White Paper:

Foundations of the 5 Dynamics Model and Assessment

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Contents

Summary ........................................................................................................ 1
The 5 Dynamics Model.................................................................................. 2
The 5 Dynamics Differentiator................................................................. 4
The 5 Dynamics Assessment..................................................................... 8
Neurophysiological Assumptions............................................................ 14
About the Authors..................................................................................... 16
Summary

• 5 Dynamics is a *method*, a way to work.

• Using this method, employees consider their work as a *process*.

• Each task in the process is best done with a particular type of concentrated focus, as well as a way of perceiving that task, and certain behaviors and ways of thinking that lead to easy, successful outcomes. We call each of these types of focus demanded by the work “Dynamics.”

• Virtually all work can be described in five Dynamics: Explore, Excite, Examine, Execute, and Evaluate. For a given work processes these repeatedly appear in a sequence.

• Each individual naturally invests him or herself most naturally comfortably in certain Dynamics, and less easily in others. *This differs from competence.*

• “Energies” refer to people’s natural ease in spending time and focus in each Dynamic. They refer to one’s measured preferences for learning, perceiving, collaborating, and behaviorally working. These Energies correspond to the first four Dynamics: Explore, Excite, Examine, Execute.

• Before using the 5 Dynamics method, individuals measure their own Energies through a rigorous psychometric assessment that is delivered online.

• They then use the work-based process model to apply their own, and other people’s energies, to achieve the optimal external business results (“Success”) and their highest internal engagement “Satisfaction”).

This paper provides you with background into the method—an adaptation of the Gestalt Cycle of Experience—and the development of the Assessment, which measures how people prefer to engage in that Cycle.
The 5 Dynamics Model

Summary

- Process models now dominate the business landscape
- Knowledge industries apply process tools
- No process tools adequately measure and incorporate the human element
- Much of these companies’ asset values, and upsides and vulnerabilities, reside in human factors
- 5 Dynamics addresses this opportunity

The 5 Dynamics method and model are based around work process. We have designed them to equip people with the tools they need to get work done. Benchmarks of effectiveness include greater externally measured success, and higher internal satisfaction or engagement for employees.

The past few decades have seen the emergence of a variety of work process-based models, including Six Sigma, Lean, TQM, BPM, BPR, QMF, and others. Although many originated in manufacturing environments, information technology has created a larger Knowledge Economy, and so they now are extensively applied in enterprises that produce no physical goods (as well as those that still manufacture). The intrinsic value of such a company is locked up not only in its patents, but also in the intellectual capital of its employees, their internal and external relationships, and their ability to innovate, collaborate, and execute.

Unfortunately, there is no rigorous way to capture that value on a balance sheet, so it is usually ignored. What gets measured gets done. What can’t get measured gets overlooked. Also, when actually implemented, most of the process approaches mentioned above tend to diminish the criticality of the “human element”. They may pay attention to information flows and competencies, but every executive knows that the best laid plans are ultimately vulnerable to the vagaries of personal relationships, office politics, agendas, misperceptions and misunderstandings, job mismatches, time...
sinks from “people problems”, internal friction, uncontrollable relationships with stakeholders, the quality of LOB distributed leadership, and the like.

This is precisely the gap that 5 Dynamics fills. It is the only approach that maps the people to the process. When that correspondence is clear, understood, and shared, people can move forward rapidly.

Our model of process is designed to be simple, flexible, and universal. Any user can map his workflow to it, and find that the mapping varies very little over time. Because of the simplicity (five descriptive terms to be discussed shortly) it can become a common language for an enterprise. People can objectively discuss work, and their contributions, in unambiguous terms that carry no emotional baggage.
The 5 Dynamics Differentiator

Mapping People to Process

Summary

* Origins in Gestalt Psychology and process thinking
* Subjective perception catalyzes the way we understand the world and how we get things done.
* 5 Dynamics draws from Gestalt’s orientation toward perception, action, energy and goal completion
* This is a process, and it explains many of the business results that companies achieve.

The 5 Dynamics model stems from the work its founder Michael Sturm did as a Gestalt psychologist. Gestalt concerns the ways in which people organize their relationships with their environments, and move through a cycle of concentrated focus and application of their energy to achieve their goals. Edwin and Sonia Nevis at the Gestalt Institute in Cleveland certified Sturm.  

Gestalt looks at how people become aware of certain stimuli in the world, which stimuli they “select” to act upon, the energy they invest in that action, where they get stuck, and how that interaction changes (or doesn’t alter) subsequent interaction with another similar stimulus.

