




# *The Way*

RULES OF THUMB, PRACTICES, PARADIGMS &  
OTHER ORTHODOXIES FOR THE ROAD AHEAD



*“And sometimes when the night is slow,  
The wretched and the meek,  
We gather up our hearts and go,  
A Thousand Kisses Deep.”*

— LEONARD COHEN

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**A WORLD / B WORLD**





# *“So what’s it all about then?”*

The philosopher Bertrand Russell is said to have gotten into a black cab, only to be confounded by the cabbie asking, “So what’s it all about then?”

Good question. What’s it all about then? Followed by “What’s my role in it all?” “What’s expected of me?” “How wide is it? How deep is it? How much is mine to keep?”

So here you are. You’re clutching little more than a Roller email address and staring down massive expectations that you’re some sort of magician who will make it all better.

And you will. And we will. Maybe just a tiny bit, or maybe a lot, either way, better is what we’re seeking.

Doing so, making it better, means finding ourselves in the middle of a proverbial war zone, be that cultural, psychological, philosophical, somatic or literal.

And that boys and girls is where we are going.

We’re not going for a few days, we’re not going for a fly-in and fly-out visit, we’re not going as consultant tourists, we’re going in for a long time. We’re going to build relationships.

The inherent complexity of the challenges we work on coupled with the need for long-term engagement makes for a unique challenge. We are not actors yet we are involved. What does it mean to be effective in such a situation?

This humble guide therefore seeks to provide some sort of...well, guidance for those walking the path of the righteous Roller.

Finally, we have to remember the old adage, “Whoever fights mobsters must take care not to become a mobster. And when you look long into an abyss; the abyss also stares into you.”



/ ru:lz əv θʌm /

# RULES OF THUMB

**01.** A BROADLY ACCURATE GUIDE OR PRINCIPLE, BASED ON PRACTICE RATHER THAN THEORY.

## **RULE 01**

# *Never Perform Alone.*

Never work alone, never pitch up in a strange town alone, never facilitate alone, never eat alone, never design alone, never sleep alone....ermm no wait, maybe there are some exceptions. But in general never do anything.

This doesn't mean that you can't spend time on your own, or that if you need space on your own you can't take that time. It simply means never performing alone.

Most rules can be broken, for example in an emergency or for avant-garde aesthetic reasons. This one shouldn't really be broken.

*Never perform alone.*



## RULE 02

# *Know What You Need.*

## RULE 03

# *Say What You Need.*

Sometimes we need to be alone, sometimes we need a third-wave coffee, sometimes we need gluten free food, sometimes we need to take Monday morning off, or perhaps we need to take a week off.

If you don't know what you need then it's generally pretty hard to get it. If you know what you need – in order to function, in order to be happy, in order to be calm, in order to be grounded, then others can help you get it.

If you don't yet know what you need, then work with someone to figure it out. But figure it out.

*Know what you need.*

Once you have some idea of what you need comes the next step, saying what you need, communicating it.

There is no shame, no embarrassment and no censure for stating a need.

When you meet your needs you can focus on others, on your work, on results. When your needs are not met some portion of our processing power is constantly trying resolve the need. Free up processing space.

*Say what you need.*

## **RULE 04**

# *Context Rules.*

Another way of putting this is “know your shit.”

There are only two general failure scenarios for our work. We either fail internally, that is, we fail at the level of our organisational “inner game” or we fail because the context kills us.

What does this mean?

Working on complex challenges means it’s actually impossible to “know” everything there is to know about a context or a situation.

Just because we cannot know everything does not mean that we are not subject to the rules of a context. We are subject to the rules of the game that prevail in any given context the moment we enter a context.

We must learn to discern what rules are sacred in a context and what rules are negotiable. Only by grasping this distinction are we able to move.

Failure to respect context is likely to result in us being rapidly ejected. Let’s try to avoid early ejection because we haven’t respected the context.

Know your shit.

*Context rules.*



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# PRACTICES

**01.** THE ACTUAL APPLICATION OR USE OF AN IDEA, BELIEF, OR METHOD, AS OPPOSED TO THEORIES RELATING TO IT.

**02.** THE CUSTOMARY, HABITUAL, OR EXPECTED PROCEDURE OR WAY OF DOING OF SOMETHING.

## **PRACTICE 01**

# *Set Intention.*

What is it that we want to create? Individually and collectively the practice of setting our intention, making it visible and tangible, literally brings it to life. The default pattern is heading into the work, into that conversation, into that research without being explicit and clear what outcome we want, and being at the whim of pulls and patterns already present in the situation.

