AFTER THE REVOLUTION:

Sustaining sustainability: the real bottom line

A new survey shows that socially responsible investment and stakeholder activism is expected to become "mainstream" over the next ten years. Who says so?   Not just futurists, who have been talking about such a shift for years. This time it was fund managers responsible for more than $30.5 trillion in assets.

More, an astonishing nine out of ten predicted that active ownership, where investors seek to influence a company's behaviour, would soon be the norm. A majority anticipated social and environmental performance indicators would shift from the fringes to the mainstream during this period.

"If it is true that 'money talks', then something of a shout roared out of page 56 of the June 4 edition of the *Sydney Morning Herald*," commented Dr Simon Longstaff in the St James Ethics Centre's latest journal. "Fund managers are not known for their sentimental attachment to… anything. Rather, they are cool calculators of value. So it is interesting to find that they are now thinking seriously about values as well."

This is great news. But it's only one of many shouts in a swelling chorus that tells us the future is at last beginning to be seen in the present.

And about time, too, say those who've been fomenting the revolution for decades. According to researchers, 40 years is about the time it takes for a major revolution to mature. This one has been coming at us at least that long, and from a number of different directions (see full story at website).

In the economic world these clustered revolutions have merged into what we call the "stakeholder revolution", one of many urgent reasons for organisations to reinvent themselves. But this revolution is bigger than business. In fact, the very point it seeks to make in our industrial world is that life is bigger than business. And that if we want to sustain life itself, we must find a way to invent, and then sustain, sustainability.

How do we do that? The Futures Foundation argues that a fourth bottom line to measure capacity-building is a key enabler of sustained success across the other three bottom lines for organisations and communities. Like a community or an individual, an organisation's own internal culture and resources equip it to respond to demanding changes in the world around it.

This enabling, empowering spirit is being sought and found in many places, in many ways.

The Futures Foundation, as always, stands ready to support those who are deciding that it's time to be part of the revolution, and who want to know how to do it.

Instead of change-makers being the voices from the margins, it will soon be those who fail to change who find themselves out of step. Even with fund managers.

INSIDE

The power of futuring

Watching a corporate or community group work through the process of Causal Layered Analysis is a great way to experience the power of futuring. But for those who can't do it that way, there's now a practical alternative in Sohail Inayatullah's latest book, *The Causal Layered Analysis (CLA) Reader: Theory and Case Studies of an Integrative and Transformative Methodology*.

Integrative and transformative it is indeed.   And described as the first major new futures theory and method since Delphi, almost forty years ago, by Professor James Dator of the

Sohail Inayatullah

University of Hawaii, another of the world's top futurists. Although the theory and process were initially developed by Professor Inayatullah, other futurists have been quick to use the concept in their own futuring work.

Live8:   compassion or narcissism?

Organisers of the Live 8 concerts have claimed that it was the biggest musical extravaganza ever staged. Millions of people watched the performances, either live or on television. More millions logged on to the Internet to watch live streaming of the events across four continents.

The objective of the concerts was to increase global awareness of poverty and to push the G8 leaders, then about to meet in Scotland, into making decisions to help alleviate poverty and hunger around the world.

But will it work? Will a big, happy party in the first world save lives in the third? Or was it all "conspicuous compassion" of the kind that Patrick West writes about? (See *Conspicuous Compassion - are we hooked on emotion?* at www.futuresfoundation.org.au).

There's no doubt that the Live8 events gave the media an unusual opportunity to cover the world's biggest problem by giving it a solid news angle.   That and the consequent pressure on the G8 leaders may indeed make a difference.   But it will take more than that, say African analysts and western activists.

According to John W. Forje of the University of Yaounde II-Soa in Cameroon, Africa today is "stuck on the runway".

"By the end of this decade," he writes in the current issue of the World Futures Studies Federation newsletter, "most African countries will be celebrating the golden jubilee of their independence.

