

Stepping into, or through, the Mirror: Embodying Alternative Scenario Patterns

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Urgent Relevance

The symposium lead article by Graham Molitor (*Scenarios: Worth the Effort?*) is especially relevant at this time when increasing effort is being made to elicit a coherent response to major strategic challenges for which some use of scenario-building will clearly be made. The challenge is all the more evident in that it is characterized by a period of questionable credibility with respect to those from whom authoritative advice might be expected to be forthcoming, whether it be (inter)governmental authorities, academia, corporate focal groups or civil society.

Underlying the challenge is a continuing assumption that somehow a degree of consensus can be achieved amongst "rational" people as to the best way forward. Failing that, it is assumed that those with the power to do so can ensure that a degree of operational agreement can be imposed – as is evident in the EU response to the democratic Irish "No" vote on the Lisbon Reform Treaty. Such assumptions run the risk of being proved to be extremely naive.

There is a sense in which underlying cognitive and behavioural processes are being ignored, even when simplistically framed as cultural preferences. The urgent question now is what is required to enable coherent action and what part do scenarios play, or fail to play, in this process.

Indicators

In seeking a fruitful way to comment on the theme introduced by Molitor, a first thought relates to an analogous challenge with respect to social and other indicators. Any set of indicators raises similar concerns as to whether they together – as a form of implicit scenario – are capable of engendering appropriate action. This concern, on the occasion of a workshop for the UNU Goals, Process and Indicators of Development Project, gave rise to a paper exploring a fruitful distinction (Judge, 1993a).

That paper argued that the difficulty is that the accumulation of data on what is unsatisfactory appears to be accompanied by a reluctance to recognize or respond to such information. It stressed the importance of taking into account the incapacity to act against maldevelopment even when appropriate indicators are available and offer striking evidence.

This suggests an analogous contrast between "Remedial Capacity Scenarios" and "Expected Performance Scenarios" to highlight the extent to which the response to a scenario may be characterized by the kind of ineffectual action (however enthusiastic) to which Molitor points. What does who expect to be done by whom with the most insightful scenario – and by whom will its insights be subsequently ignored and why?

Such a focus is especially relevant at a time when the financial, economic and climatic challenges are so evident – and when that regarding the driver of population overshoot is ignored.

Avoidance Processes

The more obvious way to frame the conventional response to scenarios that seemingly call for action is in terms of avoidance processes. This might be understood as an art form characteristic of governance and diplomacy. An earlier exploration of this phenomenon distinguished overt from covert approaches (Judge, 1997). The overt were identified as including: Stress positive achievements, Exclude critical reporters, Rotation of praise and blame, Proposal of solutions based on unacceptable criteria, Focus on monitoring, review and study, Displace attention to reframe the challenge, Celebrate achievements, Scapegoating, and Claim unproven links.

The covert "hidden art" of category manipulation was identified as including: Definitional games, Neglected or repressed categories, Over-simplification, Over-complexification, Narrowing the time-frame, Focusing on the inaccessible, Ignoring cultural variants, Favouring the fashionable, Rejection through negative association, Disqualification, Conceptual "roll-on, roll-off", "Classification" to protect interests, Exertion of pressure, and Delay.

A valuable case study in avoidance processes is provided by the different arenas in which some form of "shunning" is practiced, notably as these apply to any scenarios in which population challenges might be included. For example, John L. Farrands (1993) points to the manner in which the Rio Earth Summit excluded any consideration of the population challenge – which, as the former Permanent Head of the Australian Department of Science, he claims to be "unbelievable". The same has been the case with respect to the Poznan climate change conference of 2008 and is expected to be the case for the Copenhagen follow-up of 2009.

A much more fundamental question is whether the kinds of decisions that might emerge from scenarios are indeed ever taken. Here a distinction must of course be made between:

- intra-systemic scenarios, as developed by and within particular systems under a mandate of an empowered leadership structure able to ensure implementation. These do indeed lend themselves to implementation as part of the strategic management processes of that system.
- extra-systemic scenarios, as developed by (and for) multiple systems, across the boundaries of those systems (possibly even reframing those boundaries), without any possibility of effective resolution of the challenges to implementation.

