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Question Avoidance, Evasion, Aversion and Phobia
why we are unable to escape from traps

Annex to
Council of the Whys: emergent wisdom through configuration of why-question dynamics

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Introduction
The concern here is to clarify the nature of the various forms of question avoidance and their consequences. The main focus is the distinction between such forms in the case of the 7 WH-questions (or interrogatives): when, where, which, how, what, who and why. Of particular interest is the possibility of using the avoidance of these questions as a basis for understanding both the persistence of the range of problems profiled in the Encyclopedia of World Problems and Human Potential -- and the hindrances to the strategies in response to them. This approach leads to a presentation of these forms as a set of interrelated conditions that point to a science of "spin" but also to a healthy framework within which the appropriateness of particular forms of question can be considered.

Questions are valued in sectors dependent on adaptation in response to changing conditions. Leaders are expected to challenge the status quo: moving others out of their "comfort zones"; creating a compelling vision; establishing stretch goals; asking challenging questions [more].

Identifying and posing challenging questions for others, who are expected to find the answers, is therefore recognized as a key characteristic of leadership -- if only for the questionable purpose of keeping followers off-balance. But leaders may ask such questions of themselves. For example, John S McCallum (As the Economy Turns: 10 Questions for Executives, Ivey Business Journal, May/June 2001) identifies ten questions that business leaders should ask themselves in order to respond to issues vital to their success in periods of uncertainty. They are: Is the structure right? Is the business model sustainable? Do you want to be in the business you are in? Is executive success in place? Do you know your customer? Are the costs right? Is the product right? Do you know your competition? Is the balance sheet right? Where are you on technology? Leadership courses for executives typically focus on such challenging questions rather than on formulaic answers.

In the light of this recognition, in the case of business leadership, the exploration here endeavours to identify the challenges for social change leadership that may be especially associated with the classical WH-questions.
"Risk aversion" and "Loss aversion": implications for questions

The concept of "risk aversion" or "loss aversion" is fundamental in two main arenas:

- as "risk aversion", it is basic to investment decisions, and it is the capacity of venture capitalists to have a higher taste for risk that gives them a competitive advantage over more conventional investors with higher levels of "risk aversion". The concept is familiar in relation to any purchase decision:
  - James C. Cox and Vjoleka Sadaraj, Implications of Small- and Large-Stakes Risk Aversion for Decision Theory
  - Ralph M. Perhac, Jr. Does Risk Aversion Make a Case for Conservatism?

- as "loss aversion" it is typically associated with property already acquired, but which may be lost through accidents or threat. This is typically the area on which insurance decisions focus:
  - Colin Camerer, Three cheers -- psychological, theoretical, empirical -- for loss-aversion, 2005

With respect to questions, it might then be asked in what way it is a case of:

- "risk aversion associated with asking questions": typically this aversion might be related to the risk of finding out something which would prove disruptive to the questioner's worldview, and which it would be preferable not to know ("do you really love me?"). The questioner has therefore a particular risk preference. The analogy to the "venture capitalist", is the questioner who ventures in "where angels fear to tread", irrespective of the consequences (and possibly because of being well-armoured)

- "loss aversion associated with asking questions": typically this would be associated with an attribute which the person questioned believes they had, but may feel very insecure about the possibility of losing ("am I still beautiful?")

The focus is usefully shifted to meaning by Stephen L. Talbott (Aversion to Risks; or loss of meaning?):

What I want to suggest, however, is that we need a more fundamental category than risk-aversion to understand what is going on. The category I have in mind is meaning -- admittedly a difficult one to deal with. People who are driven by profound meaning are not risk-averse. The Christian martyr, the patriot eager to fight for his country, the mother who suffers and sacrifices for her children, the terrorist gripped by a great cause -- these people take risks because they find the risks freighted with meaning. Our age, however, has widely become known as the age of meaninglessness, and for good reason.

