Who Gets What

Communication and Your War for Social Reality

Benjamin Rubinger
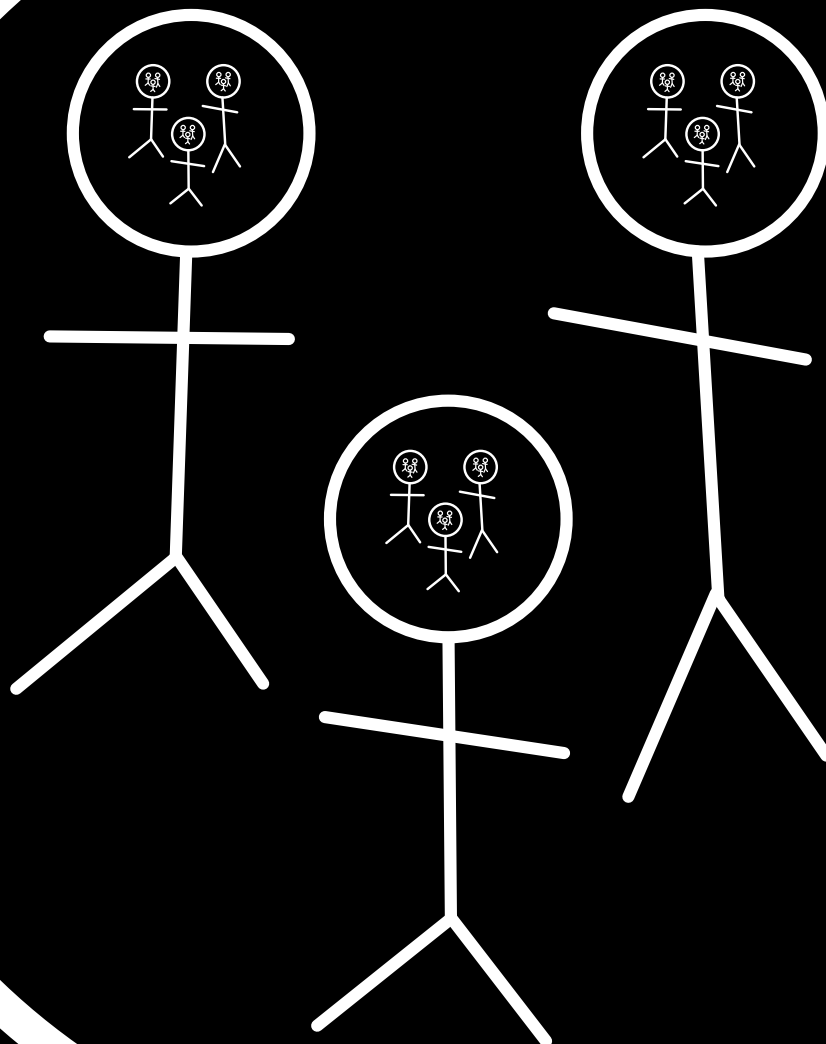
Contents

Who Gets What

Communication and
Your War for Social Reality

Benjamin Rubinger

Estimated Reading Time: 6 hours

Read Who Gets What online

Download Who Gets What PDF

Download Who Gets What EPUB

Read x.com articles of Who Gets What

Discuss Who Gets What

Introduction

Welcome to Who Gets What. You communicate throughout your life, and you have probably formed your own idea of what communication is, and what it is for. You might naturally think that communication is for positive things, like building relationships, expressing yourself, transferring information, having fun and cooperating. While communication can do these things, the intuitive view is wrong. Your actual behavior does not match your conscious ideas. When people communicate, the positive things are what they tend to think about. Exceptions and counterexamples to the intuitive theory, things like deception, power dynamics, status seeking, political conflict and others, seem to be mistakes and inefficiencies. Life isn't perfect.

But the only reason you can read this is that your parents survived to produce you. In a sense, survival and reproduction are the only things that matter to living things. As you live your life, you aren't always thinking about survival and reproduction themselves, they are not typical human obsessions. Instead, you are probably more interested in relationships, food, achievements, status, money, sex, entertainment.

The intuitive view of communication is wrong, and this book will show you a more useful and true model. Communication developed in the history of life long before conscious thought or humans. It developed, persisted and spread because it gave survival and reproductive advantages to species that communicated over those that did not. In the same way that you consciously care about relationships or money, but life is actually about survival and reproduction, communication feels like it is about expression and cooperation, but it is still entirely about aiding survival and reproduction in the unavoidable and endless competition for limited benefits. All of the exceptions and mistakes that don't fit with the intuitive view are essential in this guide to who gets what. Let's start again, with what communication is.

Communication is the attempt to transfer thoughts from one mind to another. It is expensive and full of mistakes. Miscommunication is the default, not the exception. So, why do it? People's needs are in conflict, which can be resolved by force, but force is even worse than communication. Communication is the superior alternative to force to resolve conflicts, and allows coordination. Communication is the basis of human success, the pen is mightier than the sword. Communication changes the world, for better and worse, by creating and distributing benefits. We communicate to decide who gets what benefits. You need benefits to survive, your life depends on your communication. You are in a forever war for benefits in social reality.

What This Book Covers

This is a textbook of social physics and an instruction manual. It describes what communication is, interpretation, communication tactics, relationships, power, status, the fundamental communication strategies, social groups, politics and a master plan to win your war. Topics are translated into common-sense explanations, functional models of social systems. I use detailed tables to break these systems down into manageable parts, so you can see how to fix them when they go wrong and learn how to make them work for you, piece by piece.

What Benefits Will You Get from Reading?

We naturally communicate using our intuition, but we don't really know what we are doing, or why. This book helps you understand what we are doing overall and in detail, protect your interests and achieve your goals in life. I can't tell you what to say, but I can show you how saying works. My goal is to effectively inform you about how we use communication to pursue goals. I want to help you make your dreams come true.

Ethics of Communication

Communication can both help and harm. Knowledge about how to harm can both do harm and protect from harm. It was always this way, whether I describe it or not. In my opinion, our collective ignorance and misuse of communication is a heavy cost and a significant risk to our future potential. I believe that this work will be a net benefit. I want the best for humanity and I am against injustice.

Mechanics of Communication

The Production of Communication

Communication is intuitive to us, but there is a lot to it. This is a good thing, it means that communication can be a powerful tool to get you what you want. The following is an overall description of an individual process of communication, starting from the outside world, entering the mind and producing communication that radiates back out to the world, one cycle. Most parts of the process aren't relevant to analyze at most times, but every part is critical to analyze sometimes.

Phase	System	Description
Reality	Parallel realities, objective reality, social reality	Objective reality is grounded in particles, states, the natural laws of the world. Social reality is shared beliefs, social rules, expectations, conventions, cultures.
Perception	Senses	Collect information from the environment. Lossy, only collects part of the information.
Perception	Attention	Focus on certain sensory information. Lossy and interpretive, only pays attention to part of the information and makes decisions about which information is important.
Perception	Sensory experiences	Combines attended sensory information into sensations, again lossy and interpretive.
Cognition	Experiences and memories	Combines sensations into experiences and memories, lossy and interpretive.
Cognition	Beliefs	Combines experience and memories into basic beliefs, this happened to me. Combines basic beliefs into higher level beliefs, causes, effects, other people's beliefs. Lossy and interpretive. Builds models of objective and social reality.
Cognition	Thoughts and emotions	Subjective operations on beliefs, what you think and feel about your experience

Phase	System	Description
Cognition	Choices and decisions	Voluntary and personal conclusions. Some choices modify your internal beliefs and your models of reality, some initiate external action.
Execution	Intentions	Translate an internal decision into a plan for action, which is interpretive
Execution	Actions	Body executes your intention with action, a performance, which is also interpretive
Reality	Parallel realities	Objective changes in particles and states, subjective changes in shared beliefs

Production of Communication Example of "Look, a butterfly!"

Parallel realities	Particles, states, laws and social reality
Human senses	Neural activity
Attention	Selected neural activity
Sensory experience	Parts of butterfly wing, floating and flapping, smell of flowers, sound of wind
Experience	A sunny day with a flying butterfly
Beliefs	I am outside on a sunny day having a nice walk and see a butterfly
Thoughts	I am surprised to see a butterfly and want to say so. Exclaiming that I see a butterfly is socially acceptable.
Choices	I will exclaim that I see a butterfly
Intentions	Speak Look, a butterfly!
Actions	Body performs Look, a butterfly!
Physical reality	Body motions and vibrations in air, cultural interpretation of speech

A social interaction is a continuous and iterative execution of the production of communication. Social interactions are natural, rich and complex. We don't tend to analyze them fully, but sometimes we should. We tend to socially interact reactively and intuitively, most of our communication choices are subconscious or ad hoc. Our intuitions sometimes lead us to pointless waste, conflict, lost opportunities and self-destruction. That is why we need to better understand communication, override our intuitions, analyze what we are doing, why, and what we can do better.

Language

Communication is rooted in belief. Belief is the atom of social reality. Thoughts are generated in part from beliefs. Language can express thoughts in statements. Understanding statements can reconstitute the thoughts in the

receiver, which can change their beliefs. Language is the tool of communication to transmit thoughts across minds.

Language itself is also formed from beliefs. A language is not a personal belief, a language is a changing set of shared beliefs. People need to communicate a thought but lack the words to express it. They form a word to match the thought, the word enters the language by spreading into a new shared belief that this word means that. Now the language can express new thoughts. The language changes with the changes to the shared beliefs. Language itself is an objective in the war for social reality and the competition for benefits.

The Development of Language from the Origins of Life

Language development	Example
Action reaction	You invade my territory, I push you out of my territory
Posture and vibe, body language	When you approach my territory, I make a defensive display
Sign	I draw a line in the sand defining my territory
Vocalizations	I walk around my territory and grunt to declare this is my territory
Facial expression	When you approach my territory, I face you and frown
Gesture	Point to me, point to the ground. Point to you, point away.
Calls	Awoo, I am approaching your territory. Grunt, this is my territory.
Pictogram	Drawing on the sand or painting on the cave wall
Language	What we are doing right now. Waves.

Body Language

Communication developed in the medium of in-person interaction, and can involve all aspects of an interaction. Other media, such as this writing, are extremely limited in how they express thoughts, when compared to real-life interaction. A lot of what people communicate in-person is not in the words they say. It is often less important what you say, it is more important how you say it. Body language is one category of ways to communicate beyond words. There are several dimensions of body language.

Dimension	Description	Consistent	Inconsistent
Position	Where is the speaker located relative to the listener. Near or far? Above, equal, below? In front of, beside, behind? Approaching, fixed, receding?	Approaching close, Are you ok?	Receding, Are you ok?

Dimension	Description	Consistent	Inconsistent
Posture	The overall arrangement of the speaker's body. Standing, sitting, kneeling, lying down. Upright, tense, relaxed, slouching.	Standing straight, What can I do for you?	Lying down, slouching, What can I do for you?
Gesture	Specific positions or movements of the speaker's limbs. Pointing, waving, nodding your head, rolling your eyes, turning your feet away.	Arms open wide, Good to see you!	Arms folded across chest, Good to see you.
Expression	Smaller positions or movements of the speaker's body. Smiling, frowning, raising an eyebrow, tapping a finger.	Eyebrows up, mouth open, You did a good job!	Scowling, frowning, You did a good job.

How you say things has dimensions beyond body language, things such as timing, when you choose to say something, your tone, pitch, speed, emphasis, rhythm, breathing, volume, physical contact, scent, even what you are wearing and what else you are doing at the time can totally change the meaning of the words you say.

Language Games

Games

Life is a game, it has rules, you make moves, your moves have consequences according to the rules and result in victories or defeats. Life is really a collection of games, not just one. A game is only a set of rules. The study of how players can interact with the rules and which strategies win or lose is called game theory. You don't have to study game theory, but you do have to know which life strategies work or don't to get you what you want. This book catalogues the major communication strategies and how to play with and against them. In any game there are one or more strategies that are the best at winning. Against a given set of players with fixed strategies, a different strategy may be the best. If the rules of the game change, the game changes and the best strategies change.

Win, Lose, Sums

One important aspect of any game is its sum. The sum is how much is gained or lost overall by playing the game. If there is a fixed amount of winners or benefits that remain the same before and after the game, that is zero sum, and players compete to distribute the fixed amount of benefits. Some win, some lose, this is a win lose game. If a group of friends are eating together and there is one piece of food left, they can play rock, paper, scissors to distribute the last piece of food to the winner. Playing the game does not create or destroy the food, zero sum.

If the total amount of benefits decrease by playing the game, like if two armies fight over territory, and both armies lose soldiers and destroy some of the territory in the conflict, one may win and one may lose, it's a win lose game, but it is negative sum. One player gains, but overall society loses because the total benefits are reduced, so society wants to prevent negative-sum games. The extreme form of negative sum is when both players lose, a lose lose game. Both society and individuals want to prevent lose lose games, but people still sometimes play them. One simple form of lose lose is the expression, if I can't have it, you can't have it. Imagine you have a sandwich and someone wants to take your sandwich from you. If they succeed in taking it, then that is zero sum, redistributing the sandwich. But if you don't want them to take your sandwich, and can't otherwise prevent them from taking it, you can throw the sandwich on the ground and stomp on it, destroying the benefit of the sandwich, lose lose.

Finally, there are positive-sum games, where benefits can go up by playing. These can be win lose with the winner gaining more than the loser loses, or even win win. Positive-sum games are the basis of society. Understanding

how games can be positive sum requires understanding the production of benefits, but one important source of positive-sum games is gain from trade. Money itself is uniform, there is no way to trade money to create more of it directly, but human needs are diverse. If I have water but I am hungry, and if you have food but you are thirsty, then we can trade our water and food to both become better off. It's not just physical trade, we all need relationships and other intangible things, too. Unlike money, our preferences and needs are diverse, and through different products and services, we can trade to create benefit, win win, cooperate, positive sum.

Benefits

People want to survive and thrive, and to do that we need certain things. The things that help us survive and thrive are benefits.

Communication is only about benefits.

The natural world produces benefits, but they are rare. We have developed civilization to artificially produce more benefits, and one use of communication is to produce benefits. Once the benefits are produced, there is the challenge of distributing them. The primary use of language is to negotiate the distribution of benefits. Note that this negotiation is negative sum, it does not produce benefits, it wastes benefits and sometimes destroys production.

Benefits are not limited to tangibles such as food or shelter, or immediate intangibles such as money or safety. Benefits include less immediate intangibles such as books that change people's beliefs, supporting a friend in need to improve your friendship, acts of charity to strangers that create goodwill, or actions that increase your reputation with yourself.

What about things like genuine expressions of joy, peace, kindness, generosity or caring, without expectation of payment? These are obviously not part of some ruthless competition for benefits. Good parents don't care for their children with an expectation of reciprocation or profit. Friends aren't accounting for every benefit gained or lost between them. Ruthlessness is a quality you find more in zero-sum or negative-sum games, because in those games, it's either you or me, we can't both win. In a positive-sum game, cooperation can be better than competition. We can succeed together in win win, or trade sacrifices to overall get ahead in positive-sum win lose. Joy and peace are benefits you pay to yourself, while kindness, generosity, caring are useful acts within cooperation, and in fact work to get you more benefits without immediate payment.

There is no single way to communicate. This book covers the fundamental communication strategies that broadly work to get more benefits in certain ways at certain times. People find and adopt these communication strategies because they work better than the other things they try. These strategies work because of human nature and the physical laws. The strategies remain the same because those also remain the same, but the ways that individuals understand and apply these strategies are infinite.

Limits on the Power of Communication

Communication is powerful, yet it has two severe limitations. The fruits of communication can be stolen by force, and distribution of benefits is meaningless without production. That means there are two things potentially more important than communication, deterrence in the use of force, and increasing the production of benefits. Mass production can overwhelm even unfair distribution of benefits. For example, rich people can have as many smartphones as they want, but there are still plenty of phones for the rest of us, and ours are about as good as theirs. The modern world has found ways to mass produce many things, but that drives scarcity and competition to the remaining scarce benefits. There remain many situations where force is deterred and mass production is not yet possible, things such as real estate, specialized professional services, or friendships. For these benefits, communication is king.

Dimensions of Communication

Communication has multiple dimensions.

Dimension	Description	Example
Facts	Information about objective reality with objective accuracy	This is text on a page

Dimension	Description	Example
Beliefs	Information about subjective facts such as beliefs. Whether someone has a belief is objective, why they believe is subjective.	I think you are good looking
Emotions	Information about feelings, which are subconscious reactions to beliefs.	I am so happy for you! (Then why are you crying?)
Intent	Information about what someone is trying to do	I have your best interests at heart
Signaling	Information about social status and affiliations	Did you know that I went to Harvard? (I did not)
Reputation	Information about group evaluation	We all think that what Susie did was terrible. They should kick her out.

Simple communication is purely information transfer about objective reality. Almost no communication is simple. If you focus on simple communication, you forfeit conflicts in the other dimensions and will likely lose benefits. Communication is a primary method for playing social games to get benefits. Typical communication emphasizes the non-simple dimensions and has a loose relationship to objective fact. Collecting and communicating about objective facts is one thing that people do, but expressing non-simple things and constructing messaging is a lot of the work that people do.

Messaging, Esoteric, Exoteric

Messaging is the process of designing communication for maximum advantage, using every dimension including fact, belief, emotion, intent, signaling and reputation. Communication has a speaker and a listener. Individuals within a group, insiders, can communicate about the messaging their group will speak to listeners outside of the group, outsiders. The discussions among insiders are called esoteric statements, and the messaging for outsiders are exoteric statements. The society of mind within a person has esoteric internal discussion to construct exoteric messaging for people outside the person.

An example of internal esoteric communication. They are looking at me! What should I say? Should I tell them what they want to hear? No, they will see what I am doing immediately. Should I tell the truth? No, that won't get me what I want...

When a person is part of a group, the group has esoteric discussion about how to message to outsiders. Esoteric discussion is a social calculation of how to communicate to maximize benefits, followed by exoteric statements that execute the plan. Then outsider groups have esoteric discussions about how to message other groups, the chain of esoteric to exoteric continues without end.

Conversation

A conversation is an interaction that attempts to create, negotiate or trade benefits. In a conversation, the participants are called parties, and they send messages to each other through a channel. A message is the physical form of a statement. A channel is the physical medium that transmits the message from the sender to the receiver.

Interaction is not just a bunch of actions, and it is not thoughtless reactions. An action becomes a message transmitted through the channel to a receiver, the receiver thoughtfully responds to that message, the previous sender receives the response and responds to the response. Interaction is not action action action, interaction is response response response. Interaction is a sequence of responses. All conversations are interactions, but the word interaction focuses on actions and consequences, while the word conversation focuses on the responsive transfer of thoughts to achieve goals.

You might assume that conversation requires talking, but it doesn't. People can converse using paper letters, wrestling, and other actions that are not called conventional language. People can come to understand each other's

actions without ever meeting or saying a word. Conversation subsumes negotiation, all negotiation is conversation, but not all conversation is negotiation. Some of conversation is trade, delivering benefits such as information about physical or social reality, entertainment, social connection, etc.

True conversation is both cooperative and a social contest. When both parties cooperate, that is a two-sided conversation, and is voluntary, even if they disagree about the subject. Conversation can fail in many ways and degenerate to become one-sided, or fail into physical contest. Even if the parties to a conversation totally disagree on the subject they are discussing, if they both acceptably respond to conversational cues, they are cooperating to converse. A party to a conversation can refuse to talk, called stonewalling, or they may otherwise not follow conversational cues. In both cases, the event is one-sided, not a conversation.

What are conversational cues? Conversational cues are messages that direct the conversation. For example, if someone approaches you, addresses you and starts talking, that is a cue that they want to start a conversation with you. If you were conversing with them, and they stop talking and move away from you, that is a cue that they want to end the conversation. If someone cues you to start a conversation, and you avoid them, you are cuing that you do not want to talk. If someone wants to force you to talk, their social force may convince you, or the conflict over talking may degenerate to physical conflict, such as fighting or an arrest.

Conversation is partially under your control and partially not under your control. You may have a specific conscious objective for a conversation, but your subconscious, the circumstances, and the other party may not comply. All of your actions are not fully conscious, and thus not fully under your voluntary control. Whether or not the conscious you says anything, other people can read your subconscious body language to talk with the subconscious you.

A one-sided expression, monologue, has a start and a finish and can be represented linearly. This linear string of words itself is an example. A two-sided conversation that has already happened, a dialogue, can also be represented linearly, by naming each party and listing who said what in order. The script of a play is an example. But a dialogue that is not predetermined, the potential futures of a conversation that hasn't completed yet, is not linear. There are many possible things each party could say, and many possible responses. The branching structure of potential future statements is called a conversation tree. If they say this, I should say that. But if they say this other thing, I should respond with that other thing.

People who are well prepared for a conversation can respond effortlessly to every actual situation in the conversation, because they have fully-considered responses for every branch that the conversation actually takes. Sometimes a conversation proceeds smoothly until someone takes a branch that the other party did not prepare for, and you can observe the other party switch, or fail to switch, from their prepared conversation tree to a real-time attempt to form a response. People who engage in creative conversation prefer to diverge from the prepared conversation tree as quickly as possible, while people who engage in uncreative conversation try to keep the conversation within the prepared conversation tree as much as possible. These two styles are playing semi-incompatible language games, they can understand what the other person is saying, but they won't like it, and will avoid talking to them in the future.

The language game of conversation, by definition, has rules. Some rules are necessary, both parties have to speak languages that the other party can understand, or else the conversation can not take place. Some rules are socially defined and can be broken, often including rules around conversational cues and norms, standard expectations about what people think and should do. If you are saying something and someone asks you to stop and repeat a part of what you just said, this is a basic norm that you should comply with. You should stop proceeding with what you were saying, go back and repeat the part that they requested. This is following conversational cues and cooperating. A two-sided conversation requires functional transmission of messages, if the other person briefly couldn't hear you, that move of the game did not occur, so repeating what you previously said allows the game to proceed.

There is also typically a norm of taking turns, with one person speaking, the other person listening, and the expectation that the speaker will at some point stop speaking and give the listener their turn to respond. This is necessary for most games, most games cannot be won on the first turn. Typically, speaking longer gives the speaker an advantage in the game, so speaking turns should generally be equal. Different conversations lend themselves to different lengths of speaking times.

Interrupting a speaker by speaking over them is usually violating a norm, because it is difficult to speak and listen at the same time, causing both parties to fail to advance in the language game, wasting time and effort. If a speaker doesn't take turns, or takes more than their fair share of speaking time, or makes several dependent points that the listener rejects, interruption may be cooperative. In japanese culture, certain parts of conversations are so tightly scripted that it is common and polite to speak over each other. Both parties already know that entire part of the

script, and what the polite response will be, and it is more polite to speak over the other person with the proper response than to wait for them to finish saying it, and then make them wait for you to say the scripted response afterward.

The essential elements of any conversation

- More than one party

- Parties are in overlapping spacetime. Otherwise, physical interaction of signals is impossible.

- Has a start and an end. Conversation is a temporal phenomenon.

- Communication channel. A physical medium to transmit messages, otherwise messages can not be received.

- Communication protocol. Allows parties to choose and play compatible language games, to form mutually legible messages.

- Listening. All parties receive messages from the channel.

- Cognition. Recipients accurately interpret messages into similar thoughts as the sender, understanding messages and building coherent thoughts on top of those thoughts to form a response.

- Expressing. Parties transform responses into messages and transmit them through the channel.

- Surprise, unknown or unexpected information. Progress is essential to conversation, totally predictable statements are not progressive, no longer interactive, not a conversation.

These basic conversation requirements allow conversation to occur at all, but these conversations can be unproductive, meaningless, wasteful, unpleasant, or escalate to violence. Beyond the basic possibility of conversation, what elements are essential to create great conversations, ones that are productive, meaningful, efficient, pleasant, ones that realize the potential of communication as the superior alternative to violence?

The essential elements of great conversations

- Directed interest in the other party. Even if the topic of a conversation is factual, people are the only meaning makers. The facts must ultimately serve the interests of a party to the conversation. To reliably serve a party's interests, the other parties have to know what those interests are, which requires being interested in knowing about the other party.

- Cognitive empathy and perspective taking. Each party to a conversation is necessarily different. Sometimes, these differences are essential to making progress. Parties must be able to find, understand and apply the differences between the parties to respond effectively.

- Find achievable, meaningful goals. The parties may not necessarily find the same goals, not agree with each other about the goals, or even not be aware of the goals, but a great conversation finds goals.

- Conversation awareness, cue-responsive adaptability. Conversations have very different purposes and structures, and can change purposes and structures during the course of the conversation. No fixed set of rules applies to all parts of all conversations. Conversation protocols use cues as dynamic signaling rules. Cues signal parties to change pace, depth, take turns and more. A great conversation is interactive, cooperative, and cooperation requires following compatible protocols. Conversation protocols require responding effectively to cues. Responding effectively to cues does not mean blind obedience.

- Presence, follow and advance the conversation. Parties synchronize their thoughts and advance their thoughts together to interact, by definition. To a degree, higher synchronization and faster advancement means better conversation.

- Operational, tactical and strategic. A great conversation functions as an interaction, the responses function to advance the topic at hand, and the topics advance the goals of the conversation, including the goal to find goals. A great conversation works. Yes, even phatic, emotional, creative, or exploratory conversations serve their purposes.

- Efficiency. Starting and ending a conversation at an effective place and time, in an effective way. Saying only what needs to be said. A wrongly narrow view of efficiency prohibits exploration, emotion or style, it considers them inefficient. But some amount of exploration, emotion and style is efficient. The perfect amount of exploration is unknown, but conversation is an imperfect information game with scarce resources, so there is

an efficient explore-exploit ratio. Casual, unstructured, creative or playful conversations can be efficient as part of a coherent strategy, whether intentional or not.

- Create benefits by achieving a meaningful goal

Conversation is a discovery process, where each party privately hypothesizes about what every party has and wants. Importantly, you don't fully know yourself, you know neither fully what you have nor what you want, and you know even less about others. But each party in a conversation forms hypotheses about what the parties have and want, and then tests those hypotheses by making offers and bids. An offer is a price a seller states that they would accept for a trade, and a bid is the price a buyer states that they would pay for a trade. Conversational cues also operate the trading functions of a conversation, to indicate if a party wants to trade, when to make bids and offers, when a bid or offer is accepted or rejected, when to transact the trade, how to execute the transaction, etc.

The information game of a conversation is asymmetric. You know some of the things you have and you want, but other parties might not know what you have or want. And there are plenty of mistakes, things you wrongly think you have or you want, and things you wrongly think you don't have have or don't want, and other parties make similar mistakes. This is very difficult to reconcile. These mistakes and others contribute to the impossibility of perfect communication and the fact of miscommunication being the default.

What is the social contest of conversation? Parties cooperate to converse, and cooperate to achieve goals in conversation, but they compete to contribute more to the conversation and claim more of the credit, and they compete over the benefits that they cooperated to produce.

There is a general skill of conversation, also called the art of conversation. Conversation is creative and open-ended, but it certainly includes narrower skills such as listening, understanding, anticipating, deciding, responding, speaking. The skill of conversation is also the skill of negotiation. Conversation is interactive, but scripts are not. People can create a false impression of their skill of conversation by having an excellent script, but once the conversation diverges from the script, and no script is capable of covering substantial conversation trees, then the conversation requires skill, judgement, interaction, and the difference between someone with conversation skills and someone who only has a script is revealed.

Conversation as a social contest means that conversational benefits are distributed based on skill and luck. Any individual interaction could resolve one way primarily due to luck, but over many interactions, the benefits will accrue primarily due to skill. Your relative skill in conversation and your bargaining power determines your negotiating power, which determines the distribution of benefits from the conversation, which defines your benefits.

Conversations have multiple states. An initial state where the parties negotiate how to start the conversation, an exploratory state where they probe for what they could give and get, the negotiation of bids and offers until they agree to trade, an execution of a trade. The conversation can change states quickly, or stay in the same state for a long time, loop around states repeatedly, or mix multiple states. Long established relationships often skip certain states, such as introduction, performativity, probing.

State	Description	Example
Preparation	Explore or practice the conversation tree in advance, collect evidence or props, prepare allies or contingencies	What if they don't remember me? I can remind them with this picture. What if they say no to my request? I will ask them what I could do to receive their approval.
Greeting	Cues to start and accept the conversation	Hello. Hello.
Initialization	Negotiate which protocol to start with	How can I help you?
Search for achievable goals	The exploration of opportunities for each party	What do you want to talk about? I don't know, what do you want to talk about?

State	Description	Example
Change protocol	Negotiate switching to a different protocol	No need to be so formal, we are friends!
Change topic	Introduce a topic of conversation. All parties have to agree on what the topic is.	I wanted to ask you about that. No, wait, we haven't decided the previous point yet.
Polite and performative	Follow cultural scripts, conform to social expectations, tolerate rudeness, prioritize process, harmony or reputation over results. Parties patiently tolerate mistakes, violations.	I am pleased to meet you. No, the pleasure is mine.
Pursue goals	Explore the topic, attempt to solve the problem	I would like to do it this way. What do you think?
Interjections, humor, denial, derision, encouragers	Interactive responses within a turn	. . . and that is when I. . . Oh no, they are going to tell the same story again. . . Go on, tell it!
Correction, alternatives, backup, reconfirmation, backtrack	Miscommunication and mistakes are common, this is explicit error correction to recover from errors and progress to other states	What did you say? That doesn't sound right. No, that didn't come out right. What I meant to say was. . .
Apology, reconciliation	Steps to recover from more harmful or intentional problems	I am sorry, I was mistaken. I shouldn't have said that. Can you forgive me?
Being direct, dropping pretense	When a party loses patience with politeness or performativity and becomes direct	Stop dancing around it. What are you really saying?
Escalation	Cues that the conversation is breaking down, heading toward failure or physical force	Oh yeah? Say that again.
Exhaustion	One or more parties lose energy or focus to continue	. . . and that's why we have to. . . sigh. . . what was I saying?
Interruption, take a break	Cue to pause the conversation with the intention to resume later	Hold on, something came up, I will be right back.
Resume	Cue to continue the conversation after an interruption	Sorry to keep you waiting. What were we talking about?
Probing	Discussion that seeks to learn information about what the other party has and wants, preparation for negotiation	How has your business going lately? Have you been hiring?

State	Description	Example
Negotiating terms	Making offers and bids, arguing, rejecting and agreeing to terms, introducing claims and evidence to support or contest offers, bids or terms	I paid less for it last week. The market price is higher this week. Come on, I buy from you every week! I can only guarantee prices if we sign a long term agreement.
Closing or rejecting a deal	Determining whether a deal is made or not	Do we have a deal? Yes.
Negotiating fulfillment	A separate round of negotiation, after a deal is made, about how to fulfill the deal within the agreed on terms	When can I receive the goods? The shop is busy this morning, but you can pick them up in the afternoon.
Transacting	All of the communication to execute the deal	Here is my order and the money. Here are the goods, and your receipt.
Summary, conclusion, wrap-up	Cues that this objective, topic or deal is complete, reviewing the previous conversation for omissions or errors	Did I miss anything? That is everything we agreed on.
Post or meta discussion	Comments or discussion about the deal or the conversation	It was a pleasure doing business with you. Next time, I will know to ask if you are busy first.
Invitation to next round	Conversation can continue, expand, cycle indefinitely. When one part of a conversation ends, parties can negotiate what to do next.	What else do you want to talk about?
Farewells	Cues to finish the conversation	That is all I wanted to say, I have got to be going now.
Termination	Cues to end the conversation	Goodbye. Goodbye.

Manners

Politeness is following inconvenient, socially-defined rules to express consideration and accommodate other parties. Manners are your overall level of politeness. Breaking the politeness rules, such as acting for your own convenience, is generally rude, not polite. Because politeness is socially defined, a given behavior may be polite in one culture and rude in another. The inconvenient rules of politeness cause it to be a costly signal, signaling is explained later.

Generally, it is more polite to make yourself more like an object or concept, to avoid the personal or savage aspects of being a human animal. Politeness shifts the focus from your needs to the needs and preferences of the other party. For example, it is often more polite to wear clothing that covers your body and makes your body appear more like an object than an animal, while often one of the rudest things you can do is show your naked butt to someone else. Polite clothing and behavior can help other people to know what functions you serve and how to interact with you, while rude people are poorly dressed, unpredictable and demanding.

Often it is polite to be clean, like a pleasant inanimate object, not dirty or smelly like an animal. It is often polite to be patient and not express your erratic internal emotions. Often it is polite to show that you are not physically threatening or aggressive. For example, the practice of waving your hand at someone as a greeting is polite because it is inconvenient, is very easy for the other person to see, it is unambiguous, so it is easy for the other person to understand, and your open hand shows that you aren't holding a weapon, so it is non-threatening.

Politeness rules are for the benefit of others, you follow certain rules that make the conversation easier for them.

When the other party is a stranger, you don't know who they are or what they are like. This uncertainty makes strangers more dangerous than someone that you know well. The stranger may be violent or easily offended in unexpected ways. Often, people are more polite to people they don't know as a form of personal protection.

This sometimes creates a dynamic where a person is polite to strangers, and rude to their close connections. The lack of politeness, even until rudeness, is a form of social proof that another person is very close to you. You know them very well, and you know whether they are violent or what might offend them. You know them so well, that you can say or do things to them that strangers would not accept. In this dynamic, politeness matches social distance, with greater politeness associated with greater social distance, greater rudeness with closer connection.

On the other hand, the relationships with the highest return for your efforts are your strongest functional relationships. The most effective allocation of your efforts should generally be, the most effort for your closest and most rewarding relationships, and the least effort for more distant relationships. You may follow certain basic politeness rules with strangers, and then show deeper and deeper consideration for those closer to you.

One possible synthesis of these opposing dynamics is showing the greatest care and politeness for your closest social connections, combined with occasional violations of politeness rules that demonstrate how close you are, while you show consistent common courtesy to strangers for your own safety.

Apology

Apology is a social system and a skill to repay relationship debts. A common misunderstanding of apology is that it consists only of saying I am sorry. The naive idea of how apologies work might be that the phrase I am sorry is a magic spell to fix problems. Of course, the words themselves do not solve anything, they are just hot air. The words do signal submission, which is one reason that resistant people refuse to say them. The words take accountability, I did it. Apology is also an admission of fault, which can lead to liability, meaning you might have to pay some of your benefits to others if you admit that you wronged them.

An insincere apology might include the words or a payment, but part of what makes an apology sincere is contrition. Contrition is your belief that what you did was wrong. Contrition is totally separate from feeling bad about what you did, or regret that you were caught. You can avoid feeling bad from seeing the negative consequences of your actions by blinding yourself to the consequences of your actions. And people dislike being caught, which is merely an incentive to avoid getting caught the next time you harm others.

Inconveniently, contrition is a belief, and beliefs are invisible and subjective, so it is difficult to know if another person is contrite. If you wrong someone, then by default, everyone should predict that if a similar situation occurs again, you will do the same thing. The incontrite still think that what they did was right, they would do it again. The evidence of your contrition is your subsequent behavior. Your behavior proves your beliefs, regardless of what you say. Actions speak louder than words. What makes an apology sincere is that you think you were wrong and you take reasonable steps to change your behavior to not do it again.

People are sometimes careless. They might remain recklessly ignorant of how their actions harm others. One part of an effective apology is an accurate explanation of how the apologizer's actions harmed others. The standard of an acceptable explanation is defined by the wronged parties, not by the apologizer. The standards of the apologizer are a conflict of interest.

The Apology Process

- The future apologizer does something wrong.

- A party with standing recognizes the debt and demands an apology. People with standing include someone who was wronged, a third party with relevant responsibilities, or the future apologizer, using self-recognizance.

- Create contrition. I believe that what I did was wrong. The future apologizer reflects on their actions to understand the causes, their choices, the consequences, identifies their faults, and revises their policy.

- The apologizer apologizes to the wronged. This can include a description of what they did, the harms, their responsibility, contrition, identifying their faults, saying sorry, payment, promise to not do it again, improvement program.

- The wronged evaluates the apology. Is the explanation correct? Are the performance and claims plausible? Is the payment sufficient? Is there a revised policy and is the revision likely to work? Overall, is the apology likely to be effective? Does the wronged want to recover their relationship with the apologizer? Accept or

reject the apology. An accepted apology repairs the relationship and creates a promise, a rejection means the relationship remains damaged.

- Apologizer practices and realizes the revised policy. Does the wrong recur or not? If the wrong behavior stops, the apology may have worked.

Why can't the apologizer silently fix their own problem by themselves? They are the only person who can change their behavior. Why do they need to apologize to the wronged, and why do the wronged need to accept the apology? Apology is costly to the apologizer. They can lose time, effort, reputation and other benefits. An apology is a costly signal, part of the value of the signal is the cost. The cost is a disincentive to the apologizer and observers, to deter wrongdoing. But the cost and process still appear to be wasteful, who else benefits from apology?

The system of apology benefits groups and works in repeated social games, apologies are important for ongoing relationships. One function and benefit of an apology is making a promise. An apology includes a promise to the group that the apologizer will try to not do the same wrong again. If no promise is made, then no promise is kept and no promise can be broken. Keeping promises builds trust and improves relationships. Another value of promises is creating violations. Breaking a promise is a violation that groups can punish. Without the promise, there is no violation, and harmful behavior is harder to identify and disincentivize. Apologies increase accountability to individuals for their behavior, counteracting selfish incentives that harm groups. Accountability benefits groups and their members overall. People naturally feel that everything they do is right, until social reality condemns their behavior. Apology closes the feedback loop of social reality.

Apology is for when you understand that you harmed someone else. The apology process more-or-less applies to the reverse situation, when you understand that someone else helped you. When someone helps you, you should be grateful, which you should also address. The process of expressing gratitude can be the same as apology and operate in public, and it is also common for gratitude to be expressed privately. This is why some gifts are announced publicly, and some gifts come in envelopes or wrapping paper, concealing them from public view.

Being unable or unwilling to repay a debt of gratitude can damage a relationship in the same way as being unable or unwilling to apologize. Neglecting or rejecting a debt of gratitude can even be worse than failing to apologize. You may harm someone you don't know well, or harm someone by accident, and they may interpret that event as impersonal, perhaps just some bad luck. But when you do not repay others' kindness, that is returning their personal efforts of kindness with enmity, which is more likely to be considered an insult or an attack. Being self-centered causes mistakes in both directions. Some people agonize over their own bad behavior, because it's about themselves, while the victim may easily move on. And some people disregard the generosity of others, because it's not about themselves, and are surprised when others are offended.

I'm sorry, and thank you, are sometimes taught as magic words, because almost anyone can at least say the words, and they are essential to the processes of apology and gratitude. These processes are essential for sustaining relationships, which are essential for your survival. Few people understand and use these processes effectively, but there is a range of competence from destructive to productive. At worst, there is adding insult to injury, doubling down, harming the relationship even more after a debt is formed. Next is neglecting, or refusing to acknowledge or pay the debt. Then comes acknowledging the debt but not paying it, the empty words of sorry and thank you, without action. Finally, there is acknowledging and paying the debt to various degrees, a proper apology or repayment of gratitude.

