

cia

Continuous Improvement Associates

Escaping the Crisis Syndrome How We Can Overcome Addiction

Need More of a Long-term Focus?

Here's how to get the discipline.



The source of the crisis syndrome?

Powerful structures drive individuals and organizations to become addicted to actions that relieve problem symptoms so they fail to address fundamental solutions. This leads to **The Crisis Syndrome**. This structure is described by the less bold links in Figure 1.*

How do we escape The Crisis Syndrome?

To discover the way out we'll examine the recommendations in M. Scott Peck's, *The Road Less Traveled*, and Stephen Covey's *Principle-Centered Leadership*.

The bold links in Figure 1 build on the structure described in **The Crisis Syndrome**. It shows we could drive the structure to our benefit if we had more **discipline** to allow us to increase our **use of discipline to improve life skills**. This would support positive action from loop **B4, Focus on Fundamentals** (in green): increased **work on life skills** would over the long run improve our **quality of life** and close the **quality of life gap**.

As shown, greater **quality of life skills** also gives us more **courage & willingness to develop discipline**. This activates **R8, Discipline Begets Discipline**.

What is discipline?

Discipline sounds painful ... and indeed it is, because it's about facing the pain. Peck defines discipline as "a system of techniques for dealing constructively with the pain of problem-solving – instead of avoiding that pain – in such a way that all of life's problems can be solved."

The techniques of discipline

Each of Peck's four basic techniques of discipline has a systems thinking parallel:

- **delaying gratification**: "the process of scheduling the pain and pleasure of life in such a way as to enhance the pleasure by meeting and experiencing the pain first and getting it over with. It is

What is systems thinking?

Seeking to understand system behavior by examining "the whole" ... instead of by analyzing the parts.

the only decent way to live."

Systems thinking parallel: When we understand and tolerate the worse-before-better behavior in systems, we take action that best serves the long-term.

- **assumption of responsibility**: the alternative is to "escape from freedom," to put someone else in charge of my life.

Systems thinking parallel: We know that "system-as-cause" thinking is vital for establishing a perspective of organizational responsibility for performance ... the cause of problems is not "out there."

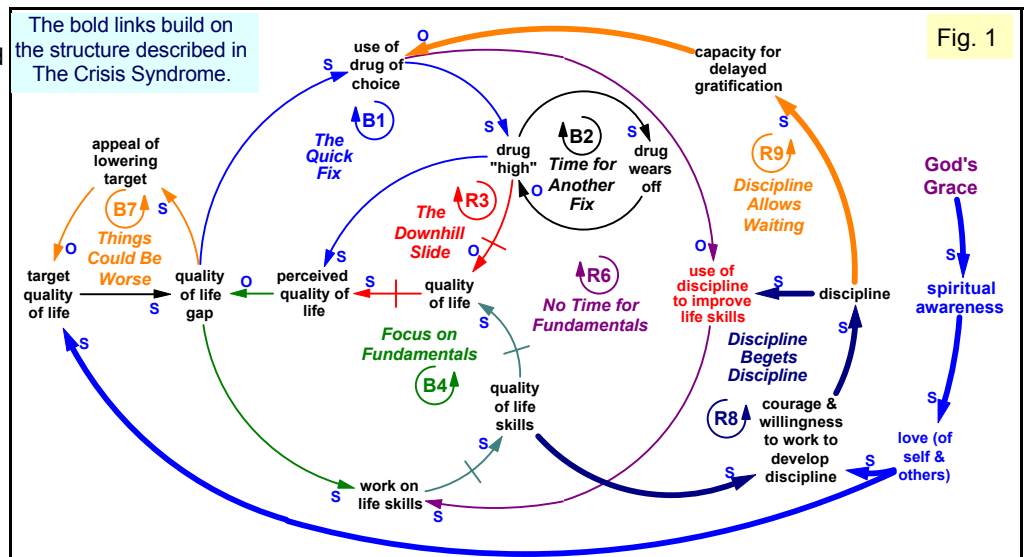
- **dedication to the truth or reality**: an openness to challenges to my map of reality.

Systems thinking parallel: Our openness to challenge of our mental models is critical for successful dialogue, skillful discussion and realistic modeling & simulation.

- **balancing**: - an ability for flexible response (e.g., live in the moment and plan for the future).

Systems thinking parallel: We need to use "both-and" thinking to integrate seemingly opposing points of view. Life is not as simple as "either-or."

An effect of greater **discipline** therefore is to increase **capacity for delayed gratification**. This decreases the **use of drug of choice** and increases the **use of discipline to improve life skills**. This creates loop **R9, Discipline Allows Waiting**.



According to Scott Peck, the courage and willingness to develop discipline come from love ... and ultimately from a spiritual awareness granted by God's Grace, consistent with AA's "twelve step" program.

* The paper **The Crisis Syndrome** describes the structure.

What is the source of the courage to apply discipline?

Peck says, "The strength, energy and willingness to use [the techniques of discipline] are provided by **love (of self and others)**." **Love** of ourselves and others is motivating; it provides the necessary **courage & willingness to develop discipline**. Also, increasing **love (of self & others)** suppresses the "eroding goals" dynamic (**B7**) by raising **target quality of life**.

So where does "love" come from?

