

The Law of the Instrument

What is your favorite tool? Is it so familiar or compelling that you are tempted to employ it in all contexts? The law of the instrument illustrates this tendency.

Tools are designed for specific uses.

- Law for legal issues
- Reason and logic for conceptual issues
- Culture and freedom of association for values and preferences issues
- Organizational management for governance issues
- Philosophy for epistemological and ethical issues
- Persuasion and service for educational and spiritual issues
- Property rights and markets for scarcity issues
- Power for productivity and self-defense issues
- Measurement and statistics for information issues
- Compassion and contribution for relationship issues
- Technology for practical application issues

It is tempting to think “only X issues exist!” or “I can apply my favorite tool to all issues!” or “if I reframe an X issue as a Y issue, my favorite tool will be effective!”

However, power can't solve preference problems any more than organizational management can solve spiritual problems or technology can solve relationship problems or compassion can solve scarcity problems or measurement can solve ethical problems.

Next time you encounter a problem, consider the context before you grab a hammer and start pounding away.