The cult of performance: what are we doing when we don’t know what we are doing?

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Introduction

This paper looks at the emerging relevance of the complexity sciences to organisations and particularly refers to the work of Professor Ralph Stacey. It also looks at the place for futures studies for organisations and attempts to link the possible differences in perspective for organisations.

The cult of performance

The cult of performance is the change that has occurred in organisations as a result of performance measurement in terms of meeting targets and it is this “cult of performance” that has replaced the “cult of purpose” in modern organisations. This has come about as a result of first order cybernetics systems thinking which assumes that all planning systems are cybernetic systems (cybernetics-control to human activity-performing a given pattern—the engineers notion of control).

The basic assumption of the “cult of performance” is based on systems thinking, particularly that field of systems thinking that assumes that human systems are cybernetic systems and it is on this assumption that policy is built on. This has lead to the current organisational belief that has trapped us into thinking we can’t say anything about performance through the contesting of different ways of thinking. When this does happen, however, it is usually the result of what has been called the “shadow organisation”, which is an important process that occurs in every organisation that challenges the concept of control in organisations.

In organisations, patterning takes the form of normative themes and propositional themes of which the narrative theme is the ordinary everyday course of things and is the most important. These themes are emerging in conversation and are both formal and non-formal and are always intertwined with each other as legitimate themes and shadow themes.

Legitimate themes are ways of talking that are consistent with the official ideology, which is designed to make particular patterns of power relating feel natural. Shadow themes are the unofficial ideologies not publicly expressed which subvert and undermine the official ideology. Themes therefore are both conscious and unconscious but the shadow theme is usually unconscious.

The author is grateful for the time he spent with Professor Ralph Stacey (Professor of Management and Director of the Complexity and Management Centre at the Business School of the University of Hertfordshire in the UK), July 2003, and to Dr Karen Morley (Head of Leadership, Mt Eliza Business School) for the opportunity of working with Professor Stacey.
The alternative to cybernetics is randomness, which is a self-organising interaction of the patterns itself. Take for example conversation. No one is in control of it – no one is standing outside of the conversation controlling it. You participate in conversation from within it, usually in the form of question structure and turn making/turn taking.

**How systems dynamics differs from cybernetics**

Cybernetics assumes linear causality; systems dynamics takes account of non-linearity, which means that cybernetics deals only with negative feedback processes through which self-regulating control is maintained while systems dynamics also incorporates the effects of positive feedback. Consequently, non-equilibrium is a highly likely state according to systems dynamics while systems move to equilibrium according to cybernetics. Therefore the possibility of prediction is not seen as problematic from the cybernetics perspective but it is from a systems dynamics one.

Discussions about organisations from a systems dynamics perspective, therefore, present much more complex dynamics and much more problematic possibilities for control than do discussions from a cybernetic perspective.

**Why cult?**

Cults are formed by values that are gross idealisations, for example democracy, that can never be applied directly, without exception, except when in a cult which means that those in the cult are part of the cult values and its functional values, without exception.

**Who is the you?**

Who is the you when you want to change something, e.g. when you need to change the culture?

There are no programmers (the “you”) who shape the extended position from an “outside” position of pulling strings or levers and action will happen. There is no analogy for the programmer for humans.

**What is the thinking behind this?**

Consider this:

- You can’t predict with any great accuracy over a longer time frame. There are however trends and drivers that are relatively easy to predict such as population growth, changing demographics, global sovereignty and environmental issues – the “grand trends”.

- Development of western civilisation has been and is an unplanned process.
- Why can’t we forecast well enough to be able to secure what we want? Why do we have to get it right?
- There are no levers that somebody can pull in order to change an organisation around. The interplay of connections cannot be controlled by anyone. All human relationships constrain and empower at the same time and this is what power is. All human relating is power relations.

