

# **'THE FUTURE AND ITS FRIENDS'**

## **Changing Paradigms of Diversity**

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# 'RETROSPECTIVE COHERENCE'

My search for meaning and learning brought me to HR in educational organisations like La Trobe University. This fits with my values - **a core business of learning and a focus on people.**



# THEMES

1. How do we see, sense and understand the future?

2. What might different perspectives on the future tell us about how to improve our organisations & their sustainability?

3. To encourage diversity, how do we move beyond still marginalised Equal Opportunity rhetoric to managing difference well?



4. The importance of diversity in building strong, peaceful communities as well as productive & creative organisations.

# PLANNING THE FUTURE?

‘Encouraging and accepting unplanned, diverse, open-ended trial and error and differences is the key to a better future, rather than conformity to a central vision’

- *Virginia Postrel*

The next Tomorrowland?



Picture © Disney



# ADAPTING FOR THE FUTURE

There is no longer  
'*THE*' strategic plan -  
our future is complex



we need strong shared values  
that change little over time



and the ability to see and adapt to  
the waves of change.

# FOCUS ON LEARNING

Nowadays, we expect our leaders - political, community and organisation to predict the impossible. We blame them. We expect them to predict change and know what to do.



When things go wrong, we rarely ask 'how did I contribute ?' or 'How could I do my job differently so the Leader can do better at creating the organisation that I want'?

# WE CAN ALIGN

We can have clear strategies in place to help us all do better.  
We have many ways to mobilise people towards a goal:

- ★ strategic plans that set a vision for all to enable alignment
- ★ incentives, systems and structures to support whole of organisation thinking
- ★ development programs and delegations to encourage, build and reward self-responsibility behaviours
- ★ rewards and encouragement of strong leadership and transparency across the organisation

# HR LEADERSHIP ROLE

HR Departments of Universities, perhaps more than any others, need to liberate, rather than control people's talents yet -

*We work as if we can and do know the future*

We cling to notions like:

- ★ there is a best person for any job
- ★ financial management is transparent and rational
- ★ we can predict skills and staff needed for the future

*Notwithstanding all this, we should congratulate ourselves on how well we are adapting to change!*



# EMBRACING A DYNAMIC FUTURE

Is the future uncontrollable change where all we can do is learn to enjoy the bumpy ride of adaptation?



**I BELIEVE THE FUTURE  
OFFERS MUCH MORE!**

It can be our organisations working to create learning, networks and relationships, where people become the best they can!



# MY EXPERIENCE

When I reflect on how I have managed 'the future', the things that made the difference in my experience are:

- ★ the mistakes I have made
- ★ the life choice lotteries I have won
- ★ the intuitions I have followed and
- ★ the opportunities I have chosen and foregone

*IN MY LIFE, TIMES OF CHANGE MAY HAVE BEEN THE MOST DANGEROUS BUT ALSO THE MOST REWARDING.*

# FACING THE FUTURE

We have built an organisation change and development program which includes:

- ★ a new Strategic Plan cast within 4 simple and clear objectives - we are using it as a living document
- ★ increased community contribution with focus on greater opportunities for those previously underrepresented in higher education
- ★ a leadership development program to build feedback and cross organisation connections to face change in an organic way.
- ★ a changed structure to focus more on our people.

# HOW DIVERSITY CONTRIBUTES

**RESPECT** is about acknowledging a common humanity, and a preparedness to treat everyone, no matter how different their worldviews, with the dignity they deserve because of their humanity

**UNDERSTANDING** implies an ability to grasp what someone else is saying in order to get to the heart of what they are trying to communicate

Doing this requires a willingness to put aside one's own preconceived notions in order to **APPRECIATE THEIR WORLDVIEW**





# DIVERSITY AS A REALITY

*Learning to 'connect with others, explore one another's points of view, work out agreements about how to proceed with the task at hand, learning not to be afraid of conflict, learning how to talk about hard things, to take risks, to be wrong'. (Thomas and Ely 2001)*



These are the core skills of diversity and also the core skills of teamwork, effective negotiation, and community building. They develop and enhance peaceful and enriched civil societies.

# DISCRIMINATION PARADIGM

In Australia, we often see our goals in terms of what we are '*moving away from*'. Our organisations and communities need to eliminate discrimination by *obeying relevant laws*.

*Discrimination, both conscious and unconscious, remains* in our organisations – hopefully less so in universities.



*Direct discrimination has become clearer* through case law and legislative change.

We are still learning about *indirect discrimination!*

# EQUAL OPPORTUNITY PARADIGM

We also need to have a *'moving towards'* paradigm.

*Proactive Equal Opportunity is becoming more sophisticated in recognition of the complexity of factors that contribute to disadvantage.*



As we become more confident and take risks, we will be able to state more clearly what we see, hope for and expect in embracing difference and diversity.

# VALUING DIVERSITY PARADIGM

Valuing diversity represents a shift from the '*social case for equal opportunity*' to the '*business case for diversity*'.

Benefits expected from working with this paradigm include:

- ★ better relationships with customers people feel more included because the organisation has 'people like them'
- ★ customers doing active outreach amongst people from their own ethnic backgrounds communities.
- ★ additional languages become obvious assets that people from different cultures often bring.



# SUSTAINABILITY PARADIGM

We are building a **new diversity paradigm** that enables us to leverage and utilise its value in **organisation sustainability**.

This means **learning from individuals who are different, and learning the processes and skills of working** with difference. These skills combined with improved mindsets at all levels will achieve full value from this paradigm shift.



It also means **learning to be open to and truly understand** (in the sense of appreciating another's world view) what other people are trying to communicate.

**Just achieving this simple set of skills could create a revolution and improvement in most of our organisations.**

# NEW OPPORTUNITIES

We are beginning to see more connections and paradigms underlying different metaphors in our organisations. Learning how to change these metaphors is often the basis for finding ways to achieve what we want.

The idea of '*diversity*' has grown from the simple notion of 'a fair go for everyone' through a range of stages, to now - where we see that working well with diversity is an essential capability if we are to get the best for and from our organisations, our staff, and our customers.