Performativity, pretense, kayfabe

Performativity has two versions. One version of performativity is following scripts, performing roles, practicing a ritual or an image. For example, if someone says something they are not supposed to say, sometimes people show performative indignation, How dare you?! They aren't really angry, but they are supposed to be angry, so they pretend to be angry to perform their role. Roles, rituals, etc. have something in common, they are fixed, predefined, they are not responsive. This lack of responsiveness causes this form of performativity to be less effective at achieving goals, because the world is complex and ever changing, no fixed strategy can accommodate the complexity and unique situations of reality like thoughtful, creative, adaptive responses can. Further, the priority of performative behavior is to conform to the script, not to solve the problem. It's defensive, I was doing what I was supposed to do, so you can't blame me for the poor result.

The second form of performativity doesn't necessarily follow a script, it creates a performance. Natural behavior is simple for you to do. You naturally say and do what you think or feel is best. A performance is unnatural

behavior crafted for another purpose. If you do x because you believe it is the best way to achieve y, ignoring what other people think, that is not performative. If you do x so that it looks like you are trying to achieve y to other people, that is performative. Natural behavior doesn't need excuses, while performative behavior does. Performative behavior is different from what you think is best, it is dishonest. You might exaggerate parts of your performance to specially appear a certain way to others, to yourself, or even to no one. There are additional incentives to perform when you are being observed, also called social pressure.

When you are honest, genuine, authentic, you are confident about your actions because you think they are the best. You don't overly care what other people might think, because you believe that what you are doing is right. Authentic behavior is the same no matter who knows about it, while performative behavior can change based on context or audience. Contrast authenticity with performativity, people being performative care about what their behavior looks like, whether or not they care about what it directly achieves. Someone being performative is pretending. All performance is dishonest. A performance is pretending to think or feel something so that you appear a certain way that is different from what you really think or feel. But someone being performative does not want the audience to know that they are pretending, because that is less convincing. This stressful performance of both pretending and hiding the fact that you are pretending is called pretense. The holistic deceptive operation and mindset to maintain a pretense is called kayfabe.

River of conversation

A river is a flowing body of water, and a conversation is interactive communication. These are two completely different things. There is a metaphorical relationship between them, these different things have specific, useful correspondences. Both rivers and conversations are temporal, have a start and an end, and run their course. Rivers and conversations flow. The water of a flowing conversation are the messages each party transmits. Stonewalling is an attempt to dam up the river.

There is a saying, you can never step into the same river twice. In a superficial way, this statement is false. If I walk up to a river, step into it, then take my foot out and step into it again, I stepped in the same river twice, no problem. But the world, the river, and myself, are continuous temporal phenomena. The first time I stepped into the river, it was composed of certain drops of water. The second time I stepped into the river, the original water had flowed some distance downstream, and the second time I stepped into the river, my foot stepped into different water.

Ok, perhaps I don't care which water is in the river at any given time, I care about flow of the water, and that is the same. No it isn't. Rivers are not constant, they ebb and flow moment by moment, hour by hour, season by season, year by year. The river changes the landscape and the landscape changes the river, both continuously. You are not the same person from moment to moment either, if nothing else, you are older. But you change in other essential ways. You can't step into the same river twice because you aren't the same person from one moment to the next, and neither is the river. The world, the river and you are not constant or stable. The only way to step into a river more than once is to form a snapshot of a specific moment, and then recreate it exactly, which we can't do in practice.

Maybe we accept that you, the world and the river are technically different from moment to moment, but perhaps there is no practical difference? Sometimes you can seem to step into the same river twice, and have the same conversation twice. Any differences between the two events is insignificant. But the river and life are chaotic. The ultimate cause of a hurricane can be the flapping of a butterfly's wings halfway across the world. Rivers naturally shift their course through erosion, deposition and the activities plants and animals. These elements interact continuously to shift the course of the river in unpredictable ways. We cannot predict the orbits of three or more bodies in space, we cannot predict the extended future weather, and we cannot predict the changing course of rivers, because these are chaotic systems. Seemingly insignificant initial changes sometimes amplify into totally different results. We never know what effects our words will have on others with certainty, and we often don't know when or why the words we speak to another person will be the last between us.

The course of the river follows the shape of the land, and the course of a conversation follows the shape of physical and social reality. Your physical circumstances and your beliefs determine your thoughts, which determines what you say, and other parties' circumstances and beliefs equally determine what they say, determining the course of the conversation as surely as water flows downhill. Rivers meander, they can only be confined artificially. No party to a conversation can be certain of how the conversation will go, because no one knows the entire future, and no one knows anyone else for certain, but equally, rivers don't flow uphill. Sometimes one or more parties have the conversation within their grasp. No matter which way the conversation turns, if it doesn't dry up it will inevitably reach the sea.

Hypothesis testing

Science is the practice of creating useful models of reality. Hard sciences create models of physical reality and social sciences create models of social realities. A model is simpler than the thing it describes, so the model does not account for everything, meaning that all models are inaccurate relative to the thing they model. Two identical things are not models of each other, but replicas. A hypothesis is a potential change to a model. Forming more accurate and more useful models requires hypothesis testing. Any change could make a model more or less accurate or useful, so to determine which changes improve the model, you have to test the changes to find out. Hypothesis testing requires interaction with the thing you are modeling. From one point of view, you could describe science as a conversation between models and realities, where a model learns about reality to model it better.

In your own conversations, you model yourself, the world and the other parties to predict what everyone has, what everyone wants, and what is possible. You use your models to make predictions, some of those predictions are hypotheses to improve your models, some of those predictions inform your decisions about how to best achieve your goals, your idea of how to get what you want.

Your models include claims about physical reality, claims about social reality, the history of the conversation including memories of actions and memories of previous states of your models. Models are useful to speculate, using the model to make predictions about the thing it models. Speculations are untested hypotheses about physical reality, social reality, what parties have and what parties want. You use your predictions to make decisions. Decisions are how you go from what you know and speculate to attempts to get what you want, testing your hypotheses, experiments.

Once you decide what you want to do, you execute your decision and perform it to participate in and to advance the conversation, every action is running an experiment to see what happens. Your actions also give results to others' experiments of their own hypotheses. Bids and offers, and accepting or rejecting deals are also forms of hypothesis testing. Executing trades, responding to conversational cues, and other conversational behavior are means to execute experiments, which test hypotheses, that attempt to improve your models and get you what you want. When you overly focus on your models and your execution of speaking, this is the common degenerate practice of failing to listen and merely thinking about what you should say, or waiting for your chance to speak. The conversation degenerates to two separate monologues, you talk past each other, no experimental results.

A successful conversation, for you, is one that advances your goals, meaning it contributes to your current or potential benefits. This rarely happens by chance. You have to know what your goals are, what you have to bid and offer, what they have, what they want, what the best exchanges would be and the most effective ways to achieve a trade. You have to speculate about what might work best in this situation, taking advantage of everything you know and can find out. A common problem is overly focusing on what you want. This violates the fundamental rule of trading, a trade benefits both parties. A conversation is not about what one party gets, a deal can only be made when both parties figure out a way to gain from a trade. To get the most you can get, you should be almost as focused on how you can threaten or benefit the other party, as on how the other party can threaten or benefit you.

Clever contest

One of the ways that we use conversation is to signal our capability, and thus our value. We demonstrate how threatening of an enemy we could be, or how useful of an ally we could be. This signaling is competitive, implicitly some conversations can be understood to mean something like, I am so smart! That's not smart, I am smart! No, I am smarter. No! I am smarter! This is what I call the clever contest, where parties compete to dominate the social hierarchy using conversation. This competition can be constructive, destructive, or both.

Part of how the clever competition usually works is that conversation follows associations and flows unpredictably, like life. Conversations naturally meander from topic to topic, covering a surprising variety that no party can fully predict or control, without destroying the interaction of conversation. If you have nothing useful or interesting to say about various topics, you appear to not have much to contribute to the group and lose the contest. If you can consistently contribute to the conversation, no matter where it twists and turns, this is a signal to prove that you are mentally powerful, adaptable, versatile, resilient, all valuable qualities. A job interview typically includes a conversation as a hard-to-cheat test of your value as an employee.

If a party knows about your strengths and weaknesses, they can intentionally influence the conversation to avoid your strengths and reveal your weaknesses, creating a false negative impression of your value, an oppositional converational strategy. People who know you well can cooperate with you, secretly or openly, intentionally or unintentionally, to avoid your weaknesses and reveal your strengths, creating a false positive impression of your

value, a cooperative converational strategy. Other people can make you appear weaker or stronger than you are, socially putting you down or lifting you up, but this is only in social reality. In physical reality, you are always nothing more or less than what you are. This is tautological in physical reality, but social reality can distort your appearance to yourself or others to an incredible degree, and the objectivity has a practical application here. You can ground your self image to counter the distortions of social reality.

You don't have to participate in clever contests for social domination, but it is often in your interest to signal your value to others, or to create benefits directly. If you are more clever or valuable than others, depending on circumstances such as the absence of oppositional strategies, you can succeed with the simple strategy called Just be yourself. Just be yourself almost always works if you are significantly more valuable than the other parties. But if your value is close enough to the other parties, dirty tricks can allow less valuable people to socially dominate more valuable people. For your own benefit in this case, you need to compete by understanding the competitive or oppositional strategies other parties use, and counter them effectively, sometimes described as having a sharp tongue, being unflappable, or being graceful.

The most challenging position to be in, when participating in a clever contest, is to be less clever. In a straight contest, you would lose. But being clever isn't the only form of value, and cleverer people often expose systematic weaknesses that you can exploit. When you cannot win a straight contest, you can wait for, or influence your opponent to make a mistake. Almost all real conversations are full of mistakes.

Never interrupt your enemy when he is making a mistake. Napoleon Bonaparte

Techniques to win clever contests when you are less clever

Name	Description
Intellectual catnip	Clever people find specific topics irresistably interesting, while other people find those topics boring. Introduce one of those topics to invite them to harm their own position in the conversation.
Overcomplicate	Clever people are able to form larger, more complex models of reality. Sometimes, sophistication is more powerful and accurate. Often, sophistication causes more error, as described by Occam's Razor, the simplest explanation is most likely to be correct. When a clever party is succeeding using a simple model, you can remind them of real exceptions and complexities that the simple model doesn't account for. This can cause the clever party to reject the simple model, attempt to use a more complex model and arrive at the wrong answer, creating a mistake.
Weakness of theory	Cleverer people are better at modeling, and tend to have higher confidence and depend on more complex models that involve unproven theory. All models have weaknesses, and more complex models have more severe weaknesses. You can select a challenge that you can handle modestly using a simple model, but that fails badly using theoretical models.
Challenge	Cleverer parties are more capable than you. You can set and achieve a modest goal, but a cleverer party can achieve a superior goal and defeat you. You can challenge the cleverer party to cause them to overextend. Due to their pride or inaccurate prediction of their skill, they may attempt to achieve perfection or take a risk and fail entirely, causing your modest achievement to win.

Name	Description
Simultaneous	Cleverer parties can do more than others, and more at the same time. Doing one thing at a time can be boring, but is often more reliable. You can influence a clever party to make mistakes by challenging them with multiple simultaneous objectives. They may correctly estimate that they can do the objectives separately, but underestimate the difficulty of achieving them simultaneously. You can forfeit some objectives to reliably advance one at a time, while the cleverer party may attempt to do it all and fail.
Mundane	Cleverer people are always exploring the unknown, seeking limits, taking risks. Performing the mundane tasks, repeating only the known, reliable methods is insufferable to them. You can defeat a cleverer party by not making mistakes, not taking risks, following a simple, reliable strategy, preparing multiple backups, focusing on fundamentals, being more committed, as in the parable of the Tortoise and the Hare.

Knowing Yourself

To get what you want, you have to know what you want. What do you want? You want benefits! Yes, but which ones, and what are your best ways to get them? I can't know your specific situation, but the constant in every situation you find yourself in, is yourself. People tend to avoid looking at themselves too closely, distract themselves from their own problems, delude themselves about who they are, lie to themselves, feel angst and mystery about who am I, really?

Travel

Some people travel to distant locations to find themselves. You won't physically find your missing self in a foreign land or at the top of a mountain. I do recommend traveling and living in a very different culture at least once in your life, it can give you a lot of perspective about your native culture and yourself that would be difficult to notice if you stayed home. Experiencing a foreign culture provides a counterexample to compare your culture and yourself against.

Facing Yourself

What you need to know yourself is not a foreign location, you need to face yourself right now. What if I don't like who I really am? There is no what if, no human should like everything about themselves. You are a human, there are things you should want to improve about yourself. If you think you are perfect, you have no motivation to continue to grow.

On the one hand, you should always accept yourself fully. Rejecting yourself is a contradiction, what alternative do you have to yourself? Beyond acceptance, you should be satisfied with yourself. Dissatisfaction with yourself is again a contradiction, if you are not enough for yourself, what alternative do you have? Even though you are satisfied with yourself, as long as you live, you can always do more. You should be grateful to be alive, want to continue living, accept yourself for who you are, and make your full effort to do even better starting now.

Ok, but how can I face myself when I am so good at avoiding myself? One method is to think about your body, your behavior, your affiliations, your achievements, your goals as if they were a third party. If you judged someone else that you heard about for the first time today, who happened to be the same as you, how would you evaluate them? Yes, harshly, but what would you suggest that they should do differently? Some people will jump to the common prescription, I should exercise more. I do recommend to find ways to include physical activity that you

enjoy into your daily life, but your surface appearance isn't very important in itself. You should have important objectives that then cause you to want a decent appearance to help achieve them.

Reflection

How do you answer the questions like, Who am I? What do I want? What are my principles? You look at your past actions as a third-party observer and look for patterns. What motivates you? That may have something to do with what you want. When did you stand up for or against something? That may have something to do with your principles. What are you good at? That may be related to your abilities. Who are you, really? You already know what you are like in detail. For example, what are you like when no one is watching? Who you are is nothing more than what you tend to do, your preferences, choices, abilities, goals.

In a sense, this is the secret method behind the highly desired and much discussed quality of self-confidence. Self-confidence is not some insane belief that you can and will get everything you want in life. No one can know that. Self-confidence is knowing what you currently want, your objectives in your social forever war, and doing something to achieve them. You don't know whether you will reach any destination, you are confident that your self is attempting to climb your path.

Becoming

Who you are tends to be very far away from who you wish to be, so far that there seems to be no relationship between those two people. Who you think you want to be can be mistaken. Take a good hard look at who you are and check if who you think you want to be is actually someone compatible with your motivations, preferences, abilities. Reject any fixed idea of who you should be, especially any idea that someone else told you or you think someone else wants. External expectations can only be correct coincidentally. What other people do and say does not apply directly to your subjective beliefs. Everything in objective reality, including what other people say, are potentially important evidence you can use to update your beliefs. Only you can live your life.

Your goals for yourself should change as you learn more. Take an honest look at yourself and think about what is the first thing that you could do better, and do it. Then keep doing that. Find the next first thing that you could do better. This is called thinking on the margin. This is the process of self-improvement, living your life to the fullest.

If this sounds unreasonable and exhausting, you are doing it wrong. By definition, you can only do things that you are able to do. The things that you can in fact improve are only things you are already able to do, which are always reasonable and affordable. If you exhaust yourself or drive yourself into failure, this is good information to learn from. Learn from your mistakes, including your mistaken beliefs about yourself, and improve on them too. Find ways to fail faster so you can learn more. Looking at yourself, your behavior, your achievements and your process of improvement, you will come to know yourself very well, and have better and better ideas of who you could become, how to become them, and what you want in life.

Social Objectives

No war is won only through pure determination or good tactics, every war has objectives, including yours. What are your current life goals? Surprisingly, people are so intuitive about living their own lives that they are often unaware of their own objectives, which makes it all but impossible to achieve them. To gain the most benefits, you should know what your objectives are in every social interaction. There is no victory without self knowledge. Being privately aware of your social objectives is necessary to reliably get what you want. I know what I want to achieve with this book. What do you want to achieve by reading it? What was your objective in your most recent social interaction? How did it go? What could you have done better? What could you do now to do better next time?

Interpretation

The meaning of a simple statement about objective reality is either objectively true or false, the person who said it is irrelevant. A thief can say that stealing is wrong. But most statements are not simple, so the full meaning of a statement is contextual. Who said it, under what circumstances, to what audience? The context can provide critical information about what the belief, intent, signal, or reputation the statement is designed to produce, potentially changing the meaning and significance of the statement completely.

Yes, an Example

A statement such as Yes explicitly means agreement, but in context Yes can represent almost anything.

What Yes means

Meaning	Prompt	Response	Explanation
Truth	Will you answer my questions?	Yes	Full and accurate truth
Lie	Will you tell the truth?	Yes	Inaccurate, I am lying
Reductive truth	Are people good?	Yes	Most people are good or can be good, but not all people, and not all the time. It is a complex question, making any simple answer inaccurate. Even the least inaccurate answer, yes, is literally false, because there are bad people. If the question was, Are all people good? the answer is no.
Placation	Will you attend my party?	Yes	You are not sure about attending their party, but you do not want to disappoint them by declining, so you say Yes to please them.
Pandering	Is my group the best group in the world?	Yes	People like it when you agree with them, and there is no objective standard for the best group in the world, so the truth is not important because it makes them like you more. This is pandering.
Legally binding commitment	Will you pay this fine?	Yes	This Yes is a legally binding promise, if you don't pay the fine after promising to pay, you will get in trouble for failing to keep your promise.
Mere encouragement	What they did made me really mad, do you know what I mean?	Yes	Whether or not you fully understand what they mean, you are responding to encourage them to continue their story.

It is a simple fact that someone says Yes, but its significance can be almost anything. What Yes means is determined by the context and the ability of the listener. Someone can make a true statement today that the listener misinterprets

as meaning something false, or totally different from what the speaker intended, but the same listener at a later time can reinterpret that statement, and arrive at the truth or form another, totally different, wrong interpretation.

Impossibility

The impossibility of perfect communication is unsolvable. Exact transmission of thought using language requires exact interpretation, and exact interpretation requires identical shared beliefs, which we can never establish. Of course, communication is possible and we are probably communicating right now, but the important part of interpretation is that we have to both play the same language game together for the communication to work. The easiest example of a language game is the language itself, if you didn't know English, this book would just be a pile of uninterpretable words. The idea of language games is attributed to Wittgenstein.

Language Game (philosophy)

Interpretation makes typical communication almost hopeless. If both parties are committed to mutual understanding, consensus is achievable, but this is rare! Among most listeners, they are incapable of understanding simple communication by default.

Making Things Difficult

When a speaker makes a simple statement, listeners interpret the statement using their current communication strategies, and their strategies emphasize dimensions such as belief, intent, signaling and reputation, not information about objective reality. In practice, you can't tell someone that the sky is blue. Their answer will have nothing to do with the simple statement. The sky is blue? Do you think that I don't know that? Are you calling me stupid?

The single biggest problem in communication is the illusion that it has taken place. George Bernard Shaw

Interpretation obligates speakers to use sophisticated listener modeling when they make a simple statement, or even when they are silent. It is impossible to say nothing. Silence communicates a choice to not speak, with a variety of possible implications. This means that speakers must use esoteric processes of internal discussion and play social games even when they make simple moves, and when they choose not to move at all.

Telling the truth to people who misunderstand you is generally promoting a falsehood. Anthony Hope

Arguing

Attacking Beliefs

People communicate for many reasons, a significant category of communication is argument. An argument is an attempt to change someone else's beliefs, to convince them. Why do we care what other people believe? Because if we can change what others believe, we can gain benefits directly, or increase our status and gain benefits indirectly.

An argument is a communication attack on others' beliefs in the war for social reality. This is why, when we notice someone arguing toward us, we feel attacked. We don't like being attacked and become defensive, attempting to protect our beliefs, whether our beliefs are accurate or not. Arguers want to defeat our defenses, so they try things like hiding their arguments. Sneak attacks are effective to bypass defenses in physical conflict, and hidden arguments are effective to bypass defenses in communication.

The purpose of argument is to convince. People can only be convinced in two ways, their mental defense can be defeated by arguments they are vulnerable to, or they can convince themselves when you provide them information they find useful. Mentally vulnerable people are easier to defeat and convince, falling prey to bad-faith arguments. The mentally vulnerable include children, people in bad health or in distress, and low IQ. Also, more agreeable people tend to go along with what other people want, by definition.

A classic tactic is to attack the listener's confidence in their own sanity or judgment, gaslighting, making someone more mentally vulnerable. Everyone, including you, make mistakes, and you will never be fully correct. But only you can take responsibility for your life, and only you can improve your sanity and judgment. Never allow others to harm your connection or ultimate faith in yourself to correct your mistakes, no matter how wrong you currently are. Others can assist you, but it is still only you that can improve yourself. No one else can save you.

Convincing people by defeating their mental defenses is an oppositional or competitive strategy, while convincing them by telling them information they find useful is collaborative. These two purposes are very different, but their

statements and behavior can appear similar. Oppositional behavior likes to cloak itself in collaborative clothing. It is usually possible to distinguish them.

We call oppositional arguing bad faith, and cooperative arguing good faith. Bad-faith arguments are a mental attack intended to impose your beliefs on an subject. Good-faith arguments are a willing collaboration to approach or find the truth of a matter together, by attacking ideas and seeing which ones survive. One way to distinguish bad from good is open-mindedness, curiosity. Does the arguer care about and understand your beliefs, do they want to know why you believe what you do, are they willing to admit when they make a mistake? A curious person cares whether they are mistaken or not, an incurious person doesn't want to admit mistakes, they are not curious about how they might be wrong.

Grounding

Good-faith argument is grounded. Grounding means there is a correspondence between words and facts, ground truths. The words attempt to transmit thoughts, generated from beliefs, from mental models that attempt to match objective reality.

Grounding (metaphysics)

A good-faith arguer is very interested in relevant evidence, and if they lose an argument, they may change their mind or reserve judgment until they can confirm it. Good-faith is willing to sound bad, while bad-faith isn't. A bad-faith arguer avoids or dismisses contradictory evidence. When bad-faith arguers think they are losing an argument, they may escalate from reasoned argument to character attacks, change the topic, or move the goalposts, but they never consider changing their mind. Ask your conversation partner, what would it take to change your mind?

Hence, good-faith can be reasonable, and bad-faith is unreasonable. Bad-faith writes the conclusion first, then searches for supporting arguments. My client is innocent because... Good-faith searches for relevant evidence and arguments, puts them together in an exploratory process, and whatever conclusion they arrive at, they write the conclusion last.

Thesis. Antithesis. Synthesis. Johann Gottlieb Fichte

Social reality exists within objective reality, but the state of social reality is never identical to objective reality. This is why social and objective realities must be considered separately. Best-effort synchrony between social and objective realities is grounding, while lack of grounding, carelessness about objective reality, always leads to divergence between social reality and objective reality.

Divergence forces everyone to constantly choose between conforming to social reality, participating in a fiction, or contradicting social reality with facts. The more ungrounded your social group is, the greater divergence they allow, and the more of a pretense they have to maintain. This leads to the rejection of facts, as in the expression, turning black into white. You can swap black and white, true and false. In social reality, everything is possible, but there is only one possiblility in objective reality, what we call actual. The emperor has no clothes. Objective reality is what you can't ignore. People can think and say whatever they want in social reality, but objective reality keeps the score. Choose how you participate in divergent social reality, but always remain grounded yourself.

Strawman

A bad-faith technique people use to appear to win arguments is strawmanning. A strawman argument claims that the opponent holds a weak, easily defeatable claim that they do not actually hold, the weak claim is the straw man. Then the bad-faith arguer defeats the weak claim that they themselves invented, to appear to win the argument. At no point in a strawman argument is the opponent's actual position required or mentioned. Strawmanning is a form of substitution, if I can't defeat my opponent's actual position, I will substitute a convenient, weak alternative, defeat that irrelevant position, and claim false victory.

A real victory would only be possible if the arguer defeated the opponent's actual position. Beware that when someone wins an argument, instead of admitting defeat, the loser will sometimes lie and claim that they never held the defeated position, that they actually hold some other position that has not been defeated yet. That is called moving the goal posts.

There is a good-faith variation of strawmanning, called steelmanning. In a personal argument, both arguers present their arguments, and the stronger argument wins. But good-faith arguers aren't interested in winning, or finding out who is better at arguing, they are interested in approaching the truth. In a cooperative, truth-seeking argument,

both arguers use their full skills to argue against all positions, no matter which position they hold. If the other party makes a weak argument for a potentially strong position, the other party can assist the weak argument, making a steelman version, that may be able to better resist their attacks. There is no possible way to lose a good-faith argument, because the purpose of the argument isn't to defend your existing beliefs, or force your beliefs on others, it is to test which beliefs survive scrutiny. A weak attack on a belief is less effective at testing it, so steelmanning attempts to collaborate to find the best attacks and defenses to reveal the most accurate beliefs.

Biases

The ideal reasoner remembers all evidence and only derives logical and necessary conclusions. Real people are far from ideal reasoners, we all think and argue in ways that are incomplete and full of mistakes. There are common and consistent mistakes that people make when they reason that we call biases. Here are some of the more important biases. The tables describe the name of the bias, what is the nature and purpose of the bias, the cause of the bias, a suggestion for how to counteract the bias, and how to provoke others to fall into the bias.

Bias	Confirmation
Description	I seek and promote evidence that shows that my current beliefs are true, and avoid or dismiss evidence that challenges my current beliefs
Mistake	The ego wants to hear that it is always correct, even though we all know that we are often wrong
Counter	Seek evidence that contradicts your beliefs
Provoke	Offer disproven evidence that confirms your opponents beliefs, and when they agree with that evidence, show that it is wrong

Bias	Availability
Description	I promote and rely on evidence that is more readily available, such as something happening right in front of me
Mistake	Available evidence is more convenient, not more true. Less available evidence could prove the opposite conclusion from the easily available evidence.
Counter	Seek all possible evidence, or unbiased sources of evidence, to form a valid conclusion
Provoke	Ask your opponent to support their claims with evidence. The opponent will often use evidence that is conveniently available to them. You can prepare less available evidence that contradicts your opponent's available evidence.

Bias	Typical Mind

Description	I assume that other people think and want the same things that I do
Mistake	Different people are different, they think different things, have different abilities, want different things
Counter	Specially consider how other people are different from you, and how those differences might lead them to different beliefs
Provoke	Think about how your opponent is thinking about the topic. They will often tell you what they think, anyway. Then ask your opponent if they think that you think the same way that they think. They will either claim that you think they same way they think, the Typical Mind fallacy, or they will admit that you are different, but be unable to correctly explain your perspective.

Bias	Projection
Description	Related to Typical Mind, Projection is when I claim that other people have the same problems or motivations that I do. For example, cheaters often accuse other people of cheating, even when the other people aren't.
Mistake	Interpretting other people is difficult, so by default we assume that other people do things for the same reasons that we ourselves would do them. This is a useful baseline, but the mistake is to not think beyond this assumption. Other people are in fact different from you.
Counter	Limit your statements about other people to what you have evidence for. Don't assume that you understand other people without evidence.
Provoke	If you suspect that someone is cheating, you can do something provably permitted but that appears extremely suspicious. The cheater may jump at the opportunity to accuse you, at which point you can turn the tables on them.

Bias	Dunning-Kruger
Description	The less I know about a subject, the less able I am to evaluate how skilled someone is in that subject. I will overestimate my own skill more when my skill is lower.
Mistake	This bias is caused by ignorance. The special quality of ignorance is that I don't know how much I don't know. That causes me to think I know a lot when I know a little, because I don't know what I am missing.

Counter	Don't assume you are superior or inferior to others because of what you think you know, focus on objective measures of performance.
Provoke	People will often argue about things that they are ignorant about. Ask them about how skilled they think they are in that subject, then put their claims to a test or collect evidence to prove that they are wrong.

Bias	Anchoring
Description	The first position, example, or context for an arugment will set an anchor point, meaning that further discussion will always be relative to that anchor point
Mistake	The truth may be totally unrelated to the anchor point you happen to start with
Counter	When arguing, attempt to consider the full space of possibilities where the truth could be
Provoke	Pay special attention at the beginning of a discussion to introduce an example close to the answer you will argue for, causing opponents to argue in reference to your example

---

Bias	Bandwagon
Description	I think that everyone else agrees about this point, so I will support this point to fit in
Mistake	Just because an idea is popular does not make it true
Counter	Use your own experience, your own critical thinking, use first principles, logic and evidence to form your own conclusions. Don't just follow the crowd.
Provoke	Use social proof to get your opponent to agree with you. Everyone else is doing it.

Bias	Sunk Cost
Description	I already spent so much time and money for this thing, it must be worth continuing

Mistake	Something is either true or useful now, or not, regardless of how much you spent on it in the past. People don't want to recognize when they were wrong, or something didn't work out.
Counter	When deciding whether to continue pursuing a project or not, consider whether you would choose to start funding that project now over every other alternative
Provoke	You want to cancel the project? Look at how far we have come, and how much we spent to get here.

Bias	Backfire
Description	When I defend my beliefs, even if I am shown to be mistaken, I get better at defending those beliefs and become more confident in them, not less
Mistake	Getting better at being defensive does not improve the accuracy of my beliefs
Counter	Separate your beliefs from your ego. Hold beliefs lightly. Attack your own beliefs. If they are true, they will survive any scrutiny.
Provoke	Are you going to let anyone tell you that you are wrong?

Truth Bearer

The idea of truth is high status. In practice, many people claim to have or seek the truth, but very few people do. It is often pretty easy to distinguish between people who seek truth and those who claim to, but don't. Those who don't seek truth will make unrealistic claims that sound good, supporting the expression, if it sounds too good to be true, it probably is. This isn't coincidental, they have to lie. If they limit themselves to the truth, they would be a truth seeker. If they say anything apart from the truth, they will never choose something that sounds worse for their purposes. They will always choose something that sounds better, to gain more benefits. One common way to sound better and defend yourself from criticism is to simplify in your favor.

Reality is complex, one of the inconvenient aspects of the truth is that it is equally as complex as reality. People can't understand full reality, even in principle. Simplification is unavoidable. Inserting yourself between the complex truth and others' understanding is a powerful strategy to gain status. There are other problems with the complex truth, such as the fact that language cannot convey some parts of reality, and is expensive and full of mistakes beyond that. These and other problems limit good-faith attempts to describe reality, to speak the truth.

But these limitations, and others, can also be arbitraged in bad faith to gain status. Arbitrage in general means that someone can make profit from an arbitrary difference. If you notice that a product is suddenly popular but the existing sellers haven't increased their prices yet, you can buy-up their stock and immediately resell it for a profit, you can arbitrage, take advantage and profit from the difference.

Just like products and services, information can also be valuable, convertible into money or status. Truth arbitrage is taking advantage of the difference between the truth and what people understand. This is a competitive strategy, taking advantage of other people, so it appears mostly in negative-sum or zero-sum games or attitudes. Bad-faith truth arbitrage is a losing strategy in positive-sum games, where cooperation wins. In cooperation, people want to help each other understand as best they can in good faith. The way to protect yourself from truth arbitrage is to never blindly rely on anyone else. Everyone is wrong in some ways and some times. You can take good advice, but you must never fully substitute others' judgment for your own. Think for yourself. Trust and verify.

Agreement

Good-faith arguments are one kind of thing, while bad-faith arguments are many different things. There are few ways to be right, and many ways to be wrong. Committed good-faith arguers must ultimately agree. They converge on a shared understanding, if not approach the truth. I am not saying that good-faith arguers always have to agree on a conclusion, but they can always reach a mutual understanding. Uncommitted or unreasonable people may not converge, they can agree to disagree. Bad-faith arguers can also reach mutual understanding, but it can be ungrounded and have little correspondence with reality.

Ungrounded Listening

People who argue are often engaged in totally incompatible activities, playing different language games, or are unaware of their own objectives. Argument is too important of an activity to skip, but most people participate without any conscious idea of why or how. This doesn't only prevent speakers from being convincing, this muddleheadedness also makes listeners unable to be convinced! The listeners' idea of communication, their communication strategy, is ungrounded, so words do not correspond to the objective world, listeners do not attempt to check whether statements are valid or accurate with their own experience, words do whatever they feel like at the time.

90% of readers will skim through this book, say Cool story bro, and carry on with their lives as if they had never read it, as if these words have no relationship to the thoughts and actions they make now or in the future. They are semantically disconnected. To them, words aren't functional, words are decorative, and furthermore the words I arranged are ugly. I present to you, the ugly truth. Or maybe words are functional only to validate their feelings and beliefs. This view is obviously wrong, we communicate because communication is functional. This book is about understanding what we are already doing and how to play functional language games to win. Whether or not your statements are grounded, your beliefs must be grounded in order for them to work. Almost nobody lives their life in isolation, so good-faith argument is a valuable tool to establish and maintain your grounded beliefs.

Willingness to Agree

We argue for the same reason we communicate at all, to get benefits. Generally, agreeing with someone else gives them your benefits, so people generally won't agree with anyone else. What benefit would they get for agreeing? None? Then, why would they ever agree? It is generally unproductive to argue with bad-faith opponents, so I recommend that you don't. Be cautious to form conclusions about other people's intent, because it is very convenient to dismiss others when you are wrong.

Reasonable and fair-minded people exist. They agree with others when others make a convincing, grounded argument, because grounding and discussing can be beneficial. Even among unreasonable people, sometimes reality punches them in the face, literally or figuratively, hard enough that they do change their minds. Unreasonable people are only willing to change their mind when the benefits they lose from being wrong exceed the benefits they think they gain from holding onto their current beliefs. When someone bets their life on a belief, in many cases, they will never change it.

It is difficult to get a man to understand something when his salary depends upon his not understanding it. Upton Sinclair

Framing

Another unsolvable interpretation problem is the context or framing around statements. The same statement means different things in different contexts. Misinterpretation is common, and commonly happens by misunderstanding the context of a statement accidentally. Skillful communicators can manipulate context to promote understanding, defend and attack.

One way to use context is to hide arguments with framing. We can explicitly discuss a subject, but I can choose the context around it to hide part of my argument or give my arguments an undue advantage. In this book I explain communication using a war framing, a metaphor of conversations as battles in social reality. In the metaphor, statements are attacks against mental defenses. This advantages my worldview that communication is primarily a competition for benefits, like a war. Other people who discuss communication choose different framings, they say communication is about an information economy with buying and selling, or discovery with news and publishing, ritual with evolution of repeating behaviors, interpersonal connection with sharing and growing, information transfer with bandwidth, latency and noise.

These framings change the argument and make the same claims more or less relevant, sensible, convincing. An economic framing might care about who benefits, while a connection framing might not care about who benefits. I mention these alternate framings in good faith, I think you will conclude that they are less effective than the one I chose. Bad-faith arguers will sometimes insist on and refuse to discuss their framing, they want to limit discussion to the topic, but the framing greatly affects the topic. People thinking in different framings are playing incompatible language games, they talk past each other. Framing is inescapable, it helps establish the language game to discuss the topic at all.

A more immediate form of framing is a loaded question. A loaded question presupposes assumptions that are not agreed by the listener and then asks a question based on those assumptions. Did you stop beating your wife? is written in the form of a question, not a statement, but it presupposes that you beat your wife. It is phrased as a yes-or-no question, and any answer you give, including silence, appears disadvantageous. Both yes and no imply that you beat your wife. The typically correct answer, no, meaning No I did not stop beating my wife, because I never beat my wife, actually implies the opposite meaning, No, I did not stop beating my wife, because I did previously beat my wife and I will continue to beat my wife. The unambiguous answer, I never beat my wife, contradicts the loaded assumption, but appears to dodge the question, if listeners don't pay attention. Why can't you answer a simple question? Yes or no, did you stop beating your wife?

The loaded assumption in the question is in fact a statement, not a question, but it is loaded in a container which has the form of a question. The questioner typically feigns innocence about this tactic, why are you getting angry with me? I am just asking questions! A loaded question includes a statement, so you are not just asking questions. Your behavior is designed to appear to be in good faith, but the question is performative, your statement is in bad faith.

Another form of framing is reference classes. Often, when people speak they are thinking about a specific context, scenario or example that they may not say, or they may say, but others may replace it, by accident or by malice. If I say People are born free and should live free, I may be thinking about how this statement applies to myself and other law-abiding, responsible citizens. The context or examples that I am thinking of are the reference class, law-abiding citizens. Someone could assume that my reference class is criminals, and form a misinterpretation of my statement because they changed the reference class. They think my statement means that I oppose punishment for criminals. They could call me a lawless villain, Did you hear what that guy said? He said he wants to get rid of all prisons and let criminals roam free and hurt everyone else! The misinterpreter assumes that the reference class of my statement, that people should live free, is criminals, not law-abiding citizens. Changing the reference class changes the interpretation of the statement without changing the statement.

Intent

Interpretation follows from perceived intent. If the listener thinks the speaker means well, they will interpret their statements positively. If the listener thinks the speaker means ill, they will interpret their statements negatively. This works well when listeners accurately perceive intent, but often works badly when listeners misunderstand the intent. Sometimes, there is no sequence of words that can correct a listener's mistaken presumption of ill intent.

Person	Statement
Speaker	I want all people to live happy and free.
Listener who wrongly assumes ill intent	They are lying, they want to oppress us all!

It goes both ways. Sometimes no sequence of words can dissuade a listener's mistaken presumption of good intent.

Person	Statement
Speaker	We should kill and maim and torture all who oppose us!
Listener who wrongly assumes good intent	They are just making an exciting speech, they don't advocate violence.

The previous examples are not fictional exaggerations. These are paraphrases of statements and responses that actual people made recently, and people grossly misperceive others' intentions this way every day.

What can you do to prevent yourself from misunderstanding others' intent? Never become completely certain about others' intent. Always maintain a minimum level of doubt in your interpretations to allow evidence to change your mind. Don't thoughtlessly take others' words at face value. Consider their track record, what others say about them and why, and especially compare their words with their actions to improve the accuracy of your perception of their intent. The purpose of a system is what it does. People's intent is shown by their actions. Watch what the hands do, not what the mouth says.

My description of communication may sound warlike, calculating and vicious. Your life experience may contradict this worldview, people may seem to you to be intuitive and kind. Yes, many people don't think much about their behavior, and do mean well. But the world and human nature define the incentives of communication, and you get what you pay for. People are not necessarily aware of the consequences of their actions, or why they do things, but they respond to incentives. People naturally feel that they are good, work hard, mean well. The road to hell is paved with good intentions. If you do not become aware of what you are doing and why, and what other people are doing and why, your life could go poorly for you.

People don't usually intend to harm others, but when they act without awareness and follow the incentives naively, they end up harming others. They do not consciously intend to harm others, but they do harm. They do not intend to calculate a vicious strategy, but the incentives encourage them to behave that way. One person is at the same time intuitive, kind, following calculations and causing vicious effects. Intuition isn't good and calculation isn't bad. The meaning of kindness is not wanting to give everyone a cookie, true kindness is only possible with greater awareness. Intent is not limited to what a person consciously thinks they are trying to do, because people are unaware and deceive themselves. Intent includes what someone subconsciously tries to do, and what the system incentivizes. You may consciously believe you want peace, but you are nevertheless on a battlefield.