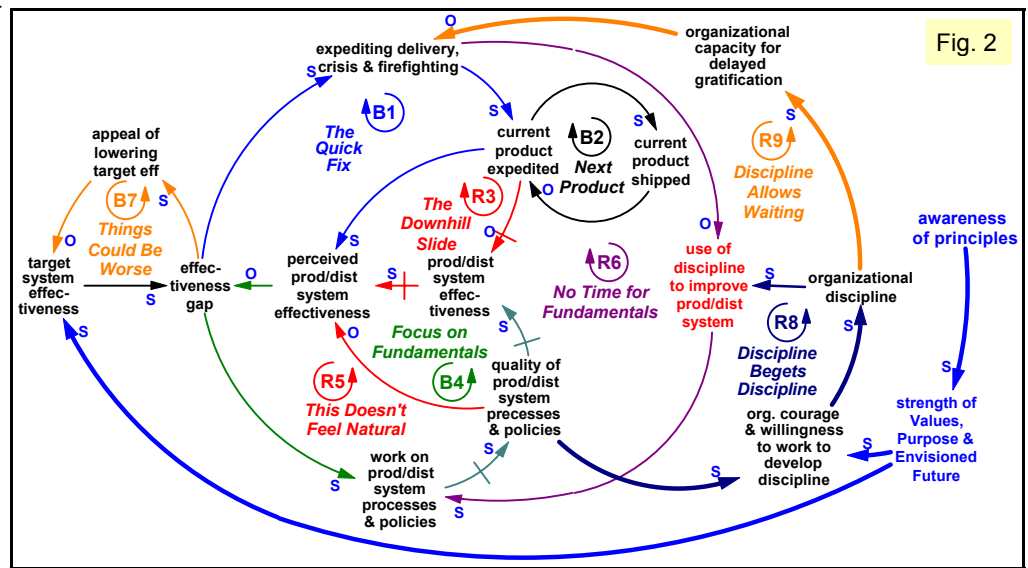
Peck says that **love (of self & others)** comes from **spiritual awareness**, which in turn is a result of **God's Grace**. This is consistent with the "twelve step" program used by Alcoholics Anonymous, which finds it effective to rely on a power greater than ourselves. Belief fuels a self-fulfilling prophecy.

What about organizations?

Figure 2 shows the structure adapted to address an organization's production/distribution system. This example shows a case where the problem is that the system is less efficient and effective than desired. Even though a short-term fix for getting product out on schedule is to expedite shipment, there's always another product to expedite ... and expediting tends to lead to other products that must also be expedited. In addition, it "gums up" the whole production/distribution system and reduces its "general health."

We'd benefit, if instead of expediting, we'd do more **work on prod/dist system processes & policies**. But to actually do this, we need **discipline**, in this case

Long-term Goal Erosion
 "As the present is emphasized over the future, the result is long term deterioration and further emphasis on the short run. ... Unless some effective institutional mechanism exists for sustaining a vision of the future and subordinating short-term conflicting goals, all social systems are subject to the erosion of long-term goals." Jay W. Forrester, "Churches at the Transition Between Growth and World Equilibrium," *Collected Papers of Jay W. Forrester*, 1975



The structure of Figure 1 is adapted here to show the structure of organizational addiction to the "quick fix."

both **organizational** and **personal discipline**. The same structure applies ... they don't call it the "quick fix" for nothing. But the prescription above for extricating ourselves from personal addiction is problematic in business. It's not generally acceptable to use a four-letter word like "love" (much less that three-letter word, "God").

As an alternative, Stephen Covey's *Principle-Centered Leadership* indicates that **discipline** derives from **strength of Values, Purpose & Envisioned Future** for which the source is **awareness of principles**. It's less objectionable to substitute **awareness of principles** for **spiritual awareness** and not address the source of principles, be they from a religious or humanist origin.

Conclusion

For improvement, we must maintain a long-term focus (see box: **Long-term Goal Erosion**). To do so, we need **discipline** and the **strength of Values, Purpose & Envisioned Future** to maintain it. This is perhaps our greatest individual, organizational, and societal challenge. Our society is trapped in this structure in many ways: addicted to drugs, firefighting, pesticides, fertilizer, prisons, growth, oil ... the list goes on and on. The paper **Crisis Syndrome Recovery** describes specific recovery approaches for individuals and organizations.

Feedback is Power - Tap It

We can pull out of, or better yet prevent, this downward spiral by having a clear and shared understanding of Values, Purpose and Vision ... and by having faith that taking a fundamental or long-term approach will be effective. We know we must understand and deal with "perception delay," the delay we experience between when we take an action and when we perceive the result of that action.

Workshop Benefits

Beyond questions and insights described in *The Crisis Syndrome*:

- Is there a shared understanding of Values, Purpose and Vision? (This must be tested to know that it's true. Typically, there's a wide distribution of ideas about what's most important to organizational success.)
- What are the measures of the real "health of the system"? (vs. "perceived health")
- What organizational policies promote increasing organizational discipline?
 - How does the organization allow and encourage examining "habits"?
 - What policies and reward systems encourage developing organizational capacity for delayed gratification?

We Need Discipline to Change

If an organization is to change the way its people think and act and interact, ... people must internalize a set of principles or disciplines that shape their reactions and govern behavior. ... Habits are automatic and therefore mindless. ... Disciplines are mindful.

Pascale, Millemann & Gioja, "Changing the Way We Change," *Harvard Business Review*, Nov/Dec 1997

Continuous Improvement Associates

Bob Powell, Ph.D., MBA
 6992 Blackhawk Place
 Colorado Springs, CO 80919
 Phone (719) 599-0977
 Fax (719) 599-0564
 E-mail: scuba@usa.net