

PLAYING THE SARKAR GAME WORKBOOK–
MACROHISTORY AS A USE OF THE FUTURE IN
CREATING CULTURES OF PEACE

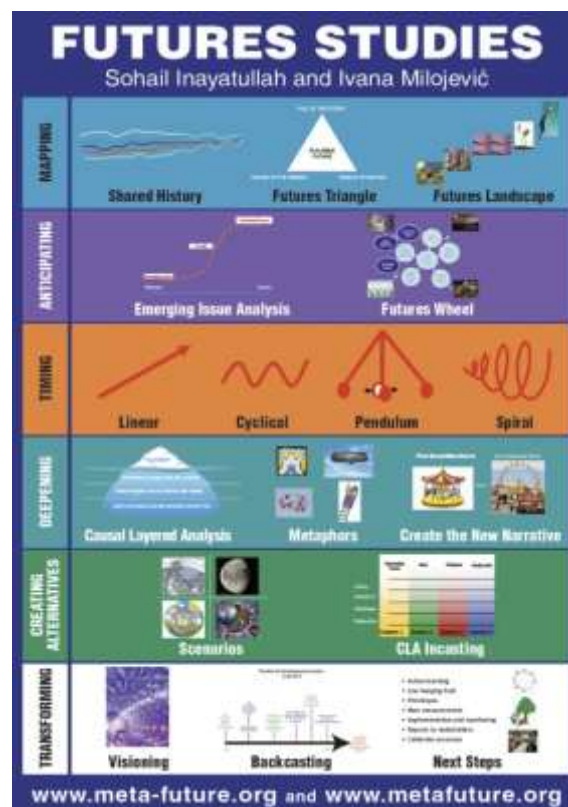


Sohail Inayatullah. UNESCO Chair in Futures Studies, USIM
Professor, Tamkang University, University of the Sunshine
Coast, and Melbourne Business School, the University of
Melbourne.

www.metafuture.org

1 INTRODUCTION

The Sarkar game is used as part of the six pillars¹ foresight process (Mapping the future, anticipating the future, timing the future, deepening the future, creating alternatives and transforming the future) to make it easier for participants to gain insight into the social reality generally and foresight specifically. The Sarkar game aids individuals gaining an appreciation of the grand patterns of history, the shape of time, and where their own organization (corporate, government or nongovernmental organization) or nation is within that pattern. It also explores power relations in organizations and nations and helps articulate an integrated, wholistic view of leadership and the possibilities of direct, structural and cultures of peace.



The Sarkar game can be played as part of a larger foresight process, or as a stand-alone workshop.

2 THEORETICAL CONTEXT

Transforming the classical Indic notion of *varna* (colour) or caste, Sarkar articulates four types of power, indeed, epistemes: the worker (shudra), the warrior (ksatriya), the intellectual (vipra) and capitalist (vaeshya) (or merchant, depending on historical episteme). Each of these types has an aspect which is progressive, and an aspect which is regressive. For example, the warrior is both the protector of the innocent and the killer. The intellectual innovates through new ideas, and can use ideas to “domgatzize” the world so that he can stay in a privileged epistemological position. The capitalism qua trader or owner can create wealth, keeping money moving, or can use financial power to “exploit” others by increasing inequity, by using capital to strategically to weaken others, and keep “it all” for themselves. The worker can fruitfully produce enhancing the entire system or can be chaotic, destroying the system.

The Sarkar Game — Hayward and Voros



For Sarkar, these are not ideal types, but rather evolutionary categories. They are reflective of concrete historical eras. In the broad scheme of history, we have moved from the worker, to the warrior to the intellectual to capitalist era. At the end of each full cycle, there is often a revolution or evolution and the cycle begins again.ⁱⁱ In organizations and institutions when there are bottlenecks in each era, often technical solutions are proposed, but for Sarkar, it is more important to engage in adaptive and transformative solutions, wherein the cycle not only continues to move, for example, from warrior to intellectual, but that the cycle does not stall in the regressive pendulum swing. Each class, often, as Pareto argued earlier,ⁱⁱⁱ stays too long in power, in epistemological dominance. By overstaying, their creativity declines and instead of innovation, dogma results, as with the intellectuals or power becomes authoritarian and brutal as with the warriors. With the capitalists, instead of prosperity for all, inequity expands, leading to a collapse of the overall system through a workers' revolution or evolution. The capitalists use the other forces: military and police power and religious power to keep the system stagnant, instead of allowing it to become more inclusive, moving, for example, from a single bottom line of profit to a triple bottom line of environment, social justice/peace and prosperity.

