experience *flow*. Even with minimizing the interruptions in a day, if *Me* does not experience *flow*, *Me* can still avoid becoming annoyed and anxious. If you find yourself frequently distracted and annoyed, take a look at your schedule to find periods where you can focus and be productive. When “interaction can be distraction-free”, you will appreciate it, and so will your friends, family, and coworkers.

# THINGS GO BETTER WHEN DONE WITH OTHERS

## Chapter 7

Today's corporation exists in an increasingly complex and ever-shifting ocean of change. As a result, individuals rely more than ever on the intelligence and resourcefulness of *We*. Collaboration has become an essential ingredient for survival and success.

Unfortunately, *We* doesn't genuinely believe that things go better when done with others. Too often collaboration looks much like the Dilbert cartoon in which the ever-cynical character of Wally views his coworkers as his competition.



Figure 7.1: Our coworkers can be mistaken as our competition

The story of Byron is an extreme example of this competition. Byron is a stereotypical big-ego software developer. He had worked for the same company for many years where he built and maintained systems

that customers used. Byron was very smart, and he knew it. Byron thought he could “walk on water”, and was very dedicated to making sure everyone knew that he was awesome.

Byron also had a very aggressive personality. In fact, Byron was a boxer - literally. He spent his lunch period every day boxing at a local gym and kept his boxing gear near his workstation.

Byron’s manager hired a consultant to help his development team become more efficient and increase the quality of their deliverables. The consultant spent a few weeks attempting to develop a rapport and training the team on a new approach to developing software.

The consultant’s approach relies on a useful tactic called Limiting Work in Progress. Essentially, it is a way to keep the developers focused on a specific task until that task is completed. When the task is complete, the developer lets *We* know that it is complete and selects the next highest priority task to tackle.

As the team prepared to begin work on the project, the consultant asked the developers to select one task to complete. Byron pushed back with great intensity. He wanted to have a small collection of important tasks because he believed he was the only one on the team who could build these components correctly.

The consultant did not let Byron’s intensity deter the team from following the approach of limiting the work in progress. At the end of a long and very aggressive debate, Byron finally conceded and agreed to work on just one task at a time. However, at the end of the heated discussion Byron turned and grabbed the boxing gloves that sat next to his desk and yelled, “But if anyone takes my tasks, we’re gonna have to box!”

The danger in this situation is that Byron’s negative emotion can infect the other members of the team. This is because emotions are contagious, some believe even more contagious than the common cold.

James Fowler, a professor of Political Science at the University of California San Diego, and Nicholas Christakis, a Harvard professor of Sociology, were curious about the contagiousness of emotions and dug into data from a comprehensive, longitudinal study called the Framingham Heart Study.<sup>16</sup>

The Framingham Heart Study was initiated in 1948 when 5209 participants were enrolled in the original cohort. In 1971 another cohort was formed called the “offspring cohort”. This additional cohort was comprised of children from the original cohort and their spouses. Later, in 2002, 4095 children of the offspring cohort were also enrolled. Thus, data from a similar geographic region and spanning three generations was collected and analyzed. Many of these people knew each other either through friendship or by direct family relationship.

Participants in the study agreed to engage in physical, mental, and emotional assessments periodically throughout their lives. Fowler and Christakis selected four questions from a mental health assessment designed to measure “happiness” on a scale of 0-12. Their statistical analysis led to a few conclusions that apply to *We*:

- Happy people tend to be connected to one another and unhappy people tend to be isolated or connected to other unhappy people.
- The spread of both happiness and unhappiness seems to reach up to three degrees of separation, just like the spread of obesity and smoking behavior.
- Both happiness and unhappiness are not just a function of individual experience or individual choice, but also a property of groups of people.

One has to wonder how this happens. John Cacioppo, a professor of neuroscience from the University of Chicago, believed that the muscle fibers in your face and body can be activated unbeknownst to you, at much lower levels than if you were to perform those movements yourself. The muscle movements trigger the actual feeling in the brain. Thus, we may mimic the expressions of another person without even realizing it, and when we mimic an expression with our bodies, our emotions follow.<sup>17</sup>

Interestingly, Cacioppo explained that the more expressive someone is, the more likely the conversation partner is to notice that expression and mimic it. Thus, a person's role or position within a group isn't as important to setting the emotional tone as the intensity of their expression.

This should give hope to those who are on teams with the Byrons of the world. You can have a positive effect on the happiness of those around you as long as you are more expressive than the nay-sayers.

