

# “Qualitative Approaches to Sustainability Assessment”

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## Presentation Outline

1. Why qualitative?
2. Sustainability – briefly
3. Issues of theory, method & practice
4. Qualitative approaches
5. Case study application
6. Innovation?

CONTEXT: Resource industry site selection/IA studies  
(Mobil, Texaco, Chevron, BHPBilliton, Woodside)



## Why Qualitative?

Noting – the name of the game is  
QUANTITATIVE and QUALITATIVE



## The reason for Qualitative Approaches

*“To Find credible and meaningful ways to negotiate understanding and responses across diverse forms of thinking and acting in the world.”*

To acknowledge the value of methodological pluralism for insights and decision making.



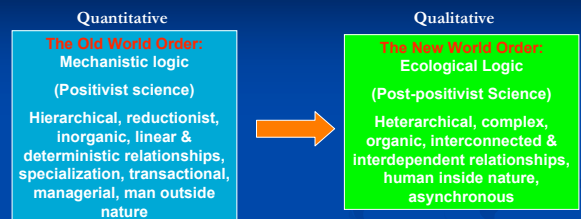
## Implications of the ‘*Cultural Turn*’ in Sustainability Assessment Methodology

*“The basic sense of landscape (as text), as a visual and horizontal surface with cultural meaning, is being interpreted in a range of methods, styles and modes, which express various emphases and the other disciplinary backgrounds of the *interpreter*...”*

Mariusz Czepczynski, 2008, p. 30



## A great transformation of our era The positivist to post-positivist paradigm shift



- IA Response: The emergence of triple bottom line-based assessment
- The powerful cultural legacy of positivist logic in TBL assessment

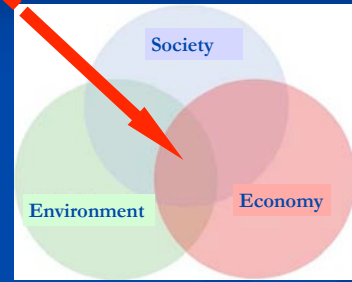


## On 'Sustainability' – briefly!



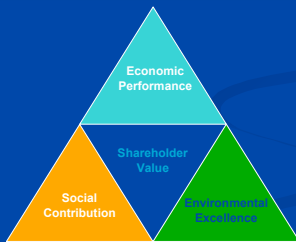
## Starting with The Conventional Triple Bottom Line.....

The bit that counts...the middle bit...



## Conventional Corporate Sustainability Framework

“..... to deliver economic performance, environmental excellence and social contribution.”



## SUSTAINABILITY

Beyond the Triple Bottom Line?

- Quadruple Bottom Line – **GOVERNANCE**
- Quintuple Bottom Line – **CULTURE**

*J Singleton 2004*



## So Why Culture?

“The culture we create and sustain with our networks of communication includes not only our values and beliefs, and rule of conduct, but also our very perception of reality... Human beings exist in language. By continually weaving a linguistic web, we coordinate our behavior and together bring forth the world.”

Fritjos Capra (2002)

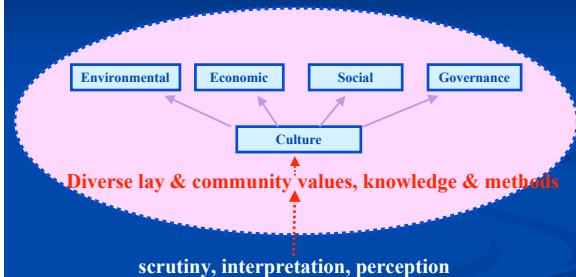
*[language acquisition, applied linguistics, cognitive development, developmental psychology, social psychology, culture studies, social anthropology – within cultural framing contexts]*



