FORESIGHT, ENTREPRENEURSHIP AND THE PHILANTHROPIC DESIRE FOR A BETTER WORLD

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ABSTRACT

International calls for renewed and rejuvenated engagement with social and environmental issues have increased in recent times and have attained a sense of great urgency. These are the issues that dominate the agenda of non-profit ‘third sector’ organizations and are considered philanthropic in nature. Locally, Richard Slaughter, answered the call and with support of both the Pratt Foundation and the Chancellery of Swinburne University of Technology, mounted a Melbourne-based effort to find innovative ways to make a difference. In the latest phase of this on-going effort, a project was mounted to first scan the research and development needs of the third sector and then engage in practical partnerships to find new routes to tackle seemingly intractable social problems.

INTRODUCTION

In calling for practitioners from outside the third sector to invest some time and thought towards the great philanthropic projects, one quickly discovers that as a generation, we have been handed a two-headed chimera. At one level, the task elicits a great enthusiasm. Besides, there is a long-standing tradition of mature practitioners switching their gaze from pragmatic matters in order to investigate the human condition. Generationally speaking, we are the next link in the chain. Intellectually, we are also
heirs to all the traditions accumulated during an unprecedented phase of historic continuity. We have much to offer. We are, therefore, mostly willing and able.

On the other hand, one is suddenly confronted with the need to specify precisely what malaise afflicts human society. In other words, what precisely is ‘The Problem’? Located within an Age of Extremes, this question is veiled in the static conducted by a world wide web of interconnected productivity and a simultaneous meltdown of local social institutions. All the traditional boundaries have become porous allowing for a hyperactive (sometimes hysterical) state of constant flux frequently accompanied by a low-grade sense of perpetual crisis. In other words, how do we define anything as definitive as ‘The Problem’ given the dynamic turbulence of the social context?

A doctor confronted with a sick patient will target the ailing organ, take a tissue sample and charge a molecular pathologist to investigate. The scientist is in possession of a wide choice of analytical tools and will quickly elucidate a diagnosis: it’s a tumour, a viral infection, or possibly a missing enzyme. But the diagnostic toolkit for social ill-health is really little more than an intuitive bleeding heart attached to a subjective worldview striving for a perspective broad enough to capture a characteristic sample.

So what is, after all that, The Problem? Can a methodology be enacted that permits an accurate overview of what needs to be done? Can we identify the core causes?

But then again, why even assume the social body is ill to any great degree?

These issues need to be resolved if the project is to make any kind of progress.

Samples and Snippets: the Depth of Suffering

- In Australia, poverty levels are 5% higher than when poverty was first measured in 1973.
- In 1996, on Census night, of 105,304 homeless people, one third were sleeping rough.
- 23% of homeless people cite ‘domestic violence’ as the reason for seeking assistance.
- Real house prices rose some 70% over the decade to 2003.
- An estimated 700,000 children were living in poverty in 1997-1998 and more than a third came from ‘working poor’ families.
- Australia has one of the highest levels of joblessness among families with children in OECD countries.
- In 1999, females in full time employment received 81% of the income of their male counterparts.
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people die at younger ages than Australians as a whole (Mission Australia, 2001).

The picture becomes far more acute if the gaze embraces the world beyond Australia’s shores. The quintessential snapshot was provided by Phillip Harter at Stanford University School of Medicine (cited by Wilber, 2000a, p.57). He shrunk the world’s population to a village of only 100 people and discovered that 80 live in substandard housing, 70 are unable to read, 50 suffer malnutrition, and only 1 person is college educated. Before concluding that The Problem must therefore be ‘poverty’ (with its concurrent homelessness, hunger, deprivation), please note the following: at the time of Harter’s analysis, 6 people possessed 59% of the wealth, all from the USA. With this last statistic, a dramatic reversal occurs in the diagnosis: the Problem may well be wealth.

“The interesting thing about all these definitions is that they only define the poor. No-one thinks of finding labels for the rich – there are far more words for poverty than there are for wealth, as the dictionary clearly shows. It is the poor who are the problem – a belief hotly contested by ‘the poor’ themselves” (van der Gaag, 1999).