Linear to non-linear relationships form from a role where there are solutions to a role where there are none. There are patterns: the system becomes interacting from moment to moment and is sometimes referred to as mathematical chaos, which means it is stable and unstable at the same time. The paradox of phenomena in nature and social systems are stable and unstable at the same time, unpredictably predictable or predictably unpredictable.

**Self-organisation and emergence**

Self-organisation is not:

- self-managing;
- opposite to command and control; and
- everyone doing their own thing.

It is:

- agents that are interacting on the basis of their own local organising principles;
- these are local, not global (widespread) patterns; which is happening in complete absence of plans for the global;
- the only rules are local rules; there isn’t any plan for the global, the whole; and
- this is anxiety provoking as no one is in control (social defences against anxiety).

**To discover a purpose**

From conversation purpose emerges, in what we are doing during the nature of ordinary and everyday life. This also happens in organisations. Organisations are patterns of conversation, and changing conversations are the same as changing organisations. Organisations do not exist, they are an abstraction. What do exist are interacting people. Interaction is patterning itself.

Again, this can be anxiety provoking as no one is in control. Organisations exist as a process of organising by people interacting with each other.

**Relationship psychology**

Relationship psychology provides a different way of transferring insights from the complexity sciences to
human action by way of analogy. The result is a potential move from systems thinking to one that lives with paradox, particularly the paradox of the recognisable but unknowable future.

Abstraction exists when an attempt is made to take meaning out of direct experiences, which suggests that the only way to influence an organisation is from within our own interaction with other people. This means becoming more attentive to our own interactions with other people and not directing concentration to the abstraction called the organisation. As a result we need to pay more attention to what is actually going on with the interactions of people than we do to organisational performance goals, key performance indicators (KPIs) etc.

However, in the current situation, that is the organisational performance cult, this aspect is talked about but rarely acted on. I would argue this is the case because it is much simpler to use performance measures in a belief that this will create equilibrium and thus control, than it is to face the prospect that we really don’t know what we are doing because, when we operate in a performance cult we ignore the fact that we don’t know that we can’t control human nature.

Indeed, what we have learnt to do effectively is to use the process of shame as an effective and powerful form of social control as more and more emotions are taken behind the scenes by the level of shame.

Where futures studies link with relationship psychology in organisations is where both are looking at what we should be doing, as humans interrelating with other humans, for the benefit of our ordinary everyday manner of interrelating and for the welfare of the planet and future generations, and not just for the immediate return on capital investment.

Purpose, therefore, is the intention that emerges creating the purpose:

The themes that people often find controversial in my work have to do with unpredictability and control. I draw on complexity theory to argue that future organisational outcomes emerge unpredictably in the ordinary interaction of their many members. This means that strategic plans won’t work and that no one is in control of an organisation. This means re-thinking control and the nature of leadership[1].

Complex responsive processes

Another method that retains both inclusion and exclusion of people in organisations and elsewhere is gossip. Gossip can be both blame gossip and praise gossip, which are ways of occupying power positions. Power positions are what Stacey (2001) refers to as complex responsive processes.

Complex responsive processes are the interaction between human bodies, which is a temporal process rather than a system.

Communication only exists in interactions, that is power relations that are continually iterating themes of togetherness. Themes have aspects of being repetitive and at the same time being transformed – a transformative causality.

Change happens from within the interaction and themes are mainly narrative in nature. Our lives are stories and narrative forms and at the same time as we are being formed our experiences are forming as propositional themes.

Complex responsive processes are a way of understanding life in organisations, incorporating a relationship psychology drawing on analogies from the complexity sciences.

Argument for new thinking

Ideology themes on the other hand are beliefs through our history of interacting that are not conscious. Ideology makes particular power situations feel natural and this is the pattern of power relations, which is subconscious and it is the causality within the interaction and this is not systemic.