Since you should always know how things are going, the answer to a few questions may give you some insight into your emotional impact on others:

- What types of emotions do I give off and how do they affect *We*?
- How easily does *We* affect my emotions? Do I even know it is happening?
- Is *We* the type of people I really want to surround myself with?
- What actions or changes do I need to make?

Even in a positive environment, *Me* tends to work independently and attempts to complete projects alone. Some may be motivated to do this through service to others, a desire not to bother anyone. Some may be motivated by pride, seeking admiration through completing a difficult task on their own. And there are some that may be motivated by laziness, thinking that involving others is too much of a hassle. Regardless of the underlying motivation, it is easy to identify times when *Me* is not open to sharing.

With a project of any reasonable size and complexity, a *We* that believes that things go better when done together will pitch in where needed. Engineers may package goods. Owners of companies may empty the trash. Provided that *Me*'s keep the proper attitude, when *We* is comprised of *Me*'s who possess a diverse set of capabilities, it is much easier for the team to manage complex projects.

Sadly, too often *We* doesn't work in an environment that genuinely values doing things together. What can these people do?

Here are three things you can do to exude the happiness contagion and improve your team.

**Start with Me.** One small tweak you can make is to change the use of personal pronouns (I, me) to plural pronouns (we). This simple substitution engenders trust from your colleagues and ultimately invokes everyone on the team to think about the health of *We*.

Also, keep in mind that the most expressive person holds the strongest impact on the emotional state of *We*. A genuine expression of happiness will have a positive effect on *We*, and potentially overcome the negative attitudes of others.

**Begin with your next new hire.** Strong, confident personalities who value working together are a catalyst for change, and will also attract other similar personalities. People who value doing things as a unit want to work with people who value the same thing.

Recall that happy people attract and affect the happiness of others. If two candidates are similar in experience and skills, your hiring decision may be based on your evaluation of each candidate's emotional state or commitment to working with others.

**“Make” people get together.** Ed Catmull, one of the founders of Pixar, reports in his book *Creativity Inc.* that Steve Jobs valued the benefits of interpersonal interactions. At one point during the design phase of the Pixar Headquarters building, Jobs wanted to have only two bathrooms (a men's restroom and a women's restroom) in the entire building. Jobs believed that forcing all the employees to funnel to one location (the restroom) periodically throughout the day would significantly increase the possibility of these interactions.<sup>18</sup>

Incidentally, the building does have a large open atrium to serve as a gathering place and encourage the unanticipated conversations to occur.

Finally, there are a few characteristics that high-functioning collaborative teams tend to possess:

- Everyone understands the shared vision.
- Each team member has compatible and complimentary skills.
- Everyone values clear communication.
- Each team member values (and is rewarded for) cooperation over competition.
- Everyone trusts their team members to provide useful feedback.<sup>19</sup>

While it probably seems intuitive or even obvious that things go better when done together, it is rare to find a group who actually believes in this principle enough to genuinely practice it day to day. With that in mind, don't feel overwhelmed; you don't have to support a cooperative environment alone. Find a colleague with whom you can brainstorm how you can both have a positive impact on your organization. Fostering positive attitudes and collaboration will pay dividends because "things go better when done with others".





# EMBRACE YOUR COMPLEXITY AND NO ONE ELSE'S

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## Chapter 8

A few years ago, Robin set out to meet a friend at a Panera Bread restaurant for lunch. She was familiar with the part of town where she planned to meet the friend, and had been to the Panera a few years before, so she confidently set off to her lunch appointment without using a GPS.

When Robin arrived at the location she thought she remembered, there was no Panera there. Realizing that the restaurant had likely moved to a nearby location, Robin pulled out her phone and looked up the store locator on the Panera website.

What she found frustrated her. The store locator asked her for a zip code, and she didn't know the zip code for the part of town she was in.

Like most people, Robin only knew a few zip codes: one for her house and one for her office. Also, Robin knew where a Panera was located near her home and near her office.

Not to be deterred, Robin went to Google and queried for Panera Bread locations near her current location. Unfortunately, the closest location that Google was aware of was her current location, so the restaurant must have moved recently enough to not be updated in Google.

Still determined to find the Panera without calling her friend, Robin decided to drive around a bit. She was sure it had to be nearby.

Eventually, Robin made her way past the restaurant district and decided to pull into a church parking lot and turn around for a second pass. As she did she thought, “Oh, I could Google the church.”

