
**HOW TO DEAL
WITH THE UNCERTAINTY
OF UNSTABLE CONTEXTS?**

10 REFERENCES FOR UNKNOWN SCENARIOS

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POINTS

UNDERSTAND **CONFUSING IDEAS**
RECOGNIZE **UNSTABLE CONTEXTS**
IDENTIFY **BIFURCATION POINTS**
EXPLORE **PERSONAL LIMITS**
ANTICIPATE **NEW RESPONSES**
TRY **FRESH MOVEMENTS**
RENEW **INNER CERTAINTIES**
UNVEIL **INVISIBLE KNOTS**
UNFOLD **MEANINGFUL STORIES**
HOLD **INSPIRING EXPERIENCES**

UNDERSTAND

CONFUSING IDEAS

The “unknown” we face stems from two key areas. Firstly, it comes from the sheer complexity and instability of our operating environment —think rapid technological shifts like the AI revolution, evolving market dynamics, or unexpected global events. Secondly, it arises from our own uncertainty and confusion as we try to navigate these dynamics. Crucially, this means uncertainty isn’t an inherent property of the context; rather, it’s about how we, as individuals, perceive and interpret that context. While complexity is an objective feature of the environment, it’s our personal mental map of that reality that breeds uncertainty.

Uncertainty

Uncertainty is fundamentally an observer’s experience. It’s that feeling of navigating situations when you don’t have clear, fixed points of reference to predict how things will unfold. It’s a state of mind that emerges when there’s a gap between what we expect and how events might actually develop—a “predictability gap”. How we choose to “bridge” or “fill” that predictability gap—the assumptions we make, the narratives we create—will directly shape the quality of our experience, for better or worse. Importantly, uncertainty itself isn’t inherently positive or negative. It’s simply the state we’re in when facing a context where the future course of events lacks precision.

Complexity

Complexity characterizes the dynamics of all living systems, including our organizations and markets. Conceptually, it refers to a system’s internal dynamics—how new patterns of behavior and unexpected outcomes emerge from the constant interrelationship of its diverse parts. The degree of complexity in any system is shaped by: the variety of its elements, the interdependence of their relationships, and the multiplicity of scenarios these interactions can create.

Bewilderment

Bewilderment is what happens when our trusted models for understanding reality break down. Faced with highly unstable events—perhaps a sudden market collapse, a disruptive innovation fundamentally changing an industry, or a global pandemic—our usual technical, cultural, or even ideological reference points can suddenly seem meaningless or irrelevant. If uncertainty is the limit of our predictive models, bewilderment is the limit of our effectiveness. It occurs when reality simply outpaces our existing frameworks, paradigms, and ways of working.

Effectively dealing with uncertainty, then, isn’t just about analyzing the external situation; it’s about managing our own “observer state”—our mindset, assumptions, and reactions—so that we can meaningfully “dialogue” with the surrounding complexity. What does it mean to “dialogue” with complexity? It means cultivating the ability to: Accurately read and interpret disruptive events and shifting facts; develop and explore alternative responses and strategic moves; and effectively manage new interventions even as the situation remains highly complex or unstable.

RECOGNIZE

UNSTABLE CONTEXTS

We're navigating an era of profound transformation, largely driven by new and emerging societal and business contexts. These are systems—be it industries, markets, or even work culture—transitioning to new structural forms, often characterized by ambiguous rules and unpredictable shifts. This structural instability signifies a system that has lost its traditional anchors and is actively experimenting with new ways of operating and coexisting.

Features of the Unknown

Constant Flux: This describes the relentless pace of sudden, profound changes that disrupt business as usual and our daily lives. It means the system isn't just experiencing a temporary blip; it's unlikely to revert to its previous stable state. As a result, many established rules, roles (like job descriptions), and work habits are inevitably being reshaped or discarded.

Deep-seated Instability: This points to a system's internal disarray, often triggered by a crisis that has fractured or severely weakened its cohesive elements. In such emerging contexts, you might observe an undercurrent of suspicion, a diminished sense of belonging among team members, and survival behaviors, all stemming from this lack of integrating reference points.