Intent does not only affect individual interpretations. Humans need healthy and deep relationships to survive and thrive, and relationships critically depend on perception of good intent. If you want to preserve a relationship, you must act and speak with positive intent toward the other person, and you must preserve your belief of the other person's positive intent. If you have sufficient evidence of their ill intent, you should not want to preserve the relationship. Often, when an interaction in a relationship goes wrong, one or more parties assumed ill intent. Perceived ill intent is a primary suspect to investigate to resolve relationship problems.

Plausible Deniability

Accountability

Interpretation is a fundamental and serious problem, it creates a serious vulnerability in holding people accountable for their speech. Simple statements are interpretable, undeniable, and can be used to hold people to account, while complex statements have multiple interpretations and create deniability. Imagine a criminal who wants to commit crimes without accountability, and investigators who want to hold the criminal accountable. Simply saying I committed the crime is an undeniable confession. Saying If I committed the crime, I wouldn't get caught has plausible deniability. It is possible to deny that you committed the crime after making that statement.

Cat's Paw

A criminal has several methods to talk about a crime without accountability. They could ask someone else to commit the crime and let them risk getting caught, that is called a cat's paw, getting someone else to do something risky or harmful, whether they know the consequences or not.

If investigators find evidence that the criminal asked a cat's paw to do it, the criminal can still be charged with incitement, conspiracy or accessory. However, if the criminal never simply asks someone to commit a crime, it is difficult to charge them. Even omitting something like a specific time can prevent prosecution. Saying please commit the crime tomorrow at noon is illegal. Saying please commit the crime at some point soon is legal.

People can say all kinds of things for all kinds of reasons, and we primarily hold people accountable for their actions, not their thoughts. This legal principle creates a protected area for malfeasance, bad intent, without accountability, but you don't have to use this legal standard in your personal conduct. You can personally detect and hold others accountable for their bad intent.

Dog Whistle

Plausible deniability shows up frequently in speech. Another form of plausible deniability is a dog whistle. A physical dog whistle is a special whistle that, when blown, makes a high-pitched sound at a frequency above human hearing but within the hearing range of dogs, so that dog owners can notify their dogs without disturbing the people around them.

In human speech, a metaphorical dog whistle is a statement with two intended interpretations, designed to secretly communicate different messages to different groups using one statement. Often, the two interpretations have two specific functions, one innocent interpretation and one illicit interpretation.

If the criminal says Commit the crime tomorrow at noon, there is only one plausible and illicit interpretation. If the criminal says to a group of children and criminal associates, with an unusual tone in their voice, Let's have fun tomorrow at noon, does everyone understand? There are two plausible interpretations of the statement. One interpretation is innocent, they will host a birthday party with the children tomorrow at noon, and the dog-whistler can in fact attend the party, further establishing plausible deniability of the illicit interpretation. The second, illicit interpretation of their statement is a hidden request, asking their associates to Commit the crime tomorrow at noon, without saying it simply, relying on ambiguity. Using dog whistles, the criminals can communicate reliably and commit crimes, taking advantage of plausible deniability based on the ambiguity of interpretation of their statements to prevent accountability.

Malicious Interpretation

Accusing others of using dog whistles is itself another form of plausible deniability. If a law-abiding person makes the same statement as the criminal, Let's have fun tomorrow at noon, an attacker can accuse the law-abiding person of using a dog whistle. There is no reliable defense against others' malicious interpretation of simple statement. A law-abiding person can make purely wholesome statements and attackers can consistently portray them as a monster by abusing the complexity of interpretation or pulling quotations out of context. Outright lying about a person can be illegal, but malicious interpretation of things they did say is legal, and has plausible deniability. The plausible deniability is specifically that the attacker can claim they really believe the malicious interpretation, whether they are lying or not, because beliefs are subjective.

Omelette Connoisseurs

The expression goes, if you want to make an omelette, you have to break eggs. This statement is literally true and metaphorically false. The metaphor is typically used to excuse harmful acts, meaning if you want to help people in the end, you have to use harmful means to achieve it. Of course, everything has its price, but people frequently love two things that this expression encourages, sounding good and doing harm. Looking at history, which is more likely? That someone deeply regrets and wishes to minimize violence to their enemies while helping as many people as possible, or that someone relishes hurting their enemies as much as possible and taking all the benefits while minimizing what they give to others. People who talk about omelettes do not care about omelettes, they want to break eggs. The omelette is not their goal, it is their plausible deniability.

For example, the omelette connoisseur says I am not a criminal, I harmed all those people for a good reason! Oh, then where did all the benefits go? I tried to benefit the people but for some reason, it didn't work out. My pure intention was to help, you must believe me. Listen to what I say, not what I do.

Mud

Aggression, attacking someone without a pretext, is often disadvantageous. By aggression, I mean both physical or social attacks. Other people and groups dislike and oppose aggressors. When someone wants to attack, they sometimes try to create a pretext to justify their intended unjust action so they don't appear to be the aggressor.

Casus Belli

There are many ways to avoid appearing to be the aggressor. The attacker will attempt to harm the reputation of their target, sling mud. If their target gains a bad reputation, attacking them isn't as bad. The attacker can plausibly claim that their attack was serving justice to the wicked.

Another option is a false-flag operation, where the attacker's people pretend to be members of the target group and attack themselves, falsely painting the target as the aggressor.

The attacker may try to provoke their target to attack them, creating the opportunity to retaliate, using the plausible deniability of self-defense despite their provocation. The attacker may muddy the water, causing confusion or chaos so that no one knows who attacked first, creating plausible deniability that they were the attacker.

People looking to fight create complexity to increase deniability, while people looking to cooperate create clarity to reduce deniability.

Language itself is a universal target for mud slinging or muddying the water, associating the target with bad things or misusing words to make it difficult to communicate about or understand the target.

Concerns

Imagine a reporter is challenging you about your political opinions. They ask, we have sources claiming that your views are dangerous to our society. How do you respond to concerns that your policies would have disastrous consequences, and you should leave the political decisions to the establishment? This lying question uses standard tactics with multiple uses of plausible deniability.

The reporter loads their question by claiming that sources claim your views are dangerous. The reporter does not claim to hold this view, the reporter is just reporting that their sources make this claim. The reporter could be lying, there could be no source that makes that claim, or the source could be an unqualified friend of theirs. Just because someone claims something does not make it true, and interpretation of what people say is fraught to begin with. Typically, if you ask a reporter who their source is and the context of the claim, they will refuse to name their source, preventing accountability. So there is a possibility that their source is well-informed and correct, but it is also possible that their source is wrong or that no such source exists. It comes down to the fact that the reporter is asserting without evidence. If the reporter wanted to make an evidentiary claim, they would have likely cited their source instead of being vague about who they are. A claim without evidence can be dismissed without evidence. But dismissing their claim won't satisfy the reporter and likely won't satisfy their audience either.

Even if their source is right or wrong, it turns out to be irrelevant to the question they asked. They asked you to respond to concerns about your policies. Whose concerns? What are they concerned about? They didn't say. And if they wanted to discuss policy, they would have asked you something specific about your policy proposals. They don't want to discuss policies, they want to discredit you. How do I know that? Because this question is carefully crafted, it is not a question, it is messaging, with a specific purpose. Its purpose is to make you look bad while preventing accountability for the reporter. Any answer you give looks bad, just like with well-designed loaded questions.

If you agree that people should be concerned about your policies, that sounds bad. Why would you advocate for policies so bad that they scare people?

If you disagree that people should be concerned about your policies, that sounds bad. Any policy has risks, and there could be people with justified concerns. Either you know that your policies will harm people and you don't care, which is callous and mean, or you don't know that your policies will harm people and you are ignorant and probably wrong, or you know that your policies will harm people but you are unwilling to admit it, making you a liar.

This attack disguised as a question can be used against any proposal. Every course of action has upsides and downsides, costs and benefits. Beyond costs are more severe risks, people could be seriously harmed by doing almost anything. Nothing in life is certain. In fact, you are never completely safe, even if you hide under your bed for your entire life. In one case, a man died while sleeping in his bed when a sinkhole opened under his room. There is nowhere to hide, life has risks. People can make an unlimited amount of concern about anything at all. But how do you know your policy will be good and not bad? I am concerned! Your concerns are your problem. If you want to ask about policy, ask about policy, not peoples' concerns.

The insidious nature of the question is that it is an attack, any answer looks bad, and the reporter looks independent and professional. The reporter is not making claims, their sources are, plausible deniability. The reporter is not concerned, other unspecified people are, plausible deniability. The reporter isn't sneak attacking you as a coward, the reporter is heroically informing you about others' concerns to give you an opportunity to reassure the public, plausible deniability. But no actual person is concerned, or no one the reporter cares about, anyway. If there were substantive concerns to attack you with, the reporter could have asked about them specifically, to make you look even worse.

Good answers to this attack are to request for details about the concerns so you can address them fully, showing that you are caring, responsible and capable of resolving concerns. Another option is to ask them which policy they

prefer to yours, and then you can show how that policy is worse. Another option is to counter with a demand for a standard that would satisfy their concern. People can be concerned about anything, what standard would satisfy them to allay their concerns? People who are concerned are often unsatisfiable. If they are unwilling to state a standard, then it would be impossible to meet a standard that they themselves don't know, making the reporter look bad. If they state a standard that is too high, then show that no policy, including the current policy, meets that standard, and their sources should be more concerned about the current policy they are currently suffering from than yours. If the standard is reasonable, show that you meet the standard, because you should be better prepared about your business than a reporter. It is always easy to criticize, so hold critics to the same standard as the doers and see them fail to meet that standard.

Theodore Roosevelt said, It is not the critic who counts, not the man who points out how the strong man stumbled, or where the doer of deeds could have done better. The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena; whose face is marred by the dust and sweat and blood; who strives valiantly; who errs and comes short again and again, because there is no effort without error or shortcoming; who knows the great enthusiasms, the great devotions and spends himself in a worthy cause; who at the best, knows in the end the triumph of high achievement, and who, at worst, if he fails, at least fails while daring greatly; so that his place shall never be with those cold and timid souls who know neither victory or defeat.

I wonder how much Teddy cared about others' vague concerns?

Ubiquity of Plausible Deniability

Outside of criminality and attacks, plausible deniability is used and abused across almost all social situations. For example, expressing sexual interest in another person is risky. When people express simple, direct sexual interest, sometimes others respond aggressively, or they want to accept, but they can't say Yes for social reasons. When people express sexual interest using plausible deniability, that is called flirting, and can allow both parties to negotiate with less conflict. The offer can be rejected without saying No, and accepted without saying Yes, answering the question while reducing accountability for both sides. Flirting brings its own problems, such as misinterpreting simple speech as flirting, and misinterpreting flirting as confusing simple speech.

Deception

Deception

Deception is promoting false beliefs in others. Why would anyone be deceptive? Show me the incentive, I will show you the behavior. The incentive to deceive is gaining undeserved benefits. Lying is the social-reality version of theft. If I state the whole truth, I am not being deceptive, even if other people reach a false conclusion. If I state a partial truth that implies a false interpretation, I am being deceptive. If I withhold information that I know another person needs to form an accurate interpretation, I am deceiving them, a lie of omission. If I outright lie, if I claim that a falsehood is true, I am being deceptive. Outright lies are more risky in the digital era, so the war for social reality is focusing more on selective truth and malicious interpretation.

Here is an example of such a deception against an imaginary person. I could attack someone's character by saying They have lied to the public hundreds of times in the last week. How can you trust anything they say? The first statement could be technically true, but misleading, while the second statement is a reasonable conclusion, but depends on the first statement being fully accurate. That makes it a malicious interpretation, because the first statement is intentionally misleading. The trick here is that you can imagine that the innocent person I am attacking bought a home weather station, and the thermometer on their weather station is miscalibrated and reporting bad data, and their home weather station is connected to the internet. In a technical sense, the owner of the malfunctioning weather station has lied to the public hundreds of times during the last week, but any reasonable person who is aware of the relevant context would not interpret this true statement to mean that the person is untrustworthy in their personal conduct, which is what the original statement implies. The original statement promotes a false belief in listeners. The attack is deceptive.

Attacker's Advantage

The attacker has the advantage when it is easier to attack than defend. In physical war, the attacker often has the advantage because they can succeed by attacking once, anywhere, at any time, while the defender has to protect

themselves from every attack everywhere all the time. It is easier to destroy than to create. It is easier to mess up a fully set fine-dining table than it is to set it. The truth is similarly complex and causally organized as a fine-dining table. A few short statements can be wrong in hundreds of ways, requiring hundreds of statements or more to correct, if anyone is willing to listen.

Attention is an unusual thing. You don't pay attention to every piece of data, every letter I write, you pay attention to the surprising data. If I repeat one letter over and over, after you see the first few letters, you quickly start to expect that the next letter will keep repeating, and skip over every expected letter until you hit a surprising one, for example aaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaab. People say all kinds of expected things, which you find unsurprising and don't pay much attention to. But when someone says something totally wrong, you will be surprised and pay attention to it. You will find it interesting and exciting. Then, if someone corrects them, it will sound expected and boring. If someone lies on purpose, the lie will sound surprising, because it is untrue. When someone corrects the lie, you won't find the correction interesting, and won't pay as much attention to it or remember it. The attacker's advantage in deceptive communication is extreme.

Exciting lies spread like wildfire, boring corrections don't. This is why there are wild rumors, but not wild corrections. Urban myths persist, while reasonable investigations are ignored.

Lying

Laws and conventions partially protect you from significant lies. Typically, if someone is caught in an objective lie for their own benefit, they will be held accountable. But deception has countless forms. Although objective lies can sometimes offer the greatest benefit, they also have significant risks if the lie is discovered. The reward to risk ratio can tell you whether lying is worth it. Objective lies do not match reality, and reality can eventually prove them wrong, except in special cases such as self-fulfilling prophecy.

Once you lie, as long as the lie continues and you continue to promote it, you have to mentally track multiple realities, the single objective reality and the multiple alternate realities where your lies are true. This is a mounting cost. Effective people and people who are bad at lying quickly learn that lying is a bad strategy for them, and tend not to tell outright lies. That leaves ineffective people who are good at lying. They tend to lie privately, so they can make different lies to different people as needed, and those people are unlikely to compare what they heard with other people. Liars also avoid details and making statements on the record. Cornering a suspected liar is pretty simple. Get their statements on the record, don't meet with them privately, demand reasonable details, verify what they say, compare notes with the other people they talk with. Then, if they lie, hold them accountable by reporting them or exposing the lie in public. Objective lies can be discovered immediately, or persist for centuries. The attacker's advantage applies. In situations where you don't care about your reputation, such as when you are fighting an enemy, lie to them as much as possible.

Warfare is based on deception. Sun Tzu

Messaging is Deception

When you deal with non-enemies, objective lying is usually a losing strategy. Getting caught in an objective lie hurts your status. In extended or repeated games, usually honesty is the best policy. In a cooperative scenario, relevant transparency is often a good default. Honesty is not all or nothing. In a competitive scenario, withholding information and carefully selecting and presenting information, messaging, is often beneficial. In my opinion, messaging is dishonest, but it is less dishonest than objective lies. Messaging is generally agreed to be part of playing a competitive social game, while lying isn't.

Designing messaging is both following your most advantageous communication strategy and it is deception. Transparency is the opposite of deception and therefore the opposite of messaging. Transparency doesn't require strategizing, so it saves a lot of time and effort over lying or messaging. How can you detect messaging that is based on partial truths? Pay attention to when people avoid basic facts and bring up unusual facts, or they avoid fact and emphasize subjective claims. Usually, when the facts are convenient to a narrative, the speaker brings up the basic facts over and over, we are the number one seller in this market. Really? I thought your competitor outsold you this month. Oh, yes, well our cumulative sales over the last six months are the highest. Who cares about cumulative sales over the last six months? Also, our customers say that we are the best! Oh, how many customers say that? At least one customer says that. Ok.

Substitution

Interestingly, silence is also messaging. If you don't have anything nice to say, don't say anything at all. People notice if you don't say something when they expect you to, so one form of deception is substitution. In a competitive scenario, if you can't say something advantageous and true when requested, don't say something disadvantageous and true, self-defeating. Don't say something advantageous and false, lying. Say something else, dodge the question. Secretly substitute what they asked for with something different without them noticing, or answer their question with a question. If their question is loaded, challenge the loaded assumption. If the question is open ended, answer it truthfully, but avoid disadvantageous points. If you are a bystander, you can detect when responders use substitution, and infer that they cannot give a nice sounding answer to the question.

If you are the questioner, it is your responsibility to notice substitution and repeat the question, allowing grace for honest mistakes and forcing dishonest substitution to fail. People using substitution can be unaware or shameless, you may have to repeat and clarify a simple question several times. Use the broken record technique. A broken record is a metaphor of a malfunctioning device that unconditionally repeats the same sound over and over. Where were you yesterday? I don't know. Where were you yesterday? Why do you want to know? Where were you yesterday? I don't have to tell you. Where were you yesterday? etc. until they answer the question truthfully, lie, refuse to answer, or escalate. Any of those responses advance the conversation and you can stop using the broken record technique. I find oppositional and competitive communication dynamics pointless, they are usually negative sum. Where you can, find and limit your communication to cooperative. But you live in a society, society has competition, and you have to compete to survive.

Scheming

Deception is one tool to use while scheming. Scheming isn't just deception, or being extra deceptive. Scheming is a secret move in a metagame, deception about which game you are playing.

Deception and scheming are unnecessary if there is no deterrence. You can take candy from a baby if you decide to. Scheming is difficult when you play a well-defined game with tightly enforced rules, just play a winning strategy, whether it uses deception or not. When rules are not well enforced, or there are multiple games you could be playing, scheming is deceiving the opponent about which game you are playing. When people ask, What are you scheming, they aren't asking which strategy you are using in the known game, they are asking which game you are playing that they don't know about. When a scheme succeeds, the loser says you tricked me! They lost because they didn't even know which game they were playing. Scheming is a common tactic for the multigamer communication strategy, introduced later.

A fictional example of scheming comes from the science fiction series Star Trek, about captain Kirk as a student at Starfleet Academy. He faced a simulated training scenario designed to be a no-win situation. In the scenario, the Starfleet captain has to defend a merchant ship, named the Kobayashi Maru, from enemy attack, but the enemies receive unlimited reinforcements, forcing an eventual defeat. Captain Kirk rejected this framing of real life, so he secretly modified the scenario to have a solution and in a trivial sense, Kirk won the no-win scenario. He played a move in the metagame, he schemed to win. No fair!

Kobayashi Maru

Feedback

Ego

People are defensive if you touch their ego, the things they identify with, and less defensive about statements about the world, all the stuff that they don't identify with. Often my body, my job, my family, my possessions, my close relationships, my community, my memories, my habits, the place I live in and my reputation are me, I identify with these things. So if you can talk to someone and praise or preserve their identity, they will often like that. If you criticize or alter these things, you are injuring their fragile ego and they will usually not like it.

If you want someone to change their behavior, you can talk to them about what you want while avoiding their ego. If you say, You left your wet towel in the bathroom, that pokes their ego by criticizing their actions, and they might become defensive or aggressive. Saying instead, I went to use the shower today and brought my towel with me, but there was no room to place it because there was another towel there, do you know whose towel that is? gets to the

same topic but skirts around their fragile ego. You are asking for their help about your problem, not accusing them of causing a problem. These are two sides of the same coin, but human psychology does not make logical sense.

Judgment

People can be more accepting about talking about stuff in their ego if you speak objectively, but get more hurt or defensive if you make value judgments about stuff in their ego. e.g. I think this part of the book sucks, it's way too long, is hurtfully judgmental, while saying this part of the book could be made shorter and still do its job, means something similar and sounds more neutral, it proposes an objective experiment I could perform, editing different versions of this part of the book to different lengths and seeing if a shorter version could work just as well.

It is impossible to live life without making judgments, you have to judge where the ground is to take your next step without falling over. It's not a question of making judgments, it's a question of accuracy, which judgments to communicate and how you communicate them.

Overall, being aware of people's egos and how you express your judgments is important to securing benefits. Inaccuracies about ego hurt the ego. A common offender is the use of inaccurate absolutes, such as always and never, everyone and no one, all and none, everywhere and no where, must and impossible. It is usually better to avoid or qualify absolute statements, unless you have evidence to support them. Don't say, You always x. An accurately qualified absolute is more useful and less hurtful, such as, As far as I have seen, you always x.

How to Give Feedback

Here we start with an example of a communication problem where someone gives bad-quality feedback.

Person	Statement	Intended meaning	Interpretation
1	Do you like my new hairstyle?	Please tell me I look good	Do I like your new hairstyle?
2	No	I prefer your previous hairstyle to your new hairstyle	I want to be mean to you
1	You are always mean	You hurt my feelings	Confusion

This is an example of a rudimentary communication problem. Both parties could do several things better in this exchange. I want to emphasize the problems with the statement You are always mean. This is an attempt to give someone feedback. Firstly, this feedback is unsolicited. If you have an ongoing relationship with someone, unsolicited feedback can be useful, but the less committed the relationship, the less likely unsolicited feedback is to help anyone. Instead of telling everyone else what is wrong with them, focus on yourself and vote with your feet, support, wallet, or attention. Also, the problem in this interaction is partially caused by an assumption of ill intent.

Useful feedback has four components.

- Generality from universal to specific. You always x is global and eternal, across all spacetime, unchangeable everywhere through past and present to the future. You x to me is specific. Feedback is more useful with more relevant information, bring receipts.

- Identity from subjective to objective. You are x is personal, as if I can assign your identity to you. Interference with personal choices is rarely welcome or useful. I think you did x is objective, it addresses an objective question, whether you did x or not, and suggests that I have a reason to believe that you did x. Objective claims can have evidence, while subjective claims can't. It also correctly takes responsibility as a speaker, using an I-statement instead of a you-statement. I-statements aren't always good and you-statements aren't always bad, but starting feedback with I-statements, and possibly staying with them, can help.

- Constructive suggestion. Insulting someone is not useful feedback. Identifying a problem qualifies as feedback, but isn't very useful in personal relationships if the other person is causing problems for you but not for themselves. I think you did x. So what? It is the responsibility of the person providing feedback to make a constructive suggestion of what they think would have been better. Doing x has these consequences, which

cause these problems for me. I think doing y would be better, it doesn't take more effort and avoids those problems. Keep in mind that people tend to do what they want to do. Any request you make to change their behavior will typically violate their current preferences. For your suggestion to be constructive, you need to account for their preferences, not yours.

- Followup. I think it would be better if you did y. What do you think? Throwing your feedback over their fence and walking away as if your job is done is rarely effective.

Problems usually only become problems because people don't already agree. Any feedback that you find necessary to give will either identify a problem that the recipient was not previously aware of, they were aware of it but disagree that it's a problem, they are aware but haven't tried to solve it yet, or they are aware but they are unable to solve it.

Recipient state	Notification only	Followup
Unaware of problem	May solve if they agree it's a problem and can act immediately	Allows questions to clarify the problem, increasing likelihood of action
Aware, disagrees it's a problem	Disagreement persists	Allows discussion of why it's a problem, potentially changing their view
Aware, disagrees on urgency	Low priority persists	Allows discussion of urgency, possibly reprioritizing
Aware, unable to solve	Inability persists	Allows you to offer help to solve the problem

Bad feedback = global eternal identity, subjective, destructive, uncommitted

Good feedback = specific limited behavior, objective, constructive, committed

Wrong

You, and others, are often wrong. If you can detect who is wrong, whether it is yourself or others, you can gain significant advantages, while if you can't, you could lose out.

Objective reality is not personally or socially convenient for you. There are few ways to be right, and many, many ways to be wrong. In order to be consistently right, you would need the full information, the capacity to think everything through, and the ability to do everything correctly. You can't do any of that, you lack the information, the thinking power and the ability to execute. It is fine to claim benefits when you are right and they are wrong, but almost always all parties are wrong. The question is what ways are we wrong, how much, how can we be less wrong? How do you find out and deal with what you or others are wrong about?

Chesterton's Fence

If you are traveling down a road, and find that the road is unexpectedly blocked by a fence, what should you do? Should you break the fence? Bypass it? Turn around and find another path to your destination?

If you don't know why the fence is there, do not remove it. If you later learn why the fence is there, then you can decide whether to keep or remove it, this was Chesterton's advice. A fence does not totally prevent you from going somewhere, it is not a physical law, a fence is only a deterrent. The fence is telling you that there is a reason you might not want to go there. If you go there anyway, you might pay an unacceptable price. The fence is often for everyone's benefit. But a fence could be placed anywhere, what if a crazy person is just blocking the road with a fence for no reason? Crazy people can't effectively pursue long term goals, that is an essential characteristic of insanity. Fences require money and maintenance, which most crazy people can't manage. Not every fence is there for a good reason, but most are.

When you disagree with someone and you suspect that they are crazy or stupid, you have found a fence in social reality. It might be that the other person is wrong or confused, and you should continue to hold your current beliefs. But it might be that your current beliefs are wrong, and the person that you think is crazy, is right, and they think you are crazy. Until you know why they think what they think, don't dismiss someone as crazy or stupid. After you understand what they think and why, when their position makes perfect sense to you from their perspective, then you can conclude if they are crazy or stupid.

Crazy

When someone conflicts with our interests, one form of social attack is to insult them. An insult is a social attack to harm someone's reputation. Confusingly, insults have some effects even when there are just two people talking. The opposite of insults are compliments, compliments are relationship building, giving appreciation, credit, increasing status to pay more benefits to the recipient.

An insult is an attempt to lower status, take benefits. An insult is a claim that the target loses or destroys benefits for the group and should be shunned or killed to benefit the group. Don't listen to them, they are crazy. An insult is a form of mental do-not-enter sign. A do-not-enter sign indicates that you should not enter the marked area, similar to a fence. If I tell you that someone is crazy, I am marking them as not worth talking to. Perhaps they are incapable, or perhaps they are an enemy. Even if an enemy says something true, it is just a trick to advance their evil goals.

Here are some examples of insults, from weaker to stronger.

silly, stupid, wacky, one of them, delusional, ideological, crazy, bad, corrupt, terrible, disgusting, vile, evil

Insulters are often an example of an omelette connoisseur. The implicit claim is that the insulter is selflessly taking the effort and risk of notifying the group about a problem, just like the omelette connoisseur claims to be interested in omelettes, but that is merely the socially acceptable justification, not their real motivation. What they really want to do is to harm the other party without the social consequences of being the aggressor. So they reduce the other party's reputation below the level of moral concern, and muddy the water with insults.

Human Coherence

Reality is coherent, so people have a kind of coherence. People who are overall functional, have their life together, of course they are not right about everything, but they aren't dead-wrong about anything. Your life is very easy to mess up, and so are other people's lives. If they were silly crazy wrong about something important, they would probably be silly crazy wrong about a lot of things, and their life would fall apart.

If someone is screaming about the end of the world in an babbling stream of consciousness while rolling on the ground, smelling of their own urine, their life is coherent. Their words, actions, place in the world all match, they are probably crazy. Even if a broken clock sometimes displays the correct time, it is not a reliable time keeper and you should not consult it. There are bad clocks. If someone has achieved and maintained a useful position in society, if their life is somewhat orderly, if their speech is comprehensible, they may be wrong about some things, they may think or say some crazy things, but they aren't fundamentally crazy.

Luxury Beliefs

When a person is protected from the consequences of their actions, they break the reality feedback loop, and develop wrong beliefs. These wrong beliefs are a luxury they can afford because they are protected from the consequences of their beliefs and actions, being wrong does not harm them.

Opinions

Everyone has opinions, and most opinions are wrong. Almost everyone is terrible at almost every important job in society. People who are good at important jobs are rare. But everyone has opinions about how the important jobs should be done, and their opinions are generally wrong. Most of the people who are given important jobs are also wrong, but sometimes, someone who is good at the job gets the job, and shows us how capable people can be.

When someone capable is taking care of things for all of us, we can all stand on the side and complain about them, but our opinions do not matter. The fact that our opinions do not matter is harmful to us, because it allows wrong,

meaning ineffective, opinions to persist and spread. When everyone else agrees that the person who is good at their job is doing it wrong, that person looks crazy to everyone who shares wrong opinions about it. And everyone who would be bad at that job and hold bad opinions looks crazy to the person who knows what they are doing. The usual pattern is that the majority has common sense, and the outlier is crazy. In these cases, where someone has demonstrated competence and unqualified people have no feedback, the outlier is usually sensible and the majority is crazy.

Another way to see that the majority is crazy is to look at social beliefs of the past. When times change, opinions change completely because social beliefs are ungrounded. People in later societies, such as you, can look at how backward, savage, confused and crazy the beliefs of past societies were, while thinking that you and your society are sensible and superior, when in many ways, you are no better.

The market can remain irrational longer than you can remain solvent. Just because someone is wrong, doesn't mean that they will fail immediately, soon, or ever in their entire lives. The world is not efficient and just, injustice can persist and thrive. You can flip a coin and get ten heads in a row. You shouldn't bet on getting that result if you flip a coin yourself, but if hundreds of people flip coins, someone among them probably will get ten heads in a row. But wrong is wrong in the end, wrong beliefs and strategies will lose to better beliefs and strategies overall, due to grounding, but not always in a way that is convenient to you.

Appearing Crazy

There are stupid and crazy people out there, plenty of them, so concluding that someone is crazy is sometimes correct. But there are a lot of alternative situations where someone is not crazy, but appears crazy to you. People who want different things than you can also appear crazy to you. People who are more capable than you can appear crazy to you, by doing something that you don't understand the significance of. Later, that capable person may succeed in a way you couldn't expect. There are also randomized strategies, where the strategist counters attempts to predict their actions. Some of their actions appear to be chaotic, they appear somewhat crazy.

Then there is the tactic of acting crazy, a scheme where the strategist presents themselves as crazy to others, in order to cause their opponents to neglect them or fear their irrational choices, a powerful deterrence. The strategist pretending to be crazy makes sure to sometimes act in a counterproductive way, but always acts sensibly when needed to preserve and advance their core interests. Acting crazy is deceptive, it intentionally presents itself in a way that is hard to distinguish from actual stupid or crazy people, but it is incoherent. Often the supposedly crazy person is consistently successful in their life, and hasn't ruined their core interests.

When people want the same things and are both thinking well enough, they can still disagree by using different reference classes. The answer to a question may be one way for one reference class, and the opposite for another reference class. Each reasoner is correct when thinking about each case, but because they are considering different cases, they think the other is wrong, and talk past each other.

Finding Who is Wrong

There are three categories of being wrong. People who are incapable of getting it right, people who are capable but unwilling, and people pretending to be wrong. These are easier to observe in other people, but you should spend more effort to observe these problems in yourself. Usually everyone is wrong, but in different ways and amounts.

Crazy

Type	Incapable
Description	Unable to think clearly, broken world model
Distinguishing characteristics	Ruining their life, not useful, unable to take care of themselves, nonsensical speech, disproven assumptions
Working with	Bothering fewer people, rejecting certainty and obsession, validating assumptions, focusing on life basics

Working against	Avoid, trigger their crazy beliefs

Stupid

Type	Incapable
Description	Unable to think independently, reductive world model
Distinguishing characteristics	Unreasonable in that they don't reason. Conventional, credulous, follows the crowd, avoids immediate danger, can take care of themselves and do simple tasks.
Working with	Convince, isolate from contrary influences, only give simple tasks
Working against	Convince, outmaneuver

Useless

Type	Incapable
Description	Unable to achieve results despite reasonable intentions
Distinguishing characteristics	Disorganized, unskilled, uncommitted, mixed up, impatient, stubborn, uncollaborative
Working with	Use them for monitoring, not doing. Have them help instead of work alone.
Working against	Outperform

Irrelevant

Type	Unwilling
Description	Makes things up, chases status, protected by others, willfully ignorant
Distinguishing characteristics	Able to think clearly, but does not usually need to, and does not. Not useful, life is fine when they are protected, incapable of self-sufficiency. Trapped in a specific narrative, captured by an ideology.
Working with	Talk to them about topics outside of their existing wrong beliefs where they can be reasonable. Enforce exacting and immediate consequences to get them to act right.
Working against	Ignore, or call to reality by exposing them to consequences

Shill

Type	Unwilling
Description	A potentially reasonable person that has incentives to be wrong about specific topics
Distinguishing characteristics	Holds reasonable views on general topics, but holds exactly establishment, party approved wrong views about topics related to their income, bribe or ingroup
Working with	Avoid corrupted topics, treat the current topic as an exception to the party view
Working against	Follow the money, counter deception

Superior

Type	Pretending
Description	Someone who is able and willing to defeat you but deceiving you, or doesn't need to explain themselves to you
Distinguishing characteristics	Ignores you, doesn't get provoked, challenges things you think are obvious, has their life together but does things that confuse you. Might feign weakness before attacking and winning.
Working against	Change the game, use larger social forces, take a chance and compete, concede

Acting crazy, Randomized

Type	Pretending
Description	A rational actor deceiving others to appear irrational as a tactic to gain bargaining power
Distinguishing characteristics	Significant track record of success combined with crazy statements, choices, appearances. Someone put in charge of something valuable or significant but appearing irresponsible, while having a significant deterring effect.
Working against	Confirm that you know what their core interests are, assume they are rational

Different, Outgroup

Type	Potentially right
Description	A potentially reasonable person that has different goals, capabilities, experiences, social groups

Distinguishing characteristics	Says things counter to your narrative, they like things you dislike, they correctly point out ways that you are wrong, you think their life is a mess but they like their life
Working with	Expand your worldview to include different people, then coordinate where there is no conflict
Working against	Understand their worldview first, then compete as usual

Relationships

Groups

The important unit of humanity is not the individual, it is the group. Yet, I am not a collectivist. Human animals are not solitary, we are social mammals. Humans are apex predators, but not because bears are not killed by human individuals, bears are killed by human groups. Human individuals are weak in the wilderness, the world's greatest apex predator is human groups.

What makes us so powerful? No human is individually stronger than a bear. Nature has made us individually weak and vulnerable because it is advantageous, it forces us to work together. If humans were less individually vulnerable, we would be more solitary and stop creating groups. We are an apex predator because we plan and coordinate, we cooperate using communication.

If a farmer plants only one kind of seed, this is called a monocrop. This can simplify farm management, but if anything attacks a vulnerability of that plant, such as weather, insects or molds, the farmer can lose everything they planted. If instead, the farmer plants a variety of seeds, a diversified strategy, it is harder to manage, but most farm problems won't wipe out all of the crops at once. It is similar with people, people are all different, some are big and strong but easy to hit, some are small and weaker but hard to catch. Because we have different advantages, we can combine them. Using specialization, different people can do the things they do the best for the group, unlike someone working alone, or a group of people who are too similar.

How does nature make us individually weak? Lots of ways. Human children are more helpless than other animals for a long time. A lot of baby animals get up and walk around immediately after birth. Pregnancy in humans is incredibly vulnerable for the mother, and for mothers of other species, it often isn't. Human birth is often a many-hours-long, dangerous process, and is generally very painful. Other animals don't appear to be in significant distress when they give birth. Nature could have made birth less painful and dangerous for humans, but it didn't. For example, consider if humans used a marsupial strategy, where babies are born small and immature, then continue to grow outside of the womb. Pregnancy could be shortened, especially the third trimester where the mother can be almost immobilized. Birth would be much faster and easier. Nature can make mammals less vulnerable than humans, but it didn't. Nature made us individually weak and vulnerable, to force us to rely on each other and communicate, because the individual is not the important unit of humanity. Our power lies in group coordination, so nature found ways to make us work together by necessity.

The Descent of Man by Charles Darwin, Chapter 2 Conclusion.

Mothers and Others: The Evolutionary Origins of Mutual Understanding by Sarah Blaffer Hrdy

Faction

Personal relationships reduce down to a single value, How much do I like or dislike you? I call this single relationship number the faction value. You can like or dislike someone for your own reasons, but your behavior reflects a single changing personal judgment of how much that relationship is worth to you, or how much you want to help, avoid or harm them.

Yet, relationships are more complex than a single number. There are other aspects that can be just as important as faction value. Every pair of people has an ideal distance between them. There are some people that you are so compatible with, the closer they are and the more often, the better. Many people aren't good for you to relate with

at all. And many good people do not have an ideal distance of zero or infinity with you, they are better to relate with at certain times, places, activities.

Some people are better for socializing, some are better for working with, some are better to see one-on-one, some are better with a group. What is this person good for? What is this person good at? What do you need from them? What do they need from you? This applies to all relationships, including friendships. But friendships aren't about taking, they are about giving! Yes, so what kind of friendship do you want, do they want, what are you capable of, what are they capable of?

Faction isn't only between two individuals, you also have your individual evaluation of groups, I like this group, I don't like that group, this group welcomes me, this group shuns me. Things that others do change your faction with them, and things you do change their faction with you. A faction value of zero is neutral, this is how you treat individuals or groups you don't know, strangers. In some cultures, neighbors greet newcomers with gifts, to establish a friendly debt between them. Repaying the debt is an insult to them, it means that you want to treat them as a stranger after they greeted you in friendship.

The common usage of the word faction is about competing groups within a group. A faction that has a high faction value towards you is your faction, and usually factions are mutually exclusive, you have to pick one faction to join, pick a side. If you decline to pick a side, all factions will tend to have negative faction value towards you, because you are implicitly declaring yourself as a separate faction. Once you choose a side, if you later switch sides, this often flips your faction value as a betrayer.

Expression of faction value takes different forms, but some examples of the lowest faction value is hatred, disgust, and Kill On Sight, KOS. Examples of the highest faction value are I love you, I would do anything for you, and I would kill and die for you. It is not coincidental that both extreme faction values are murderous. I recommend ensuring that you always maintain perspective about your relationships, all real people and groups have both good and bad aspects. Skill in communication exactly means that you can avert murder.

Order Effects

The world operates on cause and effect, action and reaction. But the butterfly effect is about consequences for actions beyond the initial effect, we call these order effects, first-order effects, second-order effects, third-order effects, etc. For example, if you throw a stone into a calm lake or make a social action, these are the order effects.

Order	Throw a rock in a lake	Social action
First order	Sploosh	Immediate social effect
Second order	Expanding rings of ripples in lake	Others' reactions to your behavior
Third order	The ripples reflect against obstacles	Others discuss your action and change your reputation
Fourth order	Floating objects bob in the water, reflected ripples interfere with the original ripples	Others change their behavior because of your action, your changed reputation interferes with your life course

When you act, you should consider the first, second and third-order effects of your action, which we might call immediate consequence, reactions and reputational effects. Sometimes first-order effects dominate, and being straightforward, direct, is the best choice. Sometimes second-order effects dominate, and the best way to get what you want is by gaining support or playing along. Sometimes third-order effects dominate, and the best way is to use reputation and status.

We don't always have the time or ability to consider everything we do so deeply. Good habits can help to avoid rethinking every action at every moment. You can deeply consider the routine activities of your life periodically, and then follow your good habits day by day. That frees up your mind to handle surprises and higher-order considerations. To succeed, you have to identify the actions and moments when deeper consideration matters the most and focus your thoughts there.

Order effects complicate our ability to interpret others' intentions. We usually assume that when others act, the first-order effect is their intended effect. If you see someone eat a cookie, you assume they ate the cookie because they were hungry. Sometimes people do things for second-order reasons, they ate the cookie to prevent you from getting the cookie, or third-order reasons, they ate the cookie to let everyone know the cookies belong to them.

