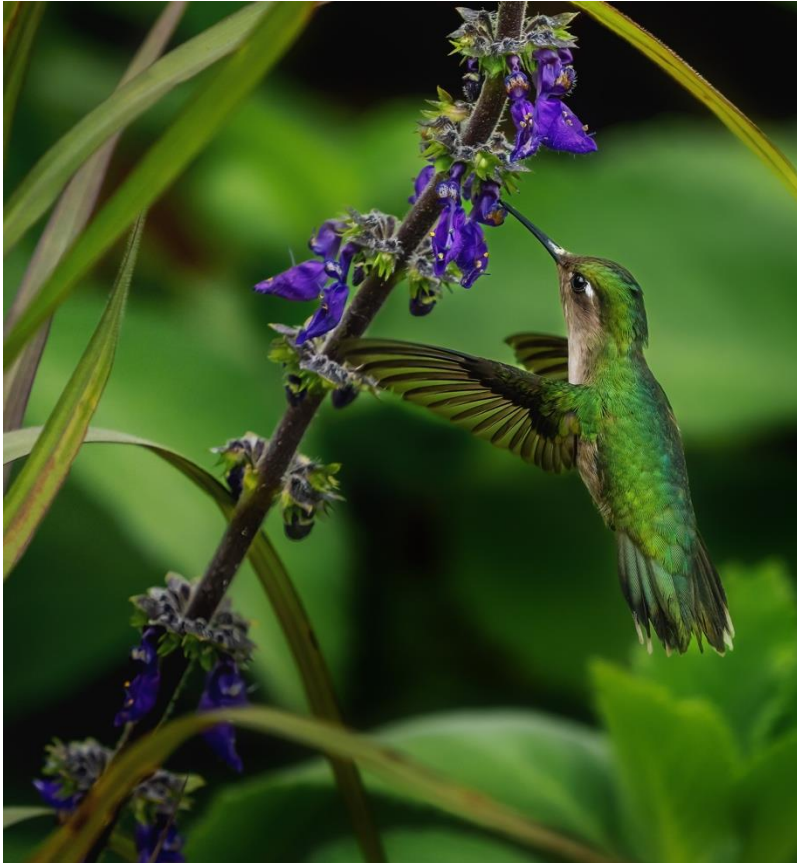


Jan De Visch  
Miguel Pantaleón  
Namrata Arora  
Tony Korycki

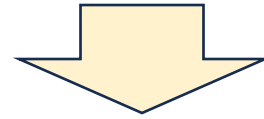


opening the box  
systems thinking for transformative conversations

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UBIQUITOUS INFORMATION ACCESS  
NEAR ZERO COST FOR NECESSITIES  
REDUCED CO<sup>2</sup> EMISSIONS  
REIMAGINED EDUCATION  
ABUNDANT FRESH WATER  
IMPROVED SANITATION  
HUNGER ELIMINATED  
ILLUMINATED WORLD  
CLEAN ENERGY  
TRUE DEMOCRACY  
ABUNDANT MATTER  
REDUCTION IN CRIME  
DISEASE ELIMINATED  
INCREASED LONGEVITY  
ENABLING THE DISABLED  
ECONOMIC ABUNDANCE  
REIMAGINED HEALTHCARE  
IMPROVED HUMAN PERFORMANCE  
WORK FOR PASSION VERSUS LIVING

*Why?  
Do we collectively create  
the outcomes we want?*



*Systems thinking is in essence going  
deeper into the causal mechanisms  
behind issues and addressing them in  
a way that can be transformative*

TECHNOLOGICAL UNEMPLOYMENT  
EXPONENTIAL SURVEILLANCE  
EXPONENTIAL INEQUALITY  
THREATENED DEMOCRACY  
SECURITY AND PRIVACY  
PROGRAMMED PEOPLE  
ARTIFICIAL WOMB  
GEOENGINEERING  
DEHUMANIZED  
PANDEMICS  
CIVIL UNREST  
RELATIONSHIPS  
LOSS OF FREE WILL  
SIMULATED SENSES  
HUMAN DESKILLING  
CONFIRMATION BIAS  
AUTOMATED CENSORSHIP  
ABDICATED RESPONSIBILITY  
ABDICATED CONSCIOUSNESS