Questioning in relation to learning

The issue of meaning with respect to risk and loss may be related to the certainties and uncertainties of learning. In a study for the Club of Rome (James W Botkin, et al. No Limits to Learning; bridging the human gap, 1979), three different types of learning were distinguished:

- "Maintenance learning" is the acquisition of fixed outlooks, methods, and rules for dealing with known recurring situations. It enhances our problem-solving ability for problems that are given. It is the type of learning designed to maintain an existing system or an established way of life. Maintenance learning is, and will continue to be, indispensable to the functioning and stability of every society". (p.10)
  - Under these conditions, questioning clearly needs to occur within a low risk / low loss "comfort zone".

- Shock learning: "Traditionally societies and individuals have adopted a pattern of continuous maintenance learning interrupted by short periods of innovation stimulated largely by the shock of external events... Even up to the present moment, humanity continues to wait for events and crises that would catalyze or impose this primitive learning by shock. But the global problematic introduces at least one new risk -- that the shock could be fatal. This possibility, however remote, reveals most clearly the crisis of conventional learning: primary reliance on maintenance learning not only is blocking the emergence of innovative learning, but it renders humanity increasingly vulnerable to shock; and under conditions of global uncertainty, learning by shock is a formula for disaster". (p.10)
  - Under these conditions, the implications of risk and loss have already impacted. Questioning can no longer anticipate the event but it can now explore why it occurred and the nature of the response to it. This may involve risks and loss in relation to reputations and careers (as evident in the case of the follow-up to the hurricane Katrina or the invasion of Iraq).

- "Innovative learning" is a necessary means of preparing individuals and societies to act in concert in situations, especially those that have been, and continue to be, created by humanity itself". (p.12)
  - This is the mode that is facilitated by consciously accepted risk and loss in relation to any dependence on strongly held assumptions, beliefs or received ideas.

As noted in a critique of that Club of Rome study (Societal Learning and the Erosion of Collective Memory, 1980), maintenance learning reinforces existing categories and paradigms, the disciplines to which they give rise, and the professional and institutional division of labour of which they are the basis. It is shock learning that has established new programmes, new institutions, and the need for new kinds of information services crossing previous categories (e.g. the environment or energy crises).

With respect to both collective and individual learning, the challenge of how questions get framed or avoided is notably highlighted by the phenomenon of group think -- as exemplified by the handling of evidence in relation to weapons of mass destruction and terrorism (cf Groupthink: the Search for Archaeoraptor as a Metaphoric Tale, 2002; Cui Bono: Groupthink vs Thinking the Unthinkable? Reframing
Gary B. Cohen (What Is The Difference Between Challenging Questions and Intimidating Questions? 2005) makes the vital distinction in relation to learning: "Challenging questions open people up to creative thinking..... Challenging questions inspire people to action -- to bridge the gulf between possibility and reality. Intimidating questions shut off creative thinking". These extremes point to the value of distinguishing the "variety of questioning styles" or "modes of questioning" that may enhance or inhibit learning, for example:

- CALI (Center for Computer-Assisted Legal Instruction) has identified five models of question formats: nintendo-ing, expert mode; novice mode; sStick to your "guns"; and fill out your knowledge/Remedial branch.
- Interviewers for recruitment or career development use a wide range of styles of questioning, including: open, closed, probing, leading, hypothetical, behavioural, and tough (Deakin University, Question time)

A trap is a function of the nature of the trapped

**Question reluctance, Question aversion and Question phobia: Unaskable questions**

**Question reluctance**: Marilee G. Adams (No Questions Equals No Sales) offers an interesting description of question reluctance in relation to the selling process:

> Question reluctance is a discomfort, fear and/or avoidance of asking and answering questions. It is akin to, and contributes to, call reluctance. Some people actually get physically anxious or tense, with symptoms like clammy palms or a rapid heart beat. Prospective customers sense anxiety and react to it, consciously or unconsciously. It can be uncomfortable to interact with someone who's anxious, so they may not even want to speak with you. That's one reason why question reluctance is a significant factor in sabotaging sales success. It's also why developing ease and eagerness with questions can make such a difference to your bottom line.