This new way of thinking challenges the systems thinkers such as Peter Senge who argues for the “whole” system, Margaret Wheatley who has the “whole” as central to her thinking and Roger Lewin’s (n.d.) premise that complexity is similar to systems thinking. Lewin (n.d.) is similar to Wheatley in this respect as both talk about “the soul of work”:

What is the soul at work? In complex adaptive systems, how we interact and the kinds of relationships we form has everything to do with what kind of culture emerges, has everything to do with the emergence of creativity, productivity, and innovation. When more interactions are care full rather than care-less in an organization, a community of care and connection develops, creating a space for the soul at work to emerge.

“The soul at work” is a double entendre: it is at once the individual’s soul being allowed to be present in the workplace; and it is the emergence of a collective soul of the organization.

Learning organisation theorists see interaction in systemic terms but the systems theory is systems dynamics rather than cybernetics. While the underlying systems theory changes from cybernetics to systems dynamics, the same cognitivist view of human nature is retained.

The way systems dynamics is interpreted as a feedback structure retains an essentially cybernetic perspective on control. Stacey (2003a) claims it is this that makes learning organisation theory an orthodox perspective.
The nature of human interaction
Metacommunication refers to the communication about a communication: that is a message about the nature of the relationship between two (or more) interacting individuals (Yalom, 1995, p.131). This means that the concept of control solely through communication is not possible because in each conversation there are statements that contain a great deal more than a simple request or command. Yalom (1995) gives as an example to compare: “close the window!” “Wouldn’t you like to close the window?” “You must be cold.” However, organisational theory has tended to assume that control is possible and three theories have evolved as a result of this belief that have their roots in systems thinking. They are strategic choice theory, learning organisation theory and open systems theory. A brief description follows:

1. **Strategic choice theory** is built on a systemic notion of interaction in which organisations adapt to their environments in a self-regulating, negative feedback (cybernetic) manner so as to achieve their goals. In other words we use such techniques as “gap analysis” to fill gaps in our strategy. This assumes that someone is in control and can achieve results by “orchestrating” strategy.

2. **Learning organisation theory** also adopts a systemic perspective on human interaction, but one that takes account of positive as well as negative feedback. It still assumes, however, that someone is in control from “outside” the system, pulling levers to create equilibrium.

3. **Open systems theory** takes a systemic perspective on interactions which focuses on regulation at permeable boundaries between subsystems of the system. The dynamics are turbulent and the importation of primitive human behaviour disrupts organisational learning.

In human psychology these theories have the following foundations:

1. **Strategic choice theory** takes a cognitivist view of human nature. Here, mind is understood to be the property of the individual brain.

2. **Learning organisation theory** employs the same theory of human nature. However, it also combines this with notions of humanistic psychology in which the central motivation for behaviour is the urge humans have to actualise themselves.

3. **Open systems theory** is psychoanalytic perspectives on organisations with a view of human nature derived from psychoanalysis.

Methodological position
The methodological position adopted by strategic choice and learning organisation theorists is that of the objective observer who stands outside the organisational system and observes it as a pre-given reality. The purpose is to manipulate and control the system. This is part of cognitivist thinking.

Open systems theory — the psychoanalytic perspectives move some way from this position in that they adopt methodologies analogous to the clinical. They advocate action research and participative enquiry. This is reflexive methodology in which organisations are understood to be social constructions.

Psychoanalytic theory describes development as primarily unconscious — that is, beyond awareness - and as heavily coloured by emotion.

Understanding organisations as complex responsive processes
Propositions per Stacey et al. (2000) are as follows:

**P1.** Humans relate to each other in the medium of symbols, which are always gestures and responses interwoven with feeling states or emotions.

**P2.** These symbols form themes that organise people’s experience of being together and being alone. The themes interact with each other in a self-organising way. Themes trigger themes that trigger themes so that they are continuously reproduced and transformed in relationships through conversation between people.

**P3.** An individual mind is silent, private conversation resonating with vocal, public conversations. Mind and group/society are the same phenomenon. They form and are formed by each other, at the same time, in an essentially self-referential process. That process is also reflexive in that people evoke, provoke and resonate with each other in ways that are both enabled and constrained by their own histories of relating.