On top of this, sometimes people are mistaken and do the wrong thing, or act for no discernible reason. The intent of any single action, out of context, is almost impossible to infer. This is why we need to collect patterns of behavior to understand others' intentions. If someone is goal directed, then the pattern of their behavior will emphasize their goals. After you identify their goals, you can infer the intention of any particular action, whether it is first, second, third, or higher-order.

Theory of Mind

The only experience you have ever had is your own experience. The single fact you can be most certain of, is that you are experiencing this moment. While every other belief you hold could be mistaken, the belief of I am experiencing now is the root of self-trust. Other people appear to exist, just like you appear to outwardly exist. But, you must be strictly less confident that other people exist than the fact that yourself exists. Other people could be shadows on the wall, pod-people, simulations, zombies, you can be deceived. But to be deceived, you must exist to experience the deceipt.

Theory of mind is your level of ability to consider external agents. It is really an abbreviation of the phrase, the sophistication of your theory of other agent's minds. If you were alone on a lifeless world with no technology, you would be the only agent. If you pick up a rock and release it, it falls down. You can interact with the environment, but the environment does not respond to you.

If you are with another person, you can interact with them at any level of theory of mind. You could act like they are just another non-agent in the environment, which is called objectification. You could assume that they have a mind and internal experience, with resources, capabilities and goals like you have, and deeply consider why they are doing what they are doing, what that implies about their experiences, preferences, intent, and how you should act to get what you want, taking into account what they want and what they might do.

The more you are able to conceive of, perceive, impute and simulate the minds of other agents and their network of responses to the environment, to you and to each other, the more theory of mind you have. The basic position that people hold about other people is solipsicm, I am the only person, no one else exists. Most people understand, at some level, that other people exist, but act almost as if they didn't understand that, which is the behavior of egotism or selfishness. Theory of mind develops as both a capability and a practice.

People begin life as babies, experiencing life while unaware of the workings of the world or themselves, an undifferentiated experience. Then they learn to distinguish between the world and themselves, ego formation. Then they learn to distinguish between passive and active external enities, actors. The rock will always lie there, but the grasshopper sometimes hops.

Then they learn to distinguish non-agents from agents, a powered vehicle is active and can drive itself forward, but can't respond, while a grasshopper can respond to danger by hopping away. This simple concept of agents defines agents who perceive stimuli and respond, but they do not have internal experiences. At this level, you treat other people like vending machines, if you press the right buttons, they might give you candy. The other agent's perception can change hidden state, allowing other agents to know things that I don't know, or for me to know things that other agents don't know.

This level of capability is testable. There are experiments that psychologists perform to distinguish between children who have or have not developed this level of theory of mind. Typical human children exhibit this level of theory of mind starting at the ages of four to five years old. This specific capability is termed Theory of Mind, but I am describing a continuum of development of theory of mind with multiple levels. More than that, there is a distinction between developing a capability, and performing to the limit of your capabilities. Your development of a capability rarely regresses, but your performance rarely realizes your full capability.

After agency comes the idea of other consciousnesses, some agents have an internal experience like I do, with joy and suffering, boredom and excitement, and they can think for themselves and change their mind. The capability is binary, either you are capable of conceiving that other people are conscious like you are, or you are not. The application of this capability is a continuum, from considering another person as a device with no internal experience, to full awareness and consideration of another person's experience as deeply as your own. This is also first-order

modeling. This level of theory of mind is able to consider, for a given action that I consider to take, how that would directly affect the experience of another person. If I give them a gift, they may be happy, and if I take their toy, they may be sad.

Second-order modeling is able to take the next step. If I do this, and this will affect them that way, how might they respond, and how will their response affect my experience? If I give them a gift, they might be happy and give me a smile, which might make me happy too. If I take their toy, they might be sad and cry, or might become angry and throw something at me, which might hurt me. This is the first level that allows you to manipulate other people intentionally.

Higher-order modeling is able to simulate the expanding ripples and chains of responses out farther and farther, considering what I might do in response to their response, and how other agents might respond to my action, how they might respond to the other agent's response, and how they would respond to each other about the response to the response to my action, etc. Success at this level allows you to manipulate events, your action can cause someone else to do something which can cause someone else to do something, designing causal chains that permit action at a social distance.

Meta-level one considers not only actions and responses, but what incentives these actions and responses create, change or destroy, and how this action would change future behavior of each of the parties involved. At this level, you aren't just manipulating people to cause particular events, your choices intentionally mold other people's minds to change their behavior in general.

Meta-level two considers how an action might change the incentives of changing the incentives. This level of consideration is often unnecessary, but occasionally essential. This modifies or designs the machine that makes the machine, your actions shape future society, shaping the future minds that comprise it. What kind of society produces a person that acts this way?

Table of the levels of Theory of Mind

	Level	Ability	Example
0	Undifferentiated	None	Newborn human baby
1	Differentiated	Distinguish self and world, ego formation	Infant
2	Actors	Distinguish non-actors from actors	Toddler
3	Agents	Distinguish non-agents from agents	Children age 4 - 5
4	First-order modeling	Conceive that some agents are conscious. Ability to consider what someone else thinks.	Display of empathy
5	Second-order modeling	Consider immediate conscious consequences of actions	Passing the marshmallow test
6	Higher-order modeling	Consider larger conscious consequences of actions	Socialized
7	Meta-level one	Consider how actions change incentives and change people	Become an example for others

8   Meta-level two   Consider how to change   Forming an organization
the incentives of the
incentives

Respect

Respect is a word with multiple applicable senses. One sense is a demand, another is a behavior, another is a personal practice, and another is a feeling.

Senses of the meaning of the word respect

- Demanded behavior - obedience, essentially submission to a dominant

- Contextual behavior - being appropriate in the context, following the rules and protocols, showing the deference, obedience, politeness accorded between social roles

- Personal practice - individual, voluntary, limited obedience, politeness, deference, protocol to another party

- Feeling - esteem or awe towards another, granting them some degree of consideration, politeness, deference, appreciation. Not necessarily obedience. Greater respect means lowering yourself further and deferring more, potentially reaching obedience.

While respect is many things, not respecting someone is also ambiguous between two things. Lack of respect can mean neutrality, in that you treat the other party the same way you would treat anyone else, or it can mean active disrespect. Disrespect means to violate the other party's boundaries, be rude, inconsiderate, consider them beneath you, give them low or no moral weight, to not treat them as a member of the group, reject their role, disobey their orders, countermand them, aggress on their body and their property, or frustrate or oppose their higher-level goals. You can respectfully oppose someone you respect in a competition, whether you win or lose against them. If you cheat in the competition, that might disrespect their higher-level goal to compete fairly, or it might respect their belief in winning at all costs. Losing to them in a fair match, despite the opportunity to cheat, might disrespect their belief in winning at all costs.

Respect, meaning quiet obedience, is often demanded by a party that considers themselves superior to you. It is possible to demand obedience in that sense of respect. But another sense of respect, meaning a feeling of esteem or awe towards the other party that causes you to be considerate, polite, deferential and appreciative, can only be felt, not demanded. A feeling is the subconscious reaction of beliefs to events. If the other party does something that you respect, you will feel respectful toward them, and if the other party does not behave in a respectable way or does not produce respectable results, you do not respect them, no matter what they demand. They can only force you to act in a respectful manner. You can give forced or inauthentic respect, which is performative, as opposed to actual or genuine respect. This is why we say that respect can only be earned, not demanded.

Respect for another human being often requires some amount of mystery or distance from them, like a the abstraction of a god or a hero. There can be hero worship, but you rarely worship people you know well, because humans are deeply flawed. The flaws typically destroy the feeling of awe. This is one reason for the advice to never meet your heroes. This advice is warning that actual people aren't heroic, so meeting the actual person will tend to destroy the hero. It is fine to meet your heroes, as long as you are willing to risk destroying the hero to meet the person, who might become a disappointment, a valuable lesson, an enemy, a friend or a collaborator. The mundane or disappointing reality of people you otherwise respect is also why some people separate their respect for a role from their respect for the person holding the role.

By granting the respect due to different roles in society, you are not lowering yourself or holding various people in awe, you may be in awe of society, or you may simply choose to participate, by making the different societal roles function as they are designed. Respecting roles is not a passive acceptance of society, it is participation, active cooperation, the action of giving respect is reifying and producing more of society, you are civilizing.

You can deeply respect a party that cannot stop or threaten you, and you can be neutral towards a party that can stop and threaten you. Meaning, whether or not you are deterred by another party, you can respect them or be neutral. But asymmetrically, to actively disrespect someone, requires that they do not deter you. When you disrespect someone, you invite their retaliation. Further, you must generally retaliate when someone disrespects you, because disrespect without retaliation creates more disrespect. To dampen or prevent escalating cycles of violence, you should create deterrence preemptively. In life, you will be disrespected unless you create deterrence. Deterrence

does not mean inviting or accepting cycles of violence, it means giving respect or being neutral to others, asserting your socially acceptable boundaries, and enforcing costs on transgressors proportionately, with precision, ensuring that transgression is lose lose, disincentivizing transgression and creating deterrence.

The behaviors and the attitudes of respect are correlated but not causal one way or the other. You can feel one way and act another. Someone that hates a society can be compliant, and someone disrupting a society can greatly appreciate it. Most often, people who appreciate their society promote it, and those who devalue their society disrupt it. A well-informed person usually supports a functional society and opposes a corrupt one, while an ignorant person disrupts a functional society and supports a corrupt one. Before you can respect others, you must first respect yourself. Lack of self and social awareness destroys the group and yourself. Greater self and social awareness builds the group and ultimately yourself. You reap what you sow.

Trust

Trust is your belief that another party acts in ways you would agree with, knowing what they know. Your trusting belief, to the extent you hold it, allows you to expose your vulnerabilities to the other party. You are willing to bear the risk of their failure or betrayal harming you, because the risk is below your tolerance threshold. The poential benefits of trust are the possibilities of all human interaction and cooperation, which all require various forms and degrees of trust.

Trust is a belief in both their compatible intentions and their competence. You cannot trust people who do not share your relevant goals, or are idiots. Car rental companies do not rent cars to people under the age of twenty-five, because their intentions are often unstable, and they have very uneven judgement, making the risks above their threshold, which is defined by profit. Trust can be compartmentalized, I can confidently trust you with one thing, and not trust you with another thing.

Trust is very hard to establish. I can observe you for extended periods of time, to collect evidence of your competence, but I would need to observe a very wide variety of circumstances to reliably understand what you are capable, or incapable of. People have gaps. They may seem generally well-informed or well-rounded, but totally fail at the next moment because they can't do something that most other people have no problem with.

Competence is the easier quality to measure, intent is all but impossible to prove. At the extreme, a talented spy could infiltrate your life and act perfectly like someone with compatible intentions for years, establishing your trust until the critical moment, when they betray you with a treacherous turn. The only defense against deceivers is to verify their compatible intentions enough that the costs of deceiving you aren't worth it. You can't prevent all aggression or deception that might enter your life, but if you increase the real or perceived costs to attackers, above the perceived benefits, or raise the costs of attacking you above attacking other people, attackers will often either be deterred or choose easier targets.

Building trust follows a curve, the same way that you build confidence in a hypothesis. At first you have no special information, the hypothesis that the person is trustworthy is completely unjustified. If they make a trust-building action or you choose to investigate their trustworthiness for any reason, you start collecting evidence. The most direct and efficient way to collect evidence of another party's trustworthiness is to extend a small amount of trust to them and see whether they fail or betray you. Two isolated, untrusting parties have no safe or costless way to establish trust. To access the benefits of trust, you have to pay into the system first, you have to prime the pump. While you can lose out by giving away free trust at first, you can also benefit from being rationally magnanimous. If the other person succeeds, we say that they repaid your trust.

They say that every person has their price, meaning that there is always an amount of money that would entice one party to betray another. There are people with principles, or who aren't interested in money or power, who are incorruptible in this sense, but the rule generally applies. It is not effective nor efficient to try to build trust by repeatedly extending minimal trust to the other party until you reach statistical significance, and then trust the other party fully. Minimal payments of trust may all be below the other party's betrayal price. Trust challenges using a constant price are inefficient, and so is a linear schedule of increasing trust. The optimal curve is some kind of exponential, where each round raises the stakes more than the last. Escalation of trust, following the trust curve is smooth and continuous. This minimizes the number of rounds, time, monitoring costs and risks to establish trust with another party.

When parties reciprocate, one party extends trust first, then the other party doesn't just match them, they offer greater trust back. If the second party merely matches the initial offering of trust, that forces the original party

to extend greater trust first again, which is a kind of betrayal. Escalating reciprocation is how people can quickly become friends. This dynamic can be exploited by spies, devious people and con artists by skillfully priming the pump and escalating trust quickly into their betrayal price. This is why, even with exponential trust curves and reciprocation, trust is best established over time, which increases the costs of deception.

It is very hard to protect a trusting belief, trust is easy to damage and hard to repair. People tend to assume that other people are somewhat competent in general, or they use proxies to estimate overall competence, easily deluding themselves that they know that someone is pretty competent or very impressive, based on insufficient evidence. All it takes is one stupid remark or one bad choice to destroy others' delusions of your competence. That is why cool people usually stand there with a blank expression, saying and doing nothing. If they don't do anything, other people are free to assume that they are really skilled, interesting and deep. An interview counters the do-nothing strategy. In an interview, you are required to say and do things for an extended period of time, making it difficult to hide your capabilities and intentions.

People tend to assume that the whole world agrees with them, that other people think like they do and share similar intentions. Sometimes challenges come up in your life that force you to choose between competing priorities, and on these occasions the people that trust you will sometimes learn that your intentions are actually incompatible with theirs, and they may feel betrayed.

People are born well-meaning, and naively trusting of others. I recommend to generally not trust other people. Other people are generally not trustworthy, and great trust is not strictly necessary for most activities. Draw the smallest boundary possible around what is truly important in your life, and protect yourself within that boundary as best you can against all threats, according to cost benefit. You don't really have to trust many other people with the things that are most important to you, anyway.

So, rather than being recklessly trusting and repeatedly, seriously hurt by others, secure your essentials yourself. Boldly move through life with high risk-tolerance for the non-essentials. Truly let what is not important slide. Be daring, spontaneous, magnanimous with the things that you can afford to lose, such as momentary social interactions where you can be friendly, polite or kind to others, forgive trivial random mistakes, try new things that are low-risk and low-cost. Maximize your opportunities while minimizing the risks to your core interests, while accepting moderate or even high risk in things that aren't essential. Be willing to lose it all, where it refers to all the things that don't really matter to you, which is actually almost everything.

But you do have to trust other people in certain ways and degrees. Do your due diligence to determine for yourself who is trustworthy, prepare to be wrong or deceived at multiple points in your life, and even when you do trust others, verify. Collect independent evidence and check the receipts while balancing cost and benefit. This is how you make deception expensive and catch failure or betrayal early. Some people take offense to verification, feeling accused of a crime they did not commit. This is an incentive to verify others privately or secretly. Actual deceivers cry the most about verification, following their incentive to not get caught. Active avoidance or resistance to verification is evidence of duplicity. Casual transparency can be evidence of trustworthiness, or an effective tactic for deception.

You can entrust your life to others, but you are the only person ultimately responsible for your own life. Coincidentally, intuitively, or intentionally, people will fail, betray and deceive you. Take every reasonable, proportionate, effective step to protect yourself, and extend appropriate trust, where necessary, to maximize benefits. There is no way through life without getting hurt by other people, but nevertheless, a lot of injuries are preventable and a lot of potential benefits are there for you to claim.

Liking

Life and circumstances force people to do a lot of things they don't want to do, be places they don't want to be, experience things they don't want to experience. Somehow, it is simultaneously true that most people are doing what they want, most of the time. Liking something means that you prefer that thing over the baseline. If I like someone, I prefer their company over the baseline, their absence. If I dislike somebody, I prefer their absence over their company.

People assume that liking something or someone means that you enjoy them or they make you feel good. But that is a wrongful simplification, similar to thinking that people enjoy sweetness, so we should add sugar to all food. People choose to eat salty, sour or spicy foods that aren't sweet at all, and they choose those over the baseline, bland food. People like things that they don't enjoy or feel good about in the straightforward way, they enjoy them because they

are different, interesting, those things are good for more complicated reasons than enjoyment. Liking encompasses far more than only being sweet, nice and happy.

People commonly misunderstand liking in that way, and then further misunderstand love as a enjoying to an extreme. If something is super sweet, very nice, and makes you so happy, people wrongly think that you love it. The same way that liking and disliking aren't feelings, they are preferences, loving and hating also aren't feelings, they are consistent decisions to support or oppose something. Those commitments are commonly associated with certain feelings, whether the feelings are the cause, the effect, or both. Feelings are temporary by nature, fickle, while preferences and commitments are comparatively more stable. If love were extreme enjoyment, then people wouldn't say that I love you, but I don't like you right now. Enjoyment and love can even be incompatible. It is hard to simply enjoy someone's company when you are committed to supporting their life. Love and hate are extreme forms of like and dislike, in that your preferences for things can cross into a commitment to support or oppose them.

Things, people and groups are complex, and have many simultaneously good and bad aspects, which makes the seemingly contradictory concept of a love-hate relationship commonplace. Some people consider love and hate to be opposites, which is true in that commitments to support or oppose something are opposite courses of action. Another perspective is that both love and hate are commitments related to something, they are the same in that you only love or hate things that you care about. In that sense, the opposite of both love and hate is neutrality, indifference or neglect. One form of revenge is the defeat of your target, another form of revenge is living a meaningful life without reference to them.

Friendship

A friend is someone you prefer to be with for certain occasions, and they agree. You would prefer to have them on your side, and if you invite them, your friend will be there. Friendship is bidirectional. Your friends are the people who show up for you, and you are a friend to the people you show up for. You don't have to enjoy each other, get along, or trust them with your life. Friendships are as different as people and situations can be, but often people become friends because they have an intuitive mutual understanding or compatibility. You can work together, not necessarily for a productive purpose, but your interaction is functional in some way. Friendship, like all relationships, is built on trust, respect, and communication!

Once you have friends, there are compatible and incompatible combinations of friends with each other and with situations. As you and your life change, your friendships can grow closer or grow apart. Friendships require regular meetings and contribution of effort, or else they fade away. A typical pattern is that it is easy to make friends in your youth, and harder to make friends as you get older. The better you know yourself and others, the fewer people match you.

Unlike family, you choose your friends, so choose wisely. The people that you associate with are evidence of your character. Friends often have a strong influence on you. Your reputation is tied to your friends, if they do something right or something wrong, it reflects on you, too. Everyone has ups and downs, friends are needed most when you are down and you have the least to offer them. The people who are only there for you only when things are going well, are called fair-weather friends, and they aren't friends at all. Real friends are there for you through thick and thin, they are rare and precious. Be the foul-weather friend for others, some of them will remember it.

Mutual Appreciation

When people think about what they want in life and their relationships, they tend to focus on what they can get. Getting stuff is great in the abstract, but you don't care about most stuff, you only care about the stuff you really want. Getting what you want is also great, but that is only one fourth of the puzzle of a human relationship. For you to get something, someone has to make it, and someone has to give it to you. The things you want to get don't come from nowhere, they come from other people. For someone to give you what you want, usually they have to want to give it to you. Why would they want to give anything to you? Because you give them something they want in exchange.

People create and have various things to offer, and other people want various things. The four-piece puzzle of a functional human relationship is that you have things you want to give to others, the other person wants to get what you want to give, and thus appreciates getting it. The other person has things they want to give to others, and you want to get what they want to give, and thus you appreciate getting it. An interaction where both parties give what they want to give and get what they want to get produces mutual appreciation and a stable relationship. It is never

stably the case that one person wants everything you want to give and nothing else, and you want everything they want to give and nothing else. What people have and want constantly change, and you need multiple relationships to match everyone's haves and wants. There are often multiple ways to get things, but relationships with mutual appreciation are precious.

Relationship consequences of matching haves and wants

I want to give	I gave	You want to get	You got	You gave appreciation	Result
No	No	No	No	No	Fine
No	No	Yes	No	No	Desire
No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Imposter
No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Worthless sacrifice, self-betrayal
No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Forced gratitude for sacrifice
No	Yes	Yes	No	No	Wasted sacrifice
No	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Symbolic sacrifice
No	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Exploitation
No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Unsustainable worthy sacrifice
Yes	No	No	No	No	Loneliness
Yes	No	Yes	No	No	Mutual frustration
Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No	Lost opportunity
Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No	Unwanted
Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Unsustainably polite
Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Unappreciated
Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Mutual satisfaction

Giving

The basis of human relationships is exchange, acts of one person giving to another. These acts occur in objective reality, social reality, or both. A particular act of giving is only one event, but giving can be understood along seven dimensions. They are, how much you want to receive it, how much they want to give it, whether you believe you earned it, whether they believe you deserve it, their purpose in giving, what they give to other people, and what they spent. It is hard to figure out what people want, and it is hard to give it to them.

Dimension	Low	Neutral	High
Recipient wants to receive	Do not want, hate	Do not mind, careless	Want, desperate
Desire to give	Do not want to give, jealous	Do not mind, casual	Want to give, desperate
Earned, recipient's belief	Unearned, guilty	Coincidental, casual	Earned, owed
Deserved, giver's belief	Undeserved	Coincidental, casual	Deserved, obligated
Giver's intent	Malicious, harm	Neutral, careless	Beneficent, help
Distribution	Uniform, everyone gets the same	Mulitple tailored	Special, unique
Giver's cost	Minimal, produced by others	Moderate, custom order	High, produced by self

Myriad behaviors, situations and scenarios lie within this categorization. Gifts, insults, rewards, punishments, donations, traps, tricks, sacrifices, tokens of goodwill, accidents, mistakes, perfunctory gestures, wasteful displays, raining on others' parades, common transactions, coverups, theft, fairness, injustice, generosity, delusion, rejection, profligacy, neglect, and more. The default mistakes are to want things you don't need, believe that you are owed things that you aren't, that other people do not deserve things that they do deserve, that other people are not worth benefiting, that you can treat everyone the same, and that you don't need to sacrifice for other people. All get, no give. That is no way to treat people. Even when everyone makes their best efforts, people are hard to please, and people rarely make their best effort. Be grateful for anything you have, and for anyone who does not mistreat you. Your gratitude is one of the most valuable tools for you to create and sustain mutually beneficial relationships.

Connection

People socialize and connect with people who are similar enough to form deep connections, through mutually beneficial exchange. Generally, to start a social connection, at least one of the four puzzle pieces has to at least temporarily fit. People with nothing in common have nothing to exchange, and have trouble connecting. The old don't hate the young as such, the skilled don't hate the unskilled as such, but without social exchange, they quickly run out of things to talk about.

Associating more with people of similar abilities, and less with people with incompatible abilities, is called social sorting. We see strong social sorting by ability and other characteristics. Famously, multiple generations of family can gather together, but the different generations cannot naturally connect. They do not share life stages, interests, resources or abilities. Often, one of the few things that multiple generations can all relate to is food, so family occasions are often centered around eating, because the other aspects are socially incompatible.

The lowest common social denominator of a family is food. Being normal in a typical social group is also based on a lowest common denominator, and that level of knowledge, ability and insight is pretty low, to include almost all members of the group. Lowest common denominator is below average. The standards for fitting into a group can only fall with the size of the group, the larger the group, the lower the standards. The holy grail for mission-driven organizations is a large group of all highly skilled people, which is almost impossible to achieve in practice. Under typical social dynamics, the lowest common denominator of groups is a low bar. Even groups that limit membership, based on a challenging standard, often do not rigorously hold that standard. The standard may be gameable, or members are able to meet the very specific requirements, but are low ability people in other aspects. The limiting factor for excellent groups has always been collecting and retaining great people, accumulating human capital.

A counterintuitive consequence of social sorting is that higher capability is isolating. On the surface, it seems that higher capability would make someone popular because more capable people can produce more benefits, and people flock to sources of benefits, such as the numerous followers of people with power. Also, capability doesn't appear to have any drawbacks, more is better, like more power or more money. It is true that more capable people can generally do all the things that less capable people can do, in addition to being able to do things that less capable people can't do.

But there is so much that most people don't know and can't do, that it is almost impossible for capable people to fit-in with less capable people. If more capability is just better, are capable people not able to act less capable? Depending on their specific capabilities, some can and some can't. But generally, capable people can do it all, including acting stupid as needed. Capable people can act stupid, but capable people all but refuse to be stupid, which is what conformity demands. There are multiple relevant levels of ability

Level of ability	Description
Inability	Cannot do things, cannot socially function
Normal	Able to do normal things, but not more
Greater	Able to do better things than normal. Almost unable to do things normally, because normal is worse. Does not notice that they are different.
Aware	Able to do more than normal, and able to notice that different people have different levels of ability. May be able to tell who has what level of ability. They do notice that they are not normal. Able to act almost normal, but not quite.
Encompassing	So much more able, that they are able to accurately simulate what other levels of ability think. Can act normal. Even then, would almost never choose to actually be normal.

It's not that more capable people can't be nice, or do favors, or follow scripts to fit in and get along. It's that social connection requires mutual benefit, back and forth, reciprocal exchange. Lower capability doesn't have much to give that higher capability wants, and interestingly, the things that higher capability has to give, lower capability doesn't appreciate. It's not that higher capability has a wallet full of hundred dollar bills, while lower capability carries singles, it's that higher capability trades in things like rare information that lower capability doesn't even understand, or can't make use of, so they have no shared currency for exchange.

The more capable you are, the deeper thinker you are, the deeper you think, the farther your conclusions are from other people. That means that less-capable people are more similar to each other in their beliefs and interests than more-capable people are. Some higher-ability people are better able to appreciate differences, but the overall effect of capability is divergent, it makes people think more differently and not get along. On top of divergence, the more you understand, the harder it is to think as though you don't understand. Once you understand, it is hard to even remember what the world seemed like when you didn't previously understand. The ability to both understand, and simulate thinking as though you don't understand, is almost impossible.

Let's take a clear-cut, not exaggerated example of shooting yourself in the foot. Everyone can figure out that shooting yourself in the foot is generally a bad idea, but take this case as an example or metaphor. If you have higher ability than your friends, you have to watch your friends shoot themselves in the foot, and not stop them, despite knowing that they are harming themselves. They do not perceive this behavior as harmful. Then they monitor you closely, to make sure that you shoot yourself in the foot, too. This kind of thing isn't some one-time initiation, or a rare ritual. This happens in almost every social interaction. Shooting ourselves in the foot is our culture. You have to live in a society, so you often have to participate in your culture. When the benefits outweigh the costs, capable people will foot-shoot to fit in. But without corresponding benefits, capable people will refuse to foot-shoot, and can't fit in. Less capable people see that you refuse to foot-shoot, interpret this as rejecting their culture, and feel insulted. You think you're better than me?

Kindness

Kindness is intentionally helping someone else. Cruelty is intentionally harming someone else. Neutrality or fairness is intentionally neither helping nor harming someone else. Egocentrism is acting without regard to whether you help or harm others, only in narrow self-interest, intentionally or unintentionally.

Achieving kindness is neither a moral value nor following a social custom. Kindness is a functional skill, and is not simple. The mechanic behind the skill of kindness has no valence, the same skill underlies kindness, neutrality and cruelty. This is an essential skill to possess if you want to achieve social goals. To be truly kind, neutral or cruel, you have to be aware that your actions have consequences on other people. You must be considerate of how your actions would affect them in particular. You must care how your actions would affect them. You must decide what you intend to do about it. You must act to realize your intentions. Finally, what you do for others must be effective.

Every one of those components is logically necessary to reliably be kind, neutral or cruel. If you do all of those things, you can be kind to some degree, but these components are chained. The chain is only as strong as its weakest link. Even if you do everything else well, one weak component will generally produce a weak result. A failure of any component causes the default behavior, egocentrism. It's not easy to be kind or neutral, but cruelty can be casual, because it is so much easier to harm than to be fair or to help.

Awareness

The first component of kindness is how much you know that your actions affect others. This establishes a continuum from oblivious to aware. If I am egocentric, I am oblivious to how my actions affect other people, I didn't know, I didn't notice, I didn't think about it. If I am aware, I know how much my actions affect other people. Awareness is measurable by how well I am able to answer the question of how my action would affect other people. We are talking about an outside-view of other people. If I throw eggs at someone's house, that would affect their house in some way. Throwing eggs would affect them more than touching it with my finger, and less than if I broke a part of the house with a hammer.

Consideration

Consideration is how much you consider how you affect others. Awareness is about the effects to an agentic object, while consideration is about the effects to conscious experience. Consideration is about figuring out in what way you affect other individuals, in degrees and particulars to them. The continuum goes from inconsiderate to considerate. This is your achievement of taking an inside view, how accurately you simulate how the other party would experience your actions.

Affect

Affect is how much you care about how you affect others. Given that other agents exist, your actions affect them, and your actions personally affect other agents the same way that their actions affect you, affect is about how much you care about the effects you have on other people. Depending on the problem you are trying to solve, you do not need to actually care or not care, but you need the ability to hypothetically care or not, to accurately predict what other people would do or what the benefits of caring might be. The continuum is from callous to caring. Caring isn't merely an emotional reaction, it is an ongoing commitment that requires skill and effort. If you lack skill or lack effort, your actions will tend to be callous.

To be reliably caring, beyond skill and effort, you have to have a caring personality or a goal to be more caring. Awareness and consideration are universally instrumental, more awareness and consideration are almost always better, to achieve almost any goal. Caring is not always instrumentally useful, e.g. a surgeon who needs to cut open someone's body to save their life. The surgeon has to care about the patient's medium-term wellbeing, to work to help them, but the surgeon has to not care about the immediate wellbeing of the patient's skin, to cut it open. Your consideration, how well you understand how you affect others, and your affect, how much you care, determines your desire, how much you want to do something about it.

Decision

People commonly desire to do something for other people, but don't know what to do in particular. Some people say that it is the thought that counts, meaning that the desire to be kind, neutral or cruel is itself the most powerful component of kindness, neutrality and cruelty, and the decision of how to express that desire is less important. There is a reason that people give this advice, but it is not true. Your decision of how to realize your desire is an equal link in the chain. Figuring it out requires things like knowledge, experience, creativity and problem solving. The continuum is from inappropriate to muddled to appropriate. Your desire and decision determines your intent, what you want to do about it.

Motivation

You may intend to do something, but fail to do it. This component is your positive action to accommodate, treat uniformly, or disaccommodate others. If you know how your action would affect someone else, and you care about how that would affect them, and you take action that deviates from egocentric, then you are motivated. The continuum is from passive to active. Passive and active are relative to egocentric, it may take active effort to stop yourself from doing something harmful, which is externally passive, but is internally active.

Effectiveness

When you act to help, be fair to, or harm others, how effective are your actions to achieve the intended effect? The continuum is from ineffective to effective. Intentional and effective help is kindness, fairness is neutrality and harm is cruelty. With different effort, you can intentionally not consider other parties, creating effective egocentricity, for example if you want to create a relaxing vacation only for yourself.

Mechanism of Kindness

Table of the mechanism behind kindness, neutrality and cruelty

Component	Continuum	Description
Awareness	Oblivious - Aware	How much your action would affect others, outside view
Consideration	Inconsiderate - Considerate	How your action would affect others experiences, inside views
Affect	Callous - Caring	How much you care about the effects of your action on others. Consideration and Affect create Desire.
Decision	Inappropriate - Muddled - Appropriate	How you choose to express your desire. Desire and Decision create Intent.
Motivation	Passive - Active	How much you act on your intent
Effectiveness	Ineffective - Effective	How much your action achieves your intent

Production

Compulsary Service

We all start life as babies that cannot take care of ourselves, our caretakers serve us hand, foot, mouth and butt, they handle everything. People take care of children so fully that sometimes, children fail to grow up. We start our lives as recipients, and for those of us that grow up, we become servants. You may think that there are people who don't have to serve anyone else, maybe rich people, entrepreneurs, explorers or leaders? Wrong, every productive person serves, and unproductive people are irrelevant. If you want benefits, you must serve others.

Everybody fights. Everybody works. Starship Troopers by Heinlein

Centrality of Production

We all want more benefits. The secret to mass consumption is mass production. If you want to eat pie, someone has to make pie. You don't have a human right to get more pie. If you can make or earn your own pie, you can have as much of your own pie as you want. People tend to be blind to production, because as children, we all get

something for nothing. As a child, we get because we need, and sometimes we get what we want. This is so pleasant and convenient that we wish the world worked that way, but it doesn't work that way. Benefits are not infinite, they don't come from nowhere, benefits come from somewhere. Benefits come from producers. Production is central to benefits, and communication follows it. Some people think that if you print and distribute more money, everyone will have more money and they won't be poor. Printing money doesn't create benefits, it devalues money. Money isn't what you want, you want the stuff you can buy with the money, and that stuff doesn't change no matter how much money you print.

If printing money could end poverty, printing diplomas could end stupidity. Javier Milei

Looking only at the current benefits that exist, we are faced with a zero-sum problem of how to divide them, and a negative-sum game of negotiation or conflict. Once there are legible benefits, people gather around them to take the benefits for themselves. People who take without paying are free-riders, parasites, thieves, enemies. This reveals a contradiction, a problem in human nature. On the one hand, I support basic human rights including the right to life. On the other hand, I also have rights to my own labor and property. You simultaneously have a right to life but no right to take my pie, even if you are starving. You have to work to eat. Those who can work, but choose not to, choose to starve themselves to death.

I don't want to compete against other people, or defend myself from free-riders, parasites, or take anyone as my enemy. Competition is unavoidable in zero-sum games, it's either you or me, by definition. The war for benefits is a consequence of non-postive-sum social games. This is why I emphasize production, the importance of making your life positive-sum. Production is the only way to win the war.

When you produce value, you don't just create benefits, your identity changes from consumer to producer, from an enemy to an ally. Becoming a producer is your ticket to join the community of positive-sum producers. Your ticket can take you farther and farther away from the natural battlefield towards civilization.

Being Helpful

How do you become a producer? Serve others. What does serving others mean? It means creating benefits for them, being helpful. Sometimes, people accurately know what they want and lack only the time, energy, skills, materials or equipment to solve their problem. You can come and help them, simple! But most of what people want help with is not so simple.

People dismiss the difficulty of helping others. It is usually hard. If you ask someone, how can I help? What can I do for you? They will ask you to do things, but often, doing what people ask for isn't really helpful. The customer is always right, but not about what they really want. People mistakenly think they know what they want, but they usually don't know. The customer is always right about the fact that they have a problem, but the customer doesn't know how to solve that problem. If they knew how to solve their problem, they would likely solve it themselves without asking for your help. The person in the situation is confused, while the onlooker can see clearly.

A quotation from Steve Jobs. Some people say, Give the customers what they want. But that's not my approach. Our job is to figure out what they're going to want before they do. I think Henry Ford once said, If I'd asked customers what they wanted, they would have told me, A faster horse! People don't know what they want until you show it to them. That's why I never rely on market research. Our task is to read things that are not yet on the page. Steve Jobs by Walter Isaacson, page 567

Legibility

When you help someone by solving a problem they couldn't solve themselves, there is a troublesome consequence. The customer will often not understand, appreciate, or agree with your solution. Remember, if the customer could solve their own problem, they usually wouldn't need your help. So, often the problem they have is one they cannot solve themselves. It makes sense that they cannot understand your solution. Also, if the problem is a consequence of a personal issue the customer is avoiding about themselves, they may dislike your solution and be unhappy about your assistance! Try cleaning up someone's room for them and see if they like it.

Helping someone else has multiple challenges. Finding a problem you can help them with, solving the problem, and helping them to see the value of your solution. Seeing the value of a product or service means that that product or service is legible, they can make sense of the value of it, while a product or service that they do not understand,

they do not see any value in, is illegible. If a customer can solve their own problem, purchasing a solution from you is almost always legible to them, at least as valuable as their own solution.

In the common case that the customer cannot solve their own problem, your solution is often illegible to them, so they cannot value it and don't want to pay you for it, because they don't perceive the value. This is why part of the service you need to provide to your customers is to make your work legible to them. Assuming you do valuable work, bad customers cannot appreciate it and your work remains illegible. Do not cast pearls before swine, do not associate with bad customers. Illegible work is worse than doing nothing, because you waste your efforts on someone who can't appreciate them. Sometimes you will even antagonize them. Good customers will find your work legible if you do your part to make your work legible to them. Communicating the benefits of your work to your customers is part of your work.

Self-Improvement

You don't start life as a capable person. And even capable people don't always win benefits. Making the value of your service legible to your customers and gaining benefits is the end of a process that requires legibility to yourself. You need to see how your efforts improve in order to develop them, what we call intentional practice. Before other people can appreciate the value of your service, you have to develop a valuable capability in the first place, and that begs the question, how do you know what to change before you produce value? The answer is that you need to find the right metrics that can describe your capability in the range between zero value and the point where your service is valuable to others. People learn and develop by making lots of mistakes and correcting them. The metrics identify your mistakes and then, when you practice again, the changes in the metrics can tell you if you corrected your mistakes or not. You have to make your capability legible to yourself before you can make your value legible to others.

Roles

Society and culture define roles that you fill on different occasions. These roles have different hats, literally or figuratively, and you wear different hats during your life. Everyone lives as a baby first, and now you can read, so your role has changed. Roles come with language games, and roles have scripts, with different complexity and flexibility. Within a given role, people expect you to say and do certain things that mean certain things. You have to say certain things at certain times in a certain way, similar to an actor following a script, but often there is more flexibility to it. When there is decision, variation, interaction, you might follow a protocol, a predefined decision tree that says what to do in different situations.

A basic small talk protocol

Hello.

Hello.

How are you?

I am fine, and you?

Doing fine, thank you.

When you or someone else fills a role, that person partially transcends their individual status and becomes a function of society. People are supposed to treat certain roles in certain ways, give them their due respect, apart from the respect they have for the individual person filling the role. Roles also constrain who talks with or works with who.

Societies are functional when they have functional roles and scripts. When circumstances change and the roles or scripts don't adapt, or the scripts fail to transmit from one generation to the next, groups or society can falter.

Separate Economies

People talk about the economy, but life has multiple economies. These economies do not mix. In the commercial economy, you buy and sell using money, while in friendship groups, you contribute using gifts and voluntary services. If you try to buy a new phone using a cake that you baked yourself, the store won't accept your cake as payment, but your cake may be valued at a friend's party that you want to attend. And you can't pay people cash to be your true friend, but you could buy them a gift using that same money. There are distinct economies for family, relationship, community, commerce and organization.

Economy	Description	Dynamic	Who is right	What you do	Form of payment
Family	Blood related people that live together, gather regularly	Collective	Current generation parents	Help meet family needs	Sacrifice
Relationship	A friendship or a lover	Emotional	The other person	Act in the other person's best interest	Expression of care
Community	A gift economy, group of friends or other community	Voluntary and reciprocal	The group	Contribute to the group equally	Gifts, generosity, non-monetary
Commerce	Buying and selling professional goods and services	Transactional	The customer	Shop and order, or sell and serve	Money
Organization	Workplaces and productive groups	Hierarchical	The boss	Be professional, do your job	Productivity

Expression of care in a relationship is unique to every relationship. The particular forms these expressions take can be categorized into the five love languages, kind words, time together, acts of service, physical affection, gifts.