In the extra-systemic case, the necessary integrity for coherent action is only ever ensured as a consequence of threats external to the disparate systems. The response is

then necessarily reactive and is not a consequence of proactive consideration emerging from the scenario building process. However the reactive approach is then positively reframed as realistically responding to a concrete situation – evidence-based reality – contrasted with any prior effort at scenario-building, then disparagingly framed as unrealistic and hypothetical. Hurricane Katrina might offer an example. The case of the "big three" US automakers is also instructive in the light of the scenarios they might have been considering in 2007, as compared with those they were obliged to consider in December 2008 when seeking a bailout from the US government.

The fire-fighting scenario was evident in the urgent response to the subprime crisis in 2008. Avoidance processes are currently evident in the response to Dafur, Zimbabwe and the Eastern Congo. They have been usefully dramatized with regard to the RMS Titanic disaster. Farrands (1993, p.176) uses a classic story to highlight the challenge:

The combined problems of population growth and economic growth demand that we apply more intelligence to their solution than we have shown to date in our global environmental and economic planning, or we shall just be like the frog in the slowly boiling pan of water who never identifies the point of discomfort level beyond which it is fatal to stay. The frog is boiled alive, every time.

Perhaps the most common approach to action avoidance is through defusing any urgency in the face of a problematic situation by appealing to the metaphor of those who perceive the glass as "half-full" in contrast to those who perceive it as "half-empty". Even the deadliest problems then lend themselves to this.

The most reprehensible approach is ensuring silence with regard to a crisis, as notably documented with respect to the extent of rape in the Eastern Congo (Jackson, 2007) where over 5 million are estimated to have died (in excess of normal mortality) from 1988-2008. Such an indicator, equivalent to that of the Nazi Final Solution, was however specifically discussed (Judge, 1993a) as not indicative of any remedial capacity.

Lack of Self-reflexivity

In decades past, action avoidance was most strikingly manifest with regard to the issue of smoking – notably in meeting rooms where scenarios were being developed or considered. It was considered ridiculous, and politically incorrect, to question the right of decision-makers to smoke in that context. More generally this can be understood as the problem of decision-makers requiring others to change their behavioural patterns without questioning their own.

This issue continues to be evident, and noted by commentators, in the resources allocated to summit meetings and the carbon footprint associated with travel to them – especially in the case of meetings considering scenarios for development or climate change. This notably serves to reduce the credibility of whatever emerges from such gatherings – especially if little emerges.

An even more general case can be made in the light of the mirror self-recognition test as evidence of consciousness. In this respect an interesting example is provided by the remark of Arundhati Roy (2008):

The only way to contain (it would be naïve to say end) terrorism is to look at the monster in the mirror.

Cognitive Glass Ceiling

The metaphor of the "glass ceiling" has been widely used with regard to the barrier to women (or those of other races) acceding to executive positions of responsibility. It may be fruitful to explore such a metaphor with respect to the barrier to effective action on scenarios, namely as the cognitive barrier to shifting from intellectual consideration of scenarios into the alternative behaviours for which the preferred scenario calls, namely the cognitive barrier to behaviour change – notably amongst those who call for it. Debating non-smoking without constraining smoking amongst the debaters is a simple example – historic for some but a continuing reality for others. The problematic nature of such situations is summarized by the proverb: People in glass houses should not throw stones.

The metaphor is a useful one since so many scenarios (and the term itself) make use of the metaphor of strategic "vision" (in contrast to other possibilities (discussed below). Scenario building may also be associated with metaphors such as "fish-bowl". More intriguing is that scenario building calls for a degree of "speculation", implying a degree of mirroring.

Whether ceiling, window or glasshouse, the question is how one pattern of behaviour is contained by it such as to inhibit effective engagement with an external pattern considered desirable. How does "cognitive glazing" work so effectively? The metaphor might even be pushed further to inquire about the effectiveness of "cognitive double-glazing", or even "triple-glazing" and "security" glass – and the possible insulation they offer against unwelcome effects on any "double bottom line" and "triple bottom line". More cynically, the role of those marketing the advantages of vacuum-sealed double-glazing might be drawn into the metaphor. A case could also be made for considering the implicit metaphorical significance of smoked, one-way and polarized glass.

