



GLOBAL
BUSINESS
NETWORK

GBN AUSTRALIA BOOKCLUB

INTELLECTUAL TOOLS FOR THE YEARS AHEAD

What a lot of fuss there is about information these days. Information is the latest fad. As the pundits would have it, we are now managing our businesses in an Age of Information; an era in which information is being hailed as one of the foundational pillars, along with capital and labour, upon which capitalism is built, and business operates. Such is the pervasion of this fad that we have willingly succumbed to the technologies it has spawned, and Bill "Mr Informatics" Gates becomes one of the wealthiest people on earth. We link into intra and internets, we e.mail each other across the corridor and the globe, with equal zeal. We access the WWW and place our own "page" out there on it. We do all that we can to inform and be informed about the operations, allocations and strategies of our businesses, while promising ourselves that we need to be as inquiring of the world out there, as the context for doing what we do in our organisations within.

Yet what a poverty stricken notion information really is. What an empty metaphor for business.

In the first place, it is certainly no recent revelation. Information has always been recognised as an essential aspect of the integrity of any system, along with energy and matter. So what's new? Systems cannot be systems unless they are able to inform themselves of themselves, and of the environments in which they exist. The ability to feed back and feed forward information is a fundamental property of all systems. Business systems cannot produce anything nor sensibly market anything, without information. Supply and demand mechanisms are vitally dependent upon information. And what is price, if it is not information? Information is the currency of communication, and what is business (or life itself for that matter) without communication?

Human communication however, is much more than the transmission and receipt of information. We need knowledge and meaning to make sense out of the world about us: Information is far too primitive a resource for those purposes. Human communication is a process of learning: Of converting experiences and insights and information into the knowledge and meaning that we need to make our actions in this world, meaningful. This is a social activity. We learn to deal with our world through sharing our experiences of it, and through sharing with each other, the sense we make out of those experiences, and deciding together what we need to change in order to adapt to them.

Talk of information is talk of "out there"- a characteristic of the organisation and of its environment, not a property of human beings. Learning, from this old information perspective then, is the process of information transmission from "out there" to "in here", not of the creation of knowledge "in here" of "out there". This latter view of learning is one which involves us as complete human beings in the process of transformation: A process which involves our emotions and insights, our values and worldviews, our prejudices and our dispositions, as well as our rational minds. We are spiritual as well as cognitive beings, valuing as well as thinking beings, imaginative and creative as well as instinctual beings. We can imagine worlds of the future, and in that process, we can gain foresight about what might happen next, and how we might deal with it, or even influence it.

This latter notion is the theme of *Learning from the Future*, the first of our selections this month, and a book in which the editors, Liam Fahey and Robert Randall, have assembled an impressive collective of authors well known in the foresight and scenario business. In our second selection, Charles Handy in his *Hungry Spirit*, takes us on the much more philosophical 'quest for purpose in the modern world'. Both illustrate the poverty of the 'information age' metaphor, with the power of imagination and creativity as the theme of the former, and life beyond the instrumental rationalism of capitalism, of the latter. From these perspectives, both give heart and spirit to organisational and individual purpose. ●

Learning from the Future: Competitive Foresight Scenarios

Edited by Liam Fahey and Robert M. Randall, John Wiley and Sons 1998

The most refreshing aspect of this, one of the latest books from the scenario planning and foresight development stable, is its explicit emphasis on the use of such processes in helping organisations understand how they might manage their futures strategically. Indeed the focus is on scenario learning which, as the two editors themselves suggest in their introductory chapter, involves two elements “constructing or developing scenarios, and integrating the contents of scenarios into decision making”. As they see it, scenarios provide ways of thinking about and analysing uncertain yet important possible futures; a function which is of relevance to each of the ‘classic’ stages in strategic decision making - understanding the (strategy) context, identifying potential strategy alternatives, developing those alternatives, choosing among them, and finally, executing the chosen strategy. The generation of scenarios from this perspective is thus one among a number of explicit means to the ends of strategic decisions, and not, as has sometimes been portrayed, an end unto itself. Thus the underlying premise of the book as Fahey and Randall have it, is that scenarios, which give insights into the futures that tomorrow may bring, should be an invaluable component of the business strategist’s toolkit: And invaluable toolkit is essentially what this book is.

