

PERSONAL CONSTITUTION

THE INDIVIDUAL AS A PROBLEM-SOLVING ORGANIZATION

This version 6.0 drafted January 22, 2022

JEREMY C. H. WANG

Foreword, or why problems are inevitable and wonderful

Dear You,

You're likely reading this because you're facing a problem: you need to make a major life decision, you've experienced something that's called into question who you are or who you aspire to be, you're feeling lost, you've done something that feels wrong. On the other hand, maybe you're here simply to reflect on yourself and your commitments. Whatever the reason, let me begin by reminding you of an essential truth:

Problems are the source of all meaning and positive change, but only if we see the adversity and the opportunity. Adversity makes us human. Opportunity enables progress.

If you need, take a minute to meditate on the knowledge that problems abound, and that we all experience problems. Observe without judgment. Let any fear, anger, disgust, despair, loss, uncertainty, or other strong negative feelings occupy space so they may eventually cool and condense in due course. Paths forward will soon become obvious.

Remember that a problem is any discrepancy between the current and desired state of something. Problems are therefore subjective. They arise from real, lived experience: someone must have a need or desire that is unmet by reality. That someone might be you, or it might be another. Problems also come in all forms. They can affect at an international, national, societal, community, organizational, team, relationship, or personal level. Some problems are significant and top of mind, like conflict with friends or family, career uncertainty, or slumps in the economy. Other problems are significant yet hard to recognize, like not taking enough risks in life and thereby failing to discover and overcome the unknown unknowns needed to grow.

Whatever the problem, it is the act of solving problems that gives human life—your life—any sense of purpose. No matter how frustrating, complex, or persistent a problem may be, you must never forget this. By solving problems, you create change: Δ 's you enact upon your surroundings, as well as Δ 's within you as you grow from experience. You, like billions of others, are a vehicle for change whether you like it or not. By merely existing you have changed your environment, and you are always in some control of your life.

You created this constitution to help you address one of the timeless challenges of being alive: how to continually define and pursue one's values and goals, lest you commit to solving problems—and thus create Δ 's—with low or harmful impact. The 'defining' part requires you to explore the world and discover what values and problems are important. The 'pursuing' part requires you to be skilful in delivering your Δ 's.

This simultaneous development of self-awareness and actionable plans is rooted here, your very own Personal Constitution. It has gone through many iterations (13 to be exact, since your first version in 2012) and it is your most quiet yet proud achievement. This constitution represents the innermost layer of your personal development, with the present version reflecting your ability to think like an engineer, entrepreneur, and organizational leader.

PERSONAL CONSTITUTION

January 22, 2022

Furthermore, you created this document to routinely achieve four key outcomes that help guide your lifelong journey of discovery, growth, and impact:

1. Slow down and reflect every now and then, as a crucial exercise in maintaining self-awareness and making the most out of, as far as we know for sure, a finite existence
2. Decide which problems are worth your time and effort—and which are not
3. Structure your efforts so that you can solve those problems
4. Above all, serve as a constant reminder that beneath all the hardship and emotional mayhem that problems can cause, that problems are also opportunities that fall into a two-by-two matrix of importance and solvability.

There are problems that don't matter, solvable or not; ignore these. Then there are problems that do matter but you may not be the best person to solve them. Motivate and support others to address these problems. Finally, there are problems that matter, and you are or can become the best person to solve them. Put the most effort into solving them—and finding where these problems exist.

Sincerely,
The person you want to be

“The purpose of life is a life of purpose”
- Robert Byrne

Overview & Contents

I believe that to live a good life is to relentlessly pursue authentic ideals for oneself and the world in which we live. That is, living a good life is about devoting oneself to a vision of the future, a mission in service of the vision, and a set of values that give meaning to the vision and mission.

My Personal Constitution establishes in explicit terms the vision, mission, and values that I presently believe to be the most personally inspiring, along with norms and strategic priorities to support these elements in daily life. These are, of course, *ideals* and not *descriptions*. Though when I'm at my best, what is ideal and what is true are closer to one and the same.

