



The Six-Week Career Makeover

*Week 3: Your Life is an Evolutionary
System*

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Your life is an evolutionary system

In *Designing Social Systems in a Changing World*, social systems scholar and founder of the International Systems Institute (ISI), Bela H. Banathy,¹ identified eight dimensions human systems need to sustain themselves within their environment. These are the “parts” of your life that become a synergistic whole based on how they interrelate and influence each other. I developed the Integrity Game over 20 years ago as an ISI fellow and have shared the booklet version with my mentees and coaching clients hundreds of times over the years. I thought this would be a good place to share the key parts of the game here with you, as well.

Consider these definitions of the word “integrity”, summarized from a few different sources:

(in teg’ ri tē) n.

1. *The state of being whole or entire*
2. *A sound, complete, or unimpaired condition*
3. *Uncompromising adherence to one’s principles; soundness of character; honesty*

Ask yourself: What gets in the way of you from creating your “entire” ideal life? Are you “unimpaired” to create the future you want? Are the principles that define your character whole, sound, and complete?

We often forget that integrity means “entirety” as well as “honesty.” When you work on improving your own “state of being whole,” you become more “sound and unimpaired” and are more effective within your family, workplace, and communities.

Synergy is the effect of a “whole” that is more than the sum of its parts. Every day, people create “synergetic results” in their lives simply because they work in companies that produce products and services they couldn’t provide or deliver if people were working alone or independently. Even if you work alone at a computer, you are creating “synergy” because you are accomplishing tasks neither you nor the computer could do alone. Synergy is the result of interaction and integration. A



“whole” is more than the sum of its parts because a whole is the sum of its parts plus their interaction and integration with each other.

You can synergistically create good results—results that are sound and practical, results with absolute integrity, or you can create a synergetic mess that’s next to impossible to unravel. To create synergetic results with integrity, you need to learn how to design and develop strategies for your life that lead to integrity.

Consider all the dimensions of your life: are they integrated in such a way that they create a whole that is more than their sum? The Integrity Game helps you explore how effectively those dimensions are integrated to make the best possible synergetic result—results with the most integrity.

Assignment 3a: The Integrity Game

You might be tempted to flip straight to the resume next—but trust this assignment. I’m going to walk you step-by-step through mapping your life system, which will give your resume context, not just content.

Bela believed that to design truly transformational systems, it was imperative to start by envisioning the ideal. During our annual “Design Conversation” conferences, he’d say, “You can’t restructure a horse and buggy into a spacecraft no matter how much time and resources you put into the effort,” and “Getting rid of what you don’t want will not get you what you *do* want.”

Envision yourself living your life to the fullest, in the most successful way possible. What is that day like? How does it feel? What’s the “scenery?” Who are your “cast of characters?” What are people saying, doing? How are you feeling?

Now, imagine you had no limits of time, money, knowledge, or skills. Consider that day in terms of the many dimensions that make up your life. Remember, in each dimension, envision yourself in the most ideal state you can imagine.

Health & Well Being

- Are you physically healthy enough for the activities of daily living?
- Are you managing chronic health issues with your health care providers?
- Do you have insurance to cover a health emergency?



- Do you have enough energy to support your goals?
 - Do you feel emotionally strong and psychologically healthy?
 - Does your mental health affect your ability to do things that are important to you?
- Rate this dimension for yourself today. Score ____.

Personal Economics, Financial

- Are you being paid fairly with an opportunity to improve?
 - Is there any aspect of your job or work that conflicts with your morals or values?
 - Do you have more than one avenue to generate income and/or savings (salary, investments, side hustle, etc.)?
 - Do you have enough money to cover living expenses?
 - Do you know your credit score? Do you use credit wisely and appropriately?
 - Do you budget and plan for future financial needs (emergencies, unemployment, retirement, etc.)?
- Rate this dimension for yourself today. Score ____.

Lifelong Learning

- How do you engage in learning? Do you enjoy the process of discovery?
 - What ignites and excites your curiosity? Do you make time to pursue things that interest you?
 - How do you evaluate what you learn? What criteria do you use to assess what you learn through your life experiences, your spiritual understanding/sense of meaning?
 - How is your ability to use critical thinking to evaluate information you learn in traditional ways?
- Rate this dimension for yourself today. Score ____.

Personal & Cultural Relationships

- Do you have a healthy sense of self-worth (self-esteem)?
 - Do you have family or friends that you can count on for support (emotional, physical) in a crisis?
 - Do your relationships at work add stress or enjoyment to your job?
 - How are you involved with your community?
 - Does your cultural heritage add to your sense of meaning and personal value?
 - Does the societal culture around you reflect the values you hold most important?
- Rate this dimension for yourself today. Score ____.