To apply this model to the corporate world: a CEO may announce five new programs at a strategy offsite. Attendees make sense of the totality differently. Their focus

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1 The Nevises subsequently went to Cambridge, MA where Edwin started the MIT Executive Program, and helped create the Society for Organizational Learning with Peter Senge, who brought “process thinking” to global business. From there they founded the Gestalt International Study Center, where 5 Dynamics is in active use today.
The 5 Dynamics Differentiator

gravitates toward some, and not others. They make meaning based on what they already have known or experienced, even though the CEO wants them to “innovate”. Having made sense of it, they decide how much energy to invest in which initiatives. Next, their energy rises and falls according to predictable patterns as they work through the subtasks. As the goal is accomplished, their energy and focus diminish, and they become available to the next stimulus and focus. This goes on constantly, in a fractal fashion, in everything we do.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>A Gestalt Example: Your Latest Mission-Critical Initiative</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><img src="b72913731a662.png" alt="Image" /></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Your Company’s Slogan Here</strong></td>
</tr>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>One Face or Two?</strong></th>
<th><strong>Do you see a white triangle floating atop a black triangle overlaying three circles?</strong></th>
<th><strong>Enterprises constantly announce new initiatives and hope for “alignment” and buy-in. But employees selectively perceive the announcement, process the information differently, evaluate what it implies for them, and take action with varying degrees of intensity, focus, and purpose.</strong></th>
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</table>
| You call an all-hands meeting and announce a critical new initiative. How does your audience understand these sound waves and visual images you transmit? | No triangles or circles exist, floating or otherwise. There are just lines and shapes. To survive, early man learned to make sense of shapes, signs, forms, and edges, and apply them to what he had seen before. Is that a lion in the grass? | Gestalt psychology follows that long trail from perception to action (or inaction) in the outside world. It asks three questions: *
| | How do employees make sense of, and then act, on the command: “You’ve got to change the way you do business!”? | What do you see?  How do you understand it?  What do you do with it? |
| |                                                                                    | We also ask, “Where in that process might you lose your focus?” |

| **The Point:** 5 Dynamics looks at people’s preferred ways of understanding the world, and how they want to move” or take action around those perceptions. This is their “process.” Is it optimal for the need? |

www.5dynamics.com
The 5 Dynamics Differentiator

Sturm felt this model was too complex and abstract. He wanted to empower workers (he calls them “co-learners”) to recognize where their natural energies would most comfortably take them, and enable them to use this knowledge and navigate the world successfully, and with the least stress. Individuals begin to align their strengths with the needs at hand, and rely on others (and offer support) where tasks that demand more energy might slow them down.

Sturm noticed that accomplishing many tasks in a process required people to pass through five phases (or Dynamics) that often appeared in this approximate sequence:

- **First Dynamic:** Understand the complete situation, see relationships, and develop creative solutions.
- **Second Dynamic:** Invest your energy exciting other people about the idea. Bust silos and develop internal support. Build a team.
- **Third Dynamic:** Develop an implementation plan using data. Create schedules, budgets, timetables, clear roles and rules, etc. Predict problems. Find faults
- **Fourth Dynamic:** Aggressively implement the plan. Hold people accountable. Measure performance. Compete. Strive for completion.
- **Fifth Dynamic:** Assess the preceding four Dynamics with a two-pronged test: external success (e.g., cost, time, quality, profit) and internal satisfaction (engagement, absence of stress). Adapt the process to increase success and satisfaction in the next cycle.

If an individual, pair, or team heeded the Dynamics, completed them in the right order, didn’t overdo or ignore any, and took the time to reflect on process improvements at the end, they would become more externally successful. This would appear as revenue, profit, cost reduction, quality, innovation, customer satisfaction, cycle time, or any other quantifiable business metric.

This was not the whole picture, however. He also found that success depended on employees’ satisfaction with the work, and with their colleagues.
We have found this model to be universally applicable to jobs, roles, or larger processes that businesses conduct. With a small amount of training, employees can automatically understand what Dynamic the work ought to be in and actually is in. The next step is for the person to understand what Energies he has, and how they align with the current work Dynamic. For that, Sturm spent many years developing the 5 Dynamics assessment.
The 5 Dynamics Assessment

Summary

- The dimensions of the assessment directly match the first four Dynamics
- The brevity of the assessment is an essential design feature. It took almost 10 years of continuous work to develop it
- The assessment simultaneously measures individuals’ preferences for learning, collaborating, and important aspects of behavior in task environments
- The assessment does not measure competence, and does not use personality theory
- It began as a learning style assessment. Its foundations are in cognitive and behavioral theory
- It has been rigorously researched tested. Reliability can vary, however, with the person’s overall mental state.
- The assessment’s validity and reliability are very high. Statistical metrics are available in a separate white paper.

