Creating the Future
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Chapter 6: How can we create the future?

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> Wounded in the battle
> Lying in the weeds
> Immersed in contemplation
> Of history's evil deeds
> He offered up to free will
> Free will flatly replied
> Conscious evolution's all there is on your side
>
> Jeb Puryear and Johnny Dowd

> Harold: You sure have a way with people.
> Maude: Well, they're my species.
>
> Harold and Maude

There are good reasons to work together. Groups can accomplish more than individuals. No one can predict which of our efforts will trigger change and have a large impact, so many simultaneous efforts increase our chances. And by working together we insure that our efforts serve us all rather than a few.

But in years of schooling we learn to work independently. We read and study alone. We work with "personal" computers. Even in "groupwork" we collaborate with a few people who are like us in age and background. Then we take tests by ourselves. How can we create the future not just for ourselves, but for our communities and societies, and for our species?

We propose five major actions:

(1) design the future rather than plan or try to fix the past;

(2) think in terms of systems and interdependencies;

(3) uncover values, beliefs, and assumptions

(4) focus on communities and on education;

(5) find new ways of being together

(1) Design the future

There are four approaches we can take toward the future. We can say that it is outside our control, do nothing, and let it happen to us. Or we can view it as merely an extension of the past and just try to fix our mistakes. Or we can predict trends and plan to take advantage of them. Or we can create images of the

future we wish for and take steps to make that a reality—we can design. The last approach has the most potential for leading to the emergence of Generation 4 modern human.

There are many aspects of design. Here are some aspects expressed as principles.

• Design by carrying out these processes: understand and transcend the current situation; create alternative images of a desired future; compare and select the image(s) with most potential; transform the situation by bringing the selected image to life.

• Use reason and intuition, rationality and creativity. Use both sides of your brain.

• Think in terms of judgments and consequences, not right or wrong decisions. There are no right and wrong decisions in designing. By definition, design creates something new, something whose effects cannot be entirely predetermined. So to say that a design is right or wrong is to use the past to evaluate the future. Instead, learn if a judgment is wise by observing its consequences.

• Be proactive rather than reactive. Being reactive only fixes or eliminates things that exist. Getting rid of what we don't want doesn't give us what we do.

• Similarly, focus on doing the right thing rather than the wrong thing righter. Efficiency means doing more in less time for less cost, while effectiveness means accomplishing goals. Focus first on effectiveness. Otherwise you can waste much effort and create ways to more efficiently do things that are not relevant to your goals.

• Embrace diversity. Include members in the design team who bring as widely varying perspectives of the situation as possible. The designs you create will have greater potential to succeed in the situation and greater ability to change when the situation changes as a result.

• Think about solutions and problems together. Trying to figure out all of the "problems" before attempting to solve any of them is a trap. There's no end to it. Instead, use solution ideas to understand problems. Let the two inform each other. The result will be designs that are better matched to the complexity of the situation.

• Don't try to control everything. Most situations, and certainly those we are considering here, are dynamic and complex. So, designs need to be flexible and to have built-in mechanisms for adaptation over time.

(2) Think in terms of systems and interdependencies

In situations that are dynamic and complex, the consequences of actions are difficult to predict. Changing something in one area will affect other areas we may not have realized were connected. And the nature of effects in the areas we thought of, and those we did not, may be surprising. So, what do we as designers do?

We need to be systems thinkers. This means assuming things are related and connected until we have clear evidence that they are separate, rather than assuming the opposite. It means creating systems that match and fit the complexity of the situation and seek to change it rather than solutions to isolated problems. It means seeking greater differentiation and greater integration, and recognizing that it's desirable for things to become more complex as opposed to more complicated. It means testing and evaluating designs by looking at their widespread consequences, not just at what they do in an immediate time and place.

Systems thinking also means that we recognize that situations and designs are themselves interdependent. Just as a wooden bowl will change the taste of the soup it contains, the situation shapes the design as much as the design changes the situation.

These thoughts on systems design apply to a new electronic device or to an organization or anything else that we can create. What does it mean to design a system when we talk about society and Generation 4 modern human? It means creating an integrated set of socio-cultural markers, for example, a world view, a set of ethical and moral standards, ways to communicate and learn, ways to organize our everyday lives and relate to one another, ways to nurture our physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual wellness, the manners in which we engage in social action, acceptable practices for obtaining and utilizing resources, the nature of our economy, our attitudes toward science and the knowledge derived from it, our sense of aesthetics and the ways we seek to enrich the quality of our lives, our system of governance, our development and use of technology, and how we relate to nature. As we learned from studying our ancestors, we must achieve harmonious interaction among these for a new generation to take hold.