The Quest for a Diagnostic Method

The contrast between Australian and international levels of distress is so vast that some local practitioners are led to question whether Australians are actually suffering all that much. It is argued, for instance by Peter Saunders and Kayoko Tsumori at the Centre for Independent Studies, that any residual poverty or injustice in Australia is mostly due
to individual lapses in either personal responsibility or individual initiative within a mostly fair and just broader society (Centre for Independent Studies, 2002a). Continued public support only encourages these personal flaws (defined as an absenteeism on the duty to perfect oneself as a model consumer). In other words, social assistance programs will only perpetuate individual laziness. The diagnosis? Australians aren’t suffering enough to merit even the current level of publicly funded social services:

“If giving people money were the solution to poverty, poverty should have disappeared by now, yet the number of people requiring support has been growing, not shrinking” (Centre for Independent Studies, 2002b).

The redistribution strategy has failed, it is claimed, and should be dumped in favour of a “self help strategy”. The cure then? Reduce social ills to a personal level so as to externalise The Problem onto the individual and then somehow charge (or coerce?) that person to help himself. In other words, there is a great emphasis on a highly skilled version of social indifference.

Is such a strategy accurate and justified? Should we be authoring self-help manuals and then absconding on further involvement?

Doing nothing is, of course, a tactic that allows any number of people (no matter the level of talent) an easy route to excellence. Indifference - dressed as the very best in social policy - does sound just a little too good (and simultaneously a little too mean) to be true. However, since the policy is gaining ground nationally and is already established internationally, it should be seriously considered. A broad scan at the level of logistics (run into the future) quickly reveals a flaw. The position is tenable if and only if ‘The Problem’ is truly due to residual levels of poverty (born of individual laziness). Should the problem be something else - for instance, wealth or wealth generating practices - then the prescribed dose of social indifference actually sets the stage to make things ever worse. For instance, by failing to target the personal laziness of rich people, something we can’t do if we are, intellectually speaking, too busy ignoring poor people.
"The very poor tell us over and over again that a human being’s greatest misfortune is not hunger or being unable to read, nor even being without work. The greatest misfortune of all is to know that you count for nothing, to the point where even your suffering is ignored. The worst blow of all is the contempt of your fellow citizens" (Roberts cited by van der Gaag, 1999).

Given that it’s possible to construct The Problem both in terms of poverty and wealth it seems highly likely that fixating on one alone will prove inadequate in the long-term. Reconciling the two is the approach taken by so-called Third Way practitioners who define the core issue as ‘income inequity’ linked to ‘social exclusion’ (Hamilton, 2003). Before asking what people are being excluded from (and who is doing the excluding), let’s be frank and admit that as stated, the Third Way hypothesis leads right back to the dreary, old Keynesian concept of ‘unequal wealth distribution’. As such, this is the antithesis to the prior laissez-faire thesis.

In the current configuration, the two social policy trends exist in a polemical relationship. In a cruel twist of fate, the polemics were subsumed by the so-called left and right wings of the political spectrum. In America, at least, thesis and antithesis are the standard bearers for a deeper conflict that has become the grist of an intractable and divisive culture war. Circumstances in Australia are set to follow suit unless a new way forward can be elucidated that transcends the political trenches.

Transcending the Dead Lock

Despite the scale of the noise and static associated with this policy debate, the culture war lives off a shallow political dynasty: both sides are perfectly devoid of profound ideas about the social fabric and what ails it. When all is said and done, both sides would prefer (and to some extent have) relinquished responsibility for the social sector (primarily to charitable organizations) while downsizing welfare in favour of tax cuts and fiscal responsibility. The ultimate signifier of this entire intellectual lineage is whether the tax cuts and budget surpluses benefit the rich or the poor or the great lump in between. But in terms of the broader social structure it doesn’t really matter. These tactics maintain the fundamental status quo. The shape, breadth and height of the associated housing/health/community bell-curves remain essentially unaltered.
So has the search reached a dead end? Certainly any logician will, at this juncture, predict that the underlying logic to these policies has reached the point of collapse. To better highlight the form this collapse takes, consider the following two big-picture statistics (van der Gaag, 1999):

1. *In the last 50 years, poverty has fallen more than in the previous 500 years.*
   [Which implies the problem all along wasn’t just poverty but the residual poverty perpetuated by the previous and failed system of governance. The solution is more of whatever we were doing to generate wealth in the last 50 years.]