**P4.** The organising themes are dynamical. They may display stable attractors in which the same themes are continually reproduced in a stable way. They may also display the analogue of attractors at the edge of chaos in which there is both stability and change in their reproduction so that there is the potential for some kind of transformation. Conversation then takes a spontaneous free-flowing form.

**P5.** The organising themes of one moment emerge from interaction between themes of the previous moment and what so emerges may take propositional or narrative forms. Both are emergent but the former takes a more stable and often more persistent form while the latter form is more fluid and fleeting. Both forms of themes are expressed
in conversation. Intention is an organising theme that emerges from conversation and organises experience. The intention of one is a gesture and its meaning lies in the response it evokes from others.

P6. Relationships organised in conversation by propositional and narrative themes both enable and constrain what may be said, done and even thought. In other words, conversations configure, and are configured by, power relations between people.

P7. Ideology is organising themes that either justify current power relations or justify the undermining of these current power relations. Dominant ideology makes current power relations feel natural, while ideologies at the margin make opposition feel natural. Official ideology legitimises some kinds of conversation and banishes others. Unofficial ideologies are themes organising the relationships and conversations banished from the legitimate arena. They may either collusively support current power relations or potentially undermine them.

P8. Ideological themes organising experience, whether official, binarise and polarise experience into sameness and difference, them and us, in and out.

P9. People are usually unaware of how ideology polarise experience and makes differences seem natural in the interest of sustaining or opposing current power relations.

P10. Another aspect of the social unconscious is the fantasies that groups and individuals develop around power relations and take into their silent conversations that are mind.

P11. Official ideologies are sometimes maintained and sometimes undermined through processes of gossip and ridicule.

P12. Change in individuals and groups means change in the themes organising the experience of being together and hence change in power relations.

P13. The responsive nature of the processes of relating means that the evolution of relationships displays the paradox of predictability and unpredictability common in complex systems. Since any gesture could call forth a variety of responses, and those responses could provoke a variety of further responses, the possibility of predicting how they will unfold rapidly diminishes. Human responses are sensitive to small variations in gesture.

Leadership and ethics in a complex world

In linking complexity theory, futures studies, self-organisation and ethics a number of questions about values are raised such as:

- What are our values that drive us towards a more meaningful life?
- What are our beliefs and worldviews that help us explore our relationship with a more meaningful life?

There is also a question about economic philosophy that arises. What philosophy of economics would help achieve a more meaningful life?

Ethical leadership, or the practice of moral philosophy, is based on normative ethics, particularly axiology (that portion of ethics that is concerned specifically with values) and, to a lesser degree, deontology (moral theories according to which certain acts must or must not be done, regardless to some extent of the consequences of their performance or non-performance—the Greek deiones—one must) (see Figure 1).

This forms the basis for business ethics or the philosophy of economics, being one of the areas of applied ethics (De George, 1995, pp. 111-2).

De George (1995) argues that although the application of morality to business is as old as business and morality themselves, the rise of business ethics as an identifiable subject of study took place in the 1970s in the USA, and since the late 1980s in Europe, Australia, and a number of countries in Asia and South America.

At its broadest, business ethics studies the moral justification of economic systems, whether national or international. Within a given system it studies the moral justification of the system’s structures and practices. Since corporations are a dominant feature of the free-enterprise system, a good deal of work has focused on the structures, responsibilities, and activities of corporations. Within the corporation, business ethics deals with the moral responsibilities and rights of individual workers—the more traditional focus of previous work on ethics in business.

De George (1995) states that those who work in business ethics tend to engage in four types of activity:

(1) The first and most common is the development and discussion of case studies that raise some moral issue in business. These are used to sensitisie students, those in business, and the general public to the need for ethical considerations in business. Although at first these cases tended to illustrate unethical behaviour on the part of large corporations, in recent years there is also a growing literature on positive cases presenting exemplary corporate or individual activity.