This document is organized as follows:

- The Individual as an Organization offers a brief introductory essay that explains why and how it can be helpful to think of oneself as an organization.
- My Vision, Mission, and Values are fundamental abstract ideas that I have personally found to be most inspiring when reflected upon and lived out. These basic ideas thus serve as overarching design requirements for my life and the impact I wish to have.
- Norms are the key behaviours that help me embrace my Values to create flow.
- Strategic Priorities are key worldly activities which, when pursued in a state of flow, accelerate the pursuit of my Vision and Mission.

1. The Individual as an Organization

There are three main reasons why I have taken this formal, organization-like approach to living life. The first is that my professional background and thinking style are well suited to this way of planning life, given my experience in systems engineering and organizational leadership. The second reason is that life is complex, so having explicit structure lends clarity, efficiency, and thoroughness in how to plan and execute. Every person bears a wide range of responsibilities (family, career, health, social, volunteering, leisure, etc.) that may be grouped into 'portfolios', each of which is a distinct set of stakeholders or distinct organization who have problems that can and should be solved in whole or in part by me. These portfolios may be readily administered with tools for strategic planning, operations management, and project management, similar to the portfolios of a business, not-for-profit, government department, or other organization.

The third and final reason for this approach is that this is a social experiment. Humans are organized into communities of different sizes, cultures, and beginnings, created by orchestrating people and resources to achieve grand visions. Although organizations oversee products, services, finances, partnerships, skills training, branding, marketing, and other functions on a much larger scale than a single person, there are analogies to be drawn with individual living. It is odd that society studies keenly and debates fervently how social institutions of all kinds should be run, yet when it comes to our personal lives, we often feel lost, overwhelmed, or reticent to discuss and advise each other about what to do or how to think. This, even though our personal lives are just as purpose-seeking, complex, challenging, important, fragile, imperfect, and varied yet relatable as any organization or any other person's life. It will be fascinating to see just how much wisdom can be shared across our societal and individual realities.

See A2: Personal Concept of Operations for a visualization of my overall operational framework for living life as a one-person organization.

2. Vision

A vision statement is a concise description of the ideal future—it is the sought-after ‘dream’ regardless if it can be achieved within one’s lifetime. A vision statement includes the key stakeholder(s) of interest, and a description of the imagined culture, livelihood, and abilities of that group. My Vision is outlined below.

A world that moves in harmony with human needs and the environment

The key elements of this vision are:

- **“world”** – individuals and organizations everywhere
- **“move”** – change location from one place to another, as applied to people or goods
- **“harmony”** – a state of balance and agreement with other systems, i.e. meeting the needs of the other systems without underperforming or overstressing itself or said other systems
- **“human need”** – a thing that is wanted or required by a person or group of people
- **“environment”** – the natural world as a whole, esp. as it relates to sustainable societies

This vision is premised on the fact that all of human existence is about movement: of matter and energy from A to B. If there is no movement, there is no progress, no conflict—nothing. Culture is defined by how we distribute our efforts to mobilize people, goods, and information.

In cut-throat cultures, people get ahead in life *at the expense* of others. In the context of transportation, this is to say that we prioritize the economy at the expense of the environment, at the cost of our own health and especially those at the highest risk of climate change, and to the disadvantage of our children and their children. We create businesses and societies that default to profiting from the few and privileged, so that we too may become part of that class whether we bring others along or not. In cut-throat land, we live in a zero-sum world that tends toward only a few achieving their dreams through selfishness, denial, and apathy.

In collaborative cultures, we work *together* to overcome current limitations, to challenge assumptions that make us act selfishly, and thus create inclusive and shared prosperity. We design technology for all rather than the few, policies that incentivize collaboration and long-term thinking, and businesses that strive to profit from collective good. We nurture mindsets founded on truth, compassion, and critical thinking. We feel connected to ourselves and to a global community, and we believe in achieving greater outcomes for the greater good.

