Causal Layered Analysis

Causal Layered Analysis is a futures research method concerned with creating transformative spaces for the analysis and creation of alternative/pluralistic/equitable futures by examining both the evident and hidden roots of a complex, wicked problem. Based on the Causal Layered Analysis (CLA) theory developed by Sohail Inayatullah.

**THE PROBLEM IN THE PRESENT**

**LITANY**

The litany is the ‘official’ accepted description of the problem. It is how we understand, conceptualize, and debate the problem. The litany is informed and articulated by dominant perspectives. These views are primarily informed by quantitative data and disseminated via mainstream media. This view is much like the tip of the iceberg; it states what is apparent but the larger part of the problem remains unseen.

**SYSTEMIC CAUSES**

This level involves a more in-depth look at the problem, but is still a short-term, simplified analysis of its causes. Social, economic, cultural, and political factors and qualitative data is considered. Interpretation and communication is often undertaken by policy institutes, editorial news articles, and non-academic journals. At this level technical and academic analysis are offered and the role of experts and academics are explored. On post-its below write several descriptions that synopsize/characterize the problem in the present as if they were headlines in mainstream media. In the two columns to the right, do the same exercise, first for a future in which the problem has not been resolved and second for a future in which it has been resolved.

**WORLDVIEW/DISCOURSE**

This level of the problem involves the assumptions, discourses, and worldviews that contribute to and legitimize it. The objective here is to look for the deeper social, linguistic, economic, cultural, and religious structures that inform the discourses we use to understand and frame the problem (and that are therefore biased). We look for the worldviews/discourses that are collective in nature (‘universal’/actor-invariant). The problem frame that arises out of these worldviews/discourses directs how the problem will be solved and yet they often go unnoticed/unquestioned. On post-its below write several descriptions that synopsize/characterize the underlying worldviews/discourses that contribute to the problem and that influence the way we frame it. In the two columns to the right, do the same exercise, first for a future in which the problem has not been resolved and second for a future in which it has been resolved. It may be challenging to articulate beliefs and discourses—remember they are collective in nature and may be broader and more encompassing than the specific problem you’re dealing with.

**MYTH/METAPHOR**

This level looks at the deep stories, collective archetypes, and unconscious dimensions of the problem. It provides a different kind of understanding of the problem. This level is concerned with exploring the unconscious aspects of the problem. Here, language is less specific and more concerned with evoking visual images and connecting with the heart instead of the mind. On post-its below develop metaphors for the problem that are informed by the worldviews/discourses that you have identified. These metaphors can be archetypes, brief, evocative, or perhaps even visual (you may use images in conjunction with verbal metaphors if you wish. Imagine a type of ‘short hand’ that most people within a collective (society/group/community) would understand immediately. In the two columns to the right, do the same exercise, first for a future in which the problem has not been resolved and second for a future in which it has been resolved.