"It will be an independence bonanza celebrated within the realm of rising abject poverty, misery, high infant mortality, rising rates of STD and the HIV/AIDS pandemic, famine, economic crisis, political instability, civil wars, ethnic cleansing and genocide, declining living standards, rising rates of corruption and insecurity and the penetrating impact of globalization, among many other ills plaguing the continent."

The question that beats everyone's imagination, he says, is why a continent once held in high esteem, with much promise, suddenly collapsed into a state of no return, even beyond the lowest thinkable levels of the colonial administration?

"One begins to wonder whether the political independence of African states was wrongly negotiated; whether Africans lack the capacity to shape and manage their affairs and destiny? Is this due to wrong leadership?

"Whether the colonial masters had a hidden agenda, that is, the instrument of political independence was handed out of spite, bad faith, creating salient hindrance and mechanisms of sabotaging the independence of African countries.

"Why has Africa after independence exposed itself to a new form of colonialism?" he asks.

In a thoughtful essay he considers various failures of governance and leadership as he tracks what he calls the "descent into decay".   He also makes positive suggestions about key areas for exploration.

For example, he notes that part of the failure of recent aid programs can be attributed to the (understandable) preference of donor governments for dealing with governments as countries' legitimate authorities -- governments he describes as having been hijacked by "a bunch of hungry and thirsty military tyrants or self-centred civilians".

"As the failure of African governments has become increasingly apparent, the attention of development specialists has turned to building up the private sector and working directly through developmental NGOs," said Dr Forje. "This approach is too narrow. It is the whole of civil society that needs to be strengthened if a stable balance between the state and civil society is to be achieved. Achieving that stable balance is good governance."

Why the world's biggest story just isn't a story

"Extreme poverty claimed more than 20,000 lives yesterday with common illnesses, including chest infections and diarrhoea, accounting for a third of the victims. Another 20,000 are expected to die from treatable illnesses today - and again tomorrow," said the *Sydney Morning Herald* on July 1, under a front-page banner headline that screamed "20,000 die each day!".

Has the news media at last begun to reflect reality?

Well, yes and no. This front page was a mock-up, a dramatic illustration for a feature on global poverty that was made possible by the Live8 global spectacular - an event which really was considered to be news.

It was accompanied by a story from Mark Scott, editor-in-chief of metropolitan, regional and community newspapers for John Fairfax, entitled *"Why you will never see a front page like this"*.

"The death of more than 20,000 people on a single day would be one of the most momentous stories of the year - full of heartbreak and horror, particularly as so many of the victims were children," he wrote.

"The headlines would be massive, the news coverage extensive, the analysis compelling and in the days ahead, the letters page would be full of reader feedback.

"But because this event happens every day of the year... it makes little news.

"The problem with worldwide poverty and the unimaginable death toll is that it is happening everywhere, all the time."

Reality is not news. So of course it makes perfect sense that the news is not reality.   Why do we expect it to be?

Are young Australians DisConnected too?

News that the London bombings were probably carried out by "ordinary British teenagers" is bound to raise the volume of criticism of "the younger generation", with its bad habits of drug-taking, graffiti-writing and other breaches of the law.

But are these really bad habits, or merely the characteristics of a new world that are being judged by the values of the old? American author Nick Barham spent a year travelling the UK and interviewing young people in their many and varied subcultures. His conclusions may come as a surprise.

Chav, skanger, yarco, ned: these are just some of the new generation words in the latest edition of the Collins English Dictionary. And the variety of names for urban tribes (like these) is "a sign of the fear people seem to have for them," according to the dictionary's editor in chief. "The obscene and violent words in this edition provide a sinister picture of something that is becoming more and more a part of everyday life."

On June 20, the media reported that the British army had been ordered onto the streets to join a summer campaign against anti-social drunken and violent behaviour. Soldiers and military police were being deployed to "help keep youngsters under control" in up to 20 towns and cities.

Are we heading into the stereotypical scenario of a violent, abusive, ugly future?

Nick Barham, in his book *DisConnected: why our kids are turning their backs on everything we thought we knew*, argues a different case.

