



CAUSE AND EFFECT

BY ROBERT FRITZ

Everything you do creates a consequence in your life. What you do may also create consequences in the lives of others. And the actions of others may cause consequences in your life. This is why no man (or woman) is an island.

Mastery of cause and effect, at its highest level, is the *creative process*—the ability to create the outcomes we desire.

Yet mastery of the creative process in painting or music or architecture or science may not translate into other areas of one's life. Many great artists have conquered the most formidable challenges of reaching the depths of human expression, but are unable to convert their creative mastery into their own lives and careers. Mastery of cause and effect in one domain does not guarantee mastery in other domains.

Many people are unaware of the degree to which their actions lead to consequences they absolutely despise. It is not uncommon for the guy who just can't seem to get it together to not notice that smoking marijuana every day has had a negative impact on his life. It is hard for the woman who eats an unhealthy diet of supersized junk food to see that her high blood pressure, high bad cholesterol, diabetes, and obesity has something to do with what she is putting in her mouth.

Our actions have outcomes, some of them intentional, and some of them unintentional. We take countless actions

in our lives, many so small that they go on unnoticed. The sum total of all of these actions forms overall patterns that often drive the direction of our lives.

Variations on Karma

Various religions and philosophies consider the principle of consequences in surprisingly similar ways. The time-frame is different however.

The notion of Karma, which comes from Hinduism, tells us that the time-frame is a series of past lives in which the actions we have taken drive reincarnation because we need to resolve the misdeeds we have engendered.

Most Western religions have a notion of good and evil in which good actions create the consequence of an everlasting heavenly existence, and bad actions lead to an everlasting life in hell.

Variations on this theme are seen throughout spiritual and philosophical thought in both East and West. No matter what the differences in belief, the common message is "live correctly, and favorable consequences will result." The opposite is also common among various schools of thought: "Live incorrectly and you will suffer unfavorable consequences."

To what degree is this true?

It does seem that past actions do materialize in our lives as present or future consequences. It seems to be true that if we change our actions, often we see changes in the type of consequences that occur.

Some of our habitual actions are better than many others. Eating well, exercising, meditating, relaxing, and being intellectually, creatively, and emotionally stimulated seems to lead to many favorable consequences. Eating poorly, suffering stress, becoming a couch potato, and falling into various ruts seems to lead to many unfavorable, and sometimes life-threatening, consequences.

It does seem that in many ways our current life is a product of the past. The profound question is: *To what degree do we have to answer to the past?*

Most systems, from the psychotherapeutic to spiritual, tell us that the past is inextricably tied to the present to such a degree that unless we deal with the past, we are unable to move forward. Resolve your Karma, lie down on the psychiatrist's couch, resolve the past, release repressed experiences, counterbalance your evil deeds with great works, learn right action, avoid wrong action, etc.

Does the past force us to correct previous mistakes? What is the point of these corrective efforts?

The Myth of Perfection

Many notions, particularly spiritual, contain an ideal of perfection. Perfection means flawless. Perfection is an *absolute* state.

Anything slightly less than perfection is *imperfect*. One is either perfect or imperfect. This is not a continuum. This is similar to pregnant or not. There is no in-between.

Is the job of life to become perfect? Many spiritual systems think so. The common theme in various creation myths around the world begins with humanity's failures leading to expulsion from a perfect garden. The world is a punishment for transgressions and an opportunity to learn the critical lessons that can lead to forgiveness and redemption. Perfection is seen as a better state than imperfection. If perfection is the goal, one's focus in life is moving toward the ideal, and the degree to which one has seemed to move in that direction equals progress.

The Myth of Progress

The built-in assumption within all of these systems is that life in its current

TEAM TIP

If your organization tends to solve problems at the event level rather than the structural level, focus on "bringing about the creations you desire" rather than on fixing what's wrong.

state isn't good enough on its own terms. Why isn't it? If we take away the ideal of perfection, we begin to be able to see the fantastic power of the reality of life as it exists in the moment. To not recognize the significance of the moment leads to two profound limitations: a lack of appreciation for the miracle of life that is before our eyes and a general unconsciousness.

Many, in the name of spiritual, emotional, or psychological progress, become insensitive to the most exquisite moments in life because they are obsessed with accomplishing what they consider to be progress. There is a great irony here. Some who are most in search for enlightenment and realms of higher consciousness become unconscious and ignorant of the actual reality they are experiencing.

If we measure *everything* against an ideal standard, we will miss the actual value inherent in *everything*. If we measured every meal we eat against the highest of standards—cordon bleu perhaps—we might not be able to appreciate the beans and franks that have their own wonderful worth.

Another Understanding of Cause and Effect

Most of us view cause and effect from the “event” level. That vantage point suggests that every event causes every other event. To change the direction of future consequences, change the events that might cause these future events. Eat better, exercise, discipline yourself, adopt a new lifestyle.

Yet trying to change patterns on the event level can be self-defeating. While it seems as if one event does lead to another, there is more going on than meets the eye.

A pattern of events is not the product of events in isolation. It is a product of an underlying structure. And this is why an understanding of structural dynamics is so helpful in changing the future patterns. Another understanding of causality is that the underlying structure of anything will determine its behavior. Our tendency, particularly in the West (Europe, America, Canada, etc.), is to want to change things before we understand what has caused them. How do we change? How do we solve our problems? Tell us what to do.

A different orientation is to first find out what has caused the current condition before we attempt to cause a new and better outcome. Often, real cause and effect are not simply on the level of events driving other events, but elements within a structure that are not always apparent. Once we study the underlying structure, we are well positioned to make changes that are effective, lasting and successful.

What are the elements that contribute to an underlying structure? They often include our dynamic urge to aspire to something that matters to us, our values, the actual reality we live in (the physics of reality for example), and various concepts we hold.

There are two types of behaviors that the underlying structure will produce. One is oscillation, in which we

may reach our goals, but then there is a reversal in which we lose our goals. The business success that turned into a financial loss, the wonderful relationship that didn't last, the project that didn't go anywhere. This pattern begins with success, but is followed by failure. It is easy to look at the events and say, “Here's where I made my mistake. I'll learn to not do that again.” Yet, if the underlying structure remains the same, next time there will be a different event that, as it turns out, functions like the one in the last story.

You Can't Fool Mother Structure

The other pattern is that of advancement, or full accomplishment. In this pattern, you do achieve your goal, but there is no counterpoint pulling you back. In fact, the success you achieve becomes the platform for further success. This is the essence of the creative process: to master how to bring about the creations you desire.

Most of us were trained to think in terms of events. We were not trained to think in terms of the underlying structures that actually cause the broader pattern of events. And when we begin to look toward the underlying structural dynamics in play, a new world of possibilities opens to us. ■

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