2. *The absolute number of poor people is increasing as the world’s population rises.*
   [Which implies the current system has an inherent capacity to perpetuate problematic varieties of poverty that recapitulate social and environmental ills. The solution is less of whatever we are currently doing at the level of wealth generation.]

First, it is necessary to identify the dominant economic model of the previous decades. It is then possible to follow through and draw the quintessential conclusion: to alleviate poverty we simultaneously need both more and less of it. I arrive, inevitably, at a causal paradox.

The hallmark feature of this paradox is the following. It is possible to evidence the truth of two statements: ‘the dominant economic model alleviates poverty’ and ‘the dominant economic model increases poverty’. The factual evidence combines with the overall contradiction and renders each assertion neither properly true nor false. A law of formal logic (namely Aristotle’s law of the excluded middle) has reached the point of collapse. To anybody trained in logic, the state of the overall conclusion is deeply familiar (see for instance Davis, 2000).
Over 70 years ago, mathematicians demonstrated something very important about truth, proof and evidence which I’m going to apply to our current conundrum. Logicians were able to figure out why the neither-true-nor-false situation occurs. And applying those insights to this project allows for three predictions.

Three Predictions

Firstly, the economic model under consideration is expected to be the product of what foresight practitioners call formal-operative modes of cognition. That is, to conventional forms of rationality. Secondly, the real-world system analysed by this mindset is expected to involve a dynamic system (infinitely variable and capable of self-referential states). It is the collision of a conventional observer with a dynamic reality that leads to rationality’s point of collapse. This variety of thought is at its best when reality’s turbo-charged creativity is standardised: as scientists do in lab-contrived experiments and as engineers do when building machines. In fact, the popularity of this mindset partly stems from the success of classical theories during the scientific revolution. This is the cognitive style that gave us Man as a lumbering robot and the Universe as mechanical clockwork. It is a powerful but inadequate mindset given the complexity of the actual universe as demonstrated by Einstein (who collapsed Newton’s clockwork universe) and by every other scientist who transcended classical theories (for instance, in the production of quantum mechanics or complexity and system theory).

That classical mechanics were transcended tells us that a post-formal mode of cognition is available to humans. That the resultant theories were even more accurate forewarns that moving beyond the conventionally rational worldview is well worth the effort.

The antidote to concepts that are neither-true-nor-false (concepts that produce paradoxical outcomes and intensely polarised debates) is unlikely to take the form of yet another classically rational idea. The task is to transcend the limitation inherent to the formal-operative worldview while retaining its coherent structures. Post-formal stages of cognition are not only possible but vision-logic (a post-conventional variety of
rationality) is particularly suited to solving this breed of causal paradox. The search for a methodology for innovative social engagement now has a \textit{modus operandi} but one with the potential to transcend the polemics, to short-circuit the culture wars while innovating social engagement. The situation is suddenly looking far more promising.

The third prediction, however, also specifies why the above approach – despite its inherent simplicity – so frequently fails to take hold. The paradoxical state of the overall conclusion constitutes a ‘Truth’ that is not available to the rational observer who is situated \textit{within} a system (i.e. situated as a player with a vested interest in the dominant economic model). From \textit{within} the formalism of Third Way theory or laissez-faire models, the argument acquires an absolutist momentum because each, in the immediate sense, is extremely logically compelling. To believe anything else is considered irrational by the practitioner and ‘irrationality’ is equivalent to ‘untruth’ in the form of chaos, disorder and confusion. Unfortunately, creative or dynamic systems (that are eminently organised and full of a very special kind of order) nonetheless can seem chaotic, they are indeed entropically challenged (entropy drives towards increased disorder) and because outcomes cannot readily be predicted they are also confusing and seemingly uncontrollable. They can resemble disorganised systems. The loss of control (disorder) is what rationality fears and, as such, there is a distrust of creative processes. With a self-imposed leash on our own creativity, practitioners become fearful of moving beyond formal logic even if that shift offers better (more accurate and efficient) forms of order. This constitutes a formidable challenge to productive re-engagement with social issues with the notable exception of entrepreneurs who are exceptional conduits of creativity.