Sure, he says, the kids are disconnected from mainstream society. "Certainly they break the law. They take lots of drugs, they play violent computer games, surf porn, listen to furious lyrics, have little respect for the government, think fashion is vitally important and look to distant unreal celebrities for life advice.

"But the more people I spoke to, the more disconnect/zones I visited, the more unfair these accusations appeared. The public portrayals of this thing called youth culture - whether they are attention-seeking headlines, sales-seeking slick ads or award-seeking gloomy documentaries - bear little resemblance to most of the experiences of young people in Britain."

Instead, Barham sees passionate energy, creating a constellation of new cultures within which young people can set their own rules, find their own connections, and disconnect from the mainstream.

"Life in Britain in 2003 is far from rosy for many of the kids who live it. As always for this age group, there is violence, prejudice, poverty, depression, insecurity, etc. But the strategies of disconnection - from the past, from mainstream politics, from traditional forms of education, from taboos and shame, from duty, and most important from reality - are not those of a stupid, uncaring, vacuous bunch. They are practical, sociable and often enjoyable responses to a world that is difficult for everyone, and within which a new code of existence is still being created."

A useful text for parents and grandparents, as well as others who want to understand the future, Barham's book takes the reader through the subcultures of drugs, fetishism, graffiti, clubbing, video games, skaters and more as he talks with young people about the world they live in and the way they live in it.

"Rather than finding this degree of disconnection discouraging or upsetting, by the beginning of 2004 my impression of British youth had become more positive," wrote the American. "I felt cheered by my contact with boy racers, with drug users and graffiti artists. Within these frowned-on activities I had found beauty and humour. Friendliness and energy. The kind of things that make living worthwhile. At the same time, there were few signs of moral ambiguity or destructiveness. The majority of people I spoke with were more conservative than I had expected. They had decided on a set of personal moral codes, and were judgemental of people who acted differently."

Going back to the numerous criticisms that were being made of young people in Britain, said Barham, it seemed that the characteristics of young modern culture - novelty, velocity, volume, choice, stimulation, hedonism, sexual and violent imagery, fashion, computer games, music, celebrity - were often mistaken for the problems of youth culture.

"Most people I spoke with embraced the very scenarios and situations that were being criticised - drug-taking, celebrity culture, graffiti, promiscuity. Embraced them wholeheartedly, with passion and creativity. Not because they were dupes, corrupt or evil; but because these things bring pleasure and self-esteem. Kids are much more capable of understanding the importance and significance of their activities and environments than we are."

All of which, he concluded, meant that perhaps the younger generation should be seen as an asset rather than a liability.

"Disconnection happens in creative cultures: it is a sign of human potential. The more disconnections that a country can hold, the more cultures it can contain that are at odds with each other, the healthier that nation is…. We should be proud of our disconnected generation."

Looking the other way..

Much of the commentary on young people comes from older perspectives. For a view from the other direction, visit the electronic 'note pad' of Tim Longhurst, the Futures Foundation's 24-year-old project director. Like others of his generation, he jots his notes electronically and files them for the world to see. It's their kind of connection.

So far Tim's note pad has sections on futures, consumer culture and media. Entries on Fox News and Apple's iPods have been thoughtful, if not favourable. And in a powerful example of global connection, his editorial response to the July 7 London bombings attracted thousands of visits to the site in a single day.

If you want to connect with one of Australia's youngest futurists, just log on to www.TimLonghurst.com.

"DEEP BRANDING": THE NEW KEY TO SUCCESS?

Once upon a time, an organisation made its own decisions in its own way. Not any more. Today, public and private organisations alike are being scrutinised and held accountable by a growing body of stakeholders. Decision-making no longer takes place behind closed doors. It is subject to the judgement of employees, the exposure of public discussion, the blaze of media attention. Attempts to protect privacy merely attract increased scrutiny.

More and more of an organisation's activities - what it pays for labour, what happens to its waste, how it deals with staff, where components are made (and how) - are being challenged and discussed by people outside the leadership team.