For Sarkar, the goal is to create a new class –the sadvipra, who can use aspects of each class in progressive ways. They are service based, protective, innovator, and wealth creators – they create cultures of deep peace.^{iv} By having a sense of the whole, the integrated, sadvipras can judge which skills are required for the good of all. They thus cannot be beholden to either their own personal ego needs, or religious, nation-state or other identity needs, but rather they need to think and act for the entire planet (in the context of a federalist democracy). This expanded sense of identity, Sarkar called neo-humanism. Neohumanism, for Sarkar, liberates the intellect, allowing for deeper ways of knowing and the inclusion of the other. It is a foundational variable in creating systems of equity and cultures of peace. It is the escape way to ensure that the sadvipras do not slip into a

particular class, and thus ensure continued stagnation. While Sarkar framed his theory in planetary terms, it is equally applicable in organizations and institutions. Thus, participants can ask in a workshop setting, is a particular type of power dominant? Has a group stayed too long and thus not allowed the other ways of knowing to express? What can be done to keep the cycle moving? Can the organizational cycle be transformed to a spiral, using the past but while focused on the future?

3 THE GAME AND THE SCRIPT

Guided by a facilitator, the game consists of dividing the room into four groups. Each group is given a script and tools. They are asked to read their scripts. They are given three-five minutes to develop their understanding of the scripts or strategy.

Workers get tools for labour, with the following script (modified from Peter Hayward and Joseph Voros, "The Sarkar Game: Creating the experience of social change:"^v Their tools tend to be shovels, screw drivers, and other "handyman" type tools. Bottles of beer may be appropriate too.

I am a worker or a simple peasant. I have individual wants; first - safety, security, food (to be free of my environment), When these are met I want belief, inspiration, faith (to be free from my suffering and fear of death). When these are met I want material comfort and wealth (to be free from want, work, discomfort and struggle). My power is chaos, the ability to disrupt. When satisfied I am quiet (for a while) and then I want, and demand, more from the system. I can stand against the system and bring it or myself down.

Warriors are given plastic guns – water guns filled with water are best - with the following script.

We are the warriors. We honour loyalty, courage and unity. We serve to protect the system from danger and chaos. We bring order where there is none. We enforce the wishes of the system. Our power is the ability to dominate the environment. Only we have the weapons.

Intellectuals are given books – foundational texts to the organization or in world history - with the following script.

We are the intellectuals. We search for the truth. We remove error and confusion. We use words and speech to convey ideas that give knowledge. We value ideas. Some of us have knowledge of scientific reality and some of us have knowledge of spiritual reality. Some of us as well use art, poetry and story to understand the past and present and create different futures. Our power is ideational. Only we can create ideas to believe in. We create the enlightenment.

Capitalists are given cash, with the following script.

We are the capitalists. We seek to apply ideas to create material growth. We seek opportunities to be successful. The more we have the more power we have. Our power is economic. Only we can create material wealth.

4 THE PROCESS

First, workers are asked to begin the game. Invite them into the centre of the room and ask them to begin based on instructions they have on their script. They may ask for clarification. It is best to leave them and have them role play as they see fit.

As they work – build, clean, type - (or not), **second**, after a few minutes warriors are invited in the game. They may suggest improvements to work harder or with more honour, or they may construct workers as lazy and shoot them.



Sarkar game action - Laoag, Philippines, May 23, 2014

Third, as a discussion between workers and warriors begins, after five minutes or so, depending if there is “regression”, intellectuals are brought in. They may dialogue directly with workers or with the warriors.



Sarkar game action - Laoag, Philippines, May 23, 2014

Fourth, after another three-five minutes or so, the capitalists are brought in. They can negotiate with any of the other three groups.