Perhaps surprisingly, question reluctance has been specifically recognized as characteristic of the legal profession, as noted by Carolyn Elefant (Ask a Simple Question: advice that lawyers find hard to follow, Law.com, 11 April 2005), arguing that law school conditions law students to equate the inability to answer questions with failure -- often with disastrous consequences.

**Question aversion and phobia:**

- Exclusivism in Christianity is considered to be grounded in an aversion to questions [more]. For example, John Shelby Spong (Why Christianity Must Change or Die) considers that it is the right wing church's aversion to questions that will eventually lead to it's downfall
- Repetitive questioning may be associated with an aversion to questions that have been already asked and answered many times in the past. For example, "He has an aversion to questions, like anyone who has experienced too often the tedium and insignificance of the responses" [more].
- Unanswerable questions: These may be associated with an aversion to questions of transcendent value, including modern science's general aversion to questions of being or "essence" [more]. "Just as Americans are strongly attached to notions of individual worth and afterlife opportunity, we also have a strong aversion to questions that do not or will never have definitive, concrete answers" (Melanie Menagh, Beyond death and dying: results of a survey on reader's attitudes towards the afterlife, Omni, Fall, 1995)
- Controversial areas: American social science has been criticized for its aversion to questions of racial equality and giving legitimacy to racial inequality (cf Gunnar Myrdal (The American Dilemma: the negro problem and modern democracy, 1944)
- Rote learning: Rote pedagogy is criticized as discouraging natural academic curiosity through it's aversion to questions.
- Postmodernism: "Postmodernism has an endemic aversion to questions of truth. Pluralism discourages us from asking about truth. Political correctness suggests that the idea of 'truth' can approach intellectual fascism, on account of its authoritarian overtones" (Alister E. McGrath, Understanding and Responding to Moral Pluralism, 1994)

**Unaskable questions**: These are implicit in the "unsaid", variously understood (cf Global Strategic Implications of the Unsaid: from myth-making towards a wisdom society, 2003; Varieties of the Unsaid in sustaining psycho-social community, 2003). They are the questions which run the risk of provoking change, whether desirable or undesirable.

- Fran Peavey (Shaping a Strategic Question) sees them as strategic questions that it may be vital to ask: "For every individual, group, or society, there are questions which are taboo. And because those questions are taboo there is tremendous power in them. A strategic question is often one of these 'unaskable' questions. And it usually is unaskable because it challenges the values and assumptions that the whole issue rests upon..... Questioning values is a strategic task of our times. This is because it is the values behind highly politicised issues that have usually got us into the trouble in the first place. We need to look at a value, a habit, an institutional pattern and ask, 'Is this value working or not ?', 'Are these values working for the common good ?....." Elsewhere Peavey (Questioning and Listening) reinforces the point: "Questioning is a basic tool for rebellion. It breaks open the stagnant hardened shells of the present, and opens up the options that might be explored..... Questioning can change institutions and entire
The challenge and value of unaskable questions is noted by Liz Ryan (Don't Be Afraid to Ask, BusinessWeek Online, 27 December 2005) who distinguishes it from an "elephant-in-the-room" variant: "So it's a strange experience, as a working adult, to ask a question that no one wants to answer -- or even wants to hear. This may happen when you start a job and make innocent inquiries about how things work in the new shop.... The unanswerable question is the one that makes people instantly angry. There's a force field around it; no one goes near it. This is different from the elephant in the room, which everyone sees but no one mentions. An elephant question could be: Will the coming reorg eliminate my department? .... The unanswerable question isn't on everyone's mind. The issue that underlies it is so much a part of everyday reality that no one questions it. That's why you garner contemptuous looks just by bringing it up.... Such contempt keeps people from opening their mouths... The problem is that the unanswerable question is the one that desperately needs to be asked -- and answered".

