

George's Dream: Deliberate Synergy

Joe Gammal

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Imagine That!

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Imagine That! celebrates the first 50 years of Synectics, a set of highly specific innovation techniques and behaviors that help individuals and teams work together in creative ways that are positive and action-oriented. Elements include strong collaborative approaches that invite speculation, fun, courage and idea development.

They originally derived from observational analysis of thousands of audio and videotape recordings of live invention sessions and meetings. They have been used successfully around the world in a wide variety of situations over the last 50 years.

The book is a collection of stories and articles from current and former staff members, clients and other associates.



George's Dream: Deliberate Synergy

Joe Gammal

In December, 2008, George Prince wrote:

Dear Joe,

...When I had to give up and retire I was working on a dream. How to get everyone to live the Synectics supportive way. I titled this dream Deliberate Synergy®. I did quite a bit of work on it and so you have a head start! My thought is that you and your remarkable team make this a reality. I am sending by mail where it stands. It is yours to tear apart as a team!

I had asked George how I might build a bridge between him and those of our current team who did not have the privilege of knowing him personally. This note was part of his reply.

He shared this dream and this challenge with others, including Marvin Smith. After George passed away in June 2009, Marvin and I, together with Terry Gilliam and others of our Synecticsworld team set about to realize George's dream. As we did so, we recognized the need for Deliberate Synergy not only in the world outside of Synectics but within ourselves and our team.



Deliberate Synergy – What it Means

Deliberate Synergy is a **way of being**, espoused and aspired to by George and all of us deep down. It is a picture of a desired way of living that brings out the best in people, and teams, with **frameworks** that help us understand it, and a myriad of **tools** to get to the desired state.

George described that vision of what it looks like, how it feels, how we're acting and behaving when we have Deliberate Synergy as follows:

“Synergy stands for that state of being when a person deals with him or herself and others in thoughtful, foresightful, considerate, appreciative ways and creates an interpersonal field that is supportive and helpful. It creates a relationship to match the heart's changeless needs, and leads to the most collaborative actions¹.”

He wrote about appreciation and gratitude and their impact on meaningfulness, individually and as a group:

“When you deliberately decide to appreciate people they—and you—are transformed.”

“Gratitude is a receptive energy. It engages your heart {while} appreciation is an energy you use proactively, with intention.”

“Appreciation used deliberately, purposefully, and proactively can transform almost any experience, no matter how challenging, into one you value and are grateful for.”

“There is universal drive for meaningfulness. Safety is freedom from any threat to meaningfulness”.

“A Deliberate Synergy group proclaims itself in minute particulars . . .” For example,

“No one is too preoccupied to put aside what he or she is doing and join someone having trouble (no matter if related to their project or the car won't start). You become aware of an invisible flow of information, support, and appreciation bits between members. It is as though the group is a circulatory system like a body, with white corpuscles to tell of trouble and summon anti-bodies. There is a constant exchange on the 'state of the union': feelings of exhilaration and satisfaction when all is well; distress and concern – and mobilization when the mission is threatened. You note an absence of rank. There is no sign of 'power over'.”

Deliberate Synergy is also a **Set of Frameworks** – maps or models of behavior that help to describe, illuminate, and explain the human dynamic. Some are already parts of core Synectics: Intent-Effect Matrix, Discount Revenge Syndrome, and Climate Energy relationship.

Others are newer, including the notion of “Field and Relationships” which George devoted much of his later years to understanding, and “The Journey to We” a new framework described later in this article.

Field & Relationships – An understanding of the nature of interpersonal fields is necessary to appreciate Deliberate Synergy. George believed “Each of us is a field of energy connected to every other thing in the world”². He further believed there is a unique field that exists within us, as well as one created between two people, and larger fields that encompass groups. Everything has an impact on field, either positively or negatively, and that field has memory. Brain research shows that long term memory is filled with the remnants of moments of high emotion, i.e. those strongly positive or negative deposits to the fields within and around us. With such moments, we’re like the proverbial elephant that never forgets.

