# ABOUT THE METHODOLOGY OF SYSTEMIC THOUGHT ACTIVITY (MSTA) AND CREATIVE GAMES

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## ABOUT THE METHODOLOGY OF SYSTEMIC THOUGHT ACTIVITY (MSTA) AND CREATIVE GAMES

The Methodology of Systemic Thought Activity (MSTA) stems from the development of human civilization over millennia and such particular aspects of it as philosophy and science, with an emphasis on cognitive theory, axiology, communication, social psychology, logic, and creativity. It has taken shape as a separate method over the last 70 years and has been successfully applied to a variety of areas where new, innovative and creative ways for solving problems are needed. Among the western sciences, the multidisciplinary area called 'cognitive science' comes closest to MSTA today.

### PART ONE

### *What is MSTA?*

The Methodology of Systemic Thought Activity (MSTA) is a combination of several methodological tools aimed at the effective organization of collective thought and the discovery of out-of-the-box, often breakthrough solutions for complex issues. The rationale behind the method is the liberation of the mind from 'snail-paced' thinking and 'tunnel vision', which hamper human creativity to a great extent. An important tool with which MSTA operates is formalization through visualization. Concepts, ideas, assumptions, correlations and statements are visualized in order to be logical and clear. The language of the MSTA is a language of visual clarity.

Another important tool used is the 'reflection position', i.e. the ability to observe the attitude of the actor towards the problem as part of the problem; this creates an opportunity for 'thinkers' to identify connections and solutions that are beyond the borders of the problem itself. The application of these mechanisms builds a screen for collective thought (see picture 1) and develops a group vocabulary that allows participants to be on the same page while speaking about this or that notion and process. The collective thought screen also secures the flow of thinking from abusive interferences, since the flow is visible for the whole group, and any idea can be caught, developed, used or criticized by each member of

*Picture 1*

the group. Moreover, thanks to formalization, when a group member picks up an idea, he or she continues the agreed logical flow of the group, and incorporates it in the group thinking in a way visible for the whole group.

As mentioned, MSTA has existed over millennia, since the times when humankind looked at its own thinking process as a separate activity. The concept, however, was coined in 1950s by Russian philosopher Georgiy Shchedrovitsky[1], who had founded the 'Methodological Circle' at Moscow State University. The historical circumstances in which Shchedrovitsky developed his approach included the death of Stalin, which opened up the depth of the crisis in which the Soviet Union had found itself after totalitarianism; and the crisis of philosophy and value in general that the world experienced after World War II. In the 1970s, Shchedrovitsky introduced the application of MSTA into everyday human activity through what he called 'Organizational-Activity Games' (OAG).

He and his followers ran hundreds of such games in the late period of the Soviet Union and immediately after its collapse. Since then, there exist various groups of people[2] who have gone through one MSTA activity or the other in the former Soviet states. Many concrete actions have been undertaken as a result of using MSTA. Shchedrovitsky's followers use his legacy in different ways to this day. It is a well-known fact that at least one high official in today's Russian power circles, Sergey Kirienko, is an MSTA enthusiast and user.

The Armenia-based version of MSTA has been developed by methodologist, professor and diplomat David

[1] En.wikipedia.org. Georgy Shchedrovitsky, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Georgy_Shchedrovitsky

[2] Некоммерческий научный Фонд «Институт развития им. Г.П. Щедровицкого», http://www.fondgp.ru/

Hovhannisyan[3]. While stemming from a Russian thinker, the Armenian Methodological Committee is not Russian and is not linked to Russia. The version of MSTA we suggest has been modified over the years to make it more creative, more transparent, more result-oriented, and more capable of addressing the value crisis that Game participants experience, independently of the actual topic of the Game. We renamed the Organizational-Activity Games into Creative Games (CG).

Since 1989[4] our team, our school of MSTA, has run about 30 medium-to-large-scale Creative Games (each for 30 to 70 people, each for 3 to 7 days), some in and for other countries, some international, on a variety of topics. Naturally, the majority of games have taken place in Armenia. Around 3000 individuals have taken part in the Games run by our team over this time, and many of them have become users of this method in their activities.