Robert Townsend (Up the Organization: how to stop the corporation from stifling people and strangling profits, 1970) urges an annual review of unanswerable questions as a method of improving a company's marketing approach. [more]

As a poet, Tess Gallagher (Asking the Unasked Question, English Matters, Fall 2004) argues: "But being a poet and a young artist demanded an initial revaluing of what a life is for: not for amassing wealth, but for giving the gift of one's spiritual and creative vitality for the good of the community, even when you may have things to say to that community that they may not want to hear. For poetry and art and science are based on asking the unasked and even the unanswerable questions -- what nobody dared to think, to consider, to try, to propose."

Unanswerable questions: It is the assumption that some questions are unanswerable that has notably resulted in avoidance of such questions:

• In a classic text of logical positivism, Moritz Schlick (Unanswerable Questions, The Philosopher, XIII, 1936) argues: "Correspondingly, the reasons why a given problem is insoluble may be of two entirely different kinds. In, the first place, the impossibility of answering a given question may be an impossibility in principle or, as we shall call it, a logical impossibility. In the second place, it may be due to accidental circumstances which do not affect the general laws, and in this case we shall speak of an empirical impossibility.... It is one of the most important contentions of the Philosophy I am advocating that there are many questions which it is empirically impossible to answer -- but not a single real question for which it would be logically impossible to find a solution.... Thus a question which is unanswered in principle can have no meaning; it can be no question at all: it is nothing but a nonsensical series of words with a question mark after them."

• In the political arena, some sets of questions are considered unanswerable (cf Tony Benn, Unanswerable Questions, Morning Star, 24 January 2003; Herbert Mitgang, The Cold War and Its Unanswerable Questions, 15 August 1994)

• In support of religious belief, creationism and intelligent design, sets of questions may be formulated as unanswerable by science (cf Evolution's Unanswerable Questions)

• The educational process from early childhood is characterized by the need of adults to respond to unanswerable questions. Many teachers report that students find unanswerable questions pointless and frustrating. These teachers suggest that most students prefer questions with concrete answers that are either right or wrong. [more]

• Disasters, accidents and death evoke recognition of unanswerable questions (cf Laura Turner, Why is Nature Angry? And Other Unanswerable Questions, 2005)

Undefined questions: Where questions are poorly defined, there may be reluctance to answer them or to treat them as worthy of consideration:

• Research: The characteristics of a good question have been defined to include: "Avoid broad or undefined questions by including specific people, places, and situations. Avoid narrow subjects by creating questions that cannot be answered with only one piece of evidence." [more] Research proposals may be deemed flawed due to the presence of undefined questions and hypotheses [more]

• Search engine query strategies: InformationWeek (8 May 2000) gives an example: "The data warehouse was built with 'indexes,' predefined queries that are designed to boost system performance. But that approach wasn't working because... marketing analysts bombarded the data warehouse with a wide range of ad hoc queries that rendered the indexing scheme nearly useless. The ability to ask those previously undefined questions is key. The people who are getting the real value out of data warehouses are asking ad hoc questions...." [more]

• Survey methodology: Don R. Kates Jr (Bigotry, Symbolism and Ideology in the Battle over Gun Control, 1992) notes with respect to gun control surveys: "These polls are meaningless because it is impossible to divine from an affirmative answer whether respondents are expressing support for the 20,000 or so controls that already exist, for some undefined additional control, or for any specific kind of new control. Indicative of the fatuity of such undefined questions is the fact that, when polls do focus on specific new control proposals, the most popular one is a law that requires judges to give severe prison terms to anyone found guilty of a gun crime"
Philosophy: Robert W. Angelo (Philosophical Notes about Wittgenstein's Logic of Language) comments on "undefined questions" received in relation to the content of his website: "If they are undefined, then they are not without answers: i.e. nonsense in the form of a question is still nonsense (which is to say that the question-sign can only be rejected, not answered): what is undefined is without meaning... Or what else shall we mean by 'undefined' [in the context of philosophy; in poetry of course we can dream]? If a word or combination of words is undefined, then it either must be given a meaning by whoever wishes to use it, or in the case of a text it may be possible to deduce the author's intention (what the author is imagined to have meant [the author's meaning]) from context".