Does this mean organisations no longer control their own destiny? Perhaps they never could - but it's clear now that in a world of accelerating, complex change, old-fashioned ideas of control just don't work any more. Ideas derived from mechanistic science - push the lever and you know what will happen - have given way to more organic approaches which learn from the complex adaptive systems of life. Communication replaces control as the single most critical process. And in a changing world of changing organisations with changing relationships, there's no way you can control communication in the old-fashioned, top-down way.

In other words, the public relations cats are out of their bags. Many of them are to be found among the pigeons. Today's organisations are dealing with the consequences as well as they can, but the outcomes are often painful, costly and can inflict lasting damage. How might tomorrow's organisation deal with the increasingly complex issue of identifying and articulating its identity, its values, its work and its achievements?

The answer is simple, but not necessarily easy.

Instead of polishing outer images, trying to manage the perceptions of different groups of stakeholders (who often have conflicting interests), the successful company of tomorrow may choose the inside-out approach of placing values and ethics at the core of its identity, and letting them make their own way out into its complex web of relationships.

Every organisation is communicating every day. Every organisation has a host of different relationships to manage. There is no choice about this. No organisation can decide whether it will or will not communicate, whether it will or will not have relationships. Its only choice is whether to do it well or to do it badly.

Public relations and corporate affairs people are recognised as the professional communicators. No doubt they will continue in this role. But to limit communication skills and expertise to the full-time professionals is to deny the greatest opportunity available to organisations today. It's like saying only the telephone operator can make phone calls.

Emerging stakeholders -- employees, customers, investors - want an organisation to know what it stands for, and to show what it stands for. And they're not waiting for a press release to tell them.

Before I discovered futures studies, my consulting career taught me that the success of an organisation depends on the success of its relationships. Those relationships are nurtured through good communication. And I learned that communication wasn't just about advertising or press releases or newsletters. Everything we say and do communicates meaning.

The information revolution increased scepticism, and therefore scrutiny, in the corporate environment. An organisation was no longer judged by what it said, but by what it did. Younger stakeholders were looking for consistency between those two, probing upstream to check intent and the values behind that intent. Today, having a brand that looks good, or even one that performs well, isn't enough if the product is made by exploited labour, if it damages the global commons, if its waste is not biodegradable.

Consumers and activists now have more powerful tools for checking these details - and sometimes they're on the inside. It takes about two minutes for an internal corporate email to hit a journalist's inbox. Now that's what I call transparency. It also highlights why winning the commitment of employees isn't just a matter of reducing staff churn, cutting recruitment costs or motivating outstanding performance.

Alongside internal pressures are external pressures - like those of the insatiable market, expecting CEOs to deliver ever-increasing profits. But there are signs the market is at last seeing the conflict between short term and long term success. Predatory capitalism is being replaced by sustainable approaches to profit-making. Investors realise that no organisation can increase its profits every quarter - and live. The smart ones see the link between corporate social responsibility and creating the kind of community they want to live in. And they're looking for safer investments in the ethical marketplace.

When it comes to environmental sustainability, a little bit of reverse mentoring wouldn't go astray. Even school children have a greater sense of urgency about climate change and other environmental issues than the generations who are meant to be running our world. But perhaps it won't be long before they'll get their chance anyway, because organisations that don't get to grips with these issues will be replaced by a new generation that knows better.

These examples highlight the empowering of stakeholders in a world where power is being redistributed in complex ways. A brand no longer belongs to the product or the company alone. It's no longer just a matter of image or perception. Instead, it is answerable to a growing list of stakeholders, whose scrutiny will hold it accountable against a range of indicators.

Perhaps the answer lies in "deep branding", branding of the product, the processes, the company - the whole value adding chain - with a core integrity that will stand up to scrutiny. Ultimately it could shape a new kind of organisation, in new sets of relationships with its host community.