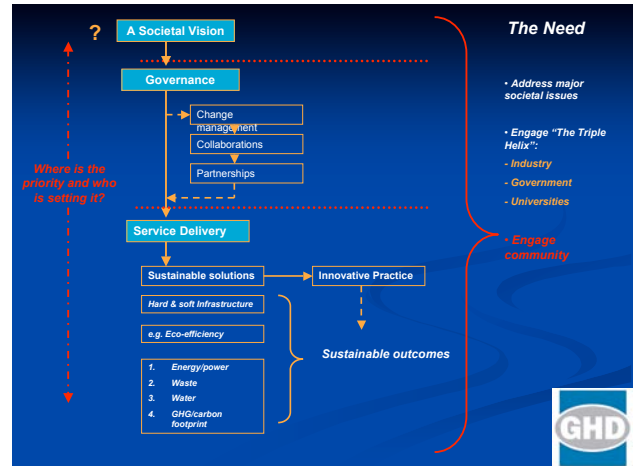
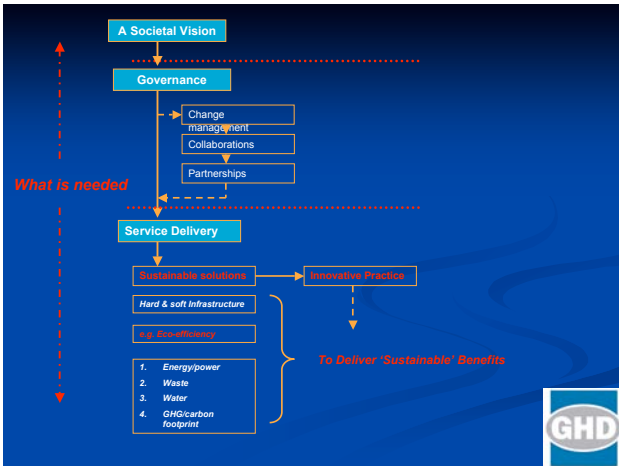
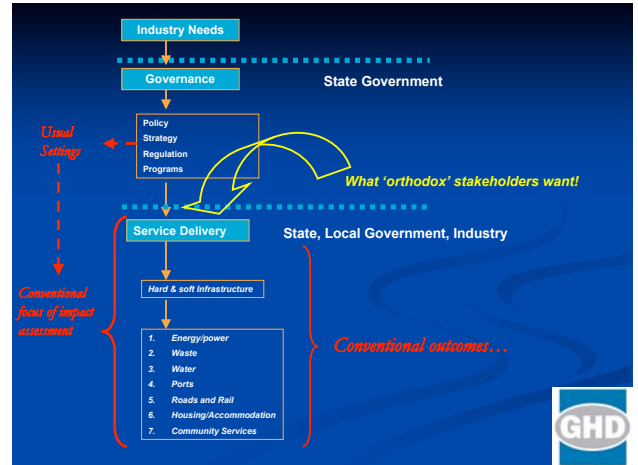
*J Singleton 2004*

## The Quintuple Bottom Line and the 'Cultural Turn'?

DIVERSE EXPERT 'COMMUNITIES OF PRACTICE' VALUES, KNOWLEDGE, METHODS



# The setting for Sustainability (or impact) Assessment...



## Issues of Theory, Method and Practice in Orthodox Sustainability and IA



## IA: The normative approach

- Applies rationale of science
- Pragmatic management instrument
- Essentially 'a means for getting to do what you want'
- Key – deals in trade-offs