So, she stopped and searched for the church name on her phone. Fortunately, the church’s address was listed on its website. She pulled the zip code from the website and entered it into the store finder on Panera’s website. Sure enough, it listed the Panera she was looking for just down the street from where she had been.

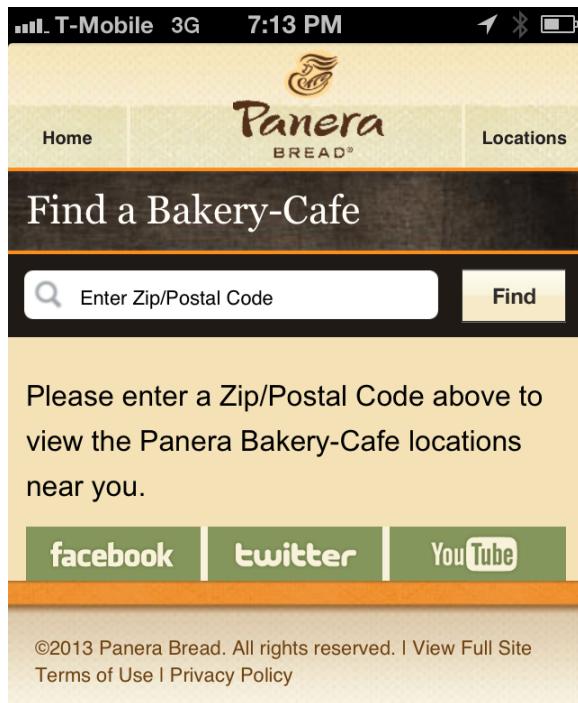


Figure 8.1: Panera Bread Bakery-Cafe Finder

Throughout this entire interaction, Robin was forced to embrace complexity that wasn’t hers. She didn’t know the zip code that her phone was in, but her phone knew where she was. Software developers such as those who created Panera’s website have tools at

their disposal that can be used to find out where the user's phone is at a given moment. Rather than embracing the complexity of asking the phone where it was, the developers pushed that complexity out to Robin and asked her to type in where she was. And, as has already been pointed out, if she needs to use this feature, she is highly unlikely to know the answer to this question.

This lack of complexity ownership and management appears in many aspects of life.

Imagine yourself in a situation where your manager has allocated 30% of your time to each of four projects. As you wander back to your cubicle, you wonder how you are going to contribute 120%. What do you do?

Too often employees embrace their manager's complexity. They take on more than can be accomplished but then just work on the projects they find the most interesting or the most important to them. In a world without clearly communicated priorities, people will set their own.

In this situation, to embrace your complexity and no one else's, you would go to your manager, explain the situation and ask for direction. It is the manager's job to set priorities and make decisions on the relative importance of projects.

When you find yourself in a situation where complexity that isn't yours is pushed onto you, consider three steps as you decide how to proceed.

- **Admit that the complexity exists.** Whether it is the complexity of managing a project team, managing a family, or simply getting to work in the morning, complexity is hidden everywhere.
- **Determine who owns the complexity.** It may be your complexity or it may belong to someone else. It is important to know who owns and should embrace the complexity.
- **Manage the complexity.** If it is someone else's complexity, politely push back and let them know. This could lead to a difficult conversation with a family member or boss. From the

previous example, if you are waiting on your manager to decide, find out what you can do to help with a resolution and encourage them to make the decision. But, if it is your complexity, embrace it! Take it in and do the very best you can to tackle it.

It isn't always easy to embrace your complexity. Complexity is often hard to manage, and various blocks may keep you from engaging with it. Two blocks that commonly hold people back are exhaustion and indecisiveness.

There are times when the demands of life push you to **exhaustion**. By the time the demands of the day are past, you have reached your limit and don't want to take time to genuinely recover by exercising or spending time with friends or family.

This not only applies to people who are on their feet all day, but also to those with desk jobs. According to Simon Laughlin, neuroscience professor at Cambridge University, the average adult brain consumes about 20 percent of the body's energy when it is at rest. For those who spend their day on intense mental tasks, this percentage increases significantly.<sup>20</sup>

When you are exhausted your mind may be dulled, preventing your body from functioning effectively. During these periods, it is important to reserve some of your energy and create a prioritized plan of attack.

One thing worth prioritizing is taking time out to genuinely recover. Activities such as watching TV, scrolling through social media, and playing video games are not restorative and actually lead to further exhaustion. Reading, listening to music, and spending time in nature are all activities that may help your mind and body recover so you can sustain long-term high performance.<sup>21</sup>

Another block that can keep you from embracing your complexity is **indecisiveness**. Putting off a conscious decision might lead to a situation you don't want to be in.

