

Scenario Planning: Investing in **Consciousness**



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SCENARIO PLANNING is a process aimed at anticipation of possible futures, and is of great utility in organizations and businesses. An array of exercises or knowledge-elicitation procedures help organizations tap into the implicit constructs governing current behavior, and assist in the development of contingency plans for meeting future opportunities and challenges.

I HAVE RECENTLY been developing some scenario planning strategies for mental health systems, pharmaceutical companies, and businesses, and have observed trends-in-progress which seem to point to some very interesting convergences and future scenarios. The following is a brief review of some of these elements and an emergent scenario (estimated course: 15 years) I have called "Investing in Consciousness."

Holistic health

The most significant trend in contemporary health care is the mass movement toward *holistic health* (aka, *wellness*, *primary prevention*, *integrative care*). This multi-billion dollar industry continues to grow rapidly, and many conventional allopathic-oriented health care systems are scrambling to develop alliances and services to meet this demand. Interestingly, the most salient personality in this movement, Andrew Weil, M.D., is an internationally recognized expert on organic psychedelics.

The serotonin story

The staggering success of Prozac and other selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors (SSRIs) as a treatment strategy for some emotional disorders, and especially as an economic force for pharmaceutical companies, has ignited interest in more refined neurotransmitter applications for both basic and clinical sciences. Advances in neuroimaging, psychopharmacokinetics, and cognitive science are accelerating, and new applications are on the horizon integrating virtual reality technology, holography, and fractal modeling with basic mind-brain research strategies.

Emerging metatheory

A new philosophical and epistemic metatheory is permeating the classical and social sciences. Reflected in constructivist psychology (Kelly, 1991; Mahoney, 1988), chaos theory (Masterpasqua & Perna, 1997), complex dynamical systems (Capra, 1996),

dissipative structures (Prigogine, 1980), Gaia (Lovelock, 1979) and holotropic theory (Grof, 1994), this emerging paradigm holds the promise of reconciling the Cartesian split between consciousness and matter. Brain will be seen as a critical but not exclusive structure embodying the *autopoietic* (self-creating) organization of *mind*, in an ongoing developmental process of knowing, or *cognition* (Maturana & Varela, 1980).

Reconceptualizing consciousness

Fritjof Capra and Stanislav Grof in their respective writings are particularly clear that this development entails a radical reconceptualization of consciousness. No longer is mind viewed as encapsulated by or restricted to brain, but is understood as a feature of all open, living systems, regardless of the presence of a nervous system. Reality is not knowable except as created by cognitive representation ("construction"). Anticipation occurs at all levels of life, and is predicated upon the abstraction of themes or patterns. All knowledge is thus invented, and reflective of the cognitive or meaning-making activities of the knowing organism.

Human ecosystem concepts

Gregory Bateson's "group mind" and similar human ecosystem concepts will assume new relevance as Western society struggles with violence, pollution, and political and moral corruption. Deep ecology will continue its nascent moves as an antidote to material authoritarianism. This ecological "web of life" perspective offers a humane and comprehensive conceptual system for approaching societal reform, one remarkably consistent with tenets of many mystical and spiritual traditions (Capra, 1975).

Psychedelic research

Related to the nascent whole system thinking is a renewed appreciation for all things psychedelic. Capra (1996) has cogently

observed: "The fact that fractal geometry and LSD appeared on the scene at roughly the same time is one of those amazing coincidences—or synchronicities?—that have occurred so often in the history of ideas" (1996, p. 150). The very impressive revitalization of basic and clinical research using psychedelic, empathogenic, and entheogenic compounds and situations attests to this renaissance. MAPS members have been instrumental in this movement, which seems to be steadily making its presence known in a variety of basic and applied programs.

Set and setting

The whole system and psychedelic views of consciousness and matter imply a refreshed sensitivity to the issue of contextual embeddedness, or as more often tagged in consciousness research, *set and setting*. Clinical psychiatry and other branches of medicine and health care will eventually come around to this awareness, stimulated by the holistic health movement, renewed respect for ethnobotany, and cross-cultural exchanges of traditional healing practices.

Economic pressures

Persistent mental health care economic pressures will continue to drive the search for greater therapeutic power (stronger therapeutic impact in a briefer period with less side effects and less cost) and will continue to stimulate a new generation of therapy models. Psychedelics have well-known mental amplification effects and are safer than most of the drugs currently employed in prescriptive psychiatry, and will get a "new look" accordingly as therapeutic agents. These will be based on a strategically integrated model in which psychoactive drugs (including psychedelics) are combined with specific therapist, environmental, and psychotherapeutic techniques to achieve a marked increase in therapeutic power. This process is actually an anamnesis or recovery of memory for psychology and psychiatry and no doubt will stimulate great interest in the very rich psychedelic research corpus from the 1950s and 1960s. Many established research programs are gaining increasing funding and governmental cooperation, and the quality of the research designs is top level.

Drugs for healing experiences

Pharmaceutical companies, still buzzing from the serotonin story and increasingly interested in dopamine and neurodynamics, will take notice of these trends and will begin stepping up basic research, the development of new psychoactive compounds, and reviews of their dormant patents on existing compounds. However, the new drugs will increasingly be "*context release*." The old model of giving psychiatric clients pills indefinitely in a mostly trial-and-error fashion will be abandoned in favor of a more focalized model in which the goal is to catalyze specific psychotropic healing experiences. The biological reductionism of the past thirty years in psychiatry will finally yield to the new constructivist metatheory. The "psycho" and "pharmaco" will no longer be uncomfortable bedfellows, but will be com-

pletely unified in the psychedelic therapy methods. The ability of MDMA and LSD to assist in integration of COEX systems (condensed construct systems of memories and emotions; Grof, 1994), for example, make them excellent candidates for inclusion in treatments aimed at psychological integration of traumatic stress complexes. Applications of psychedelic treatments for narcotic, cocaine, and alcohol dependency disorders, pain, terminal illness, and the full spectrum of neurotic disorders will demonstrate great promise in controlled clinical trials, and eventually will become part of standardized practice.