During the 1960s, much of the psychometric community was preoccupied with studies of the authoritarian personality. This was of course a very popular topic at the time, due to World War II and the Cold War. While studies like Milgram's shock experiment and Zimbardo's mock prison received great publicity, many other lesser-publicized academics were pursuing research on their own. W. Michael Sturm, 5 Dynamics' founder, attended American International College where he began experiments into authoritarian personality types.

His advisor at that time was Dr. Richard Sprinthall, (who subsequently wrote the critically acclaimed textbook on statistical methods for psychometrics) who, like Sturm was interested in psychometrics and the authoritarian personality. In doing this research, Sturm looked at two specific tools about the authoritarian personality: the F-
The 5 Dynamics Assessment

test of T.W. Adorno\(^2\) and the Dogmatism Test by Milton Rokeach\(^3\). This early work culminated in a lead article in the *Journal of Social Psychology*\(^4\).

Those two instruments familiarized him with scalar approaches to belief systems. At the same time he was working on the Locus of Control assessment of Julian Rotter, which measured the degree to which people believe the origin of behavioral reinforcement is internally or externally generated\(^5\). Rotter also heavily influenced clinical psychology with the thesis that personality is the interaction of the individual’s drives with the environment, and thus was context-sensitive rather than absolute. Sturm also worked extensively with two of the major learning-style assessments, the Wechsler Adult Intelligence Scale (WAIS), which measured verbal and performance IQs, and the Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children (WISC). The combination of studies provided a new understanding of the dogmatism F-test as well as grounding in learning theory.

Sturm was able to look at testing in an unusual way because he approached it as a social psychologist rather than as a clinical counseling psychologist. The difference is critical: Clinical psychologists test X to measure X. Social psychologists put people in situations where they think they are doing X, but they are really doing Y. Moreover, to Sturm the ultimate score isn’t nearly as important as watching the *process* of the person undertaking the experiment.

Consistent with the principles of social psychology, the process through which people work becomes more important than the ultimate result. The majority of people’s lives are not spent in outcomes, but in the journey toward achieving them. Observations of these journeys, or processes, therefore yield much more information than ultimate outcomes or scores. In part as a consequence of this belief, 5 Dynamics’ tools are process-based: they examine *how* a person works, not just what his or her ultimate output might be.

\(^3\) [http://hirr.hartsem.edu/ency/Rokeach.html](http://hirr.hartsem.edu/ency/Rokeach.html)
\(^5\) Julian Rotter, [http://psych.fullerton.edu/jmearns/rotter.htm](http://psych.fullerton.edu/jmearns/rotter.htm)
The 5 Dynamics Assessment

This practice subsequently became useful in the development of the 5 Dynamics assessment; by watching thousands of people take assessments, he observed that most people’s attention broke between the 24th and 28th items. It became a long-term goal, therefore, to reduce the number of items in any test to 24 or fewer.

The experience also afforded a perspective of process long before the notion of process was considered important. Sturm pursued his doctoral thesis at the University of Missouri under Dr. Charles Krauskopf \(^6\) who had been working on a test called the Personality Assessment System (PAS) that stemmed from the research of John Gittinger and David Saunders\(^7\).

The PAS studies the relationship between intelligence and other personality variables as they interact to influence human behavior. It was closely related to the WAIS or the WISCR, albeit translated into a statistical analysis that enabled a psychologist to determine where a person would appear on scales—such as regulated or flexible, internal or external, a la Rotter, or role-adaptive or unadaptive. The PAS also included the concept of energy and it was contextually predictive. It enables the prediction of human behavior. Ultimately this test was extensively used by the CIA and Fortune 500 executives for high-level staffing.

There were many correlations between the PAS and the Wechsler tests, so Sturm set the goal of bringing some of the PAS concepts back to learning, which had been a lifelong passion. He began observing the patterns of test takers when he administered instruments such as the Ravens Progressive Matrices (a visual test), or the WISC-R or the WAIS, or the Slossen Verbal/Oral Test, or a spelling/writing example. He methodically mapped out the process that the student applied to complete the test. Over a period of time he began to see patterns in these behaviors as well as correlations between the patterns and the test outcomes. However, the process often delivered more information than the test score. For example, children approach tasks in a particular way based \textit{not} on what they have learned, but on how they naturally go about doing things. He also observed the same phenomenon with adults.

