

Simple Rules for a Balancing Economy

HOW TO PLAY THE INFINITE GAME OF LIFE

Opening up to Reality

It seems we are on a terrible trajectory – a trajectory that will have us destroying the planet that gives life to life. We human beings are playing the dominant game of our time. It is a Finite Game¹ whose purpose is to win; we play to win, and in winning, we bring the game to an end. This game has apparent winners and losers. In reality, it is a game that will have no winners because in the endless playing to win more of the world's resources so that we can fill our personal coffers, we are depleting the planet, knocking it out of balance and in the process we are creating an un-inheritable world for our children's children.

To avert the apparent inevitable, it seems we need a different game with new rules. What if we defined an Infinite Game whose purpose is to keep playing? In truth, this Infinite Game is not new. It is the Game of Life and over centuries we have forgotten how to play it. Bit by bit humanity has been changing the rules and we now find ourselves playing a game with an ending, the magnitude of which could be cataclysmic for all who inhabit the earth.

The fascination with discovering other planets – possibly inhabitable ones – is part of the Finite Game. We can couch the search as 'furthering science', expanding man's knowledge of the universe; whether it is resources or knowledge, we are caught in a driven pursuit for more and more and more. If we find new inhabitable planets, then we can keep laying the same Finite Game, stripping the land and oceans... and when it is laid waste, we can move on to somewhere else leaving the destruction behind us. It is a good strategy that means we don't have to face the damage we have wreaked; we don't have to face the consequences of our actions; we can stay blind, deluded, pretending that this was all rather inevitable and 'nothing to do with me or us'.

What if we worked on the basis of what we currently know: This is it. This is the only planet we know of that can sustain us. If we held that assumption, how might this change our thinking and our behaviours? There are some dominant common patterns playing out at every level of our global system that reveal the flaws of our Finite Game. And we have some emerging stories of remarkable individuals, organisations and communities who have seen through the delusional veils; who have recognised when enough is enough and that always searching to gain more is the malaise of modern man which appears to have set us on a course of self- destruction.

Invitation to Inquire

We (Louie Gardiner and Glenda Eoyang of the Human Systems Dynamics Institute) support individuals, communities and organisations to see, adapt, navigate through and influence the complex situations in which they find themselves. As we have been preparing ourselves to step into service in two conferences at Caux 2012, we decided to apply our understanding of complexity sciences - to enter into an inquiry about the dominant patterns² we saw playing out in the current Finite Game as it manifests in the global economy. This led us to identify repeating behaviours (Simple Rules³) which we perceive are contributing to the emergence and maintenance of these patterns, as we see them playing out at all levels of the wider system.

Our proposition, based on our understanding of complex adaptive systems (CAS), is that as agents acting on and in the system, each of us can influence the creation of new patterns to bring us in tune with a potentially sustaining future. Legislation and global statements without individual agents within the system changing their behaviours, will not bring about shift. This proposition aligns centrally with the some of the greatest known wisdoms of humanity – change within and beyond us as individuals are inextricably linked (Gandhi, Buddhist teachings, Initiatives of Change... to name but a few). Some might suggest a direct, linear causality from change in the individual to change in the wider system; however, in the theory of complex adaptive systems (CAS) and, interestingly, in Buddhist teachings, it is held that causality is non-linear. What matters fundamentally, is that one cannot exist without the other – change within and change outwith an individual - because all are linked within CASs.

The next part of this paper, focuses on our inquiry and what was revealed to us through that inquiry. We are curious to see how this lands with you and if there is enough interest to join us in taking this further.

See what you think and let us know!

¹ Glenda Eoyang first wrote about the Finite and Infinite Game in an HSD Institute newsletter March 2012, prompted by her reading of Carse, J. P. (1986). *Finite and infinite games*. New York: Free Press.

² 'Patterns': in common parlance, refer to concepts like 'values', 'culture'. These are constructs, perceptions borne out of our attempts to make sense of what is going on in a system. We know that patterns cannot be changed at the pattern level. Patterns in systems can only be transformed by changing the conditions that give rise to those conditions – context/ container, differences, exchanges/ connections. In seeking to change a pattern, we need only focus on one of these conditions, because in doing so we automatically create shift in the other conditions. In our enquiry, we focused on behaviours (exchanges).

³ Simple Rules: a term coined in computer sciences and mathematics referring to simple repeating 'behaviours' that generate system patterns. Simple Rules can be identified in any complex adaptive system. We can change the Rules to change the pattern.

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Pattern-spotting

As in any game, there are recognisable patterns playing out in any system. If we look through the lenses of 'complex adaptive systems' (CAS), we understand that there will be patterns that repeat across ALL levels of a system. The science term 'fractal' refers to pattern repetition. Patterns are down to perception – we each may see different patterns based on our own unique lenses and specific vantage points.

Patterns show up through – emerge out of - the conditions in a system which affect the interactions/behaviours between the member individuals. In CAS, we call these behaviours/ interactions 'Simple Rules'⁴. If we want to change the pattern we are seeing, we cannot do it at the pattern level; just as we cannot change the values in a system by simply naming some new values which we think are better.