### *What is a Creative Game?*

It is an event that lasts for several (3-20) days and brings together large groups of people (15-120) from different backgrounds to create a new vision, develop new strategies, find solutions to difficult problems, develop projects to resolve these problems, build teams, free people of their biases, and give new impetus to social and organizational change.

A CG is designed and run by a group of Methodologists, with the help of Game Facilitators. The development of a new Game is a very complex, difficult, challenging, but rewarding creative task.

MSTA and CGs are a unique approach which provides a

[3] Ysu.am. David A. Hovhannisyan, http://www.ysu.am/persons/en/David-Hovhannisyan

[4] ОДИ в Армении вчера, сегодня, завтра, http://gtergab.com/files/uploads/methodology/38.creativegamesforbook6last-aug-2009-2012.pdf

space for in-depth discussion, helps building collective/shared identities, grouping people of different backgrounds and cultures, and, as a result, coming up with 'out-of-the-box' solutions for complex issues. The Game has its organic and holistic flow, its stages are not discrete and often go in parallel, and even this division into 'stages' is rather symbolic. The Game divides participants into groups which work under the guidance of Game Facilitators on the various aspects of the main topic. Every day the groups gather together to hear reports from each other; this allows the Game to build a joint identity and language.

The Game is based on drawing ideas, and its intermediary and final results are colorful drawings and schemes which demonstrate the participants' flow of thought. After the Game, some of these drawings are operationalized further. They can be also computerized, becoming useful technological tools for further addressing the issues raised in the Game. However, no particular drawing skills, or any other special talents are required from the participants.

The method of 'unpacking' ('de-objectification') used in the Game works for overcoming the effect of simplistic 'flat model' thinking. It helps participants get rid of knowledge/education/propaganda-based biases. During this stage, a process occurs of touching upon fundamental and very deep values. The Game builds a joint vocabulary with the input of all participants: notions, ideas and process descriptors referring to the topics discussed are created and they continue being referenced beyond the Game's lifetime. This 'joint language building' is often a key for developing shared identities and teams. This helps address compartmentalization, lack of solidarity and common ground for participants.

In the last stage of the game, 'pure thinking' or 'creative surge' processes take place, where people create new ideas and solutions to the issues raised from different perspectives in a highly intensive process.

The Game allocates sufficient time to address in-depth contradictions, team formation, create joint vocabularies and understanding, and eventually the development of working solutions.

### *What is the role of a Game Facilitator?*

The Game Facilitators or Game Technicians are highly important in designing the modus and scenario of the Game under the leadership of the Game Methodologists; they lead the Game and the group work throughout the event. Their role is also crucial at the stage of putting findings together, and 'translating' the results of the Game, including graphs, into policy language.

S/he helps people to get rid of their prejudices by broadening their intellectual horizons. S/he leads the collective intellectual process in a Game group so that the process does not deviate from its route. Game Facilitators translate participants' ideas/concepts into the 'languages/vocabulary' of each team and into the 'language' of the Game. S/he helps the participants learn the 'language' of the Game, which requires that every idea is drawn on the board rather than merely told to the group. S/he may be strict, for example, by challenging those who consider themselves experts on the issue under discussion, in order to demonstrate the limitations of their knowledge. S/he may intervene when the group is deviating from the main intellectual point and guide the train of thought. At the same time s/he helps participants play by opening up their creative capacities, which helps them feel empowered and become more creative. In addition to concrete ideas, actual proposals and ways for solving problems, the Game provides a bird's eye view on how to approach problems like those examined during the event, thereby often turning its participants into leaders.

### *What are the results of a Game?*

The reports from the facilitators contain the main conclusions, recommendations and project ideas. 'Tangible' results also consist of the drawings produced during the Game, and the minutes taken during the group presentations at joint sessions for all the groups. This material[5] encapsulates some of the intellectual value of the Game. However, this written and visual evidence is only the tip of the iceberg. The main result consists of the participants of the Game, who leave this event filled with new ideas and vision, with a belief that they can implement these new projects in partnership with others. The participants are the fruits borne of the Game.