(2) Case studies in turn led to the investigation of the morality of particular practices, to the responsibility of corporations with respect to consumers and the public, to produce to product safety, the rights of workers, environmental degradation, and similar issues.
A third kind of research considers how corporations might be structured so as to reinforce ethical behaviour and discourage unethical behaviour on the part of both workers and managers.

A fourth kind of activity can be called metaethical. This looks at the appropriateness of applying moral language to entities other than human beings, e.g. to corporations, corporate structures, economic systems. Considerations of whether corporations can rightly be said to have moral obligations or responsibilities has led to a lively literature on the topic. Terms such as responsibility, conscience, rights, virtue, do not mean the same when applied to corporations (capitalism) as when applied to human individuals, and neither do notions of praise and blame, reward and punishment.

The importance of international business has led to discussions of international business ethics and to a reconsideration of moral and cultural relativism, which take on special significance for those doing business in societies with corrupt governments and in the absence of many traditional restraints. Work in international business ethics has called into question whether Western-type approaches to ethical theory actually enjoy the universality which they claim or to which they aspire. This has been clearly demonstrated by the reaction to the war on Iraq and the global debates this war has generated.

Some of the answers for the questions raised above could find resonance from complex responsive processes of relating by challenging the basis of mainstream theories of managing and organising. This will have implications for strategy, leadership and for communication and change management within organisations.

There are also implications in the social sciences of complexity thinking such as the power relating and figurations that occur in the ordinary everyday way of relating that humans engage in. This leads to the patterning of mind, self and society as part of the phenomena emerging in human relating.

Stacey (2003b) recommends a methodology of participative exploration which emphasises the importance of reflexivity and the human experience of complexity in the learning process.

The relevance to change and evolution in organisations is in the communicative process and its importance in the construction of ordinary everyday reality through the facilitation of fruitful conversation that is free flowing conversation that recreates the constraining themes, norms and values of a group's identity and at the same time allows for the emergence of difference and innovative change.
Applications for complex responsive processes in organisations

This new way of thinking about organisations infers a new way of applying complex responsive processes to our way of relating with each other. For example applications for complex responsive processes are in countering the cult of performance, through conversation, in a day-to-day way of what is our purpose and how is it that we should get things done to achieve our purpose. Stacey (2001, pp. 234-5) sees this as learning and knowledge creation:

The complex responsive process perspective shifts the focus of attention, when thinking about learning and knowledge creation in organizations in another very important way. It focuses on the “ordinary” on the basis that it is the ongoing communicative interaction between everyone in an organization, and with people in other organisations, that learning occurs and knowledge arises. It means questioning ourselves when we think that our role is to “get them” to think differently, when we ask what “you do” about complexity, knowledge creation or anything else organizational. When one moves away from thinking that one has to manage the whole system, one pays attention to one’s own participation in one’s own local situation in the living present. Perhaps this humbler kind of “management” is what the “knowledge society” requires.

Being aware, when we don’t know what we are doing, of what we are doing assists in bringing people involved to the reality that not knowing what we are doing really is the situation. Leadership in this situation will tend to shift around and what may emerge through this shifting around is the realisation of the power of the question this shifting around may help emerge. If the question is powerful as to what is it we don’t know, the possibility of an applied methodology to get the things done in the organisation may emerge. Emergence of this applied methodology may come through the human interaction path dependencies that are part and parcel of complex responsive processes.

Questions such as “what would the people think about the instructions (plans, etc.) you are giving them?” could evoke emergence of a more effective applied methodology through the ordinary manner of how they actually get things done.

“Here and now” versus “the future”

How do we reconcile the notion of complexity theory, which concedes a recognisable but unknowable future with futures studies, which often recognise and claim a knowable future? The perspective I would argue is in the question – Why has it become necessary to create a “new” organisation?

Primarily the shift from the industrial era of making “things” to the information era and the emerging knowledge era of understanding “things” has created the need for organisations to develop new capabilities to accompany the new challenges – business, ethical, social and the welfare of future generations.