As we have throughout the book, we use *systems* here to imply wholes and interdependencies, not standard approaches. The situations for which designing is necessary are unique. Their parts are unique. The relationships of those parts to one another are unique. What they become together is always different.

Being a systems thinker means looking for and appreciating interdependencies, not applying single answers regardless of the question.

(3) Uncover values, beliefs, and assumptions

Few of our actions are random. We do things because we expect them to have certain outcomes. We walk one direction rather than another because there is somewhere we wish to reach. We choose foods at a restaurant or grocery because we think they will give us pleasure and better health. We vote for people because we believe they share our views on issues and will act in our best interests.

If our actions are based on goals, where do our goals come from? There are many factors we consider, consciously and unconsciously, when we form a goal. But even simple goals, like "make it to school on time today" or "save money" can be traced to underlying assumptions, beliefs, and values.

Say that you decide to go for a walk after dinner. You choose a certain route because you *assume* that it will be safe and that your heart and lungs will handle the strain. You select certain shoes and clothing because you *assume* they will be comfortable and will protect you in the weather. You may take the walk because you *believe* that walking is good for you, that exercise will improve your health, and that better health will lead to a longer life. Given these beliefs, you choose to walk because you *value* fitness and longevity.

These assumptions, beliefs, and values are often not readily apparent to us. In fact, the "communication revolution" seems to have done more to hide them than to expose them. We are bombarded with more and more information daily, but rarely is that information accompanied by a clear sense of the source, of what perspective was being taken and what evidence claims were based on. We seem to be getting more and more information but less meaning, more channels but the same voices, more media but the same messages. And throughout we get simple stereotypes while we ourselves, our relations with others, and the situations we encounter daily are not simple or sterotypical. They are dynamic and complex.

This is okay if we want to maintain the status quo or accept the directions that those few people with wealth and power will take us. It is insufficient and unacceptable if we choose to create a desirable future for all humanity. For that we need to expose underlying assumptions, beliefs, and values, find

common ground among them, then use that common ground to design.

It is not up to us (the authors) to determine what future should be created or what values should be primary. But there are a few basic guidelines that our understanding of systems and design suggests. We'll share three here. We consider them to be key ethical principles to follow as Generation 4 of our species emerges. The first extends a point made in Chapter 5.

• Design *with* and *within*, not *for*. It is the right of people to guide their destiny, to take part directly in decisions affecting their lives. Therefore, designing is something for everyone to do, not for an outsider to do for others.

• Think bigger and farther ahead. Because of interdependence, our actions affect things beyond our personal setting and circumstances. Therefore, in designing we need to think globally and well into the future. We need to think in terms of a global culture and make judgments based on their impact on future generations.

• Look for AND relationships rather than OR. We can value individual freedom, social justice, AND ecological harmony, not trade one for another. We can respect cultural tradition AND the artist working at the cultural edge. We can rely on the wisdom of the past AND be inspired by the future.

(4) Focus on communities and on education

We have said that it is important to design the future rather than just plan for it or try to fix the past, to think in terms of systems, to uncover values, beliefs, and assumptions, to design with and within, not for, to think bigger and farther ahead, and to look for AND relationships rather than OR. Underlying all these principles is a shift of mindset from the individual to the collective and from the present to the future.

These are signs of the emergence of Generation 4 modern human, and they already can be seen in many areas: a new view of interdependence and wholeness; an appreciation of dynamic complexity and what it implies for our actions; a new sense of spirituality and connection with nature; a heightened economic and social interdependence through global communication; groups exploring truly participative democracy; calls for ethical guidelines for new science and for technology that serves the common good. We're asking different questions and getting different answers about ourselves and the world.

How these developments will interconnect is not clear, but it is imperative that they do. Otherwise

each will fail to take hold and the patterns of Generation 3, already in decline, will persist. It is, therefore, no exaggeration to say that the future of our species is at stake in this interconnection.

We don't know what connections will be made or how, but there is a most promising answer to where—in communities and in education. The most likely place for the kind of work that is necessary to bring the various developments together is an authentic, sustainable community, one of people who are intimately intertwined in their everyday lives and committed to creating a healthy environment for themselves and for their children.