### *Why are other methods insufficient to achieve the same result?*

Sometimes because of shortage of resources (time, money, people), conventional methods of problem solving[6] can be too result-oriented and fall short of successful implementation, thus ending up being unproductive.

Simulations and role-games, brainstorming, even conferences, trainings, work-

[5] Armenia's Policies in The Light of The Russian-Georgian War and Its Consequences, http://epfarmenia.am/sites/default/files/Document/Armenia_Policies_Russian_Georgian_War_Sevan_Creative_Game_Eng_2008.pdf

[6] MSTA differentiates between the 'problem', which does not have a known algorithm as a solution, from the 'issue', which has already been solved several times in the past and only needs the correct algorithm to be applied for its solution. MSTA focuses on the first of the two – problems.

shops, traditional or innovative teaching, seminars, consultative technologies (facilitation, consulting and so on) as well as any learning processes or the multitude of modern human management tools suggested by management consultancies, e.g. devoted to performance acceleration, may all have some superficial similarity to CG. However, CG is principally different from all of the above in several respects:

a. It helps build a holistic worldview concerning a problem and the ways of its resolution.

b. It helps build political will among the participants to address the problem after the Game based on the results achieved during it.

c. It helps overcome value crises among the participants.

d. It moves global knowledge concerning the issue at hand forward along with ways of addressing it.

e. It builds 'generalists' rather than specialists from the participants, i.e. participants become leaders who can successfully implement the Game ideas.

### *Why does it seem so complex?*

This method is no more complex than, say, writing a more conventional project proposal or strategy aiming at large-scale social and political impact. Like with any other method, it has developed its own 'vocabulary' and tools which may appear to be inaccessible at first. If one has not sufficiently looked at the *how* rather than only the *what*, or has not thought enough about the processes of implementation of the project, it will fail. Specialists know the importance of the *process* which, if wrong or left unattended, will jeopardize *results*. MSTA and CG offer a process which is well-thought through, has been tested over a number of years in different contexts, and is also fun and aesthetically attractive (the resulting multi-color drawings of ideas catch one's eye).

### *In which areas can it be used?*

MSTA and CGs can essentially be applied to any area. They have been used in urban work, architecture, environmental work, ethnic conflict transformation, civil society development, legal work, organizational development, design, education, politics, economics, finances, etc. They have helped design successful and viable inter-governmental and intra-governmental institutions; structure societal systems; and in other large-scale governance and organizational tasks.

They are very successful when applied to organizational change: the results are shared by the entire organization and its environment and implemented by the leadership, developing a joint vision and reforming institutions. They can also be used while addressing scientific problems. In this case, the method provides an environment in which scientists can spot which elements of the problem they have missed so far. The Game may help them solve problems which seemed unsolvable earlier, make discoveries and inventions, and create new tools.

### *What are its shortcomings?*

Not every participant is able to grasp the entire result of the Game. Therefore, some of them may feel dissatisfied (while the majority feel even if not totally satisfied by the results, at least significantly intellectually refreshed). If the participants are particularly intellectually weak, graduates of a poor education system or small in number, the results of the Game may suffer. People who did not take part in the Game may have difficulties understanding its results. Those who have never taken part in such a Game may find it more difficult to understand the conclusions of the Game than those who have some experience of a CG. Its results may be left unimplemented (for instance, when its recommendations go against the plans of the beneficiary leadership). The Game does not promise or provide easy solutions, but it brings about a feeling of unity among the partic-

ipants which does not happen in day-to-day life. Therefore, some of those who took part in the Game may feel withdrawal symptoms when returning to their daily routines. Sometimes, the Game may frustrate those participants who link their personal authority to their professional expertise: the Game environment challenges professional expertise by trying to get people to put aside their prior knowledge in order to see new and untried opportunities.

***The outcomes of the MSTA exercise are manifold***

in addition to projects on and commitment for institutional change, creation of new institutions, reform of the existing ones, abandoning the plans for the creation of unnecessary ones, etc.; they include personal advancement, development of individual capacities of reflection, planning, strategic thinking, creativity, and networking.