Ethics, Morality, Higher Meaning:

- How do you demonstrate your value for yourself & others?
- How do you nurture your spirit?
- How do you actively live your faith practice or personal sense of life's meaning?



- How do your values guide your behavior with yourself and others in ways that are ethical and moral?
Rate this dimension for yourself today. Score ____.

Creative Expression, Aesthetics

- How do you demonstrate a value for creativity, expression, aesthetic surroundings, and enjoyable experience?
- Does your home environment reflect your personal aesthetics and contribute to your well-being?
- What is your workplace like? Your home?
- What does your environment and dress express to others about your values and life work? Do these things remind you of what you value most?
- Do you have an outlet for creative expression?
Rate this dimension for yourself today. Score ____.

Relationship to Social & Natural Environment

- What is the larger society like in your ideal vision?
- Do you feel safe? Free? Is the world peaceful?
- How are you interacting with the natural environment? Does it support your needs? Do you enjoy time spent outside?
- Do you consider the impacts of your actions on the natural environment?
Rate this dimension for yourself today. Score ____.

Tools and Technology

- How are you using tools and technology in your life?
- Do the appliances, tools, equipment, and other technologies you use make your life easier?
- Do they save you time? Do they enable you to perform tasks with better results?
Rate this dimension for yourself today. Score ____.

As a biological system, you are composed of a nervous system, respiratory system, and other systems that work together to create a synergistic “whole” human being. As a human being who is more than the sum of the parts of your biological makeup, how all the dimensions of your life are integrated defines the nature of the “whole” of your experience of life.

Consider this: What stops you from reaching your highest ideals? I know what you’re going to say: limits of time, money, knowledge, etc.

What are the limits that really stop you, though? Which are real and which are imagined?



The only real limits you have are the same constraints that all open systems must pay attention to to sustain themselves and grow. What are those constraints? The only constraint is that open systems must get the energy they need to “fuel” their activity from the larger “systems” in which they exist.²

Unfortunately, most of us also feel limited by circumstances we think are beyond our control.

I believe the only limits we have are the “constraints” we choose to live by: we don’t decimate the environment because we know those resources are limited; we don’t pursue our goals at the expense of others because we value our relationships and honor their human rights. (By the way, for those people who choose not to live by those constraints, they may find themselves unable to get the “fuel” they need to live in those systems!)

If there are genuine constraints to realizing our potential, why bother trying? Because the reasonable constraints we choose—those that serve ourselves and others—don’t limit our ability to realize our potential nearly as much as the self-imposed limits that don’t serve ourselves and others.

In his influential book, *Living an Extraordinary Life*, Robert White writes that the most common self-imposed limit of choice is “I’m not enough.”

“I’m not smart enough.”

“I don’t deserve...”

“I can’t because I’m not creative enough.”

“I’m too old.”

“I’m too young.”

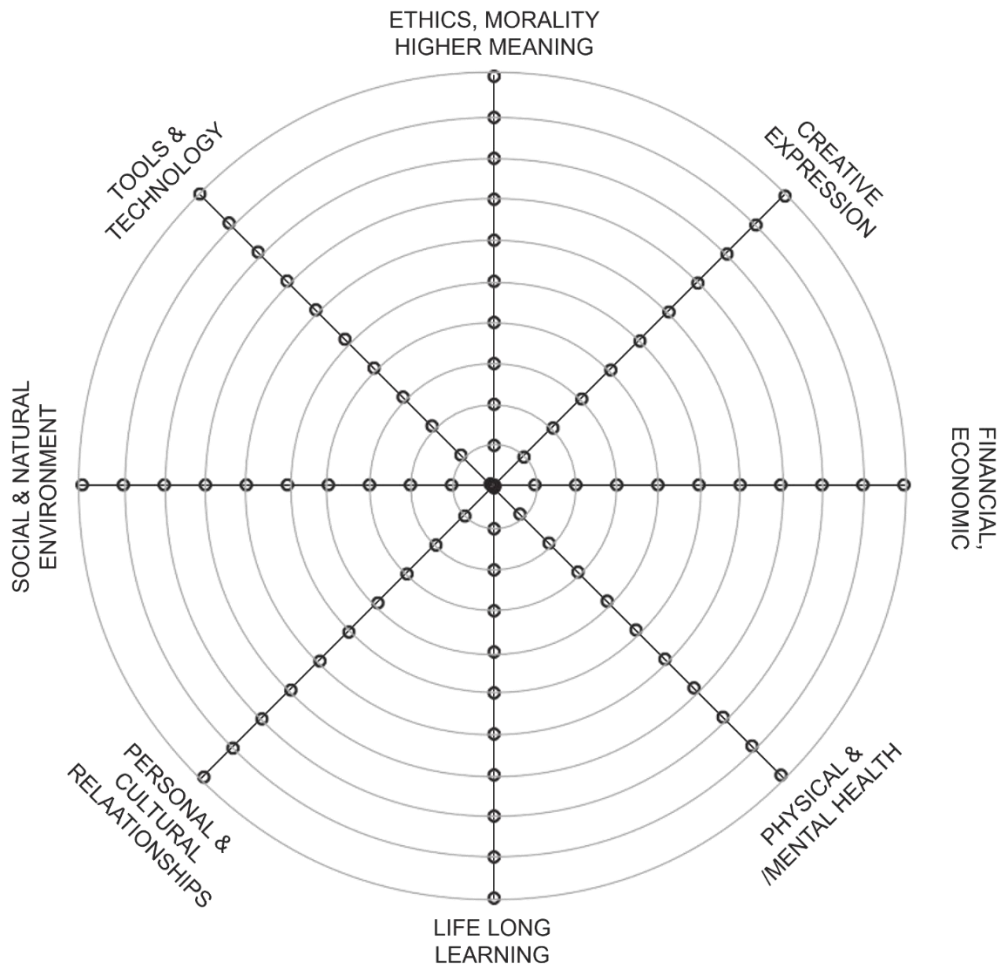
You get the idea. Robert adds, “We human beings are infinitely creative in the ways we limit our lives. There can be no escape from this self-destructive cycle until we choose to dump our basic belief that we are not enough. Then, and only then, will our experience of life change.”³