U.S. President Ronald Reagan learned the need for decision-making early in life. As the story goes, an aunt took him to a shoemaker to

have a pair of shoes made. The shoemaker asked young Ronnie, “Do you want a square toe or a round toe?”

Reagan hesitated and struggled to make up his mind. The shoemaker smiled and said, “Come back in a day or two and let me know what you want.”

A few days later the shoemaker saw Ronnie on the street and asked what he had decided about the shoes. “I still haven’t made up my mind,” the boy answered. “Very well,” said the shoemaker.

When young Reagan finally received the shoes, he was surprised to find that one shoe had a square toe and the other a round toe.

“Looking at those shoes every day taught me a lesson,” said Reagan years later. “If you don’t make your own decisions, somebody else will make them for you!”

In his book *Only the Paranoid Survive*<sup>22</sup>, former INTEL Corporation CEO Andy Grove addresses indecisiveness. He points out that there are many situations where it is not clear what is right or wrong. He states, “if you’re wrong, you will die. But most companies don’t die because they are wrong; most die because they don’t commit themselves. They fritter away their valuable resources while attempting to decide. The greatest danger is in standing still.” Grove goes on to state that your only way out of indecision may be to choose a path and work hard to make that choice the right choice.

Ever notice how exhaustion and indecisiveness can lead to a downward spiral? When *Me* is exhausted, decisions that affect *We* are pushed back. *We* may then get behind in the pursuit of a goal and *They* gets frustrated. This leads *Me* to have to work harder or longer to recover for lost time. Awareness of how exhaustion and indecisiveness are related can be a first step toward getting out of this endless loop.

When you embrace your complexity, it provides you with energy to engage with the situation. You may have a curiosity that drives you to learn more or take advantage of an opportunity. This energy might

prompt questions or spur you to involve other people in your quest to tame the complexity.

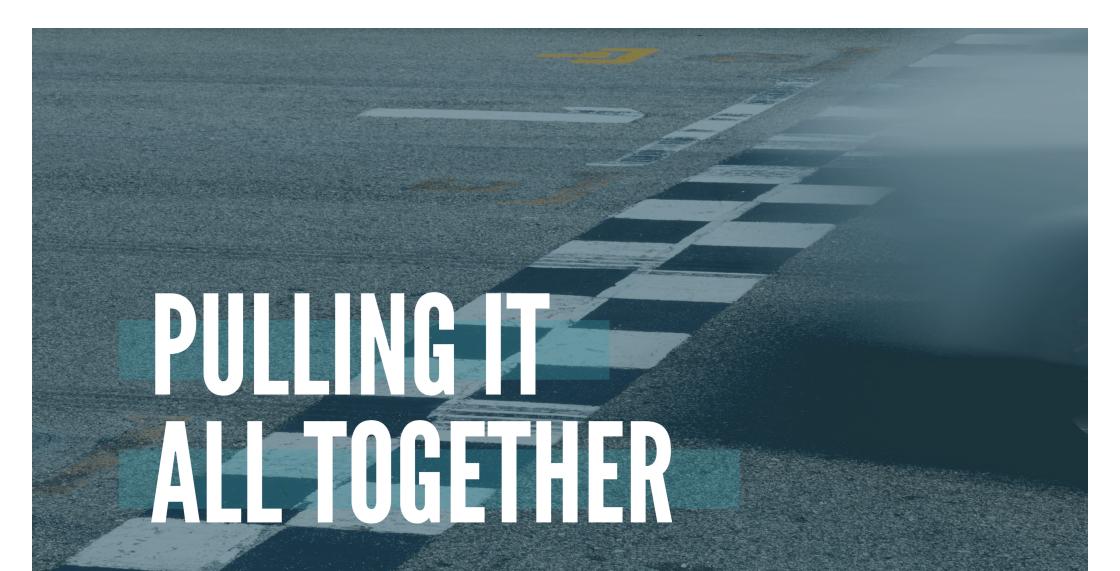
If you try to push your complexity onto others, it may get pushed back onto you. However, people are typically very helpful when you embrace your own complexity as much as possible.