-- Jan Lee Martin

The power of futuring: Causal Layered Analysis

"CLA begins and ends with questioning," says Sohail Inayatullah. "It's very accessible - ideal for work in communities as well as corporations - but it reaches deeply into our shared and disparate worldviews and motivations as it integrates different ways of knowing.

"This allows us to 'unpack' conventional futures, and that in turn helps users to develop more effective policy. It creates transformative spaces and deepens understandings of alternative scenarios."

The way the process is designed specifically encourages the inclusion of the different perspectives of different stakeholders - not just in their surface, everyday attitudes but more deeply grounded in the ideologies they hold. It can be used as a critique of proposals for the future or analysis of future needs, but is perhaps most valuable when it is used as a vehicle for participatory workshops and action learning activities.

In one case, for example, a major multinational organisation had been restructured and reinvigorated to maximise effectiveness - and, of course, earnings. Under the guidance of Professor Inayatullah it worked its way down through the levels of CLA -

- the litany, or the official description of the problem (as reported in the media, for example)
- the patterns formed by interrelationships of problems, solutions and the systems that create and support them
- the worldviews, or internal maps we use to make sense of the world, from which these systems are born; and
- the myth and metaphor level.

When the group reached level 4, it was invited to identify and articulate its "story" - was it, in its recent prosperity, a Cinderella who had married a Prince? Or was it still a Little Red Riding Hood at risk of being eaten by a wolf? No, said these senior executives. We are the Tortoise and the Hare: "we've been so thoroughly stripped down for speed and efficiency that we've left our soul behind."

It is with insights of this kind that lasting, transformative change can begin.

The CLA Reader is available for $50 plus GST and shipping at www.metafuture.org.

Australia's future communities

What does the future hold for Australian communities? Will they disintegrate? Or merely flex? Will we choose to barricade ourselves in gated communities? Or will we learn to sustain sustainability?

These four plausible scenarios were developed by Sohail Inayatullah in a short paper on the future of community. Based on his experience with community futuring projects around the world, he uses four futures methods - the futures triangle, emerging issues analysis, causal layered analysis and scenarios - to explore the futures of community in Australia.

"Futures methods seek to understand the future, seeing it not as an empty space to be filled but as a space already seeded by current images and drivers," he says. "Futures methods are concerned as much with the future out there (external political, technological, economic variables) as well as the future in here (the myths and meanings each individual and collectivity brings)." He concludes that business as usual - a journey to the future without fundamental change -- is likely to lead to the divided community future, with Australians separated by religion and inequity. In this scenario, the traditional "fair go" gives way to "give me mine!".

Communities, he says, should be seen as dynamic. We need to shift from seeing them as industrial (community as a cog in the wheel of democracy) to seeing them as biological - communities as living, dynamic ecological systems. Communities do not have to wait for the future to happen to them. Instead, as the scenarios suggest, they "can enhance their agency through collective self-reflection, through envisioning their desired futures."

Images and drivers

The *white picket fence* in the safe suburb is one basic image of community. In this view, the community is homogeneous, the economy is booming, personal relationships are important. Conflicts are handled by elected community leaders. But entry is difficult.

The *global community* - of nations, of humans - is another basic image, focused on humanistic notions of community as against political (might will win) or economic (wealth will win). Instead, rational, reasonable "men" negotiate peace and goodwill.

The hybrid, emergent image is that of the *fluid community*. Individuals move in and out of identity. Entrance to the community is based on interest. Exit means a new interest. Movement is easy.

The last image is that of *active communities* - community not as a site of passivity, of receiving declarations from globalisation, nations, developers but as a site of agency. Communities, whatever they may be, visioning their desired futures. Active, healthy, vibrant engaged communities. They are empowered by their capacity to vision where they want to go (instead of where they came from), by their capacity to deal with difference, and mediate conflict between the "strangers and dangers" within the community.