\(^6\) http://www.pasf.org/cases.htm#booklink
\(^7\) http://www.pasf.org/gitt.htm
Sturm began fashioning his own test instrument with a set of polarities different from those of Gittinger and Saunders. These had to do with learning, but also with focus and energy.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PAS</th>
<th>5 DYNAMICS</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Externalizer/Internalizer</td>
<td>Focuses on Details/Focuses on Whole</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rigid/Flexible</td>
<td>Verbal/Visual and Touch</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acceptable/Unacceptable</td>
<td>Logical/Intuitive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Factual/Imaginative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sequential/Associative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Relates rationally/Relates empathetically</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Time-oriented/Space-oriented</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Thinking-oriented/Action-oriented</td>
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These disparate scales, however, considered severally do not tell a coherent story. Sturm also was able to deduce patterns, or clusters of scores that fit meaningfully large subgroups. These clusters are quite important, because they enable an assessment to make deductive inferences.

In common language, the terms left-brained and right-brained describe certain combinations of traits or patterns. In point of fact, only 67 percent of “right-brain-dominant” people are left-handed. The traits associated with one hemisphere might also be located in the other hemisphere, as a product of genetics and hormonal activity. Moreover, many brain functions are so complex as to be carried out in both hemispheres, sometimes serially and sometimes in parallel. The terms “left-brain dominant” and “right-brain dominant” are able to convey meaning, even though their literal physiological underpinnings may be suspect. Sturm was able to identify similar patterns and overlay them on a series of polarities and an understandable sequence—producing a simplified version of the Gestalt Cycle of Experience.
The 5 Dynamics Assessment

By this time Sturm had become a differential diagnostician for learning differences. The prevailing belief at this time was that children who performed poorly in school were either brain damaged or learning disabled. Sturm again took a contrarian view: they were learning-different and likely brain-different. He found that if he understood a child’s learning process, and matched it to a teacher with a similar process, and also helped the parents adapt to the process, the results were remarkably successful. The theory culminated when he became director of Special Education for three school districts in the State of Maine, and in three years raised the reading levels of the special education students by 3.5 years.

He observed how children would actively engage in certain types of learning activities and then would pull back from other parts of the process. That engagement he termed “energy” and the energetic shift determined more about a student’s success than did anything else in the process.

At this point spent three years with at the Gestalt Institute of Cleveland under the direction of Edwin Nevis. Gestalt psychology is both process- and energetically-based, and so there was a natural concordance between Sturm’s prior work and that of the Gestalt Institute’s. At that time, the concept of resistance held much sway in Gestalt circles. Sturm did not accord nearly as much weight to resistance (His view since has become mainstream.) and rather saw resistance as a neurological phenomenon. As he saw it, people didn’t expend energy to stop something. Rather, they did not have the energy to complete something. That requisite energy was invested elsewhere. This also conflicted with some of the pathological basis of Gestalt theory in those years. Sturm viewed people’s fundamental processes as open to improvement, but not wholesale change. “Resistance”, for example, was usually an outcome of selective perception and inadequate energy to move through the Cycle, as opposed to neurosis or psychosis.

Upon graduating from the Gestalt Institute in 1983, he began working in earnest on the assessment that is in use today. He became grounded in L.L. Thurston’s theory of “just noticeable differences.” This is a statistical technique for measuring how people make decisions along a continuous spectrum when the differences between items can be very small. It applies to physical phenomena such as weights of objects, as well as
The 5 Dynamics Assessment

to attitudes and opinions. The choice they make is almost invariably right, but when the items are close together, they choose in an unconscious fashion.

In light of Sturm’s prior experiences as a social psychologist, this was a fitting statistical approach. At the point of just noticeable differences, a person cannot really think about, verbalize or be aware of what he or she really is doing. This understanding goes far to assure a more valid result.

The word choices on the assessment Sturm developed were the product of countless hours of experimentation. In selecting the words, Sturm presented thousands of words to people, asking them to rate the reaction they caused on a seven-point Likert scale. By continuously paring out the terms that fell between the two tails, he was able to reduce the population of words. Meanwhile, through observation, assessment, third-party evaluations and interviews, he was able to correlate the selection of words to the Energy, preferences and learning styles of his test-taking population. As this was done without the availability of personal computers, the process was extremely laborious.

Consecutive iterations of the assessment reduced the number of items from 1200 to 120 to 72 to 36 to 24 to 18. With each successive reduction, the measurements of validity and reliability actually rose.

