



Keep-up, Not Catch-up

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A core premise behind any change or productivity improvement effort is the concept of Keep-up, not Catch-up.

Conditions in life, science, business, medicine, and government evolve dynamically. Occasionally, the change is transformational or disruptive. In effect, the new information/knowledge gap "stacks up," and creates an obstacle to moving forward.

Failing to keep up with events or deal with the wall of new knowledge puts us at a clear disadvantage and requires hard work to catch up. When stuck in a liminal abyss, it is difficult to know what is relevant and where to reenter the process. The result may be the Alice in Wonderland effect, where you run ever faster but stay in the same place.

On a recent trip to Hawaii, I had the opportunity to visit a lava tube and gain a hands-on situational perspective.

Lessons from a Lava Tube

I knew in advance not to enter a lava tube alone, but it was part of the study on education, thresholds, assimilation, and application. From the beginning, my objective was not to walk completely through the cave. The goal was to discover analogies illustrating the difficulty of recognizing change, and then to obtain the knowledge needed to deal with future realities.

The staircase into the tube is uneven in both height and width, making it difficult to retain balance. The amount of light fades quickly in the dark, rough texture of the cave, perhaps twelve feet wide and nine feet high at this point.



An iron hand-rail embedded in the rough rock helped smooth out the path but proved insufficient to lessen the risk of falling. A young couple, flashlights in hand, hurried past and disappeared into the darkness.



Time for the experiment, I turned off the flashlight, and let go of the rail.



I have NEVER experienced such darkness or quiet. Everything resembling light was absorbed. I turned around in several circles, deliberately not counting, stopped and was lost in time, space and direction. In complete control, my fight/flight response never-the-less touched the edge of panic. The rail was on the opposite side of where I thought it to be. Lacking any other tool, I would have walked further into the darkness.



I turned on the flashlight, reoriented, and headed out of the tube. I slowly climbed both flights of stairs back into full daylight, blinking for a few moments before my eyes adjusted to the brightness. Suddenly, everything was clear once again.

Our journey through life is full of "threshold" events, confronting new situations that challenge current habits and thought patterns requiring more information.

In the darkness, unable to evaluate the size and complexity of the situation, the result was confusion. The disorientation caused by turning around is analogous to thrashing about, looking for a place to start. The flashlight was the essential tool, providing knowledge to analyze the way forward.

The stairways represent the incremental path of actions, education, personal change, and connections required to climb through the liminal threshold into the light.

In this new world, everything is swiftly changing. Social, cultural, and technological disruptions put us all in similar situations. It is tough to deal with the fact that failing to obtain additional education may lead to lost opportunities, unrealized potential, or failure. It is equally, if not more difficult, to modify ingrained or destructive habits and perceptions that delay our actions. There is no one else to blame.

Being stuck in a black hole is undesirable, and as demonstrated by the young people in the tube, the ambitious will leave us behind. Caught up in analysis paralysis, I could not catch up, and had no second opportunity. In this new world, situational awareness is imperative, and inaction is the enemy within.



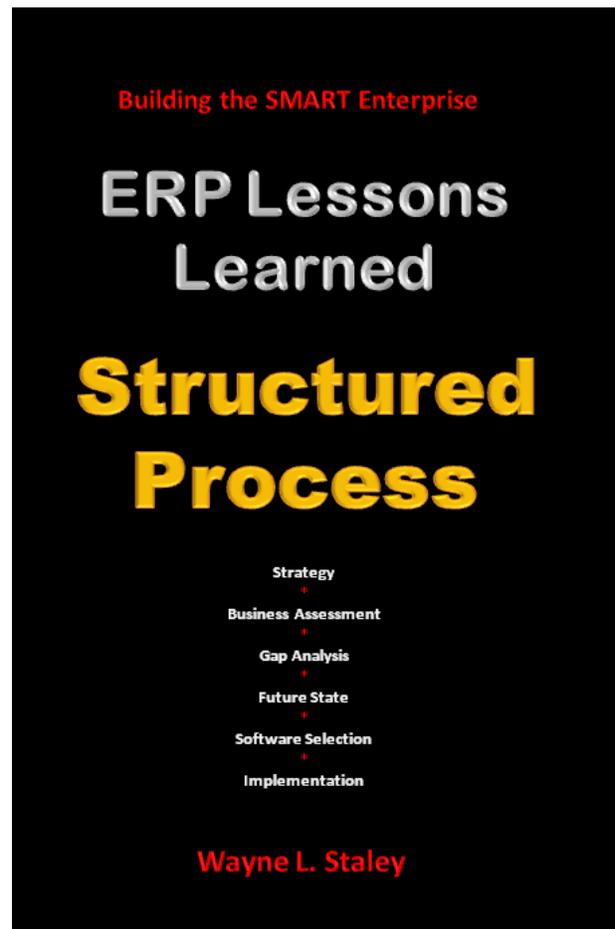
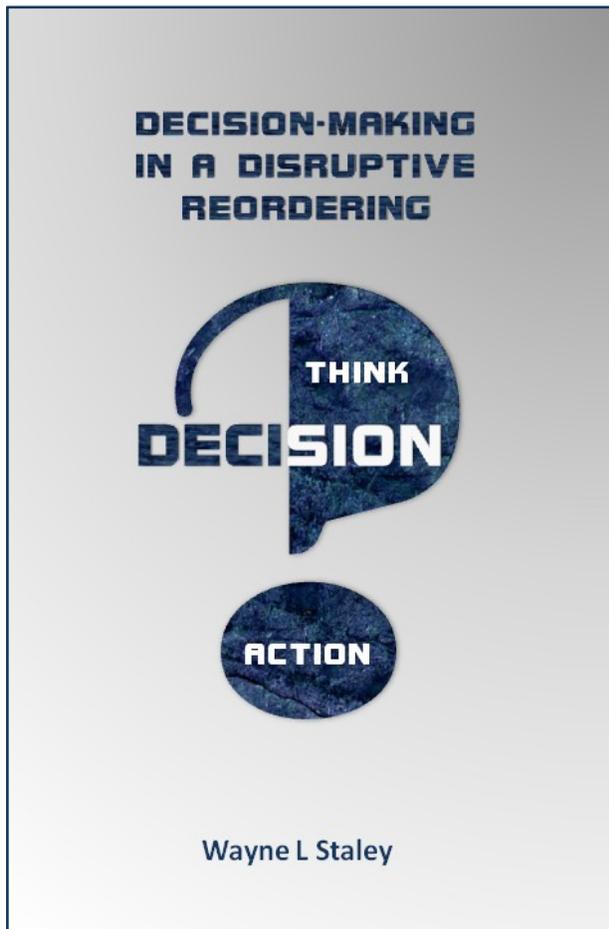
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