An Integral Approach to Scenarios

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Introduction

We would not find disagreement with much of what Graham Molitor says about scenarios as a "rational discussion targeting specific oncoming change(s)" (p.1). He says that he remains unconvinced that "scenarios make any contribution or breakthrough" (p.1), and that "most scenarios merely reinforce and regird what participants already basically knew" (p.1). Apart from acting to "jog thinking" in his opinion scenarios do "not add much value".

While we would agree with much that Molitor says about scenarios as "rational" approaches to breakthroughs in thought that has not stopped us seeking ways to best employ this method. We do this because in our opinion scenarios remain a widely accessible way to bring foresight into organisations. Poor outcomes from prior scenario processes notwithstanding many decision-makers and people with power and influence seem to regard scenarios as an approach that could produce 'valid' insights and breakthroughs in thinking. While those expectations could be deluded or naïve, we still find that clients continue to ask for scenarios in our organisational engagements. The challenge, that we have accepted, is to find ways to run scenario processes that do contribute to 'breakthroughs'.

Our overall design philosophy

Our first point is an obvious one but still worth reiterating. The scenario is only one element in a foresight process. As Voros (2003) demonstrated the 'prospective' phase is both heavily dependent on, and makes a significant contribution to, the Input, Analysis, Interpretation and Output phases of a foresight process. Our discussion here will limit itself to the 'prospective' element of such a process but we would never design such a process in isolation of the other elements. All must integrate to create the opportunity for breakthrough.

Our second point turns on our particular interest in foresight processes that lead towards transformations and breakthrough in thought and action. Specifically we have sought to employ scenarios in order to change individual perspective(s) of a situation, it's context, and the actors participating in the situation. Such transformations are necessarily individual in nature whereas most, if not all, situations are social in nature. What we have sought are scenario processes that create the poten-

tial for changes to individual perception but that then lead to social understandings and then to the individual behaviours that can produce social impact. More simply stated we want scenarios that are both broad and deep and convey individual and social breakthroughs in perspective. For us Ken Wilber's 4 quadrant model (2001) has been a very useful design tool. We make no claims that our approach is 'more' than another approach that does not use a framework like Wilber's one. Rather the 4 quadrant model seemed to good fit for what we sought to achieve.

UL	UR
Perception of the 'selves' that perceive the situation.	The actions of the 'selves' that bring forth a desired future
LL	LR
Our shared sense of the 'justness'' that we create together	Our shared sense of the desired 'world' that our actions create

Figure 1. Integral scenario design template

Figure 1 is a summary of how our scenario approach is designed. The different elements will be elaborated in what follows. That design is not a 'cookbook' that says "do this first and then follow with this". You start at the place that it is best to start at but generally the movement of our approach is to move from the external to the internal, from the individual to the group, and from thinking to action.

The process we undertake uses a number of different frameworks to elicit information from within each quadrant. To capture information in the lower-right (LR), we use scanning techniques based on the 4 quadrants, in the LR this might be based upon STEEP, or its variations, depending on what information is required for the particular work we are doing. Most of the information we need to populate the LR quadrant during the prospection stage will have been collected during the input, analysis and interpretation phases of the foresight process and will not be discussed here.

In the upper-left quadrant (UL), we make use of Susan Cook-Greuter's work on self-stage theory (1999) that is based upon the seminal work of Jane Loevinger. These stages of the self generate actors within the final scenario narrative that bring it to life and illustrate the interplay these have in the 'real' world. When presented with a theory such as Cook-Greuter's participants become aware of the self-constructed nature of how the perceive a situation. Participants also become aware of how other 'selves', be they other people or aspects of their own nature, could perceive an agreed set of 'facts' as constituting a very different situation. The use of self-structures honours the perspective of participants while also raising the awareness of different perspectives that should also be honoured.

For the lower left quadrant (LL), we use the work of Clare Graves that was popularised by Don Beck and Chris Cowan (1996). The Graves framework of values gives a good approximation of the values that play out within societies and act as indicators as to the modal value set for a given group or society. Whereas the self-structure (UL) honours an individual perspective the values framework (LL) honours what groups share as valid and just meanings. Once again participant scan locate their own sets of shared values and they also encounter different value sets that 'others' may value. This dual process of honouring and opening up to difference is central to our approach towards scenarios. The developmental aspect of Graves work is also quite useful in the development of scenario logics, but at this stage we have used Grave's ideas as a way of conceptualising the various values that drive worldviews.

For the upper right quadrant (UR), the self-stages are mapped onto the values sets and this generates a complex interplay of options as it comes to the interactions possible in the alternative futures and how these might play out. Behaviours are indicated as these are conceived. It is this stage in the scenario process that can give the greatest breakthrough in present understanding. Scenarios processes can also be useful tools for developing greater understanding of the present and the forces that shape current issues.

The Experience

Our design approach is not suitable for short engagements or for focussing questions that are limited to possible changes in the external environment (STEEP only scenarios). Our approach works well when the organisation is interested in the interplay between the external environment and the actors who inhabit that environment. It is a constant challenge to find innovative and engaging ways to introduce 'theory' into organisational engagements, but one that we do find rewarding for the overall process if it can be successfully done.

Our design approach has another 'benefit', the mixing of actor motives, external change and shared worldview does mimic 'in casted' scenario logics that are commonly employed in scenario narratives. While we also commonly employ in casts in our scenario write-ups we also find that sometimes those 'stories' happen in the workshop as well due to the mixing of the focal domains.

In Summary

Scenarios for us are decision-making tools in so far as they allow us to 'rehearse' our decisions in relative safety before having to make them for 'real'. They allow for the wind tunnelling of new and existing strategies or the development of preferred worlds. We believe that the scenarios that have been developed through this process are rigorous and include actors that make their behavioural decisions based upon their values and self-stage which gives them depth and resonance with the readers of the narrative and those involved in the process itself. Our work in this area is still developing however our experience is that scenarios can be more than the 'party-piece' that Molitor observes scenarios normally are.

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