

Path-Finding: *The Art of Possibility & Probability*

by Mike Richardson

We want a “road-map”. That’s the answer we most often get when facilitating a strategy process with an executive team in response to our question of, “what are your hopes/wants for this process which will make it a valuable investment of your time, energy and attention?”. These days though, a road-map is no longer enough as change has changed – it has become a dynamic journey on a shifting landscape. As the ink is drying on a road-map, it is rapidly becoming out of date.

Rather than “road-mapping” then, the term “path-finding” speaks of a more agile approach. We need to be constantly working on finding a path through whatever shifting landscape of circumstances and journey dynamics we face. Path-Finding requires a coming together of the art of possibility with the art of probability.

In their 2000 book, “The Art of Possibility – Transforming Professional and Personal Life” Roasmund Stone Zander and Benjamin Zander put it well, saying:

“Draw a different frame around the same set of circumstances and **new pathways come into view**. Find the right framework and extraordinary accomplishment becomes an everyday experience ... **bringing possibility to life**”

So it’s about the way we frame things, finding pathways of possibility and developing the Path-Finding strengths to make that an everyday experience. Bringing possibility to life and translating possibility into probability. In my experience, many of us find this overwhelming and a different probability takes over - the probability that we end up getting lost or defocused.

The key is in **thinking clearly enough to combine the art of probability (what is probably the best way navigate the next phase of a complex situation) with the art of possibility (seeing new pathways of possibility)**. The paradoxical blend of these two adds up to the Path-Finding strengths, of finding and executing a pathway through, no matter what. It’s about understanding the anatomy of our road, paving the way for extraordinary accomplishment to be an everyday experience.

Sherpa Alliance is dedicated to helping profit and growth responsible executives architect breakthrough journeys, by creating traction on a higher road of breakthrough leadership beliefs, behaviors and results. There are three higher order strengths of breakthrough leadership, requiring a journey oriented understanding of the anatomy of the challenge at three levels simultaneously:

Execution Excellence understanding the anatomy of the **Vehicle**
+ **and**
Executive Intelligence, Intuition & Resilience understanding the anatomy of the **Journey**
+ **and**
Path-Finding understanding the anatomy of the **Road**

= Organizational Agility **Architecting Breakthrough Journeys**
the ability to deal with rapidly changing circumstances, while out-executing our competition
and stake-holder expectations (of customers, employees, suppliers and shareholders).

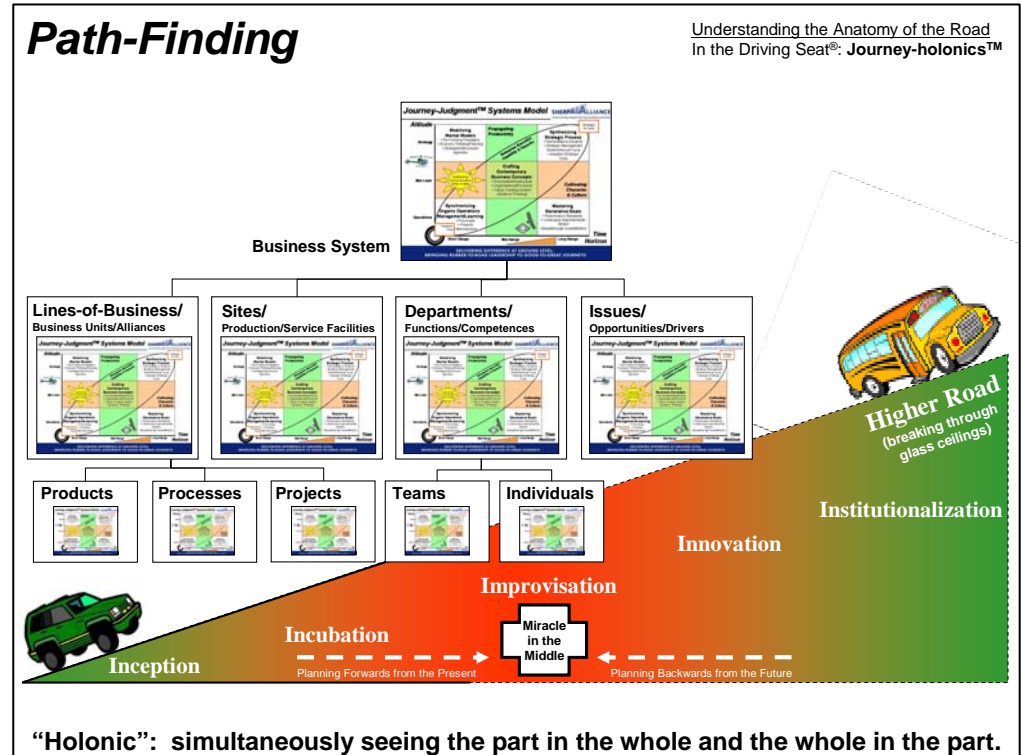
Drawing upon real-world experiences, interpreting leading edge research and developing a concept-suite, model-set and tool-box, **In the Driving Seat®** is a unifying architecture of execution for organizational agility. We are leading the way in recognizing and teaching this as a discipline and a system, of accumulating knowledge, tools and techniques. It is a timely, timeless and open architecture of best practices, reflecting the integrated anatomy and DNA of the real-world execution challenge faced by CEOs, Executives and their teams.