Clues for acquiring these new capabilities comes from understanding the mysteries of life and how this will alter how we think about organisations, management, and social change. Business can learn a great deal from nature, where the principles of the life sciences have been translated into practice and improvement in the odds of success for organisations in achieving discontinuous change have been achieved. Business should not however think that nature as a system can be directly implanted into organisations as nature, as a system. Clues for organisational translation come from both futures studies and complexity studies.

The “old” organisation is ill equipped to achieve success in rapid discontinuous change because it has been built around the concept of providing “things” and “management methods”, the industrial economy demanded. This created the many “fads” of the 1980s and 1990s, such as JIT, TQM, and BPR. Creating a “fad” out of systems thinking has not helped but has hindered the onset of change and has provoked into reality the “cult of performance”. The “new” organisation has to cope with the transformational changes that function in a connected society such as cultural fusion and networks – virtual, financial, organisational etc. The “new” organisation, confronted with these challenges, must be able to demonstrate flexibility and adaptability, which can be successfully achieved through an understanding of, and ultimately a love of, other ways of knowing. Future studies introduce us to other ways of knowing in an effective manner as follows.

Sohail Inayatullah (Macken, 1999) argues that the Western (industrialism) world view is based on Judaic-Christian views which are different from Confucian, Islamic, Indigenous and Hindu worldviews and this effects strategic and scenario planning. Strategy, he says, can be/is part of the problem because it only uses the intellect (IQ) and limits chaos and complexity (IQ+EQ). Therefore it also limits all the other ways in which we know and understand the world – intuition, instincts and through relationships (IQ+EQ+SQ).

Anticipatory action learning (AAL) teaches people and corporations how to let go and let things happen. We need flexibility and humility, which the corporate world has yet to understand.

I (Burke, 2001) argue that ultimately we need to go beyond tolerance to a deep understanding and
love of other ways of knowing and this transformation needs to start at home and in school. This requires a new hierarchy of leadership. In order of importance:
(1) Parenting leadership – idealised role model.
(2) Teaching leadership – intellectual and citizenship model.
(3) Personal leadership – idealised behaviour.
(4) Ecological leadership – humans as part, but not owners, of nature.
(5) Community leadership – inspirational, motivational - tribalism.
(6) Global leadership – nature as supreme - systemic leadership.
(7) Organisational leadership – transformational - equity for all.
(8) National leadership – initially needed to achieve global leadership.

Peter Drucker (2001) claims that knowledge is all, and knowledge technologists are likely to become the dominant social – and perhaps also political – force over the next decades. He argues that the next society will be a knowledge society. Knowledge will be the key resource, and knowledge workers will be the dominant group in its workforce. Its three main characteristics will be:
(1) Borderless, because knowledge travels even more effortlessly than money.
(2) Upward mobility, available to everyone through easily acquired formal education.
(3) The potential for failure as well as success. Anyone can acquire the “means of production”, i.e. the knowledge required for the job, but not everyone can win.

Karen Morley (2003) argues that for Australians it is time for a distinctly Australian leadership model that allows us to lead productively and with authenticity. Rather than providing a prescription for what that model is, she has asked a series of questions and put forward some propositions to start a conversation about new possibilities. It is imperative that we hold this conversation, because Australian organisations, like others around the world, face challenging times.

To assist the process, she has identified a series of significant paradoxes in Australian culture. She reports them as – we want relationships that are egalitarian. Paradoxically, we don’t think that our relationships are egalitarian.

Another paradox is that we want a culture that does not avoid uncertainty, but we see that at the present, uncertainty avoidance is high. We aspire to a moderately high orientation towards the future, but don’t see it as part of our current culture. As we face an uncertain and evolving future, these are significant factors. Do we avoid embracing options and possibilities because of uncertainty. Do we prefer to avoid risk? How will we manage our organisations well in an increasingly ambiguous and unforeseeable future?