There is also an extreme irony to the fact that the most common computer operating system, through which scenarios are most frequently presented, is also glass-based and has the name *Windows*. To the extent that such terms condition thinking, as implied by the classic study of George Lakoff and Mark Johnson (1980), one may also remark on the irony that whilst a multitude are thereby equipped with "windows" through which to observe the world virtually, only one person is seemingly metaphorically equipped with access to it in reality, namely the owner of *Windows* – Bill Gates. Curiously this happens in a period when there is widespread focus on "gated communities" and their virtual analogues. It is within such communities that scenario-building is necessarily less challenging.

Following the point of Roy (2008), the real challenge may be more than looking in the mirror. It may require cognitively "stepping through it", or "into it", as explored in a variety of folk tales – or embodying the reflection in some way, as argued with respect to mirror self-recognition.

Requisite Catalytic Effect

What is it that activates a scenario as a meaningful representation of reality with which psychoactive engagement is possible and necessary?

The most obvious factor – causing cognitive glazing to "fail" – is the publicized shock reality of human death (although only to a lesser degree its possibility). It should not be forgotten that human civilization effectively now requires "human sacrifice" prior to adopting any new health and safety legislation – no deaths, no legislation. It is just a question of how many bodies are required to gain passage of the legislation, just as cultures of the past made greater sacrifices in response to greater need. During the Cold War, scenarios (and military budgets) needed the possibility of "mega-deaths" to acquire credibility. However, as hypothetical possibilities, mega-deaths no longer have credibility – especially since all forms of death are now rehearsed daily by the media – as a prime attractor for entertainment, following the pattern of Roman games in the Coliseum.

Given the glazing metaphor and the need to "break the glass", it is curious that a catalytic effect is recognized in "breaking pattern". Plenary meetings may be invaded by fisherman who dump dead fish on the floor. Coverage of the Seattle WTO meeting focused on naked breasts. Immolation has been used by monks and others. Suicide bombing may be seen in this light. It is in this respect that the "ticking bomb" scenario has been so effectively used as a justification of torture – breaking the conventional pattern of opposition to it. Curiously the "ticking bomb" scenario, as a form of invocation of the Precautionary Principle, has not however worked in the case of crises such as population and climate -- to which it has been applied.

Somehow scenarios fail to "focus" – using the optical metaphor again – the urgency which some believe such crises merit. This phenomenon has been considered separately in relation to the challenge of psychoactive engagement with values and the necessary configuration of "focusing" elements.

Polysensorial Pattern-breaking

Scenario-building is, as stressed above, primarily an "armchair" activity with a degree of similarity to spectators watching a drama – but with a measured degree of participatory involvement, as in modern experimental theatre. It is indeed a vision-biased process that is sensitive to comfort zones. It is appropriate to note that it is another sense that is used in the event of a real emergency when immediate action is required to break conventional pattern, namely a siren. This is typically of a kind to oblige people to act and evacuate the theatre.

An earlier exploration challenged the vision-bias of strategic thinking, notably as evident in scenario development (Judge, 1993a). This highlighted significant issues for futurists of short-sightedness, long-sightedness, eye-testing and corrective lenses with respective to any such vision.

Curiously it is now the corporate world that is investing in polysensorial, or "neuromarketing", strategies following recognition that products are inadequately remembered in a highly competitive market through a single sense alone. Product identity

and recognition requires more than vision alone, as may be argued for scenario-building (Judge, 2006). The emphasis is usefully placed on the need for a form of "re-cognition" which may prove relevant to psychoactive engagement in scenarios.