Fifth, At this stage, all four groups are active in playing out the dynamics of power. The game can then conclude if there is a resolution or a total system collapse. The facilitator decides when the game is over. He or she asks the groups to go back to their respective tables and a process of reflection begins.



5 FACILITATOR TIPS

- (1) Timing bringing in the next group and concluding the game is somewhat intuitive.
- (2) It is important for the facilitator to allow individuals to role-play and not judge, ie "this is how the game is meant to be played." Each game is different.
- (3) It is best to bring in the next group if there is a natural lull in the action or conversation, or if it appears that there is a deadlock, a new type of power or energy is required.
- (4) If a warrior does shoot an individual, the individual is asked to lay down, they are now out of the game (however, clever intellectuals-priests are allowed to use science or spiritual power to bring them back from the dead ie creativity is allowed in the game).

- (5) After the game ends, it is crucial that there is a reflection period by the four groups and individuals in each group.
 - a. What did they experience?
 - b. How did they experience the other groups?
 - c. What was their self-learning?
 - d. Why was it difficult to find transformative solutions?
 - e. What does this tell them about their own organization? Their deep culture? Or nation-state?
 - f. What lessons can be drawn for youth and promoting cultures of peace?

- (6) Having an observer evaluate the process, offering a reward (a bar of dark chocolate, for example) to the group the observer believes has been the most effective or successful can be a useful way to synthesize ideas. The observer can then reflect on the process and share what they saw.

After reflections, the game is complete.

6 CONCLUSION

The Sarkar is useful in gaining insight into the nature of the organization. For example, scientists at one Federal level Agriculture department understood that while they saw themselves as intellectuals the executives in the Ministry – senior bureaucrats – the owners of the Ministry had adopted a capitalist worldview, and saw them as workers. The insight allowed them to understand why they felt undervalued. One senior scientist said: “Now I understand. I see myself as an international scientist. But the Minister sees me as his lackey worker.” This insight helped the scientist rethink his strategy when approaching the Minister and his staff. Thus, for organizations, the Sarkar game aids in exploring what aspects of leadership are weak or missing, and what needs to be nurtured. It offers an understanding of the dynamics of power. However, for example, can power be leveraged in creating systems of inclusion and deep cultures of peace. Most significantly, the Sarkar game offers a way forward in changing history and future.

The game is also an excellent way to explore one’s own leadership style, one’s own repressed, projected and disowned selves.^{vi} A gentle CEO quickly became a killer during the Sarkar game. It was obvious on reflection that he was tired of always being the pleasant negotiator. He needed to learn warrior-like skills to become a better leader, to learn how to command power. He also confessed that he felt under attack from those within and outside the system he led.

The game can be played as a stand-alone organizational intervention to explore power and leadership and the mechanisms and stages of change, or can be played in the context of a foresight workshop. I tend to play the game on the second day of a two day workshop in the “timing” pillar.^{vii} By this time we have explored the futures triangle (the map of the future through weights, drivers and images) and emerging issues analysis and the futures wheel, both of which help pattern the future.

After the Sarkar game reflection, we move to causal layered analysis, which further explores scripts, structures and narratives. The four types of power are seen as archetypes, with the goal in CLA is to transform traditional narratives that bind to new stories that better match one’s preferred vision of the future. The Sarkar game thus allows for not just an understanding of the deep structures of power, but creates the possibility for new forms of leadership, of a transformation of history and self.

-
- ⁱ Sohail Inayatullah, "Six Pillars: Futures Thinking for Transformation," *Foresight*, Vol. 10, No. 8, 2010, 4-21.
- ⁱⁱ P. R. Sarkar, *The Human Society*, Calcutta, AMPS, 1984.
- ⁱⁱⁱ Vilfredo Pareto, *The Rise and Fall of the Elites*. N.J, Bedminister Press, 1968.
- ^{iv} See the works of Johan Galtung. www.transcend.org. Accessed 15 November 2014.
- ^v <http://www.priven.org/publications/> . Accessed 4 November 2014..
- ^{vi} Hal and Sidra Stone, *Embracing Our Selves: The Voice Dialogue Manual*, New World Library, Novato, CA, 1989.
- ^{vii} Sohail Inayatullah, "Macrohistory and timing as practice," *World Future Review*, January, 2017, 1-8.