Devising a Strategy

Testing the above predictions is fairly straightforward. What is the dominant economic model? The answer to that question is uncontested. Society is operating under the aegis of a free market ideology based in large part on Adam Smith’s neoclassical school of economics redeployed in the 1970’s to renew the post-war Keynesian consensus. How representative is it of the formal operative style of cognition?
"Modern capitalism elevates a certain form of rationality to a higher plane. Consumerism and the logic of capitalism are intensely bound up with the rationality of money. As Norman Brown observed, ‘Money reflects and promotes a style of thinking which is abstract, impersonal, objective, and quantitative, that is to say, the style of thinking of modern science – and what could be more rational than that?’" (Hamilton, 2003, p.53).

If neoliberalism is truly a ‘classical’ theory, in the scientific sense, then it should possess certain hallmark features. For example, molecular biology in its formal-operative mode, sees the mutually influential relationship between genes and environment but experiences it as descriptional complexity. To surmount this impasse, the gene is reduced to the cause of the organism (for example, the gene for alcoholism). In this way, the mindset births genetic determinism. The determinism annihilates the mutual interdependency between parts and wholes in favour of linear cause-effect relationships in which the gene commands and the organism obeys. Instead, vision logic sees genes as holons: wholes that come with an in-built (and creative) ability to form the parts of a higher order system. The standard example of holonic organization is provided by this sequence: atoms to molecules to cells to organs to organisms (Wilber, 2000a). By identifying how holons manage these sequential integrations, vision logic arrives at more refined notions of biological causality. In contrast, the formal-operative mindset sees disparate bits and pieces held together by the selfish drive to survive and reproduce. In much the same way, if neoliberalism is truly a classical theory, it should be cutting across a web of integrated holons in order to isolate a reduced unit which is then elevated as the source of a deterministic kind of order. In which case, what is neoliberalism’s reductionist unit?

“Because most people would prefer to receive higher income and enjoy higher expenditure, GDP per person seems a natural measure of the economic well-being of the average individual” (Hamilton, 2003, p.11).

Money! And finally, what integrated web has neoliberalism negated in the process of constructing a deterministic relationship between money and well being?

“Politicians continue to offer only one solution: a system based on laissez-faire economics, the culture of consumerism, the power of finance and free trade. They try and
sell it in varying shades of blue, red, or yellow, but it is still a system in which the
 corporation is king, the state its subject, its citizen consumers. A silent nullification of the
 social contract” (Hertz, 2002, p.6).

The cause of The Problem? As eulogised by Benjamin Barber: “the global market
economy has globalised many of our vices and almost none of our virtues” (Barber,
2001).

As a generation we need a new method to counter the deliberate disengagement
with issues of the human condition. This method needs to be an amalgamation of
technical expertise (that transcends entrenched but paradoxical operating strategies),
innovation (that embraces rather than fearfully shuns the creativity of vision logic) and
virtue (the ability to enact a new set of values to complement the profit motive). In brief,
we need to perceive and act with virtuosity in order to create a realisable vision for a
better future.

METHODOLOGY AND RESULTS

Money has become the measure of all things; economic growth the means to
improving well being. But underlying this ideology is a social contract in the grip of
death throes (Hertz, 2002). Emergency intervention is required or the next generation will
have little more than a corpse to bury in the way of social engagement. We have four
basic options:

1. Intervention within the current system;
2. Imposition of an alternative system;
3. Regression to a prior system;
4. Collapse the system.

Needless to say, this research project will limit itself to the first option for the simple
expedient that system analysts have already visited this topic and a ‘system map’ for
social problems already exists.
Systems Map

In *Places to Intervene in a System*, Donatella Meadows recounts how Jay Forrester of MIT was asked by the Club of Rome to explain how the “major global problems – poverty and hunger, environmental destruction, resource depletion, urban deterioration, unemployment – are related and how they might be solved” (Meadows, 1997, p.78). Forrester promptly proceeded to identify the ‘leverage point’ (or the place in a complex system where a small shift can produce big changes): growth. Basically, humans are trying to solve the costs associated with growth (resource depletion, environmental destruction, urbanisation) with *more* growth while failing to spot the causal paradox:

“The world’s leaders are correctly fixated on economic growth as the answer to virtually all problems, but they’re pushing with all their might in the wrong direction” (Meadows, 1997, p.78).

One of the core insights produced by systems theory is that humans have an intuitive ability to spot leverage points in even very complex systems but tragically push them in self-defeating ways. This insight has clearly been absorbed to some extent as evidenced by the advancement of strategies like pro-poor growth, fair trade, debt relief: each a noble effort to push the lever in the other direction. Why hasn’t more progress been made? Here is Meadows on this very subject:

“We know from bitter experience that when we do discover the system’s leverage points, hardly anybody will believe us” (Meadows, 1997, p.78).