The range of senses may be briefly reviewed from this "perspective", notably as mnemonic triggers in a period when collective memory is much challenged:

- **sight** (scene, scenario): Arguably our civilization has become inured to every form of pain and danger through their being rehearsed daily by the media as entertainment. It is curious, in a world with issues concerned with balance and proportion, that such qualities having notably visual equivalents are not explored using the riches of the array of inter-transformable polyhedra (as indicated above) rather than through a simplistic focus on strategic "pillars", "poles" and "stakes" – with which very little can be effectively constructed.
- **sound** (siren): Curiously, although powerfully used for warnings by sirens, through music sound is more closely associated with pleasure than with pain and continues to play a powerful attractive role. In strategic thinking, metaphorical reference continues to be made to "harmony" and proposals "sounding right" – without however benefitting from the insights of the theory of harmony.
- **smell**: This sense would seem to be little used metaphorically in strategic development. However it comes fully into play in the assessment of initiatives that are subject to criticism. The financial crisis of 2008 saw many references to the fact that the situation "stank". The metaphor of smell is most typically used to refer to corruption of any kind – and triggers avoidance processes. It is of course a prime attractor in neuromarketing strategies and public relations in general seeks seeks metaphorically to ensure that clients "smell good" or are in "good odour"; it is of primary importance in the mnemonics of product recognition. The question is how this might be ensured in the case of social change strategies.
- **shake**: Again this sense is little used metaphorically in strategic development. However, as is evident during earth tremors and earthquakes, it certainly sharpens the mind. People may however resort to this metaphor when "shaken by a possibility".
- **sensation**: Whilst this sense is not used in conventional strategic development, it is typically used metaphorically by entrepreneurs in referring to initiatives as "feeling right" or "feeling wrong" – possibly expressed as a "gut feeling", or in the case of sensed disaster as a "sinking feeling".
- **style**: Taste may be generically understood as style in its metaphoric use. It is clear that initiatives, and their presentation, are typically approved or condemned because of their "style", whether or not they are considered "tasteful" or "tasteless" (as are many planning proposals). It is intriguing that it is this sense that comes closest to holding the sense of "soullessness" by which some strategic initiatives may be characterized. The European Union initiative has for example been characterized as soulless (cf Joschka Fischer, Pim Fortuyn, Michel Rocard, & John Loneran).

A major issue in considering any combination or configuration of senses to ensure the attractiveness of any initiative is the fact that people have different preferences.

This points to the need to consider how initiatives can be of requisite complexity to offer simultaneously a range of attractors. An area with an adequate variety of "restaurants" metaphorically clarifies the challenge faced by any effort to promote a particular social change initiative which, if inappropriately conceived, might appear to be offering but one kind of "restaurant" – alienating other potential "diners".

Virtuality as the Ultimate Illusion?

It is of course the case that advances in communication technology are offering increasing degrees of access to a "virtual world" – irrespective of the challenges of the "real world". Those weary of the latter may pursue meaningful scenarios in cyberspace, as in the case of Second Life and its analogues (Active Worlds, Google Lively, etc.). Presumably, at some stage, avatars may be able to pass from one such world to another with appropriate electronic "passports" – within a universe of alternative worlds. Constraints on scenario building and implementation are necessarily much reduced in such contexts. Clearly the environment meets the challenge of an adequate range of "restaurants".

Such "worlds" may be assumed to be of trivial significance to the challenges of the "real world". However it is vital to remember that they may be engaging the attention of increasing numbers of young people alienated by the strategic initiatives that they are enjoined to take "seriously" by their elders – who have invested so successfully in ensuring the currently disastrous condition of the planet. One possibility is to consider ways to marry real and virtual potentials.

Much more serious, however, is the development of the Joint Simulation System initiated in 1995 (Hollenbach & Alexander, 1997; Pugh & Johnson, 1995). This has seemingly now morphed, via the Total Information Awareness program, into the Sentient World Simulation (SWS) and will be a "synthetic mirror of the real world with automated continuous calibration with respect to current real-world information" with a node representing "every man, woman and child" – presumably including those responsible for the SWS itself. Regrettably, as might be expected, this is being undertaken entirely in the interests of a US strategic defence strategy on behalf of the US Department of Defense (Baard, 2007).

Understandably SWS will necessarily acquire a bias of defensiveness, as argued with respect to ECHELON with which SWS would presumably be functionally integrated. Of interest is how it might be integrated with:

- the strategic methodology of a recent study by the RAND Corporation's National Security Division (Davis, Bankes, & Egner, 2007).
- the recognition of the possibilities of "crowdsourcing", community-based design or distributed participatory design

Especially with respect to global strategic development, a fashionable phrase such as "crowdsourcing" – as derived from "outsourcing" – suggests a degree of selective exploitation that shares characteristics with the traditional exploitation of developing countries. There are challenges to the viability of such approaches that merit recognition.

