

Chapter Eight

Strategic Intuition in Army Training

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This paper introduces strategic intuition as a form of strategic thinking, and contrasts it with traditional strategic planning and “expert intuition”. It then applies strategic intuition to the problem of assessing and developing strategic thinkers in Army units. Last, it shows how to use the method of strategic intuition for a third and more difficult problem: retaining strategic thinkers for longer periods within the Army.

There are many definitions of strategic thinking. Here we will use this one: *the mental method for developing a feasible course of action toward a worthwhile goal in the face of a strategic problem or opportunity*. In a strategic problem you face a new situation that requires a creative answer to some degree; no two strategic problems are ever exactly alike.

There are many competing methods of strategic thinking. Each one gives a different set of instructions for what to do. Training in strategic thinking necessarily chooses among those many methods. Teaching them all would only sow confusion in the learner’s mind and lead to chaos in the field as everyone applies a different method. Let’s see what methods the Army currently favors.

Strategic thinking is a form of problem-solving. The Army’s FM 5-0 (U.S. Department of Army, 2010) instructs officers to first conduct a situation analysis and then generate options:

B-83: Brainstorming is the preferred technique for generating options. (p. B-16)

But this leaves us with a mystery: how exactly should I brainstorm? If I’m sitting in a brainstorming meeting, what mental method should I use to generate an option to propose at the meeting? FM 5-0 does not say.

For higher-level strategy, the Army has guidelines rather than formal doctrine. For example, the Army War College’s “Guidelines for Strategy” (Cerami & Holcomb, 2001) went into great detail on strategic analysis to assess the current strategy and then concluded:

Based on this assessment, present policy recommendations for national diplomatic, economic, and military policies that must be changed currently and in the future to protect against threats and to take advantage of existing opportunities. (p. 225)

But how do we generate a “policy recommendation?” The Guidelines do not say. In practice, the usual method is brainstorming.

We can see that in both cases—for problem-solving and higher-level strategy – the Army’s preferred method of strategic thinking begins with some kind of analysis and then offers no instructions for creating an “option” or “recommendation” for action other than brainstorming.

However, the preferred method is silent on how you actually think up an idea. The Army is not alone in this. It is almost universal, among all kinds of organizations around the world: analyze, then brainstorm (Duggan, 2005). As a result, most training in strategic thinking—in the Army and elsewhere—is actually training in strategic analysis. The second step—coming up with an idea—remains mysterious. This paper offers a solution to the mystery. It presents “strategic intuition” as a method for creating a feasible course of action toward a worthwhile goal in the face of a strategic problem or opportunity. It is the missing link in strategic thinking: how to create your strategic idea.

Strategic Intuition as Strategic Thinking

To see how strategic intuition works, let’s start with expert intuition. Herbert Simon (see Simon, 1989) won the Nobel Prize in Economics in 1978 partially for his research on how experts think, and in the 1990s Gary Klein (1998) took to the field to study experts in action: firefighters, emergency-room nurses, and soldiers in battle. In the past decade, expert intuition has become a significant field of study in its own right. Malcolm Gladwell’s (2005) popular book *Blink* gives a recent summary of that research.

We now know that expert intuition is the rapid recall and application of thoughts and actions from direct experience in similar situations. The more experience, the better and faster your expert intuition. So a nurse can walk across the emergency-room floor, glance at a child, and rush over to save the child’s life. How did she do it? She noticed something she had seen before: something in the child’s eyes, how the child was sitting, and so forth. Expert intuition happens so fast that experts can seldom pin down what exactly they recalled, but Klein developed an interview method that succeeds to a surprising degree.

We develop and use expert intuition every day, in all kinds of skills and tasks. Most military training increases expert intuition. But expert intuition can be the enemy of strategic thinking. We see a new situation and quickly see what’s familiar within it, and act accordingly. But if the situation is different enough, we’ve just made a big mistake. Expert intuition cannot solve a strategic problem, which by definition is a new situation. What if our nurse’s emergency room is dirty, crowded and losing money – and she’s never experienced that before? She cannot just walk across the floor and recall the answer from her past experience. Expert intuition won’t work.

She needs strategic intuition instead. This is a particular form of learning-and-memory that has strong roots in strategic theory and empirical cases. We can define strategic intuition as the selective recall and projection of past elements into the future as a course of action in a new combination that fits previous goals or sparks new ones, with the personal commitment to follow through and work out the details along the way. It typically occurs as one or a series of flashes of insight that occur when the mind is relaxed. The past elements come from both direct experience and from the experience of others that you learned, recall and combine.