Here are a few tips for embracing your complexity:

- **Do your research.** It is your job to understand the tasks you've been given. If you need answers, take time to formulate good questions. If you need to know what others have done, do the background research required to develop expertise related to the task.
- **Try *something*.** Be curious and experiment with the problem. Sit with the problem and potential solutions for a bit. The famous physicist Richard Feynman often tried to solve a problem before reading someone else's solution so that he was more familiar with the problem and had a context for reading the solution.
- **Formulate a good question.** Put together a short outline or graphic that illustrates your problem. An illustration or demonstration of the problem really helps communicate the situation as you understand it. Remember, *We* and *They* are not thinking about your complexity, so part of embracing your complexity is to help them quickly understand your problem, what you have thought about, what you have tried, and how they can help. Most of the time people are happy to help if you formulate the question well.

It is worth noting that often when you do the research or try something, you learn a lot about the problem and may end up solving it yourself. Regardless of the type of project or working environment, this research and experimentation will go a long way towards developing your expertise, enabling you to embrace your complexity and eventually tackle it.

But remember, if it is not your complexity, politely push back and encourage others to tame their complexity. "Embrace your complexity and no one else's".



# PULLING IT ALL TOGETHER

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## Chapter 9

This book began with a quote from Mahatma Gandhi:

*“A man cannot do right in one department of life whilst he is occupied in doing wrong in any other department. Life is one indivisible whole.”*

The seven principles presented in this book serve as a guide toward the wholeness that Gandhi referenced. These principles can be applied to all areas of life, leading to harmony in a general way. Practicing the principles creates an environment for achieving *Flow* more often and lasting for longer periods of time. And remember, times when we are in *flow* are some of the happiest moments of our lives.

While Gandhi was speaking of an individual person, the concept equally applies to a team of people or a product or service. *They* perceive the team's deliverable, product or service as one indivisible whole. If one aspect of the product fails, *They* consider it a faulty product.

In Chapter 1, this wholeness was defined as that which supports *flow*, or optimal experience. The psychology of optimal experience provides a model for an individual to attain the extremely harmonious state of *flow*, leading to wholeness in the moment. A person, (*Me*), can be

thoroughly engaged in an activity when a tangible goal exists, when there is clear and immediate feedback, and when there is a proper balance between challenge and skill. These three facets of an experience are dependent on each other and at any moment can be thwarted by the surrounding environment.

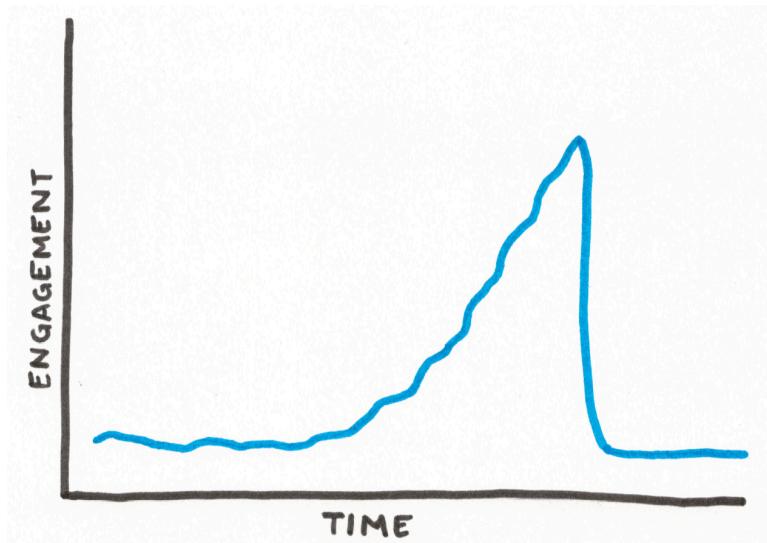
Just as an optimal experience depends on the context of the moment, the seven principles are interdependent and depend on the relationships of the participants. A unique combination of self-awareness and methods of communication is required to promote peace of mind based on the relationship *Me* has with *Me*, *We*, and *They*. Harmonious interactions with *Me* and *We* are very different than harmonious interactions with *They*.

Most directly, the principles play an important role in promoting harmony and peace of mind in the workplace. When *Me* and *We* are in harmony, it is much easier to meet expectations, understand how things are going, and create a high-quality product. This harmonic environment will be characterized by being free of distraction, valuing genuine collaboration, understanding how the individual parts within a system are related, and knowing and accepting personal lines of responsibility.

Remember the story of Alex from Chapter 6? Alex was the software developer who began his career focused and productive, but eventually got caught up in a tornado of activity. Since he worked in a chaotic environment, it was difficult for him to focus and get into *flow*. This doesn't mean that he was never in a *flow* state, but the frequency and duration of these experiences were minimal.

