

Strategic Thinking from a Regenerative Paradigm

There seem to be four paradigms for thinking about strategy. This calls for discernment of which paradigm one is using in order to be whole and complete in what we consider and reject. They have different methods but also very different results. Not only for the strategy being developed but the people doing the leading. Some paradigms degrade caring, up and down the business and across the entire system. Some give extraordinary results to the systems and each person in it.

These paradigms affect the choices we make and the outcomes we are able to have in every facet of our lives from parenting and education, to business and governance. They dictate what we accept as worth examining and embracing, where we put our energy and resources, and what we see as even possible. This set of choices starts early in life with how children are raised and educated. And it frames how we as leaders engage the workforce and even customers.

Four Paradigms of Strategic Thinking

I call these paradigms extract value, arrest disorder, doing *good* and evolve capacity.

Extract Value strategic thinking works on getting the most out of what we can access and using our skills for the benefit of the business owners/investors, with insufficient thought to the return other stakeholders receive beyond a transactional one. The strategy may even be seen as only one possible. They tend to see assets and people as interchangeable cogs in a wheel, like machine. They may offer training of skills as if they are improving a machine.

Arrest Disorder works primarily on imperfections, variances from targets or standards. Arresting disorder is based on standards and best practices defined by the organization, which is focus on planning. The driver is to keep the organization task oriented and looking for measurable outcomes on waste reduction and reduced harm. The leaders tend to see people as fixed in personality and intelligence and can only be changed by external interventions. It tends to work from fragmented view defined by problems and shortfalls of previous and current efforts. The disorder may be internally or externally focused, using measures we developed through an *arresting disorder* paradigm.

Do Good, as a paradigm, draws from culturally accepted ideals (e.g. competencies, values) for defining what is worth promoting or contributing to. It is based on the belief that humans can grow and change, and become more able overtime. Doing Good is defined by generally agreed on societal ideals, defining the parameter of what it means to do *good* — defined by one’s social group. It is where social rules come from and how “good manager” guidelines are formed. They are seen as universal and applicable to all persons and situation. They are based on the intention to create a meaningful contribution to something we, and others, value. And to contribute to communities we care about. It is why philanthropy and being a volunteer is rewarding. It is a heart or *feeling* orientation and assessed in terms of its affect on the recipient and organization. When we see a group in the world that we think we can help, we are most likely engaging from a ‘doing good’ paradigm. *The key is achieving standardized, generic ideals of good. The down side is the bias we have for what is right and good for others. It leads easily to projection our ideals, which we then proselytize and imposing our set of ideas on others.*

Evolve capacity is about developing capacity in every person and team—that is, his or her capacity to continue to evolve themselves and their capacity to contribute to systems in which they are nested. Managers focus on the *essence* of a set of buyers and communities who is “right in front of us,” now, today. Given who they are, a manager seeks to develop their potential, bringing out their essence and potential with new offerings that support their own capacity evolving. They seek to grow them in a way that Essence is able to be expressed. We seek to be fully present with a group and act in the specific situation, seeking a to enabling them to uniquely be more and achieve more. When we enable a buyer node to discover something that might be called ‘their own essence’ in an engagement and we watch how new capacity emerges to take on an ever-bigger challenge, we are likely working on evolving capacity. We may see ourselves as a research and development department for them or even as their strategy group.

The *evolve capacity* paradigm requires a much greater ableness to see potential effects of our actions. It is most often a capability that has to be developed in us in order for us to exercise it more often and more completely. It also requires moving away from standardized ideals and projections of our standards on others. Self-directed responsibility arises when we connecting them to external effects and their potential to contribute to them.