

# The Essence of Winning and Losing

John R. Boyd

Edited by Chet Richards and Chuck Spinney  
Produced and designed by Ginger Richards

For information on this edition, please  
see the last page.

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# Key Statements

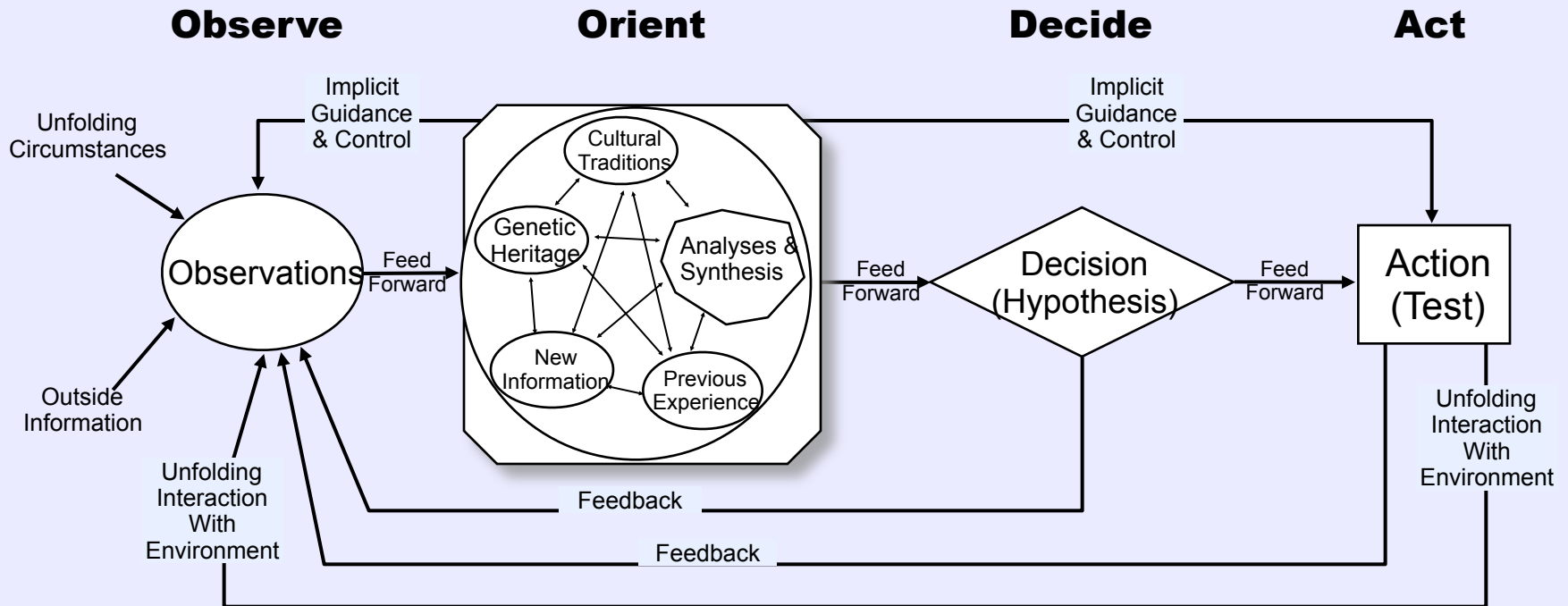
- **Without our genetic heritage, cultural traditions, and previous experiences**, we do not possess an **implicit** repertoire of psychophysical skills shaped by environments and changes that have been previously experienced.
- **Without analyses and synthesis** across a variety of domains or across a variety of competing/independent channels of information, we cannot evolve new repertoires to deal with unfamiliar phenomena or unforeseen change.
- **Without a many-sided, implicit cross-referencing process of projection, empathy, correlation, and rejection** (across these many different domains or channels of information), we cannot even do **analysis** and **synthesis**.
- **Without OODA loops**, we can neither sense, hence observe, thereby collect a variety of information for the above processes, nor decide as well as implement actions in accord with these processes.

Or put another way:

**Without OODA loops** embracing all of the above and **without the ability to get inside other OODA loops** (or other environments), we will find it impossible to comprehend, shape, adapt to and in turn be shaped by an unfolding evolving reality that is uncertain, everchanging, and unpredictable

We can further clarify these statements and their interactions by the following sketch.

# The OODA “Loop” Sketch



## Insights:

Note how orientation shapes observation, shapes decision, shapes action, and in turn is shaped by the feedback and other phenomena coming into our sensing or observing window.

Also note how the entire “loop” (not just orientation) is an ongoing many-sided implicit cross-referencing process of projection, empathy, correlation, and rejection.

# Illumination

By pulling all this together, we can see that the **key statements, OODA loop sketch**, and related **insights** represent an evolving, open-ended, far-from-equilibrium process of **self-organization, emergence, and natural selection.**

# About this edition

This edition of “The Essence of Winning and Losing “ is a PDF of an Apple Keynote rendering of the version that appeared for years in HTML on the now-defunct web site belisarius.com. Boyd’s first edition carried the date “28 June 1995,” and the last appeared sometime in January 1996, a little over a year before Colonel Boyd died. This was the only one of Boyd’s briefings that was originally created in PowerPoint and it was later published on the web as an HTML frameset.

If you have read any of the biographies of John Boyd, you may remember this briefing as “the big squeeze.” If you develop a deep understanding of this work, you’ll have the essence of Boyd.

## About the Editors

Chuck Spinney was a colleague of Boyd’s both in the Air Force and in the Office of the Secretary of Defense, where he participated in every edition of the *Discourse*. Chuck is the author of *Defense Facts of Life* and numerous monographs and op-eds. His commentaries on defense issues appear from time to time in his blog, <http://chuckspinney.blogspot.com/>.

Chet Richards worked with Col Boyd on his first paper, “Destruction and Creation,” on his later presentations, *Conceptual Spiral* and *The Essence of Winning and Losing*, and near the end of Boyd’s life, on business applications. He is a retired colonel in the Air Force, and wrote a book, *Certain to Win (2004)*, that applies Boyd’s concepts to business. He is also the author of three books on defense policy.

Ginger Richards was co-owner and president of Kettle Creek Corporation and created the layouts for the PowerPoint and Keynote versions of all Boyd’s briefings.