Unpredictable Behaviors: This relates to the novel, sometimes surprising, ways people react as they attempt to adapt to ongoing changes. Individuals and teams actively seek new strategies to cope with the unfamiliar. People may become more sensitive, and decisions, even seemingly small ones, can trigger unforeseen reactions.

Possibilities of the Unknown

Accelerated Trend Adoption: Emerging contexts often show a heightened receptivity to new initiatives, tools, or habits. Think about how quickly remote collaboration tools or certain AI applications have been adopted. This openness creates fertile ground for innovation, the uptake of new behaviors (like flexible work arrangements), the integration of new technologies, and a greater willingness to consider new ideas and strategic principles.

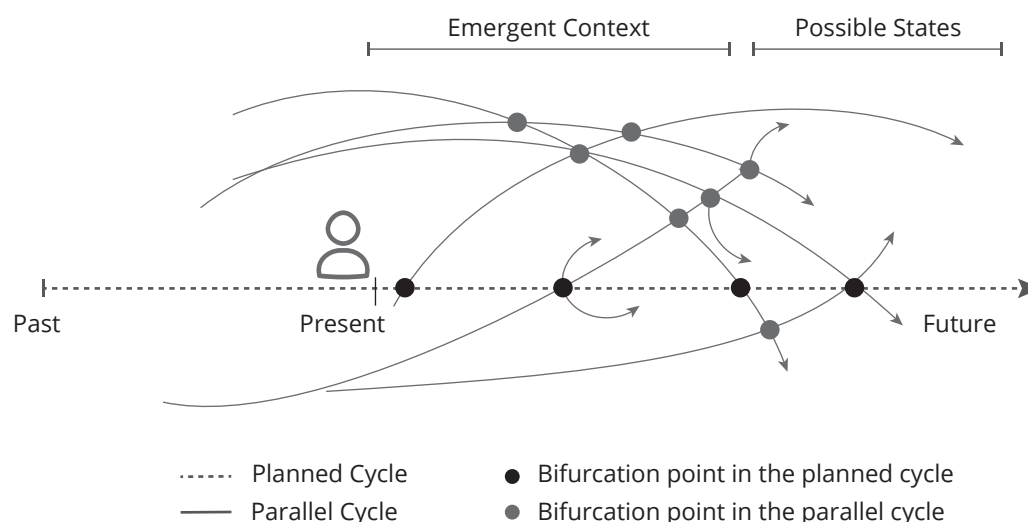
Paradigm Shifts: When familiar frames of reference weaken, systems are pushed to seek out new anchors. This can lead to the adoption of fundamentally new conceptual, technical, ideological, or cultural parameters. It's often during these times that new leaders emerge, fresh voices are heard (often from unexpected places), and new cultural or business movements gain traction, offering novel ways to navigate the lack of clear orientation.

Embracing Change: The drive for survival often becomes a powerful catalyst for change. Consequently, emerging systems might experiment more freely—and sometimes with greater risk—with new ways of working, different job roles, or new types of partnerships and collaborations. This exploration and adoption of change is a fundamental part of the quest to find a new, more stable equilibrium.

IDENTIFY

BIFURCATION POINTS

Traditional strategic planning often charts a linear course from the present to a desired future. However, operating alongside this planned trajectory are numerous “parallel cycles”—significant unfolding trends or forces such as rapid technological advancements, geopolitical instability, climate-related events, or shifts in economic policy. When these cycles intersect with our plans, or with each other, they create “bifurcation points”, critical junctures that can steer us toward entirely new and unexpected conditions. At these bifurcation points, the straightforward path you envisioned can suddenly branch out into “multiple possible states” or future scenarios. This explosion of possibilities means we can no longer count on a single, predictable outcome from our initial plans; a diverse range of futures could emerge. The more complex the operating environment—meaning, the more of these influential parallel cycles intersecting—the greater the number of potential future states. And naturally, a wider array of possible outcomes fuels greater uncertainty for leaders and their organizations.



How do turning points emerge?

A Broadening Cast of Influencers: Turning points are often spurred by an expanding array of actors, each with varying levels of resources, influence, and organizational structures. This proliferation of players diversifies the interests and demands shaping the landscape.