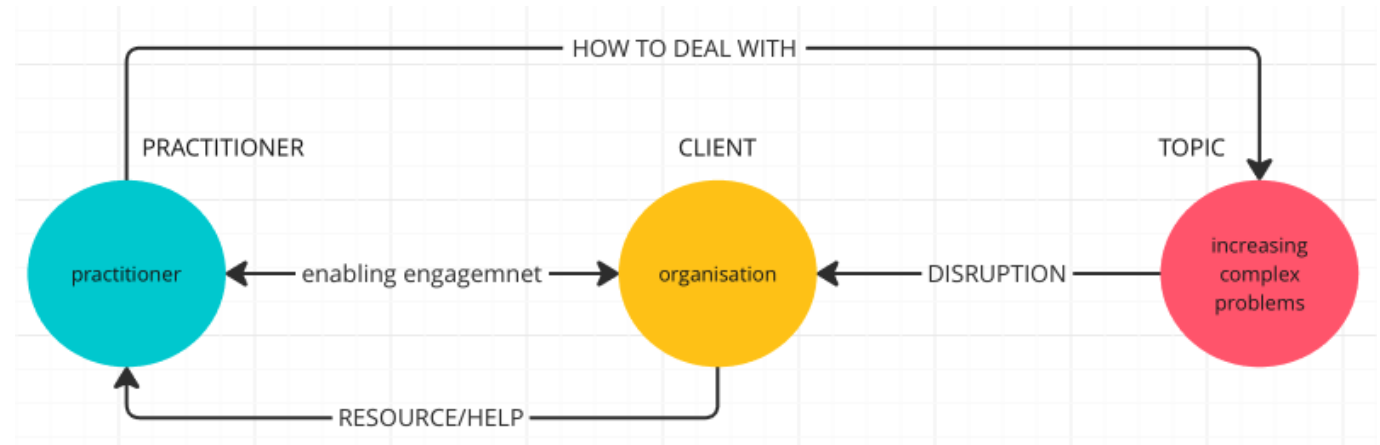
how can Systems Thinking help in solving complex organisational issues?

how can we improve accessibility of systems thinking/practice?

how can I [as CEO] engage with this 'alien' thinking/approach

[as CEO] how can this really help me?

[practitioner/user] what does real systems practice look like, on the ground?



- (1) How do we convey that which exists is an organized whole held in balance by its parts?
- (2) How do we focus on ongoing interaction between subjects or events where both change as a result of their interaction?
- (3) How do we detect and describe (shifting) patterns of interaction over time with an emphasis on pattern, not motion?
- (4) How do we evaluate systems in terms of their inclusiveness, differentiation, degree of integration or equilibrium?



why a book, why an essay?

inspired by writer Ursula K Le Guin, and her 1988 essay “The Carrier Bag Theory of Fiction”, which challenges notions of what fiction means, and how it’s told,

a different way of thinking about a story and its actors, and how we bring a ‘carrier bag’ of cultural artifacts, thoughts, beliefs and values to stories,

the essay explores fiction as a ‘system’ implicitly, considering our social conditioning and lived trajectory - the way we might think about a story,

Le Guin questions what constitutes context and perspective, a central point being that our thinking is deeply rooted in our culture, language and experience.