The Five Love Languages by Gary Chapman

It is essential to pay attention to which economy you are participating in, and don't mix them up. Here is an anecdotal example of wrongly mixing economies.

A friend of mine was departing to travel with a large suitcase. Another friend of mine offered to give the traveller a car ride to the train station. When they arrived at the train station, she helped the traveller unload the suitcase from the car. The traveller then gave her a dollar. She was insulted by this gesture.

The traveller likely followed a cultural script, that when someone who is not a family member helps you unload your luggage while traveling, you give them a dollar. What the traveller did not consider was, that script is for the commercial economy, where you give professional service workers tips to incentivize good service. You do not give family members tips for family services, and similarly you should not give friends monetary tips for voluntary acts of service. The correct form of payment are things like sincere words of thanks, travel gifts, and reciprocal acts of service to their benefit in the future.

Giving them a monetary tip means that you don't consider them a friend, you consider them a service worker. Their generous act of service to you is treated as work for hire, which they never signed up for. A one dollar tip is both grossly underpaying them and rejecting their goodwill, it is insulting.

Likewise, organization economy does not mix with family economy. I have worked at companies that claim that they are like a family. A company is not like a family, they are totally different economies. The goal of a company is to extract the maximum value from your labor, and to fire you when necessary. Families are not arranged around maximum value extraction, nor layoffs. If your company is a family, can they guarantee they will never fire anyone? Can employees live at their boss' house and get babysitting for free? Do you work for the company without a paycheck? If not, then your company is not like a family.

Loss Aversion

People don't respond rationally to rewards. If you pay someone more, you might not get more. Too much reward or constant rewards do not motivate the greatest effort, rare and hard to predict rewards do. People respond much

worse to punishment. Taking away what they have or they think they deserve drives them crazy.

The way to motivate others is to offer them an attractive reward and be very specific about what they need to to do receive it. Ask them to do things that they are capable of doing. You have to know what they value and ensure that they don't think they already have or deserve it. Enforce that if they fulfill your requirements, they will deserve and receive the reward, and if they do not meet your requirements, they will not deserve or receive it. This is so difficult that it is often better to find people who are self-motivated to do what you wanted to do anyway, natural allies, or to find people who already do that job and buy what you want from them, professionals.

There are many ways to gain and live, but you can only die once. People hate losing more than they love gaining. Incentives drive human behavior. In communication, emphasizing what people stand to lose will motivate them more than what they stand to gain. They can easily imagine the pain of losing something they already have and like, or the pain of not gaining something they know and want, but they have trouble imagining the benefit of something new to them.

It is better to ask forgiveness than permission. Why? People don't like change, and people don't appreciate things they haven't experienced. Potential unfamiliar benefits are unimaginable to them, while keeping current benefits feels essential. Don't change anything! If you want to help someone, you have to change something, and they don't want change. This is why it is better to ask forgiveness than permission. The same change that they would protest in advance, once they have experienced the benefits, they will protest its removal.

Incentives

Incentive Design

Find something that you have or you can get, that the other party wants. Find the minimum that you have to offer them to motivate them to do what you want, or the best performance to price ratio. Consider order effects, will other people be envious, will you leak exploitable information, what will the other person use the payment for, when is the best time or schedule to give it to them, which incentive is most aligned with what you want, or what is best for both of you, etc. Incentives can be subtle or implicit. You can influence others using incentives without them noticing, for example giving eye contact to people who are punctual and avoiding eye contact with people who are late.

Align incentives. If you hire people to work for you and pay them per hour for their time, you will get what you pay for, their time, not the result of what you are paying them to do. This is a misaligned incentive. It is easy to measure work hours, but hard to measure productivity for many jobs. If you hire people to do a manufacturing job and pay them per piece of output, you will get what you pay for, a high volume of output, typically misaligned on the piece quality.

Designing aligned incentives can be difficult, requiring creativity, innovation, simple rules and strict enforcement. You have to find what works and respond to changing circumstances. When incentives work, the results can become exponential. A typical example of aligned incentives are salespeople paid on commission. A worker paid on commission only earns money when the company earns money, the interests of the salesperson and the company align, in the sense that both the company and the salesperson want to sell more goods to earn more money. Another form of aligned incentive is profit sharing. When I succeed, you also succeed. A common practice today is stock-based compensation, but this is very different from profit sharing. Stock prices can have little to no relationship to the performance of a company for years at a time.

Enforcement

Incentives are important to consider and discuss, but they can only have an effect if they are enforced, and enforcement has its own quality. A perfect incentive, poorly enforced, is no better than a properly enforced poor incentive. A practical enforcement mechanism is part of incentive design. Resorting to force is the last resort, the basic enforcement mechanism. Do what I tell you, or else. Excellent incentive designs make enforcement simple and strong. A balance scale can physically show that two weights are equivalent, direct grounded evidence, which is why the Spirit of Justice wears a blindfold and holds a balance scale.

One critical skill you will commonly need to work with others is the ability to enforce costs. If you are talking, following the turn taking protocol, and someone constantly interrupts you, what should you do? You can appeal to a moderator if there is one, but usually there is not. You could always physically attack them, but can you do better?

You could talk over them in return, preventing their interruption from creating value, lose lose. You could appeal to the group that you were following the protocol and they are breaking it, an attempt to harm their reputation if there is no good reason for them to break protocol, potentially win lose in your favor.

The key is that people will tend to take every advantage that they can get, which always includes the option of walking all over you and taking your interests for themselves. You typically need to convince others that you are not an easy target, you are not a pushover, you create your own deterrance by being prepared to enforce costs on others, and sometimes actually enforce costs on others. Words are not enough, your fist needs to be strong enough to cause others to listen. This fist can be literal, but more often is metaphorical, the loss of benefits feels like a punch to the face, when you enforce enough costs on them to create deterrence. People get caught up in threats, vengeance, making others suffer, but that is a destructive attitude. The reason to enforce costs is to make incentives work to create more benefits overall, enforcing costs is an essential part of being constructive.

Enforcing rewards or costs on others can fail due to overgeneralization. You enforced a cost on me, therefore you don't like me. If I truly don't like a person, I won't bother to enforce costs on them, I will avoid them completely. You have to find ways to be specific and consistent. I like you this much, and I don't like this behavior this much, and I demonstrate this every time. Without specificity and consistency, you give mixed signals.

Motivation

Motivation is the desire to act. Incentives and motivations are complex, the metaphorical human heart operates in social reality, not physical reality. To work with other people to get the results that you want, you probably need to design and enforce both the negative and positive. For an incentive, good things will happen if I do, and bad things will happen if I don't. For a disincentive, bad things will happen if I do, and good things will happen if I don't. I will only tend to act if both the positive and the negative are true. I take action to eat every day, despite it being inconvenient, because if I don't eat, I will get weak and die, and if I do eat, it will taste good and I will feel energetic. It takes the gain and loss of benefits to motivate people.

Motivation, like ego, is fragile. Repeated failures can make people believe that they are incapable, this is called learned helplessness. Even if you offer a reward and a punishment, someone in learned helplessness will only try to avoid punishment, or even just lay down and take it, because they believe that they cannot do it. To break out of learned helplessness and make incentives work again to motivate, they need to personally experience their own ability to succeed. Sometimes, to get started, you have to force them to succeed once, before they are willing to try at all. Always start with trivial challenges, and then increase the challenge to match their capability. They can build their motivation through greater and greater challenges and incentives, following the challenge curve.

Power

Bargaining Power

Bargaining power answers the question of who gets what in a negotiation. It determines how much of the benefits someone can get.

The market price of a common item is the intersection of the supply and demand curves, but this is in aggregate. The market price does not force anyone to trade, to buy or to sell. Trades do not happen only at the market price, otherwise prices could never change. The market price is one input to a negotiation, and another input is the relative bargaining power of the buyer and the seller. Bargaining power has two components, circumstantial and personal. If I am a farmer attending a farmers market to sell produce, and I am standing there with a basket full of expiring produce near the end of the market, circumstances reduce my bargaining power. If my farm has a reputation for high quality produce, that personally increases my bargaining power. If other local farms have been affected by a drought but not mine, that increases my circumstantial bargaining power. If I am bad at negotiation, that reduces my personal bargaining power.

The largest source of bargaining power is differentiation, being the only available buyer or seller, offering unique and beneficial terms for the deal, having a more reliable reputation. Bargaining power matches your ability to harm or help the other party, which determines the distribution of benefits when you trade.

There is an interesting philosophical scenario about bargaining power. Imagine you are walking in a desert and have run out of water. If you don't get help, you will surely die of thirst before reaching civilization. A traveller happens to find you and offers to give you water and transport you back to town, an offer you would like to accept. But what

is the correct price to pay them? Travelers aren't required to give their water and transportation to every person they see. The traveller could choose to pass you by, save your life for free, or they could also choose to charge you any price. What is your own life worth to you? Probably, you would be willing to pay everything you have. When you stand there, in the desert, dying of thirst, the traveller has maximum bargaining power over you, through no plan or malice.

There may be a market price for water or transport, but no one is forced to transact at the market price, and additionally, there is no market price for your own life. If the traveller charges a high price, people will moan about price gouging. There is no such thing as price gouging, there is only bargaining power.

Imagine you agree to pay the traveller everything you have to save your life, they accept your offer, they give you water and bring you back to town. Now that you have returned to town, the traveller has no bargaining power over you. Unless you signed a contract that they can enforce, it's just your word against theirs if they appeal to others to force you to pay them everything you have. You could be a person of your word and give them everything you have, but there is no one forcing you to do that. The question of what the legal or moral thing to do in this situation is not the current topic. What is interesting, is that we create a simple situation with maximum bargaining power that flips to no bargaining power, and this helps illustrate how bargaining power works.

Overall, bargaining power refers to the power that someone has to affect a transaction, who gets the benefits. Bargaining power at either extreme can extend until it reaches all the benefits, robbery or donation. Powerful buyers receive products and services for free, powerful sellers can increase prices above market rate and receive donations. Equal bargaining power, all else equal, implies that deals will transact around the market price and give roughly equal benefit to the buyer and the seller.

Profit

Profit is the benefit to the seller for selling, profit comes from bargaining power, and bargaining power is partially based on buyers' alternatives. If the buyer must have your product and there are no alternatives or substitutes, you can charge everything they can afford, maximum bargaining power and profit. If there are a lot of alternatives to your offering, you are in a competitive market and if you charge more than your competitors, then customers will choose your competitors over you, no bargaining power, prices race to the bottom, meaning selling at zero, or almost zero, profit.

One pole, meaning only one seller or buyer or whatever, is called monopoly, has no alternatives, max bargaining power. Two poles, duopoly, allows easy cooperation between the two poles to gain a lot of profit, even without secret negotiations between the sellers, which is called collusion. Once there are more than two poles, it is often hard for sellers to agree and competition overpowers collusion, but when there is collusion to increase profits for more than two poles that is oligopoly. Whenever there are more than two poles it is called multipolarity. Healthy commodity markets are typically multipolar and low profit. Your goal as a seller of your services is differentiation. In spite of the fact that you are a human, very similar to all other humans, to earn a profit you need to find your niches. What can you do, that other people want, that other sellers can't or won't do? What is your competitive advantage? Straight competition is for suckers.

Competitive markets force sellers to respond to customer preferences, aka good customer service. Monopoly has no incentive to respond to customer preferences, bad customer service. The government gives bad customer service because government is a monopoly. Try to satisfy your customers, offer good service, and never intentionally antagonize your customers. Serve your customers, this creates customer goodwill. Never expect customer loyalty, but nonetheless it exists, this is brand value. But there are always unreasonable people, you can't satisfy everyone. Offer a beneficial product at a reasonable price, define your own standards, be kind but consistent. Claim your fair share of the benefits you produce. Don't let customers walk all over you, and don't walk all over customers. Voluntary trade only happens with mutual benefit.

Differentiate the value of your services to earn profit. How do I do that? Every case is different, but we can agree that you are reading this book. Ok, how does this book differentiate itself? It adopts a direct tone to be more concise, understandable, relatable. It addresses topics that are human universals, it applies to everyone, maximizing the addressable market. It uses common ideas that are well established, but offers a unique combination of proven ideas to offer a substantial benefit for readers. Other books are too light, they don't face the roots of your problems. Or they are too academic, they seem to be intentionally hard to understand or apply. Or they are too narrow, they only address a specific and more manageable part of the problem and limit themselves to one, or a few big ideas. This book is unique by aiming to be both comprehensive and practical, that is my answer to the question of why

you should read this book rather than do something else. For many people, I think this string of letters at some point is a good option to make their lives better. I am offering differentiated value, and I hope to personally share in some of the benefits I create for you.

Monopoly

Zero to One

Status in a Group

Status is the bargaining power of one member relative to other members of the group, hence high status or low status. Status is intangible, ever-changing and hard to measure, but it appears in physical reality by how other people pay attention, respond to you and treat you. Higher status requires that you treat someone with respect, whether or not you respect them personally.

There are infinite ways to gain status, but there are only several fundamental sources of status. Generally, something that gains benefits for the group gains status. Status is a reward or incentive for members to benefit the group. All people depend on their group for their survival. Focusing on that fact, there is no bargaining power for an individual in relation to their group, the group can demand everything from its members and offer no reward of status.

The larger reality is not so convenient for groups. Sometimes, members can defect from one group to another, creating a multipolar market of groups competing for members, and giving members bargaining power over groups. Members that can gain benefits using their capabilities, can use those same capabilities to harm the group, dual use. The opportunity loss of defection and the threat of group harm gives capable members bargaining power in objective reality, causing functional groups to award status to their capable members. The group has to pay the market rate for the services of the members, or else they will lose the member to a competitor group, or face the member's retribution against the group. The method the group uses to pay its members is through the status system, a social-reality ranking of the members. Much of what people do socially is status signaling, to enforce or increase their social status to gain more benefits for themselves.

The fundamental sources of status are unchangeable, rooted in the physical laws or human nature.

- Humans are living creatures in physical reality, and their bodies are vulnerable to weapons. The physical survival of the group depends on the physical safety created by members with martial ability.

- Martial ability is distinct from economic ability, the ability to produce benefits like food, shelter or other products or services, that has little to do with how good you are in a physical fight.

- Rare productive knowledge is separately valuable from its application.

- Production of culture is beneficial to the group indirectly, through a medium, it is human nature to appreciate beauty and be influenced by stories.

- Direct influence of group members is separately categorized as political ability.

- Standard functions of the group, roles, are performed by individual members, those functions demand a level of status, regardless of who the role is assigned to.

- Group members unavoidably have social relationships, and those relationships are unavoidably influential. The brother of the governor has some level of influence because of his relationship to someone with high status, regardless of his capabilities.

- Groups have to coordinate to achieve their goals, this coordination requires communicating group values, and group members that achieve these group values must be rewarded above those that don't, so the farther that a member goes in pursuit of a group value, the purer they are and this can grant them purity status. While reality is complex, communicated goals can only be simple, and the gap between those often create counterproductive purity contests.

- Finally, all sources of status can be stolen through lying and deceit, fraud.

Table describing the fundamental sources of status

Source of status	Capability	Group benefit	Sum
Martial	Physical violence or protection	Claims others' benefits, or deters violence to protect benefits and other incentives	Negative with conflict, zero with redistribution, positive with deterrence
Economic	Controls benefit sources	Source of almost all benefits	Positive in principle, but can be negative due to externalities
Knowledge	Rare productive information and skills	Can better compete and solve problems	Amplifies both positive and negative-sum activities
Cultural	Production of influential art, aesthetic, indirectly practical, implicit message	Increases group vitality, competes with other groups, attracts members	Amplifies both positive and negative-sum activities
Political	Get people to like you or listen to you, charisma, direct practical message	Group unity and control	Amplifies both positive and negative-sum activities
Role	None	Social functions are assigned to individuals who are assigned the status of the role	Depends on how functional the role and the individual are
Relational	None, affiliation with higher status people	None	Depends on how the relationship is used to influence the higher status people
Purity	Achievement of culturally defined values	Depends on whether the values are beneficial, often not	Generally negative
Fraud	Stealing unearned status through deception	None	Negative, due to misallocation of status

All forms of status can be translated into bargaining power in transactions. Martial status can be used for physical threat or threat of loss of protection. Economic status can afford to pay more, but amazingly economic status can be used to pay less, because successful people can be tastemakers and receive free stuff, in hopes of endorsement. This relates to the counterintuitive yet true expression, It's expensive to be poor, which implies that it is cheap to be rich. Knowledge status can be used to attract or repel other elites. Cultural status translates to popularity or popular influence, which can change public sentiment or create a boycott against a seller. Political status can be used to threaten the seller through organizational harassment or affecting public sentiment. Any form of status can be used as a cudgel in a negotiation. This is the source of the famous phrase, Do you know who I am?

The people that materially contribute to the group must be fairly compensated for their contributions or else, and the conventional way to track their contributions is a social belief about how much they contribute, their social status. Investing in the group purchases shares in the group's success. When the group distributes benefits, high status gets more benefits than low status, and everyone agrees that's how groups should work, if not about who deserves high and low status.

Often, people within a group fiercely defend the status quo, especially how their own status is earned. It might seem that the greatest threat to the status of a member of a group is an enemy or opposition group. But an individual usually cannot decide the result of ongoing group conflict, and opposing groups aren't as interested in each other as

they are interested in themselves. What most immediately and severely affects your individual status in a group are the other members of the group. The person who can most often and most severely conflict with your own interests is someone who knows you best, knows your group best, and is in a position to compete for the same sources of status you use, your teammate. This is why groups spend some effort disliking their enemies or opposition, but go totally crazy about deviants, leavers, and especially betrayers.

Threats to personal status, from high to low

- Ingroup

- Allies

- Enemies

- Enemy allies

- Strangers

Abraham Lincoln. At what point then is the approach of danger to be expected? I answer, if it ever reach us, it must spring up amongst us. It cannot come from abroad. If destruction be our lot, we must ourselves be its author and finisher.

Status also relates to accountability. Equality before the law is a reasonable principle, anyone who commits the same crime should receive the same punishment. Granting more lenience to people who contribute more to your group is also a reasonable principle. Offering credit to a first-time customer is bad business, but offering credit to your best customer is good business.

People who make great achievements are often associated with great misconduct. A society has to choose between destroying the reputations of some of its greatest contributors, discouraging everyone to contribute, or undermining the rule of law. In my opinion, public acceptance of a person who commits a crime is relative. If someone makes a great achievement that echoes through the ages, they can get away with some murder. If someone makes a minor achievement and they do the same thing, they will have to pay a price. If an unremarkable person commits the crime, they will receive the full punishment.

Hierarchy

Relative status in a group creates a hierarchy, where low status defers to high status. Different people associated with a group have different roles, and those roles have a hierarchical position. A group that rejects hierarchy and embraces equality among members is a flat organization, no one is above anyone else. Equality may be the rule in a flat organization, but that is only officially. Unofficially, in social reality, there is always a hierarchy, some people matter more than others. In many casual groups of people, the hierarchy is implicit. Sometimes, if a problem arises, the members of the group will tend to look at one or a few people for their decision.

In official groups, organizations, with persistent and explicit membership, the hierarchy is typically explicit. Members have different assigned roles, and each role reports to or is officially under a single manager or boss, creating an organizational tree. Hierarchy in organizations can be more or less rigid. In some organizations, people associate and work together across teams, departments and hierarchical levels. If your boss asks you to do something, they may have no power to make you do it.

In more hierarchical organizations, you may only work with other people on your team, and communication to any other team needs to go up the chain, from your team to your boss, to your boss's boss, to their boss, down to the other bosses, down to the other team, and back. If you don't do what your boss tells you to do, you can receive a poor evaluation, be reprimanded, or fired. In the military, the things your boss asks you to do are called orders, and you can be killed for refusing to follow them. At another hierarchical extreme, status hierarchies calcify into castes, permanent, strictly enforced and inherited levels of status.

Communicating to people at the same hierarchical level as you is very different from communicating with people above or below you in the hierarchy, when you are in a hierarchical social context. People above, superiors, can speak at will, while people below, subordinates, should only respond to requests. Superiors generally decide, and subordinates defer to the people above and implement their decision. Subordinates' typically suppress their personal feelings, disagreements, interests and other human qualities when interacting with a superior.

Hierarchy turns people into functions, creating functional organizations that produce value, but can be dehumanizing. Hierarchical organizations have typical benefits and costs, such as giving everyone clearly defined roles and procedures to complete their work, being able to replace people as needed by hiring someone who can perform the same function, and having a chain of command, like a military force, that can receive and implement orders from the top down. The typical weaknesses of a hierarchical organization are the lack of negative feedback from the bottom up, due to deference to superiors, the perverse incentives for the middle managers, lack of horizontal communication causing lack of coordination across teams or departments, rigid structure that resists change, known as business as usual, and others.

The people with the highest status are called elites. The highest status elites are leaders. Leaders come from high status, so all forms of status can create leaders. History has produced military leaders, cultural icons, knowledge leaders, business leaders, religious leaders, former activists, career politicians, nepo babies. Leaders establish themselves using high status, but then have to maintain high status to defend their position.

What do functional leaders do? They create group alignment in social reality. If half of the group wants to do one thing, and the other half wants to do something else, and the entire group has to commit to one choice, the group is paralyzed and can do nothing. A group has a massive potential capacity to act, but without alignment, a group has no actual capacity.

The job of the leader is not to sacrifice, or be a symbol, or tell everyone what to do. They might or might not do those things, but what successful leaders achieve is the alignment of group members to unlock the group capacity to act and achieve their interests. To get the group members to listen to them, leaders need high status in the group. And even though the leader may not do the object-level work to achieve the results, the leader gains significant status for successes, to allow them to align the group even more. Naturally, this unignorable source of status attracts the most status-obsessed people, who are least worthy of leading.

Conflict

Conflict is when two or more parties claim the same benefit. Conflict can be win lose, and the attacker is attracted to the possibility of winning the status or benefits. Conflict is usually negative sum, which means that if both parties to a conflict knew the costs of the conflict and the outcome in advance, they could negotiate to skip the conflict for mutual benefit. The loser can pay the winner to avoid both sides wasting resources and both sides would be better off. If everyone is capable and reasonable, almost all conflict can be avoided. The world we live in is not composed of only capable and reasonable people, so conflict is common.

Clausewitz, On War. War is the continuation of politics by other means.

Conflict is especially encouraged under conditions of high uncertainty or failures of communication. Both uncertainty and bad communication can cause one or both parties to make wrong predictions about who will win the conflict.

This is the conflict table. Each entry describes a scenario for one party, an attacker or a defender, what they predict would happen, what would actually happen if they fought, what action they would decide to take based on their prediction, and what result they would get.

Party	Prediction	What would happen	Action	Result
Attacker	Win	Win	Demand	Paid or win
Defender	Lose	Lose	Concede	Pay
Attacker	Win	Lose	Demand	Paid or lose
Defender	Lose	Win	Concede	Pay
Attacker	Lose	Win	Hold	None
Defender	Win	Lose	Fight	Lose
Attacker	Lose	Lose	Hold	None
Defender	Win	Win	Fight	Win

This explains why conflict happens under uncertainty or misprediction. If the potential attacker and defender agree that a conflict will be lose lose, they won't do it. If they agree that one side will win and the other will lose, they can skip the fight and pay the winner. The situation where they both win is uncommon.

Vegetius. If you want peace, prepare for war.

Causes of, and Preventions to Fighting

Cause	Prevention
Predict the wrong result	Deterrence, convince them they would lose or it would cost too much
The loser is unable to pay the winner, a cornered animal	Create a path of retreat for the loser
Prefer fighting over negotiation, warmonger	Avoid, delay, increase cost of attack, forfeit. They may shift attention to other targets, or you may reclaim later.
They gain something else by fighting	Spoil or offer the outside gain

When another agent opposes you, if they see through your consistent habits or strategies, they can counter you totally. One form of protection against the predictions of opponents is to use a partially-randomized strategy. In other words, don't be so predictable.

Clausewitz, On War. The best strategy is always to be very strong, first in general, and then at the decisive point.

Victims

After a conflict has started, the common question people ask is, who started the fight? The attacker is presumed to be wrong, while the defender is presumed to be right. This presumption of guilt may be convenient, but it is not reliable. The presumption of guilt against the attacker creates a social incentive to take advantage of. If you want to attack someone, instead of attacking and earning the presumption of guilt, you can instead provoke them to attack you, so you appear to be the virtuous defender. After so much human conflict, people are wary of both attackers and defenders, applying more of the idea that where there is smoke, there is fire. Perhaps both parties are unreasonable if they are fighting. In fact, sometimes one party is fully at fault, sometimes both, sometimes one more than the other, that is why you should judge every event case by case, instead of assuming or guessing.

There is a different model of conflict apart from attacker-defender. That is the model of abuser harming a victim. Society wants to protect the precious, angelic victim, so the model is completed with the third party, the rescuer, that rescues the victim from the abuser. If the rescuer is considered high status for protecting the weak and fighting for justice, that would counter the abuser-victim narrative, so the rescuer is relegated to lower status than the victim. This allows the victim to be a heroic survivor, triumphing over the trauma caused by the villainous abuser, and the rescuer is merely fulfilling their minimum obligation to rescue the victim. This allows the narrative to elevate the status of the victim.

Karpman Drama Triangle

A well-adjusted society protects its weaker members, giving status to the strong protectors. Using the abuser-victim-rescuer model, strong protectors are robbed of high status by being cast as abusers, such as by calling them a bully that uses their strength to harm the weak, and weaklings can cry about it and gain status as victims. Weaklings can attack others using the crybully strategy. First they provoke or lie about their target, claiming their target abused them, and cry about it, claiming the position of the victim. Then the rescuer punishes the false bully. This strategy misuses the rescuer as the bully by proxy. The claimed victim is actually the crybully attacker, gaining status as a victim and winning against their opponent in a conflict. The way to counter crybullies is to investigate accusations and hold false accusations accountable as much as the crimes they falsely accuse others of. There must be no double standard for weak people, the principle of equality before the law is best to prevent perverse strategies such as crybully.

Status Games

Signaling

Signaling is an unsolicited, implicit status grab using a proxy. If you are rich and you show off your expensive looking watch by checking the time in an exaggerated manner every five minutes, you are using a proxy, an expensive watch,

as a proxy for wealth, to grab status as a wealthy person, unsolicited by anyone else. No one asked you how wealthy you are. And you are expressing it implicitly, you are showing a watch, not saying I'm rich, bitches! If someone asks you about your net worth and you answer them, that is not signaling.

The reason that implicit is important is that it provides plausible deniability. If someone asks, Why are you waving your expensive watch in my face? you could say, what do you mean, I just wanted to check the time, don't be so insecure. They aren't being insecure, you are, by waving your watch around to grab economic status.

In nature, male animals often signal their mating quality to females using signals and displays, famously with the male peacock and his shimmering feather displays. The peacock is not explicitly chasing peahens down to mate, the display is an implicit status grab. It suggests but does not outright say, I would be a wonderful peacock to mate with, look how wonderful I look.

Signaling often includes bragging. Bragging is showing off the benefits you have, to rub others' faces into what you have that they don't. Human signaling can be about mating, but is most often about status. I am rich, I am respected, I am important, I am knowledgeable, I am well-known, I am popular with elites, I know people with authority, I am affiliated with exclusive groups. Sometimes they say it explicitly, but they always say it implicitly. After making sure everyone has seen their expensive watch, they may complain about how old and shabby it is, and promise to buy the latest, shiniest watch as soon as it becomes available, a form of humble bragging, bragging with plausible deniability.

Signalers tend to be demanding and impatient. They think they are better than others and deserve more benefits. If they signal and other people don't respond the way that they expect and demand, they will usually repeat the signal compulsively, as if you didn't see it the first time, or as if repeating will make you start caring about it? When they lose patience, they will often escalate into dominance displays or violence.

Signaling Status Behaviors

Behavior	Description or example
Name dropping	When I was at Harvard, I enjoyed talking about myself then, too
Conspicuous consumption	Oh, this old thing? It's only a platinum multithousand dollar watch, it doesn't even tell accurate time, ha ha ha
Bragging	I've written three New York Times best selling books and appeared on CNN, surely you've heard of my work?
Humble Bragging	Now that I am famous, I can't go anywhere without people recognizing me, it's so inconvenient

Signaling Dominance Behaviors

Behavior	Description or example
Claiming more than their share	Taking the best seat without asking
Taking social resources	Hogging group attention when others need to take turns
Assuming importance	Handing out contact info or invitations without confirming interest
Denigrating	Oh, you went to a state university? I think it's wonderful that people like you can get some kind of education in this country.
Lying and overpromising	I could do that anytime I wanted, but I don't feel like it now

Behavior	Description or example
One-upsmanship	Oh, you have a fancy car? So do I, but my car is fancier than yours. Oh, you have two fancy cars? Did I mention that I have three fancy cars myself, I must have forgotten to mention it earlier.
Breaking rules	Rules for thee but not for me, e.g. skipping lines
Breaking social conventions	Interrupting, dismissing, contradicting without evidence, putting their hands on someone

Cheap and Costly Signals

Cheap signals are easy to copy. If rich people start liking a low-cost restaurant, everyone can copy them and visit the same low-cost restaurant. Cheap signals are unreliable and change quickly. Costly signals are not easy to copy, they require significant sacrifice. Sometimes low-status people gain cheap access to costly signals and can cheaply gain status, but costly signals are usually protected if they are able to endure. Costly signals are wasteful, but mostly exclude truly poor people. However, some people of all classes sometimes become obsessed with status signaling and find ways to make costly signals beyond their means, by cheating, saving up or overspending.

Lying is sometimes a costly signal of group loyalty. Sometimes people say ridiculous things that everyone knows aren't true. Why would someone intentionally repeat a lie? Because some lies become associated with a group narrative. By repeating the lie, they show support for the group narrative, proving loyalty. But aren't obvious lies ineffective and pointless? No, the more obvious the lie, the better the signal.

If someone repeats something true, they could be unaware of the group or they could be an honest person. The purpose of the truth is ambiguous, it does not distinguish between group loyalists and non-loyalists. A good signal is unambiguous. A specific lie can distinguish between group loyalists and non-loyalists. Only a group loyalist would be willing to repeat an obvious lie to support the group. The cost of the signal is their own reputation for honesty, which is easily lost by repeating a single obvious lie. Other group members observe the costly signal and give them high status as a committed, loyal group member for sacrificing their personal status with others for the group. Then anti-loyalists can adopt a countersignal of criticizing the lie, and the war continues.

Virtue Signaling

Virtue signaling is trendy status grabbing. Virtues are personal qualities that your culture values, they can be almost anything, empathy for others, capacity for violence, lack of self-importance.

Activities of Virtue Signaling

Name	Description
Performative support	Saying I support the current thing, wear the pin, wave the flag. I just heard about the situation in Africa, and I haven't stopped crying for days. Selective outrage, calls for action when the outgroup does something wrong, silence or excuses when the ingroup does the same thing.
Name dropping	Repeating someone else's name to affiliate with virtuous individuals, groups or acts. I was at that event, it was amazing.
Virtue dropping	Turning every conversation into the current thing and how much you support it. I support veganism and I am a vegan. OMG it's a dead animal!

Name	Description
Holier than thou	Visible acts of virtue, such as charity. Conspicuous virtuous consumption choices. Telling others, I never whip my servants.
More sacrificial than thou	I realized that I didn't fully adopt the ideology, so I burned all my clothes and now wear these rags.
Jargon dropping	Use specialized insider vocabulary, argot, to show your group affiliation.

Virtue signaling is signaling, but the signal is about a virtue, group or trend that is culturally high status right now.

Trends

People constantly chase after high status. High status people avoid low status crowds, so high status people constantly change the places they go, the things they do, the way they talk. The people chasing after them copy and distribute the high status ideas, more people follow those ideas, and they become trends. A trend is a recent and increasingly popular high status thing. When the trend establishes itself and persists, it becomes a fashion, a distinct style or way of life. If a fashion is intense and short lived, it is a fad. More intense than a fad is a craze, where people go crazy about a trend, acting irrationally and losing a lot of money or causing people to get hurt. Beyond a craze is a panic, with social upheaval and disruption. Beyond a panic is a riot, which is beyond our scope here.

Social change	Started	Example
Trend	1970s	Clothing made with synthetic fabrics, such as leisure suits
Fashion	Late 1960s	Bell-bottom pants
Fad	2017	Fidget spinners
Craze	2017	Pokemon Go, people formed crowds, some people got hurt
Panic	2020	Toilet paper during the initial Covid19 lockdowns, stores were sold out and rationing this basic commodity

Trends are often seen in cheap signals, where high status people or groups establish an internal trend as a new signal to claim higher status, this spreads within the group, then leaks out and spreads across the culture until the value of the cheap signal is destroyed and it becomes low status, creating a new cycle of opportunity to create a new high status cheap signal. One example of this cycle is words that mean good. If something is good, you could just say it is good, but people want to sound better than others when they praise something, and constantly invent new words to mean good.

Started	Word
1920s	Hot
1940s	Cool, hip
Mid 1960s	Groovy, boss
Late 1960s	Far out
Early 1980s	Radical, gnarly
Mid 1980s	Bad

Started	Word
Early 1990s	Fly
Mid 1990s	Sick, dope, phat, tight
Early 2000s	Crunk, bling, hot
Mid 2000s	Lit, the shit
Late 2010s	Gucci, slaps, bet
2020s	Slays, bussin

Countersignaling

Once a signal is established, it becomes well-known and expected. Making the same signal as everyone else isn't impressive, it doesn't appear important or unique. Common signals become old-hat. Very costly signals can remain potent, but anything less costly can lose potency. When the signal loses power, but that signal is the primary and established way to claim status, what is the alternative?

The solution is to introduce a different signal. When one signal gets old, if someone stops using that signal, or chooses to signal something else, or signals the opposite, that is countersignaling. Countersignaling is relative to a default signal. If everyone is wearing muted colors now, what stands out the most? Wearing bright colors. When everyone is wearing bright colors, what stands out the most? Dark colors. When everyone is wearing dark colors, what stands out the most? Patterns. These mass shifts from signal to countersignal, countercountersignal, counter counter counter etc, are what the fashion world calls seasons.

Plenty of people don't conform to the latest fashion for all kinds of reasons. These people are also countersignaling, but there are successful and unsuccessful countersignals. A successful countersignal gains status, breaks an old trend and starts a new trend. Other people want to copy the successful countersignal, until it becomes the signal. This dynamic is formalized in the term counter-culture, where people intentionally reject elements of the popular culture to establish a distinct subculture defined in part by opposition to the dominant culture. If the countersignals developed in the counterculture break containment, they can become the signal and are stolen by the dominant culture. Then the counterculture loses relevance by merging with the dominant culture, or continues to reject the dominant culture with a counter counter signal.

Failed countersignalling is the default case for nonconformity, the countersignal isn't impressive. Of course that is the default case, impressing people is difficult and rare, and further, anyone who works for a living, that is, poor people and people with meaning in their lives, everything they do is to survive or advance their mission, which usually is not about impressing other people. Things that are important usually don't look impressive, and things that look impressive usually aren't that important. Further, people who are failures or who are figuring out their lives also aren't impressive. The most successful countersignalers are people who are obsessed with signaling and are skilled at getting attention and looking impressive in new ways, tastemakers, and people of high achievement, who occasionally happen to look very impressive as a side-effect of doing something important.

Reputation

Reputation is common knowledge about the status, stance or character of a person or group. It is similar to faction value, but the evaluator is not an individual, the evaluator is the group. Reputation is the current answer to the question, what does the group think about them? Reputation is objective, in the sense that there is a common belief in a group about a person. Reputation is subjective, in that it is a judgment. But reputation is not just subjective, it is something even more subjective than subjective, it is a socially defined belief, a belief about what other people believe, eg I know that you didn't do it, but they all think you did.

Your personal reputation can rise or fall based on whether the group agrees with your statements about a person. So, if the group already dislikes someone, maybe you want to lie about that person to improve your own reputation by harming their reputation. Your attack encourages others to attack them for the same benefit. This cascade of personal attacks to claim reputation is called a pile on. The copycats don't gain as much status as the first person, so they are encouraged to escalate, in order to claim more status for their attack. This is a race to the bottom dynamic.

Every group faces this dynamic. When someone does something exciting to gain status, others tend copy them to also gain status, but face diminishing returns. Instead of stopping the behavior or accepting lower rewards, the

copiers tend to escalate to gain as much status as the first person, or sometimes more. What this means is that the rewards for reputation drive group members to extreme behavior. The dynamic defines two attractor states, groups that actively protect themselves against extremism, or groups that succumb to extremism. Groups tend to rise and fall. They flourish, stay focused on their mission by maintaining principles and cooperating with society, they lose their way and wander off mission, fall to corruption, disperse, or fail to prevent extremism and become an extremist group.

Gossip

Gossip is secret informal discussion of reputation changes. Some people are very excited about other people's lives, busybodies. They always want to hear and share the latest news about people they know, but they don't want to face their own lives and make contributions to the group. Sometimes news spreads quickly, everyone hears about it through the grapevine. Other times, people are discussing what they think will happen, someone mishears something, someone misunderstands something, or someone lies, and a rumor is created. A rumor is gossip about a lie. Because it is a lie, it is more interesting than the truth, and spreads faster than accurate gossip or corrections. This happens so often that rumors are consistently produced, like a factory, called the rumor mill.

People who engage in gossip are often petty and jealous. If a busybody doesn't like you, they may intentionally spread a rumor about you to harm your reputation, a character assassination attempt. A common form of this is starting a rumor about sexual misconduct. Gossip is a secret, it is supposed to be hidden, so one partially effective form of resistence to gossip is to demand being overt or explicit, e.g., tell me to my face, go on the record.

There are parallel justice processes in society, the court of law and the court of public opinion, representing objective reality and social reality respectively. The court of law has explicit rules, agents and processes, while the court of public opinion is informal and judges people in social reality. The standard of evidence in the court of public opinion is the dominant rumors. Gossip and rumor can be used productively, but usually they are weapons to harm people for entertainment, spite or opposition.

Shame and Guilt

Shaming is an attempt to harm a party's reputation using overt claims that they have socially disapproved qualities, a direct attack on them in social reality. Social approval and disapproval affect incentives, driving or even controlling behavior. Don't you want other people to like you and give you benefits? Then you must follow social expectations. Social rejection, ostracism, can prevent you from gaining benefits and threaten your survival. The internal emotion of shame is a feeling of overall wrongness, inadequacy, unworthiness. The emotion of shame has a functional purpose, but like anger and guilt, you must not indulge in it or else it becomes destructive.

Shame can be used as a form of diffuse social control of a group. Influential people can wield shame for personal control of both individuals and the group. People who have sufficient bargaining power can endure shaming and become shameless. Shaming is ineffective to control them. Say what you want, but if you deny my contributions to the group, or the necessity of my product or service, then the accuser or the group will face worse consequences than me, thus establishing deterrence.

Guilt is an internal, subjective conclusion of specific personal wrongdoing in social reality. One common purpose of shaming someone is to cause them to feel guilt and change their behavior, or expose additional exploitable weaknesses. To feel guilt, the person has to care about other people. There is an essential difference between simple reward and punishment, and awareness of social reality. Reward and punishment thinking is something like, I regret that I was caught breaking the rules. Social reality thinking is something like, I regret breaking the rules because I harmed other people, the group, and ultimately myself. Someone who feels guilt wants to change their behavior for the greater good, indirectly for their own good.