We can go back to some classics of strategy theory and see elements of strategic intuition within them, in particular Sun Tzu’s (c. 512 BC/2003) *Art of War* and *On War* by Clausewitz (1832/1976). Modern brain research shows that Sun Tzu’s Dao philosophy promotes a state of

mind that favors flashes of insight. Modern Asian martial arts feature the same mental discipline: the “do” in judo, aikido, tae-kwondo and the like means “Dao.” And Clausewitz gives four keys to strategic intuition that translate well into modern strategy in any field of endeavor: examples from history, presence of mind, coup d’oeil, and resolution.¹

Examples from history are a form of learning-and-memory where you especially retain and recall the specific tactics that others combined for a successful strategy in a previous situation. This happens naturally because we’re human. It is how you learned most things in life, from walking and talking to sports and calculus: from what other people did before you. But it can happen actively as well, through study. And here we meet Clausewitz’s main example: Napoleon. By studying what Napoleon himself described as the “eighty-three campaigns” of the “great captains whose high deeds history has transmitted to us,” he had an arsenal of elements to combine in each new situation he faced (see Duggan, 2002; Herold, 1955).

The second step, presence of mind, translates well to the Dao philosophy of Sun Tzu and Asian martial arts. You must free your mind of all expectation of what might happen: you “expect the unexpected,” as Clausewitz (1832/1976) puts it. This is actually very difficult to do. The two biggest obstacles to presence of mind are excessive focus and negative emotions. Excessive focus means you cannot let go of your current understanding of the problem, your goals, your timeline, options you’ve already listed, and so on. You must free your mind of all that, to let your brain make new connections. And negative emotions of all kinds—anger, frustration, worry, fear—flood the brain with the hormone cortisol, which blocks recall. You literally cannot think creatively (see Dugan & Mason, 2011).

The third element, coup d’oeil—or glance in French—is the term Clausewitz (1832/1976) uses for a flash of insight. Modern brain science shows how presence of mind fosters flashes of insight. In a clear mind, selected examples from history combine in a new way to show you what course of action to take. It is not a complete strategy, but it provides key elements that show you the way. It may be one big coup d’oeil—the famous “Aha!” in the shower—or a series of smaller ones that you do not feel as strongly as discrete cognitive events. But the mental mechanism is the same for both, large or small.

Last comes resolution: that is, resolve, determination, will. The flash of insight sparks a conviction that this is the right path despite the obstacles and resistance you will face, especially from others around you who did not have the idea. Of course, it is hard to distinguish good resolution for a good coup d’oeil from stubborn persistence for a bad idea. But examples from history offer help: if the examples from history that made up the coup d’oeil are solid and in sum cover the new situation, that’s a good idea.

We can now look at how analysis really works. Let’s analyze the performance of American forces in Afghanistan. You look at the situation and you draw from similar situations in your memory some set of measures and data you judge applies to this new situation. If these parallels

¹ For a comprehensive review of these sources, see Duggan, W. (2007). *Strategic intuition: The creative spark in human achievement*. New York: Columbia Business School Publishing. For the Asian sources in particular, see Duggan, W. (2008). Strategic intuition: East meets west in the executive mind. *Peking University Business Review*, January.

come quickly, from only your own direct experience, that's expert intuition. If it takes more time, and you draw from situations you know about that are not in your direct experience, that's strategic intuition. In practice you typically draw from both, and you cannot sort out which is which. But the strength of your resolution—how hard you argue your case—depends on how strong those parallels seem to you, whether or not you are conscious of them and able to explain.

It is unlikely that anyone has enough of the right direct experience to analyze well the performance of American forces in Afghanistan solely through expert intuition. So we call that a “strategic” situation, where you need strategic intuition. If the situation is within your direct experience, we call that a “tactical” situation, and expert intuition works. Strategic thinking—as strategic intuition—is thus the search for the right combination of parallels within and beyond your own experience to apply to a new situation.

Strategic thinking has a second step as well: strategic synthesis. That is, after you analyze the situation, you get an idea for what action to take. Quite literally, an idea comes together in your mind. We can see the same distinction between expert and strategic intuition: do the elements of your idea come just from your own experience (expert) or also from the experience of others (strategic)? If we now ask what course of action American forces should pursue in Afghanistan in the future, this is clearly a strategic question where no one person has enough direct experience to give a good answer solely from that source. And we see again how there is no logical answer to the question, just better or worse guesses, whose strength depends on the quality and relevance of the parallels from which we draw.

