

*Then came the churches, then came the schools,  
then came the lawyers, then came the rules...*

—Mark Knopfler, “Telegraph Road”

## Chapter Three

### *The Lifecycle of Social Systems*

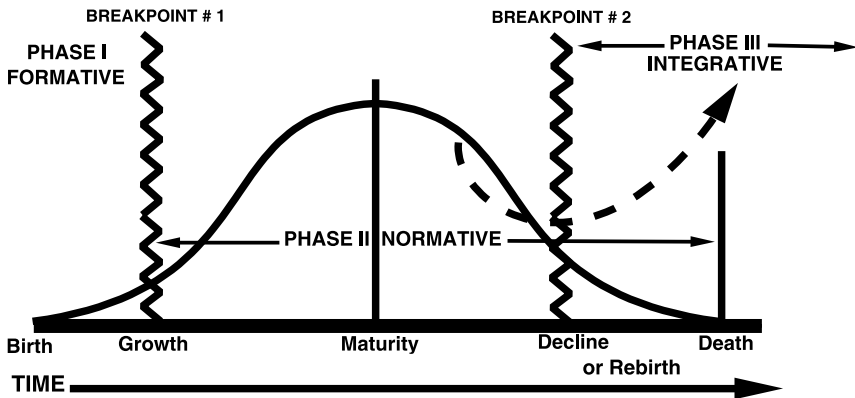
**W**e participate in social systems—family life, friendships, work life, religious life. We either get a sense of meaning from this participation or we don’t. The nature of the system, our role in it, and our view of that role determine whether or not it means anything to us. Since our purpose here is to find meaning in our lives, we need to understand the nature of human social institutions.

George Land is a general systems practitioner. He wrote *Grow or Die* and, with Beth Jarman, *Breakpoint and Beyond*. I worked with him on a 3M program called “Living Innovation”. He applied general systems theory to social institutions. He showed that institutions go through at least two major phases—formative and normative. Most die at the end of their normative phase. However, a third phase, rebirth, is possible. He called this the integrative phase. What’s important to us is the nature of these phases because of the impact they have on people.

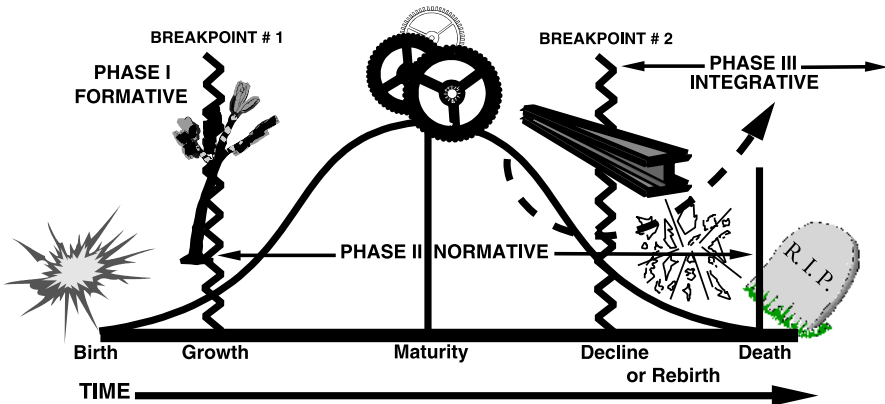
In the very beginning, a social institution is completely intangible. It originates as a purpose, a concept, an idea, a philosophy, a solution to a problem in someone’s mind. People then move to manifest it—give it a form that will undertake the processes that accomplish its purpose. That gives it a material state. We call the material state “reality”, even though

it's only the material portion of reality, because our physical senses—sight, hearing, touch, taste, smell—can detect it. The system moves from the intangible to the tangible, from the spiritual to the material, from concern with function (the *why*) to concern with form and process (the *how*). In physical terms, we could say it begins as an invisible gas, then a flexible solid, then a rigid mobile solid, and finally a rigid immobile solid. It moves from pure energy to petrified matter. Finally, it shatters and dies—unless it recreates itself by recognizing its original, spiritual state.

### THE LIFECYCLE OF A SYSTEM



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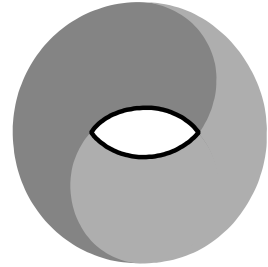


### The Formative Phase

When people are creating a system, that system is in its formative phase. They begin with a purpose. Then, they design the means for accomplishing that purpose. Through several stages, they develop the practices, pro-

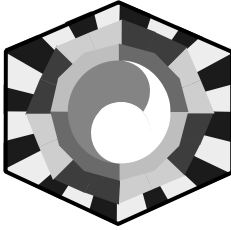
cesses, and tangible forms that actualize their intent. The system journeys from spiritual to material. For example, a new religious philosophy recruits adherents, develops symbols and artifacts, and builds places of worship. These comprise the physical form of the founding philosophy.

The formative phase may be either open or closed. If open, it recognizes both of the system's principal complements, so that its purpose is beneficial to both. If closed, the creators consider only their own benefit.