Unconsidered questions: These are recognized with the emergence of new perspectives:

- Liberation theology: John Marks (An Agenda for a True Theology of Liberation, 1987) criticizes activist political theologians for giving no serious consideration to any of the major schools of either micro or macro economic thought whether they be neo-classical, Austrian or Keynesian in inspiration. He argues that "The main policy they advocate is a utopian socialism unsullied by any consideration of alternatives and ungrounded in any serious economic analysis. Their discussions on matters of social policy are similarly crude. Nowhere, for example, do they consider even the major works concerned with welfare capitalism let alone some recent critics of this viewpoint... But they also neglect or ignore many wider questions that bear directly on their central concern with the material condition of the people in the less prosperous countries of the world".

- Computer software: Concern with issues that have been ignored gave rise to Some Meditations Upon The Evils of Unconsidered Questions (The Creed of the Querent, 2001)

- Religious issues: Donald J. Kagay (The Theory and Practice of Just War in the Late-Medieval Crown of Aragon, The Catholic Historical Review - 91, 4, October 2005, pp. 591-610 ) points out that "From the High Middle Ages onward, this intrusion of philosophy and ethics into military matters gave rise to generally accepted standards by which war was waged and peace negotiated. With this growing regulation of the violent aspects of warfare, formerly unconsidered questions, such as the involvement of clerics in war, became the meat of both canon and Roman law."

- Technological advances: The increase in genetic knowledge has, for example, resulted in recognition of previously unconsidered questions of ownership and control [more] Such understanding raises previously unconsidered questions about how the information gained can and should be used.[more]

Unidentified questions: Such questions may be considered as fundamental to the creation of knowledge.

- One element in the Policy on Learning Expectations for Michigan Students is: "Create knowledge by raising and identifying previously unconsidered or unidentified questions and issues; creating new primary knowledge; and creating new approaches to solving or considering questions and issues" (see also Michigan Curriculum Framework Content Standards on Learning, Problem Solving, and Decision-making, Appendix V of Embracing the Information Age: Report by the Task Force of the Michigan State Board of Education, 2001).

- For a poet: "I believe that any who hope to sort out and find any hidden meanings, must first seek to grasp the unidentified questions. Then, if having achieved that much, they will find the answer is something which cannot even be formulated". [more]

There is a case for reviewing question avoidance, and especially "unidentifiable questions" as being an implicit challenge to the identity of a person or a group. As Kenneth Boulding (Ecodynamics; a new theory of social evolution, 1978) teasingly puts it:

> Our consciousness of the unity of self in the middle of a vast complexity of images or material structures is at least a suitable metaphor for the unity of group, organization, department, discipline or science. If personification is a metaphor, let us not despise metaphors -- we might be one ourselves.

But, beyond such use of metaphor as an answer to the challenge of identity, why should identity not be associated as much with a question as with any answer to it? In Boulding's terms, we may be the question itself rather than any particular answer to it.

Question avoidance vs Question evasion

A clear distinction is made between "tax avoidance" and "tax evasion" [more]. This can be helpful in distinguishing between "question avoidance" and "question evasion". Thus:

- **Tax avoidance** is the legal utilisation of a tax regime in order to reduce, by entirely legitimate means, the amount of tax that is payable. This may be achieved by using tax deductions, changing tax status through incorporation or, depending on citizenship, establishing an offshore company, trust or foundation in a tax haven.
  - **Question avoidance** could in this light be understood as using the dialogue process, and due procedure, to reduce the need to respond to questions. This may be achieved by distraction. Typically this means orienting the dialogue to other topics, or simply by avoidance of situations in which questions can be asked.

- **Tax evasion** describes the illegal means used by individuals, and other bodies, to evade the assessment or payment of taxes. This usually entails deliberately misrepresenting or concealing the true state of affairs from the tax authorities in order to reduce tax liability, and typically includes dishonest tax reporting of income.
  - **Question evasion** could in this light be understood as essentially dishonest misrepresentation or dissimulation --
avoiding transparency -- so as to conceal the true state of affairs, thus avoiding the arousal of any question or any sense of obligation to answer.