Ostracism

Ostracism is expelling a member from a group. Typically status is considered to be positive, the more status you have, the more valued and connected you are to the group, while ostracism is negative, the more ostracized you are, the less value you have to the group and the more they want to get rid of you. Shunning is the related action of expelling a member only in social reality, but not physical reality. Shunning is when people say, I am not talking to you.

You need to be part of a group to survive, so the experience of ostracism feels like a mortal threat. Ostracism can operate as a near equivalent to capital punishment, a disincentive for behavior that harms group interests, or it can be coopted for selfish purposes. For example, if you become jealous of another member of the group, you could falsely accuse or frame them, and get them ostracized so that they lose their status, whether you can take their status for yourself or not. Ostracism can be abused for control of the group, where a leader forces the group to comply with their demands, under the threat of ostracism for the first person who resists.

Conformity

Conformity is making your actions match others' expectations in social reality. A shared social expectation is a norm. Usually, if you act the way that everyone expects, they will act as everyone expects, and nothing special will happen. Often, something special happening to you, is bad for you. There is a lot of social programming, social pressure, propaganda to conform. Fit in! Go along to get along! The nail that sticks out the farthest is the one that will be beaten down!

There are problems in every direction of the conformity dynamic. Social expectations are often wrong in various ways. Should you conform, even if that would be wrong? Should you do the right thing, even if it means deviating? What about when people disagree about social reality, how do you know whose reality to conform to? Society is composed of multiple groups, and often, conforming to the norms of one group means deviating to another. Beyond the direct consequence of a choice to conform or deviate, your conformity affects your reputation, you may become known as a conformist or a deviant. There are opportunities, risks, rewards and penalties for conforming. There are also opportunities, risks, rewards and penalties for deviating. Conforming isn't always good or bad, and neither is deviating.

How do you know what to do? You have to determine for yourself what is in your best interest. Some kind people may assist you to do that, but overall, only you can live your life. Generally, taking consequential action without considering the consequences is stupid. Letting your emotions override your reason, relying entirely on other people, or doing whatever seems like a good idea at the time, these brainless behaviors are almost guarenteed to lead to your ruin. Being out-of-control, credulous or thoughtless makes it possible, and sometimes easy, for other people to manipulate you for their own benefit, to your detriment.

Benefits of conformity

- you know what to do in common situations
- you can easily predict the costs and benefits of common actions
- other people can reliably predict what you will do in common situations
- the group operates in a consistent, understandable, predictable manner
- independent actors coordinate without coordination costs
- other people can identify which group you belong to, and many of your beliefs from any single action you take
- when social reality changes, everyone in the group changes their behavior together
- working with people who conform is easier, because you know what they will do, and they will typically obey commands
- you don't have to spend much on enforcement, because groups often share the effort of enforcing norms
- groups often welcome conformists as members
- your risk of being singled out is minimized by fitting in with the group
- the group may protect and defend you as one of its members

Benefits of deviance

- you can respond appropriately to specific situations, which is every situation
- you force others to face situations they aren't familiar with, reducing the advantage of prior experience
- people may not be able to predict what you will do, making countering you more difficult
- the group does not bumble into the same problems, over and over

- you can achieve superior coordination by paying coordination costs

- other people can't identify which group you belong to, and cannot accurately predict or assume things about you from a few examples

- when social reality changes, members respond uniquely and explore more possibilities sooner

- working with people who deviate is necessary for success, because exploration is always necessary under changing conditions

- you can sometimes claim outsize benefits, because enforcement against deviants is expensive and difficult

- groups are often formed or lead by deviants

- your opportunity of being singled out is maximized

- the group may reject you when you deviate, only to seek you out when social reality agrees with you

George Bernard Shaw. The reasonable man adapts himself to the conditions that surround him. The unreasonable man adapts the surrounding conditions to himself. All progress depends on the unreasonable man.

Decision table of when to conform

Cost of conformity, risks of doing what everyone else is doing	Benefit of conformity	Cost of deviance, enforcement, risks of doing something different	Benefit of deviance	Choice
Low	Low	Low	Low	Either
Low	Low	Low	High	Deviate
Low	Low	High	Low	Conform
Low	Low	High	High	Either
Low	High	Low	Low	Conform
Low	High	Low	High	Either
Low	High	High	Low	Conform
Low	High	High	High	Conform
High	Low	Low	Low	Deviate
High	Low	Low	High	Deviate
High	Low	High	Low	Either
High	Low	High	High	Deviate
High	High	Low	Low	Either
High	High	Low	High	Deviate
High	High	High	Low	Conform
High	High	High	High	Either

Even within the choice to deviate, there are always many ways to deviate, degrees of deviation, and the choice of

whether to be covert or overt. If you deviate overtly, you may pay the price immediately or soon, but your behavior is honest and simple. If you decide to deviate covertly, you have to conduct a clandestine operation and account for the case where you get caught, at the time of the deviation and for a long time thereafter. Overt or discovered covert both affect your reputation and the reputation of the group.

Conformity is not always a choice. If you are different from others for any reason, physically, mentally, holding a different personality, resources, beliefs, values, you may be unable or unwilling to conform, even if it would be advantageous or safer to do so. Some people conform without thinking, some people deviate without thinking. Some people devote their life to conformity, and some of those people succeed to conform, while others fail to conform, even with their full effort. Some people deviate for the purpose of rejecting conformity, and some people never consider conformity in the first place.

Given how specific and incoherent norms are, people from other cultures or people who think for themselves rarely conform. Who Gets What explains the principles behind social reality, but social realities themselves are not principled. In a rational society, people who think for themselves would reach similar conclusions and fit in, while people who relied on inaccurate heuristics and deluded themselves would be deviants. Human societies are not rational, so it's independent thinkers who are deviant and the deluded are conformant.

Conformity and deviance are themselves complex. There are multiple forms of conformity, the letter of the law, the spirit of the law, and subservience. Following the letter of the law is often the minimal amount of conformity, and sometimes has hidden costs. A letter of the law action is immune from punishment in theory, but it may harm your reputation or offend someone by harming their interests. Following the spirit of the law means that you make a good-faith attempt to produce the results that the law theoretically intends to achieve. It is important to notice how deep the concept of the spirit of the law is in social reality, the grounding of the spirit in objective reality at this point is tenuous, but present, which is one part of the work that a serious court of law has to do. The final form of conformity is subservience, abject conformity, there are no rules and certainly no principles, except the principle that you do whatever they say, whenever they say it.

The forms of deviance are opposition, rebellion and independence. Opposition is simple-minded contradiction, if you say yes, I say no. If you tell me to do something, I refuse. If you try to do something, I try to stop you. It sounds like being oppositional is the opposite of being controlled by another party. But an oppositional form of deviance is still controlled by the party you oppose. Opposition is sometimes so stupid, that if I want you to do something, I can just forbid you from doing it, to cause you to do it.

Rebellion is an attempt to overturn a power structure, to replace it with something else. While opposition can have no goal, rebellion has a goal, even if that goal is often dumb. Both opposition and rebellion oppose a power structure, but opposition is reactive, while rebellion has some degree of agency, attempting to create a different power structure, or taking some initiative beyond reacting.

Asserting independence also opposes the control of a power structure, but unlike rebellion, independence does not seek to destroy or replace the power structure, it has objectives without reference to the power structure, and can achieve its own goals without directly challenging the power structure, while rebellion is essentially about challenging the power structure itself. Power structures are totalizing by default, meaning that they have disincentives to allow anyone within the power structure to be independent, so from the point of view of power structures, independents and rebels are the same.

Deviance often has immediate social costs, but conformity often has hidden personal costs. Conforming often contradicts your personality, habits, preferences, beliefs, feelings and other goals. Beyond the effort of creating the pretense, when you choose to conform or performatively deviate, instead of doing what you really want, you spend that part of your life in partial self-denial, you are actively destroying a part of yourself. Sometimes this is just a normal cost of doing business, sometimes this adversity makes you stronger, and sometimes conformity hurts you and makes you weaker, or a different person altogether. Even sadder, in many cases, conformity isn't especially important or enforced, but people wrongly assume that it is, over-conforming wastefully.

Dostoevsky. Your worst sin is that you betrayed yourself for nothing.

Whether by chance, received wisdom, the wisdom of crowds, or hard-won wisdom, a valuable norm may develop and persist. These norms are there for good reason, while many people who conform to them don't know why. This is a form of Chesterton's Fence, if you don't know why the norm is prevalent, don't deviate from it. Once you learn the reason why the norm is there, then you can decide whether to conform to it or not. But this advice only applies in friendly territory. If you are a common person doing common activities in a healthy society, if you share the culture,

values and goals of your society, then you should conform by default. Those fences are probably there for a good reason, fences tell you where not to go, for your own good. Even if you are facing a common problem, if you are an unusual person or have an unusual goal, the conformist solution may be useless or counterproductive. The advice reverses in enemy territory.

Reversal of Chesterton's Fence

Item	Friendly territory	Enemy territory
Culture, values, goals	Shared	Opposed
Default choice when encountering a fence	Conform	Deviate
Meaning of a fence	Tell you where not to go	Tell you where to go

Sometimes the smiling people, who look like you, who say they are your friends, are actually your enemies. Sometimes the frowning people, who look different from you, who say they are your enemy, are actually your friends. When it comes to declaring enemies, you can often take people at their word, but distinguishing friend from foe is hard. Finding friends requires establishing trust, it requires a consistent pattern of beneficent behavior. I warn you, it is not always easy to tell when you are in friendly or enemy territory.

The choice of whether to conform is downstream of your goals. If you want to be right, more than you want to fit in, then do what you think is right. If your primary goal is to cooperate with a group, more than the goal of being right, then conform even if it is wrong. Don't be narrow-minded about it, there are degrees of conformity and there are degrees of wrongness, only you can draw the lines for your own best interest. The analysis is easy when your goals aren't in conflict, but life doesn't make things easy, so eventually your goals will come into conflict and you have to choose one over the others. What people choose when it comes down to it often reveals their values, priorities and goals. You can learn a lot about yourself and others by paying attention to these choices. A person with greater creativity or social skill can sometimes avoid, accommodate or resolve goal conflicts and get more of what they want.

Conformity is sometimes unintentional, intentional, brainless, strategic, forced, deceptive and many other things, but conformity is also part of your personality, called agreeableness. If you are inclined to agree with other people, believe them, care about their feelings and perspective and do what they ask of you, you are more agreeable. Agreeable people are more conformist, with all of the associated benefits and costs. They can be social chameleons, people pleasers or toadies, but they can also be simply friendly. Peoples' personalities do change over their lives, and agreeableness is a broad measure that comprises multiple beliefs, attitudes and skills. You can be agreeable but not a gullible pushover, and you can be disagreeable without being a hateful loner.

Norms are sometimes stark, but they are rarely precise. There are often enormous gaps between the letter and the spirit of the unwritten social laws. Attempts to codify norms are often slip-shod and ad-hoc, making them incoherent, inconsistent, exploitable and challengable. We call these codified norms, rules. Depending on your goal, you can fulfill the true spirit of the rule and get purity points, you can comply in various ways and be unremarkable, and you can maliciously comply to impose costs without violating the rules. Covert malicious compliance creates hidden problems with real costs, but does not directly affect the reputations of the complier or the group. Overt deviance and malicious compliance are visible in social reality, harming the reputation of the individual and the group. Both acts are disobedient, and challenge the power structure or hierarchy of the group, which usually provokes an overt response to preserve the power structure. This is why some problems or deviant people are handled privately, preserving the group's reputation, and some are handled publicly, to attempt to restore the group's reputation after an overt loss.

Ontology of Communication Strategies

In these chapters I will describe the fundamental communication strategies. A communication strategy is a distinct way of talking, a basic idea that people can have about their role in society, why they relate to others, a concept of what they are primarily doing when they communicate. These are not specific techniques or short term goals, they are more of an overall orientation or style. People are often not aware of which strategies they use, but their communication is attracted to one or more of these strategies because they work to gain benefits and status. This is

an ontology because it attempts to categorize almost all speech acts between one or more categories, the categories cover all of the common communication strategies. The ontology also attempts to consider not just the goals of the strategies, but their typical character and consequences. It is a sort of field guide of human communication.

The communication strategies that one person uses can change over their life, and their behavior can reflect a mixture of strategies in any interaction. The strategies themselves don't change and are fixed by nature.

Communication strategies can be developmental. We might communicate in certain ways when we are a child, different ways as a teenager, and we might settle on one style in adulthood or continue to shift to different communication strategies during different activities or periods of our lives. See Kohlberg and Ken Wilber about related concepts in developmental psychology.

Lawrence Kohlberg's Stages of Moral Development

Integral Theory (Ken Wilber)

I first introduce the communication strategies, then describe them in detail, show how each strategy appears to the others, their unique incentives, how people typically progress or regress through them, and how to work with and against them.

I describe each communication strategy systematically using many dimensions. Here is an explanatory table, where I describe what every dimension means.

Dimension	Explanation
Description	A short description of the overall concept of the communication strategy
Values	What does this person primarily value when they use this strategy?
What words do	The essential idea of what words are for, why we speak, how words work, what effect do words have
Messaging	The central meaning behind everything someone says when they use this communication strategy
Goals	Can this strategy effectively pursue goals?
Consistent	Using this strategy, is the communication consistent or not? Hypocritical? Contradictory?
Truth	What is the relationship of this strategy to objective truth? Yes, it is truthful? No, it isn't? Or it may be indifferent, the speaker doesn't care whether their statements are true or not.
Reputation	Do people who follow this strategy care about their reputation?
Status	How does this strategy gain status within a group?
Unity	How does this strategy affect group unity and solidarity?
Subordinates to	Who or what do people who follow this strategy subordinate themselves to? Who do they follow or obey?
Totalizing	Does this strategy demand that everyone else conform to it? Does it try to force every shaped peg into one hole?

Dimension	Explanation
Manipulative	Is this strategy willing to manipulate other people?
Force	What is this strategy's preference about the use of force to get what it wants?
Violence	What is this strategy's opinion about the use of violence?
Rule of law	What is this strategy's opinion about the rule of law?
Let live	Is this strategy willing to let other people live how they want, or does it want to interfere?
Theory of mind	How does this strategy think about the minds of other people?
Forms of government	Which forms of government does this strategy tend to form?
Dominates	Which other communication strategies can this communication strategy often defeat?
Typical emotions	What are the most common or distinctive emotions that people have when they use this communication strategy?
Typical behaviors	What are the most common or distinctive actions that people take when they follow this communication strategy?
Archetypes	What are the most well known jobs, roles or examples that use this communication strategy?
Historical figures	Who are some famous people in history who significantly use this communication strategy?
Examples	Typical statements this strategy can produce
Crash outs	Typical statements this strategy produces when it fails

Summary of Forms of Government

Form of government	Description
State of nature	Animals in the wild, eating each other and reproducing
Anarchy	No formal government
Minarchy	Minimal government, such as common defense, police and courts. Minimal government decision making
Libertarian	Maximum individual liberty, which can include no government and low government

Form of government	Description
Tribal	Group of people who live and work together. Decisions are made by elders and a chief, authority is fluid based on status.
Gang	Criminal group of lawless workers, decisions made by a gang leader
Military dictatorship	Formal government run by an army lead by a supreme leader
Junta	Formal government run by an army lead by a group of generals
Seniority	The longest-serving members decide
Committee	A decision maker delegates a decision to a group they appoint
Democracy	Every member can vote on a decision. Simple majority or other voting methods decide based on the votes.
Republic	Members choose representatives. Representatives make decisions by voting.
Elitism	Decisions are made by the members with the highest social or cultural status
Ecclesiocracy	Decisions are made by religious leaders
Theocracy	Decisions are made by religion under the active authority of their god
Epistocracy	Decisions are made by the most knowledgable
Meritocracy	Decisions are made by those with the highest achievements
Consensus	Decisions are made when every member agrees
Communes	Egalitarian group, decisions made by consensus or leaders
Utopia	An imaginary, nonexistent form of government that is assumed to work perfectly
Bureaucracy	The group governs itself according to its own leaders, writes its own regulations, and decides its own enforcement. Individual members follow policy, with simultaneously total discretion and no discretion.
Autocracy	Rule by a self-declared supreme leader
City states	Each area with a distinct high population density, a city, governs itself and cooperates or competes with other city states

Form of government	Description
Constitutional	A consitution is a foundational document or rules for a government, that any other form of government then abides by
Futarchy	Decisions are made using prediction markets. Anyone can buy or sell shares in the markets to predict outcomes of a decision. The market price at the market close makes the decision. When the outcome of the decision is known, the market pays the shareholders with correct predictions.
Cliques	Informal fluid groups making informal decisions by leader, consensus, democracy or other informal processes
Aristocracy	Decisions are made by a hierarchy of heritable family titles, usually with a king to grant and revoke titles
Kleptocracy	Decisions are made arbitrarily by those in power to steal from the other members
Plutocracy	Decisions are made by the most wealthy
Oligarchy	Decisions are made by a small group of powerful individuals
Nationalist	Emphasizes the nation over the individual, using other forms of government to make specific decisions within the government
Communist	Rejects individual property, enforces collective ownership and distribution. Decisions are made by a ruling party using other forms of government.
Fascist	Autocratic nationalist, a supreme leader with total state authority over other members
Monarchy	Decisions made by a supreme leader with a family heritable title of king
Socialism	Any form of government that collects income to redistribute to the members to increase equality or welfare, the social safety net
Federation	A group where the members are not individual people, but the members are other governments, such as a city-state alliance

Introduction to the Communication Strategies

First I introduce all the communication strategies, then I will describe each in detail.

Strategy	Description
Greedy	I take and demand what I want
Nice	I will be nice to you, and hope that you will be nice back to me, to give me what I want
Strong	I use dominance to get what I want
Avoidant	I get what I want by myself
Troll	I prevent other people from getting what they want, to get what I want
Artist	I express artistic truth to get what I want
Expert	I use rare knowledge to get what I want
Rules	I do what I am supposed to do, to avoid ostracism, and force others to do what they are supposed to do, to get what I am supposed to get, according to the rules
Simple	I create or trade for what I want
Status	I associate myself with people who have what I want, to get what I want
Partisan	I advocate for my group, to get what I want
Ideologue	I advocate for my beliefs, to get what I want
Player within a game	I understand and play the game, to get what I want
Multigamer	I operate within multiple games, to get what I want
Game designer	I change the game, to get what I want

Greedy

Description	Say whatever you think will work to get what you want
Values	My current desires
What words do	Words are tools to get what I want
Messaging	Gimme
Goals	No, impulsive
Consistent	No
Truth	Indifferent
Reputation	No
Status	Deludes itself that it already has status it does not have

Unity	Slight harm, not loyal, but simple to manipulate. Doesn't take risks, goes with the crowd
Subordinates to	None
Totalizing	No
Manipulative	Yes, crude deception
Force	Yes, if I think I can get away with it
Violence	Preferred
Rule of law	No
Let live	No, I want everything
Theory of mind	Everyone else is greedy too, so I need to take their stuff first and protect my stuff
Forms of government	State of nature
Dominates	Nice, avoidant
Typical emotions	Entitlement, impatience, self pity, rage
Typical behaviors	Demanding, begging, lying, escalating, stealing, crying, insulting, shaming, screaming, moaning, tantrums, hitting, failing the marshmallow test
Archetypes	Brat, criminal, impulse shopper
Historical Figures	Caligula, Nero, Henry VIII
Examples	I want it now! No, this is mine. Yay, I love you.
Crash outs	Nooooooo. I hate you! Wahhhhhhhh wahhhhhh.

Nice

Description	Be nice to others and expect them to be nice to you. Overly literal view of the golden rule, treat others the way you want to be treated, and expect them to treat you well.
Values	Others accept you, compliance, harmony
What words do	Words are one way to be nice
Messaging	I will do anything you want so you will accept me
Goals	No, won't assert anything
Consistent	No, say what others want to hear

Truth	Indifferent
Reputation	Yes, wants to be seen as nice, but will sacrifice own reputation if others demand it
Status	Forfeits its status to others, weak bid for purity status through conformity and sacrifice
Unity	Helps, not loyal but easy to control
Subordinates to	All
Totalizing	No
Manipulative	Yes, emotional coercion
Force	Yes, when pushed
Violence	Indifferent
Rule of law	Indifferent
Let live	Yes
Theory of mind	Naive, everyone wants to get along
Forms of government	Consensus, democracy, seniority, utopia
Dominates	Greedy
Typical emotions	Obligation, anxiety, credulity, frustration, resentment, guilt, impotence
Typical behaviors	Acting kind, polite, boot licking, complaining when others don't do what I want, sulking, lashing out
Archetypes	Nice guy, nice girl, toady, people-pleaser, assistant, weak parent, anyone when they express polite generosity
Historical Figures	Neville Chamberlain, Louis XVI
Examples	Mother, may I? I don't want to be any trouble. I'm sorry, I'm sorry! I just want everyone to get along.
Crash outs	You're being mean. No fair! It was my turn. After everything I've done for you. I tried to be nice, but.

Strong

Description	Show strength
Values	Power
What words do	Words display dominance and submission

Messaging	Fear and obey me
Goals	No, except strength related
Consistent	No, capricious, except if consistency shows strength to the strong, I keep my word
Truth	No, the truth is that I am not strong
Reputation	Yes, obsessed
Status	Seeks martial status
Unity	Necessary for group unity but can also threaten unity by losing, splitting, or coup
Subordinates to	Stronger people
Totalizing	Yes, it all comes down to power
Manipulative	No, except threats and displays of force
Force	Yes
Violence	Yes
Rule of law	No, except law of the jungle, chain of command, great leader, might makes right
Let live	No if they are weaker, or if I can get away with it
Theory of mind	Animalistic
Forms of government	Tribal, gang, junta, military dictatorship
Dominates	Greedy, nice, avoidant, troll, simple
Typical emotions	Anger, self importance, aggression, discipline, insecurity
Typical behaviors	Display of strength, bullying the weak, following the strong, lashing out at perceived slights
Archetypes	Bully, enforcer, military, bandit, terrorist, weak parent
Historical figures	Alexander the Great, Genghis Khan, Attila the Hun
Examples	Do what I tell you, or else. This is my area. Yes, sir! Don't make me come over. Watch out.
Crash outs	Nobody talks to me that way. Say that again. I will make you pay. Come here and fight me.

Avoidant

Description	Leave me alone
Values	Independence, peace
What words do	Words are overall harmful
Messaging	Go away
Goals	No, except to keep others away
Consistent	No
Truth	Indifferent
Reputation	No
Status	Claims minimal political status as an unavoidable group member and forfeits any status above that
Unity	Slight harm through nonconformity
Subordinates to	None
Totalizing	No, everyone has their own way
Manipulative	No, except to get you to leave
Force	Only in self defense
Violence	Prefers less
Rule of law	Indifferent
Let live	Yes
Theory of mind	Full theory of mind, to preserve independence
Forms of government	Libertarian, democracy
Dominates	None
Typical emotions	Flow, diligence, intolerance, fierce independence, peace, inflexibility, loneliness
Typical behaviors	Solitary, routine, staring into space, laconic, stubborn, talking to yourself
Archetypes	Downtrodden worker, recluse, crazy cat lady, expat
Historical Figures	Emily Dickinson, Henry David Thoreau, J.D. Salinger
Examples	That's not my problem. I don't want to get involved. I'll handle it myself. Ok, thank you, goodbye.
Crash outs	What part of No do you not understand? Mind your own business. I don't care. Get out!

Troll

Description	Rebellious troublemaker, causes problems for their own entertainment. The activity of crabs trapped in an open bucket. If the crabs cooperate, they can escape the bucket, but they pull each other down. None succeed despite the lack of anything stopping them.
Values	Chaos
What words do	Words are tricks
Messaging	Don't ignore me
Goals	Short term
Consistent	No
Truth	Antagonistic, the whole truth is boring, selective truth and lies are fun tricks
Reputation	Seeks infamy
Status	Seeks status by harming others' status, implicitly increasing their status because status is relative. Is marginalized from status and spoils others status' until they have status or equal opportunity.
Unity	Harms
Subordinates to	None
Totalizing	No, troll rejects everything, including their own worldview
Manipulative	Yes
Force	Avoids force due to cowardice, loves brinksmanship
Violence	Yes, more
Rule of law	No
Let live	No, wants to bother everyone
Theory of mind	Sees those with more power as self-righteous, cowardly hypocrites. Sees conformists as victims of tricks.
Forms of government	Anarchy, gangs
Dominates	Greedy, nice, strong, avoidant, simple
Typical emotions	Jealousy, rage, self-loathing, schadenfreude, aggression
Typical behaviors	Trolling, pranks, defiance, apathy, vandalism, running away

Archetypes	Teenager, misanthrope, trickster, troublemaker, comedian
Historical figures	Diogenes, Caravaggio, Oscar Wilde, Lenny Bruce
Examples	I'm just being honest. What are you angry about? It was a joke. I didn't do anything wrong. Can't catch me.
Crash outs	You think you're better than me? You're all a bunch of hypocrites. I'll get back at you.

Artist

Description	Express my creativity
Values	Artistic truth
What words do	Channel artistic truth, words are aesthetic, form over function
Messaging	I express the beauty of the world
Goals	Short term, often interrupted
Consistent	No
Truth	Metaphorical truth
Reputation	Yes and no, wants universal praise for expressing their true self, which is impossible
Status	Seeks cultural status
Unity	Helps through production of culture, harms with allegiance to artistic truth against group narrative
Subordinates to	Their muse
Totalizing	Yes, their work, their live, and the world itself are an exploration of artistic vision
Manipulative	Yes
Force	No
Violence	No
Rule of law	Mixed
Let live	Mixed, wants attention from everyone but too self-centered
Theory of mind	Everyone is a better or worse artist
Forms of government	Communes, elitism

Dominates	Greedy, nice, avoidant, troll, rules, status
Typical emotions	Warm appreciation, self-aggrandizement, ecstatic beauty, abject failure, pride, self-loathing, self-indulgent
Typical behaviors	Oversharing, monologuing, seeking validation
Archetypes	Artist, designer, influencer
Historical figures	Vincent van Gogh, Beethoven, Shakespeare
Examples	Nobody understands me. I'm not like other people. Isn't it beautiful? I have a vision.
Crash outs	You ruined it! What's the point of anything?

Expert

Description	Knowledge leader within their subject area
Values	Authority from rare knowledge
What words do	Words are power, suppress the intellectually weak, identify the intellectually strong, words are the arena for intellectual competition
Messaging	I know more than you
Goals	Yes
Consistent	Yes
Truth	Indifferent, avoids getting caught lying, while exaggerating knowledge and importance
Reputation	Yes, obsessed
Status	Seeks knowledge, purity and relational status
Unity	Helps with useful knowledge, harms with inconvenient truths that harm narrative
Subordinates to	More knowledgeable
Totalizing	No, the more you know, generally the more you know that you don't know. There are other areas of expertise.
Manipulative	Yes
Force	No
Violence	No
Rule of law	Yes

Let live	Yes, unless they threaten my status
Theory of mind	Spectrum from animals to students to enlightened
Forms of government	Ecclesiocracy, epistocracy, committee, elitism
Dominates	Greedy, nice, strong, avoidant, troll, artist, rules, simple, lower status, partisan, ideologue
Typical emotions	Confusion, tedium, patience, mastery, righteousness, insecurity, self-importance
Typical behaviors	Lecturing, touting themselves, using impenetrable jargon, name dropping, correcting others, gatekeeping
Archetypes	Academic, hobbyist, industry expert, author, priest
Historical figures	Thomas Aquinas, Sigmund Freud, Henry Kissinger
Examples	Well actually. . . I have studied this for x years. That is a common misconception. The true answer is not publicly known.
Crash outs	What are your credentials? You are a bunch of savages!

Rules

Description	Do what I am supposed to do. Tell others what to do. Code switch for different contexts.
Values	Norms, conformity
What words do	Define the rules, act within the rules, enforce the rules
Messaging	I am doing what I am supposed to do, but you are violating the rules
Goals	No, but indirectly by following rules that constrain me to achieve a goal
Consistent	Yes, if the rules are consistent. But not coherent, will follow any set of rules, even if they contradict. Unprincipled.
Truth	No, whatever the rules say
Reputation	No, unless there are rules about reputation
Status	Seeks political and purity status by enforcing group conformity
Unity	Helps
Subordinates to	Rules, social pressure

Totalizing	Yes, everyone is part of society, everyone must do what they are supposed to do
Manipulative	Yes, using rules
Force	Yes, if the rules say so
Violence	Yes, if the rules say so
Rule of law	Yes, but not principles of law
Let live	No. Everyone breaks the rules.
Theory of mind	None, they are behaviorist. Others' behavior is good or bad, law abiding or violator
Forms of government	Bureaucracy, autocracy
Dominates	Greedy, nice, strong, avoidant, troll, artist, simple, status, partisan, ideologue
Typical emotions	Annoyance, disgust, tedium, vengeance, dissatisfied and unsatisfiable, judgmental, helpless
Typical behaviors	Following the rules, appeals to the rules, tell others what to do, report people, nit picking, criticism, insults
Archetypes	Bureaucrat, police, judge, mediator, nosy neighbor or homeowners associate or landlord, Karen, decent parents
Historical figures	Torquemada, Oliver Cromwell, J. Edgar Hoover
Examples	You can't do that. Are other people doing it too? I'm just following the policy. I have to report you.
Crash outs	That is unacceptable. I'm calling for help. I'm just doing my job.

Simple

Description	Do the right thing
Values	Principles, justice, truth
What words do	Words mean things. I say what I mean, I do what I say.
Messaging	What is right, is right
Goals	Yes
Consistent	Yes
Truth	Yes

Reputation	No
Status	Skips socially defined status and creates benefits directly, gains economic and knowledge status
Unity	Harms by nonconformity and rejecting narrative
Subordinates to	Objective reality
Totalizing	No, everyone is ultimately only responsible to themselves
Manipulative	No
Force	Yes, if justified
Violence	Prefers less. Yes, if justified
Rule of law	Yes for just laws, no for unjust laws
Let live	Yes. If you don't bother me, I won't bother you
Theory of mind	Assume others are responsible agents like themselves. Evaluates them on the spectrum of good and evil. Principles like truth is good, lying is evil.
Forms of government	Minarchy, city states, meritocracy, constitutional, futarchy
Dominates	Greedy, nice, strong, avoidant, troll, artist, expert, rules, status, partisan, ideologue
Typical emotions	Confusion, disappointment, confidence, righteousness, hope, despair
Typical behaviors	Standing for what is right, telling the truth even when it is inconvenient, being celebrated and being rejected, being deceived and betrayed, dying early
Archetypes	Child, hero, great leader, anyone who cares enough to give tough love
Historical figures:	Socrates, George Washington, Martin Luther, Thomas Paine, Abraham Lincoln
Examples	I am not sure. I know we're not supposed to say it, but... that's not right
Crash outs	I can't believe you're going along with this. I'll do it myself. But, you lied to me!

Status

Description	Do whatever increases my status
Values	Social status

What words do	Words signal status
Messaging	I will repeat whatever gains me status endlessly until I find something better
Goals	No, just chases the current status game
Consistent	No
Truth	No, status is socially defined
Reputation	Yes, obsessed, what will the neighbors think?
Status	Seeks fraud, purity, relational, economic and political status, uses any means available such as lies, hoarding, affiliation, theft, bribery, etc.
Unity	Helps by conforming and harms with unfair, self-interested status grabs
Subordinates to	Higher status
Totalizing	Yes, it all comes down to status
Manipulative	Yes
Force	Yes
Violence	Indifferent
Rule of law	Selective. Rules for thee but not for me, also, I am not a criminal
Let live	Yes, except if I can use you to gain status
Theory of mind	People with status have minds, others don't. Everything high-status people think is right, everything low-status people think is wrong.
Forms of government	Cliques, aristocracy, kleptocracy, plutocracy, oligarchy
Dominates	Greedy, nice, strong, avoidant, troll, artist, expert, rules, simple
Typical emotions	Jealousy, self-hatred, adoration, disgust, desire
Typical behaviors	Name dropping, boasting, signaling, denigrating, living beyond their means, keeping up with the Joneses
Archetypes	Social climbers, fans of celebrities, members of exclusive clubs, people with ostentatious status symbols such as fancy cars
Historical figures	Louis XIV, Cleopatra, Catherine the Great, Cornelius Vanderbilt II, William Randolph Hearst

Examples	I know the owner. I wouldn't be caught dead going there. Did you hear who is visiting?
Crash outs	Do you know who I am? You're just envious of me. I'm calling the governor about this.

Partisan

Description	Do whatever is good for my group and my reputation within the group
Values	Their group
What words do	Words signal group superiority, inferiority, allegience
Messaging	Crafts narratives to advance the interests of the group
Goals	Yes, often short sighted
Consistent	No, consistency is inconvenient for shifting narratives
Truth	No, the truth is incompatible with the best narrative
Reputation	Yes, often short sighted
Status	Seeks purity, relational and political status through activism, enforcing group unity internally and competing with other groups externally, sacrifice self for group
Unity	Helps unity by creating and enforcing narrative and conforming, fighting other groups and proselytizing
Subordinates to	The group
Totalizing	Yes, everything happens in relation to the group
Manipulative	Yes
Force	Yes
Violence	Yes
Rule of law	No
Let live	No, outsiders are resources for the group
Theory of mind	Ingroup members are people, outgroup are not people
Forms of government	Tribal, nationalist, communist, fascist
Dominates	Greedy, nice, strong, avoidant, simple, rules, status, ideologue

Typical emotions	Belonging, hatred, fear, aggression, oppression, triumph, defeat
Typical behaviors	Meetings, protests, organizing, service to the group, complaining, incoherent yelling, double standards, ignorance
Archetypes	Revolutionary, protester, member of an organized religion, fan, political party member, tribe member
Historical figures	Huey Long, Crazy Horse, William Wallace, Mother Jones, George Steinbrenner
Examples	It's us or them. We need to stick together. We can't let them win. We are the best. They are evil.
Crash outs	You're a traitor. You're dead to me. How could this happen to us?

Ideologue

Description	Believer in an ideology
Values	The ideology
What words do	Words transmit the one true ideology, fight ignorance and false ideologies
Messaging	Preach and defend the ideology
Goals	Yes
Consistent	Yes
Truth	No, no ideology is consistent with reality
Reputation	Yes, among true believers, no among everyone else
Status	Seeks purity, knowledge, relational and political status by conforming and sacrificing for the ideology
Unity	Helps by spreading and defending the ideology, proselytizing
Subordinates to	The ideology and its priests
Totalizing	Yes, everything happens in relation to the ideology
Manipulative	Yes, if it helps the ideology
Force	Yes
Violence	Yes
Rule of law	No, unless the law agrees with the ideology

Let live	No, all must believe
Theory of mind	Believers are human and nonbelievers are not human
Forms of government	Theocracy, autocracy, communism
Dominates	Greedy, nice, strong, avoidant, troll, artist, rules, simple, status, partisan
Typical emotions	Peace, doubt, superiority, disgust, awe, fear
Typical behaviors	Practicing the ideology, preaching, frothing at the mouth, mistreating nonbelievers
Archetypes	Religious zealot, communist, nationalist, generally ists and isms.
Historical figures	Lenin, John Calvin, Joseph McCarthy, Pol Pot
Examples	The book says that...we know the ultimate truth. We must spread the faith. The ends justify the means.
Crash outs	I tried to save you, but you chose the wrong path. The revolution is coming.

Player Within a Game

Description	Figure out the rules and play the game, integrate the many games into a single game and play to win
Values	Winning the game
What words do	Words are one system within the game
Messaging	Determined by the current winning strategy
Goals	Yes
Consistent	Indifferent, whatever is advantageous
Truth	Indifferent, whatever is advantageous. Cares deeply about knowing the truth internally.
Reputation	Indifferent, whatever is advantageous
Status	Depends
Unity	Depends
Subordinates to	The game
Totalizing	No, there are different games, and games I choose not to play

Manipulative	Yes
Force	Indifferent, whatever is advantageous
Violence	Prefers less, but whatever is advantageous
Rule of law	Yes, except if disadvantageous
Let live	Yes, except if you obstruct me
Theory of mind	Game theoretic
Forms of government	Republic
Dominates	All
Typical emotions	Excitement, interest, focus, caution, calculation, patience, determination
Typical behaviors	Competence, acting, misdirection, diligence, striking at the right moment
Archetypes	Professional, successful businessperson, strong parent, promising youth
Historical figures	Sun Tzu, Niccolò Machiavelli
Examples	Why do you think so? How do you know that? Could you tell me the details? You got me this time. I was just lucky.

Multigamer

Description	Plays within multiple shifting games
Values	Good tradeoffs
What words do	Words are a versatile tool to advance multiple objectives
Messaging	Whatever seems most important here and now
Goals	Sometimes, capable of pursuing goals but priorities can frequently shift
Consistent	No
Truth	No, objective truth is counter to many socially defined games
Reputation	Yes, often beneficial across games
Status	Seeks multiple statuses, generally knowledge, economic, relational, political

Unity	Helps
Subordinates to	Chaos, Larger forces
Totalizing	Yes, it's all connected
Manipulative	Yes
Force	Indifferent, whatever is advantageous
Violence	Prefers less, but whatever is advantageous
Rule of law	Indifferent, whatever is advantageous
Let live	No, everyone affects everyone else
Theory of mind	Others are resources, pawns, allies, opponents, everything shifts, reacts, mixes, balances, can't apply game theory consistently
Forms of government	Monarchy, socialism, federation
Dominates	All
Typical emotions	Overwhelm, opportunism, resignation, anticipation, frantic work, crisis management
Typical behaviors	Planning and adjusting, putting out fires, delegating, high stakes conversations, enforcing consequences
Archetypes	High level executive, core member of an extended family, high level official, leader
Historical figures	Benjamin Franklin, Otto von Bismarck, Franklin D Roosevelt, Winston Churchill

Game Designer

Description	Chooses and creates games, intentionally redefines social reality
Values	My own view of the highest good
What words do	Words are a versatile tool across both the game and the metagame
Messaging	Constructed to advance objectives in both games and the metagame
Goals	Yes
Consistent	Indifferent, whatever is advantageous
Truth	Indifferent, whatever is advantageous. Cares deeply about knowing the truth internally.

Reputation	Indifferent, whatever is advantageous
Status	Depends
Unity	Depends
Subordinates to	None, but may pretend to subordinate if advantageous
Totalizing	No, we can separate, prioritize, analyze, solve different problems differently
Manipulative	Yes
Force	Indifferent, whatever is advantageous
Violence	Indifferent, whatever is advantageous, prefers less
Rule of law	indifferent, whatever is advantageous, prefers rule of law
Let live	Yes, except if you obstruct me
Theory of mind	Full application of game theory, both finite and infinite, metagame theory, capability modeling, hidden strategy and deceit
Forms of government	Any
Dominates	All
Typical emotions	Calm, calculative, patient, decisive, flexible, prepared, conscientious
Typical behaviors	Being in the right place at the right time, acting unnoticed, doing what no one thought could be done, winning
Archetypes	The best people you know, great figures of history, charismatic people, unsung heroes
Historical figures	Solon, Lycurgus, Peter the Great, Augustus Caesar, Alexander Hamilton

Strategic Interaction

A communication strategy, by the nature of communication, does not operate in isolation. Communication strategies interact with other communication strategies, and these interactions have consistent dynamics. There are areas of mutual understanding, one way understanding, mutual misunderstanding, dominance, competition, mutual avoidance, mutual destruction and mutual success. I describe each strategy from its own perspective, egocentric. For example, if I use the greedy communication strategy, how do others appear to me? Use this guide to see the perspective of other strategies beyond your own strategy.