In fact, foresight practitioners would anticipate that about 1% of the population can witness and honour (believe) the necessities inherent to system-truths (Wilber, 2000a). That is an insufficient number to attain critical mass behind a social movement. The system map needs to be boosted with a finer understanding of how humans arrive and sustain their beliefs.

Integral Psychology: a Developmental Framework
How do humans come by their beliefs? That beliefs are not particularly truth-based is an observation so obvious there seems little point evidencing the statement. The material world may well possess an innate objectivity (which can be truthfully known) but that knowledge is mediated by the subjectivity of the observer. In the process, subjective worldviews are created that are amalgamations of self-identity, cognition, values and beliefs. According to integral psychologists, the truth - from childhood to mature adult - grows with the organism (Wilber, 2000b). Consequently at any one point of time, there are levels of truth active simultaneously within a society: levels inherent to pre-conventional, conventional and post-conventional stages of development (Wilber, 2000b). It’s not so much that the truth can change (as postulated by moderate forms of postmodernity) or that there is no truth (as postulated by extreme forms of postmodernity) but rather that the level of subjectivity of the observer must change if a child is to make his/her way to a mature adult human being.

The problem with system analysis is that it aims for objective truth that is hopelessly dissociated from the subjective beliefs prevalent in society. And worse. System theory failed to expound a set of values altogether (primarily because practitioners were deliberately trying to remain “unattached” in terms of beliefs/values since these carry unstated but paradigmatic assumptions). The resultant knowledge base will therefore seem unfamiliar and somehow foreign, irrelevant or sterile given that the societal norm prefers a firm attachment between what is believed true and what is believed beneficial/benevolent (values). For example, note the juxtaposition in the statement: “Growth is good”.

However, to explore the domain of beliefs entails overcoming a certain phobia that academia has acquired with regards to discussing ‘values’. Yet observe the crucial role values play in each of the following (Meadows, 1997, p.78):

- People who are paid less are worth less.
- Evolution stopped with the emergence of Homo sapiens.
- One can “own” land.
As Meadows points out: “The shared ideas in the minds of society ... constitute that society’s deepest set of beliefs about how the world works.” These shared beliefs constitute the invisible “assumptions of our culture, all of which utterly dumbfound people of other cultures. [Beliefs] are the sources of systems” (Meadows, 1997, p.84).

The paradigmatic beliefs need not be true for the system to work. The beliefs, however, do need to be compatible with the developmental needs of human beings, preferably in a way that facilitates growth to our highest potential. In the reverse relationship (i.e. with the lever pushed in the wrong direction), the shared beliefs survive at the cost of people and their developmental potential. In other words, this is the leverage point and it is currently set with too great an emphasis on the integrity of ideological beliefs while lacking sufficient synergy with the developmental needs of humans. When anti-human beliefs are sustained at a global level, the resultant system can thwart humanity and the damage done is directly proportional to how fervently the ideology is believed. Hence, the danger inherent to fundamentalist zeality.

The beliefs inherent to a system, then, come in two varieties: they are either a parasite or symbiont of human development. Either way once a system is in place, the beliefs that underlie it will reflect the mindset (the subjective stage) of the dominant players:

“If you want to understand the deepest malfunctions of systems, pay attention to the rules, and to who has power over them” (Meadows, 1997, p.82).

The operating strategy takes on the characteristics of its human operators. Since humans can undergo development to beliefs and ideas that are essentially symbiotic (rather than parasitic), it seems a safe bet that systems can follow suit. As such, the very act of assisting humans reach and express their full potential implicitly can feedback and amplify into systematic self-correction. If sufficiently effective aid can be provided then philanthropic projects come with an in-built dynamo that can generate the kind of momentum that can shift a system.
The key is to embrace philanthropic values and carry into these projects an understanding and commitment to human developmental processes such that beliefs can be identified that sustain pro-human and pro-environment values. A developmental framework of exceptional breadth, depth and height is provided by Ken Wilber in *Integral Psychology* (Wilber, 2000b).

One final note. All of the above has been said far more simply by someone with first hand experience of a parasitic system:

"When everything is valued in terms of money, it is those who have the money who are looked up to. But if we use other ways of valuing people ..." (van der Gaag, 1999).