She has also argued that one of the more obvious negative features of our current organisational life – unethical behaviour – may be a consequence of our prevailing values. There are other possible values we may hold, and different ways in which we may see the world – being more diverse in our value set might offer new and positive possibilities.

Paradoxes are evidence of the complexity of the environment we face, she continues. Complexity theory helps us understand that we can only hold tensions and paradoxes in balance, not make them go away. Just as we will not stop greed, avarice, and competition, we will not stop altruism, compassion and cooperation. We need to hold these, as many other paradoxes, in tension and find a conscious balance that helps us move forward. We need leaders who will help us contain and manage our fears about these paradoxes, not avoid them. Paradoxes are potentially the seeds of a paradigm shift in how we lead and manage our organisations into the future.

Our leaders will need to shift their focus, restructure their frameworks and foster novel capabilities to help create this new future. Morley (2003) says they will need to:
- deal with complexity, to clarify and focus without simplifying or reducing;
- understand the nature of emergence, and reduce the need to impose control;
- work from a radically altered power basis, emanating from their capacity to build relationships across their organisation rather than from their status and hierarchical position;
- develop strong and constructive relationships with all their organisation’s people; and
- act with integrity, from a conscious and deliberate values base.

The new organisation recognises that talent and knowledge are their real assets and the wealth creators rather than land and property. Philip Sadler[2], from Mt Eliza’s UK associated business school Ashridge Business School, argues:

Today’s economy has been described as a post-capitalist one in that the term capitalism denotes a past form of economy in which the capital, i.e. money and things such as land and property, was in the hands of a relatively small number of people. We called those people the capitalists and they employed the rest of us to labour on their behalf. Today there are two major differences. Firstly the tangible capital, money and property, is owned by the mass of the people via pension funds, insurance policies and home ownership. Secondly, and increasingly, it is intangible capital, such as knowledge and talent that is recognized as a more important factor in wealth creation than physical effort. The market capitalization of a company reflects the latter view, taking into account far more
than a company’s asset value. However, these two perceptual changes are taking effect very slowly and many institutions and practices are still based on the idea that there remain capitalists and workers.

Managing stakeholders in an increasingly complex world

Human capital plus social capital equals stakeholder value (HC + SC = SV) is an emerging paradigm. This is a change from the industrial paradigm of land, property and financial capital equaling shareholder value as Sadler and others have predicted.

Sadler urges an “inclusive approach” to governance and management where he sees the four basic essentials as:
1. A clear purpose that includes, but goes beyond, shareholder value and is capable of motivating and inspiring people.
2. A business success model based on an understanding of the drivers of long-term sustainable business success – and that business success model would differ from one company or one industry to another.
3. Mutually trusting and beneficial relationships with key stakeholders, i.e. investors, customers, employees, suppliers and local communities.
4. The “winning of the licence to operate” by which he means establishing and maintaining the kind of reputation for integrity and socially responsible behaviour that enables the company to be respected in society.

These essentials need to be formally adopted through discussion as to the company’s direction, goals and values. What we are talking about is “reinventing” the company in the context of what is going on in society. This kind of rethinking what a company is “for” has been prompted by growing discontent about global capitalism.

The quadruple bottom line – the value of community involvement

The quadruple bottom line includes the welfare of future generations. On the question “Who decides what is to be?” Sohail Inayatullah (1999) wrote:

Who then will create the future? Will it be those who are part of the current system, those in the continued growth model of the future? Government leaders and corporate CEOs? Will it be young entrepreneurs from Silicon Valley, the.Com children followed by the double helix generation? Or will it be the social idealists, those imagining a more organic connected future, totally outside of current notions of official power and wealth? But do these idealistic members of social movements have the memes and the capacity to create a new future? Will their challenge for new rights (for humans, animals and plants), for gender partnerships (womanists and feminists), for spirituality (seeking to transcend religion and secularism, finding meaning in a lived relationship with the infinite) and for social activism (a moral not amoral economy and politics) and against 500 years of continued growth be successful?