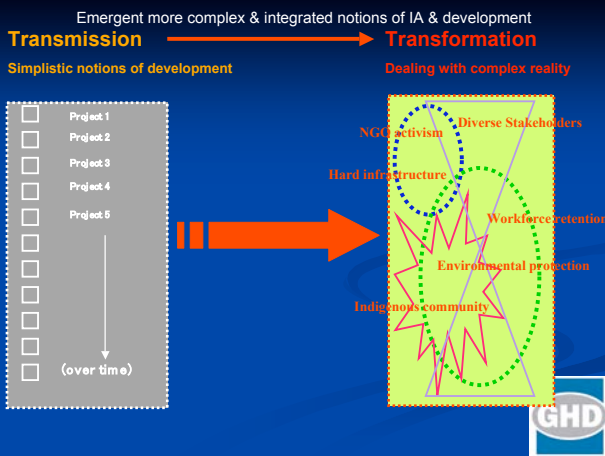
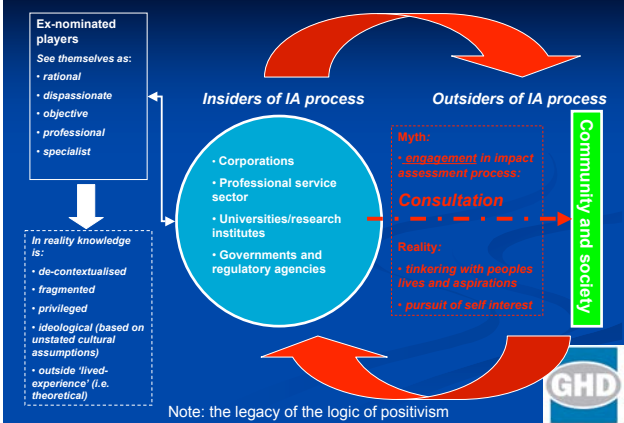


## IA and science based 'license-to-operate' assumptions

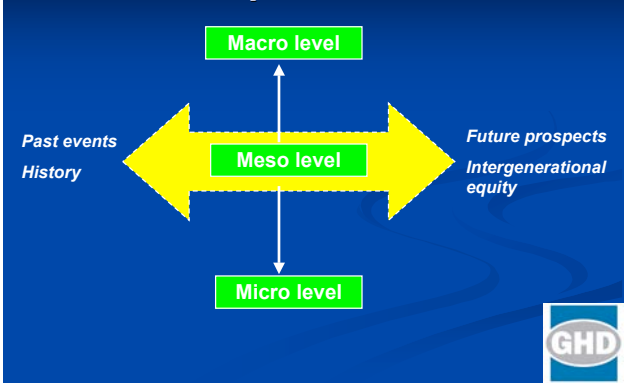
- Objective
- Rational
- Specialist
- Systematic
- Value free
- Based on best knowledge and knowledge systems



## Grapples with knowledge building, engagement & decision-making



## Emergent new world order implications for IA practice: Interpreting & integrating the three-tiered societal realm & temporal dimension



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## Qualitative Approaches and Techniques

Principles derived from practice



## Qualitative

*Employs:* ethnographic analysis/attitudinal research approach

*Reliant on:*

- Explanation and description
- Narrative
- Interrogation
- Dialogue, discussion and debate
- Iterative learning/double loop learning
- Conclusion making
- Consensus reaching
- Soft rating and value scales (intuitive and subjective)



## Qualitative

*Key elements:*

- Capture 'community based' views, values and insights
- Everything captured and recorded to validate ratings and conclusions reached
- Narrative explanations of all ratings made and decisions reached
- Process allows the false mutual exclusivity between social, environmental, economic to be overcome and appropriately addressed



## Qualitative

Allows various 'intangibles' to be explored and taken into account:

- 'Hidden community sentiments' and issues
- Temporal issues
- Equity issues (intra-regional, inter-regional, intergenerational, inter/intra community)
- Community fears, anxieties, hopes and aspirations
- Regional 'story telling' to inform 'sense making' – in reaching decisions and imputing community values

