FUTURES UPDATE

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Futures Update No. 8.

Deeper learning…

Source: Angela Wilkinson & Rafael Ramírez, University of Oxford
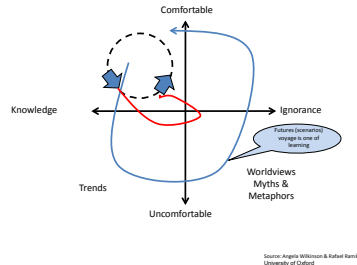
Creating and Designing Change

Robert Burke

Creating and designing change is 'futures thinking in a leadership context' because, in my view, leadership is essentially about creating preferred futures for organisations, communities and nations. I believe the role of leading the change to create a preferred future is the fundamental difference between leadership and management. If this wasn't the case, if all you wanted to achieve is maintenance of the status quo, you wouldn't need leadership. All you would need is good management. There may be nothing wrong with maintaining the status quo, or with good management, if that is all that is required. In many circumstances this could even be desirable such as with flying aeroplanes, maintaining environmental integrity and in proven effective medical and hospital care.

One of the key benefits of futures work is in researching the difference between management and leadership by stimulating your thought processes through asking questions that you may not have asked before within the context of not knowing the answers and not being required to know the answers.

I believe the reason you need leadership is to create a preferred future often within this context of not knowing the answers, but knowing you can create a vision that is preferable and desirable from which the answer(s) emerges. To achieve this may require 'constructive destruction'. That is, in order to create a preferred future, you might have to 'destroy' the present way of doing or thinking in order to allow new thinking and new ways of doing, enacting, to emerge.

Richard Normann (2001 p.3) referred to leadership as *enacting a reality*.

> The fundamental process of leadership is that of interpreting a (continuously evolving) context, formulating our notions of our identity and the emerging new contextual logic into a set of 'dominating ideas' which are both descriptive and normative, and then translate these dominating ideas into various realms of action.

The model below (figure 1) is derived from the work of Richard Normann, particularly his 2001 book *Reframing Business, when the map changes the landscape.* I learnt the model from Angela Wilkinson and Rafael Ramírez, Oxford University.

The model suggests that most organisations plan in the comfortable/knowledge quadrant and this process is one of literally going around in circles within this quadrant. *This process is often known as business planning!*

The red line indicates that occasionally managers try to go deeper but quickly the heat is turned up and they race back to a cooler and more comfortable space. *This process is often known as strategic planning!*

The blue line is a *'voyage of future learning'*. As you travel into the knowledge/uncomfortable zone you enter the quadrant of emerging issues and trends. Trends are the left over's of yesterdays futures. That is, the trends are there but they are often chosen to be ignored because they are uncomfortable to face, ETS (Environmental Trading Scheme) for example. *This process is often called 'stick to your core business'!*

The uncomfortable/ignorance quadrant is the domain of our worldviews, our mindsets if you wish. *This process is often called 'off with the fairies'!*

WARNING – If you are seriously attempting change or attempting to be creative or innovative – you stand a very good chance of 'getting shot'. Often innovative behaviour tends to be seen as deviant behaviour which tends to become socially repelled and punished. Researchers in different fields (for example Foucault and R.D. Laing) have mapped and illustrated these phenomena. What is deviant depends on the institutionalised perspective (Normann, 2001 p.210). The prospect is fascinating.

However, the deeper we take our learning the more comfortable we become with our ignorance, our anxiety, because we are trying to learn from it, as an adaptive challenge, and solutions begin to emerge which we can crystallise and begin prototyping back into the comfortable/knowledge quadrant. Heifetz and Laurie (1998, cited in Heifetz and Linsky 2002 p.108) refer to this as '*the productive range of anxiety'.*

All planning is about the future. What if questions are about the future. One of the key benefits of futures work is in stimulating your thought processes by getting us to ask questions that we may not have asked before within the context of not knowing the answers and not being required to know the answers. The *mental* process that corresponds with reconfiguration is *reframing* (Normann, 2001 p.202). That is, we must be able to look at ourselves and at our situation from different perspectives; we must bring different realities into it, and we must be able to move into other realities and see ourselves from different vantage points.

Reflection

1. What is considered deviant behaviour when designing interventions in your organisation?
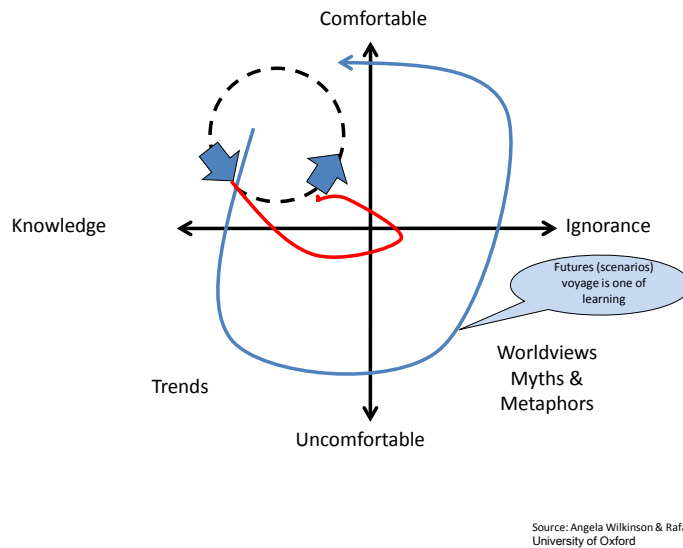2. What is the institutionalised perspective that makes this deviant?

