

Technology and Purpose

Lant Pritchett

Oxford RISE

December 2, 2019

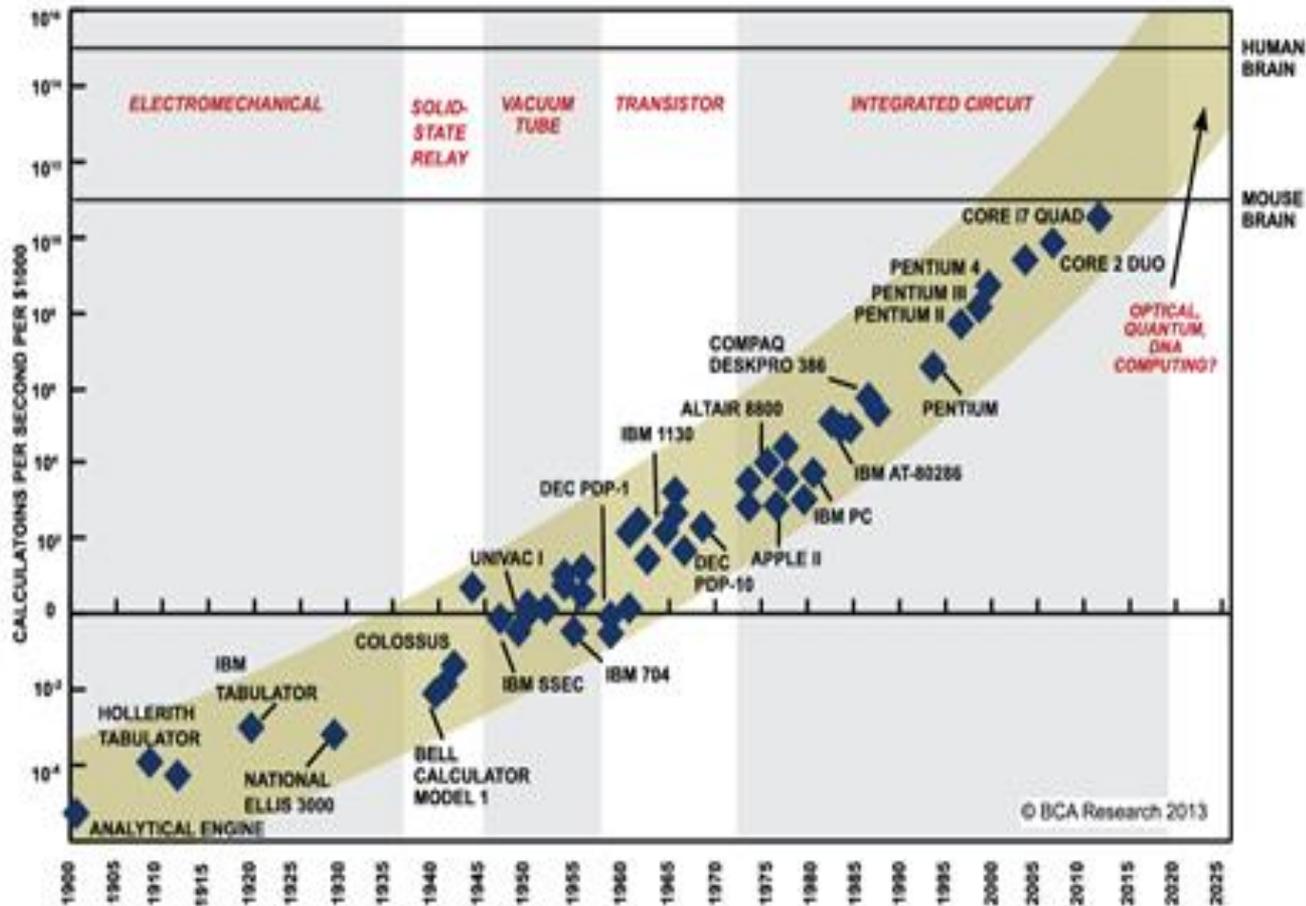
Message of my talk: You don't make
Pinocchio into a real boy by adding
more strings