Before implementing the Harmonics Way principles, Alex was able to attain a *flow* state if he knew his goal (things should work as expected), if he knew how things were going (feedback), and if he was comfortable enough to maintain a balance between challenge and skill (quality). However, he did not operate in a distraction-free environment, did not entirely embrace *his* complexity, and may not have been working with anyone else.

Early in his understanding of the Harmonics Way, Alex decided to track his level of engagement throughout the workday. The graph in Figure 9.1 below illustrates what he discovered. He was able to eventually get into a *flow* state, but because of his environment, it took considerable effort and did not last long.



*Figure 9.1: Engagement over time **before** implementing Harmonics Way principles*

As Alex began to implement the Harmonics Way principles, he tracked his level of engagement a second time and graphed the results shown in Figure 9.2 below. Alex was surprised to discover that his level of engagement dramatically changed. Although he continued to have interruptions throughout the day and meetings to attend, his overall level of engagement significantly increased. Applying the seven Harmonics Way principles enabled Alex to consistently attain a state of *flow*, and to sustain it for an extended period of time.

While the Harmonics Way principles are very personal, they can also guide interactions with teams, customers, clients, products, and services. For example, goals come with expectations. Each business sponsor or client brings expectations of how a product or service will facilitate accomplishing a goal. Team members have expectations of

their teammates. Customers expect smooth transitions in processes. Ideally, these expectations will align such that when the team is successful, customers achieve their goals as well. Another way of saying this is that *We* has expectations of *Me* that will contribute to *We*'s goal of helping *They* achieve their goal. In a high-functioning system, things work as expected.

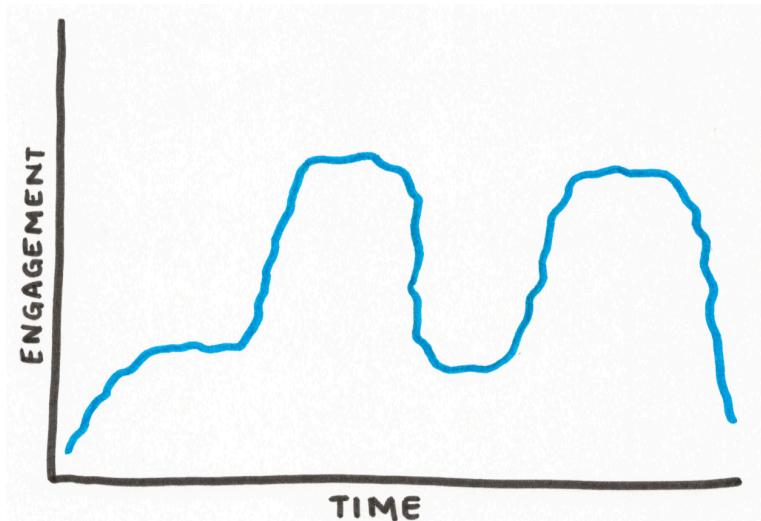


Figure 9.2: Engagement over time *after* implementing Harmonics Way principles

Proper feedback is also important to a high functioning system. When an individual always knows how things are going, opportunities for an optimal experience become more prevalent. Similarly, when a team or customer always knows how things are going, situational awareness increases and anxiety is reduced. While *We* or *They* may not like the current situation, knowing how things are going is still more harmonious for them than not knowing. *They* want to understand how the product or service is contributing to the stated goal (expectations).

When a team, product, or service promotes engagement, control, or flow, *They* perceive the quality as high. When *They* experience anxiety, boredom, or apathy toward a product or service, the perceived quality is low. Since the product or service is one indivisible whole, a high-quality experience will have quality baked in.

As previously stated, the 7 principles presented in this book are interrelated, interdependent, and, at times, tangled around each other in intricate ways. The following sections briefly offer some insight into these interconnections. It is important to keep in mind that these are just examples. *Me* and *We* must experiment with the principles and discover the tactics that work within each specific environment.

## **Things Should Work as Expected**

People bring expectations to interactions with products and services, as well as with other people. Managing these expectations is important for high-quality interactions. It is vital for *Me* and *We* to understand the expectations of *We* and *They*, and to clearly communicate reasonable, attainable expectations.

High-quality interactions also develop trust among the participants. *They* expect to be able to purchase a product or service from a trustworthy source and use it without failure. When the quality *They* expect is delivered, the trust afforded to *Me* and *We* increases.

