

## Scope and Message

THE DUELING LOOPS ARE A MODEL OF A KEY PORTION OF THE POLITICAL POWERPLACE. The scope of this book is limited to a hypothesis of what the structure of this model looks like, how it behaves, and how that knowledge can be applied. If you find yourself thirsting for further discussion of the many other concepts briefly introduced here, please see the additional material at [Thwink.org](http://Thwink.org).

This book carries three main messages. The first is the Dueling Loops model explains the mystery of why progressives have been unable to reliably solve difficult social problems. *This is the diagnosis*. The model also predicts how, if progressives switched to pushing on high leverage points instead of low leverage ones, they could solve such problems with relative ease. *This is the treatment*. As modern medicine has demonstrated, successful treatment requires correct diagnosis.

Underneath lies a more subtle second message. *The Dueling Loops model is an example of how, once activists can clearly “see” the dynamic structure of the problems they are working on, what to do to solve them will become relatively obvious*. Like the astronomer who now has a telescope, activists will be able to see and do a multitude of marvelous things that were beyond their reach before. Solving difficult social problems will still require serious work. But it will now be a much more pleasurable and successful experience, because the human system will respond in a more predictable manner.

Going even deeper, activists will develop sound models and use them to solve difficult problems only if they are driven by *a process that fits the problem*. This is the third and deepest message. Activists are problem solvers. A process that fits the problem will become *the* foundation for progressivism, just as the process of double entry accounting became the foundation for the business world in the 15<sup>th</sup> century and the Scientific Method became the foundation for all of science in the 17<sup>th</sup> century.

*What’s the difference between a good problem solver and a great one?* I believe it’s the ability to ask the right question at each fork in the road as a problem is solved. If you have a process that fits the problem, the process automatically guides you toward what those questions should be at the strategic level. As Toyota says, “The right process will produce the right results.”<sup>2</sup>

That the process must fit the problem is *the* message of this book.

# Introduction

**S**OCIETY'S PROVEN INABILITY TO SOLVE THE GLOBAL ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY PROBLEM is a symptom of a deeper problem: our inability to solve many types of difficult social problems. These include war, poverty, and corruption, as well as environmental sustainability. All these problems have defied solution for thousands of years. WHY IS THIS?

The approach this book takes to answer that question is so uncommon that when I presented early versions of the concept to environmentalists, the reaction of nearly all of them was to reject it outright. Even career professionals, some with MBAs or PhDs and one CEO earning \$150,000 a year, rejected it.

This left me with the baffling problem of how to best express my ideas. How do you take a concept that goes 180 degrees against the norm, and hence is almost certain to be rejected, and communicate it in such a manner that automatic rejection does not occur?

My answer was to go over and over the argument until it became so clear and logically compelling it is immediately accepted as self-evident, *once the argument is understood*. The heart of the argument is expressed as a simulation model, shown on the cover of this book. The model explains the foundational forces driving a society's political behavior. This hypothesis is expressed in the structural shape of the model and a series of model scenarios.

The model answers a question that arises from of the mystery of:

1. Most people are progressives.
2. The goal of progressive philosophy is to promote the common good.
3. In theory this is also the goal of democracy.
4. *Why then do democratic systems so strongly resist changing their behavior from what benefits the special interest few to what benefits the common good of all?*

How to answer that question and our departure from the norm begins with this line of reasoning:

Most efforts on solving the sustainability problem focus on its **technical side**, which consists of the proper practices (technologies or behaviors) that must be followed in order to achieve sustainability. Examples of proper practices are renewable energy, permaculture, and the four R's of reduce, reuse, recycle, and repair. *But surprisingly little effort addresses why most of society resists adopting these practices*. This is the **social side** of the problem.

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**Change resistance** is the tendency for a system to resist change even when a surprisingly large amount of force is applied. A striking example occurred in 1999 when the United States Senate voted 95 to zero against signing the Kyoto Protocol. Not a single senator could be persuaded to vote for the world's best hope of solving the climate change problem, even though a democratic president (Bill Clinton) and a rather pro-environmental vice president (Al Gore) were in office at the time.

The technical versus the social side of the problem is a crucial distinction. Society is aware of the proper practices required to live sustainably. But most of society has a strong aversion to adopting these practices. As a result, problem solvers have created thousands of effective (and often ingenious) proper practices, but they are stymied in their attempts to have them taken up by enough of the population to solve the problem. *Therefore the social side is the crux of the problem and must be solved first.*

But that is not what environmentalists are doing.