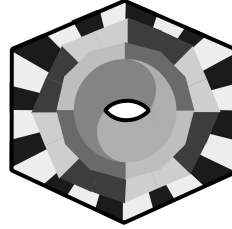


## Originating Purpose

Closed Approach



Open Approach



Whether open or closed, the formative phase requires making it up as you go along. It involves constant creative problem-solving. Forming a new business, for example, requires not only creating the product or service; it also demands creating all the abilities to get it into the marketplace.

Once a system prospers, by accident or design, it moves into its normative phase. This is usually the beginning of its end.

### The Normative Phase

The normative phase of *all* systems have the same purpose, which is completely independent from the originating purpose of any specific system. The goal of the formative phase was to figure out how to materialize the system's intent. The goal of the normative phase is to maximize the *efficiency* of the forms and processes it created to do that, whatever they were. That's why the transition is called a "breakpoint"—new goal, new rules. The formative way of working no longer applies.

To focus on maximizing efficiency, regardless of the specific nature of the system, the people in charge during the normative phase accept, uncritically,

whatever *content* already exists. What “we do around here” is a given. Their concern is confined to doing it more efficiently and effectively. They epitomize the attitude that everything substantive that’s worth knowing is already known. After all, it works, doesn’t it? Their job is to maximize predictability. This means eliminating diversity and variance. Maximizing predictability includes ensuring that everyone in the system also accepts, unquestioningly, whatever already exists. The question is always, “Are we doing things right?” It is never, “Are we doing the right things?” The normative phase is about control and conformity. This is “management”.

The premise of *Breakpoint and Beyond* is that mankind is approaching the second major breakpoint in its history, the transformation from normative to integrative systems. But what was its first breakpoint, the rise of normative systems? According to Land and Jarman, it was the rise of civilization itself. That makes sense. The major difference between pre- and post-civilization life was man’s mode of survival. Before “civilization”, man was nomadic. People didn’t know what tomorrow would bring. Hell, they didn’t know what was behind the next rock. Evidently some genius decided that the not-knowing (lack of predictability) was the primary reason life was so difficult and attributed it to the constant wandering. The answer: stop moving, stop facing new situations every day, every week.

Civilization meant staying in one place—settling. Rather than seeing many new things every day, people now saw many familiar things every day. They felt more secure.

A nomadic existence is, quite literally, making it up as you go along—a perpetually formative existence in which creativity is linked directly to survival. Civilization is the opposite. It’s built for repetition—doing the same things, the same way, under the same conditions, day after day after day. That’s “normative”. Civilization overtly punishes creativity, because creativity produces variance and decreases predictability. That’s O.K. up to the point of establishing a stable platform on which to work. But beyond that point, the drive for predictability becomes a prison of conformity that drives out the diversity needed for vitality. The civilization weakens and dies. These dynamics apply to every level of human existence—an individual person, one-to-one personal relationships, social organizations such as companies, social institutions such as business, education, and religion, entire societies, and even civilization itself.

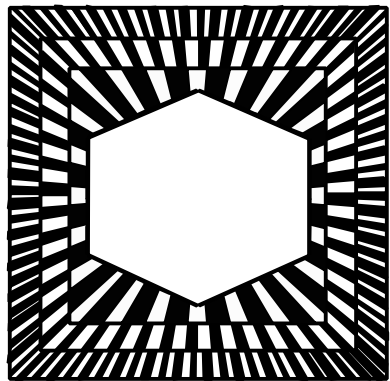
Human existence went from one extreme to the other—from constant variation to constant repetition. Either one alone is insufficient. Constant variation prevents building and spreading a body of knowledge about what works and what doesn't. Constant repetition prevents the growth of knowledge and understanding that permits adaptation. It eventually causes the death of the system.

Viewed this way, the human race has more to fear from civilization than from atomic warfare. In fact, all forms of Armageddon are the *result* of closed, normative systems. All that changes is scale.

If you're a student of history, you've seen normative dynamics in the decline and fall of societies, some of the most notable being Greece, the Roman Empire, and, most recently, the USSR. If you're a student of business, you've seen normative dynamics in the decline and fall of individual businesses, companies and entire industries—the American steel and automotive industries, for example.

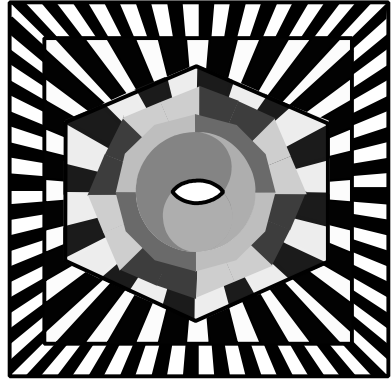
The Japanese were able to capture more than 30 percent of the American car market because of such dynamics. In his book *Iacocca*, Lee Iacocca recounts trying to convince Henry Ford III that Americans wanted more fuel-efficient cars. Mr. Ford's response in effect, was, "Americans want big powerful gas guzzlers, and that's what we're going to give them." This is the man in charge of a normative system doing his job—demanding adherence to the established rules in the face of powerful evidence they no longer apply. This is how normative systems commit suicide.