Two dozen other writers add their voices of insight and experience to those of the two editors, and in so doing, a text of remarkable variety and utility emerges, with scenario learning being clearly established within the context of “learning for strategic futures”. There are four sections to the book: An introduction to the logic and utility of scenario learning, is followed by comprehensive descriptions of the well established basic approaches to constructing scenarios led off, in a chapter entitled *Plotting Your Scenarios*, by Peter Schwartz and Jay Ogilvy. In addition to exploring the differences between the inductive and the deductive approaches to scenario generation, these two GBN principals also illuminate matters such as building narratives and conducting scenario workshops. They close with eight key tips for scenario team leaders. In a later chapter in this same section, Schwartz and Ogilvy illustrate their own principles in an exposition of different scenarios for global investment strategies for the new century. Other writers in this section address such issues as mental maps of the future (Ian Wilson), their use in discovering paths to desired futures (David Mason), and an introduction to dynamic scenarios: where “systems thinking meets scenario planning”, as Edward Ward and Audrey Schriefer subtitle their particular chapter. The message here is that as the real world is not a static set of conditions but an ever evolving system which functions in complex and dynamic social and political environments, it is appropriate that systems thinking be employed in conjunction with scenario approaches. The consequent dynamic scenarios methodology which is advocated by Ward and Schiefer is taken a step further by Paich and Hinton in their chapter, in their development of simulation models as a tool for rigorous scenario analysis. The aim is for more informed choices about the future, and while, as these latter authors claim “no model or group of models will reveal the “truth” about the future...[they]... can reveal useful distinctions about our operating environment and certain limitations in our capacity to understand that environment”.

The authors of the eight chapters in the third Section of the book, explore a variety of aspects of scenario application in contexts as diverse as industry, competitor, and economic scenarios, scenario-based planning for technology investments, and importantly, how scenarios enrich public policy decisions. Bonnet and Olson provide a very powerful case study of the latter in exploring a scenario development project for the New Jersey Statewide Transportation Plan conducted by the Council of Governors’ Policy Advisors and the Institute of Alternative Futures. As these authors conclude: “the scenario/vision process described here led to new priorities and innovative outcomes, especially in the area of land use and community design”. This account, complemented by all of the other chapters in this section, provides very firm evidence which can be used in support of the claim that scenario learning has a very considerable range of application across human affairs. Exemplifying this claim, the third section of the book is brought to a close by Adam Kahane’s chapter describing the manner through which scenarios helped common ground be discovered in the process of imagining South Africa’s future. Kahane concludes his description of the renowned Mont Fleur Scenarios, in whose generation he was deeply involved, with the submission that “scenarios are a promising tool for public consensus building”.

The seven chapters of the final section of this most illuminating book, focus on managing the organisational context for scenario learning. The central theme presented here is perhaps best captured by the claim of Ian Wilson, one of the authors in this section, in stating that “many, if not most, of the problems in introducing scenario planning into an organization stem from a failure to recognise the

magnitude and duration of the implementation effort that is required to use this technology to change the prevailing management assumptions”.

And that returns us to the pervasive theme of these columns — that effective learning from the future through scenario generation and exploration, is most essentially concerned with challenges to, and changes in prevailing weltanschauungen. *Learning from the Future* provides ample evidence for this contention along with a host of helpful practical hints on what is required to achieve it. ●

The Hungry Spirit *Beyond Capitalism, a Quest for Purpose in the Modern World*

Charles Handy, Hutchinson London 1997

Inspired by a somewhat mysterious verse from the Book of Revelations, Charles Handy keeps a small white stone on his desk. It is there to remind him that if he ‘prevails’, he will eventually find out who he truly ought to be — “the other hidden self”. Life, he has decided, is a search for the white stone; a process of discovery “of who we are, what we can do, and ultimately, why we exist and what we believe.” The context for this focus is Handy’s belief that organisations and individuals alike have to decide what it is they are about before they can sensibly decide what it is that they have to do. The central argument of his book, as he presents it, is that “in our hearts, we would all like to find a purpose bigger than ourselves because that will raise us to heights we had not dreamt of”. The problem is, that in this age of capitalism, there has been far too little incentive to seek such a purpose, in the face of the wave of the market imperative.

Drawing on a wonderfully wide spectrum of writers and thinkers across the past two millennia, from philosophers of ancient Greece to contemporary economists and political scientists, Handy weaves a rich and entertaining narrative. His essential premise is that capitalist societies are not working as well as they were expected to do, and certainly not for the good of all. “The market, competition and efficiency, all good things in themselves, turn out to have unintended side effects”. Capitalism might well have proved itself superior to communism and extreme socialism but it has yet “to convince that it has the complete answer to our desire for progress.”