Trends and emerging issues

Current problems are around issues of conflicting interests (can one be both Muslim and Australian?); the breakdown of communities (crime, divorce, housing prices driving dramatic demographic shifts); and the survival of local economies in a globalised era (the Maleny versus Woolworths battle, for example). Emerging issues offer a hint of things to come. These range from the high-tech -- robots, artificial intelligence, geneticisation of communities (who is enhanced, who is not) and cyber democracy -- to the warmly human (schools as learning and community centres, creating a new hub such as that previously held by the church). We may ask if communities can become alive in the collective sense: will communities of the 21st century be foundationally different from those of previous centuries? Will there be a shared spiritual dimension as new memes and learning fields like those envisaged by Lovelock and Sheldrake create a collective intelligence, perhaps even a shared soul? And how will we measure success in future communities? Will we measure by triple

Imagine Chicago!

Imagine a city where...
- **young people are leading the way forward**
- **public schools are thriving community learning centres**
- **neighbourhoods and institutions work together to share ideas and resources**

... and all citizens recognise and apply their talents to create a positive future for themselves and their community.

This is the vision of Imagine Chicago, a vision that's well on the way to being realised, even in the toughest parts of the city. Especially in the toughest parts of the city.

After 10 years of Imagination in Action, Bliss Browne and her colleagues at Imagine Chicago have many inspiring stories to tell - stories of empowerment, stories of dedication, stories of transformation. Key processes have included appreciative inquiry (which concentrates on what works, instead of what doesn't) and intergenerational inquiry, in which young people interview city leaders and others about their ideas for the future.

When Bliss Browne was in Sydney not long ago, we were lucky to hear some of these stories at first hand. Imagine, for example, a literacy program centred on the local school: parents know how to get to the school, explained the Episcopalian pastor and former corporate banker. "If we'd asked them to come to the museum, they wouldn't even have tried. Instead, we asked them to come to the school, and took them in buses to the museum."

The museum? Yes: the task was not only parent literacy, but also the empowerment of these people as citizens.

"Museums are masters of communication," said Bliss Browne. "They take huge amounts of information and organise it into key ideas and objects and connections and questions, which is exactly what textbooks do.

"If we can basically hardwire into parents how to read museums, and how to help their children create exhibits, we can in the process develop a love of learning.

"Another key insight for us was that things that are central to a family budget are also central to a city system. So we organised the curriculum around the elemental challenges - energy, water, housing, recreation, education, transportation - which would be the line items in a city budget."

When the topic was transportation, the location was the Chicago Historical Society, where the team worked with the parents - almost all Latino and African Americans.

"Our aim was to get them thinking deeply about transportation as a system, which connects to other systems, but a system around which they have

Australia's future communities

bottom line - checking economic wealth, social inclusion and environmental sustainability? And is spirituality the fourth bottom line, that which creates the deeper cohesion for all communities?

Causal layered analysis

All of these ideas are drawn together in a process called Causal Layered Analysis (CLA). In this process, participants are invited to drill down from the visible problems and issues (level 1: the litany - the official description of the problem); to the patterns formed by interrelationships of problems, solutions and the systems that support them (level 2: the systemic); on to level 3: the worldviews, or internal maps we use to make sense of the world; and finally to level 4: the myth and metaphor level (see book review p1). In the Australian context, popular myths of community include the white picket fence, the notion of home sweet home. Another story is the community as a journey, a caravan moving in a direction - this is the myth of frontier, of inclusion and expansion. There is a utopian, even spiritual dimension. A third myth is that of the divided community - the community at war, deep conflict. These are often economic disguised as religious. This story is about breakdown, about loss. The last story is about the community and resilience. We may struggle in a community but it gives us health, we live longer, being part of a community. The community is living, part of an adaptive learning culture. It is organic and we are its cells.

> **"Social inclusion has been identified as protection against various illnesses."**

The four scenarios

In addition to the work that has gone before, two key variables are used to develop the quadrant of four scenarios. They are the integration to fragmentation axis and the innovation to tradition axis. From his work with many communities, Dr Inayatullah offers the scenarios of communities in disintegration: community in flex: enclosed communities: and communities in sustainability. (For more detail on these scenarios, see the full paper at www.futuresfoundation.org.au.)