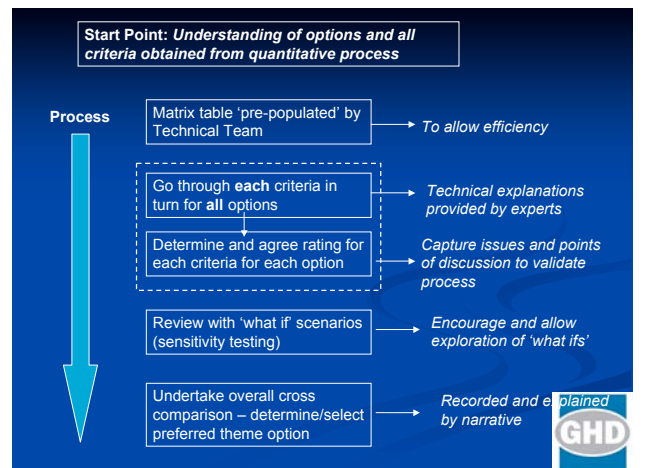
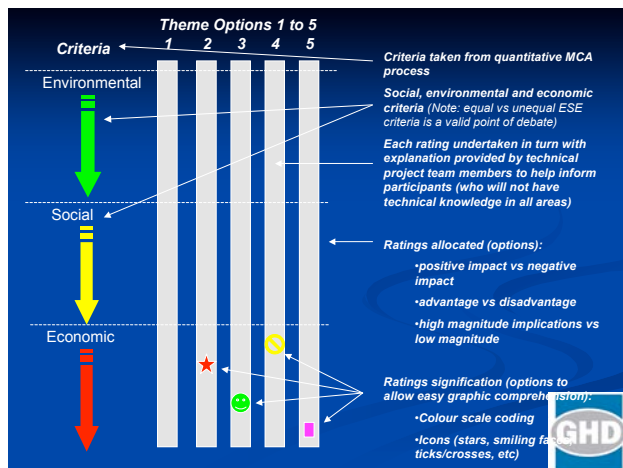
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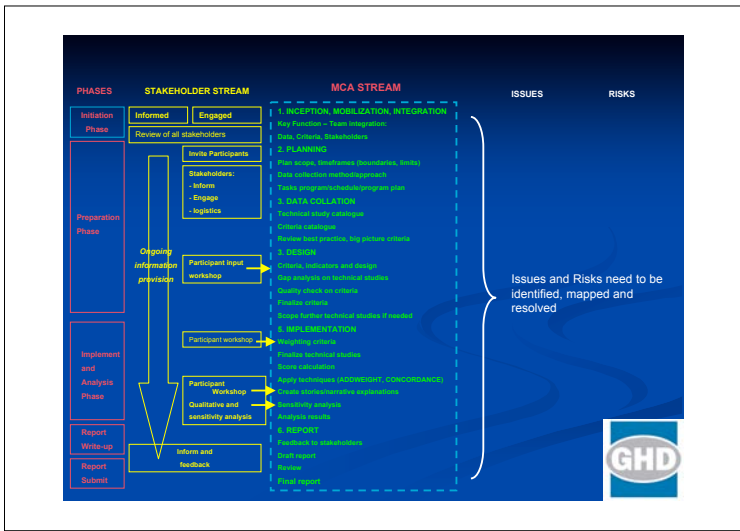
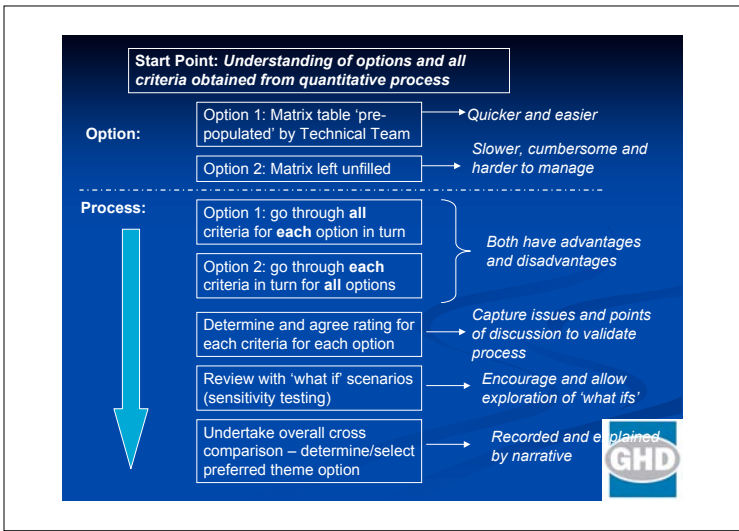