A normative system is entirely concerned with the mechanics of material existence—effects. That consumption excludes a view of spiritual existence—cause. Therefore, a normative viewpoint is blind to what things *mean*. That's why man's search for meaning is both so difficult and such an old, old subject. Civilization effectively outlawed meaning 8,000 years ago. Of course, there have been many people who have resisted the idea of life without meaning. We know how many of them ended up, don't we? And let that be a warning to the rest of us.



*Normative systems are concerned exclusively with the material. They actively ignore the spiritual.*

As any system grows, its functions become more developed. They specialize. But nature doesn't normalize. Living things—open, adaptive systems—go directly from their formative phase to an integrative phase. They refine their operating subsystems in accord with their primary purpose. Thus, the subsystems evolve interdependently. One does not develop in isolation from or in conflict with another because that would weaken the larger system's chances of survival. The claws of successive generations of tigers may become sharper and stronger, permitting faster catches and kills. The heart of a mammal that depends on flight for survival might increase its pumping capacity so as to deliver more oxygen and energy to muscles, while removing toxins faster. In an ant colony, the workers might develop greater capability to gather food supplies during adverse weather while the soldiers develop greater ability to resist attacks.



*Living systems specialize interdependently, to more effectively achieve their original purpose*

In contrast, almost all human social institutions, whether open or closed in their formative phase, become closed soon after birth. Specialization takes a very different form. Subsystems and components specialize *independently*. People concentrate on refining and standardizing the forms and processes of their function, ignorant of the reason it exists in the first place—its meaning. People focus more and more on pieces rather than wholes. The “big picture” gets smaller and dimmer. This is bureaucracy. A bureaucrat is not only unconcerned with citizens or customers. He also doesn't know or care what other departments, or even the person seated next to him, are about. This fragmentation eventually disintegrates the system.

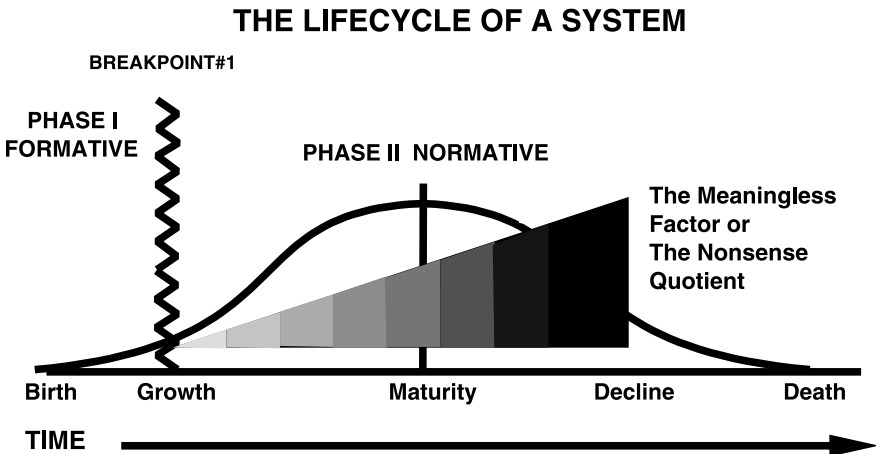
While thousands of living species have survived and evolved for hundreds of thousands of years, a few hundred years is the high end of life expectancy for human social institutions—except for religions, which we'll talk about later in this chapter.

Remember the old story of the little girl who asked her mother why she always cut the end off a ham before she baked it? Mother answered, “Because my mother did.” The girl then asked her grandmother why she cut the end off the ham before she baked it. Her grandmother answered, “Because my mother did.” Great-grandmother was still alive, so the little girl

asked her why she did it. “Because my roasting pan was too small for the average-sized ham,” replied Great-Grandma. That’s normalizing—attention to form and process, oblivious to cause—the “why” behind the action. It’s “monkey see, monkey do”—unexamined imitation. By definition, it’s meaningless.

One of my friends has a favorite rhetorical question: “Have you had twenty-five years of experience or one year of experience twenty-five times?” A normative person in the normative phase of a system has “one year of experience twenty-five times”. It’s doing the same things, the same way, over and over and over again. Those who refuse this kind of existence are labeled “nonconformists”. When Socrates said, “An unexamined life isn’t worth living”, he was referring to this condition. It isn’t worth living because it’s devoid of meaning. An “unexamined life”—mindless repetition of activities without understanding their purpose—*isn’t* living, not only by Socrates’ standards but also by Nature’s.

Exclusive focus on forms and processes heightens complexity, which becomes more and more incomprehensible without a conceptual framework to keep all that detail organized and integrated. As a result, the “meaningless factor”—the “nonsense quotient”—increases as the system ages. Now you know why Scott Adams has an endless supply of material for *Dilbert*.