The higher order strength of Path-Finding demands an integrated understanding of the anatomy of our road, embodied in the In the Driving Seat®: **Journey-holonic™** model.

The term “holonic” means, “simultaneously seeing the part in the whole and the whole in the part” – looking at any part of our business and seeing not only how the part fits in with the whole but also seeing how the whole fits in with the part. Think of the suspension system of an automobile – it’s easy to see how the suspension system as a part shows up in the whole of the automobile. But what about how the whole of the automobile shows up in the suspension system as a part? Depending on whether this automobile is an SUV or a sports car, the form, fit and function design and specification of the suspension system is likely to be very different. That’s how the whole shows up in the part. “Holonic” is similar to the word “holographic”. We know if we shatter a hologram, and pick up any piece, that we can see a microcosm of the whole in the part.

We can slice the pie of our business system as a whole any which way we choose to – by product; by process; by project; by team; by individual – by line of business; by site; by department; by issue. By “issue” we mean the critical/strategic issues that the business is facing, whatever they may be, at any level broadly and deeply across the business. For instance, Managing Talent; Improving Customer Experience; Utilizing Plant & Equipment, as just a few examples.

In fact, to some degree, the reality is that we have to be finding pathways on all of these parts all at the same time. In the field of systems thinking there is a concept of “nested systems” – capturing the idea of systems within systems within systems. It’s the same with nested journeys – we are undertaking journeys within journeys within journeys. It’s about how they add up to the overall journey of the business, simultaneously seeing the parts in the whole and the whole in the parts.



Unlocking, uplifting and unfolding a higher road for a business is about navigating a paradoxical blend of the art of possibility and the art of probability, in a phased approach. Any breakthrough journey, with a part of the business or with the whole of the business, can be thought of as comprising five macro phases:

Inception: we launch the inception of a journey by identifying a need and fostering some attention and intention around it. Things can easily get trodden on in this phase, maybe inadvertently, and get killed off before the journey even had a chance.

Incubation: we incubate the fledgling beginnings of the journey, keeping it on a life support system. Things can easily get trampled on in this phase as we run into resistance, inertia, and FUD (fear, uncertainty and doubt).

Improvisation: as we begin to encounter bigger tangible and intangible barriers, obstacles and hurdles, we have to improvise a way through. Things can easily wrestled to the ground in this phase by competing priorities leaving us with woefully inadequate time, information and other resources.

Innovation: our persistence eventually pays off and we have won enough support and resource allocations to really start innovating and building momentum. We can easily stub our toe in this phase if we suffer a failure, which can easily set us back one, two or even three phases.

Institutionalization: we have made it this far and are now focused on embodying the innovations into our business as permanent shifts which then become self sustaining. We can easily stop short in this phase due to pressures to declare victory and redeploy resources too soon.

Navigating these journey phases is about anticipating the critical success factors of each, simultaneously planning forwards from the present and backwards from the future, meeting in the middle - so that we aren't left reliant on some kind of miracle happening in the middle of the journey.

Architecting a breakthrough journey for the business overall is about nested journeys, and having the Path-Finding strengths to undertake the right journeys within journeys within journeys, in parallel and in sequence. Consider some different scenarios: a turnaround; a merger; a promotion; a major acquisition; a faltering strategy. Architecting a breakthrough journey for any of these scenarios involves creating traction on some kind of higher road and finding a path to do that – a path of journeys within journeys within journeys, in parallel and in sequence. **Different scenarios call for a very different combination of sequential and parallel priorities to create traction. Get that right and a higher road awaits you. Get that wrong and a lower road beckons.**

A greater understanding of the anatomy of our road offers us the opportunity to be more consciously working the phases we are in with our nested journeys. In turn, this allows us to be thinking more clearly to combine the art of probability (what is probably the best way navigate the next phase of a complex situation) with the art of possibility (seeing new pathways of possibility). This develops our higher order strength of Path-Finding for organizational agility, paving the way for extraordinary accomplishment to be an everyday experience. In my experience, many organizations are not as conscious as they need to be and they are paying a price with some lack of agility as a organization.

See the booklet entitled [Organizational Agility & Architecting Breakthrough Journeys](#) to understand how this integrates with the rest of the In the Driving Seat® concept-suite, model-set and tool-box. Applying these concepts, models and tools will help you create more traction on a higher road of breakthrough leadership, beliefs, behaviors and results. You will become more agile as an organization and more able to be architecting breakthrough journeys, broadly and deeply throughout your organization. Travel well.