## Qualitative

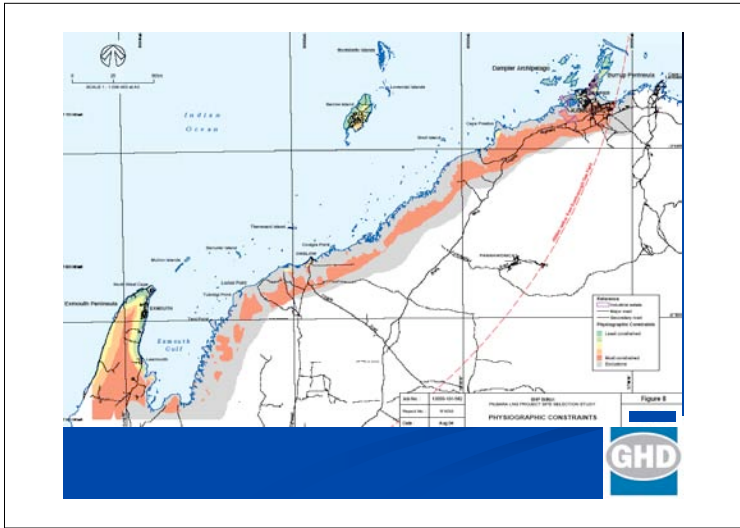
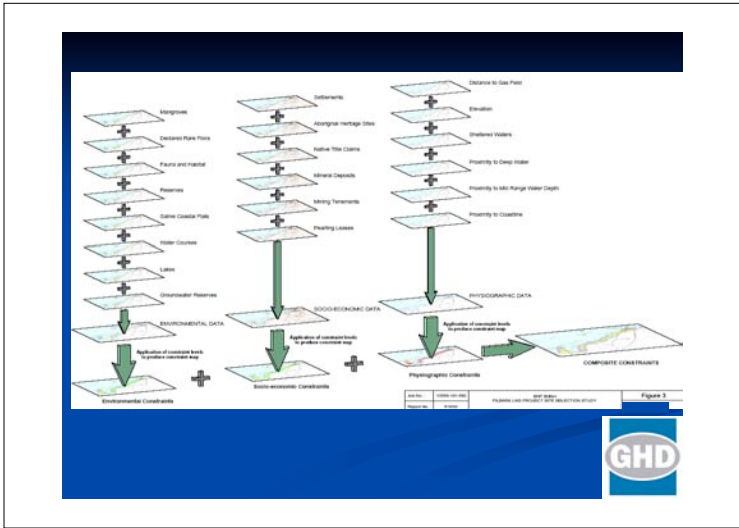
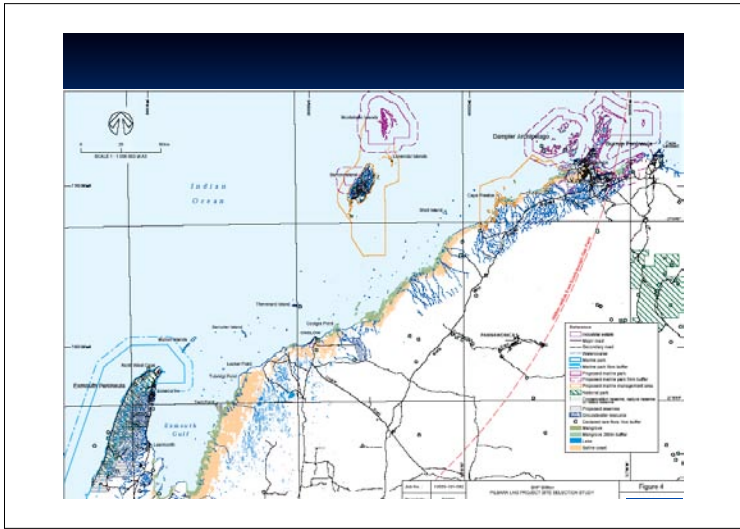
*Other points:*