So in returning to this current inquiry, Glenda and I first named dominant patterns we are seeing in our current global/ economic system: '**Greed**', '**Self-centredness**', '**Thoughtlessness**'. And then, as yet more recent revelations occurred in the Banking world referring to rate-fixing, we saw there was another pattern showing up through the media: focus on and judge 'those people' (not ourselves) in influential positions associated with institutional power eg. within banking institutions, governments etc. We named this pattern, '**Blame**' and it presumes that the problem and responsibility rests outside of ourselves, with those powerful 'others'.

But if we hold to our CAS knowledge that patterns play out across many levels in a wider system, what does this really mean? If we consider the crisis in the banking system as being merely one part within the wider global system – we have to ask ourselves 'where else are common behaviours giving rise to those patterns playing out?'

In other words, we must consider the possibility that the observed and named patterns and behaviours showing up in banking and other financial institutions will also likely be showing up in our own lives, communities, in our organisations, in our networks. However, because we are not in the public eye and our 'rewards' may be tiny by comparison, no one focuses on us and so we may not see ourselves as part of the pattern/ problem?

So.... Here is an invitation to enter into a rather more personal enquiry. As you continue to read, hold the possibility that some of your patterns and behaviours are actually very similar to or the same as those people... trust that herein lies the potential for powerful shift. The joy of working with CAS, is that we come to recognise that we can influence change in a much bigger system by acting elsewhere, in other parts, including ourselves as individuals.

Influencing Patterns

Dominant Patterns we see now...	Patterns we want to see... for a Balancing Economy
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Greed• Self-centredness• Thoughtlessness• Blame	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Generosity• Whole-ness• Care• Adaptive capacity

After naming the dominant patterns we are seeing, and considering what alternative patterns might be more tuned to an Infinite Game, Glenda and I turned our attention to the simple rules/ behaviours. Which ones are currently at play? How, by subtly adapting the current behaviours, could we create the conditions for catalysing the emergence of new patterns that would support a 'Balancing Economy'?

In defining these new behaviours (Simple Rules), we examined the interplay – interdependence - between them. This matters, because in isolation, a single Simple Rule could shift a pattern in an unhelpful direction. So for example, overleaf, in the right-hand list of behaviours for an **Infinite Game of a Balancing Economy**, the first Simple Rule only makes sense when it sits alongside the others. To simply 'Produce more than we need' could have us trapped in the current paradigm. When this works with 'Share advantage' and 'Take care of OUR interests', 'Strive for balance' and 'Take responsibility', suddenly, the patterns that show up become different.

Our invitation to you, as you digest the Simple Rules, is to consider:

1. To what extent are you behaving as in the current Simple Rules of the Finite Game?
2. Which of the Simple Rules of the **Infinite Game** are you most resistant to embracing? Work on those.
3. Share your learning as you 'live into these' Simple Rules with others – including us
4. Suggest improvements to the **Infinite Game Simple Rules**

⁴ Simple Rules – the term arose from computer science when demonstrating the kinds of patterns we see in flocking birds and shoals of fish, could be replicated on screen using a few simple mathematical equations ie. Simple rules which give rise to the immensely complex patterns we see in nature. In animal systems, behaviours are our equivalent of those mathematical equations.

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Simple Rules of the Current Economy – Playing a <u>Finite</u> Game	Simple Rules for a Balancing Economy – Learning to play an <u>Infinite</u> Game
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Consume more than we need 2. Exploit advantage for personal gain 3. Take care of own interests 4. Strive for more 5. Reward power above time and effort contribution 6. Avoid responsibility 7. Accuse others when things go 'wrong' 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Produce more than we need 2. Share advantage 3. Take care of our interests 4. Strive for balance 5. Reward contribution 6. Take responsibility 7. Turn judgment into curiosity

In naming Simple Rules as we have done above – it can be helpful to offer some explanation/ rationale for each one. This can support newcomers to a system to understand the context and intention behind the behaviours.

A well formed Simple Rule can apply to any and every person in a system, no matter where they sit or what role they play. To be relevant and impactful, the Simple Rules must arise out of an inquiry engaging individuals within the system seeking to make itself more conscious and adaptive.

And so, as we invite you into the inquiry, the above list in the right-hand column may alter. Once agreed, and depending on context, it is sometimes helpful to consider how progress/ impact can be measured. This could be explored subsequently.

Beyond this first step, it is up to us to all of us to play with them – to see how they come alive in our own lives and to bear witness to how new patterns emerge over time.

We cannot guarantee these particular behaviours will produce our anticipated patterns. This is the reality of working with complex systems: no absolute ability to control, predict; only anticipation and influence and a willingness to join in the game and enjoy the ride.

PLEASE GET IN TOUCH WITH US IF YOU WOULD LIKE HSD SUPPORT IN YOUR ORGANISATIONS:

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