“opening the box” an essay to provoke thinking

incorporates a unique dialogue between Pandora and her grandmother

profound insights into understanding reality, questioning narratives, and navigating our interconnected world

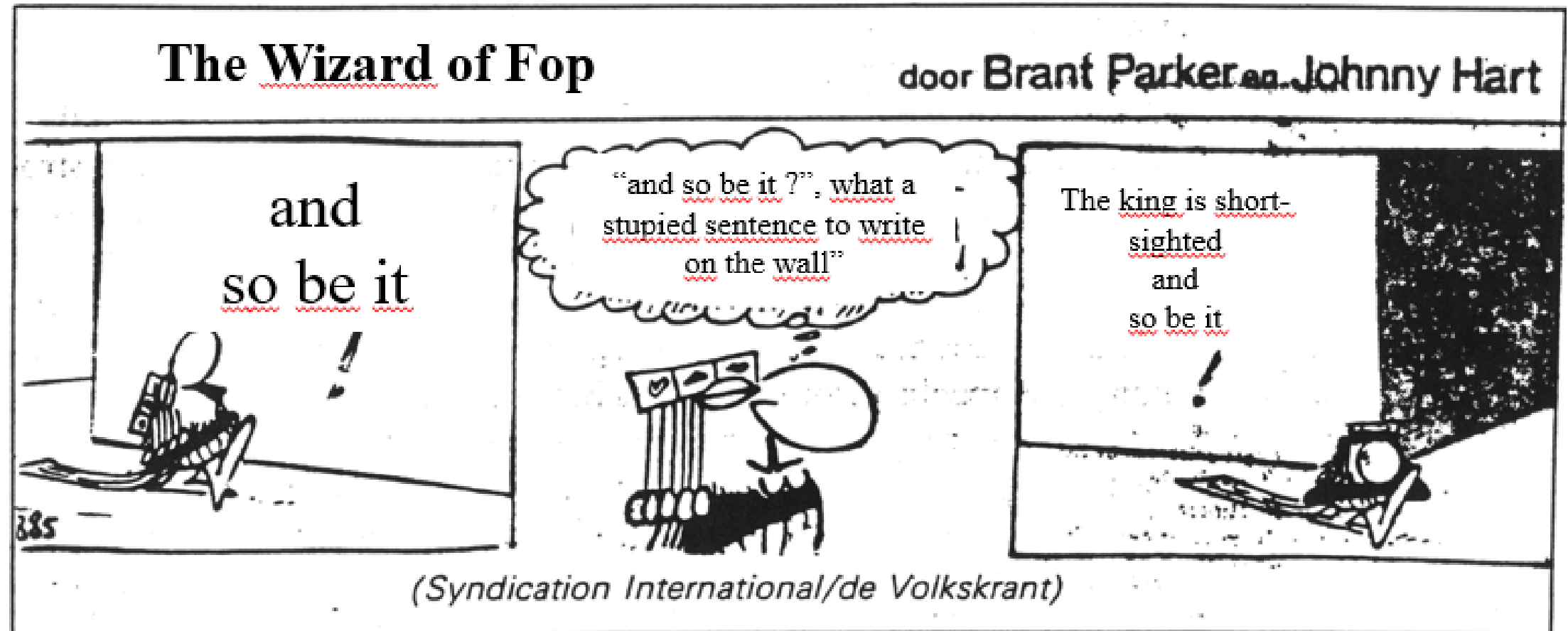
centred around four layers of systemic thinking

- parts and wholes,
- emerging change,
- coherence, and
- metamorphosis

## reflection

- [breakout - 20-mins – groups of three]
- what is your experience of communicating ‘how you do what you do’?
  - concepts ... in strategy, in marketing, etc
  - pick two of the questions below:
    - what is the difference between how we communicate to various people – practitioners, C-suite, business, public service, and third-sector stakeholders?
    - what works well for sense-making?
    - what leads to good decision-making?
    - what doesn’t work?
    - what resources are helpful to you when you practice?

“the most important thing in thinking is to observe what isn’t thought about.”



"opening the box" is not just a book; it's a tool for opening dialogue around the quality of one's thinking.

use it in various formative contexts to explore the inner place from which you operate, get closer to the essence of daily work, and make better sense of your world.

## questions? questions ...

... perhaps there are better ways of improving our lives and our environment, but what are they?

... can the major problems of our time be addressed with this way of understanding reality?

... how might we think systemically and critically to make sense of the challenges faced in domains such as our economic or food systems?