In the case of both avoidance and evasion, the question may potentially be asked by oneself of oneself. However these distinctions are, of course, not clearly made in practice -- as with regard to taxation.

Question evasion is addressed by so-called "hard questions" as well as by acknowledging the tendency to avoid them -- rather than "biting the bullet" (cf Questions to which Many deserve Answers, 2000). The aftermath of 9/11 has given rise to commentary on "avoiding hard questions". Reductionism can be seen as a way of avoiding hard questions [more]. Management avoidance of hard questions is seen as a means of making fewer hard decisions [more]. Blaming others -- blacks, muslims, etc -- may be seen as a typical technique to ensure such avoidance. The potential cost of avoiding hard questions, in the case of Iraq, was stated by a member of the US House Armed Services Committee: "We can win this war and come out the weaker for it, if we're not very careful." [more]. Population-control zealots may complain about overly fertile Third World women while avoiding hard questions about overconsumption in their own countries.

Jonathan Chait (The Peculiar Duplicity of Ari Fleischer New Republic Online, 2005) provides a helpful analysis of the techniques of responding to "hard questions" used by a White House press secretary.

But what Fleischer does, for the most part, is not really spin. It's a system of disinformation -- blunter, more aggressive, and, in its own way, more impressive than spin. Much of the time Fleischer does not engage with the logic of a question at all. He simply denies its premises -- or refuses to answer it on the grounds that it conflicts with a Byzantine set of rules governing what questions he deems appropriate. Fleischer has broken new ground in the dark art of flackdom: Rather than respond tententiously to questions, he negates them altogether.

Chait names and describes the techniques employed by Fleischer: Audacious Fib, Process Non-Sequitur, The Rules

Michael Kinsley (Just Supposin': In defense of hypothetical questions. 2003) generalizes this phenomenon:

Avoiding questions (from reporters, from opponents, from citizens) is the basic activity of the American politician. Or rather, avoiding the supply of answers. Skill and ingenuity in question-avoidance techniques are a big factor in political success. Usually, avoiding the question involves pretending to answer it, or at least supplying some words to fill the dead space after the question has been asked. But if you can squeeze a question into one of a few choice categories, the unwritten rules allow the politician to not answer at all.

In the case of political debates, the US Debate Advisory Standards Project found that with respect to political candidates:

With respect to failure to answer questions, most opposed punishment. Participants believed that the moderator should note that the question had not been answered and pose the question again. Participants opposed further punishment based on their belief that the damage to a candidate's image caused by question-avoidance is punishment enough. [more]

The various phases in the reluctance to investigate the evidence relating to incidents surrounding 9/11, followed by the response to the presentation of evidence for "weapons of mass destruction" in Iraq, the associated "intelligence failure", and the various subsequent inquiries, all provide a multitude of examples of question avoidance and evasion (cf 911+ Questions in Seeking UnCommon Ground and protecting the Middle Way, 2001). The nature of questioning in relation to evidence is also characteristic of crime detection. This may involve both question avoidance and question evasion: when (time), where (place), which (instrument), how (mode of operation), what (nature of crime), who (suspects), why (motive).

Another distinction that could help to clarify the relation between "question avoidance" and "question evasion" is that between "conflict prevention" and "conflict avoidance" (cf Robert Bacal, The Difference Between Conflict Prevention And Conflict Avoidance). It might be asked whether other insights could be obtained from any distinction between "intimacy avoidance" and "intimacy evasion" -- especially given that a question may well be associated with intimate, if not invasive, semantic or existential engagement.

**Distinguishing "avoidance" and "evasion" for 7 WH-questions**

In each of the following seven cases, avoidance may be "legitimately" achieved by misdirection and misleading -- most charmingly in flirtation and courtship. This may be understood as evasion if it is done to gain unfair advantage. The distinction is obvious in the case of slight of hand for amusement and its use when cheating in card games for money.