Values and virtue are inextricably linked in a way that requires its own vocabulary, a vocabulary that transcends the sterility of unattached truths. However, the only tenable site in which to develop narratives about "other ways of valuing people" is the future. Foresight practitioners, aware of this fact for a number of decades, have made enormous strides creating the expertise to convert yearning/longing into strategy:

"Future studies is not simply about any future. It is about the future well-being of people. It is an action science, and the action is social in the broadest sense, including the political, the economic, and the cultural. As such, futures studies aims to produce knowledge and foresight that can be used by people to steer toward more consciously-chosen futures. Thus, futures studies places as much emphasis on the utilization of knowledge as on its production ... Also, futurists explore values and the nature of the good society ... This means that futures researchers must devote some of our time to the study of human values and we must be responsibly concerned about the future consequences of our work" (Bell 2002, p.245).

The goal, in the immediate sense, is for values that sustain symbiotic (rather than parasitic) beliefs so as to lay the foundations for a more virtuous system. To achieve this, the dynamo inherent to philanthropic projects needs to be turbo-charged with the both the strategic vision of foresight practitioners and the pragmatic creativity of entrepreneurs.
Armed with a systems-map and values-map, the next step involves assembling the team to undertake further, more refined analysis in practical rather than theoretical terms.

The Team

The project of engineering a new vision of social engagement was differentiated among three sets practitioners each associated with particular skills:

1. **Entrepreneurs:** Unlike their business peers more generally, entrepreneurs are fearless in the face of creative innovation, progress, technological change and are masters at spotting and capitalising on barely perceivable gaps and deficits in the market. As a breed they are less reliant on command-obey procedure, on reducing and quantifying every aspect of an operation in order to control it. They are characterised by a dynamic operating style rather than a mechanical one and as such do not distrust relinquishing control to intuition, instinct, spontaneous insights and networks wherein vision logic can thrive. Furthermore, their dynamism includes a capacity to 'dive in and have a go' that can generate momentum for even unlikely projects. Finally, they are skilled in generating the venture capital for risky or explorative projects (Hayward and Voros, 2004).

2. **Foresight practitioners:** While the term 'futurist' is associated with predictive techniques (forecasting and modelling), foresight practitioners differentiate themselves by a greater emphasis on critical and analytical approaches to the normative drivers (to those trends, processes, beliefs and ideas that ensure the continuation of the status quo). These analytical techniques already incorporate the developmental framework of integral psychology. In addition, they have devised methods to facilitate envisioning realisable alternative futures in conjunction with the techniques to facilitate organizational transformation. They are master planners when it comes to realising deep structural change. Importantly, they are not ‘values-free’ but openly favour an ethical regard for human developmental needs (Hayward and Voros, 2004).
3. Philanthropic foundations and non-profit organizations (NGOs): These are the practitioners with years of insider experience working in areas where the social fabric has unravelled. They are familiar with past approaches and contemporary assets/deficits in terms of service delivery for the disadvantaged. They have already developed some cross-sector networks and built capacity, resources, funding and volunteers to deliver aid to those who need it and to feedback ideas to the policy makers (De Simone, 2002).

The Australian Foresight Institute at Swinburne University of Technology hosted the initial process that conceived, analysed and enacted an opening strategy (the development of ‘social foresight’). In the second stage, a partnership was formed between foresight practitioners and NGOs in order to run a pilot study within the social sector in Victoria. Additionally, a program was outlined for future R&D opportunities in order to build the broader alliance.

Trial Run and Further Opportunities for Involvement

The trial run was sponsored by the Victorian Council of Social Services (VCOSS) and hosted by the Council for Homeless Persons (CHP). Two operational areas were targeted:

1. The consultation process between non-profit organizations and peak bodies that constitutes the information flow for the development of new protocols;
2. The evaluation process to assess the efficacy of new, cross-sector strategies.

While the trial run is on-going, the feasibility of this kind of partnership has been established. The preliminary finding is that foresight practitioners have a role to play primarily (or at least, in the first instance) by integrating forward thinking into operating protocols. The foresight methods applicable upon first establishing engagement are the simpler methods (Slaughter, 2002). In terms of the consultation process, for instance, a benefit to the sector was identified by adopting the so-called Futures Triangle. Backcasting has a role to play in evaluation procedures. There is, however, a great interest within the sector for action research tools that emphasise forward thinking and
more work is currently being conducted to find ways for the sector to gain access to ‘action foresight’ (Ramos, 2004).