What if you were able to clarify your vision for living an extraordinary life and learn ways to begin integrating all the dimensions of your life most effectively and



successfully, completely “unimpaired” by self-imposed limits? How would you start to do that?

Let’s look at your score another way so you can start to envision how the relationship of the dimensions together might influence how effective the “whole” of your life is. For each dimension, mark your score on the “wheel” below. Are you riding through your life on a flat tire?



Your Integrity Wheel

I’m sure you’ve noticed that “career” is not one of the eight dimensions identified by Banathy. Your career is its own system, a “whole” comprised of multiple dimensions. In your career, there is a financial dimension, relationships,



learning, tools and technology, and even (hopefully) expression of ethics and morality. Your career is not separate from your life; it is just one expression of it.

Your Complex, Adaptive, Evolutionary Life System

Your life isn't made up of isolated parts—it's an interconnected system where each component influences the others. Career, health, finances, relationships, and personal growth—they don't operate independently. Just like an ecosystem, when one area thrives or struggles, ripple effects shape the rest. Although we are taught basic linear cause-and-effect thinking, Systems Thinking considers all components of a system and how they interact with each other to create an emergent property: the “whole” that is more than a “sum of its parts.”

Many people attempt to compartmentalize their career decisions, treating work as something separate from their personal well-being and relationships. But successful career planning requires a systems-thinking approach, recognizing how external factors impact your progress.

Open vs. Closed Systems in Career Growth

Unlike machines, which function as closed systems with predictable inputs and outputs, human lives operate as open systems—constantly evolving and responding to external forces.

To contrast, consider a factory assembly line that follows a fixed process; each action leads to a specific, expected result. On the other hand, your career path is shaped by economic shifts, technological advances, industry trends, and personal growth. It is a complex, open, adaptive system. Understanding that your career operates within an open system means success isn't just about effort—it's about adapting strategically to external changes.

You are probably familiar with Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, which suggests that human development follows a structured path—from survival (food, security) to self-actualization (purpose, fulfillment). While this model provides valuable



insight, the Integrity Game takes a different approach, even though there are some parallels and similarities.

Both approaches emphasize layered development – Maslow’s hierarchy progresses from basic needs to higher levels of fulfillment. At the same time, the Integrity Game illustrates how different life areas interact to support or limit personal success. Additionally, both recognize interdependencies – Maslow’s model demonstrates that higher needs (esteem, self-actualization) depend on stability in lower needs (security, belonging). The Integrity Game also highlights how a single weak area can disrupt the overall balance.

While Maslow’s model is linear; the Integrity Game is dynamic – Maslow suggests a step-by-step progression, while the Integrity Game helps individuals identify leverage points to create targeted improvements across multiple areas. Leverage points are areas in your life system where a small shift can create a major impact. For example, if your career feels stuck, investing in a new skill (a leverage point) can unlock better job prospects. If stress is affecting your performance, adjusting your work-life boundaries (another leverage point) can lead to greater focus and success. The Integrity Game helps you pinpoint these high-impact areas.

The Integrity Game focuses on adaptability – Life doesn’t always follow a structured path. Sometimes career growth happens before financial security, or personal fulfillment drives professional success. This exercise recognizes fluid, evolving life systems rather than rigid steps.