Get quiet. Get clear. What do you want to create? What is the outcome? Visualize it. Whether it is a difficult conversation, deciding where to go on vacation or the most challenging project you've worked on yet. Set intention.

## PRACTICE 02

# *Find Your Game. Practice.*

All too often we are born into a game and we play it unconsciously. Here's an opportunity to pick your game, to play it consciously, to aspire to mastery and virtuosity.

If you're here it's because you're good at something. In some cases it's obvious and in other cases it might not be. The bottom line is that you are here for a reason. Trust that reason.

If you know what you're good at it's worth remembering there is no upper limit to how good you can get. It's not like anyone, doing anything, will hit a peak of performance where they cannot improve any more.

Practice. Practice some more. Find opportunities to practice. Find someone to practice with. Tell others what you are practicing. Get good at it. Get world class at it.

*Find your game. Practice.*

## **PRACTICE 03**

# *Work In Cycles.*

Imagine a year. A year is a cycle. It begins and it ends and repeats. A year represents the time it takes for the earth to complete one revolution around the sun. In a year the earth arrives back at where it was and begins a new revolution.

In contrast to a cycle, a project has a beginning and an end but it never repeats.

Cycles are found throughout the natural world. We have formalized cycles through time but cycles can be imprecise and wild, as in nature, as well as specifically defined.

In our work, we work to cycles and not to projects. Cycles of 24 hours, 5 days, 30 days, 90 days, cycles of summer, autumn, winter and spring.

Each cycle represents an opportunity for both small and major mid-course corrections. Each cycle represents a new beginning and an end. Each cycle represents the opportunity to cultivate continuous improvements in what we deliver and what we do.

Cycles never end. And that's ok.

## **PRACTICE 04**

# *Master The Inner Game.*

One of the most seductive and largely unspoken myths in doing change work is that we can change things without having to change ourselves. Every game is composed of two parts, an outer game and an inner game. The outer game played against external opponents and the inner game played against ourselves. Focusing on 'them', the system, the oppression, won't win the game. (See Orthodoxy #6: As above, so below.)

When you stop yourself, get stuck, hold back, go too hard, are afraid, defend vehemently, refuse to look, surrender too easily – all are places where the game is jeopardized.

The trick is learning how to master the inner game that goes on between Self 1 – our critic, judge, ego, commentator, or 'teller' and Self 2 our authentic self, the unconscious mind, nervous system, muscles, or 'doer'.

You may have to unlearn this relationship. You may have to break old patterns. You can be sure this work will ask you to take your inner game to the next level, wherever you are starting from. Phone a friend, get a coach, do what you need to do to master your inner game.



## PRACTICE 05

# *Strike a Balance.*

This work is physically, intellectually and emotionally exhausting. While most people can perform well in these conditions for a short period of time, without attention to individual and team health and well being, the frequent and predictable pattern moves toward burnout, deterioration of well-being and a drop in performance and delivery over time.

Since we haven't tapped an in exhaustible source of energy yet, we all need to find a balance between using our resources and refilling them. This requires awareness of how I am doing, how my team is doing, and how the organisation overall is doing. It requires awareness of your needs at a minimum at the physical and emotional level – am I tired? Am I frustrated? Checking in at the level of our health, well-being and sanity is a practice that makes all the others possible.

This probably means getting your heart rate up for at least 20 min a day and breaking a sweat. It might mean saying no to going out to dinner with everyone if you now you just need some time to yourself. It may mean getting up early to set yourself and your day up. It may mean dancing all night.

Most of us are pretty good on running on close to empty. This is a risk we can't take. We never want to get below a quarter tank. The practice here is to stay in balance and regularly checking the petrol gauge and taking action needed to refill when low or get support when you have a flat tire.

*Strike a balance.*

## PRACTICE 06

# *Integrate Minority Views.*

*“Behind the world's most difficult problems are people — groups of people who don't get along together. You can blame crime, war, drugs, greed, poverty, capitalism or the collective unconscious. The bottom line is that people cause our problems.”*

— ARNOLD MINDELL, SITTING IN THE FIRE

Every time a group comes together, minority positions come into being. These minority views might be around how chairs are arranged in a room, taking breaks, or more difficult issues such as gender balance or who gets to speak. One way of understanding a minority view is as representing wisdom that the majority cannot see.