From Strategic Intuition to Creative Strategy

In ordinary practice, strategists are seldom conscious of the precise examples from history that make up their flashes of insight. But in team situations, it helps greatly to make your examples explicit. Once he was in charge, Napoleon never had to explain his coup d'oeil. In modern organizations, we do. That's why we must convert the four elements of Clausewitz into a more formal method of strategic thinking for teams. The result is “creative strategy,” where you apply strategic intuition in a systematic way to find a creative solution to a strategic problem. The method of creative strategy comes from three diverse sources: “rapid appraisal” in international economic development, a “what-works scan” in social policy research, and a problem-solving matrix from General Electric's corporate university in the late 1990s. Together, these three sources give us a team method that matches well what a single brain does in a flash of insight of strategic intuition (Duggan, in press).

The starting point of creative strategy is an “Insight Matrix,” to organize examples from history that the rapid appraisal and what-works scan discover. At the top of the matrix, the team writes down its current understanding of the situation or problem, always as a provisional draft because it might change. This kind of change is normal in strategic thinking: sometimes that insight you have at night is a realization that the problem is actually different from what you first thought. Then comes analysis: you break down the problem into smaller pieces. You list these in rows, also in draft, because they too might change as you proceed.

These first two steps of creative strategy—the problem and its pieces—need not take much time,

but you must do them well, and with the right people. This is where rapid appraisal comes in. It is a set of iterative interview techniques that unearth what a key set of people really think about a problem. The interviewees must include whoever will ultimately decide what strategy to pursue and then take the lead in pursuing it. These are sometimes the same person, sometimes two people, sometimes more. In complex situations and organizations, often you must conduct one quick round of interviews just to find out who these people are. If you then change the problem or its pieces as you proceed, you must go back to that key group to get their understanding and approval.

Next, you ask an important and often overlooked question: “Has anyone else ever made progress on any piece of this puzzle?” Across the top of the matrix, as columns, you list sources to search for an answer to this question, and draft again for they might change. Now the team starts a treasure hunt—the what-works scan. You search the sources for elements that might apply to each item on the list of problem pieces. This is seldom easy, because outside of physical science we lack statistical “proof” that one element works best to yield a particular effect.

This what-works scan has its own specialized methods and techniques to arrive at a set of elements that fit the problem at hand. This scan is quite different from traditional strategy methods, which spend most of their time and effort on research about the problem. In contrast, creative strategy comes after the key leaders in charge of the problem have already done their homework in that regard, by whatever method they think best. Once they understand the problem and decide to try to solve it, creative strategy spends most of its time and effort on searching for solutions, as a what-works scan.

The what-works scan takes as much time as you’ve got. In urgent situations, that might be one day. For longer-term problems, it can take a week, or a month, or a year. In principle, a what-works scan can go on forever, as there are always more corners of human experience to investigate. In the old days of gold mining, if you had infinite time and money, you would dig a hole everywhere on earth, as deep as possible. The less time and money you had, the fewer and more shallow the holes. So, too, with a what-works scan.

When you run out of time, or when you judge you have found plenty of promising elements, you take the next step: you select and combine. There is no precise formula for that, because this step matches the flash of insight in a single brain, where elements come together in your mind. You connect the dots. But not all the dots. The what-works scan yields a set of elements worthy of combination, but if you combine them all you will just have a giant mess. You see how that one, and that one, and that one together make a strategy that will fit your situation and solve your problem.

This step produces resolution: the will to pursue the strategy you see. This is where most strategy-making falls short. Some expert or group of experts produces a report that concludes with a strategy that they hand over to leaders to make a decision. In other words, the experts had the coup d’oeil and resolution, not the leaders. That’s why most such reports end up gathering dust on office shelves.

Creative strategy solves this problem in two ways. The simplest is that the answer comes back to

the leaders in the form they understood and agreed to: the problem and its pieces that the rapid appraisal drew out of them. Then the what-works scan fills in the pieces. The scan might conclude with a select combination of elements. The leaders are in a good position to see the combination, and thus have resolution to act. A way to yield stronger resolution is to present the leaders with the results of the what-works scan, and then lead them through the steps of selecting and combining the elements themselves. You can do this by iterative interviews—a rapid appraisal in reverse—or through a formal workshop.