*They*, as clients, expect integrity in *We*'s relationship and deliverables. *They* expect *We* to be engaged with their problems and anticipate their needs. *They* expect *We* to bring expertise, to advise, and to guide them to a great solution.

*They*, as users or consumers of a product, expect simplicity, cohesiveness, and clear, timely feedback.

*We* expects to have access to the right tools and a distraction-free environment so *We* can be productive and accomplish team goals.

*We* expects to trust our teammates' output. Solid teams foster a trusting atmosphere, allowing members to challenge the output of a teammate to ensure the quality and integrity of the deliverable.

*We* expects to know how each team member contributes to the overall outcome of a project and how the individual contributions are related.

*Me*, *We*, and *They* all carry expectations, and when the other six principles are in place, it is likely that things will work as expected.

## **Always Know How Things are Going**

*We* and *They* expect feedback from *Me* and *We*; they want to know how things are going. Without timely, informative feedback, *We* and *They* may feel anxious and worry about the performance of the team, product, or service. Observation and feedback provide vital pieces of information for *We* and *They*'s peace of mind.

In a team setting, a services industry, or any work setting in which quality depends on the functioning of systems, it is much easier to diagnose and respond quickly to problems within a process. The sooner you can identify a failure within a process, the sooner you can adjust quickly as needed. A key to diagnosing problems within a process or system is knowing how things are going.

Without solid understanding, people tend to create their own stories to fill in the gap. These stories can lead to distraction. *Me* and *We* can minimize the distractions related to the unknown by providing relevant, regular feedback.

*They*, as clients, expect relevant, regular updates and feedback at appropriate times and intervals. *They* hold an expectation of transparency and clarity in *We*'s communication. When *We* frames the updates and feedback in the context of *They*'s goals and expectations, it greatly enhances *They*'s situational awareness and facilitates clearer communication of progress toward the goal; *They* always know how things are going.

## **Quality is Baked In**

The way *They* experience your product or service has a quality. *They* may be thrilled with the quality, especially when considered against other values such as price. Typically, *We* and *They* never expect low quality, but everyone has expectations of quality based on some value. *They* judge *Me* and *We*, so it is imperative that *They* think highly of you, your product, or your service.

One primary method of understanding how others perceive quality is through research. By regularly inquiring on how things are going, *Me*

and *We* can understand what is important and valued by *We* and *They*. The quality of the experience can then be adjusted for improvement.

Once expectations have been established and methods for understanding how *They* judge quality are in place, it is vital to perform each step within a work process properly and with attentiveness. It becomes very difficult to add quality at the end of a product or service delivery process.

Keep in mind that quality is the whole experience. That which produces harmony for *We* and *They* is perceived as high quality. That which disrupts their peace of mind is perceived as low quality. Ensuring quality within the individual parts of a system, or steps in a process, supports the overall integrity of the system.

For *Me* to sustain quality work, there must be a distraction-free environment. Proper focus and conscientiousness to a work process are bolstered by calmness. As Csikszentmihalyi describes in his book *Flow*<sup>1</sup>, when *Me* is fully engaged in a task, that individual is likely performing at their highest potential and quality work naturally flows.

The focus and attentiveness that *Me* brings to work when engaged at an optimal level, may lead *We* to discover the most effective and efficient processes. These processes will be further tuned when *We* discovers informative quality measures and regularly tracks those measures. When work products or processes provide proper feedback, *We* can be aware of quality without much effort. As *We* operates at a sustained level of excellence, *They* expect the product or service to “just work.”

### **Always Know How the Parts Relate to the Whole**

It is difficult to fully appreciate *They*'s expectations without understanding how those expectations fit within a larger context. This larger context is easier to grasp when the underlying architecture is apparent. *Me* and *We* need to ensure that the integrity of the design of the system is always preserved, and verify that the right thing is delivered. Once this is verified, clearly communicating the basic architecture to *We* and *They* becomes paramount.

When *We* and *They* understand how the parts relate to the whole, the feedback provided by a unique process is more meaningful, and may reveal more about the state of the system. This information provides insight into how to adjust and solve problems.

*They*, as a client, want to understand how issues or problems relate to the entire deliverable and how the issues might impact the system. It is vital for *Me* and *We* to craft communication that will bring *They* out of the whirlwind of the day and into a focused conversation.

To prepare for such a conversation, *We* must consider processes, underlying architectures, and be able to quickly and clearly communicate the effects of changes. With proper diagnostics and information, *We* can present a coherent message to *They* that facilitates a meaningful exchange.