In a selfish society—sadly, the current society—we concentrate on amassing enough privilege so that problems do not apply to us. But in a supportive society, we join forces to empower each person and the world entire. I am dedicating my life to the latter in the context of transportation specifically, due to my interests and skills as an aeronautical engineer, and because transportation is an essential mechanism by which people build and share the personal and social power used to improve one’s own life. For more on power, see A1: Rank and Power Model.

3. Mission

A mission statement is a concise description of the unique contribution(s) performed to further the vision—it is the distinct offering that helps bring us closer to the dream. My Mission is outlined below.

To make transportation as fast and accessible as the internet

The key elements of this mission are:

- **“transportation”** – the movement of people or goods from one place to another
- **“fast”** – requiring relatively little time compared to alternative options, and especially compared to the broader process or activity that depends on said transportation
- **“accessible”** – able to be reached or used

Of course, this mission is not to be taken literally—unless one day humanity invents safe teleportation. However, the dynamics of the internet and how it replaced traditional communication is a suitable analogue for the future of transportation. Transportation networks ought to be fast, or at least fast enough for the user relative to the costs incurred by the user and secondary effects on society and the environment. Fast transportation including aviation should be available and affordable for anyone, anywhere¹. The costs of expanding transportation networks should be minimal. Networks should be easily re-configurable, because society is always changing and evolving and thus the optimal network design must also change. And much how the computer—the tool for accessing the internet—has become smaller, cheaper, and faster, so too should airports and the services they render to aircraft, passengers, and cargo. When these network properties are realized, so too will the perils of the modern-day internet. Responsible usage, network security, and geopolitical rifts must be managed to ensure transportation remains safe, trusted, and connected. But in short, a transportation system modelled after the internet would do what internet did to snail mail: reduce travel and delivery times, increase efficiency, increase the resolution and flexibility of network nodes, render more reliable and on-time service, and above all, make the transportation of physical items rather than digital items accessible to the masses. Only through a global coordination of people, technology, and policies will we achieve this change hopefully in our lifetimes—for which I firmly intend to do my small part.

¹ There are still issues with access to internet, but at 60% of the world having access to internet in 2021 as compared to 20% of people who have ever flown, the internet’s accessibility is a sensible benchmark for air transportation in particular.

4. Values

My core values consist of desired attributes to my life which, when realized, create a state of flow—that is, a state of immense energy, interest, and meaning in which I am at my best. These values offer a sense of purpose by inspiring my Vision and Mission, and they help me in everyday life by guiding my plans and actions. Although the world will always have its flaws, the awareness and realization of my core values empower me in the pursuit of progress.

Challenge

New experiences that encourage myself and others to grow personally or professionally

Honesty

Truthful, forthcoming, and vulnerable to establish relationships with others

Innovation

Development of radically new and better means of accomplishing something

Intimacy

Emotional connection and compassion for the goals and experiences of others

Achievement

Drastic improvements upon the status quo

Autonomy

Freedom to strategize and execute, and without hindrance or resentment from others

Openness

Willingness to give and receive criticism and consider multiple possible solutions

Continuous Improvement

Ongoing progress of one's identity, skills, knowledge, as well as passions and interests

Community

Sense of unity created by mutual respect, teamwork, and shared values and vision

Emotional Health

High levels of integrity, energy, and love, where Challenges in life are engaging but neither trivial nor debilitating

PERSONAL CONSTITUTION

January 22, 2022

These top ten values are listed in the order to be interpreted by the Pursuit Values System framework. That is, Challenge is my driver value, Emotional Health is my result value, Innovation through to Achievement are my go-to values, and Autonomy through to Community are my accelerator values.

It is also worth noting that a major theme of my core values is humanism: the respect for human agency and the use of critical thinking to satisfy human values, collectively and individually. My Vision, Mission, and Core Values are fundamentally about creating a humanist world, where everyone has the power and will to influence their well-being, to support others, and to approach human needs and differences with compassion, inclusivity, and science.