Along the way of working towards this aim, contradictions between the varying value systems and interests of the individuals or agencies they represent will be resolved via specific processes of MSTA called 'moving upwards alongside the reflection lift', 'de-compartmentalization' and 'de-objectification', and 'achieving a joint space of thought-activity'. When the group reaches this level, which happens in a matter of one or two days during the Game, it abandons the prejudices of its members and of their expertise, their stereotypes and 'homework luggage'. True group creativity is unleashed, which results in creative ideas and projects that are fully doable since they take into account all the necessary elements of achievability, such as the issues of resource, monitoring, realism, red-tape, planning, leadership, and they are also strengthened by the fact that the group participants become the authors, protagonists and doers of the project themselves. The chance of manipulation is reduced in the CG by the fact that, in the common thought-activity space, all participants are equal and any deviation from the common thought flow is easily discernible by them and is discarded through the process of thought-activity. This process allows avoiding the usual traps associated with other types of brainstorming (such as groupthink, for example), as well as the limitations of existing decision-making mechanisms, such as voting, consensus, consensus minus one, arbitrary decision-making, veto, subordination, etc.

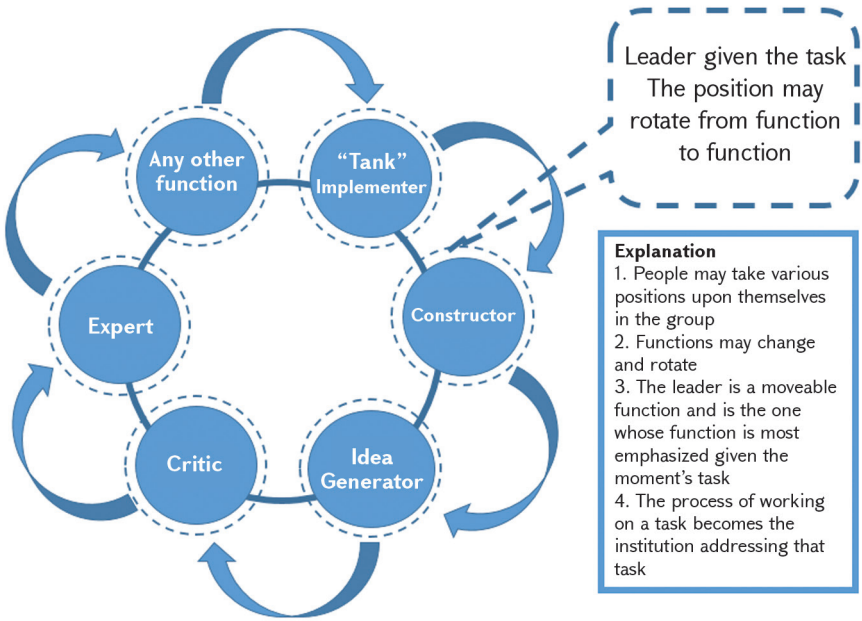
*For more information on MSTA and CG, see the next part*

## PART TWO

## MORE ABOUT MSTA AND CREATIVE GAMES

### *Decision Making*

To see an example of how **decision making, as well as the group dynamic and leadership** work can be accomplished in an MSTA-based system, please refer to the scheme in Picture 2: here we have a group which has built a joint identity related to the implementation of a strategic task. Its members acquire dynamic functions necessary for the group to accomplish its task: 'the generator of ideas', 'the implementer', 'the constructor', the 'critic', etc. These functions can change depending on the stage of the implementation of the task. For instance, the idea generator at the stage of implementation can become a critic, and the implementer can become an idea generator when this task is most relevant. Each one of them takes upon himself or herself the temporary leadership at the point in time when a particular stage of the project at hand has to be accomplished, based on the most pressing need: at the stage of idea




*Picture 2. The principle of "sliding general"*

generation it is the generator who is in charge; at the stage of implementation it is the implementer; etc. This scheme itself is the result of a past CG and has been used since then for many group systems which require dynamic and flexible leadership and decision making outside of the usual decision making types.

This is just one illustrative and simplified example of decision making principles that can result from applying MSTA.

### *Rebuilding Identities and Renaming Reality*

MSTA allows us to bring back the broken identity of any unit[7]—an individual, a group or team, a community, and/or a larger group—say, a society—into a more or less holistic unity. Unity which is not totalitarian but is capable of achieving targets as a well-functioning group.