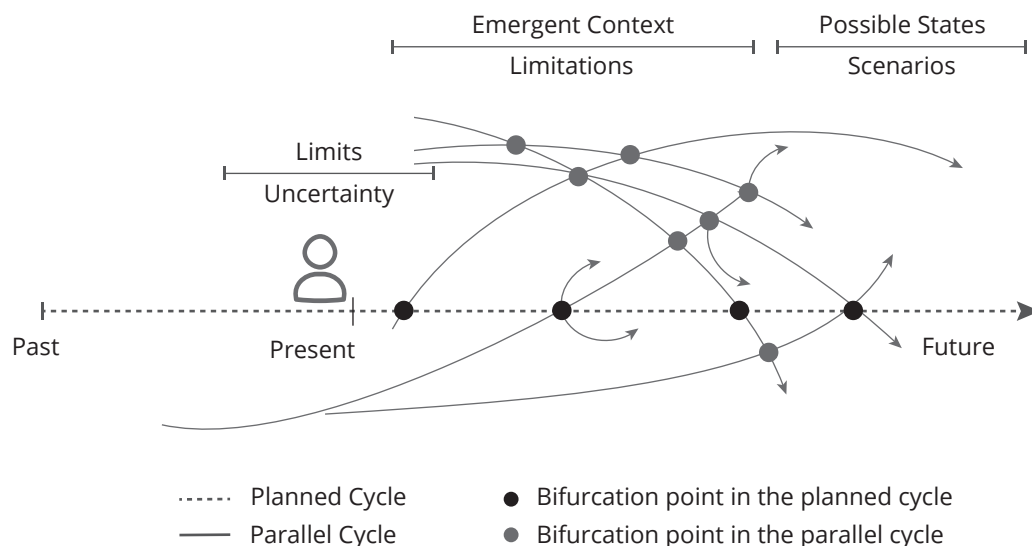
Hyper-Connected Networks: Today's environment is characterized by intricate webs of interdependence, amplified by the sheer speed of technological change and the volatility of global interactions. This dynamic dramatically extends the impact of effects, accelerating the speed of these impacts and their subsequent consequences.

Exponential Change & Disruption: We're experiencing a multiplication of novelties—breakthroughs in areas like AI, biotechnology, or renewable energy—that often manifest as sharp disruptions to the status quo. These exponential changes can profoundly transform business models, societal norms, and daily life far quicker than linear progressions.

EXPLORE

PERSONAL LIMITS

In making present-day decisions, we often base them on just one or two anticipated future scenarios or states of our situations. How events actually unfold shapes the alternatives available to an organization; some expected trends will materialize, while others won't. Our unique experiences essentially define our field of vision—what we notice and what remains invisible to us. We interpret events through a complex filter of our perceptions, thoughts, emotions, past experiences, intuition, expectations, and projections about the future. Consequently, when we observe what's happening in our context, we automatically assign meaning to those events, turning “reality” into our own subjective image or interpretation. To truly broaden this “image” of reality, then, we must consciously explore the boundaries of our own experiences, aiming to transcend the self-imposed confines of our personal models and perceptions.



The known world is just an image

The complexity of your operating environment creates what we call **limitations** for any project or plan; these are the genuine external constraints or challenges you face (e.g., economic downturns, regulatory hurdles, technological disruptions). These are the external causes affecting a plan.

In contrast, **limits** are not dictated by these external factors that might seem to affect your growth. Instead, limits stem from your own personal interpretations—how you perceive those situations and define what's possible or restrictive for you and your team.