There is a case for distinguishing the terms characteristic of misleading "answers" to the 7 WH-questions, perhaps: "then" (in response to a when-question), "there" (where-question), "this" (which), "thus" (how), "that" (what), "them" (whom), and "because" (why). Each of these may be used to collapse uncertainty and complex dilemmas inappropriately and prematurely. This is best characterized in well-known phrases such as that of Myron Tribus "There is a simple answer to every question and it is usually wrong" or that variously attributed to Will Rogers and H L Mencken 'There is a simple solution to every problem - and it is always wrong'. This has been variously paraphrased, for example: "For every human problem there is a solution that is quick, simple, inexpensive -- and wrong".

**When-question avoidance / evasion:** Processes of avoidance (distraction) or evasion (dissimulation) by the "when shy" may be distinguished with respect to when-questions such as the following:
• Timimg of imminent disaster: According to Bill McGuire (Global Catastrophes, 2006, updating Guide to the End of the World, 2002) people are completely in denial about the nature and probability of disasters -- notably 718 potential hazardous asteroids currently heading towards the planet. Similar avoidance or denial is evident in the case of the many thousands of "world problems" identified by those international constitutencies attentive to them (cf Encyclopedia of World Problems and Human Potential). Typically questions about timing are avoided, although the degree of probability may be concealed through dissimulation. Of particular interest are the questions asked by (or elicited from) people who live in the proximity of a volcano or an earthquake fault-line (such as the San Andreas Fault in California). When-questions in relation to the probability of a hurricane like Katrina are now acknowledged to have been both avoided and evaded.

• Postponement of action:  
• in anticipation of natural disasters: In situations developing towards possible disaster, when-questions may be avoided through an array of postponement processes -- exemplified by "putting off until tomorrow what could be done today" (mañana). Through misrepresenting the scope of the possible disaster, or its imminence, question evasion is achieved. Emphasis may be placed on the uncertainty of the timing of earthquakes, volcanos or asteroids.
• in anticipation of man-made problems: As in the case of natural disasters, there are many ways to distract attention from necessary when-questions. However when-question evasion is achieved by misrepresenting information relating to the possible problem, as exemplified in the case of
  ▪ climate change and global warming, Gulf current reversal
  ▪ environmental pollution
  ▪ overpopulation and its consequences for shortage of resources (water, oil, food)
  ▪ gender disproportion in the population
• anticipation of statistically probable disruptive events: These typically call for when-questions in relation to appropriate preparedness as cultivated by social security schemes, civil defence authorities and insurance companies. Such questions may be avoided by misrepresenting or denying the risk in cases such as:
  ▪ personal accidents: traffic, domestic, sporting
  ▪ property accidents: fire, flood, subsidence, earthquake
  ▪ health/disease: incapacity, care

• Death: Any when-questions in relation to death tend to be avoided as unpleasant through distraction onto more agreeable matters, or framed through euphemism (eg "making provisions") in the expectation of a vague answer. More problematic is actual evasion of such when-questions by effectively cultivating assumptions of immortality or deliberately misrepresenting medical information. This may of course have different implications for:
  ▪ one's own death
  ▪ death of near relatives, dependents or of those on whom one depends (in some way)
  ▪ problematic processes prior to death (senility, Alzheimer's disease, incontinence, vegetative state, etc)

• Anticipation of desirable events: The problematic conditions of life may be alleviated by anticipated events with which when-questions can be associated. When questions may be avoided regarding the reality of the hoped for event in order better to nurture hope for its realization. More problematic is the misrepresentation of the probability of the event to a degree which ensures psychological dependence on its occurrence. These processes are typically evident in the case of hoping to:
  ▪ win the lottery, benefit from a legacy, or be awarded a bonus
  ▪ meet the right person ("falling in love")
  ▪ have a child
  ▪ achieve a qualification
  ▪ achieve enlightenment or benefit from end-tines religious scenarios