Finally, a word about the word: community, while appearing to have one meaning, can be seen to have multiple meanings and contexts, says Dr Inayatullah. First, it is understood in opposition to the market (jungle, economic relations, dog eat dog) and the state (power, party politics). Second, community is a site of shared identity, whether that of a neighbourhood, a community of scholars, medical professionals, or indeed, sex workers. Third, recent understandings have moved community to being part of the nation's (or world's) social capital, necessary for growth and for resilience in the face of hardship. Fourth are definitions around health and community. Social inclusion has been identified as protection against various illnesses.

choices and history -- because if we can think about the past we can think about the future.

"These parents would not have been interested in a tour, and would view the museum as a rich person's place. They wouldn't have gone there. That's why we bussed them from their local schools."

Even then, some incentive would have been required to encourage participation. What was the secret?

"The previous spring we introduced three great ideas. We explained that participation would help them improve their children's reading comprehension, that it would improve their communication skills and parenting skills, and that it would improve their access to the city.

"We ran workshops at the local school in which we gave them incentives. We not only talked about the importance of reading, but we gave everybody a beautiful illustrated visual encyclopaedia (one parent said, *"I learned that you can own books and not just rent them"*). At the second workshop, anyone who showed up with a new person was given another book. It was all about reading. They loved the first book, and a lot of people showed up.

"By the third workshop there were 35-40 parents in the room. By the fall we had 175 parents - the single biggest parent literacy program in the city.

"On the way we brought all eight schools together. These people would never otherwise have had an excuse to meet each other. There had been strong animosity between some groups, but bringing them together as parents can create a bond."

While much of the groundwork of new knowledge was laid at the school workshops, the real power of the program was found at external locations. For example, while a monthly workshop at the school created a core competency among the parents, especially in the context of transportation, it was the visit to the history museum that delivered real magic.

"We had a person in character, in historic costume, address them with a personal narrative about the two weeks it took to travel the last seven miles to Chicago," explained Bliss Browne. "This was a first person narrative. The message was that history is very interesting, and transportation has changed a lot.

"We invited them to think about which five things they could take on the wagon, if they were travelling that way. That was a message about choices.

"We showed them how to read a map, which caused a great deal of excitement. It was a first for many of them. They found their birthplaces, where their parents lived, and so on." The evening encompassed a huge leap in reading competence, from key reading skills to "reading" the museum's exhibits.

"Everyone here is a reader," Bliss Browne would say, "and I know that because you are all reading me right now. One of the key reading skills is inferring a word from the context. Museums show us contexts."

Parents were invited to make a picture to teach their child something that they had learned. By the end of the evening, they were given copies of draft citizen transportation plans for the State of Illinois - a $650m decision being made in the legislature - and urged to take it home and "see what you think about it."

How about that for empowerment!

For more stories about Imagine Chicago visit www.imaginechicago.org.

All around the world, people are coming together in their localities to imagine and create new possibilities for their collective future. Despite their differences in age, background and perspective, what they share is a faith in community and in its civic spirit, the idea that together, using our minds, hearts and hands, we can help to shape the world we live in. Powerfully, perhaps unknowingly, they are the leadership of a new movement - a movement of social imagination."

-- Imagine Chicago

IN A NUTSHELL

"I presume you all know there is a problem: the industrial system, of which we are each a part, is consuming the earth and destroying the biosphere. Though it is a very long-term trend, you might say that it is a very bad trend. There's another trend that is a good trend: a developing sense of right and wrong with respect to the first trend. Let's call it environmental ethics. Where these two trends intersect is where the fate of humankind will be decided. What we need at that intersection is a plan."

-- Interface chairman Ray Anderson, at the 2005 National Business Leaders Forum on Sustainable Development

Signals in the noise

Is Monsanto holding a smoking gun?