Within and across these communities, education is key. Today we have predominantly *maintenance learning*. We school our children in what is already known and expect them to take it on faith that this knowledge will be relevant in their future. We slice the world into subject areas and separate what can and cannot be studied into grades. We impose more and more testing when students have not memorized enough facts and figures or have not gained the ability to apply standard rules in known situations.

Maintenance learning offers little help in creating the future. Instead, we need to create educational systems and approaches that are evolutionary, for example: evolutionary learning to help learners of all ages face unexpected situations, find and build connections; approaches that nurture respectful and caring relationships rather than competition, that offer a wide range of learning approaches and resources; tasks that learners themselves see as relevant; and goals that focus on evolutionary consciousness and the capacity for conscious evolution.

(5) Find new ways of being together

A question remains. What do we do in communities and in education that will lead us toward conscious evolution? In other words, what approaches will help us make connections, find common ground, create images of desirable futures, and select and plan to make those images come to life? It seems necessary for us to find a new way to be together. Our interactions today are guided by a mindset of competition. We fight for the floor, insert ourselves in momentary silence, and attempt to convince each other of right (me) and wrong (you). This discourages listening and meaningful collaboration, the very things necessary for us to create a future together.

The words *dialogue* and *conversation* are now being used to describe a different way of being together. In a conversation, groups of people focus on particular issues and are guided by carefully worded triggering questions. They take time to think before speaking. Everyone has an opportunity to share their thoughts. Everyone else listens. Time is important, so a conversation may last a week or be continued over years rather than stay within the artificial constraint of an hour.

Conversation leads to a deep understanding of each others' perspective. Rather than saying "no, you're wrong" participants ask "what do you mean?" They listen and learn. The common ground that results is deeper, richer, and firmer. It allows whatever the group builds to stand more strongly.

Conversation opens up creative capacity. Truly listening and reflecting allows participants to see connections more clearly. It opens them to possibilities rather than closing them off to views that they do not immediately share. It allows them to see AND rather than OR relationships.

Participants in a conversation often find themselves in a special state of consciousness. Time seems to move at different speeds, emotions are heightened, and an unexpected level of energy emerges for both the individuals and the group. This is the same experience that athletes have when everything comes together and they perform at a high level. It has been called peak experience, liminal state, and flow.

Imagine communities around the world engaged in conversation, each designing the future for itself. Each recognizing its interdependence with every other community, thus leading it to find means to collaborate. A global culture based on self-design. Conscious evolution. Generation 4 modern human.

New Agoras

We may find inspiration in the Agoras of classical Greece. The Agoras were places of assembly where democracy was practiced. Each year forty assemblies were held and citizens had the opportunity to deliberate and make decisions about issues that affected their lives and the lives of their communities. The proceedings were governed by a democratic constitution, and this constitution brought everyday citizens into an active role in the service of the common good. Perhaps we can bring the Agora concept and experience back to life. True participative democracy could become the guiding idea for our society and the engine for conscious evolution. The Agora as an image of a self-designing community might capture our imagination and help us see possibilities.

Core Ideas

6.1. Designing is different from planning or trying to fix what exists. It involves imagining new possibilities.

6.2. Designers use reason and intuition, depend on judgments rather than decisions, are proactive rather than reactive, and embrace diversity of viewpoints.

6.3. Most situations of importance are dynamic and complex and require systems thinking.

6.4. To be able to work together we need to uncover and understand our own and each other's assumptions, beliefs, and values.

6.5. Communities and education have the most potential for making connections among new developments that will lead to Generation 4 modern human.

6.6. Conversation represents a new way of being together. It is a powerful tool for designing, systems thinking, and uncovering assumptions, beliefs, and value. It offers much to the development and ongoing work of communities and education.

6.7. Conscious evolution might be manifested in a global culture of community self-design—new Agoras.

Activities

A. Think about an action you took recently. What did you intend to accomplish? What were your general and specific goals? What assumptions did you make? What beliefs and values guided you?

B. Reflect on recent discussions you have had in which you did not agree with another person's point of view. What assumptions did you make? What assumptions did he or she seem to make? What values and beliefs led you to your point of view? What values and beliefs likely led to his or her point of view?

C. If you woke up tomorrow morning and found yourself living in a community dedicated to self-design and to creating a better future for its children, what would you see? What actions would you take on a daily basis? How would you relate to other individuals, other communities, and to the natural world? What would you value most in living in that community?