The normative phase confines thinking to linear, analytical processing—acquiring data and learning from authority: “This is how we do things around here”. In an advanced, declining normative phase, we get the

mindless Stimulus/Response mode that caused the psychologist B. F. Skinner to boast that, in an eighteen-month period, he could condition a human being to do almost anything. This is robot man, the completely mechanical perspective that sees only lists of facts and strings of data, with no clue to what they mean. It is conforming, unquestioning, uncritical, unexperimental, unchallenging—and mind-numbing boring. Here’s a popular example of how mindless it gets:

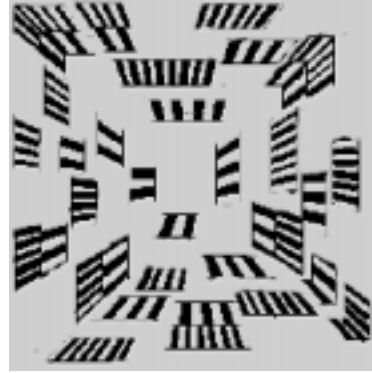
The U.S. Standard railroad gauge—the distance between the rails—is 4 feet, 8.5 inches—clearly not a “nice round number”. Where did it come from? That was the gauge of English railroads. English expatriates built the first U.S. railroads. The people who built tramways—predecessors to railroads—built the first railroads in England. They used the same specifications they used for building wagons—4 feet, 8.5 inches between the wheels. The wagons used that odd spacing because the wheel ruts on the old long distance roads had that spacing. Who built those roads? The Romans. Roman war chariots made the ruts. The military spec for the wheel spacing on a Roman war chariot was ... 4 feet, 8.5 inches, of course. Why? Because that was just enough space to accommodate the rear end of two war horses. Therefore, U.S. railroads, today, are built to accommodate two, nineteen-hundred-year-old horses’ asses from Rome.

“Accommodating some horse’s ass” really captures the essence of a normative system. Now you know why so many people hate their bosses and have “problems with authority”.

*Dualism* is the mechanism normative social institutions use to specialize—to increase predictability. It causes the fragmentation that eventually destroys them. Dualism is the practice of viewing the principal complements of any system or subsystem as enemies rather than as partners in a larger whole. As such, it divides systems into progressively smaller, isolated antagonistic pieces until they become battlefields of tiny soldiers, each fighting for himself.

In Western history, for example, sectarianism first split the human race into the God-fearing versus the Heathen. The God-fearing created more antagonistic dualities: God against Satan, Heaven against Hell, Good against Evil, Man against Woman, spiritual against material. The God-fearing then split into Christians and Jews. Then the Christians split into

Protestants and Catholics. Then the Protestants divided into Lutherans, Congregationalists, Anglicans, Baptists, Methodists, and other denominations. See how it works? It literally is destruction. Think of dualism as a slow fission reaction in human social institutions.



We see dualism in the thesis-antithesis dialectic of history, first described by Hegel. A revolution, an antithesis, rejects the established system *entirely*—its central principle, its processes, its forms. Therefore, the thesis that the revolutionaries oppose limits their own scope. The antithesis rejects *everything* in the domain of the thesis, no matter how valid it may be. That's why antagonistic revolutions—the only kind we can have in normative systems—can't produce true freedom. They can only build equal and opposite prisons that hold different people.

Dualism gives normative systems their “either-or” character: “Either you're with us or against us”. Because they focus on form and process, normative systems say, “Either you look like us, you do things the way we do, or you don't. If you do, you're in. If you don't, you're out.” When the system's objective is to reduce variance and increase predictability, deviance and diversity in both processes and people are “out”—very out.

In an old, declining normative system, antagonism toward deviation from “good form” becomes so petty that it's incomprehensible. Remember my accounts of Gaines™ Meal and the new package for Gaines™ Biscuits and Bits? It got even sillier. Shortly after those two incidents, I received a formal job evaluation. On the positive side, those two efforts, which were related to my competence, were cited as “nice tries”. On the negative side, having no relation to my competence, were:

- 1) The trousers of my suits had no cuffs;
- 2) On occasion, I'd allowed my hair to reach my shirt collar before getting a haircut;
- 3) My shoes, while black, weren't wing tips;
- 4) I walked “funny”. While other people dragged their feet and shuffled, I distinctly picked my feet up and put them down.

These issues, weighed against my competencies, produced the net evaluation: “Not management material”. That looked to me like simple insanity at the time. Now I know what caused it. And remember, General Foods didn’t live much longer after this.

The rules of normative systems are both formal and informal. The formal ones are written down as regulations, policies, and procedures. The informal controls, however, are usually more senseless, more powerful and more permanent. They exist as *memes*, a term coined by the brilliant biologist Richard Dawkins. Here’s his definition:

We need a name for the new replicator, a noun that conveys the idea of a unit of cultural transmission, or a unit of imitation. “Mimeme” comes from a suitable Greek root, but I want a monosyllable that sounds a bit like “gene.” I hope my classicist friends will forgive me if I abbreviate mimeme to meme....

Just as genes propagate themselves in the gene pool by leaping from body to body via sperms or eggs, so memes propagate themselves in the meme pool by leaping from brain to brain via a process which, in the broad sense, can be called imitation....

As my colleague N. K. Humphrey neatly summed up “... memes should be regarded as living structures, not just metaphorically but technically. When you plant a fertile meme in my mind you literally parasitize my brain, turning it into a vehicle for the meme’s propagation in just the way that a virus may parasitize the genetic mechanism of my host cell. And this isn’t just a way of talking—the meme for say, ‘belief in life after death’ is actually realized, physically, millions of times over, as a structure in the nervous systems of individual men the world over.”