The simplistic picture of today's global—and Armenian—world is that too much specialization, too much information, too many opportunities, as well as the crises of management and values have fragmented the individual worldview, global perception and visions, including individual or social perception. Our task is to make it whole again but avoid too much mythology, making the individual—and the group—critically-minded, creative and educated.

MSTA is a human technology rather than an automatable one. Computer technologies can help us, while using MSTA, to improve its usage and make its impact more effective. But, as we know, the issue is that humans can do things that non-human technology cannot: humans develop objectives and ways to achieve them, and automated technologies are simply the means and resources in this process. So, we need, first of all, human technologies. The 'fourth industrial revolution does not convey the reality of global developments' – these are words that Shchedrovitsky would have liked. The words 'industry' and 'revolution' sound for many as outdated today as many other such words: 'ideology', 'left', 'right', 'enlightenment' etc. They are considered stereotypically if only one part, domain, or form of their meaning or capacity

[7] «Перспективы, цели и задачи молодежных движений на Кавказе в условиях неурегулированных конфликтов», http://gter-gab.com/files/uploads/methodology/obshchekavkazskaya-igra-pitsunda-2003-fevral-final.pdf

is taken and presented as the whole, and it is believed by the speaker that everyone agrees that this partial picture represents the whole object. The person taking this fragment usually mistakenly believes that everyone agrees that the content of that concept is understood the way they mean it.

What we are talking about here is *renaming reality* to go beyond stereotypes, to move from discussing a part of the object to its whole.

### *The Value Crisis*

Value systems are constructed in all possible ways: genetically, perhaps, some of them are transferred from parents to their offspring; epigenetically and socially they are constructed by families, societies and states, by the environment of individuals. Humans are extremely flexible and adaptable, as compared to many other species, therefore they are capable of adapting to the value systems in which they operate. They can agree on some values and disagree on others, but they can adapt by fitting their desire for freedom within some value systems and change other values with which they do not want to agree.

A major way of influencing value systems is, obviously, the education system of humankind in its entirety. It is this institution with its formal and informal components that makes individuals behave in one way or another. There is no doubt that the elements of the current global crisis would be absent or different if it were not for the education institutions which shaped humanity for the last several centuries of the history of civilization.

There is also no doubt that the education system globally is in crisis today. What are the manifestations of that crisis?

Higher levels of education have ceased to be a guarantee for success in the market, either individually or collec-

tively. It is more and more visible that formal education institutions are often unable to form the type of individual they aim to develop; the one illustration of this is the fact that people from Western Europe (presumably educated according to the 'western' standards) adopt an aggressive and twisted form of Islam and go to join the Islamic State. Another illustration is that the number of people educated in formal institutions who, however, remain functionally illiterate, is growing.

To this, one should add technological growth with its unexpected effects. If we follow the logic of Ken Robinson, we can say that the system of education that exists today was developed in the previous, pre-internet, period of civilization. This education system, with its proposal for analyzing the flow of information the way it was done in times past, is now outdated.

Relative freedom and ease of mobility for a majority of humankind—both in real as well as virtual space—allows for potential learning opportunities unsurpassed by previous eras of history. On the other hand, this brings about several challenges. To take only the internet, first, it is filled with information that may be misleading; second, it does not provide any guidance on how to select what one may need. This brings about the change in the value system orientation that a major part of humankind relied on in the past: that there is a 'mainstream' value system that an individual belongs to, versus all other values. But since possessing a 'mainstream' value system is 'hard-wired' in humankind's psychology as it has evolved over the centuries (because it was a precondition for the capacity to adapt and cope with challenges), this situation of challenging the 'former mainstream', in turn, results in 'easy adoption' of a mainstream as a defensive measure, a way of 'saving' one's psychology from the challenge posed to it by the 'unruly' information world's onslaught. This is similar to a scenario when the brain is unable to react in time and it is the spinal cord that gives the signal but ends up being mistaken and produces a signal that does not match the situation correctly.

Thus, globalization and new technological opportunities bring about a new challenge: *returning to the archaic mindset* as a defense against the complexity of the world.