Three variations on the theme

- Are activities “logistics” or “implementation intensive” (requiring transaction intensive local discretion)? Some activities are “Moore’s law resistant”
- Bringing organizations “back from the brink” requires bringing purpose back to life, not just support functions
- “Account” versus “accounting” based accountability

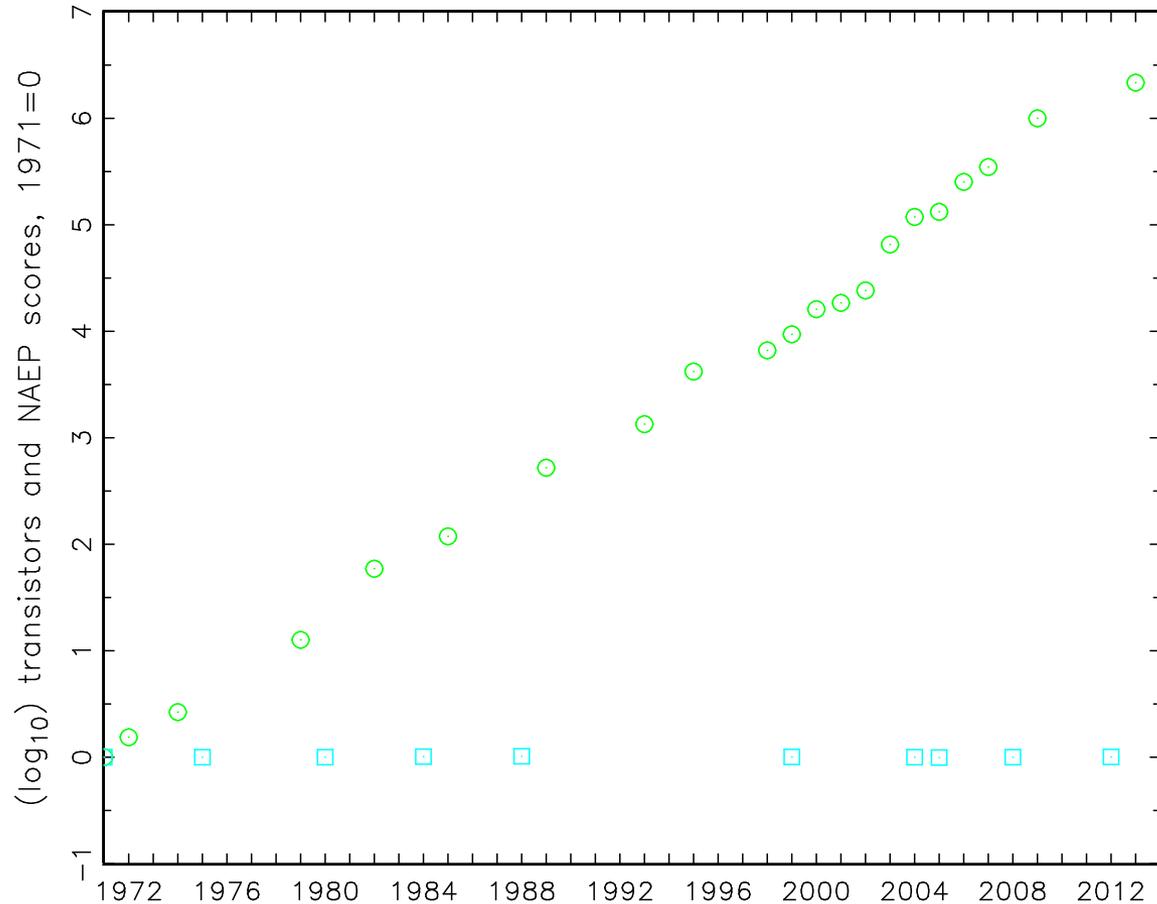
Improvements in information technology (IT) are not new, roughly same pace for 50 years with cumulative 10^{10} improvement