Memes are the informal rules of normative cultures—broad institutions such as family, religion, business, and education, and the smaller cultures within them—individual families, denominations, companies, and schools.

Probably the most common and obvious way to enforce conformity is simply to ridicule a deviation, like a new idea, as silly, meaningless, stupid, crazy. But there are many more subtle memes in any normative culture. While he didn’t use the term *meme*, Torrance, in his work on our educational system, gave names to the ones that annihilate creative think-

ing in children. They apply to school, the workplace, all social institutions. The only difference between schools and workplaces is the age of the participants.

### **Meme No. 1—Success Orientation**

The title sounds positive. But rather than focusing on the primary causes of the desired result, as a formative system does, a normative system treats itself as the definition of “success”. Under these conditions, “success orientation” means “Follow the rules—avoid negatives”. A “negative”, by definition, is anything that deviates from the system’s tacit beliefs, its memes. Because a normative system assumes it already does all “the right things”, to succeed is to conform and never ask why.

I once asked an organizational psychologist how he’d attempt to do new business development in an established company. He said:

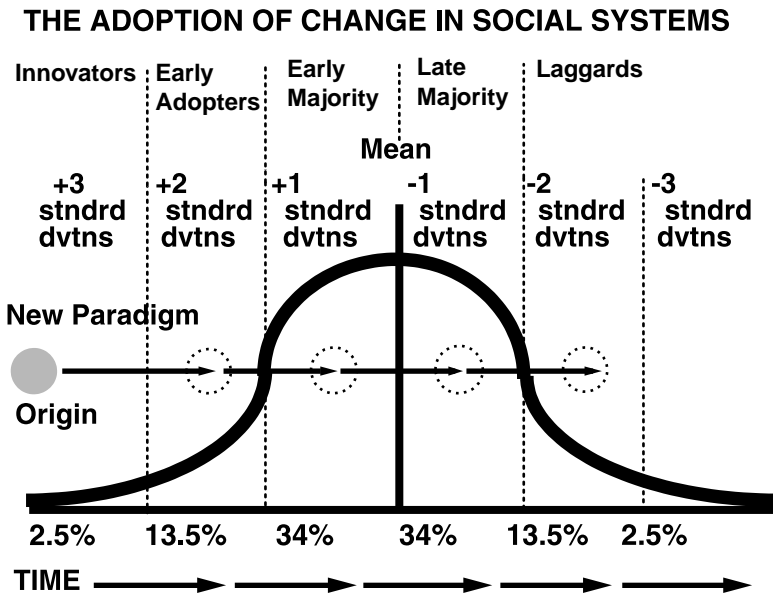
The first thing I’d do is locate the new business unit in Montana—in some town that’s just about inaccessible—nowhere near an airport and a hell of a drive from anywhere. Then, I’d get one phone—just one—and screen incoming calls. The idea here is to quarantine yourself. You see, when you cut through all the motivational crap, there are only two primary motivations—pursuit of possibilities and avoidance of negatives. New business is about pursuing possibilities. Around 3 percent of our population does that. About 92 percent are completely concerned with avoiding negatives. There’s a 5 percent swing group that is sometimes motivated by one, sometimes by the other. As a company ages, it first throws out the obvious “pursue possibilities” types. Then it gets rid of those who *might* pursue possibilities. Those left devoutly avoid negatives. They pose no threat of introducing diversity, and they have sworn to kill off any who do—like you and your new business unit, for instance.

I came to call this avoidance of deviation, diversity, and negative consequences “life in a minefield”. People spend their time and energy figuring out how to avoid getting blown up. Picture, for a minute, a life almost entirely composed of decisions about how to *avoid* negative consequences—a life about what *not* to do. This is the *normal* view of life. How *could* anyone find meaning in it?

## Meme No. 2—Peer Orientation

All memes in normative systems directly or indirectly enforce external dependency. This one demonstrates that very clearly. “Peer orientation” is normality’s benchmark. It says, “The majority opinion is the right opinion. To know what is right, find out what most people think.” All we know for sure about the majority opinion is that it is almost never the best answer. But notice how it answers a qualitative issue quantitatively? That’s more obsession with the material to the exclusion of the spiritual—form and process without purpose.

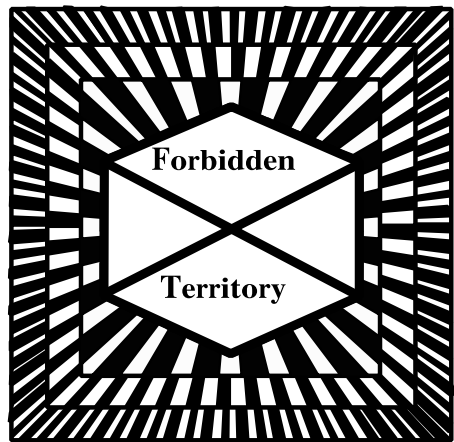
Growth, change, and progress don’t come from majority rule. Everett Rogers broke new ground when he studied how innovations are actually adopted. He found that the “new” is created by “Innovators”, the 2.5 percent of any normally distributed population who have the personal strength to be minorities of one. On a bell curve, they are +3 standard deviations from the mean, from “normal”. They are *major* deviants. Innovations first move to “Early Adopters”. These are people who think more independently than most. They are not totally committed to the status quo. They look for ways to make things work better. They are the first ones to try any new solution that holds promise. When they find one that works, they adopt it. That, in effect, endorses it to the balance of the population, the “Early Majority” and the “Late Majority”. Once that hap-



pens, it's O.K. for "normal" people to do it this way, because it has become "the way we do things around here".