Those who have the capacity for *critical thinking*, those who have had an 'exceptionally good' education, those who have acquired the capacity to orientate in the complexity of values flooding the world today, can resist that effect. However, they are a minority, since very few education systems today take into account the factors mentioned above, and most of them are designed to be even more conservative than some other systems, precisely for the reason of preserving the 'mainstream value system' that they have successfully relied upon over the times

of their existence, without realizing that this is no longer sufficient to guarantee the progress of humankind.

The result is a clash of two mega-value systems: one which is capable of orientating in the world today and making informed and effective decisions that are beneficial for the future of humankind, and one which is not, and the latter is a majority.

These two mega-value systems permeate all the other institutions and sides of society, be they social, cultural, economic, state-interest (e.g. 'geopolitical'), etc. It is also understandable that the clash between them has existed historically, it was just not realized in these terms. For instance, the clash between the 'West' and the 'rest' is a flat model of this conflict. A lack of realization of the true essence of this conflict brings about a situation where those who think their position is 'correct' have to accept a challenge to their position which comes from the 'cultural corner'. That is why gender studies and feminism, or anti-colonial discourse have become so important, because the domination of the 'truth paradigm' by a 'white western man' was deficient and unjust. At the same time, exaggerating identity politics results in another 'flat model' approach, which exacerbates the conflict between mega-value systems rather than resolves it. The critique is usually not based on a conscious discussion of the two "mega-value" systems; it simply casts aside the "western" approach as one that is dominant, "imperialist" and culturally limited.

We have several manifestations of this replacement of the mega-issue by its flat models. For instance, Human Rights are interpreted as a manifestation of 'western values' that is not applicable in the case of other cultures, and the fact that they are of a value created by humankind universally is lost in this kind of relativistic approach.

If the idea of Human Rights is replaced by the idea of 'western values', it immediately becomes deficient. Human Rights can be conceived as globally applicable. Independently if a 'western' or a 'non-western' person argues that they are 'western values', in both cases they become deficient, because they lose their global significance. If the problem is formulated as a 'flat model' then either side can be accused, sincerely or manipulatively, in simplistic distortion or motivated reasoning while using this concept.

Similarly, there is a conflict between mega-discourses versus *compartmentalization* of knowledge. Professions have become more and more complex. Mega-discourses, such as religion, even if followed by individuals, are no more directly linked to the other elements of the individual's identity, such as his or her profession. Just like the dollar is no longer linked to gold; and governance is no longer linked, in many

places, to divine origins. In earlier times, one's identity could be linked to the prevalent mega-discourse within which one is situated. Here is a simple example. The Russian word for "peasant" is *крестьянин*, stemming from the root which means "Christian". In such very obvious or other, not-so-obvious ways, one's worldview was being kept holistic. Today, many people do not have such a holistic worldview.

### *More on Education and Other Crises*

MSTA exposes the fact that education is in crisis—and, in fact, it is in crisis at a global, post-Soviet[8] and national Armenian level[9]. MSTA protagonists have talked[10] and written about the fact that if an element of a global or post-Soviet crisis is not being addressed while the focus is on the national crisis—the effect will not be positive. So, we need a methodologically new educational system. We suggest using MSTA to review mental processes, deconstruct the possibilities for prognostic strategy and collective thinking, as well as for many other things.

MSTA is a great tool to develop a concept of an innovative educational/scientific system[11] and implement it. Incidentally, a crisis was felt strongly by Shchedrovitsky in the Soviet education system of the second half of the 20th century, and this was one of the reasons why he developed his system as well.

The Russian school after Shchedrovitsky stayed distrustful towards creativity, which made their approach too

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8 Gtergab.com, Отчёт игротехника группы «Среда» «подростковой» игры в г. Лазаревском, https://gtergab.com/files/uploads/methodology/39.otchiot-chetverg-for-web-nov-2009-full.pdf

9 Игра «Лидерство», февраль 2009 г. Севан, http://gtergab.com/ru/news/methodology-2/leadership-a-creative-game-february-2009-sevan/119/

10 Armenia 3.0 Understanding 20th Century, Part 9, http://www.ep-farmenia.am/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/Armenia-3.0_Part-9_transcript_English_March-14-2017_final_published-on-March-31-2017.pdf

11 Gtergab.com, Проекты группы «Университет», отчёт игротехника Г.А. Тер-Габриеляна, https://gtergab.com/files/uploads/methodology/37.bruisov-odi-report-gev.pdf

technical and technological and, in some cases, devoid of the capacity 'to fly'. Perhaps that is why they were accused of totalitarianism and manipulation, eventually ending in crisis.