We are now ready to contrast strategic intuition, as the formal method of creative strategy, with other forms of strategic thinking. In the business world, the most popular form of strategic thinking comes from Michael Porter's (1980) "competitive strategy."² This method offers a means of analyzing your industry and competitors. But it says nothing at all about how you then proceed to your strategic idea. In practice, the team digests their analysis and then goes into a room to brainstorm. But what actually happens during brainstorming? If I ask you to quickly throw out an idea about something, what method will you use? Expert intuition. You will draw from your direct experience in some way. If you fill the room with a diverse set of people, we have a diverse set of direct experiences, and that helps somewhat. But what if the element we need is beyond the experience of the people in the room? They need time to let their minds search for it in the deep recesses of memory, which a brainstorming session does not let them do. Or they need a what-works scan to look even further afield.

Although expert intuition is what really happens in brainstorming, you're told to "think outside the box." Use your imagination. Think up something completely new. But is that good advice? I'm now going to think outside the box on the future strategy of American forces in Afghanistan: we'll invent a pill that makes them invisible. But of course that's ridiculous. Why? Because your brain quickly scans examples from history and you know what I propose is impossible. The whole premise of brainstorming is massively misconceived: that is, lots of wild ideas from a group of people will produce a single or composite gem. At best, you get decent ideas from expert intuition. At worst, you get useless fantasies.

Let's see an example from the business world that makes the limits of brainstorming clear. Steve Jobs was famous as a creative thinker, and he was quite conscious of how he did it. For him, "creativity is just connecting things" that you see from various sources (Duggan & Mason, 2011). He wasn't even an engineer. He was an innovator, pure and simple, who mastered strategic intuition. His first successful product was the Apple II: the world's first small, cheap, easy-to-use computer. His partner Steve Wozniak was the one who actually built it. Xerox then invested some money in Apple, and that allowed Jobs to visit the Xerox research center in Palo Alto, California. Jobs saw a big, expensive machine that ran the world's first graphical user interface and mouse. The Apple II had the standard green screen. Jobs had a classic coup d'oeil, where two elements came together in his mind: the small machine of Wozniak, plus the graphical user interface and mouse from Xerox. The result was the Macintosh, an even bigger hit than the Apple II.

² Since Porter, there have been other popular methods of business strategy, but they are all forms of analysis that rely on brainstorming to follow. For example, see Christenson, C., & Raynor, M. (2003). *The innovator's solution*. Cambridge: Harvard Business School Press; Kim, W., & Mauborgne, R. (2005). *Blue ocean strategy*. Cambridge: Harvard Business School Press.

If you look at all subsequent Apple innovations, they have been a series of creative combinations from elements that Apple mostly did not invent. For the Macintosh, the Apple team could have brainstormed forever and never come up with the graphical user interface and mouse. Those elements were beyond their personal experience. To find them, they had to search. And that's what Jobs spent most of his time doing thereafter, once he figured out the secret of creative strategy. Such is the real story of all kinds of successful innovations, in business and all other fields.³

Brainstorming can work, when the problem at hand is within the collective experience of the people in the room. For many problems, that's fine. For strategic problems or innovation, brainstorming will give you an expert solution, not a creative one. Unfortunately, brainstorming is still the dominant method of creative thinking in the world today, for all kinds of organizations. Some methods specialize in the brainstorming part. For example, IDEO is a well-known firm that applies "design thinking" to brainstorming. But it amounts to the same thing. These methods all follow the same two steps: some kind of analysis, and then brainstorming.

Assess and Develop Strategic Thinkers

Now that we see how strategic intuition differs from conventional methods of strategic thinking, we can see the problem of both assessing and developing strategic thinkers in any organization. The simplest problem is this: if you use the wrong definition of strategic thinking, then you will find the wrong kind of thinkers and develop in them the wrong kind of thinking. In that case, people who are terrible at your method of strategic thinking might actually be the best strategic thinkers, because they're right and your method is wrong. So the first step is to change your formal methods of strategic thinking to creative strategy instead, then you will see who is good at it. If your organization lacks the understanding or commitment to convert to creative strategy, then master it yourself and look for people who think that way even if they do not follow a formal method—like Steve Jobs.

Of course people differ in their creative abilities and we know enough about how creativity works to assess whether someone seems at ease with creative combination: that is, making new combinations from disparate elements. Unfortunately, there is no formal test of this. If you give me three objects to combine, I might be a whiz at combining, but one of the three objects might be completely new to me; so, I have no idea how to combine it. In this way, all creative tests are partly a test of knowledge—it is impossible to test creativity alone.⁴

Creativity tests fall into four basic categories: divergent thinking, such as the Torrance Test of Creative Thinking; convergent thinking, such as Mednick's Remote Association Task, artistic assessment, such as the Barron-Welsh Art Scale; and specialized personality tests, such as the

³ See Duggan and Mason (2011) for the Jobs example and many others in business and other fields.