Instead, in every case I've examined so far, environmentalists are mostly trying to solve the technical side of the problem. I have yet to find a single individual or organization focusing on the social side, though there must be some. ***This shows problem solvers have been working on solving the wrong problem, which is a striking conclusion that should send shockwaves throughout all of environmentalism.***

Consider the old saying, "You can lead a horse to water but you can't make him drink." Problem solvers have been working on finding the water (finding technical solutions) or leading the horse to it (promoting those solutions and putting them under the horse's nose). But that's the easy part. What they should be working on instead is *how to get the horse to decide to drink.*<sup>3</sup>

### Strategy

In mid 2001, after 20 years as a consultant, I made helping to solve the sustainability problem my life's work and committed to the project full time. As a systems engineer from Georgia Tech, my specialties have been small business management, process improvement, problem analysis, information and software engineering, and all sorts of related topics.

When I started the project I immediately set up a six year, three step strategic plan. The first two years were for getting my arms around the problem. The next two were for making an original contribution. The last two were for communicating my ideas and starting to work elbow to elbow with others to combine my possibly useful ideas with theirs to solve the environmental sus-

tainability problem. This is when the first version of the Dueling Loops book was written.

On top of this three step plan I imposed two key strategies. The first was to work in isolation for the first four years. This was because no significant progress had been made, indicating a novel approach was needed. But if I worked with others or based my research on the literature *instead of the actual system*, then I would probably fall into the same ruts and groupthink traps as others. Hence the critical importance of working alone at first. The drawback to self-imposed isolation is lack of networking and remaining an unknown in fields you are trying to influence. Normally this is a surefire road to failure. It was a tough choice, but I was prepared to take that chance.

The second strategy was far more important. From day one I set about designing a formal process to solve the problem. This became the System Improvement Process. What separates it from the rest is decomposition of the sustainability problem into three distinct subproblems. The first is overcoming change resistance. This is the strategy that led to discovery of the Dueling Loops of the Political Powerplace.

## **The Progressive Side of the Book Is Born**

The purpose of building the Dueling Loops model was to answer the question in step 2.1 of the System Improvement Process, as listed on page 167: *Why is there such strong resistance to adopting the solution?* As so often happens in scientific explorations, a pleasant surprise occurred. Although I was addressing the sustainability problem, the model turned out to be so generic that it also explains why there is such strong resistance to adopting a solution *to any difficult progressive problem*.

This was a tremendous insight. But what to do with it? Fortunately the perfect opportunity appeared when I realized that the *Analytical Activism* book, at a ponderous 262,000 words, was simply too big and serious for most readers. The solution was to extract what interested readers the most and put it into a much smaller book. This was the analysis of the Dueling Loops model. When I begin to design the little book, I could see this was a chance to frame the model differently. *Instead of a model for the change resistance part of the sustainability problem, I elevated it up one level of abstraction to be a model for the fundamental challenge all progressives face: how to get political systems to accept their new viewpoints, ones that would benefit the common good.*

This was exciting because I could see the potential. The Dueling Loops really do seem to explain the phenomenon of change resistance. As you work

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your way through the book, you will see this is basically because progressives are working for the good of the system as a whole. Their goal is to optimize the system for the common good of all, rather than the good of the special interest few, which is the opposition's goal. The Dueling Loops explain how these two opposing goals are basically two opposing feedback loops in the political system. Whichever loop gains the most supporters wins. ***Currently the wrong loop is dominant, which is why progressives are so stymied, frustrated, and helpless, because they have no idea this is the cause of decades of problem solving failure.***

By reframing the Dueling Loops as an analysis of the Progressive Paradox, this book aims to help not just one but two very worthy types of readers: frustrated environmentalists and equally frustrated progressives. This book offers a strategic path out of that agony. *The path consists of using two key tools: a formal problem solving process that fits the problem and modeling the problem.* The book illustrates how to apply these tools by using the sustainability problem as a running example.

### The Contents of the Book

The book has deliberately been kept short so that it's an unimposing read, despite its analytical content. I've worked hard on organizing and writing the book so that you will find it an easy read, except for a few spots where you will have to work a little. If I've muffed up, please let me know so that together we can make it a better book.