Realize that "normal" people do not adopt innovation because they make an independent, thoughtful evaluation of it. They are imitators. Their lives are about things that are "approved". This is what external dependence is all about. Normal people avoid the risk of making a mistake, which might occur if they thought for themselves. Now ask yourself, "How can a person who will not think for himself or herself find meaning in life?" Obviously, being confined to forms and processes, the *mechanics* of life, that person can't. Being "normal" and finding meaning in life are mutually exclusive. To "be normal" is not a goal of life. It's a goal of machinery.

"Normal" is that wasteland where people believe they are avoiding negative consequences by carefully following the system's norms. They're partially right. Negative consequences are imposed on those who deviate from the system's norms by those who swore to uphold them—The Early and Late Majority. These are the status quo police. They are externally dependent themselves. They force external dependency and extrinsic motivation on others. These are the functionaries, people who perform required actions with no knowledge of their purpose. In any social institution, the chief functionary is typically its head—the head of the church, the head of state. In most companies, it's the CEO. Enforcing conformity to the norms is top management's real job. People become top management precisely because they are the most aggressively loyal conformists. If you've heard of "the cloning factor" in corporations, now you know what it means. Of course most top managers have no vision. If they did, they wouldn't be top managers. They fear vision and creativity, no matter what buzzwords they preach.



Under the rule of the status quo police, the system's original spiritual state is forbidden territory.

Let's be very clear about this. Normative systems impose a view of life on the people in them that includes only material states—forms and processes. This *denies people access to meaning which denies them the right to their own spiritual existence*. This is true of any normative system, regardless of the area of life it controls—government, education, law, business, or religion. Perhaps the infantry soldiers of the U.S. Army described normalcy best—“Ours is not to wonder why. Ours is but to do—and die.”

### ***Meme No. 3—Sanctions against Questioning and Exploring***

Kids intuitively seek meaning. They ask, “Why?” Their parents, who've learned not to ask that question, teach their children not to ask it. In the process, they unwittingly drive their kids into a meaningless existence. They get a lot of help from teachers, principals, priests, ministers, rabbis, and other adults. Two of the more popular admonitions against asking “why?” that I remember from my childhood, were “Curiosity killed the cat” and, “When you're older, you'll understand”. If you've ever asked *why* your company had some particular practice, I'll bet the answer you got was, “Because that's the way we do it around here.” It means, “I don't know why and don't ask!”

### ***Meme No. 4—Gender Jail***

Perhaps the most discussed polarity in any society is the difference between male and female. Yet Torrance points out:

Creativity, by its very nature, requires both sensitivity and independence. In our culture, sensitivity is definitely a feminine virtue, while independence is a masculine value.

What could be a more intimidating way to discourage creativity and independent thought than by accusing a person, especially a child, of violating his/her gender? Remember, gender is the *primary* means, in our normative culture, of affirming a person's existence. The first question we all ask upon hearing of a newborn baby is, “Is it a boy or a girl?”

Yet in *Creativity: Flow and the Psychology of Discovery and Invention*, Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi describes how comfortable creative people are with their own paradoxical traits—characteristics “normally” considered mutually exclusive. Creative people are *both* highly energetic and quiet and peaceful. They are both smart and naive, playful and disciplined, extroverted

and introverted, humble and proud, conservative and rebellious, passionate and objective. They are equally comfortable with convergent and divergent thinking, with fantasy and reality, with things intangible and things tangible, with both spiritual and material states. These people are definitely *not* “normal”. They’re *integrative*.

### ***Meme No. 5—Equating Divergency with Mental Illness, Perversity or Evil***

Normative systems warn that any divergence from their tacit beliefs is unhealthy and sick. It must be cured. Children are taught very early that to be different is to be bad, inferior, even mentally ill. When someone applies this view to an entire group of people, we call it bigotry. Yet the protectors of the status quo constantly apply it to creative, integrative individuals to prevent the inquisitive thinking that might challenge and dislodge established memes.

### ***Meme No. 6—The Dichotomy between Work and Play***

I discovered this one when I was a kid. I called it the “Castor Oil Syndrome.” If you enjoy something, if it’s fun, it’s bad for you—it’s worthless. Conversely, if you hate it, it’s good for you—it’s worthwhile. It “builds character”. Play is fun; therefore, it’s “bad”. Work is “castor oil”. It’s good for us because we dislike it so much. What was this nonsense? Well, I first heard it in church. It’s one of the core neuroses of our Puritan/Judeo-Christian heritage. If we really enjoy something, it’s not worth any redemption points with the Big Scorekeeper in the Sky. Do we hate work simply because we’ve been convinced that it must be joyless to be worthwhile? Do you suppose there might be some correlation between hating work and not finding meaning in it?