Such concerns are of great relevance to the hopes expressed for electronic democracy, notably in relation to some new form of world government. How indeed might scenarios get built in such contexts and how might people be expected to buy into them? What is to be done with those who do not?

In such respects major learnings are to be derived from the pioneering explorations of *Limits to Growth*, as promoted by the Club of Rome from 1972. Especially interesting is the manner in which efforts to analyze the evolution of the world problematique from that time have themselves been undermined in an academic context. As shown by Turner (2007), the original study provoked many criticisms which falsely stated its conclusions in order to discredit it. Despite the repeated substantiation of its conclusions, including warnings of overshoot and collapse, recommendations of fundamental changes of policy and behaviour for sustainability have not been taken up. One of its principal areas of focus was population.

Game-playing and Facilitation

The use of game-playing, notably management and strategic games, has long had a close relationship to some forms of scenario-building. Arguably it provides a greater degree of "hands-on" engagement with the constraints of the system. Typically however it tends to be used in intra-systemic situations and avoids the disagreeable challenges of multi-systemic situations that reflect the larger reality.

There are two major issues with respect to the levels of engagement that are possible with such games:

- strategic decision-makers of any standing (if only in their own estimation) do not play such games. Sensitivity may be further exacerbated by cultural issues. Such people are more likely to play virtual games anonymously (and with their children).
- facilitators, with their particular process "models", have the greatest difficulty in designing themselves out of the process and therefore are readily perceived as seeking to occupy what might be understood as a surrogate chairperson role – for which they have not been mandated. Facilitators also play games. These difficulties may be further exacerbated by the unacknowledged, unconscious power and identity needs of facilitators and an inability to give conscious consideration to them.

Setting such issues aside, there is a case for reflecting on a legislative analogue to Second Life – perhaps "Legislative Life". Such reflection is specially appropriate in a period (the financial crisis of 2008) when attention has been drawn to the artificiality of the daily dynamics of the financial system in contrast with those of the "real world". Reflection might also be justified by the degree of disconnection between the endless international conferences (and summits) and the "real world" with which they seemingly have the greatest difficulty in engaging -- despite its agonizing emergencies.

Would a "Legislative Life", in which elected representatives could engage anonymously, allow scenarios to be usefully explored through games – bypassing the above constraints? There might even be the possibility, for some issues, of enacting consen-

sual outcomes as real world legislation. A form of precedent has already been set with the transferability of funds from Second Life to the real world – to the point of raising the interest of the latter's tax authorities.

As discussed previously (Judge, 2003), the science fiction explorations of game-playing by Hermann Hesse (1943) with respect to the realm of Castalia, and by M. A. Foster (1977), both point to intriguing possibilities. The "game" in the latter case is based on a more intricate version of Conway's *Game of Life*. A comparison is made in that discussion with the games played for strategic purposes by two alternative communities, the Federation of Damanhur (in Italy) and the Findhorn Foundation (in Scotland).

Seizing the Moment

It is one thing to meander linearly through the issues, as above, and another to enable some form of "cognitive fusion" as required in the integration of information for decision-making by fighter pilots in the moment. The modalities of such an urgent possibility have been explored in the light of the conceptual challenges of nuclear fusion on which so much hope is placed. Unfortunately the international capacity to engage in such possibilities is as problematic as the decades-long pursuit of the "political will to change"

Potentially more realistic, in the light of the Club of Rome's articulation of "problematique" and "resolutique", is to match these two with "imaginatique" and "irresolutique". Here "imaginatique" refers to the dynamics of creative imagination to which many naturally respond, whereas "irresolutique" refers to the game-playing dynamics in institutional environments that systematically undermines the initiatives of the "resolutique" in response to the "problematique". These may be configured as a diagram consistent with the dynamics of complexity (Judge, 2007a). The fundamental challenge is then framed mnemonically (Judge, 2007b).

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