Applying Systems Thinking to Your Own Life

Now that we see how careers operate within open systems, it’s time to map your own life system. The Integrity Game helps you evaluate where different areas—work, finances, health, relationships—are thriving or struggling. If one part of the system is off balance, it affects everything else.

By identifying high-impact leverage points, you’ll gain a clear roadmap for making strategic adjustments that create meaningful change across multiple areas.



Systems Thinkers sometimes create a causal loop diagram to show how different components influence each other. Feedback loops are either “positive” (which should not necessarily be equated with “good”), where one variable “feeds” or adds to another, or “negative” (not necessarily “bad”), where one variable balances out or negates another. Another way to understand the interrelation of all the components or variables within your Life System is to compare sets for potential improvement or positive influence.

The Integrity Game uses an individual application of Structured Dialogic Design (SDD). SDD was created to enable groups of people with diverse perspectives to collaborate on complex systemic problems, but it is also a worthwhile personal endeavor. SDD is a robust systems-thinking methodology that helps individuals and groups identify key leverage points in a complex system—whether an organization, a career path, or, in this case, your life system.

One of the most effective tools in SDD is pairwise comparison, where you systematically assess how one aspect influences another. For each set of two dimensions of your Life System, ask yourself: “Would improvement in A help to achieve improvement in B?” and vice versa. Then, “Would improvement in A help accomplish improvement in C?” and so on.

This Structured Dialogic Design approach doesn’t focus on balancing or negative feedback loops, and only looks for ways each variable might improve another.

Working with paired influence evaluations in this way enables us to manage complex interrelations that take into account our cognitive limitations. The result of the process is a “tree of meaning” or influence pattern where the deep drivers are at the roots and the lines of influence on other system components can be traced. The “roots” are leverage points where real and enduring change throughout the system is possible.⁴



If you are tempted to focus on what you might think is most important, you may be sabotaging your outcomes if you are not attending to a situation's influential leverage points.

Here's an example: Kelly is clear that her daemon or dharma is to create art. Creative Expression and Aesthetics are what she believes are the most important dimensions of her overall "Life System." Kelly always prioritized what was most important in her life: creative expression, often at the expense of other dimensions, and found herself struggling to accomplish what she cared about most. When she began to examine all the dimensions in pairs, it became clear that physical and mental health, as well as financial stresses, always short-circuited her art. Like Maslow, Kelly discovered that the foundation—the "roots" of her own Tree of Meaning was health and financial resources for life's basic requirements. Others might include personal relationships (family, friends, community) as influential as health and financial security, along with all the other dimensions.

An influence tree for Kelly's Life System dimensions might look like this:

Canopy:

- Morality & Meaning
- Aesthetics, Creative Expression

The Trunk:

- Tools & Technology
- Lifelong learning
- Relationship to Social & Natural Environments
- Relationships

The Roots:

- Health & Well Being
- Personal Economics & Financial Health (foundational leverage points)

Assignment 3b: Your Tree of Meaning

Now, go back to the diagram from the first part of this assignment. Look at the dimensions that you scored lower. Using SDD principles, evaluate how each element affects or is affected by others. Ask questions like:



- Would improving my health help improve my ability to create financial health? (Likewise, would an improvement in my personal economics significantly improve my health and well-being?)
- Does strengthening relationships lead to better emotional resilience (well-being)?
- Does improving my financial situation significantly improve my ability to practice creative expression?
- Does improving my capability for Life Long Learning significantly improve my ability to utilize tools and technologies in my life?

The goal is to map causal connections, recognizing which aspects drive significant changes in other areas. Chances are, your own Tree of Meaning will look pretty similar to Kelly's: health and well-being, and personal economics (and possibly personal relationships) will be your "roots"—the key leverage points for improvement in your overall life system. I'm sure this exercise looks like a lot of work, but it won't take long—and the patterns it reveals will surprise you."

Talk about these eight dimensions and your Tree of Meaning exploration with your Posse Career Coach. Come up with one or two actionable goals to improve areas where you feel a lower score in a higher leverage point dimension is negatively impacting other dimensions of your life.



References & Endnotes

- ¹ Banathy, B. H. (1996). *Designing social systems in a changing world*. New York, NY: Plenum.
- ² Laszlo, E. (1996) *A systems view of the world*. Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press. Also von Bertalanffy, L. (1968) *General System Theory*. NY: George Braziller.
- ³ Laszlo, E. (1996) *A systems view of the world*. Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press. Also von Bertalanffy, L. (1968) *General System Theory*. NY: George Braziller.
- ⁴ Flanagan, T. R., & Christakis, A. N. (2010). *The talking point: Creating an environment for exploring complex meaning*. IAP Information Age Publishing.