⁴ Gayle Dow has compiled a full set of creativity assessments at Indiana University (see http://www.indiana.edu/~bobweb/r546/modules/creativity/creativity_tests.html).

Lees-Haley Creative Behavior Inventory. The divergent and convergent thinking tests suffer knowledge bias. The artistic tests make the mistake of equating “creative” and “artistic.” And the personality tests ask questions that typically include divergent, convergent and artistic questions, which only compound the problem. And all these tests are timed, which might be their greatest flaw. True creative ideas need lots of time to form in the brain.⁵

If you cannot convert the whole Army to the methods of creative strategy, and personality tests and other formal assessments do not work, how do you judge someone’s strategic thinking in a scientific way? The answer is: you cannot. Science has yet to advance that far. The only way is informal, through observation. Who seems curious? Who reads and thinks and asks questions outside their core areas of expertise? Who seeks new experiences, for learning rather than thrills? Who solves problems by looking for parallels outside their personal experience? This might help you select a small cohort to learn the method of creative strategy. Only when they learn it and do it will you be able to tell who understands it best, can do it best, and wants to do it more. That might give you a group that can stay in touch as they spread creative strategy to their regular units. This is how any new method spreads through big organizations that do not adopt it formally.

Above all, strategic intuition is something you can learn. Certainly some people can learn it better and faster than others, but there is no easy way to determine who they are ahead of time. And the biggest obstacle to learning strategic intuition is not the innate ability of the learner, but the competing methods of strategic thinking that people learn instead. That was Patton’s problem. He found himself in constant conflict with his fellow officers, who used traditional planning methods, learned in the same academies and courses (see Duggan, 2002). Jomini was the main source of those conventional methods, which spread from military to business, with a clear pedigree straight to Michael Porter and beyond. But Patton used strategic intuition instead. And like Napoleon, Patton was quite conscious of his method. He tells us that an officer:

...must become so thoroughly conversant with all sorts of military possibilities that whenever an occasion arises he has at hand without effort on his part a parallel...to attain this end, I think it is necessary for a man to begin to read military history in its earliest and hence crudest form and to follow it down in natural sequence permitting his mind to grow with his subject until he can grasp without effort the most abstruse question of the science of war. (D’Este, 1993, p. 94)

Patton was a master of examples from history to apply to the new situation at hand; but it got him into trouble:

For years I have been accused of making snap judgments. Honestly, this is not the case because I am a profound military student and the thoughts I express are the result of years of thought and study. (D’Este, 1993, p. 445)

⁵ Yet Mednick, the author of a popular associative test, gave one of the best descriptions of creativity: “the forming of associative elements into new combinations which either meet specified requirements or are in some way useful”. See Mednick, S. (1962). The associative basis of the creative process. *Psychological Review*, 69, 220-232.

Patton is a striking case where expert intuition meets strategic intuition. He studied the experience of others—that is, examples from history—so deeply that he could recall them almost as fast as his own experience. He knew past battles so intimately that he hinted he did so because he was there, through reincarnation. In a way, he was indeed there, by studying them so thoroughly that he could place himself in specific spots at specific times in each campaign. The famous statue of Patton at West Point should remind us of his greatest skill, which all officers need to learn and practice: strategic intuition.⁶

Retain Strategic Thinkers

The three problems of assessing, developing and retaining strategic thinkers are nested, like Russian matryoshka dolls: your strategy to develop includes your strategy to assess, and your strategy to retain includes your strategy to develop. So retaining is the biggest and hardest problem because it includes the other two to some degree. Let's use this problem of retention to demonstrate how to apply creative strategy, with assessment and development as two of the many rows of our insight matrix.

ARI's background material gives clues to other matrix rows:

- *What are the motivators and demotivators for strategic thinking? What are the reward structures for strategic thinkers in non-strategic positions?*
- *How should the Army manage the talent pool to keep strategic thinkers from leaving?*
- *Do natural strategic thinkers need particular assignments to stay motivated? How can they self-motivate in any assignment and find ways to apply their thinking processes to non-strategic problems?*
- *How can the Army socialize the value of early career strategic thinkers?*

We can summarize these problems as motivation, reward structure, talent management, assignment, and early socialization. We add them to the rows of the matrix, with assessment and development. That's a good start. We then need to use rapid appraisal to verify this list with the key leaders who will decide on and have responsibility and authority for implementing the creative strategy that we come up with. That might alter the list. Next, we look for sources that might have solved at least one of the problems in the rows. These are our matrix columns. We then set out on the what-works scan.

