

28 The Matrix

For 5,000 years, humans lived in the past tense: "Yesterday was the same as tomorrow." For the next 500 years people lived in the present tense: "Today can be whatever we want it to be." But now, for the next 50 years we must start living in the future tense: "Tomorrow's social, economic and political constraints must become today's reality."

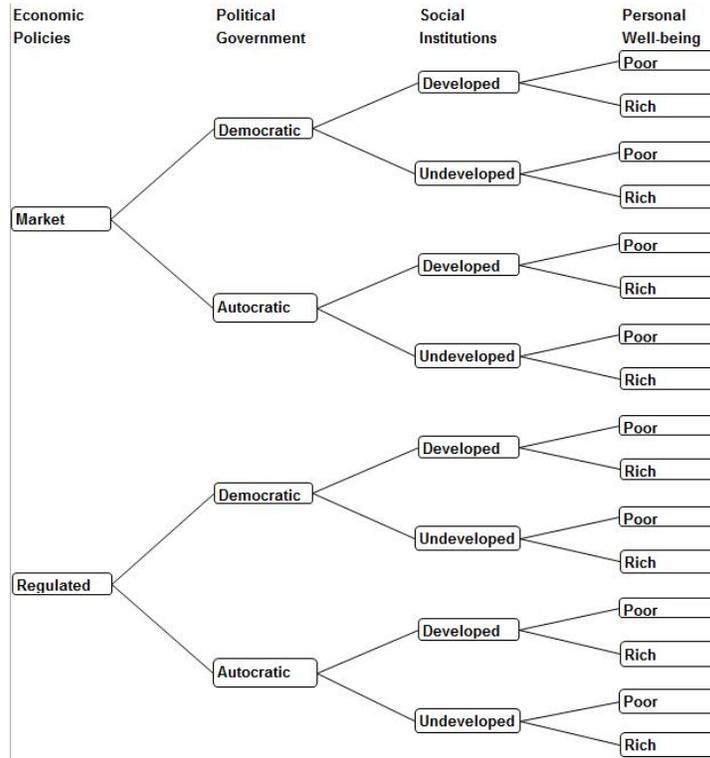
"A quote."

The source

In the context of this book, the conceptual task is to understand how the economic, political and social aspects of an issue manifest themselves at the personal or psychological level. Most issues have more than one aspect. A common way to treat such complex subjects is to think about them in a hierarchical manner.

Hierarchical Thinking

Hierarchical thinking can best be represented by a flow-type diagram in which a major distinction subsumes a number of other secondary distinctions. In the example is below, an economic perspective is taken as the primary distinction, and the other distinctions become sequential aspects.



In this example, if one concept is assumed to be super-ordinate and subsumes the other three, the four considerations permit 24 different conceptual hierarchies. Often, such conceptual frameworks are built around a particular perspective – such as economic

globalization -- that relegates the related aspects to a sequential hierarchy. However, critics of globalization argue that the efficiency of free market economics should not be the super-ordinate concept, but that it should be human well-being, which in the above example is the end-point consequence.

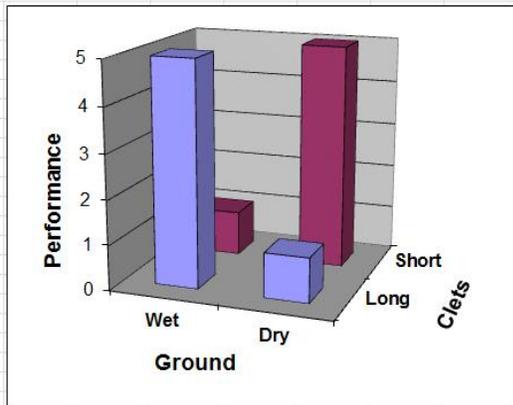
“A quote”

Author and source

Both ideological and academic disciplines tend to result in hierarchical thinking when applied to social issues and to solving practical problems. Because this approach yields many possible solutions, social issues and practical problems often appear to be intractable. The alternative is to turn the thinking process on its head, and begin with the social issue or the practical problem that needs to be solved; the results in a form of matrix thinking. Most social issues and practical problems are complex, and have political, economic and social aspects. In a matrix, these three aspects are treated as dependent rather than as independent variables.

Matrix Thinking

In contrast to a hierarchy, matrix thinking considers how the separate dimensions combine. In this way of thinking there is no super-ordinate concept. Each dimension is simply part of a matrix. Consider a simple illustration of whether you play better on wet and dry ground or with long or short cleats. There is not an absolute answer. The answer is in found in the matrix.



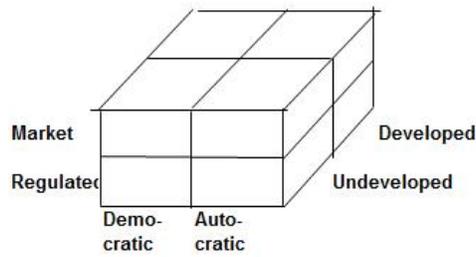
Cleats	Ground	
	Wet	Dry
Long	5	1
Short	1	5

To apply matrix thinking to the diagram of hierarchical thinking, the first three dimensions would have to be repeated for both high and low levels of well-being, resulting in 16 unique possibilities as the outcome. Issues in the social and behavioral sciences look different when

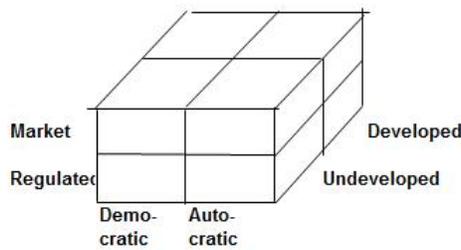
approached from a matrix type of thinking rather than a hierarchical one.

Matrix thinking avoids rigidly applying ideological and theoretical perspectives as if they are applicable in a universal way to all issues and all practical problems. Rather, they are simply treated as being dependent on the nature of the issue or problem to be solved. This is the appropriate order because ideologies and theories are the relative negotiable elements over which we have control; the social issues and practical problems are the actual reality to be explained descriptively. The social sciences can provide empirical

evidence on the contributions of various economic, political and social conditions on various social issues and practical problems.



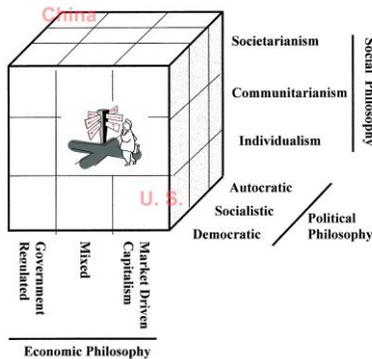
High Levels of Personal Well-being



Low Levels of Personal Well-being

Is the level of personal well-being better off under an autocratic or a democratic system, under a regulated rather than market economy when the social institutions are either developed or undeveloped?

Just as performance is low when the field is wet and cleats or short, or the field is dry and cleats are long, our ideological and theoretical perspectives are the relative and negotiable elements, but reality is not. However, when we reverse that arrangement and our ideologies and theories become nonnegotiable, only then do our social issues and practical problems become intractable.



It is unlikely there is a single universal solution to the ideal combination of all of the possible economic, political and social distinctions for all issues, for all people at all times and places.

Significant social issues and practical problems – such as variations in wealth and income disparity -- are the reality that must be understood by descriptively identifying their underlying economic, political and social conditions. The ideological and theoretical distinctions are the empirical descriptive, not the prescriptive, elements in matrix thinking.