... how might you think and act systemically and differently in your future?

... what has the fable of Pandora to do with modern human decision-making, or raising consciousness of a situation, or aiding sense-making, or arriving at accommodations about what changes to pursue?

... should we take alternative perspectives about how Pandora has been represented, about the decisions and actions she took, or why she's been portrayed as she has?

... why should we need to change our approaches?

... where are the leverage points for change in systems, and how do they relate to the meta-systems of governance, education, nature, and planetary resources?

... how might the ever-curious Pandora have explored the richness of her situation in a systemic way, and what might have been alternative outcomes?

... what would the understanding of context, dynamics, relationships, transformation, and leverage, looked like to her, and what bearing does that have on how humans might choose to explore, and survive as a species, in our complex world?

think of a tough issue you are struggling with.

what are the three most important questions  
that come to mind to come to a better  
understanding of the issue?

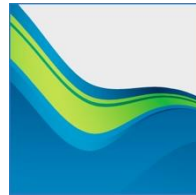


You cannot lead systems transformation unless you deliberately ask different kinds of questions and presence the future as it emerges.  
Questions are tools to shape reality and uncover what you are not yet thinking about.

## Four thought procedures (/thought forms) for discovering what you are not thinking about



- **Procedure 1: Part of a Big Picture:** How is an issue part of a broader context, and what is the nature of that context?



- **Procedure 2: Dynamic (In-Motion):** In what way is an issue still emerging, creating unforeseen problems?



- **Procedure 3: In-Relationship (coherence):** How an issue is shaped by its function in a totality of intrinsic and extrinsic relationships, thus sharing common ground with other issues.



- **Procedure 4: In-metamorphosis (transformation):** How tensions, disequilibria, and developmental challenges create risks and the potential for transformations.



## Part-whole thinking:

How an issue is part of a broader context?

Underlying principle: holism

- Nothing can be viewed in isolation
- There is always a bigger picture to consider, and each thing that one looks at is just part of that whole.

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“Disinformation is most effective in a very narrow context.” – Frank Snapp



Dynamics (emerging change/in-motion):