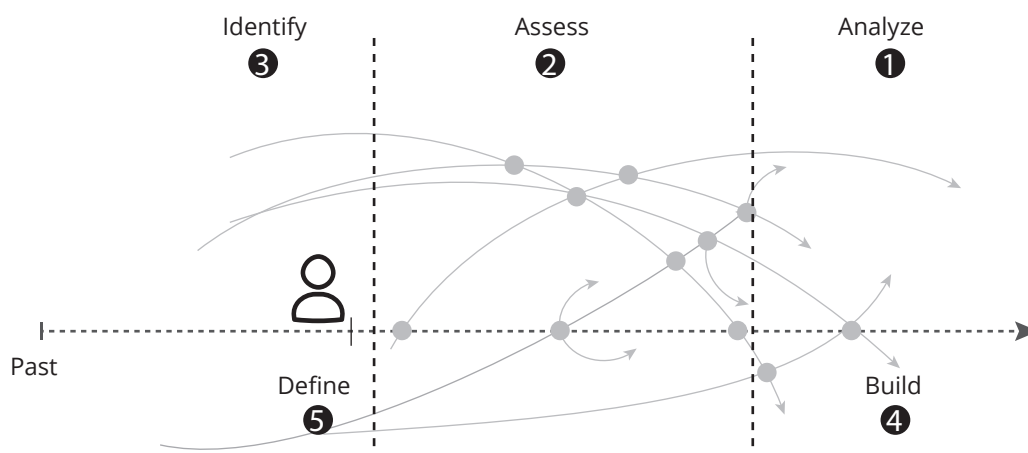
This is why organizations operating in the same market or region—facing identical external limitations (like economic conditions, legal frameworks, or technological hurdles)—can have vastly different internal limits. Some organizations will perceive “enemies” or insurmountable barriers where others spot opportunities. Simply put: limitations are features of the context; Limits are features of your mindset. The crucial difference between **limitations** and **limits** boils down to your perception of the situation. Your limits are born from the internal “negotiations” or conclusions you draw when faced with the external limitations of your context.

NEW RESPONSES

Organizations inevitably face moments where the future broadens from a single projected path into a wide spectrum of possible states. When the present moment becomes a critical bifurcation point, fundamentally altering operating conditions, it marks a clear boundary between the familiar territory of the known and the uncharted landscape of the unknown. Our history is known territory; looking forward, however, there are few certainties about the potential landscapes we might encounter.

Five intervention points

- 1. Analyze Possible States of Future:** Actively identify and explore the potential transformations your context might undergo as various bifurcation points evolve.
- 2. Assess Current Capabilities & Gaps:** Take stock of your existing resources and capabilities. Based on this, develop alternative plans tailored for different emerging contexts, and proactively train your people to navigate these potential future states effectively.
- 3. Identify Potential Challenges:** Cultivate a keen awareness and sensitivity to shifts and movements within your broader context. This vigilance will help you anticipate necessary structural changes within your organization before they become urgent crises.
- 4. Build a Support Ecosystem:** Proactively assemble the necessary requirements and create a robust network of internal and external resources. This ecosystem will be vital for supporting complex decision-making when navigating unfamiliar and challenging landscapes.
- 5. Define a Guiding North Star:** Create a compelling and inspiring vision of the future. This will serve as a crucial reference point to guide the development.



TRY

FRESH MOVEMENTS

We navigate our reality based on the definitions and narratives we construct about our experiences. When confronted with new, “emergent” moments of change, our brains instinctively scan for risks and threats, often quickly overlaying those initial feelings with stories that solidify our interpretation of the facts before us. The inherent instability of these emergent periods, however, can actually prompt us to refocus on aspects of our work and lives that we might otherwise overlook when things are stable and in a comfortable equilibrium. This means that the often-unseen flip side of instability is a rich field of opportunities waiting to be explored. If we can consciously step back from our initial judgments and ingrained statements about a situation, we can better explore its hidden dynamics and identify the genuine innovation possibilities these disruptive moments can offer.

Use the **unexpected** to explore alternatives

Disruptive situations often reveal new paths for exploration simply because abrupt changes can suddenly expose facets of your operations, market, or personal approach that were previously obscured by routine. It’s precisely during these turbulent conditions that we tend to be most attuned and sensitive to underlying changes. Such instability can breed more opportunities for innovation, partly because it’s often easier to experiment with new behaviors, processes, or habits when the entire context is already in flux and transitioning toward new ways of operating or living.