All too often, decisions in groups are made on the basis of power. This might look like a leader making decisions, an alpha male dominating decisions or at best a majority vote determining the outcome of a decision.

The challenge with these approaches is that failing to incorporate minority views into decision-making has consequences. Minority views do not go away simply because the group has dismissed these views.

In the worst case, unacknowledged minority views become the basis for our deepest and most pernicious conflicts. In more day-to-day situations minority views become the basis of ongoing low-level conflict, dissatisfaction, people feeling like they are unseen, and the loss of good ideas and critical information.

Integrating minority views into decision-making ensures better decisions. Doing so also addresses budding conflicts and dissatisfaction almost at a root cause level.

*Integrate Minority Views.*



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# ORTHODOXIES

**OI.** AUTHORIZED OR GENERALLY ACCEPTED THEORY, DOCTRINE, OR PRACTICE.

## ORTHODOXY 01

# *Phenomenological Not Utopian.*

One of the most important distinctions made in all the work we have done is to recognize the gap between what *is* and what we *desire*. In other words, our starting point was not what reality we desired.

Our starting point was trying to discern the realities as they existed for the people that the project aimed to help. Even when considering the future, the starting point is to consider what is plausible before getting into what is desirable.

In modern philosophical terms, this perception of the particular is known as phenomenology, from the Greek *phainomenon*, “that which appears.” Founded in the early twentieth century by Edmund Husserl as a way of studying subjective experience, phenomenology developed multiple strands of thought.

Our approach to addressing complex challenges is phenomenological. This means that we start with what is and not what we desire.

The journey between what is and what is desirable, what is better, is the essence of the work.

# *Prototyping Not Planning.*

Prototyping can be looked at as a practice but it can also be viewed as a mindset or even a paradigm.

Prototyping as a practice means producing an early, crude “proto” version of an idea – be that a draft paper, a product or a service. This “version 1.0” will almost certainly be flawed. The purpose of a prototyping (as opposed to a pilot) is to test out the value of whatever has been created for whoever is deemed a beneficiary.

In very simple terms, if you’re writing a report for someone. Write a quick first draft and show it to them to seek an early reaction. They will quickly correct you.

The challenge of prototyping is that we are addicted to the notion of a “right answer.” We are schooled in providing a single answer, and it is judged to be either right or wrong.

Prototyping requires us as creators to embrace the reality that our first guess will likely be wrong or deeply flawed. This requires both a thick skin and the courage to put a flawed creation out in the world.

Prototyping for those who are consuming our ideas requires an understanding that they are co-creators and not simply consumers. This means practicing both appreciation and forgiveness.

# *Movement Requires Friction.*

*“A wheel turns because of its encounter with the surface of a road; spinning in the air it goes no where. Rubbing two sticks together produces heat and light; one stick alone is just a stick. As a metaphorical image, friction reminds us that heterogeneous and unequal encounters can lead to new arrangements of culture and power.”*

– ANNA TSING

Building diversity in the groups we work with results in friction. People coming from different worlds bring different sensibilities, cultural norms and practices. Putting difference in a room creates friction. This friction produces heat.

The elimination of friction from the groups produces frictionless teams, teams that go no-where despite the wheels spinning.

Tsing reminds us that creating new arrangements of culture and power require a degree of friction. Practices of how to work with friction range from Myrna Lewis’ Deep Democracy to Ronald Hieftz’s adaptive leadership.

## ORTHODOXY 04

# *Skin In The Game.*

*“What the ancients understood very well was that the builder will always know more about the risks than the client, and can hide sources of fragility and improve his profitability by cutting corners. The foundation is the best place to hide such things. The builder can also fool the inspector, for the person hiding risk has a large informational advantage over the one who has to find it. The same absence of personal risk is what motivates people to only appear to be doing good, rather than to actually do it.”*

— TALEB & SANDIS

*“The idea of skin in the game when involving others in tail risk exposures is crucial for the well-functioning of a complex world.”*

— TALEB & SANDIS

Consultancies typically do not have any skin-in-the-game in terms of what they deliver to their clients. Clients accept 100% of the risk of engaging a consultant. This has an impact on the quality of the solutions being provided to a client – a little like building a house where the builder has no liability for the house falling down.

As the situations we are involved in get more complex, one way of hedging against failure is to build skin-in-the-game at multiple levels, including how we function as a firm. This differentiates us from traditional professional services firms who have no skin-in-the-game and also from traditional charities who operate from a purely altruistic or egoless place.