Human systems originated to solve problems, to improve mankind’s well-being. But normative systems are the ultimate Catch-22s. Because they can’t adapt, they must perpetuate the problem they were established to solve in order to perpetuate their own existence. Without “Original Sin”, for example, Christianity has no reason for being. Most psychological therapy doesn’t advocate self-actualization. It advocates normality, which guarantees its practitioners an endless supply of neuroses.

The two columns below summarize the traits of the formative and normative phases of social institutions. Because normative systems are “ei-

ther-or” in nature, they adhere to the traits on the right, excluding and punishing those on the left.

## FORMATIVE

spiritual  
soul  
theory  
design  
synthetical  
intangible  
holistic  
see  
function  
right-brained  
qualitative  
diverse  
distinctive  
inclusive  
people in charge of the system  
creative learning

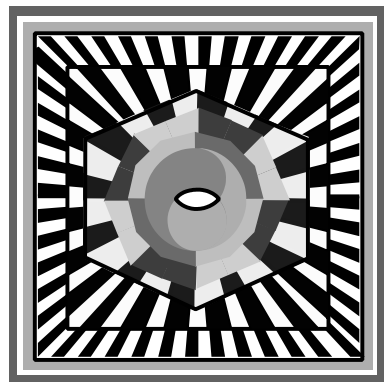
## NORMATIVE

material  
body  
fact  
structure  
analytical  
tangible  
fragmented  
do  
form  
left-brained  
quantitative  
homogenous  
commoditized  
exclusive  
system in charge of the people  
learning by authority

## The Integrative Phase

The integrative phase means unifying the fragments of the normative phase by recognizing *both* the spiritual and material states of a system, *both* its principal complements and its original purpose. It doesn't mean throwing away what exists. It means discovering the meaning behind it. It often requires re-designing the system, based on its original intent, to fit current conditions.

The integrative phase is an *open, adaptive* system. It resolves the Catch-22s we see in the normative phase. People know the system's original purpose—its *Why*. An integrative system is like H<sub>2</sub>O in its liquid state, water. It recognizes both its spiritual and material states and continually flows back and forth between them. Because it is tightly linked to its other principal complement in its environment,



*An integrative system recognizes both its spiritual and material states.*

it adapts its forms and processes to external changes. It is fluid rather than rigid.

If you understand the difference between the formative and normative phases of a system, understanding the integrative phase is easy. Integrate the formative and normative, the spiritual and the material, and you get a whole system.

People in open, integrative systems continue to acknowledge the system's origin, its two principal complements, and its intent. They understand the basis of unity between the principal complements, even after the system has become large and materially complex. Therefore, they can see the *meaning* behind its forms and processes. They can see the relationships between causes and effects. They know *why* things do or don't make sense. They know what to change and when it needs to be changed. Unlike within a normative system, whose complexity is incomprehensible, people can comfortably function in the complexity of an integrative system because they have the foundation of *purpose* for organizing all the details.

In an integrative or open, adaptive system, people practice *inclusion* of diversity rather than *exclusion*. They transcend dualism. That keeps the system integrated even after it is concretely complex. They are concerned with both function and form because they focus on how things are complementary, how they "fit together". They remember that their goal is to accomplish the system's original intent. Subsystems evolve interdependently rather than independently.

We have many examples of open, adaptive, integrative systems in nature. Ant and bee colonies are two of the more popular ones. But any ecosystem, no matter how you define it, is a complex of interdependent open, adaptive systems.

Within the realm of human experience, there are many examples of systems that *began* as open systems—in business, in government (democracy, the founding philosophy of the U.S. government), and in education. But an integrative system remains open and adaptive after it is fully operational. By this criteria, the only examples of ongoing, integrative systems that I know of are specific people. Integrative people:

1. Have a sense of purpose for their own lives;
2. Are grounded in the originating purpose of whatever system they work in;

3. Are keenly focused on “the other” principal complement;
4. Work toward the reconciliation of antagonistic separation, the reunification of parts into wholes. They live to unify.

Consider Abraham Lincoln. Although he became president long after our originally open system of government had entered its closed, normative phase, he himself was grounded in its original purpose—a government “of the people, by the people, and for the people”.

Albert Einstein was one of history’s preeminent integrative thinkers. Fritjof Capra, a physicist who wrote *The Turning Point*, elegantly portrayed the integrative view when he said, “At the rate we’re going, physics will prove spirituality”. If you know John Lennon’s music or his writings, you know that he, too, was an integrative. The *Tao Teh King* (also *Tao Te Ching*) by Lao Tzu is a complete work devoted to transcending dualism into unity. Socrates, also, was an integrative.

The best-known integrative in Western culture was Jesus Christ. I’m referring only to the man, not to the social institutions that co-opted his name to perpetuate the same normative, dualistic antagonism he transcended. At church, I heard two very different definitions of God. Most often, God was portrayed as the Supreme Being, the ultimate judge in the battle between good and evil. This was a God to fear. Once in a while, I’d hear that “God is love”, “God is unity”, “God is one”, meaning the unified whole of life. I knew these definitions contradicted one another. Now I know why. The first is not only God in man’s image, it’s God in man’s *normative* image. The second is the integrative view of God. Therefore, an integrative person is one who is “made in God’s image”.

