Part 3

Embedding Reality
Editors’ Note: Embedding Reality

by Kurt April

Many have sought to understand the dynamism of modern life through the lens of “generic constructivism.” Complexity, multi-leadership and multi-management, around the globe, are not only poorly understood, but very poorly implemented – and, unfortunately, the true and maximized benefits of good intentioned public and private processes and systems are never fully realized. It was Bennis who wrote: “Leaders do the right things, while managers do things right” – in the modern world both are needed in an integrated manner (we can’t have one without the other). In this part of the book, the authors deconstruct the myriad of paradigms, perspectives, cultures, traditions, approaches and its underlying discourses across the world: the dispositions discourse, the contextualizing discourse, the subjectivity discourse, the narrative and dialogical discourse, the process and systems discourse. Too often, dominance of one paradigm over the other leads to partial success and even failure.

Where the process of setting objectives and achieving results is inconsistent, and where the intentions are not aligned across teams or departments, stovepipes are reinforced, dominant paradigms win out the day, and cross-cutting issues do not get resolved. As a whole, organizations become more bureaucratic, less able to change, not necessarily because their parts are individually badly organized, but because there is not adequate communication and alignment between the parts and between organizations and their environment (including stakeholders). This same issue arises at every level – from nation, to province, to district, to locality, to organization, to person. Effective processes provide feedback loops, linking policy, strategy or objectives to measures, and link measures to actions that people care about, to ensure that intended results are produced and key objectives are delivered. Keith Morrison, in his chapter on complex change and, in particular, the monopolistic position of Companhia de Electricidade de Macau (CEM) – the company which provides electricity to Macau – describes experiences (not dissimilar to many utilities and even public sector organizations around the globe, which are facing, and have faced, deregulation) where multitudes of committed and professional
employees are striving to deliver modern services with inadequate management systems and processes. Keith clearly articulates the effectiveness of current CEM leadership who understand how to action their intentions, and leadership who are convinced that preparation for a new external situation begins by changing the internal environment of an organization. However good the people and committed the leadership, though, if the systems and processes that organize them does not work, the organization will not be fully effective. The weakness is in the ability to translate compelling vision, policy and objectives into the programs and projects that deliver results/outcomes “on the ground” – both inside the organization, as well as with stakeholders. And if people, on an individual level, are not willing to renegotiate their identities, they too will not be fully effective.

Exponential increases in everyday complexity and the speed of change, enabled through techno-scientific changes and transparent and efficient management techniques, accelerate the pace at which new regional, and transnational, opportunities and risks emerge to challenge us all. Well implemented systems, practices and ways of thinking about embedding the burgeoning global realities jointly seek to embed visionary leadership ideas, good management practice and achieve key objectives for sustainable and effective communities, organizations, societies and countries. Authors of this part of the book propose various reasoning architectures to make explicit those areas and practices where stumbling blocks can be removed, for disseminating best practices and for sharing knowledge. We are encouraged to not only think systematically about organizations, but more importantly of organizations as the processes of people “relating to each other” and “interacting with each other over time.” Hongyan Xu, in her article Chinese Culture: Its Impact on Knowledge Sharing, succinctly describes the way in which Chinese people relate to each other, and how time-honoured traditions and philosophical legacies permeate the everyday lives of Chinese people. Hongyan presents her article as an offer to the Western world – a gift for possible enrichment of Western perspectives and practices, particularly in knowledge management and knowledge distribution, through a deeper understanding of harmony, encouragement of a learning attitude, appreciation of wisdom and accumulated knowledge, respect for elders and those who have gone before, the respect for people’s capabilities in various aspects of their lives, the seeking of shared intent and Guan Xi, and the continuous practice of dialogical identity. She does however caution that some of the dimensions of Chinese culture, such as hierarchy consciousness, subtlety, indirect hinting and conversational accommodation, lengthy time-based trust particularly of outsiders, alienation of “others” and acceptance before questioning, have the potential to problematize knowledge sharing capability.

In China, emotional intelligence, social intelligence and spiritual sensing, manifested through sensitivity to interpersonal relations, cooperation and the desire to avoid conflict, are perceived differently than in the Western and
Northern world. These highly developed sensing and intelligence capabilities have the potential to act as facilitators of change-through-people, as opposed to the predominance of change-through-systems in the West (and proposed for developing regions by the West over the last 50 years).

Ambassador Kochar presents a geo-political view of diversity across the planet, unpacking the dominant religious and cultural influences on political, business and everyday life. The individual’s contextual role and choice are examined within the historical and cultural social practices and action, and the individual is challenged to focus on how s/he cognitively engages, individually, in the construction of knowledge from collective social construction. If done well, the opportunity exists for individuals, organizations and many parts of the world to leapfrog much of the parochial approaches currently practiced. The overall message of this part is that the world may expand its “reality,” by listening more carefully to different voices, dissenters, resisters and “others” who may reveal important messages, and this could be critical to the effectiveness and speed for embedding “expanded reality.” Organizations in emerging economies and/or transitional societies, in fact, have the opportunity to leapfrog organizations in other industrialized nations, by implementing joined-up governance and service delivery from the start. We use the term “leapfrog” to mean overtaking industrialized nations – as opposed to playing “catch-up” – to take a position of primacy, by both recognizing and living out what is really going on in the world now and capitalizing on its wealth of advantages, e.g., demographics and inclusive diversity, national and humankind’s history, multi-cultural heritages, geographical location, motivation for change, best practice reconciliatory stance and transformation, and the world’s roots in spirituality – this is why some pundits avoid using the word “developed” vs. “developing” countries because it presupposes that countries like South Africa, China, India, countries in Latin America and other emerging and transitional economies and societies are not more developed in certain human competences than industrialized nations. There is thus much for all to learn, in the spirit of collaboration in order to co-create not only a liveable future, but a desired one (a future inclusive of all).

One particular type of parochialism is unpacked by Cathy Havener Greer, in which she discusses the unintended consequences of precedent, stability and continuity in the rule of law in American legalistic society, in her article: American Legal System Diversity: Stare Decisis in a Changing World. Cathy posits that the legal profession itself, including the judiciary as well as attorneys, are key players in maintaining social stability, and therefore serve to embed continued discrimination, especially of women, in the legal profession in the USA. She raises some worrying consequences of a continued status quo, namely, biased legal treatment of American citizens, the dilution of democracy, perpetuation of conditional/privileged law and degradation of the desire to serve.

In fact, the one-dimensional legalistic approach to governance is the brunt of critique offered by Kai Peters, Kurt April, Marylou Shockley and Vinay
Dhamija, in their chapter Diversity and Corporate Governance. By broadening and expanding the dominant, control approach through engaging both external and internal checks and balances, they argue that organisations will achieve the desired transparency improvement and governance strengthening – by highlighting key barriers. By comparing practices, structures and policies in both industrialized and emerging economies, Peters, April, Shockley and Dhamija illuminate potential grey areas of accountability and transparency that breed corruption, and loss of knowledge-competencies.

Reading this part of the book will make it obvious to the reader that plural constructivism is a needed philosophy, and an essential managerial/leadership competency. “Reality” in modern cultures actually takes the form of a conglomerate of multiple realities, a conceptual landscape of socio-cultural-political-religious worlds. As was the case with ancient cultures, through their lived experience our authors posit that these modern worlds or frames emerge and are embedded through varied narrative themes, oral myths, stories, dialogical identities and symbols.