There are three sections to this delightfully easy, yet intellectual, read: A critique of capitalism with its unfettered focus on self-interest, an exploration of deeper purpose, and ideas for a ‘better’ capitalism and the facilitation of a decent society. Capitalism in its prevailing forms, has its flaws, as indeed have most systems. It is, as Keynes long ago asserted, “absolutely irreligious, without internal union, without much public spirit”. Yet we, as human beings, hunger for such spirit. Life has much more to it than markets and competition and profits — important though all of these are. The modern capitalist system is not only flawed because it does not (cannot?) address this hunger, but it also has such a power of seduction that we have, by and large, forgotten that it is only a tool, and as Handy reminds his readers “tools are not for worshipping”. “Capitalism is a liberating not a defining creed, money as the means not the end” and under this credo, “ultimately we need a new understanding of life, one that gives money its due, but no more than its due.” And again he returns to his pervasive theme — we need to know who it is that we are if we are to select the responsible things to do.

As Charles Handy argues, a sensible starting point in the quest for such a new form of capitalism which embraces and indeed nurtures the decent society, is the somewhat paradoxical concept of what he terms Proper Selfishness. This is the search for ourselves that we often best pursue through our involvement with others. “To be Properly Selfish is to accept a responsibility for making the most of oneself”. It is self-discovery through collaboration with others, not self-interest in competitive isolation. As to change? Education needs to be redesigned to allow us to learn how to accept more personal responsibility, while governments need to return responsibility to the people. It is only when this happens, contends Handy, that “we can feel that life and society is ours to shape. Were that to happen, our values could dictate the way things worked, rather than the other way round”.

Charles Handy has been a discriminating and prescient thinker over many decades. His writings have been characterised by an optimism born of a faith in human decency, and a lifetime of empirical observations of its manifestation in practice. In this book, this optimism remains undimmed. While we were wrong to have placed so much “faith in an undiluted ideology of self interest when we should have trusted our humanity more than the system” he reminds us, “[w]e can override that system, just as we can override the programming of nature.” ●

1994

- The Seven Cultures of Capitalism* by Charles Hampden-Turner & Fons Trompenaars (Piatkus - UK)\$21.20
- * *Capitalism(s) in Competition* by Eric Bet (GBN).....\$17.00
- Global Change* by Keith Suter (Albatross Books).....\$21.25
- Where to From Here* by Leonie V Still (Business & Professional Publishing).....\$23.75
- * *The Structure of Entrapment* by Charles Hampden-Turner (GBN) ..\$17.50
- * *White Eye* by Blanche d'Alpuget (Viking)\$16.95
- The Management Myth* by Richard David Hames (Business & Professional Publishing)\$33.95
- The Ecology of Commerce* by Paul Hawken (Allen & Unwin)\$29.75
- The Executive Compass* by James O'Toole (Oxford Press)\$33.95
- * *Messengers of the Gods* by James Cowan (Random House)\$14.45
- * *Values and the Corporation* by Jay Ogilvy et al (GBN).....\$17.00
- The Fifth Discipline Fieldbook* by Peter Senge (Allen & Unwin)\$42.45
- * *Turbulent Mirror* by John Briggs & F. David Peat (HarperCollins)\$26.95
- The Last Three Minutes* by Paul Davies (Allen & Unwin).....\$12.95
- Leadership and the New Science* by Margaret Wheatley (Woodslane).....\$25.45

1995

- Framing Technology* by Leila Green & Roger Guinery (Allen & Unwin)\$19.95
- Competing for the Future* by Gary Hamel & C K Prahalad (Harvard Business School Press) (PB) \$25.95..(HB)\$46.95
- The Future Eaters* by Tim Flannery (Reed Books)\$33.95
- Learning Unlimited* by Alastair Rylatt (Business & Professional Publishing)\$29.70
- Enterprising Nations: The Karpin Report* (Commonwealth of Australia)\$25.45
- Australian Civilisation* edited by Richard Nile (Oxford University Press)\$21.20
- Creative Compartments* by Gerard Fairtlough (Adamantine Press)\$25.50
- Challenge to Change* by Richard Eckersley and Kevin Jeans (CSIRO Publications)\$29.70
- The Death of Economics* by Paul Omerod (Penguin Books)\$14.50
- The Revolt of the Elites and the Betrayal of Democracy* by Christopher Lasch (Norton)\$33.95
- The Knowledge Creating Company* by Ikujiro Nonaka & Kiroataka Takeuchi (Oxford University Press)\$46.95
- * *Living Without a Goal* by James Ogilvy (Doubleday)\$34.95