I guess the best answer to that question comes also from Inayatullah: “Imagine the future and let your children’s children see” (Aguilar, 2002). Socially responsible behaviour that enables organisations to be respected in society evolves from an adherence to the values of the quadruple bottom line. That is reporting on financial, environmental, social and future generations.

Richard Slaughter puts it this way:

Let me be clear: I am not saying that forecasting became redundant – far from it. It remains in wide use, necessary use, in countless instrumental contexts today. Rather, what has been lost, and probably lost forever, is the notion that forecasting can tell us much of value about how we should operate in the world and, more particularly, how we should solve some of the very serious problems facing humankind. Such questions are bound up with complex social and human issues, but forecasting fell silent when confronted with the human predicament (Slaughter, 2002a, pp. 26-31).

Slaughter (2002) sees difficulties in what he termed the “American mainstream empirical tradition”:

To cut a long story short, I found that I could not proceed without developing a critique of that tradition. Specifically, I commented on:
- its superficiality and lack of depth;
- its failure to recognise the roles of language;
- power and embedded social interests;
- its lack of understanding of its own sources and grounding;
- its routine appropriation (not only in the USA) by the powerful;
- its over-confidence in easy prescriptions; and
- its lack of openness to other traditions and other “ways of knowing” (Slaughter, 2002, p. 7).

I have long held the view that it’s way overdue for us collectively to wake up from the “American dream” that has truly become a nightmare. The traditional Western myth, the basic “story” endlessly marketed to us day and night, based on growth, materialism, rapidly advancing technology and linear progress, Western style, should be seen for what it is: a destructive, radically divisive, out of balance and – hopefully – a temporary phase in humanity’s development. It is becoming clearer that the current path is one that will cost humanity dearly unless it is questioned, critiqued and changed. The truth is that beyond Dystopia lie other states and stages of civilisation that can be reached by people of intelligence, humility and
good will. Books like Why Do People Hate America?, along with critical futures work in general, help us to be increasingly clear about what our passage from here to there really entails.

Futures studies centre on the science, art and ethics of negotiating and creating alternative futures. We need to explore grand patterns of change, foresight and insight, alternative ways of seeing and knowing the world, creating alternative futures through social and political means, and transformative action.

Conclusion

Complexity science as a source of analogy brings in attributes of being human to provoke thinking and presents an alternative way of thinking about what we already do.

It is a way of making sense which is inseparable from action and resists the idea of tools and techniques in organisations, as these provide us with an “instrumental” view of organisations which is contested by complexity thinkers such as Stacey (2003b). This makes it complex.

It is responsive because we don’t always adapt, we respond. It is a process because it is different from the interaction of agents to product to whole (systems).

Humans as autonomous individuals through reason can set objectives and work out what patterns are needed to get results. This means that you can never think of human actions in terms of systems because in order for human beings to be part of the system they would have to be natural to the system and doing what they are told for the “whole” of the system (unfolding). This can’t happen because humans are not systems.

The leader emerges in the process of recognition. Leaders are forming and being formed by those they are leading at the same time.

Patterning takes the form of narrative themes and propositional themes of which the narrative theme in the ordinary everyday course of things is the most important. These themes are emerging in conversation (verbal, non verbal) and are organised of being and of being together.

The patterning of the interactions between human bodies is both communicative and power related. This means that we enable and constrain each other at the same time as the natural process of human interaction that produces nothing but further human interaction.

In human interaction there is no analogy for programming and therefore no programmer.

Future studies enable us to move beyond the reality of “here-and-now” to include, but not replace the here-and-now, with philosophical questions about values, economic philosophy, environment, global governance, changing demographics, and the grand trends, for the benefit of future generations.

Notes

1 Professor Ralph Stacey, email correspondence, Mt Eliza Business School, 26.3.2003.

References