Use the **fragility** to explore new supports

When established reference points—like old strategies or market certainties—weaken, it naturally prompts us to look toward new horizons and consider different anchors. Challenging the conventional framework, or seeing it falter, can empower us to seek out new networks, advisory groups, or guiding principles for our daily decisions and long-term strategy. When instability shakes our usual “safe havens” or comfort zones, it can create an opening to forge new connections, explore different ideas, and even redefine the meaning and application of core values and principles within the organization.

Use the **paradox** to explore other decisions

Embracing or observing paradoxical behaviors—actions that seem contradictory yet hold a certain truth—can help break us out of binary, either/or thinking by introducing a richer repertoire of options. Paradoxes inherently question our assumptions about “what should be right” or the “only way” to do things. They can challenge the fear of change by illuminating new roles, unconventional ideas, different strategic orientations, and fresh choices that weren’t previously considered. This exploration allows us to make different decisions, potentially freeing ourselves and our organizations from paths heavily conditioned by past history, both individual and collective.

INNER CERTAINTIES

The way we perceive a situation—our “gaze”—effectively creates the territory we operate in, and this perception is deeply conditioned by our past experiences and historical references. To truly renew our inner certainties, we must be willing to examine these deep-seated conditioning factors that shape how we interpret situations. Every situation you encounter holds various possibilities, not just immediately favorable ones. New events always trigger changes in the context, each with different potential consequences. These possibilities are the spectrum of what could happen as events unfold. Critically, your ability to seize opportunities for transformation hinges on the explanations you construct about the possibilities inherent in your present circumstances.

Extend the outside world



This involves actively scanning and engaging with external **possibilities** to deepen your understanding and broaden your map of the context's characteristics. This process includes: incorporating a wider range of actors into your analysis of event dynamics; identifying key trends that could impact the relationships between these actors; projecting various possible future states that could emerge and transform current situations.

Map New Variables

Add new descriptive elements.
Stay open to new appearances.

Identify reciprocal effects

Link trend impacts together.
Foresee potential ripple effects.

Anticipate bifurcation points

Connect trends to bifurcations.
Analyze bifurcation point effects.

Redefine the inner world



This focuses on internal work: seizing **opportunities** to reframe your interpretations and the explanations you build around the external possibilities you've identified. This process involves: updating your cognitive frameworks to broaden your interpretations; clarifying the underlying attitudes that shape your interpretations and explanations; examining stereotyped behavioral that might be distorting how you relate to the facts.

Update beliefs

Contrast statements with concepts.
Welcome challenging viewpoints.

Recognize moods

Describe your emotional framework.
Convert discouragement to response.

Defies habits

Avoid compulsive old recipes.
Inspire people to discover.

UNVEIL

INVISIBLE KNOTS

We rarely remember verbatim descriptions of past events; instead, we collect meaningful elements and insights to apply to future experiences. This inner landscape holds a treasured repertoire of responses we deploy to cope with various situations. It's an internal guidance system that shapes our daily actions and defines the boundaries of what we consider known versus unknown in our lives. When facing unfamiliar or unknown conditions, we instinctively turn to these internal references to make sense of external facts. These references organize themselves into four key dimensions:

Emotions

These define **what you feel** and are the first internal references activated to frame the facts. Your emotions significantly affect the quality of your connection with these events.



Notice

What are your recurring emotions in key situations?
What specific words or triggers activate them?
How do these emotions manifest in your body?

Explanations

These define **what you think** and house the internal narratives and justifications that support your point of view, judgments, ideas, and statements or your personal script.



Identify

What are the immediate thoughts that surface?
Which emotions typically trigger these thoughts?
What are your most representative words or phrases?

Perceptions

These define **what you "see"**—the specific elements, and details you identify, recognize, emphasize in any given situation. These filters directly affect your description and understanding of what you observe.



Analyze

What are the characteristics of the situation?
How you expand or enrich your descriptions?
Is it possible to consider other perspectives?