The immediate impact for the non-profit organizations is a gain in the ability to differentiate between the day-to-day activity of providing assistance and services (i.e. alleviating suffering) and more fundamental activity geared towards promoting long term change (i.e. eliminating the causes of suffering). The former sustains the normative status quo which, unfortunately, has acquired a tolerance for a certain amount of homelessness (currently at the level of 100,000 Australians annually). The latter enables the organization to challenge the normative tolerance to homelessness (social indifference). In other words, foresight enables organizations to complement reactive strategies with more proactive goals.

Surprisingly, foresight techniques also seem to foment inter-organizational relationships even if the organizations are already involved in social problems (such as philanthropic foundations). This finding reflects a certain amount of fragmentation between organizations, projects and strategies. The need for so-called ‘joined-up planning’ finds a ready solution in foresight’s integrative and holistic approaches. The overall impact of engaging foresight practitioners also tills the soil sufficiently for the entry of entrepreneurs to help realise the proactive visions engendered in the earlier stages of collaboration.

To meet these longer term goals, the project also resolved the logistics by which practitioners from each category can participate in a collaborative R&D process. The forum preferred by sector insiders is a Futures Scenario Forum in which the deeper goals of the sector and the proactive aspirations can be workshopped in an environment that could lead to collaborative action. The means to fund a three year initiative have been identified as have project partners.

Preliminary Case Study: Homelessness
The following case study evolved from the trial run with service providers in the homelessness sector and constitutes a preliminary framework to assist in the formation of the broader alliance.

NGOs dealing with homelessness have clearly identified that there is a demand for low-cost housing which is unmet by either the public sector or private market. According to neoliberal theory, consumer activity should have enacted a "natural" push in the market to meet this demand and a choice of products should have become available. In other words, exclusion from market participation shouldn't be possible. Similarly, the public sector, via democratic procedures, too should have responded to this demand. Clearly, either oversight or neglect has occurred on a large scale. One of the reasons for this failure is that private companies are run by rules that tend to exclude feedback from any other sector other than its own business sector. As more public organizations adopt business-style management, the ability of the broader system to respond to feedback is eroded. The failure of the supply side is a particularly acute example of this process.

The visible tip of the iceberg relative to this unmet demand is outright homelessness. While the number of people seeking assistance has been steady at about 100,000 for a number of years, there is a growing backlog of people (especially young people and families on low-income) struggling to gain a foothold in secure housing. As such, the system carries the potential to see sudden and dramatic increases in homelessness should the attrition of low-cost housing continue.

Given this situation, NGOs increasingly lack the means to provide long term solutions and have, instead, consolidated their stock of so-called crisis housing: primarily shelters. The day-to-day demands of this strategy absorb most of the existent resources of the organizations. Projected into the future and this situation will ultimately lower expectations of what constitutes a minimum acceptable quality of life and increase the divide between have and have-nots. Furthermore, the failure to enact preventive measures
could well see the slide of more people into ever more precarious housing situations. The combination of these two factors is itself a potent destroyer of well being:

“Research has repeatedly shown that it is not those who live in the richest societies, but those who live in societies with the most egalitarian wealth distribution, that have the best health. It is relative income levels that matter, not as one might have thought, absolute ones. Death rates from some of the most significant diseases are reduced when income differentials are lowered” (Hertz, 2002, p.65)

The take home message is that the situation is getting worse: public policy, independent fiscal measures and market forces are moving the housing system in precisely the wrong direction. Furthermore, there are currently no measures in place among NGOs to address how to intervene in the overall system in a way that addresses and creates new opportunities to stimulate the supply side of the equation.

The role of the broader R&D exercise (the Scenarios Forum) is to bring together NGOs, foresight practitioners, entrepreneurs and philanthropists to brainstorm core issues like the one identified above: stimulating the supply of low cost housing. The following points are set out as an example of potential discussion points:

1. A role for Community Development financial institutions to provide capital for development schemes.
2. A role for state government in supplying so-called blighted land cheaply without the requirement for further involvement in housing schemes.
3. The design of a new breed of mortgage that is tolerant to income discontinuities and fluctuations associated with job insecurity, casualisation and short-term contracts.
4. Architectural interest in understanding and solving errors made in the design of public housing especially high rise.
5. The development of new architectural designs that incorporate cheap materials and construction, energy and water conservation, and optimally interesting living spaces that manifest a great regard for the occupants.
6. Discussion of the necessities associated with a construction company specialising in low-cost housing.