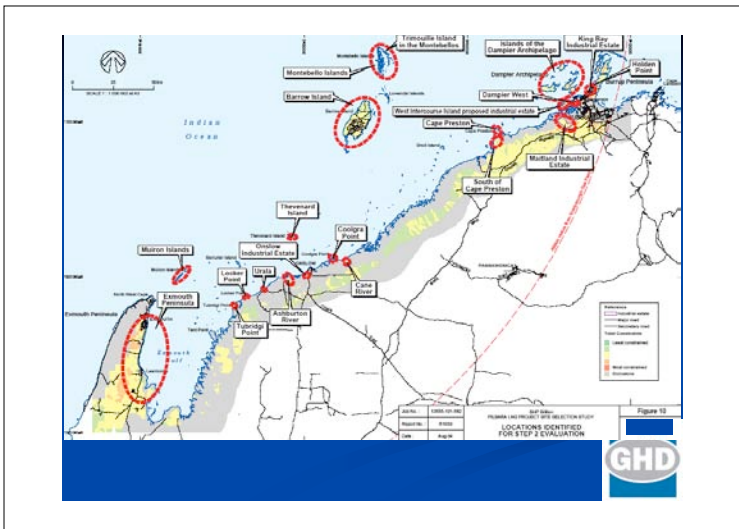
- Decisions and conclusions remain the "decisions and conclusions of the Group" – this is its legitimacy
- Seeks to engage from the group
  - regional knowledge
  - lived experience of participants
  - holistic overview (rather than siloed expertise, or narrow interest focus/self interest)
  - community insight





## Case Study BHP Billiton Pilbara LNG Site Selection Study





### Qualitative

#### Qualitative Rating Matrix – Example Only

Criteria	Option 1	Option 2	Option 3	Option 4	Option 5	Option 6	Option 7	Option 8
Major Advantage	High	High	High	High	High	High	High	High
Minor Advantage	High	High	High	High	High	High	High	High
Neutral	High	High	High	High	High	High	High	High
Minor Disadvantage	High	High	High	High	High	High	High	High
Major Disadvantage	High	High	High	High	High	High	High	High
Major Positive	High	High	High	High	High	High	High	High
Minor Positive	High	High	High	High	High	High	High	High
Neutral	High	High	High	High	High	High	High	High
Minor Negative	High	High	High	High	High	High	High	High
Major Negative	High	High	High	High	High	High	High	High

### Rating or Scoring Scales

High

Major Advantage

Minor Advantage

Neutral

Minor Disadvantage

Major Disadvantage

Low

Major Positive

Minor Positive

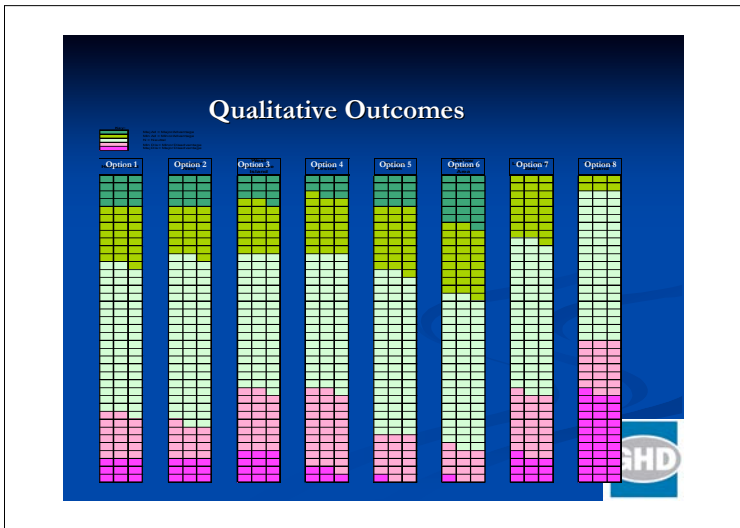
Neutral

Minor Negative

Major Negative

or

No numbers!



### Innovation?

#### Some Thoughts

### Moving Practice Forward...

What is “community” and better representation in the process:

- The value of reference/focus groups
- The value of key informants
- The tension between.....

## Innovation?

Running **Quantitative** along side **Qualitative**:

- Covering metrics and unquantifiables
- Applying additional rigour of CODMEM
- Achieving some 'triangulation'
- Taking a risk!

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## Innovation?

