

## Towards Human and Social Innovation - Not Wanting to Know in Order to Create

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### Principal Topic

The formation of a venture relies, in part, upon the participants reaching a shared understanding of purpose and process. Yet in circumstances of great complexity and uncertainty how can such a shared understanding be created? If the response to complexity and uncertainty is to seek simplicity in order to find commonality then what is lost and what is at risk? Can shared understandings of purpose and process be arrived at by embracing complexity and uncertainty and if so how? These questions led us to explore the process of dialogue and communication of a team in its formative stages. Our interests were not centred upon the behavioural characteristics of the individuals in the 'forming' stage of group dynamics but rather the process of cognitive and linguistic turns, the wax and wan of ideas and, the formation of shared meaning. This process of cognitive and linguistic turns was focused thematically on the areas of foresight, innovation, entrepreneurship, and public policy. This cross disciplinary exploration sought to explore potential synergies between these domains, in particular in developing a conceptual basis for long term thinking that can inform wiser public policy.

### Methodology/Key Propositions

This paper explores the notion of engaging with complexity through a process of dialogue and reflexivity in order to discover shared understandings as the first step in venture creation. Each of the writers 'sense', but do not 'know', that there is some common thread that weaves the domains of innovation, entrepreneurship and foresight together. This paper was generated through a process, a trilogy, whereby understanding through complexity and uncertainty was assembled by twining dialogue and reflexivity.

Our study created a purposive sample of the enterprise creation process; in our case, a research enterprise. However, we argue that it could equally have been a commercial or industry enterprise being conceived in an uncertain and complex field. The research was conducted in two phases. The first phase was generative and the second normative. Phase one engaged in sequential dialogue limited by time and space. Email was the primary tool of data creation and capture. Each correspondent was set a limit of 300 words and each participant in the trilogy was given 48 hours to create the next link in the dialogue process. The dialogue was rotated in sequence between two active participants and one passive. The passive actor played an observer role noting the threads of the dialogue and the filtering of the respondent before becoming the active participant and passing the observer baton to the first dialogue originator and being the recipient of the previous receiver's correspondence. The sequence was rotated through three full cycles with the dialogue aiming to build toward agreement (without judgment on whether broader acceptance may be achieved) between the three co-researchers.

Phase two brought all three participants together along with their field notes on the threads and choices made in the dialogue and a reflexive process was used to analyse and distill reasoning and rational choice before concluding the process we had encountered. In a sense the research is an action phenomenology in that we sought to explore in real time the process of creating structures of shared consciousness in the human experience.

### Results and Implications

Both foresight and entrepreneurship rely, to an extent, upon innovation to break free of the conventional structurings of the world that are somehow wrapped into dynamics of failure or dissatisfaction. Both create innovative ventures that transcend present complexities and uncertainties and seize future opportunities. It

seems both 'counterintuitive' and 'proper' that imperfect understandings are the obstacles to and the portals through which shared understanding is created.

Providing an insight into the process of communication in the creation of shared understanding lays the groundwork for comprehending the dynamics. Furthermore, making the process explicit will perhaps be a useful tool for reviewing the way intended and unintended consequences of decisions and shared purpose can be fruitfully examined.

As well, we articulate some of the issues and complexities involved in developing wiser public policy which incorporates long term thinking, social and technological innovation, and an entrepreneurship deeply situated in both material conditions and discursive contexts. This work on building conceptual, linguistic and intellectual infrastructure for public policy informed by these synergetic cross disciplinary domains offers new pathways for others to build on in meeting the complex challenges of the 21st century.

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