

10 Common 'Mistakes' to Avoid, & 'Needs' to Meet, When Seeking to Create a Better World

Because of the holistic nature of the approach being advocated, all of the areas below overlap & are highly interactive & interrelated. This was written in response to the Commonwealth Government's announcement of the **Australia 2020** Summit in Canberra, ACT (19-20 April, 2008: <http://www.australia2020.gov.au/>); downloadable as a PowerPoint presentation from: www.stuartbhill.com

1. Getting the usual 'experts' (mostly older males) together to talk & plan

- always leads to tinkering with existing (flawed) plans – ['rearranging the deckchairs on the Titanic']
- excludes most, including those affected by such plans & their fresh ideas

Need

- involve mostly 'different' people, including (if possible) those most affected
- start by focusing not on plans, but on values, beliefs, worldviews & paradigms
 - then feelings & passions
 - then, emergent from these, hopes, dreams, visions, imaginings, & creative thoughts
 - only then can 'design/redesign-based plans' be enabled to emerge (these proactively enable systems [structures & processes] to meet long-term to short-term, & broad to specific, goals, & to make systems as 'problem-proof' as possible)
 - then critically analyse, integrate, & flesh these out, etc
 - detail participatory opportunities, responsibilities, time lines, resource & support needs, means for monitoring outcomes (feedback), tracking progress, & for ongoing redesigning & fine tuning

2. Emphasising problem-solving approaches (back-end, reactive/responsive, curative)

- these tend to focus on symptom management & neglect the need to address the underlying maldesign & mismanagement roots of all problems [trying to make systems work that can never work!]
- they typically over-focus on measuring problems (a main strategy for postponing action - by those who benefit from the *status quo*),
- & on efficiency & substitution strategies, eg, improved application of pesticide & on finding less disruptive (but still purchased) substitutes, such as biological controls & genetically modified organisms
same story in other areas: medicine, energy, etc

Need

- redesign existing systems (& design new systems) to make them as problem-proof as possible
- & to enable effective change from flawed/defective systems to significantly more improved ones

3. Getting stuck in activities 'pathologically' designed to postpone (feared) change

- particularly measuring problems ('monitoring our extinction')
- endless over-collection of data (often 'justified' by arguments for 'evidence-based [vs. responsible] approaches')
- hearings, committee meetings, report-writing, etc [appointment to such committees may be to limit one's influence]
- most such preoccupations have NO follow-through, & usually only lead to more of the same

Need

- postponing pathologies must be recognised, exposed, contradicted & addressed; by taking responsible, timely, appropriate, collaborative action
- access to relevant data is needed to make responsible decisions; however, adequate data are often already available from other places, in other languages etc
- globally, billions of dollars are wasted annually unnecessarily repeating studies in new locations or with mischievous intentions (often related to perceived threats to existing commercial advantage)

4. Trying to solve problems within the disciplines or areas responsible for creating them; or with multidisciplinary teams of selected experts/authorities from favoured disciplines, with others excluded

Need

- genuine transdisciplinary, trans-competency & multi-experience teams, able to access disciplinary & specialised knowledge as needed
- include competencies relating to holistic approaches to design, sustainability, wellbeing, meaning & effective change processes

5. Patriarchal (them doing things to/for us, & us doing things to/for them) & 'driven' do-good approaches are rarely exactly what is needed

- these are generally not embraced by those being 'helped', or sustained after the helpers leave
- also, they invariably have diverse negative unexpected consequences

Need:

- inclusion of those most affected by proposed 'improvements'; as primary collaborators in change processes; & from beginning to end
- enables ownership, relevance, achievability, ongoing improvement & openness to unforeseen/surprise benefits

6. **Planning 'Olympic/mega-scale', heroic initiatives (from hearings to projects) with no follow-through or provision for ongoing support (more than just funding)**

- these invariably only reach the analysis, planning & preliminary stages; & then are abandoned
- most have unforeseen numerous long-term & widespread harmful side-effects

Need

- diverse, mutually supportive, doable initiatives that have long-term support
- consideration of opportunities for ongoing improvement & learning our ways forward collaboratively towards improved futures

7. **Over-focus on knowledge & data, & neglect of wisdom & experience** (most 'wisdom' cannot be supported by data; it involves working with the 'unknown' – most of what is – not just the limited 'known' – often in ways that rely on intuition, 'right brain' & gut feelings, etc)

Need

- to be much better at recognising, valuing & involving the wisest & most experienced in our society, & not so obsessed with 'cleverness' (whereas wisdom enables us to work with the 'unknown' & 'know', cleverness is limited to working with the miniscule 'known')

8. **Over-focus on 'productivity', profit & quick dramatic results**

- predictably leads to burn-out, only short-term, limited benefits, & often unexpected disbenefits (additional problems that are often initially unrecognised)

Need:

- much more focus on 'maintenance' activities [sustainable 'productivity' is a by-product of this]
- caring for one another (& other species & the environment)
- celebration
- venting feelings, & access to 'healing' support, etc
- prioritise time & resources for these activities
- sustained productivity is emergent from the effective maintenance of whole systems

9. **Homogenisation tendencies**

- these tend to result in construction of currently favoured 'norms' (for people, structures, processes, etc)
- failure to consider diversity and 'alternatives'
- creation of in-groups & out-groups
- also, inclusion, exclusion & blaming
- failure to benefit from the creativity that resides at the margins & in the borderlands of society

Need

- openness to appreciation of the value of heterogeneity & 'functional' diversity within all systems, with its opportunities for synergy, mutualism...
- lateral & paradoxical thinking & acting
- extension beyond the usual competencies
- relevance to core needs & possibilities (plus, 'Testing Questions' & 'Integrator Indicators' for these)
- a sense of inclusion, ownership, & a sense of place, etc

10. **Neglect of the arts**, or only token involvement

- over-focus on the sciences, technologies, business, politics, the professions, the media, & the other major institutions within our society
- as a result, the arts are poorly supported, regarded as a luxury or optional extra, an afterthought, or even irrelevant

Need

- recognition of the arts, in its broadest sense (including humour), as being an essential part of both the foundation & means for implementation of all efforts to achieve genuine & sustainable improvement

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