On framing and context

A frame is the host structure that contextualizes events. It may be a physical structure such as a vehicle, which gives context to wheels, brakes and accelerator, or it may be abstract, such as political persuasion, which colors the same event differently for different people.

The frame is not the context; it is the reality underlying the context.

How does a project engineer avoid idiosynthetic frames?

The answer lies in examining project qualities that are independent of context and interpretation.

While the frame is ever-present it is usually subliminal. So much so that some people are quite incapable of perceiving it. For such a person the understanding of their own psyche extends only as far as their own contextual vision – a form of psychosis. These people tend to cherish deeply held convictions to the extent that these beliefs trump reality by framing it within a context.

Frame supplies context
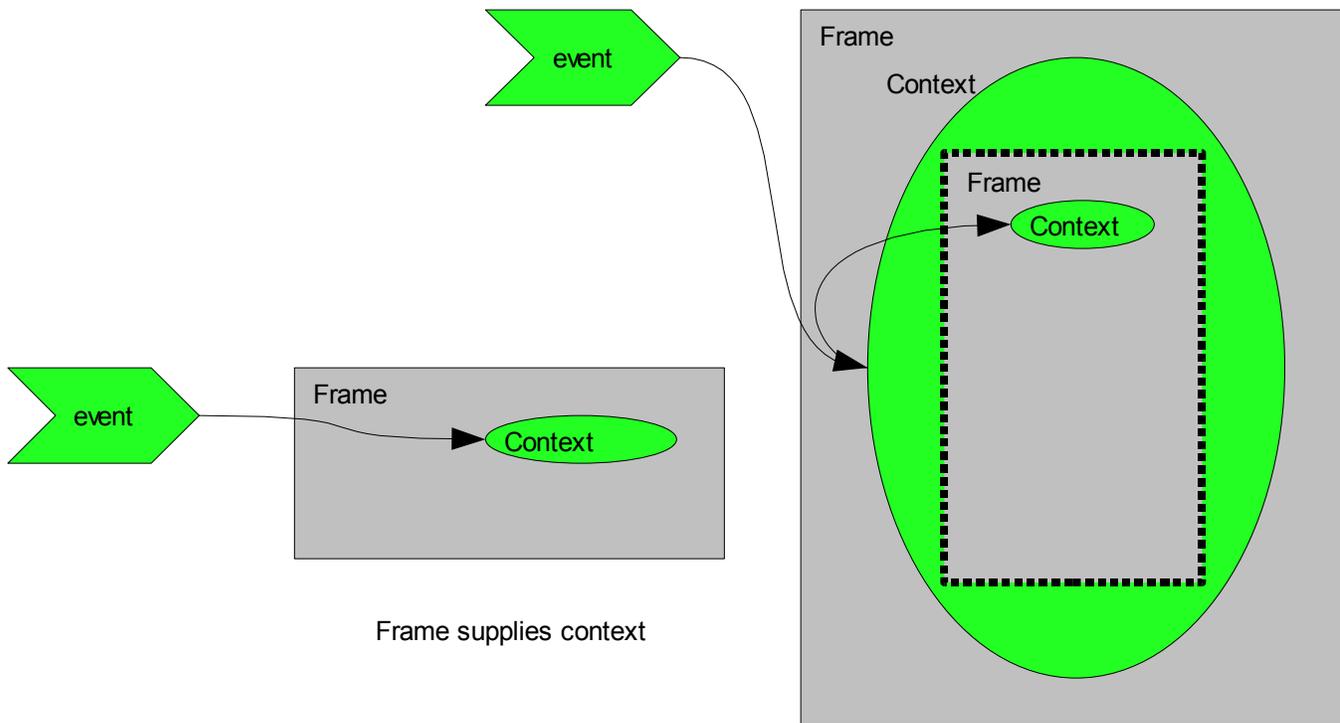
Frame supplies context - supplies virtual frame - supplies context

In other words, if a sufficiently powerful context is framed then it can becomes the frame for all other contexts. We call such frames idiosynthetic.

While psychotics are most prone to synthesizing their own frames we are all capable of it, and do it regularly. Normally we revise our virtual frames when they bump up against reality, but it is not always apparent they have done so. For example, one of the largest and most inflexible realities we have in common is the fact that the earth is spherical, and yet all us have struggled with the concept of all those upside-down people on the other side of the world.

As any software programmer can attest it is easy to stumble into an idiosynthetic frame – to believe the computer must be at fault, not yourself. When realization dawns it is with a sense of chagrin – "How could I have been so stupid!".

Idiosynthetic frames are anchored in the individual, but other frames may be anchored in a social collective, which makes them far closer to reality as far as the individual immersed in that society is concerned. Social frames are anchored in context rather than in reality, but they influence reality heavily enough to seem an integral part of it. Cults are emblematic; they isolate their thralls from external reality and replace it with their own synthetic framework. Orthodox society does this to varying extent, and while an individual may detest the the frame he is immersed in, expressing his feelings can be suicidal. Consider the plight of anti-Hitler Germans during the Nazi era.

The ideal Project Engineer is both self- and socially-aware enough to know which frames supply which context, for when it comes to project engineering the consequences of framing becomes significantly larger. Idiosynthetic frames are no longer passive entities that afflict individuals – they now have an expressive capacity. Buildings collapse and doctors amputate the wrong limbs because of them. Social frameworks may be contextually irrational, and the project engineer must understand how they contextualize events in order to manage their influence.

What then of the framework that reality imposes on a complex project? How does the project engineer keep the frame as close to the project as possible? Keep the project anchored in reality[1] ? The answer lies in examining project qualities that are progressively more independent of context and interpretation:

These are the structural relationships between:

- the reasons for the project,

- the goals that arise from those reasons,

- the things that have to be done to achieve those goals,

- the sequence in which they need to be done,

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1 Sometimes the project engineer wishes to influence reality. This can only be done if the engineer has a grasp of all the pertinent frameworks and the context that collective supplies.

- the resources that will be employed,

- and the structural relationships between all of these.

This structure can be described mathematically and analyzed to yield a frame that is divorced from subjective interpretation and influence.