7. Anticipate the response from the open market to increased availability of low cost but well-designed houses.

8. Development of the corporate social responsibility plank to guide the development scheme in a way that benefits people with low incomes (i.e. how to engender pro-poor growth).

9. Model whether the advent of a pro-poor development scheme has an impact on the operation of the private market.

Finally, some effort also needs to be spared regarding beliefs associated with housing. Home ownership is highly valued by Australians. The increasing difficulty achieving ownership of one's first home must carry profound resonances. As such, there needs to be some discussion of the chain between beliefs, values and systems of supply as it regards home ownership.

CONCLUSION

At the London School of Economics, Helmut Anheier and Diana Leat recently undertook a similar initiative to rejuvenate engagement with humanitarian and environmental issues. They took a different methodological route and concentrated, in the first instance, on a very broad scan of philanthropic foundations. They were interested in criteria that better allow foundations to act as catalysts that identify new solutions for entrenched social problems. Their study was published in a book entitled From Charity to Creativity (Anheier and Leat, 2002). Despite the methodological differences, both the London School of Economics and the Australian Foresight Institute studies converged in their core findings. For instance, both identified ‘creativity’ as a definitive ingredient in emerging recipes for social improvement; both studies identified the need to involve outsiders in philanthropic projects:

"Real creativity and innovation require new approaches, new combinations, and a mix of perspectives, cultures and disciplines. They need outsiders to give freshness and all the
virtues that go with lack of insider knowledge and first impressions. They need insiders to provide deep knowledge and understanding. If foundations are to be creative and innovative in their own thinking and in their grant-making, they need to find ways of ensuring access to diverse, varied talents and ideas. They need to be able to combine access to deep knowledge and understanding with access to those who can see things in a fresh light unencumbered by preconceptions from the past” (Anheier and Leat, 2002, p.18)

The Melbourne based effort used social foresight as its methodological approach (Slaughter, 1996) and as such, was able to define what it is about creativity and outsiders that stands to make a big difference. Foresight methods qualify ‘creativity’ and ‘outsiders’ within two broader frameworks: causal-layers and integral-developmental maps. As such, the foresight approach is eminently aware that creativity isn’t one property. On the contrary, there are as many varieties as there are stages in human development. For instance, creativity in a bacchanalian sense won’t do at all in these kinds of projects. There is no point confusing the creativity of pre-conventional stages with the needed variety associated with post-conventionality. In integral psychology parlance (Wilber, 2000b), this is known as the pre/post fallacy (the ease with which pre- and post- conventional stages are assumed one and the same). We don’t just need more creativity; we need the creativity born of hearts, minds and souls alive to vision logic.

Similarly with the term ‘outsiders’. The last thing the philanthropic system needs is more ‘economically correct’ outsiders who are blind to the causal paradoxes inherent to some conventionally rational ideas. That kind of outsider can accidentally produce disengagement from social causes (“the nullification of the social contract”) and therefore movement in the wrong direction.

While it is promising that these kinds of studies can, and have, made some progress, it is important to recall that some truths struggle to be recognised and believed. They have no impact. Foresight understands this phenomenon relative to its integral and developmental framework. Pre-conventional stages have trouble witnessing conventional truths. Conventional stages struggle with post-conventional insights and disregards them as pre-conventional nonsense (Wilber, 2000b). It becomes crucial to note that the societal
centre of gravity in Australia is located around the mid-levels of the conventional stage and is associated with a long list of very fine achievements. What is needed here is not a full scale assault and frontal attack on conventional institutions, achievement and beliefs (even its neoliberal economic ones). The conventional stage is the foundation (not the nemesis) and the portal (not the enemy) of post-conventional insights. You can’t destroy the former without undermining the latter (Wilber, 2000a). Each needs each other. The task at hand is about complementing conventional thinking. In particular by identifying its causal paradoxes (usually signed by a heated and rather prolonged polarised debate) and using vision logic to identify small gestures that have a big, virtuous impact.

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