In a sense, the test is neither rationally assembled nor rationally completed. It is based on elicited response of emotions provoked by specific terms. This is not a cognitive form of self-examination. At the same time, people do not behave in a cognitive way because fundamentally they are not rational. People complete the assessment by making neurophysiologic "choices," below their cognitive level.
Neurophysiological Assumptions

Summary

- The principles of synaptic efficiency and pruning underpin explain some of the assessment’s validity and reliability.
- People make the word-choices unconsciously and emotionally, and are subsequently justified by the more rational parts of the brain.

The brain comprises only 4% of body mass but consumes 20% or more of blood glucose, the compound that the body converts to create muscular and mental activity. In this sense, the brain is inherently inefficient, and thus it seeks to conserve energy through the principle of synaptic efficiency; it has been demonstrated that the brain tends to route neural messages along the most efficient (electrically least resistive) pathways. Applying this principle to the 5 Dynamics assessment, we see that the socially oriented person will “see” the socially oriented word foremost; this occurs because the neural pathways of the brain that control social function are the most efficient. Thus, the brain selects the socially oriented word and sends it to the parts of the brain that understand socialization. These connections have been corroborated by cross-validating 5 Dynamics' instruments with other independent assessments. (See the Validity & Reliability Summary.)

Unlike some traditional assessment tools that attempt to label and measure aptitude, competencies, or personality features, 5 Dynamics' assessment is architected on a radically different model. In terms of current understandings of brain function, the working hypothesis is that when presented with a computer-based assessment containing a selection of words, the brain registers all of the words, but only one of them may, for example, correspond most closely to a person's preferred way of doing things. The brain is a top-down processor that seeks to recognize what it already knows. Life experiences and positive reinforcement lead to the formation of neural networks that react to the presentation of particular stimulus patterns. Limbic-frontal connections in the brain provide positive emotional valence for a preferred stimulus resulting in an "Ah-ha experience" as described in the Gestalt theory of perception.
Thus the subject perceives the socially oriented word as most charged with energy and activates the neural networks for a positive response to socialization. In a broader sense, it is hypothesized that the destinations of these messages control the individual’s preferred modalities of perceiving, learning, doing and collaborating. Discrimination and decision-making are pre-frontal brain functions, but these activities are always colored by the energetic charge that the limbic (emotional) brain provides through direct connections of the limbic system to frontal areas. In order to cut through the noise of additional words presented by Thurston pairs, the input pathways probably activate limbic pathways to a critical threshold and, hence, achieve an emotional charge that leads to the selection of one word out of the four.

This is not a conscious process although the mind subsequently rationalizes the choice by applying reason or logic to it through post-hoc attributions of value and meaning. (Secondary neural value-laden and overly cognitive consideration is to some degree responsible for the assessment's validity in light of its relative brevity. In addition, the Internet-delivered assessment measures the latency between choices. The longer the latency, the more conflicted the test-taker is, i.e., there may be conflicting outcomes from several competing neural networks. This can be filtered recursively back into the scoring algorithm. Likewise, a rapid choice suggests a strong discriminatory process and a clear preference for one modality over others. Or, again, there are fewer conflicting networks and the dominant network requires less time to assert itself as the choice-maker.)
**About the Authors**

**Michael Sturm**, Founder. Mike’s professional training includes the fields of social, counseling, Gestalt, learning and educational psychology. Mike has a M.A. in Psychology and worked on his Ph.D. in Psychology at the University of Missouri. He has over 20 years experience in education, serving in roles as a Teacher, Principal, Differential Learning Diagnostician, Director of Services for Exceptional Children and Director of Creative Learning at the elementary, junior/senior high and adult levels. He has taught in, directed or founded schools/programs in traditional, British Primary, open classroom or creative learning and arts. He began working with assessments in the early 1960's focusing on communications and learning.

**Dr. Peter L. Nelson**, Research Director. Peter is a psychologist and social scientist with a deep background in statistics and neurobiology. His work began with psychophysiological studies of the human brain with particular regard to the processes of consciousness, arousal and perception. This interest led to participation in research projects in neuroscience in the United States, England and Denmark. By the early 1980s, Dr. Nelson had become a social scientist focusing his research on how people experience and understand reality—whether seen through the visions of mystics or the daily perceptions of businessmen and businesswomen. Since then, he has worked for governments, nonprofits and businesses as a research consultant on projects ranging from end-user ethnography and U.S. national surveys to usability research and corporate cultural analysis. He is the author of numerous refereed articles in professional journals, as well as several books.