THE FUTURE OF ORGANIZATIONS: MUSINGS OF A MANAGER

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ABSTRACT

*Dominant forces of the last century, developments in science and technology, the
presence of ideological rigidities and the complexity of organizational environment
will continually shape the future. Developments in human skills can readily catapult
organizations to their future. Four views of the future highlighted include: the future
is an extension of the past; the future is new; the future is now; and the future is
somewhat "past". In our attempt to (re)invent the future, we need a leadership skill
that will propel the organization to its future.*

Keywords: Future organizations, leadership, environment

INTRODUCTION

The history of organizations is a dull subject requiring the tenacity of students in all sectors of
human life. Humans have a rich story of organizations from cradle and have handed it down
through folklore and inscriptions. Wachter (2003) for instance, begins his reflections of the
past, present and future of demography by quoting the Ninetieth Psalm, in King James'
English translation of 1611. The Psalm is clearly connected to the reported study on
demography.

Our history is lived presently and so is able to connect to the future. The real benefit derived
from time and effort spent in futures studies is not a guaranteed prediction. It is the
resourcefulness acquired by carefully exploring many options, choosing the most desirable,
and framing step-by-step proposals aimed at turning opportunities to outcomes (Jennings,
2007). Three factors usually distinguish futures studies from the research conducted by other
disciplines (although all disciplines overlap, to differing degrees). First, futures studies often
examines not only possible but also probable, preferable, and "wild card" futures. Second,
futures studies typically attempt to gain a holistic or systemic view based on insights from a
range of different disciplines. Third, futures studies challenges and unpack the assumptions
behind dominant and contending views of the future. The future thus is not empty but fraught
with hidden assumptions. Kirby & Gary (2002) argue that religious futures scholarship focuses
on predictable occurrences in the future of religion, based on present observable trends, and
past trends in religion, compounded by expectations of wild cards or quantum leaps, in the
context of society's future as a whole, ranging from science to technology. They ask
adherents to get involved in bringing religious values to the future of these sciences and
technologies.

Swanson (1991) contends that two major forces have dominated events and shaped the
patterns of human history in the 20th century. Sometimes these forces are as subtle as they
are pervasive meriting their scrutiny. Firstly is the development of the sciences and
technology. Developments in communication, transportation and in the techniques of

production have been spectacular, yet with dire consequences at the same time. Environmental pollution in all forms is a case in point. Moreover the developments have been very uneven. Large groups of people, especially in agriculture, and important industries are relatively unserved, indeed even shortchanged. Secondly is the presence of ideological rigidities, forces which have altered the lives of nearly every member of the human family. These include totalitarian tyrannies, recurrent nationalism, racism and the frequent renewal of theocracies. It is seen in divided countries, barriers to intellectual exchange, abuses of secrecy, and expressions of tribalism. Interestingly, the greatest conflicts of the century have been between those who are still seeking the truth and those who are certain that they have already found it.

ROPPA (2003) on declared the commitment to increase durably its productivity to ensure availability and accessibility in quality and quantity of food for its populations and also raw material for industries, African small-sized and medium firms working in the processing of its local productions. Secondly, to organize its professions so that they become efficient to provide to smallholding services and goods they need, to defend their interests and concerns, to create essential partnerships with other professions and actors.

Daellenbach (1994) identifies several factors that contribute to today's complex environment including rapid technological advances, information explosion, and the widening gap between the developed and underdeveloped countries of the world. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the agricultural sector. The seasonal dimension of agriculture means the results of decisions made today regarding planting and chemical applications often take months to materialize. Likewise, decisions related to investments, market development, and agro-chemical research can take years, or even decades, to yield results. Other factors that contribute to complexity in agriculture include demographic issues (poverty, high population growth and income growth rates), dietary and consumer preference changes, government action, agricultural research, land use, and climatic changes (Pinstrup-Andersen & Pandya-Lorch, 1998).