1996

- Jihad vs McWorld* by Benjamin R Barber (Times Books)\$34.95
- * *Lords of the Rim* by Sterling Seagrave (G P Putnam's Sons)\$43.95
- Trust* by Francis Fukuyama (The Free Press)\$39.95
- How are we to Live?* by Peter Singer (Mandarin Books)\$14.50
- An Intimate History of Humanity* by Theodore Zeldin (Minerva)\$16.95

- * *Having Our Say about the Future* (ASTEC)Free
- Maximum Leadership* by Charles Farkas, Philippe de Backer and Allen Sheppard (Orion)\$16.95
- Leadership in a New Era* edited by John Renesch (New Leaders Press Sterling and Stone)\$42.95
- Scenarios: The Art of Strategic Conversation* by Kees van der Heijden (Wiley)\$42.95
- The State We're In* by Will Hutton (Vintage).....\$16.95

1997

- Emotional Intelligence* by Daniel Goleman (Bantam Books).....\$14.50
- The Dilbert Principle* by Scott Adams (Harper-Collins).....\$21.25
- The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Or der* by Samuel P. Huntington (Simon and Schuster)\$33.95
- The Future of Capitalism* by Lester Thurow (Allen and Unwin).....\$16.95
- The Foresight Principle* by Richard Slaughter (Adamantine Press)\$33.50
- Burying the 20th Century* by Richard Hames with Geraldine Callanan (Business and Professional Publishing)\$33.95
- Is Australia an Asian Countr y?* by Stephen Fitzgerald (Allen and Unwin)\$16.95
- Mastering the Infinite Game* by Charles Hampden-Turner and Fons Trompenaars, (Capstone)\$33.10
- The Living Company* by Arie de Gues (Harvard Business School Press).....\$33.95
- Learning to Plan and Planning to Learn* by Donald Michael (Miles River Press)\$35.95
- Tyranny of Fortune* by Reg Little and Warren Reed (Business and Professional Publishing)\$25.45
- Intelligent Leadership* by Alistair Mant (Allen & Unwin)\$21.25
- Factor 4: The new Report to the Club of Rome* by Weizsacker & Lovins (Allen & Unwin)\$21.25
- Cybercorp: the new business revolution* by Games Martin (Amacom).....\$42.45

1998

- Corporate Collapse: Regulation, Accounting and Ethical Failure* by F. L. Clarke, G W Dean & K. G. Oliver (Cambridge)\$25.45
- Japan: A Reinterpretation* by Patrick Smith (Pantheon Books)\$42.45
- Do Lunch or be Lunch* by Howard Stevenson with Jeffrey Cruikshank (Harvard Business School Press)\$49.95
- The Fourth Turning* by William Strauss and Neil Howe (Broadway Books).....\$26.95
- Imagined Worlds* by Freeman Dyson (Harvard University Press)\$40.50
- Scenario Planning: Managing for the Future* by Gill Ringland (John Wiley and Sons)\$51.80
- Learning from the Future: Competitive Foresight Scenarios* by Liam Fahey & Robert M Randall (John Wiley and Sons)\$54.00
- The Hungry Spirit* by Charles Handy (Hutchinson)\$29.75

*These books are currently unavailable

O R D E R F O R M

YES! Please send me the following books (please tick your selection)

Please add 10% to your order to cover postage and handling

Please find enclosed my cheque for \$..... made payable to Global Business Network Australia Pty Ltd; or

Please debit my Bankcard / Mastercard / AMEX / Visa / Diners

Card No.:

Expiry date: / / Today's date: / /

Name of company:.....

Name of cardholder:

Signature:

Your delivery address:.....

Additional copies of GBN Australia BookClub titles are available while stocks last!

GBN Australia BookClub Level 1, 71-73 Lithgow St St Leonards NSW 2065 Ph: (02) 9439 4255 Fax: (02) 9439 4511



GLOBAL BUSINESS NETWORK