Shifts in professions

Psychiatry as a profession continues to contract, with many top medical school programs struggling to fill residencies. Meanwhile, the profession of psychology has exploded. According to the American Psychological Association, there are currently about 14,000 students enrolled in clinical, counseling, and health psychology doctoral programs in the U.S. alone, most of whom will become licensed health care providers. Roughly 2,300 new

clinical psychologists will enter the field in 1998. Psychologists are extensively trained in diagnostic and psychotherapy methods, as well as in psychopharmacology and neurobehavioral models. Several programs are underway in which psychologists are prescribing from a "traditional" psychoactive medication formulary. Given that nurse practitioners, podiatrists, dentists, and other non-physician health care providers have secured prescription privileges, it is almost a certainty that psychologists will be legally prescribing

psychoactive medications within ten years. The influx of rigorously trained psychotherapists eager to add prescription privileges to their skill sets will accelerate the synthesis of the new holistic treatment models. Due to overcrowding in the health care field, many of these practitioners will relocate to private industry.

Focus on reform

The political war on drugs will be conceded as a dismal failure, and harm reduction and other reform approaches will be given much more emphasis. There will be renewed focus on rehabilitation of chemically dependent individuals and inmates based upon the fact that current incarceration practices serve mostly to exacerbate the psychopathy and dangerousness of offenders, and wreck the lives of normal citizens busted on drug possession charges. A hero will eventually confront the political scene armed with data on offender recidivism, enforcement ineffectiveness and expense, and the sustaining of the criminal drug culture as by-products of thirty years of insane prohibition policy. Forensic and rehabilitation professionals will rediscover the early studies on the use of psychedelic reformative treatments for prisoners, helping them achieve corrective emotional, ethical, and behavioral experiences.

Reformation of religion

The Western hunger for an authentic, direct experience of

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the divine (mysticism) will fuel the demand for large scale reformation of religion. The didactics that currently represent many religious orthodoxies, failing to offer any substantive relation to God and *holos* for a skeptical public, will continue their erosion. It is no accident that the only religious groups currently attracting large numbers of new members are those with a charismatic tradition (e.g., Pentecostal), inherent transcendentalism (Buddhism) or innovation (cults). Off-shoots will follow the leads of many of the psychedelic churches of the 60s and the current practices of the Native American Church in reclaiming the use of psychedelic substances as a mystical sacrament for Everyman. The spiritual healing figure Deepak Chopra talks openly about his psychedelic experiences as helpful in extending consciousness, and they don't seem to have harmed his business sense, either.

Value of innovation

Business increasingly demands "knowledge workers" who can add economic value by innovation. Creativity and innovation will be the key drivers of business activity in the next several decades. I am familiar with numerous business enterprises and highly skilled individuals reliant upon the use of psychedelic or other consciousness-expansion techniques for the development of new concepts, ideas and practices. Of course, many of the seminal thinkers in our century have used psychedelics to catalyze their creativity. The new premium on innovation will prompt a fresh look at the voluminous data on the psychedelic impact upon creativity for scientists, artists, designers, and other groups. Strategic psychedelic-based creativity sessions will stimulate business practice within two decades. The demand for psychedelics for creativity application will be a prime factor in changing drug access laws.

Emergent Scenario

These trends converge in my scenario to an emergent property, in which the whole is greater than the sum of the parts. If the identified trends are valid, it seems reasonable to predict that we are well on our way to a *new societal relationship to altered states of consciousness*, including those invoked with the assistance of psychedelic substances. The synergy of the trends in business, religion, and therapeutics will power the transition.

Interestingly, the religious yearning and therapeutic interest were both present in the 1960s psychedelic movement, but they were insufficient to weather the repressive backlash. The movement was crushed for mostly political and economic reasons, as establishment leaders saw it as a threat to the status quo. But with the "establishment" now composed of visionaries like Andrew Weil, Bill Gates, Steve Jobs, and Ted Turner (not to mention the pharmaceutical industry) attitudes are changing. Business leaders will see potential profits in the psychedelic resurgence and its promise of enhanced innovation, and this will be the key driver of its legitimization to the mainstream. This in turn will contribute to innovation and progressive humanization of business practices.

This multidimensionality of trend elements serves to increase confidence in the scenario, as the developmental thrust will be boosted from many different societal sectors, therefore "buttressing" stagnation or regression in any one or two domains (and there are doubtless other domains of relevance here that we have not considered).

Conclusion

In a full scenario planning process, this would be but one of the many scenarios generated. Additional elements would be abstracted, operationalized, and tracked, with new combinations, weightings, and patterns sifted and re-sifted. All scenarios would be subjected to strenuous challenge. The outcome of this iterative analysis is an array of robust scenarios that are highly developed. They are typically rendered in multiple formats and schematics, important because the mode of representation can affect what one perceives in the scenario.

The scenarios are then used to guide strategy and deployment of resources. For example, the reader may wish to act "as if" the above scenario were to develop. What would be the impact on your activity? How might you modify current practices or allocate resources differently? By tracing out such implications, we sharpen our anticipatory abilities and are better prepared to roll with—not against—the changes.

The United States is nearing the end of the dubious era of state-sponsored repression of mind, and it is to be hoped that it can play a leadership role in a new global consciousness ecosystem, one in which principles of deep ecology, social reform, and liberation of activity and imagination take precedence. Like the proverbial spore on the wind, there is change in the air. Everyone breathe deeply. •

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