Playing the Simulation Game

Ecopolicy is a simulation game developed by the German Prof. Frederic Vester and further developed by Prof Malik as an introduction to systems thinking. Students act like the government of a country in despair, with the goal to stabilize the country through developing a balance between education, health, politics, production, environment, quality of life, and population growth. These are all important sectors of human life and in the game they are all interlinked in such a way that each decision results in a chain of effects and repercussions - just like in real life.

Playing the game shows the pitfalls of the usual practice of concentrating on isolated problems - that is, solve one problem and create several new ones. In the game the results of both foundering the fictitious country with short term decisions, and leading it towards a stable and sustainable country are experienced. The highest score is automatically calculated from the nature and effectiveness of the decisions that students make.

The competitions are run within schools in several rounds between small teams within classes, between classes within schools and between schools within regions, until a winning team for each region has been determined.

The final competition is run as an “Ecopolicyade” when all the winning teams from each school (region or state when extended wider) will be competing against each other in the presence of invited guests from all walks of life - managers and decision makers in Government, companies, businesses and organisations. The value of the Ecopolicyade does not only lie in the benefits to the students, but the event itself serves as an Inter-Generational Co-Learning experience.

The winning team receives a prize in the form of air tickets to the next World Conference of the International Society for the Systems Sciences (held annually in a different country) to compete in the International Ecopolicyade against the best teams from around the world. At these events, the teams will be able to obtain advice from a world audience of systems scientists and representatives of international Governments, large companies and organisations – a truly inter-generational and inter-cultural co-learning experience for all involved on how to deal with the complex issues facing our world.
Government and business institutions are under pressure to make the right investment decisions in the face of a continually changing geo-political and socio-economic landscape. Policy makers, managers and leaders today are expected to deliver innovative solutions to cope with increasing change and uncertainty. To make matters more challenging the complex environmental, socio-economic, business-financial issues tend to transcend the jurisdictions and capacities of any single organization.

We manage the systems we are part of a highly compartmented structure, i.e. disciplines, government departments, university schools, organisations, etc. These structures are important for our society to operate in an orderly way. However, without an understanding that all these different sectors in life are highly interconnected and that there is a strong need for interdisciplinary, cross-sectoral communication and collaboration, the solutions to address the multi-dimensional and multidisciplinary nature of complexity will remain inefficient.

There are a multitude of difficult, long-term global challenges ahead, almost all of which are coupled with our most pressing national and local concerns. Despite many efforts to deal with these complex issues facing our society the solutions so far have seldom been long lasting, because “treating the symptoms” and “quick fixes”, using traditional linear thinking, is the easiest way out, but do not deliver the solutions.

Creating a “new way of thinking” in society is like having to turn a very large ship that is propelling fast and strong in one direction. Although such a turn is extremely difficult it has become crucial to step outside our collective ‘comfort zone’ and develop new ways of thinking in order to act in the interest of our future.

“Starting with the young” is a major leverage point to address this difficult problem and gaming is part of the culture or language that talks to young people. With these as departure points the simulation game (Ecopolicy) introduces young people to the concepts of systems and interconnected thinking.

Since its instigation in 2005 the holistic simulation game Ecopolicy has become one of the most popular competitions in various countries in Europe, Asia and the USA. In Germany alone more than 3000 schools and 175,000 pupils per year are now taking part in the competitions, with the final competition in the German Parliament.

A group of high schools in South Australia will be the first in Australia to take part in a series of competitions to learn about interconnected thinking. Students learn through playing a computer simulation game how to shift from our traditional, mainly linear, simple cause-effect thinking approaches to a new way of thinking in relations, in feedback cycles, in patterns, in networks, in systems. Most important – the game is fun, with illustrations, animations and music leading to a strong emotional engagement with the message of the game.

Warning - highly addictive, Parental Guidance required, also for parents!

Do we get it right?
• Do we make good policy and investment decisions?
• Are we aware of the unintended consequences of our decisions?
• Are we effective in our cross-sectoral communication and collaboration to deal with the multi-dimensional nature of complex problems?
• Do we go for quick fixes because it is easier to treat the symptoms?

OR

Do we urgently need new and innovative ways of thinking and a fresh approach to deal with the problems facing our society?

We live in a complex, ever changing and diverse world in which all things are interconnected. Politicians, business managers and all members of society have to make important decisions on a daily basis in the complex web in which business, social issues, finance and economics, environment, politics and culture are all highly interconnected.

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