Science has been a bit more tolerant of integratives than other areas of society. Integrative thinking in a normative world has often literally been a matter of life or death.

The ninety-one people Csikszentmihalyi interviewed for his book *Creativity: Flow and the Psychology of Discovery and Innovation* are undoubtedly integratives. They’ve made significant contributions in many different fields. They’ve come from many countries. But they all had one thing in common: they all had a specific purpose, pursued it, and accomplished it. Their work had meaning to others, but it had great meaning to them *first*. They didn’t do it for recognition. They weren’t *externally* motivated.

They did it because they saw an opportunity to make things work better that was meaningful to them. They were *internally* motivated. In Joseph Campbell's words, integrative people are those whose "*life experiences on the purely physical plane... have resonance within [their] own innermost being and reality, so that [they] actually feel the rapture of being alive.*"

Creativity, purpose, meaning, spirit, origin, art, authenticity, integrity, unity, and the sense of being fully alive are inextricably linked.

I learned the following exercise from George Land. It allows people actually to experience the difference between a normative and an integrative perspective. Following is a list of word pairs. Create two sentences using each pair. First, place the words "either" and "or" between the words. For example, "A person's opinion is either factual or intuitive." Then, using the same sentence, place "both" and "and" between the words, such as, "A person's opinion is both factual and intuitive."

Conforming—Deviant

Following—Leading

Factual—Intuitive

Linear—Pictorial

Concrete—Abstract

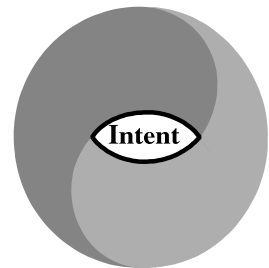
Material—Spiritual

Known—Unknown

Tactical—Strategic

How does each make you feel? Notice how the normative version ("either-or") allows you to put the subject of the sentence in one box or the other and close the box, while the integrative version ("both-and") doesn't. If there is a box in your view of the integrative, at least it's an open box. The normative version separates; it's exclusive. The integrative version unites; it's inclusive.

If you've come across Eastern religions, you've probably heard paradoxical statements such as, "To have it all, you have to give it all up". Viktor Frankl, who wrote *Man's Search for Meaning*, founded Logotherapy. Logos is a Greek word that denotes meaning. Therefore, "Logotherapy" means correcting an absence of meaning in one's life or, a process for finding meaning. Its principal technique is "paradoxical intention". If you've never seen this term before, what does it probably mean? How about "the reconciliation of apparent opposites through a



common intention”. And what is that? It’s the definition of the origin of an *open* system—where its *meaning* is.

Understanding integrative systems allows us to understand why “paradoxical intention” works. It moves the person’s focus away from tangible effects to intangible, originating cause. It reconciles antagonistic principal complements. Remember Christ’s “Love thy enemy”? Different words, same meaning. “Paradoxical intention” and “Love thy enemy” mean embracing what the person rejects or, more accurately, fears. It transcends duality into unity and fills the void of meaning. This raises an interesting question. Do you suppose that, by “Heaven”, Christ meant a life *with* meaning and, that “Hell” is a life *without* it?

## Summary

All systems, whether natural or man-made, begin as intangible designs. They have a purpose that unifies their principal complements. We can understand the origins of man-made systems. The true origin of natural systems is still unknown—regardless of

|                    |                            |                            |
|--------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|
|                    | <b>Open</b>                | <b>Closed</b>              |
| <b>Formative</b>   | Man-made<br>(and Natural?) | Man-made<br>and<br>Natural |
| <b>Normative</b>   |                            | Man-made                   |
| <b>Integrative</b> | Natural<br>(and Man-made?) |                            |

what science and theology claim to know. The formative phase translates a system’s spiritual state into its material state. Those that fit well with their environment survive and prosper. Those that don’t, don’t.

Systems can originate as open or closed, but the majority of both natural and man-made systems appear to originate as closed systems. Once viable, however, man-made systems and natural systems develop very differently.

Natural systems may prosper for tens or hundreds of thousands of years because they are naturally open, adaptive, integrated systems, even though their design *may* have occurred by accident. (The concept of purposeful evolution challenges the traditional view that evolution occurs randomly. The traditional definition may be due more to normative thinking than to reality. We’ve yet to answer that one.)

Man-made systems, including social institutions, from individual businesses to entire societies, become normative, closed systems. At least in the Western world, their maximum life span is rarely more than a few hundred years. Most don't live that long. Organized religions are exceptions to that rule. Many have lasted thousands of years. But remember, they are often about a next life, not this one. Their founding hypothesis can't be tested. If there is no next life, who's going to tell us?

Because they deny the spiritual state—originating cause—normative systems produce the *Catch-22s* that make life senseless and meaningless. Being normal means living a life that has no meaning to the person living it. The solution is quite literally to change our view of reality—to move forward into an open, integrative view of it. This is extremely difficult, primarily because it's more about unlearning old stuff than about learning new stuff. To put a new engine in a car, you first have to remove the old one. In the U.S., as in any culture, we've all been subjected to thousands of memes that come from a normative view of reality. Before we get into the deeply personal issues of moving from a normative to an integrative perspective, let's look at the memes we'll have to unlearn in the United States, and where they came from.