Degrees of Trust and Freedom in the process

Allowing **ONLY** stakeholders to:

- Select and/or confirm sustainability criteria
- Undertake criteria weighting
- Input qualitative rating/scoring
- Inform sensitivity values

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## Innovation?

In the use of **Community Focus/Reference Groups**

Apply following principles:

- Engage at the outset
- Provide all technical support possible
- Select through 3<sup>rd</sup> party referrals only
- Avoid 'elite capture'
- Membership open knowledge
- Legally absolve from any liability – whatsoever
- All practical attempts to gain representivity

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## Innovation?

**Peer Review Groups or Panels**

Apply following principles:

- Engage from outset
- Independent membership
- Observe whole process
- Freedom to comment in any way – internal only
- Undertaking to respond to all advice given
- Without obligation or prejudice

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## Innovation?

Tailored elements to workshop events

Apply following:

- Rapid decision-making techniques in group discussion
- Real-time capture of narrative explanations and decisions
- Constant feed-back to verify and ensure ownership

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## Innovation?

**Designing and Adapting on the Run!**

Need the following:

- Constant scrutiny and transparency
- Honest explanations and carefully considered responses to change

Hence: systematic ongoing validation through independent review by expert panel

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### Example: [www.ilovebees.com](http://www.ilovebees.com)

Website address flickered across a cinema advert (2002):

- No rules or instructions provided – just a set of coordinates and times


**Result**

- 600,000 engaged over following 4 months – to resolve the mystery
- mass collaboration of intelligence and creativity
- set-up blogs, bulletin boards, websites, instant chat rooms, etc
- gathered, published and shared information
- sifted, sorted analysed, debated theories, planned, split into teams

**What Actually Happened**

- thousands somehow collaborated
- no-one in charge, no one met, didn't know each other
- high level of coordination – no formal organization existed
- 1 message board clocked 50 posts/30 seconds for first few weeks
- 1 million message board postings in 10 weeks

Result – *complex, coordination and accurate outcomes somehow happened*




### The fourth great transformation: The cascading ICT revolution

e.g. Web2for Dev – Participatory ICT for Development:

- The web as information & networking platform
  - Enable harnessing of collective intelligence
  - Architecture for participation
  - Creates rich user experiences
  - Offers re-mixable data sources
  - Builds complex artificial intelligence capacity
- In essence (Utopian view)
  - An open source medium
  - Fosters engagement, interaction, collaboration, & community (real & virtual)
  - With the user repositioned to the centre
- Power and Security? (Dystopian view)
  - In 2007 Britain's MI5 Intelligence agency warned 300 TNCs of E-espionage

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### The Implications for Sustainability Assessment

*The Wisdom of the Crowd is coming!*

From: "Cogito ergo sum" (I think, therefore I am)  
To: "We think therefore we are!"

- 20th Century industrial assumption:**
  - Ideas come from specially gifted people – supported by:
    - specially trained people
    - working in special places
    - in bureaucratic organizations
    - with special titles
- 21st Century post-industrial reality:**
  - Ideas will come increasingly from:
    - wide ranging people
    - multicultural forms and styles of communication
    - working in geographically dispersed or local locations (virtual & real)
    - flexible combinations of different knowledge and skills



### The Great Transformations of Our Time

- Science and shift from positivism to post-positivism
- Sustainability Imperative
- Energy Revolution
- Information Communications Technology Revolution
- Globalizing economy and market system
- Rising nations – BRIC, MENA, Latin/Islamic Alliance
- Shift of global power to the East
- Relative decline of the West



## The Great Challenges for 21<sup>st</sup>C Business

1. Global climate change
2. Peak oil and twilight of the 'carbon economy'
3. New consumerism and new consumption
4. Globalization versus Regionalization
5. Geopolitical risk and domestic political volatility
6. Bottom of the Pyramid



## Realities and Opportunities – On the Edge of Chaos

1. Transitions with levels of change at least as large as the industrial revolution
2. Whole industries will disappear
3. Others will entirely transform
4. The past will be little use in understanding the future
5. Adaptability with speed will be key
6. Key Question: Do you have FUTURE FIT?

