SCENARIOS, FUTURES AND KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT

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1. THE CONUNDRUM

Scenarios encapsulate past experience, we know that the future is not going to be like the past/present, but we still try to predict/anticipate.
QUESTIONS: How can the knowledge of deeply experienced people about the PAST help people in the future? What kinds of things are you interested in when you interview experts around challenging situations? Do these cognitive capabilities also provide FUTURE-oriented benefits? This question is to Gary.
Matt’s Notes: Crystal balls that foretell the future with perfect certainty don’t exist, you can’t gather data + evidence from events which haven’t happened yet; but the questions you do or don’t choose to ask a hypothetical crystal ball tell you something about how you currently frame a situation.

QUESTIONS: why is it important to recognise your current framing of a situation? How does that help adapt to future needs? Are scenarios mostly about the present and not the future at all?
What are we doing when we build scenarios?

- A crystal ball needs to allow people to think about multiple futures.
- Scenarios need imagination.
- We need to avoid judgment when working on scenarios.
- Scenarios can be looked at from 4 perspectives or levels:
  - Litany
  - Worldview
  - System
  - Metaphor

QUESTIONS: What is the role of experience (patterns of past experience in an experienced practitioner) versus just imagination versus analytic techniques in building good scenarios? This question is to all three panelists.

- The first level is the litany — the official unquestioned view of reality (data).
- The second level is the social causation level, the systemic perspective. The data of the litany is explained (e.g., GDP growth) and questioned at this second level (the system, e.g., capitalism).
- The third level is the discourse/worldview. Deeper, unconsciously held ideological, worldview and discursive assumptions are unpacked at this level.
- The fourth level is the myth/metaphor, the unconscious emotive dimensions of the issue that each individual or a collective in a team or agency hold. CLA helps to understand constraints and opportunities of preferred futures that are often described in development and business plans.
Example from ADB

Futures thinking and foresight to develop a new approach to knowledge management

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LITANY</th>
<th>ADB is a finance++ bank</th>
<th>ADB is a knowledge solution bank</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Official public description or quantitative data of the issue</td>
<td>Know WHAT</td>
<td>Know HOW</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SYSTEMS</th>
<th>Number of knowledge products and services per departments</th>
<th>Number of solutions applied to complex problems</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Short-term historical facts and structure uncovered</td>
<td>Project performance</td>
<td>Development impact</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>WORLDVIEW</th>
<th>We need to collect, capture and share more knowledge</th>
<th>We need to apply knowledge to understand the problems and co-create solutions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Personal/organizational view that supports and creates the system</td>
<td>Knowledge on a chain</td>
<td>Knowledge with wings</td>
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</table>

| NARRATIVE/ METAPHOR | Model that supports and creates the worldview | |
|---------------------|-----------------------------------------------|
Powerful narratives to convince stakeholders about change
Curiosity

- Puzzles
- New Ideas
- Missing Information
- Violated Expectancies
- Implausibility

Klein, G. (2022) *Snapshots of the Mind*, p. 289-91
2. THE BENEFITS

Working with scenarios is about skill and capability building, especially for decision making in uncertainty. Not just strategic level planning, but also capabilities to respond tactically. Building richer mental models. Reacting faster and more smartly. Building the capability to foster insight.
What scenarios can provide

- Richer mental models of the participants
- More insights and discoveries
- Greater calibration for the team members
- Increased common ground — the scenarios become common referents. And so do actual events if they are used as scenarios
- Greater candor as team members learn to work together
- Greater team coordination
We can think of scenarios in terms of imagining how the sea of uncertainty which surrounds our business environment might come ashore in different ways, redrawing the map of the ecosystem in which we operate, challenging strategies, policies, roles, relationships, and identities. Scenarios then become not just a matter of strategy but exploring the common ground of an unwritten future, even when there are disagreements in the present.
exformation
tor nørretranders
kenya hara
cassini nazir

matt finch – mechanicaldolphin.com
What scenarios can provide

- Enable us to think about disruptions, recognize signal early
- Thinking critically and in depth about our situation, and the constraints and opportunities of preferred futures
- Create shared understanding of preferred futures
- Understand that several scenarios can happen in parallel

Futures thinking allows people to think about disruptions, gain more knowledge about them and recognize them early as they appear. So scenarios become knowledge about the future.
3. PRACTICAL SUGGESTIONS

Practical ways of leveraging scenarios within the organisation
Four suggestions for practice

1. Use scenarios to turn policy into practice
2. Use scenarios to address wicked problems
3. Consider the ShadowBox approach for designing and running scenarios
4. Use the Pre-mortem method
Turning Policies into Practices

- Many organizations issue policies without considering the kinds of judgments and decisions and expertise needed to carry out those policies
- Scenario exercises such as ShadowBox can help ensure that the policies will turn into practices
Program for managing wicked problems

There are lots of ways not to handle wicked problems
  - Treat them as conventional problems & other problematic mindsets

Suggestions for:
  - Self-preparation,
  - Framing wicked problems — the Clarity Frame, the Causal Landscape
  - Wrestling with wicked problems

Almost all wicked problems involve multiple stakeholder interests
  - Stakeholder issues: Making tough tradeoffs, reducing Common Ground breakdowns, selecting leaders who are skilled at perspective-taking
ShadowBox

• Problem:
  • Subject Matter Experts (SMEs) are costly and often unavailable

• ShadowBox Training Method:
  • Present challenging scenarios, with periodic Decision Points: Multiple-choice response options, priorities, information to track, etc.
  • Trainees rank the alternatives and record their rationale
  • Trainees compare their responses and rationale to a panel of SMEs

• Rationale: Trainees see the world through the eyes of the experts
  • And no SMEs have to be present
  • Promotes individual discovery, corrects flawed mental models and immature mindsets

• Evaluation studies: 18% to 27% improvement after ½ day of training
Susann has used the pre-mortem in a leadership retreat – any comments on well how it worked?
Two suggestions for practice

**Anchor foresight work in user, use, and purpose**

- Who will experience ‘reframing’? To what end? Through what means?

**Map your business environment**

- Consider your context as an island of relationships surrounded by a sea of uncertainties
- How might these uncertainties come ashore in different ways, challenging assumptions about what lies ahead and what's “really going on” in the here-and-now?
Futures thinking requires working at 4 levels with tools like Causal Layered Analysis (CLA): Litany, systems, worldviews, and narratives/metaphors. The first level is the litany — the official unquestioned view of reality (data). The second level is the social causation level, the systemic perspective. The data of the litany is explained (e.g., GDP growth) and questioned at this second level (the system, e.g., capitalism). The third level is the discourse/worldview. Deeper, unconsciously held ideological, worldview and discursive assumptions are unpacked at this level. The fourth level is the myth/metaphor, the unconscious emotive dimensions of the issue that each individual or a collective in a team or agency hold. CLA helps to understand constraints and opportunities of preferred futures.

FF thinking helps to recognize when the time comes that requires to activate new or different sets knowledge.

What I like most about FF, it helps to understand people, communities and context. Many knowledge organizations and knowledge workers believe that with knowledge we can draw on rational behavior and evidence to make decisions, but unfortunately humans display bounded rationality as you all know. This comes back to the question “why people don’t use the knowledge they have?”...
Thank you!

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