Meanwhile this is a method which made many of its participants and protagonists successful, happy, and able to help their countries, societies, teams, and the issues they tried to address with scarce means. MSTA is not a panacea. But it has a chance of helping overcome the impasse of the global educational crisis.

MSTA is a very human- and individual-dependent method. The most difficult thing in it, perhaps, is to find people who can work alongside the leader of the method—the methodologist; i.e. to have followers not at the level of beneficiaries, but at the level of those who will continue the development of the method.

That is why it is crucial to pick up from the present MSTA team what we know and can do, strengthen and magnify the capacities of the limited group of people who can continue what we do, bring in new people into that pool, and use the method to the fullest.

Like many other methods, MSTA is art, science and skill, so conveying it verbally will always be deficient. It has to be experienced. It is about practice and action, a method most useful in the project paradigm: it unites the highest levels of abstract philosophy with the minutiae of mundane actions. MSTA is the most disruptive technology one can imagine.

MSTA, when applied on a large scale, can positively impact any area of its application[12]. Let us briefly look at a few areas.

[12] Facebook.com. Gevorg Ter-Gabrielyan, Armenian team's MSTA activities, https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fbid=1558140017543617&id=256028707754761

### *Governance*

Our governance is so deeply dysfunctional that it almost does not make sense suggesting a holistic reform plan. That is why political parties do not have any such during the election circles, nor do the opposition ones pursue piecemeal changes in-between of elections. Although such plans do exist, they face the risk of being 'eaten up' by the systemic dysfunctionality of the whole.

MSTA can be used to address this deep crisis[13] and suggest ways for reconciling the plan of particular change with the process of systemic reform[14].

### *Business*

The various branches of MSTA that evolved in Russia around the students of Shchedrovitsky, independently of their particular successes and failures, failed in one major task: turning this into an international methodology and breaking into the international market. Our Armenian Creative Games have been successful in that, although internationally we have so far addressed only the non-profit sphere. Our team members have consulted several post-Soviet businesses[15] using MSTA. In Armenia today, the following applications of MSTA in business seem most pertinent in the short- to medium-term:

- Using MSTA with and for businesses which want to innovate; educating them in creativity and innovation[16]. Identifying clear ways forward for innovative ideas with high likelihood of success. This is a way different from the usual path of startups: the majority of such technologies which are today used in the world and in Armenia are based on 'ad hoc searching' of ideas or, consciously or inadvertently, replicate the success of already existing ideas. None of them educates participants into targeted thinking, creativity, and innovation, and combining ideas and values with market approaches. Needless to say, the world today dreams about such a combination. Of course, if particular ideas need support, MSTA can be applied to boost them as well, in a more narrow and targeted way.

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[13] Необходимые действия Армении в свете Российско-Грузинской войны и ее последствий, http://gtergab.com/files/uploads/methodology/30.expert_workshop_russian-sept-2008.pdf

[14] Epfarmenia.am. Initial Conclusions and Recommendations from the "Mechanisms and Strategy for Civic Engagement in Local Governance" Organizational Activity Seminar, http://epfarmenia.am/sites/default/files/Document/CELoG-CG-Major-Highlights-_Eng_0.pdf

[15] Геворг Тер-Габриелян, Тринадцать друзей бизнес-Оушена или типичные ошибки постсоветских бизнес-лидеров, https://gtergab.com/files/uploads/methodology/20.business-ocean-spring-2007.pdf

[16] Epfarmenia.am, Նորարարություն և քննադատական մտածողություն. Գևորգ Տեր-Գաբրիելյան, http://epfarmenia.am/hy/video/innovation-critical-thinking

- Armenia—and the Armenian branch of MSTA—can become an international hub for bringing back meaning into the world's undertakings. The capacities of MSTA are very large and they are as yet untapped fully. Armenia will then indeed become something that Armenians like to boast about – a globally renowned location where meaning is produced and radiated worldwide, shaping the global future.