When people show you who they are, believe them. Maya Angelou

How Greedy Perceives Others

Greedy tends to misinterpret others as greedy in a reductionist way, pulling everyone down to their level so they can all roll in the mud. Greedy can negotiate with compatible strategies using a kind of quid pro quo, but incompatible strategies refuse greedy negotiation, which greedy sees as miserly. Some strategies give a mixed message to greedy, where they sometimes negotiate and sometimes deny, which greedy finds confusing. Greedy has special insight about partisan, and understands the partisan group itself as a greedy agent, while partisans don't understand their sacred group with the same clarity.

Greedy	Greedy
Nice	Generous
Strong	Greedy
Avoidant	Miserly
Troll	Greedy
Artist	Confusing
Expert	Greedy
Rules	Miserly
Simple	Miserly
Status	Greedy
Partisan	Greedy group
Ideologue	Confusing
Player within a game	Miserly
Multigamer	Miserly
Game designer	Miserly

How Nice Perceives Others

Nice is simplistic and naive, understanding others as nice or mean. They try to be nice to everyone, but some people are just mean! How unfair and cruel of them.

Greedy	Mean
Nice	Nice
Strong	Mean
Avoidant	Mean
Troll	Mean
Artist	Nice
Expert	Nice
Rules	Nice
Simple	Mean
Status	Nice
Partisan	Nice
Ideologue	Mean
Player within a game	Mean
Multigamer	Nice
Game designer	Mean

How Strong Perceives Others

Strong reduces others to strong or weak. Some strategies can appear strong or weak depending on circumstance and attitude. The multigamer shows a shifting mixture of strength and weakness that they find confusing.

Greedy	Weak
Nice	Weak
Strong	Strong
Avoidant	Depends

Troll	Weak
Artist	Weak
Expert	Weak
Rules	Depends
Simple	Strong
Status	Weak
Partisan	Depends
Ideologue	Depends
Player within a game	Depends
Multigamer	Confusing
Game designer	Depends

How Avoidant Perceives Others

Avoidant wants to avoid communication, but still needs to interact with other people. They often have a decent understanding of other people and communication strategies, it is mainly a question of who can cooperate to minimize communication. Reasonable people can quickly reach a mutual understanding and cooperate with little more interaction afterward. Useful people can cooperate to some degree, with higher costs. Useless people can't effectively cooperate, and pests harass them until they are removed.

Greedy	Pest
Nice	Useless
Strong	Useful
Avoidant	Reasonable
Troll	Pest
Artist	Pest
Expert	Useless
Rules	Pest
Simple	Useful
Status	Useless
Partisan	Useless
Ideologue	Pest
Player within a game	Useful
Multigamer	Pest
Game designer	Useful

How Troll Perceives Others

Trolls spoil other people's objectives, to make them as frustrated as the trolls themselves. People who are easy to spoil are called marks. Spoiling the objectives of greedy is as easy as taking candy from a baby. People who understand troll's motivations aren't marks, they are targets that can react and resist. Trolls understand and overall agree with each other to a significant degree, but compete when their goals conflict. People who understand trolls and have layers of protection and support are difficult targets. Trolls primarily break rules, so rule strategy has a special relationship with trolls as both predator and prey. Strategies that maintain order predate against trolls. More capable strategies that understand trolling but don't necessarily maintain order can come into opposition with trolls and counter them proactively.

Greedy	Mark
Nice	Mark
Strong	Mark
Avoidant	Target
Troll	Competitor
Artist	Mark
Expert	Difficult target

Rules	Both predator and prey
Simple	Opponent
Status	Mark
Partisan	Difficult target
Ideologue	Difficult target
Player within a game	Opponent
Multigamer	Predator
Game designer	Opponent

How Artist Perceives Others

Artist perceives others on a spectrum of artistic merit. For example, strong pursues a fundamental truth of strength and has a unique aesthetic, we call them martial artists. Nice doesn't pursue any truth and has no aesthetic, so it is hack.

Greedy	Hack
Nice	Hack
Strong	Artist
Avoidant	Artist
Troll	Hack
Artist	Artist
Expert	Hack
Rules	Hack
Simple	Artist
Status	Hack
Partisan	Hack
Ideologue	Artist
Player within a game	Depends
Multigamer	Depends
Game designer	Depends

How Expert Perceives Others

Experts use rare knowledge to elevate themselves, thinking they are better and above other people. They see most people as beneath them, but artist and simple are at least human in their pursuit of truth. Expert is ultimately status seeking, so expert is disgusted by status seeking people with lower status than them, and they are envious and adore higher status people.

Greedy	Lower
Nice	Lower
Strong	Lower
Avoidant	Lower
Troll	Lower
Artist	Human
Expert	Superior
Rules	Lower
Simple	Human
Status	Depends
Partisan	Lower
Ideologue	Lower
Player within a game	Lower
Multigamer	Human
Game designer	Depends

How Rules Perceives Others

Rules tends to judge others based on whether they are doing what they think they should do. Rules reduces others to law abiding or violator. Similar to ideologues, no one is pure except for themselves, everyone else is ultimately a violator. Conformists are typically tolerated, nonconformists are not tolerated. A partisan for a culturally accepted group is acceptable, a partisan for a so-called fringe extremist group is unacceptable. An ideologue for a mainstream ideology is acceptable, an ideologue for an unpopular fringe ideology is unacceptable. Rules is totally unaware of the fact that their values are socially determined and not anchored to any objective or stable truth, and smugly enforce social conformity with the same gleeful cruelty today as yesterday, except that yesterday the rules were totally different from today, and they have no problem with that. Rules demands abject submission to an individual interpretation of culture, and most strategies are not so accommodating. You aren't wearing your I support the current thing pin! One of the terrible things about rules is its arbitrariness. Attracting their ire isn't a question of doing wrong, it just depends on what they notice. Show me the man, I will show you the crime.

Greedy	Violator
Nice	Abiding
Strong	Violator
Avoidant	Depends
Troll	Violator
Artist	Depends
Expert	Abiding
Rules	Abiding
Simple	Violator
Status	Abiding
Partisan	Depends
Ideologue	Depends
Player within a game	Depends
Multigamer	Abiding
Game designer	Depends

How Simple Perceives Others

Simple sees the world in right and wrong. Some things we know for relatively certain, these are principles, and people are clearly right and wrong by those principles. Any strategy that cannot hold shared principles is plain wrong. Other areas are less certain, we must reserve judgment or make our best effort to determine better and worse. By these lights, some strategies are wrong, others are potentially right. Obviously, determining right from wrong in a given circumstance requires individual judgment.

Greedy	Wrong
Nice	Wrong
Strong	Potentially right
Avoidant	Potentially right
Troll	Wrong
Artist	Potentially right
Expert	Potentially right
Rules	Wrong
Simple	Potentially right
Status	Wrong
Partisan	Wrong
Ideologue	Wrong
Player within a game	Potentially right
Multigamer	Wrong
Game designer	Potentially right

How Status Perceives Others

Status sees the world as a status hierarchy with roughly four groups, useless lower-status nonhumans, useful lower-status people who can give me status, competitors and higher-status people to suck up to.

Greedy	Useless
Nice	Useful
Strong	Depends on status
Avoidant	Useless
Troll	Useless
Artist	Depends on status
Expert	Higher
Rules	Useful
Simple	Useless and stupid
Status	Competitor
Partisan	Useless if outside the group, useful if inside the group, or competitor
Ideologue	Useless if outside the ideology, useful if inside the ideology, or competitor
Player within a game	Depends
Multigamer	Higher
Game designer	Depends

How partisan perceives others

Partisans view others on two dimensions, whether the other person is a member of their group or not, and how useful the other person is to their group. Different partisans have different levels of strictness, some may tolerate everyone and only slightly prefer their group, while others may hate everyone except the most devoted group members. Usually partisans are not that strict, and welcome group members whether or not they are useful, and welcome useful people whether or not they are a member of their group. Partisans don't care much about what communication strategy members of their group use, as long as they are loyal to the group. Greedy insider is fine if that greed does not hurt the group, hurting outsiders is fine. A greedy outsider is also fine if they help the group. A greedy outsider that harms the group is an enemy. A nice insider is fine, a nice outsider that opposes the group is an enemy, and a nice outsider that neither helps nor harms the group is a fence-sitter. Pick a side! You're either with us or against us. Again, any strategy is fine for members of the ingroup and supporters, no strategy is acceptable for outsiders, opponents or betrayers.

Partisans are especially obsessed with the reputation of their group, and their speech is compulsively crafted to develop a public narrative about the ingroup or the outgroup. This obsession extends to how they understand others' speech, they can only interpret others' speech as an intentionally constructed narrative to support or counter a group. When someone makes a simple objective truth statement, to a partisan, there is no such thing as a principled commitment to tell the truth. Simple appears to partisan as an idiot, because their truthful statements don't serve any useful narrative.

How Ideologue Perceives Others

Ideologues have a singular focus on the ideology, and see others as either believers or heretics, with special hatred for former believers, or believers that deviate from their narrow path. They do not mind which communication strategy others use as long as they accept the ideology. Ultimately, an ideologue can accept no one except themself, everyone else deviates from their current beliefs in some way and is heretic. Other communication strategies can accommodate ideology to varying degrees. These determine whether the strategy could survive under ideological oppression.

How do other communication strategies survive under ideologue oppression?

Greedy	Yes
Nice	Yes
Strong	No
Avoidant	Yes
Troll	No
Artist	Yes
Expert	Yes
Rules	Yes
Simple	No
Status	Yes
Partisan	No, except if the partisan group is the ideological oppressor
Ideologue	No, except if their ideology is the dominant one
Player within a game	Yes
Multigamer	Yes
Game designer	Yes

How Player Perceives Others

Player generally investigates other people to determine their communication strategy before deciding how to play against them. Player perceives others' communication strategies as what they are, unless successfully deceived. Player can usually adapt to any other strategy and work with or counter them to achieve their own goals, given enough resources. Often, the resources of one person cannot overturn a group or a culture, limiting players' options. Sometimes, specific circumstances can allow for creative options to achieve goals that would be otherwise impossible. With enough resources, especially information, players can often win. Players will lose if they are unlucky, they lack resources, their goal is too difficult, or they face a better player. Players collect information, form a specific strategy, execute and respond to changing circumstances and repeat until they win or lose. Other people aren't as reliable as myself, I am not here to make friends, I am here to win. The most reliable player strategies tend to be close-ended, operate mostly in the dark and rely on systems, not people.

How Multigamer Perceives Others

Like player, multigamer investigates and understands others to determine how to play against them. The difference between player and multigamer is that player operates under one existing game while multigamer is playing more than one game overall. While player can make mostly fixed determinations about other people, keep, discard,

support, betray, the multigamer has shifting priorities and is constantly reevaluating a more chaotic situation. Both player and multigamer can be decisive, but multigamer anticipates much more chaos and pursues open-ended strategies, collecting resources and allies to form a diffuse web of soft influence that can shift and react to changing priorities and emerging situations.

How Game Designer Perceives Others

To game designers, other people are not immediately relevant, like a friend of a friend that you may never meet. They can be more objective about people they aren't personally entangled with. They can think about what motivates them, how to put them in a position to be motivated a certain way. Everything can be a resource, game designer operates on the level of cause and effect, first order effects, second order effects, habits, tendencies, models, likelihoods. History doesn't repeat, but it rhymes. Game designer applies first principles to solve an urgent problem or design a scalable strategy to deal with a larger problem from the root. Communication strategies are one factor in the system of incentives. Show me the incentive, I will show you the outcome. Game designers select an outcome, then start designing incentives to cause it.

The Incentives of Communication Strategies

The communication strategies are fixed by human nature, but society doesn't explicitly force people to communicate one way or another. People are often unaware of which strategy they are using, so how do people find and follow a strategy without knowing it? Modeling and incentives. People mostly don't learn by explanation, reading books, or figuring things out for themselves. People mostly learn by modeling others, monkey see, monkey do. But when we copy what other people do, if it doesn't work for us, we quickly stop doing it. Incentives are what make the strategies work for people who try them, keeps them following the strategy, and trains them how to follow the strategy even better. Each strategy has distinct incentives that attract different people at different times.

Communication Strategy	Negative incentive	Positive incentive
Greedy	Don't ask, don't take, don't get what you want	Ask for or take what you want, get what you want
Nice	Punished for asking or taking what you want	Rewarded for asking nicely, being patient and conforming
Strong	Dominated by someone else, loss of something important by weakness	Protect or gain something important using dominance
Avoidant	A significant life failure causes rejection of communication	Avoidance works to reduce problems
Troll	Marginalized or failed in status competition	Destruction of others status improves your relative status
Artist	Failure or weakness in non-cultural status competitions, denigration of non-cultural status	Success in cultural status competition, elevation of cultural status
Expert	Failure or weakness in non-knowledge status competitions, denigration of non-knowledge status	Success in knowledge status competition, elevation of knowledge status
Rules	Punishment for nonconformity, mediocrity in status competition, lack of alternatives	Reward for conformity and cultural enforcement
Simple	Harm from criminals, hypocrites, idiots, carelessness	Proof of reliable success of principles, independent success of principle

Communication Strategy	Negative incentive	Positive incentive
Status	Harm from low status	Elevation of high status, benefits of association with high status
Partisan	Harm from outgroup	Protection from ingroup
Ideologue	Harm from chaotic beliefs and unpredictable reality	Safety of constant certain ideology
Player within a game	Loss in status competition from superior strategy	Winning through superior strategy
Multigamer	Loss in one game while playing another	Surviving in multiple games at once
Game designer	Significant loss due to systemic problems	Proof of agency through modification of incentives

Progression and Regression

Adopting communication strategies can be developmental and contextual. Each strategy has subsequent strategies that people often progress into. Under stress or after a setback, people may also regress. Although any sequence of strategies is possible, certain transitions are unlikely. Children typically go through a greedy phase, while most people never reach player or above.

Greedy	Nice, strong, avoidant, troll, artist, rules, simple, status
Nice	Strong, avoidant, troll, artist, rules, simple, status
Strong	Avoidant, troll, artist, expert, rules, status, partisan, ideologue
Avoidant	Artist, expert, simple, ideologue, player
Troll	Artist, expert, rules, simple, status, partisan, ideologue, player
Artist	Expert, rules, status, partisan, ideologue
Expert	Status, ideologue, player
Rules	Status, partisan, ideologue
Simple	Avoidant, troll, expert, partisan, ideologue, player
Status	Strong, rules, partisan, ideologue
Partisan	Avoidant, troll, expert, simple, ideologue, player
Ideologue	Avoidant, expert, simple, player
Player within a game	Multigamer, game designer
Multigamer	Game designer

Working With and Against

Player, multigamer and game designer can work with all other strategies and achieve competitive or cooperative goals, while other strategies are more limited or even unable to pursue goals reliably at all. Outside of your own communication strategies, how can you work with or against other communication strategies in general?

Greedy

Greedy has special challenges to work with because it is capricious and irrational. The famous formula to motivate greedy is a mixture of positive and negative incentives, the carrot and the stick. People are loss averse, so a single incentive can operate as both a carrot and a stick by promising the carrot but threatening to take it away if they misbehave. Offer greedy something cheap that they like, eg candy, and then ask them to do something for you to earn the candy, and if they don't do it right, you won't give them the candy. Demanding and threatening them with the stick makes them resentful and combative, it's less effective. Giving them frequent rewards, the carrot, makes them entitled and unruly, also ineffective. Intermittent reinforcement with clear, consistent, strictly enforced standards and immediate feedback for deviations is required to get them to work, which is usually not worth it.

Working against greedy is among the easiest because they lack awareness and planning. Entrapment works well, create a situation where the temptation to misbehave is too great, and arrange for them to get caught. Or create a threat that scares them and they will neglect any current agreement. Greedy understands enemies, but not planning, so use a cat's paw or create plausible deniability when you work against them.

Nice

Nice is easy to work with on trivial tasks and hard to work with on difficult tasks. Nice will do almost anything you ask, so working with them is as easy as asking, or even suggesting, that you want them to do something for you. They are often happy to do it. But if the task requires commitment or confronting another person, nice will tend to agree to do it, and then fail. Successfully working with nice requires anticipating the parts that nice will be unable to do on their own, and helping them over the hard parts, to let them complete the parts of the task they are capable of.

Working against nice is also relatively straightforward. Nice is vulnerable to demands or intimidation. Please don't run against me in this election. Their answer might be, Ok, I won't, thank you for telling me, good luck running unopposed! However, when you work against nice, they tend to lash out when they can't supress their own desires anymore. you can oppose them politely and then let them explode against other people, or entrap them to explode at a time and place of your choosing by pushing them beyond their limits, or use a cat's paw to oppose them. Sometimes nice lashes out by appealing to the group or authority, so prepare by opposing them with plausible deniability or act only within the rules to face no penalty for your actions. There is no rule that says I have to be nice, is there?

Strong

Working with strong is possible whether you are stronger, about the same strength, or weaker. If you are stronger, dominate them and order them to do what you want. If you are about the same strength, then challenge them, gain their respect, and offer a fair exchange. If you are weaker, one option is to submit to them and manipulate them to do what you want. I heard that the people I want you to beat up called you weak, are you going to stand for that?

Working against strong is about the same. If you are stronger, defeat them and to the victor goes the spoils. If you are about the same strength, you can attack with allies, sneak attack, weaken them, etc. to defeat them. If you are weaker, you can submit to them and manipulate them to be defeated by others, or join others to defeat them. In a place with rule of law, winning against strong within the rules can work, as long as the rule enforcement is effective.

Avoidant

Working with avoidant is exactly what they think they don't want. But no person is an island, we all need things, so working with avoidant comes down to determining what they need and helping or threatening them to get them to do something you want.

Working against avoidant can be either easier or harder than usual. If avoidant cares more about avoiding you than protecting whatever you want, then you can take what you want without contest. If avoidant cares more about protecting whatever you want than avoiding you, then they may put up a fiercer resistance than others. But avoidant prefers to work alone, so collecting allies, a group, a surprise attack, overwhelming force can overcome avoidant when they resist.

Troll

Working with troll can be as easy as following along on their mischief. Directing troll to do anything in particular can be like herding cats, possible but difficult, their whole concept is not doing what they are told. They can accept fun suggestions if they think it is their idea.

Working against troll can be easier and harder than usual. If you can identify the troll, they are usually weak to confrontation, and as rule breakers they can be reported to the group or authorities for punishment. Trolls don't want to be held accountable, so they operate covertly and make efforts to be hard to find and escape once detected. Primarily, the challenge in opposing troll is finding them or getting them in trouble.

Artist

Working with artist can be simple if you share an artistic vision. If you do not, working with them could be difficult or impossible. One option to work with them, without a shared vision, is to ask them to do what you want in exchange for also giving them an artistic outlet for their authentic self expression.

Working against artist is difficult if you oppose them directly. Artists are usually weak in most regards, but fiercely pursue and defend their artistic vision. So don't directly oppose their artistic vision. Attack their many weaknesses instead, such as reputation, social connections, resources, sanity, etc.

Expert

Working with experts is relatively easy if you defer to them in all matters of their expertise. They are difficult, if not impossible to dissuade on matters of their expertise, sometimes only by citing specific claims made by other experts they respect, and substantial and obviously applicable original evidence. Experts may have some flexibility in their preliminary conclusions, but will dig in if you challenge their central theses.

Working against experts can be done by emphasizing that a particular topic is not actually within their area of expertise, countering their claims with more or more prestigious experts, or assassinating their aura of expertise by attacking their perceived competence or character. Another option is to go around instead of through, a bane of experts is irrelevence. Ignore their conclusions because experts don't usually have significant authority to enforce their opinions on others.

Rules

Working with rules means conforming with them or being above the rules. You can get rules to do something if you convince them that they are supposed to do it, or if it helps them catch people who are breaking the rules. Rules won't listen to rule breakers, so you have to channel requests through someone they respect, such as their boss, to make them do things if they don't respect you.

Working against rules can be simple if you are covert, break the rules and don't get caught. Rules either does everything by the rules or are otherwise very consistent about what they think they can get away with, their behavior and reactions are easy to anticipate. They lack creativity or authentic enthusiasm, so anyone with talent or determination can outperform them in a straight contest, or you can cheat. When rules attempts to oppress others by hen pecking them and appealing to authority, reject their special authority, counter the holes in their claims, find fault with them, shout them down within the rules. They lack a fighting spirit and can't face serious opposition. After a conflict with rules, anticipate their counterattack when they will bring support, and be ready

with exonerating evidence, have evidence of their own crimes, or skip out. They don't have significant authority to track you down and can't afford a drawn out fight.

Simple

Working with simple is simple. Learn what their principles are and then adhere and support those principles. If those principles support charity or fair exchange, ask for what you want and give simple what they want, and then both parties get what they want. Talking to smart people is so simple. If you do not support their principles, you can ask for their help anyway, or try to lie, with the risks of being rejected or discovered.

Working against simple can also be simple. If you are also simple, you can outcompete them in a fair contest. If you don't care about justice, you can lie, cheat, or steal against them. Also, simple is unpopular, so gang up on them and take what you want, unjustly. Simple faces the defenders dilemma, while the attacker doesn't have to worry about simple compromising their principles to resist them.

Status

Status is usually unwilling to put in effort themselves, but are usually willing to trade their resources for status. If you have higher status, have something with status or know someone with status, you can dangle the possibility of status in front of them and get them to jump like a trained seal. If you don't have any status resources to trade with them, they are pretty hard to work with, although better than greedy. If you can contribute to or threaten their reputation, you can get better service from them, otherwise expect mistreatment.

To work against status, you can get them to abandon a contest against you if you offer them something else with higher prestige. Opposing them can be dangerous, they have no scruples, they see themselves as above others and above the law, and kick people down with a vicious and careless attitude. The positive is that they are not hard workers, and are otherwise easy to defeat. Oppose them covertly if possible, anticipate criminality if they are losing against you, they will probably give up quickly when they lose and hold a grudge.

Partisan

Working with partisan means being or becoming a member of their sacred group, or convincing them that you support their group and are on their side. The degree that they think you provide value to their group is the amount that they will work with you or ask for other group members to help you. Asking a partisan to do something for you as an outgroup or opponent falls on deaf ears, find an ingroup member and use them as a proxy.

Working against partisans usually means beating them in a fair competition, and them trying to turn everything into group conflict. Reject their framing, and they will escalate by crying about oppression for sympathy and outsider support or bring other group members to gang up. When they escalate improperly, you can appeal to authority to get them penalized. If the group is dominant, then sometimes they can run rampant and you have to oppose them covertly.

Ideologue

Working with ideologues is easiest when they consider you a fellow believer, they can be diligent and generous in service of their ideology. If you are not a fellow believer but do tolerate their ideology, fair exchanges are possible but you may be unwelcome as an outsider. Ideologues won't work with heretics or oppressors, so again you can use anyone they respect as an intermediary or cat's paw to get something from them.

Working against ideologue is similar to working against artist. Threatening their one true belief will make them froth at the mouth and give dogged resistance. Attack their many other weaknesses instead, especially intrinsic flaws of their dogma, or aspects that are dogmatically low status. Ideologue can spread to become a dominant culture, which is hard to oppose overall, so a typical method is if you can't beat them, join them, and oppose them from inside the group, with the risk of being identified as a non-believer. If the ideology is not dominant, then it is usually isolated and unpopular, and mass opposition or appeal to authority can counter them.

Player Strategies

Working with a player is likely to succeed if you have a shared objective. The closer your values align, the more likely the player will choose win win, mutually beneficial, gains from trade moves. Cooperating with a player when you are otherwise in competition or opposition means that they will turn on you when advantageous, and they can anticipate your betrayal, too.

Working against a player can be a straight contest between players. Victory or defeat is determined by skill, resources, determination and game theory.

Group Dynamics

Formation and Growth

Interests

Groups form where there are benefits. People are attracted to collect the benefits for themselves, naturally gathering around the benefits. Successful groups gain benefits and attract members, and groups that fail quickly disperse. People want to side with winners and people are strongly loss averse, they hate losing, both in the sense of not gaining, and doubly in the sense of forfeiting something they currently possess. A source of benefits is sometimes called an interest, a group formed around an interest is an interest group.

Just because you do not take an interest in politics doesn't mean politics won't take an interest in you. Pericles

Partisan and Ideological Groups

Groups form around a common interest to increase the bargaining power of the group for that interest. There are two group orientations, partisan and ideological. A partisan group defines its members first, and those members tend to be similar and thus tend to have common interests. An ideological group defines its interests first, then accepts members who share them. Real groups have both partisan and ideological aspects.

Partisan Groups

Anyone can form a partisan group for any reason, but there are common sources that consistently form groups or are able to scale to larger groups. The most fundamental source of partisan groups is blood relation, binding multiple people together as effectively one set of genetic self-interest. Typically any identifiable culture can become a group, where people who act in a similar way, aka form a culture, tend to want similar things.

One example of a source of culture is location, people who live in the same place experience the same environment and interact with each other a lot, eventually form a consensus about many aspects of life and create a culture. The ingroup are people from the location, and the outgroup are people from elsewhere. Conflicts between members of the location ingroup create their own competition for group interests, we call this local politics.

People who earn a similar amount of money tend to do similar work and face similar problems, creating a group based on socioeconomic status, what we call a class. Class conflict is common in history.

Partisan groups tend to form around things that are hard to change, who your family is, where you were born, when you were born, how much money you make. These are groups more about identity, the identity creates common interest, and the group succeeds based on group loyalty. Members subordinate themselves to the group, it's about the people, not the blood, location or job.

The group grows based on reproduction of the members and attracting eligible new members. Members want to stay in the group when the group gives members more benefits than non-members. Partisan groups can be difficult to grow, people only reproduce so fast, and there are only so many eligible members such as people who live in a given location. Although a culture can spread, it cannot spread quickly, and cultural loyalty is weaker than the sources of culture, shared genes, shared location, shared roles.

While the number of people in a partisan group is hard to change, the interests and objectives of the group can change fluidly around them, the narrative. A culture is also a shared narrative, a common idea of who we are and what we believe, going from identity to ideology. This is why partisans are obsessed with narrative. We are stuck on this boat together, but where should the boat go?

Ideological Groups

Contrast partisan groups with ideological groups. Ideological groups can grow quickly by recruiting anyone that accepts the ideology regardless of identity. The ideology unifies the ideological group on certain issues and forms the group around those common interests by definition, rather than forming the group around things that tend to create common interest. Ideological groups are vulnerable to easy come, easy go, where members show up to claim benefits and then abandon the group. To make the group stable, ideological groups will make it easy to join and hard to leave, trapping members, or hard to join so that members prepay the group and can leave without becoming a net cost to the group.

The number of members is easy to change, but the objectives of the group are hard to change. Ideologues don't need narrative to translate from who we are to what we believe, because the ideology already defines what we believe. Ideologues have the opposite problem, we know what we believe but we lack identity, and without identity we lack loyalty. So ideological groups are obsessed with forming an ideological identity, with common locations, places of worship or meetings, common activities, rituals or rallies, and ways to look the same, like people who share a culture or genes do, religious garb or uniforms, flags, symbols.

Corruption

Corruption is violations of principles about benefits. Higher achievement garners higher status is a principle, while pay-to-play, bribing people to recognize achievements is corruption. Selling goods as advertised is a principle, selling fake goods or taking customers' money without delivering promised services is corruption. Meritocracy is a principle, favoritism is corruption. Equal treatment under law is a principle, choosing not to prosecute because the criminal knows the governor is corruption. Honesty and transparency in government conduct is a principle, lying and coverups are corruption.

Credit and Blame

In theory, if you create benefits for the group and make them legible, the other members of the group should be aware of your contribution, update their beliefs about your bargaining power and status, and allocate future group benefits according to your updated status. In the same way, if you harm group interests or make a mistake and cost the group benefits, your status and future benefits should decrease. Overall, theory and practice correlate, someone with a golden touch will be recognized and a consistent loser will be shunned. But status is a social reality, subject to so much distortion that the relationship between how much group benefit you produce and your status can seem random, or the opposite of what it should be, or fair and accurate, it depends on how well the group operates.

In fact, beyond legibility, you have to take positive action to claim credit and assign blame in social reality. It seems that your work is never finished, not only do you have to find ways to help, do the job, make the benefits legible to others, but then you have to claim your credit, too.

If you don't claim your own credit, someone else may claim it for themselves. Stealing credit is far easier than earning it. And blame is even more important to allocate accurately. People tend to be ready to shift the blame for a problem onto others when it is their fault. Stealing credit and shifting blame is corruption. Apart from corruption, there is silent, private accounting of credit and blame, where people unilaterally evaluate others. When that accounting remains unpaid, it tends to gain interest and transform, unpaid blame becomes a grudge, and unpaid credit becomes a debt of gratitude.

When people work together as a team, some members tend to concentrate the credit for the team's work onto themselves. Sometimes it is true, that one member of a team deserves almost all of the credit, but also there is a massive incentive to not appreciate other people's work or otherwise steal credit for yourself. Similarly, when a problem occurs with a team, there is often diffusion of responsibility. No one wants to take the blame, so it is other people's fault or the whole team's fault, not their fault individually. Again this is sometimes true, but there is a massive incentive to shift blame away from yourself.

People who have authority also bear responsibility, but stealing credit and shifting blame are advantageous. So despite their responsibility to accurately allocate credit and blame, bad leaders steal credit from their team and shift blame onto other teams or find a scapegoat, a person without authority to unjustly pin the blame on, so the person with authority steals positive accountability and avoids negative accountability. The humble and extreme opposite policy for an authority is to pass all credit to the team, and claim all blame from the team. This policy is not accurate, but can help to counter the perverse incentives for authorities to misallocate credit and blame.

When you know or can investigate for yourself who deserves credit or blame, use your own judgment about who deserves what. Abandon leaders or people who do not share your judgments of credit and blame, and affiliate yourself with people who share your judgments of credit and blame. Go where you appreciate others and others accurately appreciate you.

Regulatory Capture

The government, meaning formal or informal members and processes in a group to regulate the group, create and enforce rules to make the group work. Government has inherent conflicts of interest. Who watches the watchmen?

A government is a body of people usually notably ungoverned. Shepherd Book, Firefly

Group members want to protect or expand their own benefits using any means possible. For the good of the group, a fair, impartial, long term growth oriented government is best. But governments are not physical devices that logically derive and implement policy, governments are themselves groups of people and policies that govern other groups of people. The reason rules are made is to prevent people from doing things that are individually beneficial but are negative-sum for the group, strategies where the individual wins and the group loses. The government is the mechanism to define and enforce those rules and prevent the group from losing out. But government, composed of people, also wants benefits, the same as everyone else, but government has no one to stop them from breaking their own rules. Regulatory capture is when interest groups pay off the government to create rules unfairly favorable to them in the first place, or to not enforce rules on them, allowing the interest group to gain at the expense of the group. The regulators have been captured by the groups they are supposed to regulate. Regulatory capture is a form of corruption.

Wireheading

Wireheading is direct corruption of rewards, with dire consequences. Wireheading is the logical conclusion of regulatory capture, maximum corruption. If I gained access to the databases that keep track of money, I could give myself a bajillion dollars and shift the economy, trampling on others' efforts and causing inflation. If I were in charge of a sports league, I could declare myself the champion. If I became a drug addict, I could give myself a chemically induced high whenever I wanted without the corresponding achievement of my goals. I control the reward signal, but as a result, the reward is unrelated to the objective reality conditions it is supposed to be grounded in. The reward becomes meaningless, the incentives are broken, the production of benefits stops, the group stops functioning, the group dies.

Coalitions

Groups are typically not fully unified, each group has its own internal politics, groups within the group competing for interests and negotiating status. These groups within a group are factions. Factions are esoteric politics while groups compete in exoteric politics.

A coalition is when a set of factions or groups that could compete against each other agree to cooperate. The collective bargaining power of a coalition is higher than the bargaining power of the individual factions. The condition for a coalition to form is that each member stands to gain more benefits than they lose. The coalition acts as one entity, so it can only coherently advocate one way per interest. If some members want to vote yes on a given issue, and some members want to vote no on that issue, then the coalition can't vote both yes and no, the coalition has to choose either all yes or all no, and all members must vote that way, sometimes against their own interests. But members care about some issues more than others, so coalitions form when the coalition increases the members interests on net.

Political Parties

A political party is a coalition. A party does not have a coherent platform, identity, or ideology. It is a dynamic combination of multiple interest groups. The party does not serve the interests of any individual person, it is a net benefit to the factions or groups that join it, and individuals benefit from being members of the constituent groups. The current policy positions of the party are not your policy positions. Your policy positions are unique, or aligned with your best fit groups. The party sometimes, or often holds positions against your interests, but overall is supposed to serve your interests via trading bargaining power between groups.

Political parties operate the same way as politicians and are similarly unstable. Politicians satisfy the preferences of the factions within the group to unite the group, constantly changing what they say to match or lead social reality. Political parties satisfy the preferences of groups within the party to unite the party, constantly changing their platform to match or lead social reality. When one political party harms the interests of a member group, the other party can pander to that group to pull the group from one party to another. Political parties can remain in dynamic balance by reallocating benefits to different groups to remain competitive with each other.

Sometimes a political party screws up and loses competitiveness. Now that party can't offer the constituent groups benefits, the party breaks up, and the constituent groups redistribute themselves to other parties. Even if there is only one party remaining, coalitions by definition have multiple groups, and even a single group tends to have factions. Groups of groups within a political party can form party factions, and faction competition within a party can lead to a schism, where the previously unified party coalition breaks into new parties along party faction lines. Political parties are emergent and self-regulating features of political conflict, just as groups emerge from human dependence and conflict of interests.

Politics

Belief

Beliefs About Beliefs

There are things I think that I know, my beliefs. There are things that you think you know, your beliefs. My beliefs and your beliefs can be different. Beliefs can get complicated. I can straightforwardly believe something or not, but I can also have a belief in belief. I can think it is good to believe x, even if I don't believe x itself. We also form beliefs about others beliefs. I think that you think x. Commonly, it can go one level deeper, I can think that you think that I think x. The depth usually stops at that level.

Our beliefs about what other people believe define social reality. Social reality can be separated into individual social beliefs, I believe that that individual person believes x, and collective social beliefs, I believe that people collectively believe x. If we have a belief that there is a collective social belief that x is bad, then we won't advocate x publicly. If we think there is a collective social belief that x is good, we might praise x publicly even if we personally don't like it. However, there is a self-fulfilling aspect to this behavior. If enough of us are dishonest about our beliefs, then we establish and support a mistaken belief about others beliefs, a stable false social consensus, a falsifiable collective social belief.

Reflexivity

You can't neutrally observe reality from nowhere. There is nowhere to stand outside of reality. You observe from within reality and your observation is not passive, your presence and observation change the reality you observe. You aren't safely watching the movie in the audience, you are the camera in the scene, or one of the actors. Belief is not reflective, belief is reflexive. Your experience changes your beliefs, your beliefs change your actions, your actions change reality, reality changes your experience. Experience, belief, action, effect, experience, belief, action, effect, etc. When you look into the abyss, the abyss looks back into you.

Reality creates belief as we expect, but belief creates reality too. The location of any famous building was once an empty field. The building was invented in peoples' imaginations and then built to physically manifest their belief. Afterward, people live within and around the building, the manifestation materially and socially shapes their lives and the subsequent buildings they imagine.

All communication has error, causing some amount of error in reaction and additional error in response. This is the game mechanic of the social game called telephone, where the first player whispers a message privately to the second player, then the second player attempts to whisper the same message to the third, until at the end of the chain, a totally different message is announced by the final player. Errors compound. Often, there is a threshold of error rate. If the error rate is below the threshold, communicators can correct the errors and arrive at agreement, also called converging. If the error rate is above the threshold, each interaction produces greater confusion and communication fails, diverging.

Social Cost

People can harm, steal from and obstruct each other. This can redistribute benefits unfairly and break incentives, destroying production of benefits. You can think of this as a social cost or inefficiency. But behavior follows from belief. If the people around you, your society, held different beliefs, your social costs would change. Dysfunctional beliefs, such as everyone is out for themselves, create a low-trust society, where everyone has to spend a lot of resources to protect themselves. Functional beliefs can create a high-trust society, where you spend much less on self-protection or other non-productive activities.

I have lived in times and places with both low and high trust. My possessions have been stolen and destroyed, and I have lived confidently in peace among trustworthy people. The people are not physically different, only their beliefs are different. Social costs can range from destroying all benefit production to negligible. Functional beliefs can do more than reduce social costs, they can create social benefits, such as improving collaboration. One of the most amazing medications ever invented is the placebo, a physical object that has no direct physical effect, used to change beliefs, and cause physical effects indirectly. In physical reality, you cannot create something from nothing. In social reality, you can create something from nothing, within limits.

Preference Falsification

People say quite a lot, and their actions often don't match their words. This is the distinction between stated preferences and revealed preferences. People often say, I started a new fitness program. Then you might ask them, aren't you supposed to be exercising now? I don't feel like it today. Their stated preferences sound good, and their revealed preferences feel good. Usually people delude themselves and paper over the ugly truth of their revealed preferences, but sometimes someone makes bold claims or objectively falsifiable statements, then runs headfirst into a contradiction with reality. This unignorable collision is preference falsification. When a bunch of people get together and rally for a cause and raise money, if after the big event they see that nobody donated, they notice the gap. Oops, I guess nobody actually cared. If only the organizers of the event know that nobody donated, then that is a private preference falsification. If everyone can see that the event didn't raise money and people notice, that is a public preference falsification. The falsification becomes public knowledge.

Preference Cascade

A preference falsification can trigger a preference cascade. Initially everyone might believe that everyone else supports a noble cause. Their belief might be falsified when no one shows up for a scheduled rally. Then, when the cause is mentioned again, they might say out loud that they don't care about that cause. This can start a cascade. Everyone who privately didn't care about the cause but thought that everyone else did care about the cause can suddenly agree that they also don't care about that cause, and this can continue to cascade from group to group. Now the common knowledge of what people believe totally shifts from everyone believes everyone else cares about this cause, to everyone believes that everyone else does not care about this cause.

If you suspect that a social belief is wrong but you lack public falsifications, you can carefully ask other people about it in private, but they might report you for heresy. People who have survived repressive regimes know all about this dilemma. You can also silently confirm people's beliefs by watching what they do when they don't think they will get in trouble for violating the social belief. If you can privately falsify the belief, then it may be possible to falsify it publicly. You can take great risk to publicly declare your heretical belief, arrange a blameless public falsification, or use a cat's paw.