Field uses the metaphor of a “container” that counts and holds positive and negative deposits. Dr John Gottman identified the existence of an emotional ‘field’ between individuals that had a powerful influence on their level of defensiveness. He called it Positive or Negative Sentiment Override. When the sum of interactions added up to appreciation, it resulted in lowered defensiveness and an inclination to interpret actions positively. When the sum equaled disrespect, the level of defensive behavior was high and interpretations were negative. The action may be the same but the interpretation could be opposite depending on the bias in the field. We also know from his work that it takes 5 positive affirmations to balance a single negative/withdrawal/discount. That bias is memory carried inside the field. We can assume from this and from our own experiences, that it

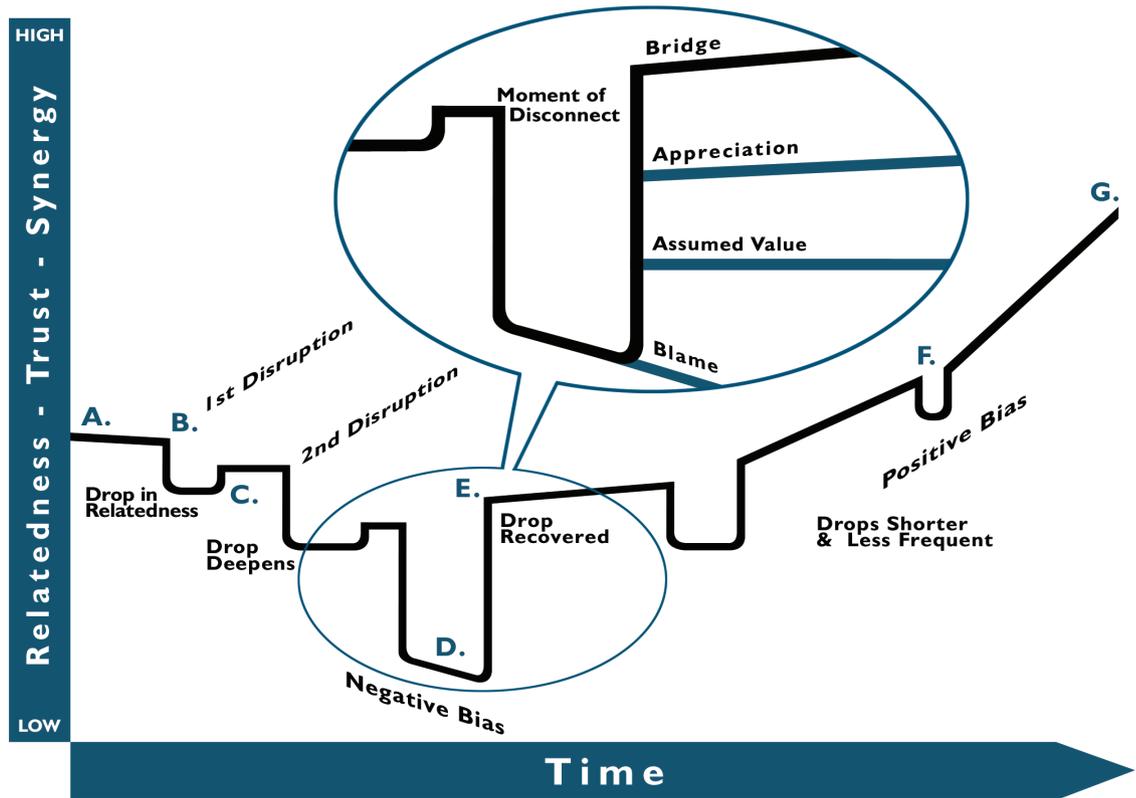
takes time and deliberate effort to turn a negative override to positive.

The practice of Deliberate Synergy has a **Set of Tools** – methods and exercises that can help teams get to the desired state. Some of the existing approaches (more to be invented) include:

- *Appreciation Exercises* – developing an appreciative state of mind; and proactively leveraging “appreciation as energy”³.
- *The Awareness Wheel*⁴ – or Self Wheel, described by George and used for mutual awareness as well.
- *Synectics Creative Problem Solving Diamond*
- *The Trust Formula (and Levels of Delegation)*
- *The Itemized Response/Developmental Feedback*
- *Six-step Reframe* – an NLP technique to tease out higher positive intention...then problem solve with and for each other⁶.
- *Unmentionables exercise* – a technique for anonymously raising issues for group discussion
- *Dialogue* – communicating, not in argument and discussion, but in dialogue to increase intimacy and deepen understanding, empathy, and the relationship⁷.

The remainder of this article offers an outline of a new framework for visualizing the effect of behaviors on our field and, more importantly, the effect of our responses to those behaviors, including such responses as the *appreciation* and *awareness* tools mentioned above.

The Journey to We – a Framework for Understanding Deliberate Synergy



The “Journey to We” (or the Relationship & Conflict Response Path) is a visual construct for understanding the impact of our behaviors on a relationship and the options we may choose to call upon in response. It maps over time how positive/negative the Field is between people.