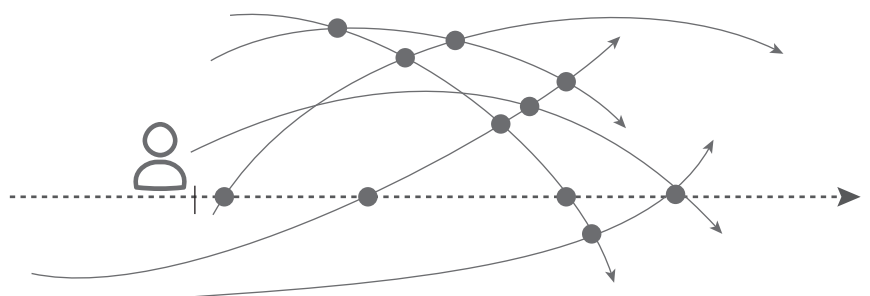
Behaviors

These define **what you do** and encompass your ingrained habits and responses—whether they are compulsive, reflective, defensive, collaborative, or reactive under pressure.



Explore

What alternatives are available in this situation?
What are the potential effects of each alternative?
What other viable options could be considered?



UNFOLD

MEANINGFUL STORIES

The stories we tell ourselves—our narratives—define the meaning of everyday events. They describe, explain, and justify what happens around us and, crucially, what happens to us as we navigate unknown or uncertain situations. This collection of narratives forms our “personal script” —an invisible underlying structure that organizes and gives coherence to our visible, day-to-day stories. Within these narratives, “arguments” are the threads that define causal relationships, explaining why things happen as they do. Therefore, if you consciously challenge the arguments embedded in your narratives, you begin to challenge and potentially reshape your deeper script. Trying out different answers to the same recurring questions can help make this invisible structure visible.

Script

This is the fundamental structure of meaning that guides your overall stance and position in life and work. Think of it as a hidden, internal network that profoundly shapes your inner world and default responses.



Narratives

These are the specific stories you tell that describe daily scenes and give shape to events. They are the visible, spoken or unspoken explanations you use to make sense of and “dialogue” with the facts you encounter.

Arguments

These define the cause-and-effect relationships you perceive between different situations or elements within your narratives. They are like the crucial pieces of a puzzle, determining how various components logically fit together in your understanding of events.



Explore the narratives

Pay attention to “compulsive” or emotionally charged words; they often signal underlying impulsive reactions. These words might be attempts to soothe or manage specific emotions.

Explore the specific language you use to describe what you feel. This can provide valuable clues about how your narratives are shaping those feelings.

Examine the arguments that underpin your key decisions. In doing so, you may uncover clues about the invisible emotional links that keep you attached to a particular script or way of seeing things.

HOLD

INSPIRING EXPERIENCES

Our engagement with everyday facts is fundamentally a relationship with our own subjective interpretations and explanations of those situations. In essence, this relationship is with a “virtual reality” that we construct—a mosaic of our thoughts, emotions, and habits. Our experiences can be seen as “subjective packages” that arise from the interplay of two core processes: the content or cognitive interpretation of events, and our emotional position or feeling regarding that content. The content framework is shaped by our cognitive interpretations, while our emotional responses are influenced by physiological reactions linked to these interpretations.

Rewrite the script



This involves consciously managing the **content** you use to describe your circumstances. It means curating your descriptions to avoid harmful, irrelevant, or distorted content that can cloud your experiences. To refine your script: explore points like recovering the true meaning of words to avoid nonsense; not adding interpretations that don't exist in the facts themselves; and setting limits on routine to prevent its intrusion into your projects.

Preserve the value of your words

Prune meaningless verbiage.

Seek enriching conversations.

Avoid contaminating your stories

Avoid fabricating situations.

Know your reality's limits.

Frame the routine

Identify invasive sources.

Set “wake up calls”.

Take care of the feelings



This means actively addressing the **moods** that subtly shape your personal and professional decisions. Your feelings define your particular “map” of any territory and significantly influence the circumstances you perceive and face. To nurture your emotional state: explore actions like avoiding aggressions and threats that could cloud your alternatives; transforming hopelessness into opportunities to bring something new to your map; and nourishing your inspiration to expand your enthusiasm.

Avoid contexts of hostility

Exit threatening situations.

Use breath against compulsions.

Use frustration as a lesson

Note frustration-holding words.

Explore realities with curiosity.

Move from inspiration

Ask challenging questions.

Activate enthusiasm for paths.