5. Norms

Norms are behaviours that embody an underlying set of values. As such, norms comprise a general code of conduct for my actions. Norms answer the question, “what should I do on an ongoing basis to live my values and create flow, so that I may serve the vision and mission the best?” My norms may be summarized in a single statement and are further detailed below with an emphasis on nuance rather than extremes in normative behaviour.

I shall be a problem solver, team player, and visionary in everything I do

That is, I shall:

- Be thorough yet practical, fast yet careful, efficient yet effective, creative yet critical, proud yet humble, assertive yet open-minded
- Treat others with honesty and tact, diplomacy and candour, critique and praise as appropriate, and above all, self-respect and respect for them
- Build fun, high-performance, and professional team cultures when working with others
- Invest in my personal growth and the growth of others
- Balance learning and mistakes with doing and results
- Continually reprioritize my efforts according to changing information circumstances
- Err on the side of flexibility, results, discussion, leadership, and growth over procedure, tradition, authority, management, and ease
- Take time to reflect about the present, dream about the future, and envision detailed possibilities and action plans

6. Strategic Priorities

Strategic Priorities are broadly defined activities that I shall pursue to fulfill my Vision and Mission. These focus areas address the question, “which worldly endeavours will I concentrate on to live my mission and advance toward the vision?” In practice, they may be used as an informal checklist when deliberating if a proposed activity or commitment makes sense for me.

My focus areas are stated below in no particular order. Each priority is described as a goal, and comes with its own metrics, constraints, and criteria that constantly change in response to ongoing life experience and self-awareness. Since these metrics, constraints, and criteria are so nuanced and dynamic, they are left to be defined and refined outside this document.

Maintain a loving and healthy family life.

Improve transportation via research, technology, policy, and start-ups.

Empower others to lead positive change in their own lives and communities.

Appendices

A1: Rank and Power Model

Here, power refers to one's ability to influence their own life. The meanings of "personal power" and "social power" are drawn from Arnold Mindell and Julie Diamond's Rank and Power Model (Process Work Institute), which highlight two different but nuanced sources of such power. Personal power comes from within, such as from attitude, cognitive skills, connection to self, sense of purpose, and insights from life experience—personal power is derived from conditions inside one's own mind. Social power comes from beyond the mind, such as from physical ability, popularity, culture, wealth and buying power, social compatibility, job title and authority, perceived competence or worthiness, biases, and other social structures and processes—social power is context dependent, and derived from our interactions and relationships with others and our surroundings. Personal and social power can enhance or suppress one another, both are shaped by our decisions and experiences throughout life, and both forms of power are needed to live one's mission, values, and vision.

A2: Personal Concept of Operations

My Personal Concept of Operations (Figure 1) describes the practical framework—comprising key artefacts and processes—that I have developed to execute the abstract ideas set out in this Constitution.