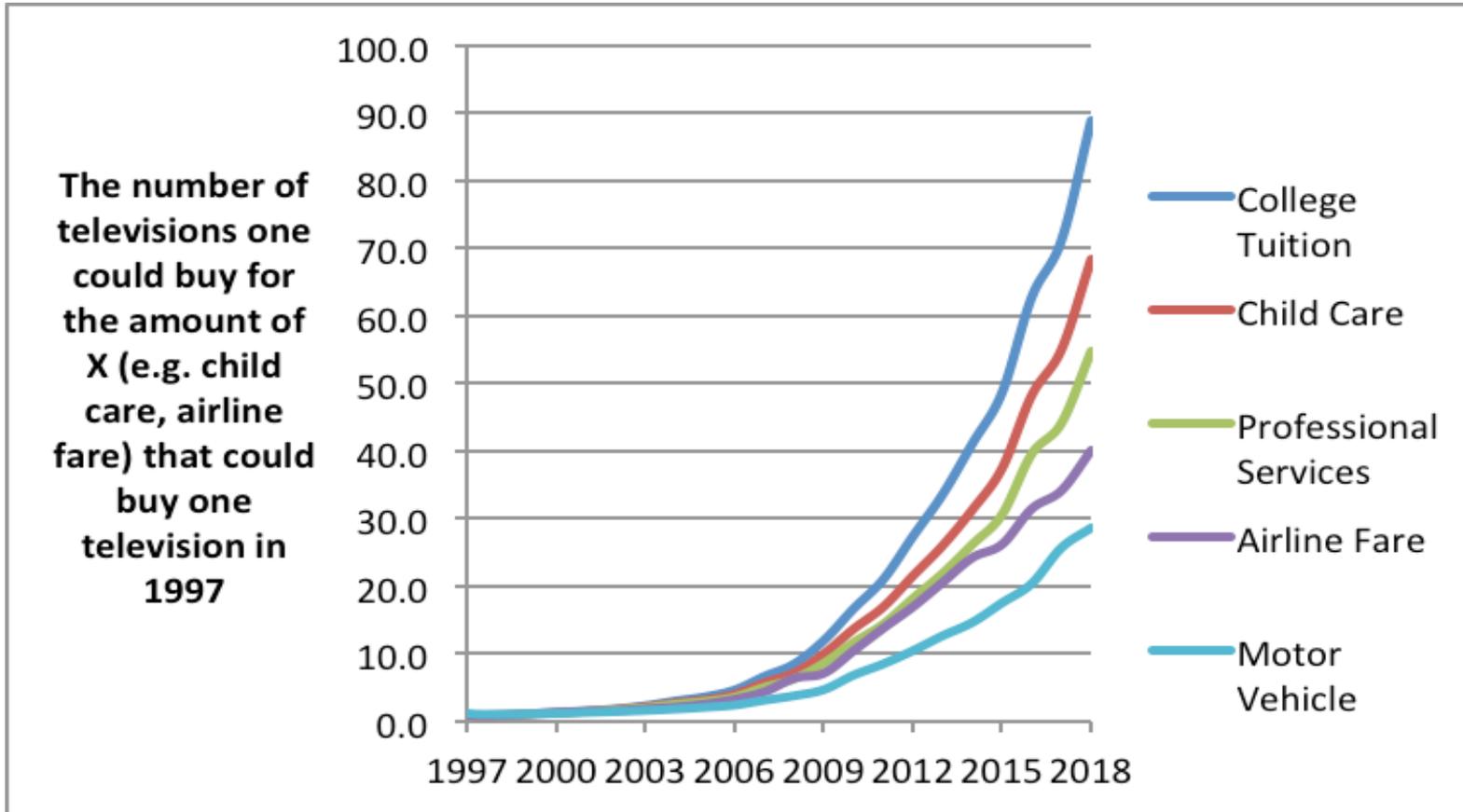
For reference:
highway speed of 60 mph and the speed if light differ by about 10^7

SOURCE: RAY KURZWEIL, "THE SINGULARITY IS NEAR: WHEN HUMANS TRANSCEND BIOLOGY", P.67, THE VIKING PRESS, 2006. DATAPPOINTS BETWEEN 2000 AND 2012 REPRESENT BCA ESTIMATES.