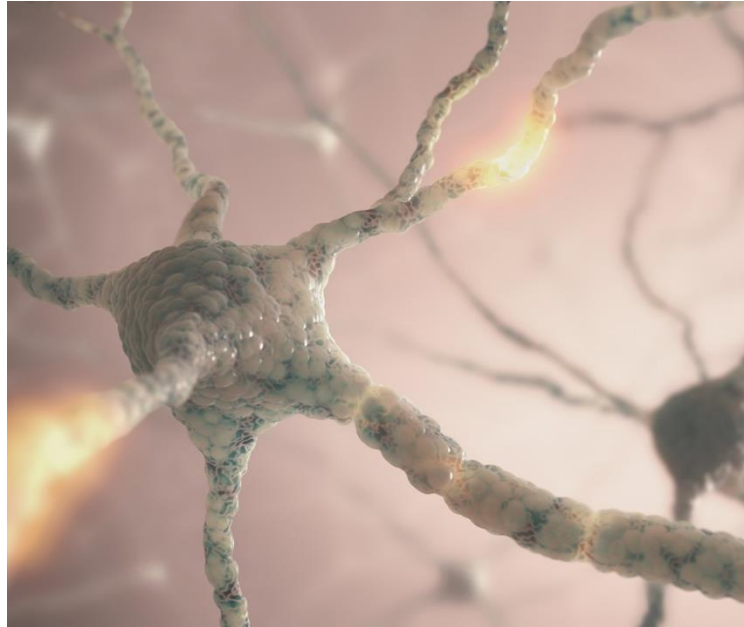
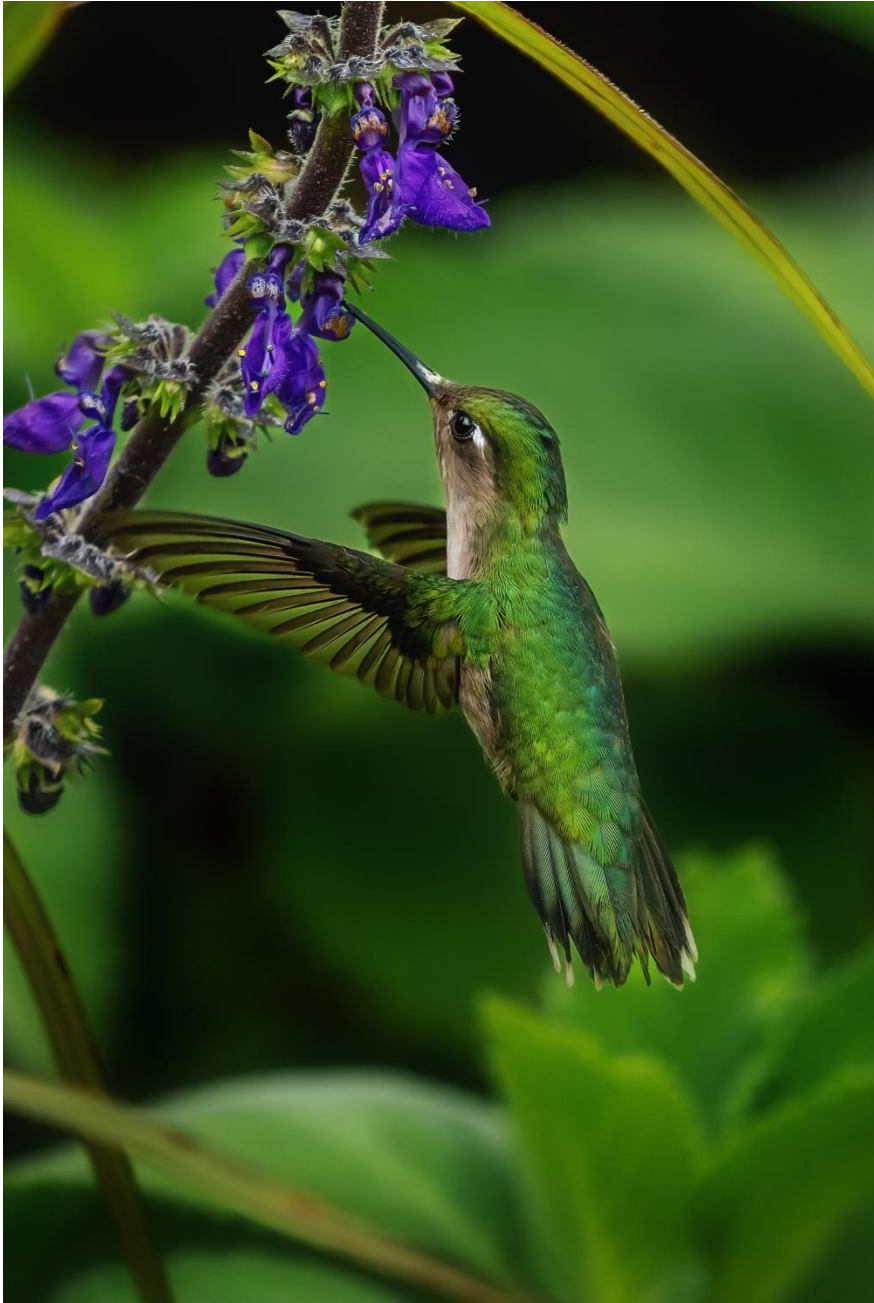
How an issue has become 'problematic'?

Underlying principle: dynamism or constant change

- Everything that exists can be considered to be in state of motion, never static but always, in a sense, becoming what is not already and, at the same time, leaving some of what is behind

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“The further backward you look, the further forward you can see.” – Winston Churchill



## Coherence

How is one issue shaped by another?

Underlying principle: relationship, or common ground

- Each and every thing is related in some way to everything else, and it is those relationships that give something its essence

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“Things are related because they are elements of a totality.” - Otto Laske



Metamorphosis/Human agency

Which are the tensions, disequilibria, and transformational challenges an issue provokes?