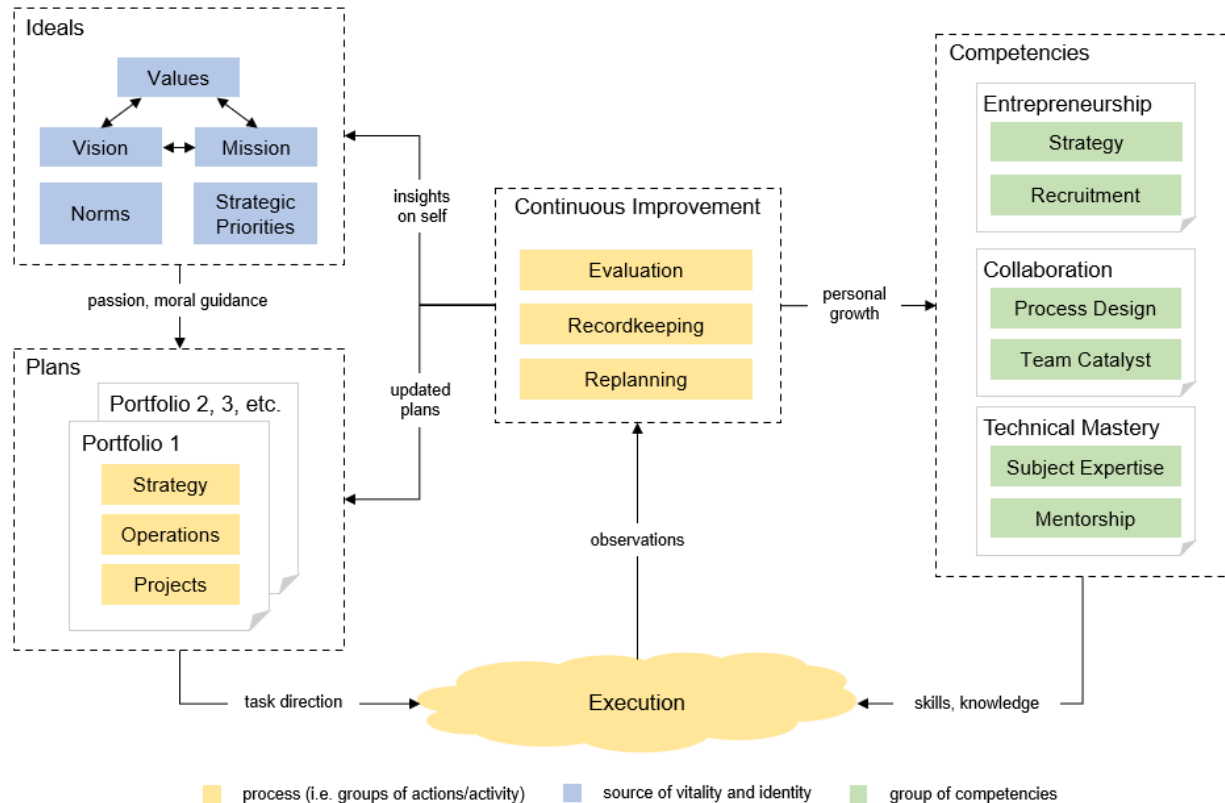


Figure 1: Concept of operations depicting myself as a series of organizational processes and artefacts.

Some notes on the diagram:

- “Ideals” represent the ideas that comprise in this Personal Constitution. They are the personal and worldly aspirations that lend meaning, guidance, and vitality in life. As stated in the Introduction, it is the continuous refinement and pursuit of ideals that constitutes living a full life / living the best possible life.
- “Plans” refers to the artefacts and activities that involving interpreting ideals and observations to generate tasks that can be performed to achieve impact in the real world. These plans may be organized into ‘portfolios’ as described in §1. Every portfolio serves one or more Strategic Priorities, and involves strategy, operations, and projects.
- “Competencies” refers to the capabilities (skills, knowledge, etc.) that enable a person to function and achieve impact throughout life. The first skill in each pair is individualistic in

nature, while the second skill is interpersonal and influential. The competencies in this framework are loosely based on the engineering leadership theory of Rottmann et al.²

- Strategy: the creative process of analyzing the past and present together with one's goals to envision and evaluate new possibilities
- Recruitment: convincing others to contribute to a common goal—e.g. securing investors, hiring team members, finding advisors, making new friends or supporters, or other means of enlisting others' support
- Process Design: the development and coordination of systems to achieve results
- Team Catalyst: the facilitation of teamwork and strengthening of relationships
- Subject Expertise: specialized skills and knowledge in an area of problem-solving
- Mentorship: teaching and advising others while learning from them at the same time
- “Execution” is the act of realizing one's Ideals and Plans in the real world, by applying Competencies to complete tasks in the pursuit of Ideals.
- “Continuous Improvement” is the feedback mechanism that involves observing one's execution of tasks (including listening to others' opinions), keeping factual records of one's execution, and evaluating results against ideals, plans, and competencies to glean insights about the self, update plans, and learn new competencies
- Inspiration and sense of direction exert influence from top to bottom, while information and learning exert influence from bottom to top. The more abstract and general concepts sit at the top; the more specific and tangible, at the bottom.

² Engineering Leadership: Grounding Leadership Theory in Engineers' Professional Identities (2015)