### **Interaction should be Distraction Free**

The complex problems that *Me* attempts to solve often have many parts and require a distraction free environment to fully grasp.

Working on such problems with a great deal of focus can lead *Me* into a state of *flow*. These *flow* states are not only some of the happiest moments in a person's life, they are also the state of mind in which a person is most productive. To regularly experience *flow*, *Me* needs to minimize internal and external distractions.

When each *Me* on a team is able to complete a task without interruption, *We* can find *flow* as well. The shared experience of *flow* is a powerful catalyst for both enabling personal happiness and promoting highly efficient and effective teams. One way that *Me* and *We* can limit external distractions is to have planned times for feedback and interaction as well as planned times for focus.

Encouraging everyone on a team to use a time-boxing approach such as the Pomodoro Technique and respecting each person's focused time will create a very positive and productive environment.

While you can work hard to promote peace of mind for yourself (*Me*) and your team (*We*), when you interact with *We* and *They*, you enter their whirlwind of activity. Surviving this whirlwind with your peace of mind intact is easier if you keep these things in mind:

- *They* expect your undivided attention even when *They* are distracted.
- *They* expect you to value their time and not waste it.
- *They* expect focused communication from *Me* and *We*.
- *They* stay focused when informative messages are delivered at appropriate times.

## **Things Go Better when Done with Others**

Working closely with *We* and *They* is vital to the successful delivery of any product or service and will require significant, sustained coordination and attention. *We* should promote open communication among team members and attempt to answer team members' questions in a timely fashion. Interactions with *We* should take precedence over outside communications as much as possible. With this in mind, it is important to talk with *We* and *They* to discover roles, goals, and expectations for communication. Knowing the type and the frequency of feedback that is meaningful to *We* and *They* will help you promote everyone's peace of mind.

Additionally, *We* should identify representatives of all members of *They* and invite them to actively engage in the delivery process as much as possible. Actively engaging *We* and *They* to gain their insights into what is important to them will help you improve your deliverables. As *Me* and *We* understand more of what *They* expect, *Me* and *We* are better equipped to meet that expectation.

However, just because something is important to *We* or *They* doesn't mean *Me* should be distracted by it. For example, a senior executive within your company may come to you with a question. Since you want to impress the executive you may be tempted to stop your current task and try to quickly answer the question. By talking with the executive, and setting an expectation for when the question should be answered, you can avoid an immediate distraction and plan time to focus on the question. With this focus, you have time to deliver a high-quality answer, potentially leading to a better reputation than a quick answer would.

## **Embrace Your Complexity and No One Else's**

When you offer a product or service to *They*, it is essential to remember that *They* expect you to take on the complexity of understanding the product or service, know the risks or issues associated with deliverables, and communicate these issues in a way that allows *They* to provide guidance and direction as needed.

*They* offload the technical complexity of a problem related to a product or service, but retain the domain knowledge to implement the solution in their environment. *They* should embrace domain direction and decisions, and shift the technical complexity to the product or service. This enables *We* to embrace the technical complexity, which is the value that the product or service provides.

While members of *We* may be domain experts, or become domain experts in the course of delivering a product or service, *We* should continue to defer to *They* as appropriate. For some service industries, providing guidance, direction, or feedback to *They* may be *We*'s responsibility. However, what *They* choose to do with the information is up to them.

Unfortunately, there are times when *They* have unreasonable expectations. *Me* and *We* may need to remind *We* and *They* of lines of responsibility and complexity, and help them embrace their complexity. However, if you provide a product or service and *They* do not embrace their complexity, it will leak onto you and become your complexity. Great opportunity is discovered when a customer does not embrace complexity and you can help.

## **Conclusion**

The Harmonics Way is not an easy path. It will take hard work to implement and follow the seven principles outlined in this book. Be persistent and allow the principles to grow in *Me* and radiate out to *We*. There is no solid starting place, though it will be easiest for you to begin with *Me*. Maybe you need to use the Pomodoro Technique to help yourself simply focus a little more. Maybe a difficult conversation with your team regarding your current workload is in

order. Regardless of where you begin, start small, simple, and strategic.

It is important to understand the interplay of the seven principles and how each principle can be incorporated into daily work life. As they grow, you will likely discover that the principles apply to many aspects of work and life, eventually taking on a life of their own. Over time, and with persistence, you will successfully begin to promote peace of mind for *Me*, *We* and *They*.

For more on The Harmonics Way, please visit [HarmonicsWay.com](http://HarmonicsWay.com).



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