

June 2018

A HOARY OLD CHESTNUT

Way back in October 2015 I wrote about the difficulty of getting people to change their minds or activities and listed quite a few chestnuts in construction that I and colleagues at RML had long railed against with some success. In some instances of course we have been noticeably unsuccessful;

- Procurers failing to appreciate what they are buying and the consequences of taking up the cheapest offer,
- Engineers as well as other professionals displaying dismissive attitudes to improved practice and innovation,
- Lack of appreciation of civil engineering methods by environmental specialists,
- Over-emphasis on initial costs rather than whole-life costs,
- Miss-handling of soil when being stripped, stored and reused,
- Failing to optimise the use of site generated soil-making materials,
- Soil erosion leading to pollution in water courses,
- Over-specification and complication - of planting techniques as one example
- Inadequate preparation and over-compaction of soil
- Providing adequate design and resources for long term management,
- Poorly recorded management works,
- Ignorance about plants and fauna,
- Avoidable damage to mature trees and shrubs,
- Work being undertaken during the wrong season,
- Ignoring local provenance,
- Overuse of fertilisers,
- Hydro-seeding will mask inadequate preparation.



Well I must say that the item that was our 'top of the pops' in 2015 is still making the news these days, sadly all the wrong sort of news.

Many of the other situations in the list still do arise but I would say that they are becoming fewer and further apart. At least that is our impression at RML. Perhaps our newsletters are having some effect, it would be nice to think so. I would say that the introduction of Construction Environment Management Plans and Environmental Clerks of the Works are both having a beneficial impact on site performance.

I am told that on one project that we know of there are engineers who are totally unreformed so far as the environment is concerned. I am surprised at this and a little depressed too. And it's only Monday.

Everyone I meet complains about Procurement, yet in the last 3 years or so we have seen the development of an Institution of Procurement and Supply. It may be that the Institution has few members who are involved in construction.

No matter what the Institution of Procurement is doing, it still seems that staff in 10 Downing Street, and probably in other government bodies too, persist in calling for best possible prices, ie lowest prices but still expect the highest quality. Instances seem to occur on a regular basis that we, the public, do not get 'value for money' because contracts fail to deliver. So there is something wrong with procurement in the public sector.

Kind regards

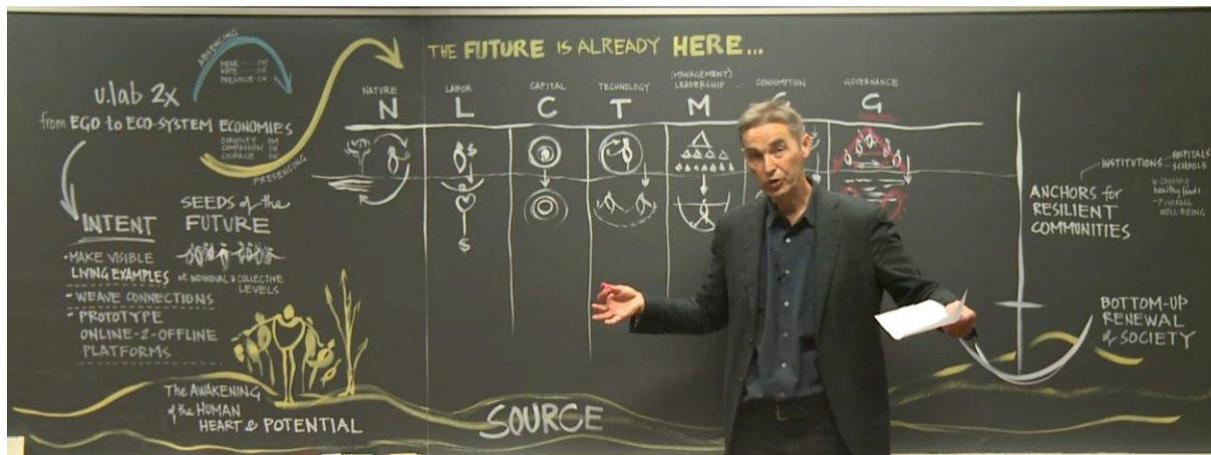
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THE FUTURE IS HERE

Building the future is all about leading and learning from the future



How can one lead and learn from the future? Having an open mind is a vital ingredient. Otto Scharmer, a well-known American writer on business matters, says that one should learn and lead from the future as it emerges in front of you.

He says that in order to achieve this it is necessary to recognise an opportunity, connect personally with what is waiting to emerge and then act quickly to develop momentum. I commented in February how Robert Browning thought that 'a man's reach should exceed his grasp'. Leading and learning from the future is all about extending your grasp.

In effect what Otto is telling us is that experience is an important element in teaching but it does little by way of encouraging leadership, indeed experience can be a restriction in many situations especially when one is dealing with stubborn thinkers. Obfuscation is another unwelcome trait that prevents progressive thinking and activity. Having an open mind is so important.

So I would agree with Otto that the future is here today and all that do is we have to recognise it. In my experience making the first step in what might be a new direction immediately releases the next

action. This kind of behaviour is as old as leadership itself but a lot depends on being emotionally involved.

Having a thread to connect your actions is a great help. The thread helps you to recognise the next step as it appears along your chosen road.

I experienced this in civil engineering many years ago long before Otto was writing about it when I was asked to design and manage projects aiming to improve the environment in areas which had been spoilt by careless mineral working. This had not been attempted before and most engineers didn't believe that people in other disciplines could teach them anything. I discovered that people who knew a great deal about soil and vegetation could and were more than willing to get involved with me. This turned out to be an emerging future for engineers and environmental scientists.

Along the way we have learned many lessons when we were faced with the challenge of improving the environment in which disadvantaged communities of people, fauna and flora were living. Not only did we as engineers adapt existing knowledge and practices to accommodate outside ideas but the 'outsiders' too learned a great deal about the benefits that society could gain from a wider use of their knowledge. Some thought that just collecting information about plants for example was sufficiently challenging, no more than stamp collecting really, but I offered them a new and exciting field in which to be engaged.

In my next newsletter I will be talking about what Steve Jobs thought about the future.

Kind regards

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