Let's pause to contrast this method with a more common one for solving a problem this big and complex: expert opinion. That is, you ask a set of experts in different specialties what they recommend to solve the problem. That's similar to brainstorming, where each person in the room draws on their own expert intuition to answer. The advantage is similar too: a wider range of sources than only one person's experience. But remember the Macintosh: the Apple team could

⁶ Key sources on Patton's thinking are D'Este, C., *Patton: A genius for war*. New York: Harper Collins. Nye, R. (1993). *The Patton mind*. Garden City: Avery. Blumenson, M. (1972-74). *The Patton Papers*, 2 volumes. New York: Houghton Mifflin.

have brainstormed forever and never come up with the graphical user interface and the mouse. If they had put together a panel of experts instead, it would be left to chance whether the right person from Xerox would end up in the room.

For the problem of retaining strategic thinkers in the Army, we cannot predict who will be the right experts to ask for elements of the solution. Only a search can do that: like Jobs did informally, or as a formal what-works scan. Experts are good for coming up with the rows and columns of the matrix, but they cannot possibly have direct experience of all the solution elements you will discover when you actually do the scan. No one has that much experience in all the different fields and kinds of organizations that your search will reach. The opinion of a dozen experts is good, but a search among hundreds of examples from history is even better.

More practically, let's see how ARI might proceed after receiving and discussing the expert papers in this present project. From there, ARI might revise the list of matrix rows and start to fill in the column sources. One likely addition to the rows is "staff reduction," if the Army expects that over the coming decade. The next step would be to conduct rapid appraisal to verify and alter those rows and columns with the set of people in the Army system that are best placed to decide and lead for the range of solutions that might arise.

Like this problem, the Army itself is so large and complex that it might not be easy to figure out who will ultimately decide and lead the resulting strategy. That step might require a rapid appraisal of its own: big complex problems in big complex organizations typically turn up key deciders and leaders who are not obvious at first. The key group might end up so big and diverse—perhaps from within and outside the Army itself—that you need a formal workshop to bring them together to agree on the problem and its pieces that you draw from the rapid appraisal.

ARI would then conduct the what-works scan, to investigate sources that have made progress at some time on these various pieces of the puzzle. Because of the subject, the sources to scan would likely extend far beyond the military; retaining high-potential or high-performing staff is a problem all big organizations face to some degree. Certainly some organizations, somewhere, have made progress on some parts of the problem, especially under pressure of staff reduction. The farther afield you search, the more creative your strategy. For example, traditional churches have faced staff reductions over the past few decades. Have any of them done anything that works to retain their strategic thinkers, even if they do not call them that explicitly? Perhaps religious organizations of all kinds and faith are worth searching, because like the Army, their staff are heavily influenced by official doctrine and personal motivation, but face volatile, complex circumstances that call for strategic solutions.

Given the scope and complexity of the problem, this what-works scan will likely take months. It will likely involve several changes to the problem and its pieces, which you need to run by the set of deciders and leaders for their understanding and approval. And then comes the last step, to select and combine the elements. ARI has the usual range of options here. On one extreme, you can select and combine yourselves and present the set of deciders and leaders with a single creative strategy. On the other extreme, you can give them all the elements you found and lead them through a workshop where they select and combine themselves.

My guess is the solution lies somewhere in between these two extremes. The problem is so big and complex that the solution will be too. If ARI selects and combines, then they cannot possibly expect readers to see what ARI sees. Each reader will see something else. You will lose agreement among them, and the resolution to follow through. On the other hand, the deciders and leaders are probably so many and so busy that few of them would study the elements you give them enough to be able to select and combine them themselves in a workshop. ARI might pare down the elements to ones they see as most promising and suggest partial combinations of different elements to solve different pieces of the problem and then have a workshop from that. But do not present a full combination, or you will lose the resolution of the deciders and leaders.

I do not know ARI well, but I would guess you have the potential to do all these steps. Most likely, ARI's present methods for research and creative problem-solving are not creative strategy. If ARI understands strategic intuition, and decides to learn and try out creative strategy, a strategic solution is well within your grasp.

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