

Unprecedented!

~What Armchair Elitists Don't Get~

In this political environment we often see alarm raised by commentators and armchair elitists decrying some action as unprecedented. I suggest that such fear mongering may be a demonstration of limited complexity of mental processing.

It is generally thought that so-called professionals represent the highest level of a modern culture's productive contributors. The notion of becoming a doctor or lawyer, professions requiring advanced education, seems almost a lofty goal. Some feel that people in academics, with doctorate degrees, represent the top echelon. The occasional genius (statistically irrelevant), who might provide niche contribution, is noted, but set aside as a phenomenon that cannot represent an aspiration.

While such "professionals" are probably smarter¹ (whatever that means) than eighty percent of the population², what is not generally understood is that there are several strata above; and the difference in capability between those ascending levels is pivotal.³

There is some jockeying among, and within, the professions as to which roles are more impressive but there seems to be a consensus that they view themselves as smarter than the rest of humanity; and occupying the highest tier or stratum in their community. The "elite" that I am challenging here include those that expect to be introduced with their titles. They are, arguably, delusional (smile).

For those working on planet Earth, there are seven⁴ strata of increasing role complexity to which one might aspire depending on one's ability to bring the required mental processing capability to the position.

¹ This is not IQ (which is just not helpful in assessing capability), this is Complexity of Mental Processing, and its maturation. Those that dig IQ would argue their percentile is even more exclusive. See Jaques, *The Life and Behavior of Living Organisms*, p.27; Jaques and Cason, *Human Capability*, p.3,13; Lee, *The Practice of Managerial Leadership*, 2nd Edition p.43.

² Jaques, *The Life and Behavior of Living Organisms*, p.188. This chart is reproduced on Page 3 of this essay.

³ The fact that a person is occupying a role requiring a certain complexity of information processing capability does not mean that s/he does not have higher capability. The ideal, of course, is for everyone to have an opportunity to contribute at the level at which s/he is suited.

⁴ Actually, eight, but let's not get rarefied here. See Lee, *The Practice of Managerial Leadership*, 2nd Edition, p.34;

Line worker roles are Stratum I, CEO of a large, global corporation is Stratum VII, and doctors, lawyers, architects, Ph.D.s, etc., generally fall within Stratum III complexity with most of the work being Stratum II.⁵

While people capable of fulfilling roles above Stratum III represent a significantly smaller percentage of the population, their presence marks the highest potential of our culture. A culture cannot attain goals more complex than the ability of its most capable contributors. It should also be noted that those goals cannot be attained without the contribution of Stratum I contributors.⁶

I am suggesting that those having trouble with “unprecedented” are not capable of processing information above Stratum III. I mean, they are bright, but limited. To understand my point, it is helpful to realize that roles below Stratum IV involve work that follows a path that has been set out. Stratum III roles may involve making choices between a number of paths but following one path at a time - serial processing. Stratum IV roles involve managing multiple pathways in relation to each other - parallel processing.⁷

Higher stratum roles require abstract conceptual mental processing which is not restricted to utilization of existing pathways. Intangible concepts at this level are constantly changing and involve strategy instead of being limited to tactics.⁸ At this level of mental processing, “unprecedented” may be a factor, but is not a limiter. A culture cannot advance if it is limited to existing pathways.

Respectfully submitted,

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⁵ See chart, Lee, *The Practice of Managerial Leadership, 2nd Edition* p.28. This chart is reproduced on Page 4 of this essay. See also Human Capability chapters in books cited in footnote 1.

⁶ I love you guys!

⁷ Lee, *The Practice of Managerial Leadership, 2nd Edition*, p.32,33.

⁸ Ibid. 53.

Table 13.1
Rough Estimate of Size of Population of Successive Levels of Capability

Order of Symbolic Complexity	Type of Work Processing	Description of Level	Approximate Numbers In:			
			21- to 70-year-old Population		21- to 50-year-old Population	
			%	No. per Million	%	No. per Million
5 th	Declarative+	Universals	0.0003	3	0.0001	1
4 th	Parallel	Stratum VIII	0.01	100	0.001	10
	Serial	Stratum VII	0.05	500	0.005	50
	Cumulative	Stratum VI	0.1	1,000	0.03	300
	Declarative	Stratum V	0.5	5,000	0.07	700
3 rd	Parallel	Stratum IV	1	10,000	0.5	5,000
	Serial	Stratum III	7	70,000	4	40,000
	Cumulative	Stratum II	40	400,000	40	400,000
	Declarative	Stratum I	40	400,000	40	400,000
2 nd	Parallel	Limited	8	80,000	9	90,000
	Serial	Retarded	1	10,000	2	20,000
	Cumulative	Mental Handicap	0.7	7,000	1	10,000
	Declarative	Mental Handicap	0.5	5,000	1	10,000

Jaques, *The Life and Behavior of Living Organisms*, p.188. At the time this chart was first developed, "retarded" was a scientific category – relax.

Stratum and Time-Span

Stratum	Time	Role
VII	20 Years	Corporate CEO
VI	10 Years	Executive Vice President
V	5 Years	Business Unit Manager General Manager
IV	2 Years	Functional Manger
III	1 Year	Unit Manager Middle Manager
II	3 Months	First Line Manager Specialist, Analyst
I	1 Day	First Line Employee Clerical, Office, Factory

Lee, *The Practice of Managerial Leadership*, 2nd Edition p.28. Time span is reference to the longest targeted completion time of a task in a role.