Developments in human skills can readily catapult organizations to their future. The Internet, for instance, was conceived in the era of time-sharing, but has survived into the era of personal computers, client/server and peer-to-peer computing, and the network computer. It was designed before LANs existed, but has evolved to accommodate LANs as well as more recent ATM and frame-switched services. It was envisioned as supporting a range of functions—from file sharing and remote login to resource sharing and collaboration, and has spawned email and more recently the Web. But most important, it started as the creation of a small band of dedicated researchers and has grown to be a commercial success with billions of dollars invested annually (Leiner et al, 1997).

FOUR VIEWS OF THE FUTURE

Four views of the future emerge: the future is an extension of the past; the future is new; the future is now; and the future is somewhat "past". The first view, the future is an extension of the past, holds that the past logically extends into the future. Pettigrew et al (2001) hold a similar view in their argument that history is not just events and chronology. They confirm that it is carried forward in the human consciousness. The past is alive in the present, and may be shaping the emerging future.

The second view is that the future is new. This theme proposes a range of newness that may be predicted. This framework is linked to the first and only shifts in cases where there is a major innovation. All new ideas of organizations fall into this category. An innovative change (penicillin, for example) is so obviously superior that resistance is futile. The third

view is that the future is now. Musings such as "we're living in the future," or "the future is here," fall here. This is evident in the fulfillment of many past generation's predictions in our age. Self-fulfilling prophecies, as these predictions may be, have a tendency of being realized within the person's lifetime. The last theme is that the future is somewhat "past". This theme analyzes the speed of our progression. We are progressing at supersonic speed. There is no need to predict the future as J K Galbraith, the economist establishes, "There are two kinds of forecasters: those who don't know and those who don't know they don't know." Change is spontaneous, in fact, it is a dream. Some technophiles and business boosters' sound convinced that change not only happens but must happen ever faster in the future. If their analysis is right, and life from now on moves at the computer's pace, then humans have no more to hope for than to imitate the best machines—keep running at full speed until they at last break down and are replaced (Jennings, 2007).

THE LEADERSHIP ROLE IN FUTURE SCHOLARSHIP

Organizations have no way of knowing of the future except their leaders dream awake. Organizational leaders are judged based on how well they live their firm's visions and much more how they let others live those dreams. After telling how his 1974 vision of the future led to his becoming the world's richest man, Gates gives his new vision of the future: Rapid progress in computers and telecommunications will produce good things for everybody. He admits to a few worries: power failures and the loss of privacy. He envisions people using video cameras to document every moment of their lives to guard against criminal charges (Gates et al, 1995).

The lingering question is, "Does the future have a future?" Karl Popper, in his book *The Open Universe* tried to prove that the future is unpredictable: because one cannot anticipate the knowledge our descendants will have, one cannot forecast what they'll do. One cannot know what they will know, it would take them so long to know what they know that the future would already have arrived (Cornish, 2004).

Our premise is that a reflection on the past should reveal patterns and not solutions. Rolf (1999) affirms that the future of business lies not in selling products but in selling dreams and emotions. He identifies six markets: (1) the market for adventures; (2) the market for love, friendship and togetherness; (3) the market for care (e.g., pets); (4) the who-am-I market (products that proclaim their owner's identity, such as fashion, automobiles and accessories); (5) the market for peace of mind; (6) the conviction market, which is also referred to as cause-related marketing ("green" products, worker welfare, etc.) Needed, a crop of leader-managers that can consolidate **resources** continuously, human and others, to realize their visions and dreams here and now.

Gabor (1964) asserts that it is not possible to predict what will happen in the future, but it is possible to create the future through imagination and effort. More creative imagination both in short-range social engineering and in long-term visions of the future is possible and practical. Leiner et al (1997) indicate that the most pressing question for the future of the Internet, for instance, is not how the technology will change, but how the process of change and evolution itself will be managed. They do not foresee a lack of technology, vision, or motivation in the Internet's future but possibly direction and marching collectively into the future especially given the large number of its stakeholders. Remember, the future is past and its active reinvention is paramount.

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