Underlying principle: Transformation

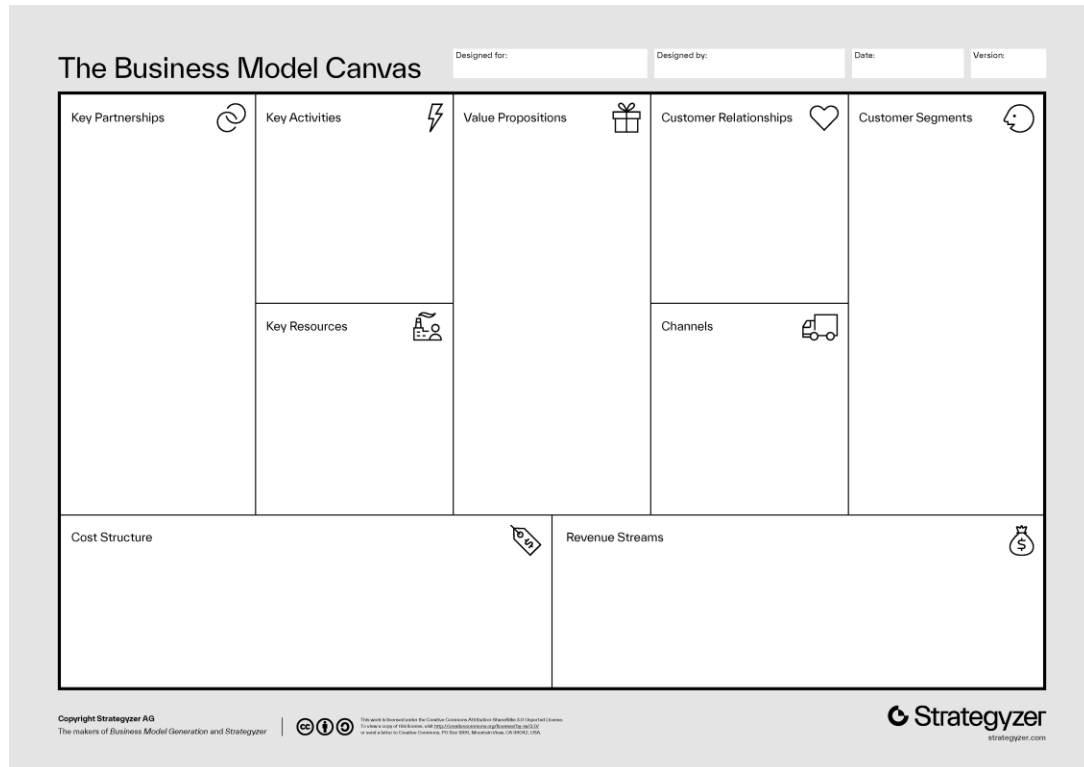
Combination of the other three thought structures: movement through forms

Developmental movement:

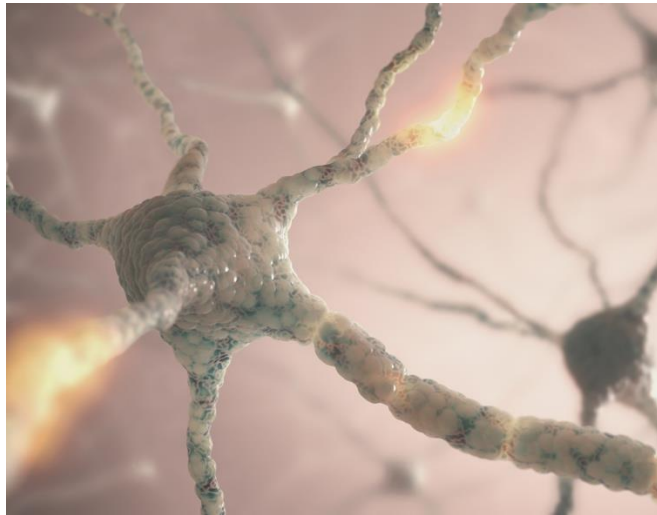
- Towards a new form that transcends and includes the previous form;
- Regressive in the sense of a form breaking down, collapsing or reversing its previous growth