Deeper learning…

Comfortable

Knowledge — Ignorance

Trends

Uncomfortable

Worldviews
Myths &
Metaphors

Futures (scenarios) voyage is one of learning

Figure 1

Deeper Learning

Designing for Designing - There are two processes required:

1. *Reconfiguration* (structural)
2. *Reframing* (processual)

The goal is reframing for reconfiguration which is creating conditions that lead to emergence. If we want to change the structure we have to have a process that is creative and this usually means it does not lend itself to rational control, since creative innovation by definition is an open-ended process, where results cannot be predicted or guaranteed. The challenge for all of us is to create our own future. This is where it is vital to understand that innovation is a social not a technical process and where the hidden human dimensions could mean the difference between success and failure.

The pressure of 'premature closure'

The critical link in strategy is the work that needs to be done even before the planning or design stage begins. This is because if we do not engage in the rigour needed to challenge our thinking, our worldview, we will get what we already have – comfortable/knowledge.

Normann (2001 p.249) describes critical five domains of capability:

1. ***The style of interaction (the social domain)*** – a code of conduct as practised, not espoused. Critical issues are discussable and confronted rather than non-discussable and condemned to internal power games.

2. ***Cognition, world views and mind-frames (the cognitive domain)*** – the ability to move between conceptual levels of 'seeing' things from the angles of different paradigms – of framing.

3. ***Artefication skills (the design domain)*** – artefacts can be physical or mental (memes). Manifest the identity of the concept of 'structure'.

4. ***Ecological interfacing (the spatial domain)*** – 'the edge of chaos' for the purpose of reinventing ourselves to survive without fully 'controlling'.

5. ***Political leadership (the power domain)*** – using power to protect emergent processes as well as to mobilise power to move ahead.

Adapted from Normann's work I have developed a map to link this process with futures thinking. Using this with Sohail Inayatullah's Causal Layered Analysis (CLA) is brilliant here (Figure 2, below).
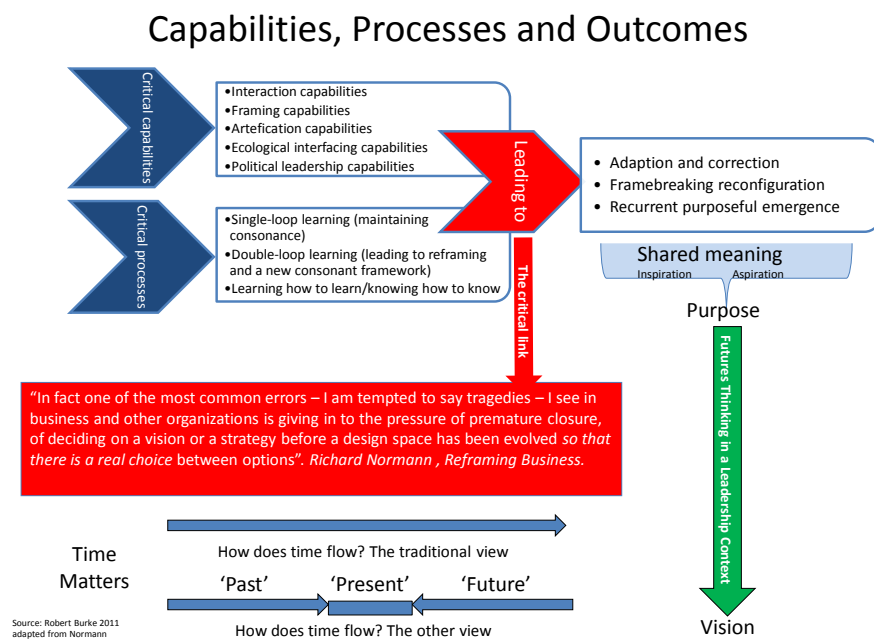
Capabilities, Processes and Outcomes

Critical capabilities
- Interaction capabilities
- Framing capabilities
- Artefication capabilities
- Ecological interfacing capabilities
- Political leadership capabilities

Critical processes
- Single-loop learning (maintaining consonance)
- Double-loop learning (leading to reframing and a new consonant framework)
- Learning how to learn/knowing how to know

Leading to

- Adaption and correction
- Framebreaking reconfiguration
- Recurrent purposeful emergence

Shared meaning
Inspiration   Aspiration

Purpose

The critical link

"In fact one of the most common errors – I am tempted to say tragedies – I see in business and other organizations is giving in to the pressure of premature closure, of deciding on a vision or a strategy before a design space has been evolved *so that there is a real choice* between options". *Richard Normann , Reframing Business.*

Futures Thinking in a Leadership Context

Time Matters

How does time flow? The traditional view

'Past'   'Present'   'Future'

Source: Robert Burke 2011 adapted from Normann

How does time flow? The other view

Vision

Figure 2

The number 1 criterion, therefore, is ***clarify purpose (s) of intervention – or fail!*** If you have the purpose and the reasons for the change clear, the implementation will be natural. CLA transforms the litany of a particular future by nesting it in systems, worldviews and myths. The deconstructed future can thus be reconstructed by switching to an alternative system, worldview or myth.

References:

Heifetz, Ronald A. and Linsky, Marty. (2002) *Leadership on the line, staying alive through the dangers of leading.* Harvard Business School Press. Boston, Massachusetts, USA.

Normann, Richard. (2001) *Reframing business, when the map changes the landscape.* Wiley, UK.

Inayatullah, Sohail. (2004) *The causal layered analysis (CLA) reader.* Taipei, Taiwan: Tamkang University