Two people meet (*Marker A on the diagram*) and instantly create a field of relatedness, trust, and synergy which will strengthen or weaken

over time. We move along this relationship path until that first breakdown, the first gap between intent and effect, a moment of disillusionment, a moment of disruption (*B*). Often we do not express how we feel about it.

The downward spiral begins. Rather than addressing the issue, we often fall into one or more avoidance behaviors – we blame, we reserve final judgment and remain on guard, or

we give the benefit of the doubt. We may try to assume positive intent and persuade ourselves the person meant no harm and is only intending something mutually beneficial. This may create a small uptick in the relationship (C), but if we suppress our feelings, the person with whom we have an issue never becomes aware of the impact of their actions. They do not get the chance to consider how to act differently to get what they want for themselves and for us without negative effects.

The next time we feel discounted by that person, the drop is more significant because we are triggering not only the latest event but past events. We know that the brain creates neuro-pathways; each time a discount occurs, the pathway fires and is reinforced. Without clarification or addressing the issue, even “Assuming Positive Intent and Assuming Value” are incomplete in restoring the field and preventing the trigger from firing disproportionately the next time. This degradation of relatedness and deliberate synergy continues in a downward spiral. Soon a negative field bias is created and is reinforced with each disruption, each negative interpretation of behavior (D).

However, the downward spiral can be arrested and turned around (E). It requires us to begin with Assuming Value and Positive Intent, and then go beyond these to Proactive and Sincere Appreciation (received as validation or meaningfulness) and, finally, Bridging the Issue directly. Over time these actions create future pull toward the same positive behaviors. We stop discounting and feeling discounted, and we get things turned.

The goal is an accumulation of positive field that

is rooted in (1) mutual stated appreciation and validation, and (2) working through issues as they come up in an honest and open way (F). There is recognition that every issue is an opportunity for growing and learning and becoming even better. The comment “I have an issue” (or some signal phrase we create) is greeted with openness and anticipation instead of defensiveness. We deliberately want that relationship to be better. Those positive deposits through appreciation and through resolution create a strong positive field override, so that breakdowns occur less frequently and, when they do, they are minimally charged. The conflicts are not felt at an emotional level. There is a presumption of worth and value. We need the ability to give feedback, to identify weaknesses, and to work on them “with love” (as George wonderfully modeled).

If we are fortunate, we attain a level of relatedness, trust, and synergy that approaches George’s ideal, “a relationship to match the heart’s changeless needs, and leads to the most collaborative actions.” It’s a WE that comprehends the needs and growth of each individually and of the relationship (G).

The key steps to turn the negative spiral round ...or prevent it

- *Assuming Value and Positive Intent – important but insufficient.*

Assuming Value and Assuming Positive Intent are both cognitive/intellectual exercises. To Assume Value is to make an assumption that there may be some good, some value that can be found in an action or idea, regardless of how remote it may seem initially. To Assume Positive Intent, is to allow for the possibility there was no malice intended, but that the positive intention was

simply misaligned with that effect created. The former looks for the good in a *thing*, whereas the latter looks for the good in a *person*.

It can be dangerous ONLY to Assume Value and Positive Intent. Within a Synectics creative problem solving session, these work temporarily to stay open minded; however, if the behavior engendered any significant negative emotional response, then assuming value or positive intent is insufficient beyond the meeting. Our subconscious lays waiting for that trigger to occur again and adds to the 'discounts' pile, cumulatively. The memory may subside over time but at the basic human level of field and relatedness we don't let it go and it may play out in the discount-revenge cycle. All this occurs if we do not close that gap between intent and effect and we have no opportunity to learn.

- *Proactive and Sincere Appreciation*
In relationships, proactive and sincere appreciation consistently received and given can create a different impact on neural network embedding. If I consistently assume value by sincerely appreciating you – being grateful AND valuing – then you feel validated and meaningful. Sincerity, especially through specificity, is essential, With response in kind, mutual validation is created..

However, what is lacking still is the opportunity to learn, to consciously and more immediately close gaps between our intent and the effect that our behaviors have on each of us. Very often we must go further, by Bridging the Issue

- *Bridging the Issue*
Any transaction between two people is not one event but two. It represents a different experience for each of us. More broadly, we

each have our own map of our journey together. “Only if I know, can I grow, and together can we become better”. The most effective approach for lasting positive impact is direct communication or bridging with each other around the issue. For many, this is difficult. One excellent approach is the Awareness Wheel to reflect, engage, and resolve. There are a few key steps:

- 1 Self-awareness – about what you perceive, feel, think, and want in connection with something you've experienced
- 2 Mutual awareness – sharing what's going on for each of you and hearing openly and empathetically
- 3 Mutual resolution – problem solving to mutual solution; and, importantly,
- 4 Behavior change, where promised, followed by continued active appreciation.