Since 1971 the USA has tracked average learning of seniors in high school: almost unchanged whereas computing power has increased by 10^6



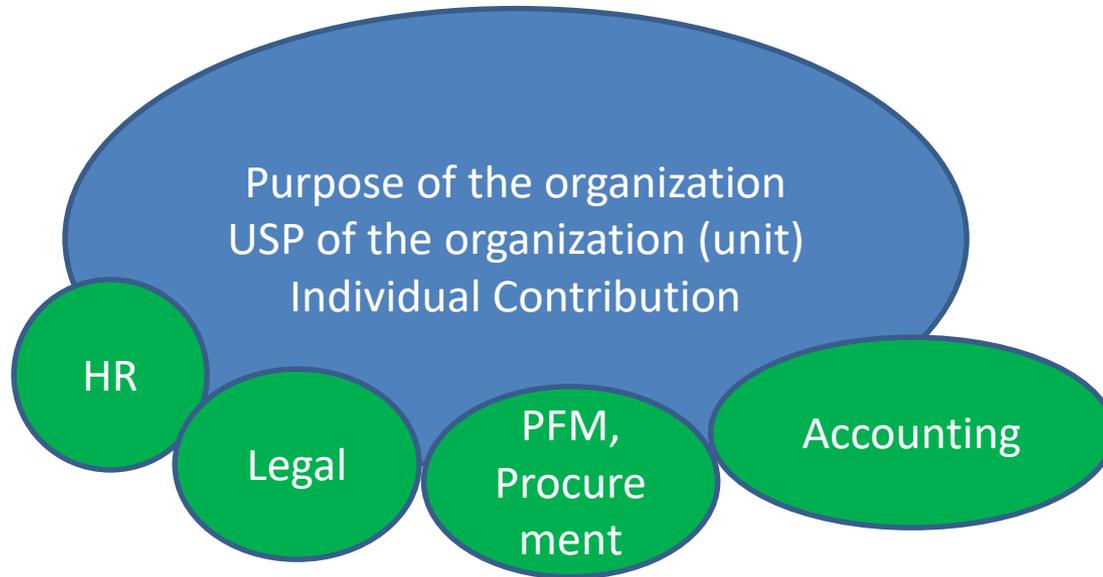
Products that are “Moore’s law amenable” have gotten *enormously* cheaper you can buy 70 televisions for the child care that could buy you 1 in 1997



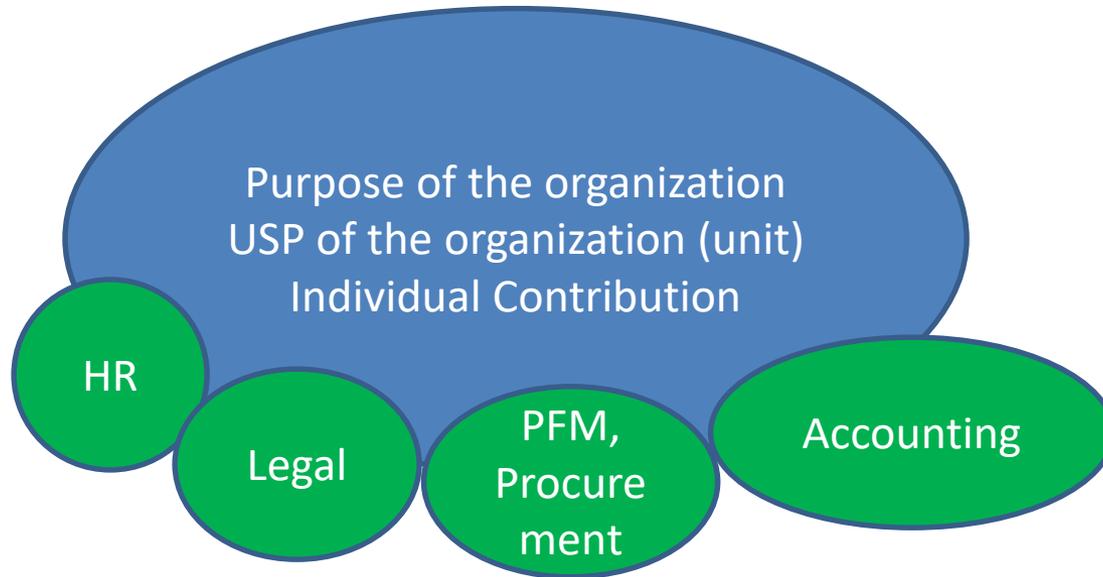
The organization that carries out the activity is run like (name/paradigm example)	The nature of the activity actually is:		
	Logistical (works on thin inputs, “states of the world” are easily verifiable, mapping to actions straightforward)	Professional (works only on technical expertise, “states of the world” are verifiable only to other experts, but mostly objective(ish) but with professional judgement (e.g. beauty of architecture)	Personal (works on inter-subjective, “states of the world” are mostly subjective and idiosyncratic and both socially constructed but personal)
Weberian bureaucracy (Post Office)	Match: Delivers well	Mismatch: turns “professionals” into “workers” or “occupations” and leads to ineffectiveness as it demoralizes those with professional skills	Mismatch: destroys the very spirit and essence of the activity, demoralizes, de-humanizes
Professional Practice (Dentists)	Mismatch: inefficient and doesn’t reach economies of scale/scope/inter-connectedness	Match: Delivers well	Mismatch: But not so bad.
Partnership/Club (Marriage)	Mismatch: inefficient and doesn’t reach economies of scale/scope/inter-connectedness	Mismatch: doesn’t acknowledge truly needed expertise and makes decisions that don’t work technically	Match: Delivers well