**Part 1: Getting Started**, frames the problem by describing The Progressive Paradox. The real problem to solve is progressivism has long been blocked from achieving its ideals, due to systemic change resistance. But why? If we can solve that mystery we can overcome the resistance. *The system will then change from resisting solutions to naturally "wanting" to solve progressive problems, starting with the most important one of them all: sustainability.*

The foundation of how to crack the problem wide open begins with this carefully worded definition:

*Progressive philosophy is a comprehensive rationale and value set whose goal is optimizing the human system for the common good of all and their descendents.*

This becomes the catalytic concept that I hope will carry you through the rest of the book, just as it now carries me forward in my work.

After framing the problem, Part One then introduces the two main tools that will be used to solve it: modeling and a process that fits the problem. The hypothesis that change resistance is the crux of the problem is presented.

**Part 2: The Dueling Loops Model and Sample Solution**, is the intellectual meat of the book. It presents the Dueling Loops model and six sample solution elements that push on the high leverage point found in the model. Also presented is the New Dominant Life Form (the modern corporation and its allies) and the five main types of political deception. Using the same computer simulation approach that *The Limits to Growth* used, a series of 22 model scenarios are explored. By comparison the first edition of *The Limits to Growth* used 12 scenarios. Just as in *The Limits to Growth*, it is the description of the model and these scenarios that are the heart of the book, *because they explain so much and, if true, allow us to use the model to begin to solve what up until now have been insolvable problems.*

**Part 3: The Niche Succession Model and Sample Solution**, is short. It extends the Dueling Loops by adding the Niche Succession subsystem. This explains what's really happening at the deep level Darwin would be thinking on if he was alive and working on the problem today. An ecological niche succession is underway. The Previous Dominant Life Form, *Homo sapiens*, has been surpassed by the New Dominant Life Form, who is now in control of the biggest niche on the planet: the biosphere. The extended model reveals another high leverage point: quality of political decision making. The solution element of Decision Ratings is presented to push on this point. Decision Ratings promise to radically improve the effectiveness of political systems, just as the invention of modern democracy did 200 years ago.

**Part 4: How Can We Apply This New Knowledge?** The book answers this question in three unique ways:

**Chapter 11: The Assault on Reason Examined**, moves from theory to practical application with an educational critique of Al Gore's book, *The Assault on Reason*. The chapter shows where he went somewhat astray in his search for "trying to figure out what has gone wrong in our democracy, and how we can fix it" and how he could correct that error, using the perspective of the Dueling Loops and true analysis. I have tried to be very diplomatic and sensitive here. The helpful critique applies to all similar books, articles, and efforts, a point I hope that you and other readers will see.

**Chapter 12: Taking Up Where Limits to Growth Left Off**, proposes a project taking up where *The Limits to Growth* left off in 1972. The premise is

that *The Limits to Growth* only identified the sustainability problem. Now we need to take the next step. This is not to solve it, as conventional wisdom assumes. Instead, the next step is to diagnose why the system is so strongly resisting changing to a sustainable mode. Once a correct diagnosis is made, then we can go ahead with developing a solution. History shows this will be an order of magnitude easier to implement than those being attempted now, because we have at last diagnosed why the patient is ill.

**Chapter 13: The Tantalizing Potential of a Permanent Race to the Top,** finishes on the highest note possible by exploring the prospect of a permanent race to the top. The difference between this vision and others is it's based on a structured analysis of how to make this state come about. *This is realistically possible and even probable once the Dueling Loops are understood.* This is a vision people can rationally get excited about, because it arises from a comprehensive, experimentally provable analysis. To me this leads to *rational optimism* instead of *emotional optimism*. There is a difference.

### Going Deep

Consider this book's historic context. *The Limits to Growth* used a simulation model to correctly identify the sustainability problem. No other tool could have done that. ***Due to the extreme difficulty and complexity of the sustainability problem, the same tool is required to take the next step, or it will fail.***

But there's more. What the Dueling Loops book is doing at the deepest strategic level is executing a process that fits the problem. This is the System Improvement Process, a generic process for solving any difficult social problem. As the Scope and Message page concludes, "That the process must fit the problem is *the* message of this book." ***Lack of a process that fits the problem is the ultimate reason progressives are stymied, no matter what country they may live in or what problem they are working on.***

I sincerely hope that after you've finished reading the book, these points ring loud and clear and true, because if they do, then we can solve the Progressive Paradox.