The idea of applying MSTA on a larger scale than before is fully feasible. The resources that its one round will require will not be more than the resources needed for a high quality international conference, at least in the beginning.

*The unintended and incalculable additional outcomes* of Creative Games may include computer game scenarios, simulation scenarios, research scenarios, policy recommendations, particular inventions, gadgets etc. For instance, ideas such as sending SMS via landline phones, or having double-screen computers in shops so that the client sees the same information that the salesperson is looking at, thus increasing transparency, were invented by the participants of MSTA exercises long before they began being produced industrially. But of course, the major potential impact of MSTA as a whole is in revolutionizing the life and business success of individuals which possess that skill, and of the groups and entire societies which acquire meaning and a capacity to create their future.

### *Novelty*

MSTA's practical application exists since 1973, when Shchedrovitsky ran his first Organizational-Activity Game. It has been applied in Russia in business and governance and has probably been partly successful – see Kirienko's career. However, turning it into an open, transparent and internationally marketable tool has been achieved only by the Armenian team[17], and only partially. It will be a novelty to do it on a larger scale for Armenia's benefit.

*Drawing ideas[18] and thoughts and coming to a consensus via drawings rather than mere words* is probably one of the most innovative ways of overcoming the crisis of notions in today's global world. This crisis has been identified as early as the beginning of the 20th century, but became an endemic condition with postmodernism; this crisis is also very much linked to the pervasive mistrust that permeates the world today, because mistrust of words is a part of global mistrust. Needless to say, it is also very pertinent to Armenia today.

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[17] Towards Peace Games: Facilitation and Creative Games in Conflict Transformation A Comparison and Contrast, http://gtergab.com/files/uploads/methodology/17.calgaryarticle-july-2006-2013.pdf

[18] Facebook.com. Creative Game 2017 photos, https://www.facebook.com/groups/276237769459786/photos?_rdc=1&_rdr

*Where does one learn thinking today, both in Armenia and in the world?* People are taught, whether consciously or unconsciously, by their surroundings, their families and schools, but almost never addressing the tools for thinking directly. In the best-case scenario, they learn formal logic and rhetoric. In rare cases, they study philosophy and critical thinking. In science they use the process of thinking but usually do not study it. Thinking, meanwhile, is a much more all-encompassing skill than logic, and is used in philosophy, science but also in many other areas. *People think that when they experience psychological processes they think—but in fact that is not thinking.* MSTA offers people a toolset to learn how to think—and makes them acquire that skill fast and successfully. In today's world, where *'critical thinking'* has become another buzzword and nobody really understands what it means, MSTA offers people *the reflection paradigm, or 'the reflection lift'*—perhaps one of the most important 'inventions' of Shchedrovitsky, and one of the most important inventions of the last 100 years—equal to such groundbreaking ideas as the invention of syntax. To be certain, neither reflection nor syntax have been invented by any known individuals in history, but the reflection upon both of them, the capacity to see them 'from beyond' and to make them, apart from a phenomenon, into usable tools is attributable to this or that historical time, thinker and groups of thinkers.

One cannot understand fully what MSTA is theoretically: one has to experience it. Becoming well-armed with MSTA requires effort, willpower, and decisiveness. One has to read volumes to understand MSTA, and even then it requires a philosophical background and/or mind. Meanwhile, experiencing it in practice allows one to dive into development and grasp the method. In the opinion of university professors engaged in MSTA, participation in one good MSTA exercise—a game of, say, five days' duration—is equal to studying for one semester in a good university. A part of the reason why Armenia's NGOs are so robust despite the rest of the country's crisis is the

use of MSTA over the years, promoted by the Armenian Methodological Committee members, which has had its influence on the success of at least certain social activities, their vitality and stability.

Today's global problem is not *'what to do'*: it is *'what to do; why to do it; how. And doing it'*. MSTA addresses this entire circle.

*This text was finalized in 2018*

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