## ORTHODOXY 05

# *As Above, So Below.*

The adage is attributed to the Emerald Tablets of Hermes Trismegistus. The ancients believed it was impossible to study humanity without studying the universe, and vice versa. The macrocosmos is the microcosmos.

Whatever we think, do or practice in Roller, will be mirrored into our client work. Whatever happens in one part of the system reflects and impacts throughout the system. We ignore this to our peril. It means that the conditions we create inside ourselves and our teams not only impact us, and our ability to perform but directly impact the outcome we are trying to achieve.

If we are not personally individually resourced and healthy, we can't expect to support that condition in the client system or expect to be creating outcomes that are. If the client system is one where power collects at the top, you can bet we will start to see that dynamic within the project team.

This places a responsibility on us as practitioners to do our own work, to take dynamics that show up in us and in the team seriously and when we see something in a part of the system that is working or not working, being intentional about whether we take action to mitigate it or amplify it.

*As above, so below. As within, so without.*



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# PARADIGMS

*or “it’s practices all the way down”*

**OI.** AUTHORIZED OR GENERALLY ACCEPTED THEORY,  
DOCTRINE, OR PRACTICE.

*“A scientific revolution that results in paradigm change is analogous to a political revolution. Political revolutions begin with a growing sense by members of the community that existing institutions have ceased adequately to meet the problems posed by an environment that they have in part created. The dissatisfaction with existing institutions is generally restricted to a segment of the political community. Political revolutions aim to change political institutions in ways that those institutions themselves prohibit. As crisis deepens, individuals commit themselves to some concrete proposal for the reconstruction of society in a new institutional framework. Competing camps and parties form. One camp seeks to defend the old institutional constellation. One (or more) camps seek to institute a new political order. As polarisation occurs, political recourse fails. Parties to a revolutionary conflict finally resort to the techniques of mass persuasion.”*

— THOMAS KUHN

THE STRUCTURE OF SCIENTIFIC REVOLUTION

## PARADIGMS & PRACTICES

# *A World / B World*

PLANNING  
PLAN  
TECHNOCRATIC  
HIERARCHICAL  
PLAYERS/COUNTER-PLAYERS  
MANAGEMENT  
FINITE GAMES  
FLATLAND  
POWERPOINT  
EPISTEMOLOGICAL  
TACTICAL  
SHORT-TERM  
HIGH RISK  
BIG WAGERS  
RESOURCE RICH  
MOONSHOT  
LOW ROI  
SYMPTOMS  
NEO-SOVIET  
DIKTAT  
FEAR  
SILO  
COMPLICATED  
TECHNICAL  
FRAGILE  
LINEAR

PROTOTYPING  
TEAM  
PRACTICAL  
FLEXIBLE  
NON-PLAYERS  
FACILITATION  
INFINITE GAMES  
REAL WORLD  
EXPERIENCE  
PHENOMENOLOGICAL  
STRATEGIC  
LONG-TERM  
LOW RISK  
SMALL BETS  
RESOURCE POOR  
SPREAD BETTING  
HIGH ROI  
CAUSES  
ENTREPRENEURIAL  
NEGOTIATION  
OPPORTUNITY  
WHOLE  
COMPLEX  
ADAPTIVE  
ANTI-FRAGILE  
ITERATIVE

## PARADIGMS & PRACTICES

<b>PARADIGM</b> <b>PRACTICE</b>	<b>A WORLD</b> <b>BUSINESS AS USUAL</b>	<b>B WORLD</b> <b>EMERGING COMPLEXITY</b>
FLATLAND <i>“The cognitive style of PowerPoint”</i> – EDWARD TUFTE	ABSTRACTION	LIVED EXPERIENCE
MARKET ORIENTATION	MARKET-IS-ALWAYS-RIGHT	MARKET AS MEANS
EXPERTISE	DECONTEXTUALIZED <i>Technical &amp; Epistemological</i>	CONTEXTUALIZED <i>Phronesis</i>
FORMAL/INFORMAL	FORMAL PARASITIC ON INFORMAL	FORMAL-INFORMAL SYMBIOSIS
POWER <i>“Rationality &amp; Power”</i> – FLYVBJERG	IDOLATRY <i>Outside-Of-Self</i>	POWER AS A RELATIONSHIP
STRATEGY <i>Inner/Outer Game</i>	OUTSIDE(-IN)	INSIDE-OUT





END OF DOCUMENT

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OTHER ORTHODOXIES FOR THE ROAD AHEAD

VERSION 7.1