Environmentalists and food security activists in India have renewed calls for a moratorium on genetically modified (GM) foods and crops after rats, reportedly secretly tested with GM corn diets by Monsanto, developed blood and organ abnormalities. The activists are seeking publication of full test results from Monsanto, and independent testing of the giant biotech company's genetically modified food and crop products.   Indian activists are also concerned about other impacts of GM products on the country's 600 million farmers, with "suicides by the hundred" following massive crop failures in southern Andhra Pradesh state, where Monsanto's GM cotton had been used.

Inter Press Service   *full story at www.futuresfoundation.org.au*

South Pacific futures: Oceania toward 2050

Alternative scenarios for the future of the South Pacific include one from the *Globalists*, who see a movement towards generally beneficial world market competition;   *Oceanians*, who identify a tendency toward greater regional consciousness of positive potentials;   *Dependency* analysts who observe the Pacific Islands drifting into unfavourable relations with global markets; *MIRABers*, who see a trend to reliance on income from Migrant Remittances, Foreign Aid and Bureaucracy, and a focus on *Ethics* in the context of a growing *Asianisation* of the South Pacific.

Foundation for Development Cooperation   *www.fdc.org.au*

The Rich and the Rest: growing concentration of wealth...

A century ago, battles against what angry Americans called plutocracy -- rule by the rich -- raged all across the US. Those battles would eventually leave the world's first mass middle class by the 1950s. Today that plutocracy is back and that middle class is hurting. What about tomorrow?   In the 21st century, will Americans continue to tolerate enormous disparities in the property people own and the wealth individuals have accumulated, asks economist Sam Pizzigati?

The Futurist   *July/August 2005*

...with beer and circuses for the poor electors

For a certain segment of the population, Nascar's raid on American culture -- its logo festoons everything from cellphones to honey jars to post office walls to panties; race coverage, it can seem, has bumped everything else off television;   and, most piercingly, Nascar dads now get to pick our presidents -- triggers the kind of fearful trembling the citizens of Gaul felt as the Huns came thundering over the hills. To these people, stock-car racing represents all that's unsavory about red-state America: fossil-fuel bingeing; lust for violence; racial segregation; runaway Republicanism...etc.   What's the appeal of watching... traffic?

New York Times Book Review   *22 05 05*

WELCOME TO THE STAKEHOLDER REVOLUTION

Experts track emerging issues by the changing amount of space they are given in mainstream media.   Using that approach, regular media watchers can see at a glance that the issue of corporate social responsibility is no longer merely emerging: it has arrived.   Here are just a few recent examples....

The 13th Eye on Australia report shows a clear shift in Australians' values with the consumers' portrait of a successful company including 87% saying it is a good place to work, 85% that it gives back to the community, 75% that it fights for a cause and 70% that it cares about people first and money second, reports the president of the Public Relations institute of Australia. He congratulated the UK government for its leadership in establishing a Ministerial portfolio for corporate social responsibility and drew the attention of members to the Federal Government's current inquiry into related aspects of Australia's Corporations Law.

PRIA eNewsletter   *05 07 05*

A KPMG global study shows that while CSR may be moving into the mainstream, businesses are still struggling to understand it.   It found that 52 per cent of the world's 250 biggest companies issued CSR reports compared with 45 per cent in 2002, but also identified serious gaps in the reports, suggesting corporations were having trouble matching the rhetoric.

Meanwhile Elisabeth Sexton examines the question of the fiduciary responsibility of directors, highlighted by the James Hardie case.   She says the business lobby is distancing itself from the interpretation of the Corporations Act that Hardie relied on to justify walking away form asbestos victims.   And in the same feature, Matt Wade throws a spotlight on the way financial risk is being exported by government and corporations and instead "heaped on households".

In the food industry, nutrition experts are threatening to resign from their professional group over concerns that food industry sponsorships are influencing the organisation and its policy-making. They believe the presence of the cerealmaker Kellogg and food and confectionery giant Nestle as sponsors of the Dietitians Association of Australia "compromises the group's ability to criticise the food industry's marketing of junk food to children."

Sydney Morning Herald   *04 07 05, 07 07 05*