“The butterfly that makes of home of its cocoon will never fly” - Deborah Johnson

# Business model canvas



- Build a richer picture of each of the dimensions.
- *Example:* the concept of 'customer segments'
- Leading to more integrated decision-making

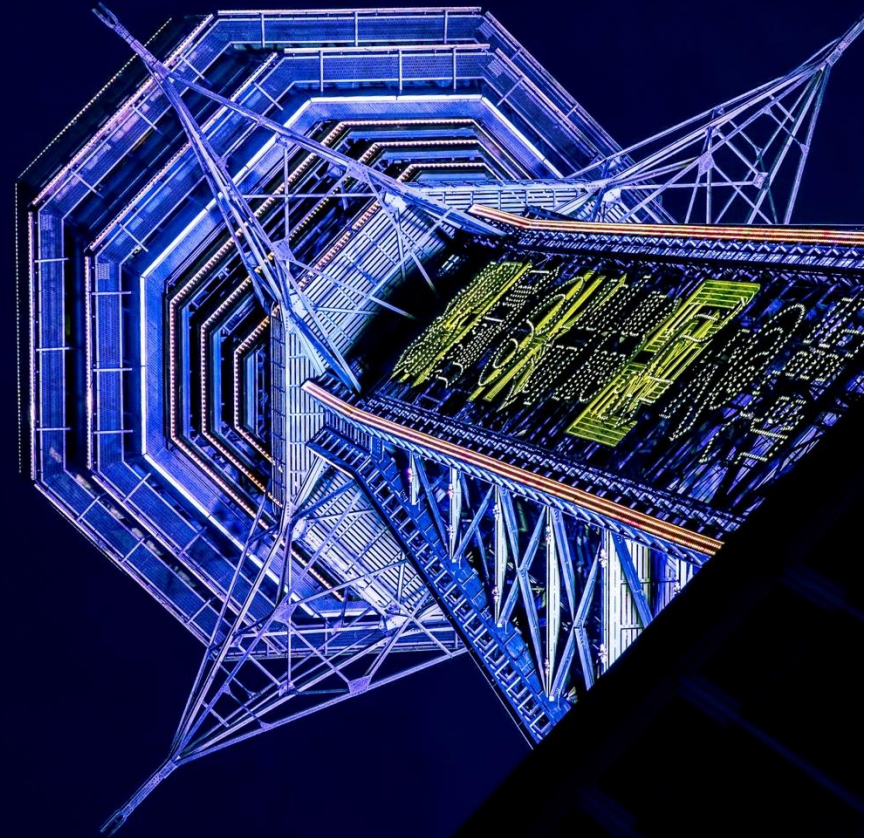


“The challenge is to rehearse the future and prepare for a range of possibilities”

- Source: Fast Future Research

## Reflection - Breakout

- 20 min - Groups of three
- Briefly share with each other your struggles.
- Choose a key concept from your struggle and question it together from the four lenses.
- Observe how this questioning affects your train of thought





## About the book

[available from amazon.co.uk](https://www.amazon.co.uk)

[available from amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com)

also available from local amazon country sites

- Pocket-sized paperback: £5 (or local currency)
- Kindle-reader edition: £2 (or local currency)

We will create a new Learning Circle for anyone who'd like to talk about the book and its' meaning.

We have also set up a LinkedIn group for discussion and feedback about the book.

<https://www.linkedin.com/company/opening-the-box/>

We are open to running workshop activity for people who read the book and want to learn more.

The background consists of several overlapping, slightly crumpled white paper scraps scattered across a light gray surface. Each scrap has a large, bold black question mark printed on it. In the center of the image, there is a large, faint, light gray watermark of a question mark. The overall composition is clean and minimalist, focusing on the theme of inquiry and uncertainty.

questions?  
feedback?