“Back from the Brink” requires
organizations with Purpose

A functional organization: Purpose, USP (correct and believed) and individual commitment

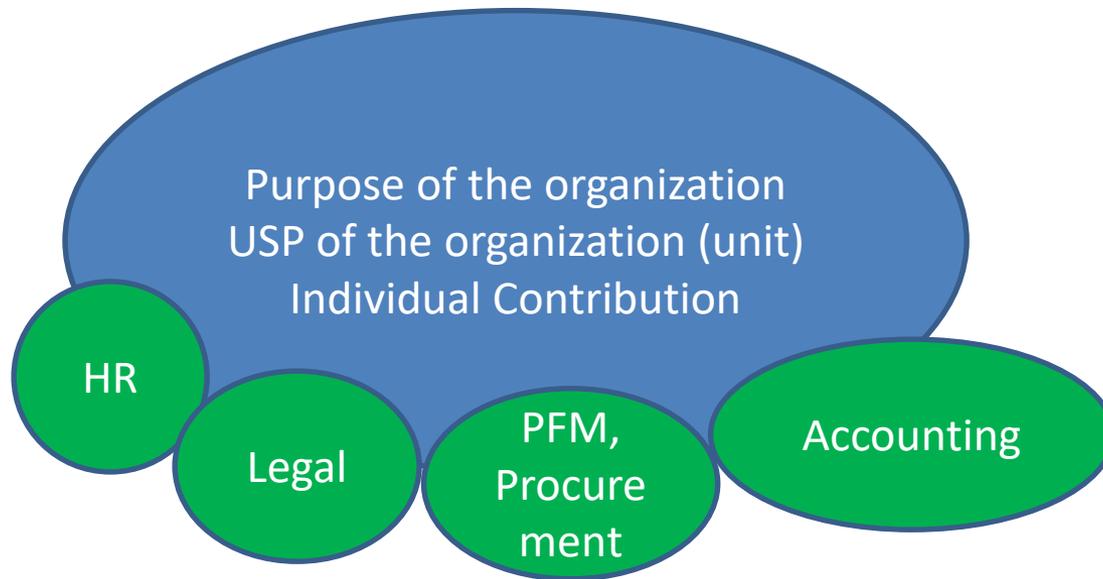


One possibility: *Purpose* and *USP* are enhanced by IT



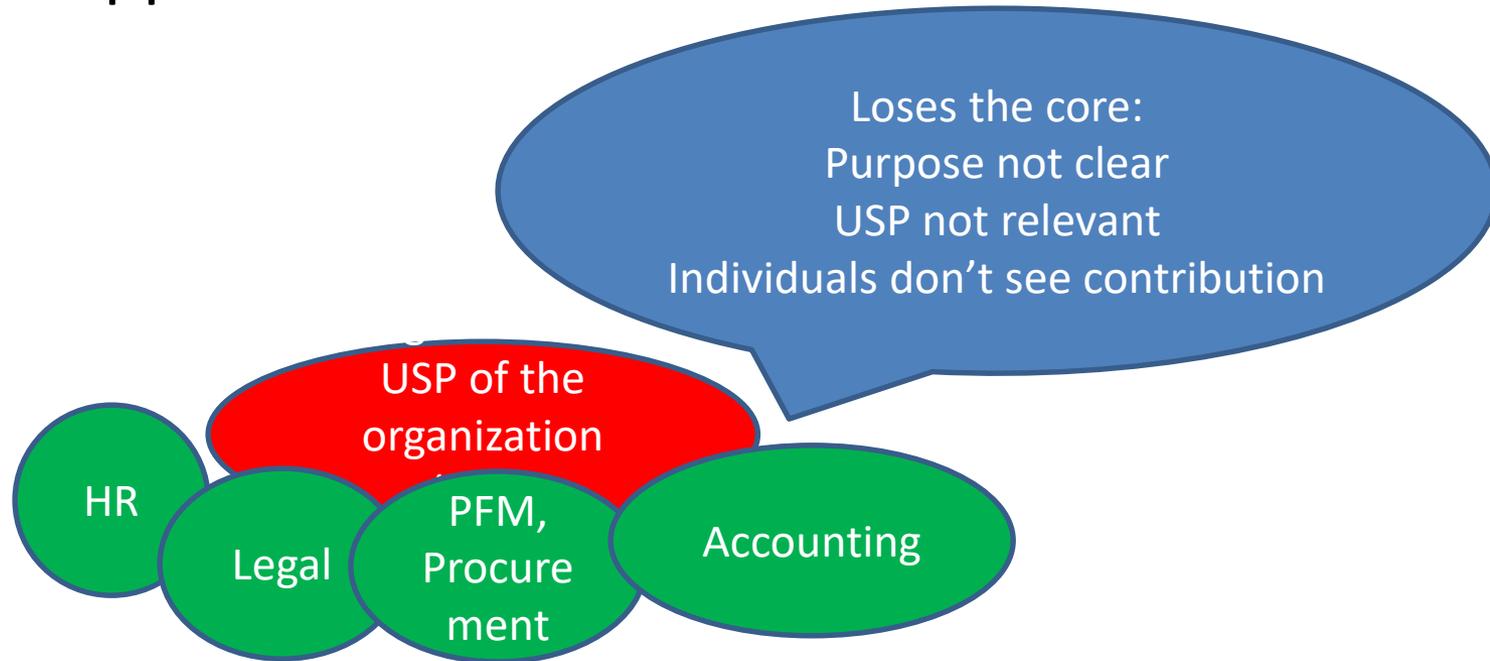
In this case this makes the organization more *effective* and *efficient*

Another possibility: *Purpose* and *USP* are Moore's Law resistant but *support functions* are enhanced by IT



This makes the organization more *efficient* (as less time is spent on support, freeing up time on task) but only indirectly more effective

When organizations lose any or all of the three the core shrinks and becomes a carcass off which the “support” feed and it is a zombie



When the organizational core is lost, you cannot use IT in the “service” functions to improve the organization. At best one will get a compliant zombie (at best).

In the DISE data Tamil Nadu accomplished SSA goals and lost 1.2 million students....

Table 7: Data from the State Report Cards taken from EMIS system in India, the District Information System for Education (DISE) for Tamil Nadu

	Enrollments			Inputs		
	Enrollment in Government	Enrollment in Private	Percent in government	Percent with drinking water	Percent with Girl's toilet	Pupil Teacher Ratio
2004/05	5,487,221	4,297,171	56.1%	79.8%	25.4%	55
2011/12	4,226,225	5,229,293	44.7%	100.0%	75.3%	29
Gain/loss	-1,260,996	932,122	-11.4%	20.2%	49.9%	-26

Source: State report cards, various years, downloaded from <http://www.dise.in/src.htm>

You cannot beat a turtle into moving

**The head has to come out for
the body to move**



**Organizations can survive
external attack...by not
moving**



Account based accountability

Accounting based

- Based on “thin” objective inputs
- Process compliance based

Account based

- A narrative of what the person did and why that was the right thing to further the organizational objective
- Focus on outcomes and causal models, “why” to purpose, not just “what”

Returns to Navigation by Judgment in Countries of Differential Environmental Unpredictability