We can address and learn from an issue that we were not previously aware of or 'available' to hear. We can understand the impact of our behavior ...and adjust. That adjustment, that mutual understanding, strengthens the relationship. Each time this happens there is a further binding. We know where each other stands. Over time a positive (instead of negative) override or bias is created in the field we share.

Skillful use of these three components – Assuming Value and Positive Intent, Active and Sincere Appreciation, and Bridging Issues – takes practice...and courage. That's part of what I believe George meant by “deliberate”.

“George’s highest aspirations – ‘To change the way people interact with each other, and inspire the way they relate to their world’”

The Journey to Me

Imagine mapping the same diagram as in the Journey to We to the relationships within yourself, between your Core Self and the different parts of yourself. According to Kathleen Logan-Prince, based on her study and practice of Richard Schwartz’ Internal Family Systems Therapy, your Core Self, is always calm, clear, resourceful, always creative, and always confident. When a wounded part acts up and grabs on to “Self”, a very aware person can have a conversation with that wounded part. The Core Self, being ever resourceful, can imbue that wounded part with the resources it needs. Once it has those resources, it can disentangle itself from the core. Relatedness and yet separateness occur.

In his article Self and Synergy (and also in his Book, Mindspring), George too played with the idea of two voices⁸. He wrote, “I was so interested in the idea that I might sometimes be working against myself that I began to identify the characteristics of the two parts of my ‘split’ personality. The fact of two voices now suggested that I might not be monolithic, but rather, a relationship – a field – fascinated me. Perhaps this was the core governor that controlled my use of my gifts”. The tough voice

of righteous safety he called his ‘Safekeeping Self’. The tentative idea-getting subordinate voice, he called his ‘Experimental Self’. He went on to explore the “destructiveness of self-punishment” on “my internal field”. All this suggests that there may be an internal path or journey of relatedness among those different parts of us... and Synergy can exist there too, if we are deliberate. When it does, it profoundly and positively impacts our ability to engage with others.

A Wish and an Invitation

In 2010, as part of our ambition for the next 50 years, we set a vision for Synecticsworld which echoes George’s highest aspirations – “To change the way people interact with each other, and inspire the way they relate to their world”. Deliberate Synergy and George’s dream “to get everyone to live the Synectics supportive way” is at the heart of this vision.

Our commitment to it, to George’s dream, and, most of all, to each other, compels us to learn, to look within, to experiment, and to lead in this area. If you are reading this book I know there is a part of you for whom this resonates deeply, and you are already playing a significant role. I invite you to take up George’s challenge and continue the journey with us...into the next 50 years.

Joe Gammal is a Managing Partner of Synecticsworld. He works with teams and organizations to help create and implement fresh thinking around business challenges. He is also a coach, facilitator, and trainer helping to imbed skills for a culture of innovation to take root. Joe has facilitated projects and conducted innovation leadership and team training across North America and in Japan, New Zealand, and Western Europe.

Before joining Synecticsworld, he held a number of senior marketing and product marketing positions with Apple and Hasbro, including founder and Director of Hasbro’s Interactive Play and Kids Software Division. Joe was also VP of Market Development for a technology and design spin-off of MIT, and a management consultant with Arthur D. Little.

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- 1 See "Deliberate Synergy® Program: Making one plus one equal two and one half" article by George Prince.
 - 2 See "Your Brain Will Not Tolerate Disrespect – The Fateful Role of Meaningfulness" article by George Prince
 - 3 See "Self and Synergy", article by George Prince
 - 4 See "Collaborative Marriage Skills" book by Sherod Miller, Phyllis Miller, Elam Nunnally, Daniel Wackman pp 47-77
 - 5 See 'Your Life is a Series of Meetings' book by George Prince and Kathleen Logan-Prince, pp 39 to 43
 - 6 See "Encyclopedia of Systemic NLP and NLP New Coding" pp 1215-1216, describing the origination of Six Step Reframing by John Grinder and Judith Delozier
 - 7 See "Dialogue" by William Isaacs
 - 8 See "Self and Synergy", article by George Prince