Overton Window

The Overton window is the set of beliefs that we socially agree that reasonable people can disagree about. The question of whether chocolate or vanilla ice cream is superior is typically within the Overton window. We usually believe that reasonable people can disagree about their preferred flavor of ice cream. The question of whether we should kill all humans is typically outside of the Overton window. We usually believe that reasonable people cannot disagree about whether to kill all humans, all reasonable people hold the view that humanity should live. Only unreasonable people could hold the view that all of humanity should immediately die.

Perceived social reality is not objective reality, so the window can shift substantially without any material change in the world. A view that was previously outside the Overton window can enter the Overton window, and the window

can even shift so much that the same topic can be outside the Overton window on one side, enter the window, then exit the window on the other side.

In my lifetime, one topic that seemed to follow this socially surprising transformation was gay rights. Among many communities, and perhaps in American culture overall, there was previously a common belief that being gay is deviant. Then, over a surprisingly short period of time, the Overton window shifted due to various factors. Suddenly we believed that reasonable people could disagree about whether being gay is ok or not. Then, about just as quickly, the question was more or less decided again but in the opposite direction. Being gay is in fact ok. Reasonable people cannot disagree about whether it is ok to be gay. I myself support a wide range of freedom of inquiry and discussion without artificial limits, but that's not what the Overton window is. The Overton window is the set of topics that we believe that others believe are reasonable to disagree about, and we often believe others are uniform and narrow-minded. Everyone thinks that x is awful!

A cohesive society may have one consistent Overton window, while a less cohesive society may have totally different Overton windows depending on the group or situation. Similar to esoteric and exoteric statements, different topics are acceptable to debate within a group versus outside the group, or in one group versus another.

Your Overton window is your limit of who you are willing to communicate with. Anyone outside of your window is unreasonable. You may feel that everyone outside of your window is essentially the enemy, they are often outside your circle of moral concern, let them die or kill them on sight. Even worse, because you are unwilling to talk with them, their position as an enemy can never change, even if they turn out to be right and you are wrong. You would not know because you are unwilling to talk with them, another reason to never allow yourself to be absolutely certain of anything.

Narrow windows are convenient for political control, they limit disagreement to trivialities or a manageable set of options, while wider windows allow people to question sacred cows and diverge, harming unity. The world is complex and people are diverse even within a seemingly uniform group, unity is only possible artificially. Beliefs are also developmental, youth should seek change, while mature people should seek to preserve what works. This creates generational conflict. If the windows are too narrow, should the elders and the youth kill each other? Anything outside of your window needs to be established beyond a reasonable doubt. If someone asks you to prove that something is so firmly established that you are not willing to discuss it, you should be ready and able to demonstrate it. If you are unwilling to discuss things that you can't prove, your window is too narrow. For me, there is no topic outside of my window in principle. My only enemies are those that obstruct me in bad faith.

Politicians

Politics is who gets what, a group negotiation of group benefits. Negotiations are zero-sum games, oppositional, which is why politics itself is negative sum. The best government is minimal, to minimize losses from politics. A quickly negotiated set of simple and clear rules are the best output of a political process.

Simple rules produce complex behavior. Complex rules produce stupid behavior. Andrew Hunt

There are no good opportunities to expand government control. Politics is the activity of the governing body and referees for a sport, they don't generate the value of the sport, they create a level field for the players to create value with. We don't want to find more opportunities for referees in the sport, we want to minimize the referees to allow the players to create the value to the greatest extent, without allowing players to exploit others unfairly. Government maximalists, fascists and communists alike, are wrong.

A politician is a professional group representative. They speak and act on behalf of a group in a political competition, like a lawyer advocates on behalf of an individual in a legal proceeding. A politician is always in an unstable position, because their high-status role as the representative of the group depends solely on the perceived social reality within the group and the coherence of the group. The intrinsic instability of perceived social reality means that the position of a politician is also intrinsically unstable. A politician pushes around the shifting piles of sand in the windy desert of social reality. If they don't stay on top of churning perceptions, they will be swallowed by the sand. This explains why politicians act the way that they do. Politicians say things that aren't true. They may not be dishonest people, but their job is to speak and act to satisfy a socially defined reality and win an active negotiation.

Negotiation and Objective Truth

The claims, offers and counteroffers made in an active negotiation are not necessarily true, they are designed to gain the most benefit. There is a fact of the matter about the market price or physical qualities of any item, but the market price is only an average. Any individual may be willing to pay much less or more for the same item, the market price doesn't compel any individual to trade at that price. The correct price for an item is whatever they are willing to pay, it's socially defined or personally defined, there is no objective fact of the matter that they could be overpaying or underpaying, that the item is worth more or less. A transaction is descriptive, this is what happened, not proscriptive, this is what should happen. If two people voluntarily trade at a price, then it was in some sense a fair trade, all else equal, even if that price is very different from what other people pay or what the same people pay on other occasions. Negotiation is socially defined, and objective truth can contribute, but doesn't determine the result.

There is no objective price apart from what buyers and sellers individually agree, but there is an objective input to a negotiation, bargaining power. The price can vary based on various factors outside of bargaining power, but bargaining power is one objective input to a negotiation that affects whether the deal is made and if so, at what price.

Political Speech and Objective Truth

When a politician says we deserve more, or mischaracterizes others intentions, or uses any one of a dizzying array of political tactics, these are moves in a political game to manipulate sentiment, increase leverage, express people's emotions, collect supporters and achieve social objectives that have nothing to do with objective truth claims about the world. These are actions that operate within perceived social reality, confusingly using the same language tools we use to discuss individual relationships and objective facts.

Often political speech addresses multiple audiences, aligning a coalition of groups that disagree about some issues but agree about other issues, attracting new members from outside the group, fulfilling obligations to other groups or to members of the ingroup, changing public perception of opposition groups, maintaining or improving perceptions of the politician themselves within the group. It's no wonder that political speech distorts reality, reality could never consistently support such a strange narrative.

Talking Points

Talking points are prepared statements about political issues that politicians repeat. They are professional grade messaging. Talking points consist of carefully selected topics, framings and evidence that maximize political position, prestige and bargaining power. Repetition is a proven technique to increase the legitimacy of a statement, whether or not it is true.

Repetition legitimizes, repetition legitimizes, repetition legitimizes. Adam Neeley

Self-fulfilling Prophecy

There is an objective fact of social reality, people believe something or they don't. Statements about objective reality, including people's beliefs, are objectively true or false. But beliefs can change in ways that objective reality can't. Statements about social reality can change people's beliefs, making a statement false at the time before the statement is expressed, and true afterward. These kinds of statements are self-fulfilling prophesies, e.g. you are imagining a pink elephant.

Political leaders are professional political speakers, their statements attempt to change belief. A lot of political statements are attempts at self-fulfilling prophecy. If they say, Our group is failing, that is usually bad politics. It may be true in some way, but is often not useful. If they say that Our group is succeeding, even when it objectively isn't in some way, this is sometimes a lie and sometimes not! If they say the group is succeeding even when it currently isn't, the group might attract more members, gain support, increase the determination of the members and actually succeed because of their enthusiasm, confidence, determination, and effort, making the statement true. The more they repeat the prophecy, the more that people believe it and make it happen. Of course, there are strict limits to the philosophy of if you believe it, you can achieve it. Some things, even if you believe, you cannot achieve.

A politician attempting to gain the most benefit from self-fulfilling prophecy uses it both when the outcome is likely and even when it is uncertain, meaning that more often than not, the self-fulfilling prophecy comes true, but also,

almost half the time they are quote lying unquote. A self-fulfilling prophecy, or an attempted self-fulfilling prophecy, has an undetermined truth value at the time it is expressed. Only after the event can the truth of the statement resolve to true or false, I was always right, or I apologize for lying about that.

One difference between responsible and irresponsible leaders is whether they apply self-fulfilling prophecy for mutual benefit or for extraction. Irresponsible leaders abuse their position to extract the most value from the group for their own benefit or their cronies. Leaders can persist, whether they are responsible or not, by protecting their position. The most responsible politician should protect their position, if they have reason to believe that their replacement would be worse for their group. It would be nice if the most stable strategy for leaders is to responsibly collect the most benefits for the group, but political dynamics are not straightforward.

Self-fulfilling prophecy is a kind of prediction. The general form of a prediction is an assertion about the future. A naked assertion is not convincing, so convincing predictions come with a proposed causal mechanism and evidence. A simple prediction can be honest about the intention of the speaker, the mechanism and the evidence. A self-fulfilling prophecy is also a prediction, but as an attempt to change social reality, it must usually be dishonest about the intention of the speaker, the mechanism or the evidence.

Separately, listeners of predictions have to interpret whether the speaker is making a simple prediction that they can independently evaluate using grounding, or a self-fulfilling prophecy that is merely a way to talk persuasivly, rhetorical. Importantly, the speaker of a simple prediction may not benefit from the result of their prediction, while the speaker of a self-fulfilling prophecy will always benefit from the result of their prediction, otherwise they wouldn't make the effort. These essential differences create confusion between speakers and listeners of simple predictions and self-fulfilling prophesies.

Prediction confusion about the statement "There will be a drought"

Type	Simple
Request	Prepare for the likelihood of running out of water
Speaker intention	Warn listeners of a danger for group benefit
Simple interpretation	Is the mechanism and evidence correct? If yes, I should conserve water.
Self-fulfilling interpretation	Why do you want people to die of thirst? That doesn't make sense.

Type	Self-fulfilling
Request	Act more virtuously, or else we will be punished with drought
Speaker intention	Promote virtuous behavior using an impersonal powerful threat
Self-fulfilling interpretation	If the group acts virtuously, we can handle any problem and live well.
Simple interpretation	How does virtuous behavior change the weather? That doesn't make sense.

Clout

Clout is the ability to get the attention of a group. Attention is scarce and hard to control, making clout valuable in itself. Most often, clout is merely a side effect of high hierarchical position or high status. Anyone in a high position

will have authority over things that will affect others directly, or things that will significantly affect the group, which concerns all members of the group and sometimes related groups. When that person does or says something, it affects the current and future interests of a lot of people, so many people pay attention to what they do and say.

One way to garner attention without already having a high position is to produce value, that value collects attention, this is positive attention. Producing small scale value gives the producer a smaller scale of clout, which is also valuable. At small scales, the value of the object-level benefits individuals produce are far higher than the clout, while at the largest scales, the value of the clout can outweigh any individual or small group production of value.

Most people like attention, they like feeling important, whether or not they are important to other people. They may be willing to anything, absolutely anything, to get attention, this is called being an attention whore. At larger scales, doing anything and everything for attention is called clout chasing. People who already have a high position and are able to maintain it, or who don't care about the associated clout, don't chase it. People who produce value can promote themselves and their offerings to others, to increase the distribution of their offerings, this benefits the listeners and is not clout chasing. Because few people are in high positions, by definition, and creating value is difficult, and many people want attention, people commonly become clout-chasing attention whores to gain attention without creating value, this is negative attention.

The attention incentives drive attention whores to lie, cheat, steal, and promote or create scandals. A scandal is when the public learns that someone is doing something extremely wrong. If a low-status person follows the rules, that isn't doing anything wrong, and if the low-status person commits a normal crime, that is mundanely wrong and not a scandal. But if a high-status person commits a normal crime, that is extremely wrong, because high-status people already have so many resources and so much influence, resorting to crime is an extreme failure and a scandal.

High-status people are often protected from punishment for wrong-doing, so people become obsessed with scandalous rumors about high-status people. If the rumors are substantiated, the high-status person may be convicted in the court of public opinion, and lose status. But clout chasers aren't seeking to create or preserve value in society, they are seeking attention by creating scandal. If they can find scandal lying around, they will use it, but otherwise they will do anything to create it, typically at others' expense.

This is why attention whores will often create outrageous provocations and spout false allegations, to fish for overreactions and find allegations that stick, without regard to how their actions harm the reputations and livelihoods of others, or the effects of spoiling and polluting the information environment with lies. Those are externalities that do not prevent them from perpetrating a tragedy of the commons. You are a consumer of information, I recommend that you use your own market power to withhold your attention from attention whores, and pay your attention to information sources that produce value that is meaningful to you and constructive to society.

Social Change

Leading Social Movements

Let's say you see great injustice and intolerable problems in the world, in society. According to you, society must change. How can you accomplish that? In a sense, you cannot change the world. You and your power alone are insignificant. How insignificant are you? Imagine a cube of water, 7.39 meters on a side, taller than a two story building, weighing over 400 metric tons. This represents the population of the world, and comparatively you are one drop. Limited to the population of the USA, the cube would be 2.57 meters per side, weighing 17 metric tons. Now imagine yourself, a single drop of water, the size of an ant, trying to move that cube of water. Even if you were a strong ant, you cannot move it alone. Your individual power is insignificant, directly changing the world is throwing an egg at a boulder.

You could foment a bloody revolution to topple the establishment. However, this is a book about communication, communication is the alternative to violence, not the justification for violence. I admit that there exist circumstances where bloody revolution is the best answer, but I disagree with almost everyone who thinks that their bloody revolution is the solution to the problems they see with society. Probably, if you think that bloody revolution is the answer to your problems, I disagree with you. Please do not be a violent extremist or a terrorist. Reject partisanship and ideology. Try to make the world a better place for everyone cooperatively. I have constructive suggestions to help you.

Despite your lack of individual power, nevertheless, the world does change, and individual people do participate in changing the world. There are several effective strategies. One of the most dramatic is becoming a spark that ignites a fire of change, a nucleation site. If there is a significant falsifiable social belief, if everyone already privately

agrees that a change should occur but no one is willing to talk about it or take the first step, you can be the person who stands up, shouts from the rooftops about the change that everyone already wants. If you are too early, people won't have realized what they want yet, and will dismiss you. If you are too late, someone else will become the nucleation site before you, as people accidentally or intentionally initiate changes all the time.

If you are at the right place, at the right time, with the right messaging, you can start a preference cascade, gain reputation for being in front of it, and repeat it to multiple audiences, garner support, and lead a movement, I also call this a wave. The potential energy does not come from your individual power, the potential energy was already in society, your individual power is just to create an outlet for that energy, you channel the mass potential energy. The most likely case is that the energy lacks a convenient method to change society and the energy is wasted. Or other people come to take the leadership position away from you, take leadership and extract personal benefits from the movement while ruining it. Or your initially pure and effective intention gets warped and twisted as other groups join and demand concessions until the movement forms into a new coalition that gets eaten by the existing coalitions.

But if you are able galvanize a movement, remain the leader and resist compromising away the principles that establish the movement, you will then become a new visible target for a counter movement from the establishment, the people that benefit from keeping things the way they are now, and who have all the resources of society available to them to resist your incipient social movement. Their whole industry is oriented to crushing the constant parade of social movements that challenge their establishment. In the war for social reality, the current winners are best equipped to defend themselves. Is a pharmaceutical executive unable to treat a common infection? Social movements can win, but the defender has the advantage.

A lot of people consider themselves to be social activists. A successful social activist has high cultural status and is a leader, this is a highly valued position with low barriers to entry, so it attracts a lot of useless people. To some extent, social activism can be useful for worthy causes and beneficial policies. In the digital era, information is not scarce. Anyone that wants to know about anything can learn about it for themselves. To spread an idea, you don't have to stand outdoors, hold a sign, and yell about it. Governments are ultimately accountable to the people, and if the people want something enough, they can get it. Previous social activism strategies, such as raising awareness, signing petitions, holding rallies and protests, are no longer relevant for creating social change. The current methods to change hearts and minds are effective digital communication about the topic, creating ideological groups and communities, modeling your desired behaviors and policies, producing benefits using your policies, and developing technologies to change incentives.

Market Forces

Consumer Side

You can create social change through your passive personal market force, choosing what not to buy, not to visit, not to work with, not to live in. A more active personal market force is choosing what to buy, to visit, to work with, to live in.

Producer Side

More active than exercising consumer power is becoming an active market participant, offering products and services, building facilities and infrastructure, hiring and firing. The power of being a producer comes with equally heavy responsibilities. Running an organization is hard work and has risks, but offers corresponding potential benefits.

Vote with your service, your feet, your wallet, your support, your attention. This is exercising your power in the market, and is the most effective and commonly disregarded form of social advocacy, because it doesn't gain status, it is functional, risky, and requires effort and sacrifice.

Social Forces

Why do people often think they need to change the world in a political sense? The greatest political changes are downstream from markets, which are downstream from technological advancements. Don't waste your life advocating social beliefs, which are not what matters and not what you ultimately want, when you could be working within the market, which has the power to shift social belief. If you further have the ability, advance the technology to overturn the markets.

The way to predict the future is to invent it. The way to change the future is to make it.

Conclusion

Summary of the War for Benefits

Politics is who gets what. Who gets what is determined by political power. Political power is the bargaining power of a political group. Political power determines group benefits, and groups distribute their benefits to their members. How do groups distribute benefits? Internal politics, but primarily based on status. Status is determined by the bargaining power of a member within a group, and determines their benefits. Contribution and communication determines individual status within a group. Production of benefits enables status gaining communication.

People communicate, to participate in groups, to compete for status, to get benefits, to live a better life.

A Master Plan

This is a master plan of how to communicate to survive, win your war for social reality, and thrive.

Take care of yourself

You can't serve others if your needs aren't met. Breathe, sleep, hydrate, eat, exercise, clean yourself, dress yourself, maintain your living environment, meet your own basic needs.

Create space to serve others

Spend less time and effort to meet your own needs. Increase your speed, efficiency, simplify, rearrange your life to be easier to manage, improve your health, etc. until you can easily take care of yourself. Most of your day is available to serve others.

Serve others, create legible benefits

Prepare yourself and find a product or service to offer that helps other people in a way that they appreciate. Serve other people, create legible social benefits.

Use the value you create to be self-sufficient

Claim your credit to collect some of the social benefits you produce to support your own life.

Exceed self-sufficiency to become able to invest

Again improve how you manage your own life and your service to create a surplus of benefits, beyond self-sufficiency. Your surplus is available to invest in others.

Invest in other people

Through your service or social activities, find other people that share your values. These are potentially your people. Invest your benefits in them and communicate with them to establish relationships, create goodwill, support their endeavors. A droplet received in need will be repaid with a spring.

Assemble your people into a group

Join or form a group of your people. This is the powerful form of humanity.

Combine strengths to create more benefits

Work together with your group to better serve others. When you are up and they are down, you carry them. When you are down and they are up, they carry you. Specialize your work within your group to be what you are best at and is most needed, share the burden with your group to combine strengths and outcompete other groups.

Take greater responsibility

The reward for providing good service is the opportunity to provide more service. Greater service means greater bargaining power, greater status, greater benefits. Invest your surplus benefits into protecting and improving your service and your group.

Win your war for social reality

Use winning strategies, your people, yourself, your benefits and your bargaining power to gain and protect your status. Use your benefits to make your dreams come true.

The End of Who Gets What

Glossary

- Abuser - the party that unjustly harms the victim

- Action - a specific behavior in reality

- Agent - something that uses its abilities to achieve goals in an environment, such as people and some animals and devices

- Anchoring bias - the starting point of a discussion sets an arbitrary value that all further discussion is relative to

- Apology - a social system and a skill to repair broken relationships

- Argument - an attempt to convince

- Artificial - intentional manipulation of reality

- Attention whore - someone willing to do anything to get attention

- Availability bias - focusing on evidence that is easier to access, failing to consider representative data that is harder to collect

- Awareness - how much of reality you notice, for example, how much your actions affect others

- Backfire bias - increasing your confidence in your beliefs merely because you attempt to defend them

- Bad faith - an oppositional mode of argument that attempts to defeat the opponent's mental defenses, close-minded, unwilling to admit mistakes, incurious

- Bandwagon bias - going along with whatever you think the most popular belief is

- Bargaining power - who gets what in a negotiation. Determines the relative share of the benefits a party can get. Comes from differentiation, the amount that one party can help or harm the other.

- Belief - a thought you hold about reality. A basic belief is something like, this happened to me. Basic beliefs combine into higher-level beliefs, such as causes, effects, beliefs about beliefs and beliefs about other people's beliefs. The atom of social reality.

- Benefits - things that help you to survive and thrive. Includes tangibles such as food or shelter, immediate intangibles such as credit or safety, and less immediate intangibles such as friendship or the content of books.

- Bias - a false method of reasoning, an inaccurate sample of data, any thinking process that reliably gets the wrong answer

- Bid - a price a buyer states that they would pay for a trade

- Blame - loss of status from the loss or destruction of group benefits

- Body language - physical communication apart from words and grammar, such as body location, posture, gesture, expression, timing, tone, pitch, speed, emphasis, rhythm, breathing, volume, physical contact, scent, attire, current activities, etc.

- Cat's paw - getting someone else to do something risky or harmful, instead of doing it yourself

- Channel - the physical medium that transmits a message from the sender to the receiver

- Chaotic - a system where insignificant initial changes can be amplified into totally different results, making it unpredictable in the long term

- Chesterton's fence - a metaphorical or actual fence that blocks your progress for an unknown reason. A fence is a signal to not enter, so first investigate why the fence was erected. After you understand the situation, then you can reasonably abide by or remove the fence.

- Clout - ability to get the attention of a group

- Clout chasing - doing whatever it takes to try to maintain and increase clout

- Coalition - a set of factions or groups that agree to cooperate, generally because they anticipate gaining more than they lose from the cooperation. The separate groups act together, as if they are a single, larger group.

- Cognition - mental processing in general. In a conversation, cognition can apply to accurate interpretation of messages into thoughts that are similar to the thoughts packaged by the sender into the message, producing relevant, valid, coherent thoughts based on that, and turning those thoughts into a response.

- Cognitive empathy - understanding how another person might feel and why, without experiencing the emotion yourself

- Communication - the attempt to transfer thoughts from one mind to another. Only about benefits. Can create, destroy and allocate benefits.

- Communication protocol - shared knowledge of a particular language game

- Communication strategy - a distinct way of talking that follows social incentives to locally maximize benefits

- Compliment - a social act to increase a party's reputation, can help build relationships

- Confirmation bias - to seek and promote evidence that supports my current beliefs, and avoid or dismiss evidence that challenges my current beliefs

- Conflict - when more than one party claims a benefit

- Conformity - making your actions match others' expectations in social reality

- Conscious - within explicit awareness, able to reason about

- Consideration - your understanding of others' perspectives, goals and experiences

- Contrition - your belief that what you did was wrong

- Conversation - an interaction that attempts to create, negotiate or trade benefits

- Conversation awareness - accurately detecting the state of the conversation and its parties, receiving and understanding conversation cues

- Conversation tree - the branching structure of potential statements in future, not predetermined conversations

- Conversational cue - a message that directs the conversation. Please repeat that.

- Convince - to change your belief

- Coordination - when more than one party works together to gain or protect benefits

- Corruption - violations of principles about the allocation of benefits, such as violations of meritocracy, fairness, breaking the allocation rules

- Countersignal - Deviating from performing the expected signal. Failed countersignalling is the default outcome and does not gain status. A successful countersignal gains status, reduces an old trend and grows a new trend. Common sources of successful countersignaling are tastemakers and high-achievers.

- Counter-culture - a group that intentionally rejects and opposes elements of the dominant culture.

- Craze - a more intense fad, people go crazy about a trend, act irrationally and damage society

- Crazy - an insult intended to mark a party as not worth relating to due to mental problems

- Credit - gain of status from the creation, gain or preservation of group benefits

- Cult - a non-dominant religious group that totally assimilates and controls its members and absolutely reveres a great leader or mission

- Cultural status - produced by capacity for and accumulation of cultural achievement

- Culture - a set of beliefs, values, practices, protocols and styles that characterize a group, can increase group identity, coherence, effectiveness, enthusiasm, attract members, gain group status

- Crybully - a deceptive strategy that manipulates outside perceptions of the attacker and defender. The attacking crybully baits the defender into attacking or falsifies an attack, and starts crying, creating the appearance of the crybully being the defender or the victim. If there is a rescuer, if deceived the rescuer may defend the crybully and attack the defender on the crybully's behalf. The crybully achieves the effect of bullying the defender by proxy while appearing to be the victim to others.

- Deception - promoting false beliefs in others

- Decision - Figuring out how you want to solve a problem, converting desire into a specific intent

- Desire - Created by consideration and affect, something that you want, but without a specific plan to achieve it. Combine desire with a decision to form an intent.

- Differentiation - what makes one party different from others, such as being the only available buyer or seller, offering unique and beneficial terms for a deal, or having a more reliable reputation

- Directed interest - seeking information about something to achieve a related goal

- Disrespect - violate the other party's boundaries, be rude, inconsiderate, consider them beneath you, give them low or no moral weight, reject them from the group, refuse their role, disobey their orders or countermand them, aggress on their body and their property, oppose their values.

- Dog whistle - a statement with two intended interpretations, designed to secretly communicate different messages to different groups using one statement, usually one interpretation is innocent and another is illicit

- Dunning-Kruger bias - the correlation of personal knowledge or skill in a subject area with the ability to judge skill in that subject, causing people with low skill to misjudge their knowledge or skill as higher than it is when they are unskilled, they don't know what they are talking about.

- Economic status - produced by productive capability and accumulation of capital

- Economy - an extended system of trade, composed of markets

- Ego - the defensive, posessive, anxious, sensitive, self-aggrandizing tendency a person has about their identity

- Emotion - mental state created by subconscious reactions to beliefs, eg fear, joy, impatience

- Esoteric - communication between insiders about messaging

- Exoteric - communication from insiders to outsiders, execution of messaging

- Experiment - an interaction with reality that can reveal whether a hypothesis is accurate or not

- Expressing - transforming responses into messages and transmitting the message through performance

- Expression - smaller or detailed qualities of the speaker's actions in objective or social realities, changes the produced meaning without changing the central actions or words

- Fact - a true statement about objective reality

- Faction - a group within a group

- Faction value - a single number describing how much one party likes another, how much they value their relationship

- Fad - a shorter lived and more intense trend

- False flag - a combat operation where members of one group impersonate members of a target group and conduct an attack in the name of the target group, creating the appearance that the target group is the aggressor

- Fashion - an established, persistent trend that creates a distinct style or way of life

- Force - taking or protecting benefits primarily using objective reality, physical objects and actions, including growth and violence, construction and destruction. Communication is the superior alternative to force for negotiating benefits.

- Framing - the context around the topic of conversation. Framing can greatly affect interpretation and which aspects of the topic are emphasized or even the conclusions you draw.

- Fraud status - gained by stealing status through deception, appears to others as the non-fraud forms of status

- Friend - someone you prefer to be with for certain occasions, and they agree

- Game - a set of rules, often defines initial states, allowable actions, consequences and final states. Some final states can be defined as winning or losing.

- Game theory - the study of games and strategy

- Gesture - specific positions or movements of the speaker in objective or social realities, a nonverbal statement or phrase

- Goal - a specific benefit that you prefer

- Good faith - a collaborative mode of argument that attempts to challenge ideas, seek truth, open-minded, curious

- Gossip - secret informal discussion of reputation changes

- Government - members and processes in a group that regulate the group, create and enforce rules to make the group work

- Grounding - matching statements with objective reality, correspondence between words and facts

- Group - a persistent collection of people who coordinate for shared goals

- Guilt - an internal, subjective conclusion of specific personal wrongdoing in social reality

- Hypothesis - a proposed model of reality that can be confirmed or rejected by experiment

- Identity - the specific qualities that characterize a person. Their body, name, job, family, possessions, close relationships, community, memories, habits, the place they live in.

- Incentive - a benefit that corresponds to an action. People follow incentives, you get what you pay for.

- Ideological - commitment to a fixed set of beliefs, the ideology. Anything the ideology says or that promotes the ideology is good, anything that contradicts or limits the spread of the ideology is bad.

- Insider - a member of a group

- Insult - a social attack to harm a party's reputation, can also harm relationships

- Intention - the conscious, subjective decision to take a specific action to achieve a goal

- Interaction - a series of responses

- Interest - a large or extended source of benefits, sometimes the cause of the formation of groups dedicated to protecting or exploiting the interest

- Interpretive - approximate translation from one form to another with potential error

- Intuitive - unconscious behavior, acting without knowing why

- Iteration - repeat a process until you reach a result

- Judgment - a subjective evaluation, according to your own values, concluding whether something is good or bad, or how much

- Kayfabe - the whole practice around maintaining a pretense

- Knowledge - a true belief about a fact

- Knowledge status - produced by the value of rare information and intellectual achievement

- Language - a changing set of shared beliefs about which words and grammar correspond to which reality. The tool of communication to transmit thoughts across minds.

- Language game - a set of rules that both parties must both approximate in order to establish mutual comprehension. Perfect accuracy of interpretation is impossible, but with effort, most people can converge on a shared set of rules to play similar enough language games.

- Leader - an insider who successfully negotiates, aligns, anticipates or proposes social realities to their group

- Legibility - the ability to see the benefits of a product or service. An illegible product or service is one that you cannot see the benefits of.

- Lie - a claim that a falsehood is true. When used for personal gain, lying is the social-reality version of theft.

- Life - the set of games available for an agent to reflexively play in reality

- Liking - preference for that thing over the baseline, disliking is preference for the baseline over that thing. Between things, like and dislike is relative preference or dispreference.

- Listen - receive messages from a channel

- Loaded question - a statement in the form of a question that smuggles an unaccepted premise

- Lose - reduce benefits

- Lose lose - both parties lose by playing the game

- Loss aversion bias - the tendency to hate losing more than you love gaining. This is irrational, because a benefit is worth the same amount whether it is gained or lost.

- Lossy - imperfect transmission of information due to losses or alterations, pieces are missing or changed, incomplete, incorrect

- Love - commitment to support something. Compare to hate, the commitment to oppose something, or neutrality or neglect, the lack of commitment to something.

- Luxury belief - a wrong belief held by someone whose opinion is irrelevant or who is protected from the consequences of their mistaken actions, being wrong does not significantly harm them.

- Malicious interpretation - attacking another party by abusing the complexity of interpretation, for example by assuming bad intentions, or reframing quotations pulled out of context

- Market - the collective trading activity in a specific product or location

- Market force - a straightforward form of incentive to balance supply and demand. High demand for a product can drive the market price up, increasing the incentive to supply the product. Improvements to the production of a product can lower costs to produce it, increasing the profit and incentive to supply it. Market forces organize groups to create the most benefits.

- Market price - the typical price paid for a product at a given market at a given time. No one is forced to trade at the market price, and individual trades happen at different prices. The intersection of the supply and demand curves. If there is not enough market activity, the market price can be undetermined.

- Martial status - produced by capability and application of physical force

- Message - the physical form of a statement

- Messaging - communication crafted for maximum advantage

- Metagame - a game about a game, trying to win the higher-level game of picking winning strategies in the object-level game.

- Mind - the subjective state, capability and experience of a thinking agent

- Model - a simplified structure of beliefs intended to correspond with part of reality

- Motivation - the incentives that are sufficient to cause you to take action

- Natural - the state of reality without intentional manipulation

- Negative sum - total benefits decrease by playing the game

- Negotiation - determining how to allocate conflicted benefits

- Norm - a shared social expectation

- Objective - independently observable. In the context of a war, an objective is a specific goal.

- Objective reality - observable particles, states and the natural laws the world

- Offer - a price a seller states that they would accept for a trade

- Order effects - consequences for actions beyond the initial effect, first-order effects, second-order effects, third-order effects, etc.

- Ostracism - expelling a member from a group

- Outsider - not a member of a group

- Overton window - the perceived social reality of which beliefs reasonable people can disagree about. Beliefs outside of the window are not socially acceptable to discuss. Different societies or groups have different windows, and windows shift in social reality.

- Parallel realities - more than one reality operating simultaneously. In communication, there are two categories of simultaneously relevant realities, the single objective reality and the multiple social realities of each party.

- Panic - a more intense craze that causes social upheaval and disruption

- Parties - participants in a conversation

- Partisan - commitment to a fixed identity group or other group of people. Everything the special group does, or anything that benefits the special group, is good, and anything that harms the special group is bad.

- Performance - the execution of an intention in reality

- Performativity - has two versions. One version is following scripts, performing roles, practicing a ritual or an image. The other version is behavior used to signal rather than achieve.

- Plausible deniability - a harmful statement that is reasonable to claim that you did not intend. Plausible deniability is created by complex statements that have more than one reasonable interpretation. A speaker can say something with a harmful interpretation, then avoid harm by insisting that they intended the non-harmful interpretation.

- Political party - a coalition in a government

- Political status - produced by capacity for and accumulation of power to collect, unify or direct groups

- Politics - which group gets what

- Politician - a professional group representative who participates in the government, a leader

- Politeness - following inconvenient, socially-defined rules to express consideration and accommodate other parties

- Position - where the speaker is located relative to the listener, in objective or social realities

- Positive sum - total benefits increase by playing the game

- Posture - the overall arrangement of the speaker in objective or social realities, what they are prepared to do

- Prediction - the output of applying a model to a situation, what the model claims would happen

- Preference cascade - when a preference falsification from one person triggers preference falsifications for other people in a chain or a spreading wave, quickly shifting social reality

- Preference falsification - when revealed preferences contradict stated preferences and change a social reality

- Premise - a mutually agreed statement in a discussion

- Pretense - pretending that you aren't pretending

- Probing - discussion that seeks to learn information about what another party has and wants

- Production - artificial creation of beneficial products or services, positive sum

- Projection bias - assuming that other people have the same problems or motivations that I do, failing to consider that people are different

- Profit - the benefit to the seller for selling. Revenue minus cost of goods sold. Profit comes from bargaining power.

- Prophecy - a prediction about a future state of reality

- Purity status - produced by achievement of culturally defined values, whether or not these benefit the group

- Reaction - natural, intuitive action triggered by a previous action

- Reference class - the specific contexts, scenarios or examples associated with a statement. Different reference classes can significantly alter the meaning of a statement without changing the statement itself.

- Reflexive - when you are an interactive participant within a system and everything you do affects both the system and yourself, not a separate observer

- Regulatory capture - when the intended subjects of regulation control the regulators instead

- Relational status - produced by personal relationships with high status people

- Relationship - the action, perception, and intent of the interaction between two individual parties

- Reputation - group evaluation of a party. Facts about shared subjective beliefs about the party.

- Rescuer - the stronger party that saves the victim from the abuser

- Respect - refers to any of four different things, a demand for obedience, a behavior of following the appropriate protocol, a personal practice of reverence, or a feeling of esteem or awe that promotes consideration, politeness, appreciation and deference.

- Response - intentional action related to a previous event in pursuit of a goal

- Revealed preference - what a party does, their actual choice and behavior, often feels good to them and is different from their stated preference

- Role - socially defined scripts and rituals to allow different people to perform a consistent social function

- Role status - status granted by holding a social role

- Rudeness - breaking politeness rules

- Rule - a codified norm, often vague and exploitable

- Rumor - gossip about a lie

- Rumor mill - informal social dynamics that consistently produce rumors, like a factory

- Scandal - when the public learns that someone did something extremely wrong

- Scheming - a secret move in a metagame, deception about which game you are playing

- Schism - when a group or coalition breaks apart into separate groups or coalitions, often along faction lines

- Science - the practice of creating useful models of reality

- Self-fulfilling prophecy - a prophecy that, as a result of communicating the prophecy, causes the prophecy to come true. For example, sometimes if leaders say that the group is succeeding, the group will make more efforts to succeed, causing the group to succeed because of the prophecy.

- Service - creating or protecting benefits for others. Mandatory for all capable adults.

- Shaming - an attempt to harm a party's reputation using overt claims that they have socially disapproved qualities. Separately, the associated internal emotion of shame is a feeling of overall wrongness, inadequacy, unworthiness.

- Shunning - expelling a group member only in social reality, not physical reality. e.g. I am not talking to you.

- Signaling - an unsolicited, implicit status grab using a proxy. Cheap signals are easy to copy, while costly signals require significant sacrifice.

- Simple - pure attempt to be grounded in communication

- Social forces - created by social incentives such as approval, statements, gatherings of people, conventional practices, expectations. Purely social, therefore the weakest and least grounded force in social reality, after technology and market forces.

- Social pressure - incentives to perform when you are observed

- Social reality - observable and unobservable shared beliefs, rules, expectations, conventions, cultures

- Socially-defined belief - a belief about what other people believe, e.g. I know that you didn't do it, but they all think you did

- Society of mind - the multiple interdependent agents in one person's mind

- Spacetime - the three spacial dimensions and single time dimension that comprise objective reality. Overlapping spacetime is required for physical interaction to occur.

- Speculation - unvalidated prediction

- Stated preference - what a party says they want, what they promise to do, often sounds good to others and different from their revealed preference

- Statement - an expression of a thought in a language

- Status - the bargaining power of one member relative to other members of a group. Status is intangible and ever-changing, it appears in physical reality by how other people pay attention, respond to and treat them.

- Stonewalling - a party to a conversation refuses to talk

- Strategy - a fixed set of choices about how to play a game

- Subconscious - below awareness, implicit thoughts and beliefs, unable to reason about

- Subjective - personally created and personally observable mental phenomena, unobservable to others

- Substitution - when a party responds to a request with something different that what was requested. In a competitive situation, if the true answer is disadvantageous, and remaining silent is disadvantageous, dodging the question sometimes works.

- Sunk cost bias - the mistaken assumption that the more I spend on a project, the more the project is worth

- Surprise - information received by a party that was previously unknown or unexpected

- Synchrony - how close two parties match each other in their objective or subjective state, and how close in time it takes them to match up. Especially important as part of an interaction.

- Talking points - professional-grade political messaging

- Theory of mind - your level of ability to consider external agents

- Thought - an idea, a specific portion of a state of a mental model

- Topic - the object level of a conversation, the current thing we are talking about

- Trade - a voluntary exchange of specific benefits, both parties gain from trade

- Trend - an emergent temporary shift in popular topics, products or activities, usually chasing after the habits of high status people

- Troll - antagonizing others when unprovoked, a pest, a troublemaker. An effective method to tear others down to increase the troll's relative position.

- Trust - your belief that another party acts in ways you would agree with, knowing what they know. A belief in both their compatible intentions and their competence.

- Typical-mind bias - the mistaken assumption that other people think and want the same things that you do. People are different from each other.

- Victim - the weaker party that is harmed by the abuser and saved by the rescuer

- Virtue signaling - trendy status grabbing

- War - an extended conflict where one collective sentient party enforces their will on another to get benefits

- Win - gain benefits

- Win lose - one party wins and the other party loses by playing the game

- Win win - both parties win by playing the game

- Wireheading - direct corruption of rewards. Wireheading is the logical conclusion of regulatory capture, maximum corruption. The reward becomes unrelated to the objective reality conditions it is supposed to be grounded in. The reward becomes meaningless, the incentives are broken, the production of benefits stops.

- Zero sum - the total amount of benefits remains the same before and after playing the game, no benefits are created or destroyed, the benefits are reallocated to different parties

---

References

The 48 Laws of Power by Robert Greene

The Elephant in the Brain by Kevin Simler and Robin Hanson

How the Way We Talk Can Change the Way We Work: Seven Languages for Transformation by Robert Kegan and Lisa Laskow Lahey

Pragmatics of Human Communication: A Study of Interactional Patterns, Pathologies and Paradoxes by Paul Watzlawick, Janet Beavin Bavelas, Don D Jackson

The Prince by Machiavelli

Thinking, Fast and Slow

What's Our Problem by Tim Urban

Your Situation by Benjamin Rubinger

Version 12026 143