• Reconciliation: In this case the when-question relates to long-standing differences. The issue may be avoided by focusing on the present and the future -- "drawing a line" and "moving on". Problems are associated with misrepresentation by those involved of the differences and their origin in order to evade any when-question with regard to the possibility of such reconciliation. Cases include:
  ▪ divided countries and peoples: Germany, Korea, Taiwan-China, Cyprus, Ireland, etc
  ▪ blood-feuding families and tribes
  ▪ apologies/reparations for past abuse: Germany, Turkey (Armenian massacre), Japan (treatment of POWs; "comfort women"), US/UK (slavery)
  ▪ recognition of treaty obligations: USA (indigenous peoples), Australia (indigenous peoples), etc

• Changing lifestyle: Here when-questions focus on the timing of such a change -- when to "make a break". The necessity of asking the question may be avoided by continuing to cultivate habitual patterns of behaviour. However the necessity may be evaded by misrepresenting it, attributing greater weight to less substantial evidence, even when the pattern is increasing the risk of death (whether physical or psychological):
  ▪ ceasing substance abuse: drugs, smoking, alcohol, etc
  ▪ changing diet: excessive food consumption (calories), consumption of inappropriate foodstufs (sugar, fat, etc),
  ▪ ethical decisions: ethical investment, consumption of animal products
• engaging in fitness regimes
• career change: downscaling (living simply)
• leaving a relationship: domestic violence, preferred alternative, etc
• immigrating: to a more favourable location, seeking asylum

• **Problems of the future**: Some issues will only become evident or critical to future generations. The relevant when-questions may be avoided by simply focusing on the present or the short-term future (effectively “exporting” into the medium or long-term future). More problematic is the evasion of such questions through misrepresentation of the nature of the problem to be faced at that time so that the when-question is not even envisaged:
  • implications for "grandchildren": typically those arising from invasive development and progressive loss of greenspaces and wilderness areas
  • rising sea levels
  • accumulation of nuclear waste

**Where-question avoidance / evasion**: Processes of avoidance (distraction) or evasion (dissimulation) by the "where shy" may be distinguished with respect to where-questions such as the following:

• "**Suffering elsewhere**": Here the issue is the avoidance of where-questions regarding places where a high degree of suffering is occurring. Geographical distance, ignorance and insensitivity may be used as an excuse to focus on the "realities" of a proximate comfort zone. News about distant problems may simply be avoided as being unpleasant. More problematic is the deliberate suppression of information regarding such suffering to ensure that no response is even envisaged. Cases that can be usefully distinguished include:
  • problems on "other" continents: apartheid (South Africa); prisoner abuse (Abu Ghraib, Guantánamo Bay); genocide (Darfur); occupied territories (Tibet, Palestine)
  • problems in "other" countries of a region, as with the challenges of Cyprus
  • problems in "other" neighbourhoods of a city, as with no-go and slum areas
  • problems in "other" households

• **Problems in other sectors**: In the case of institutions, or governments, that are fragmented into agencies with specific sectoral mandates, assessment of the challenges of the institution (or a particular section of it) may simply avoid mention of problems in other sectors -- notably in any glossy presentations. More serious is when such positive presentations, and the decision-making that they reinforce, misrepresent and cover-up the problems experienced by some sectors -- effectively evading any where-question regarding the possible existence of such problems.

• **Resettlement**: Here the where-question concerns the settlement or resettlement of peoples as a result of flooding (whether natural disasters or water projects), of conflict or of geopolitical strategic decisions at the highest level. The question of where such people could or should go may simply be avoided, even though the challenge is recognized -- possibly including issues relating to any "right of return". However the question may be evaded by misrepresenting the issues. Cases include:
  • settlement including,
    • the Jews and Palestinians,
    • the populations displaced by Stalin
    • the Chagos people displaced from Diego Garcia
  • flooding, most notably in the case of hurricane Katrina and the Three-Gorges project on the Yangtze River
  • refugees, from the 40-plus regional conflicts around the world

• **Relocation**: People in one location may consider moving to another, "better", location to improve their quality of life. The precise location and practicalities of the where-question may simply be avoided. More problematic is the situation when any necessity for asking the question is subject to misrepresentation in order to evade the issue. Cases of relocating in pursuit of a better life (and the "end of the rainbow" or "distant fields being greener") include:
  • between countries, including immigration, by especially in the form of seeking asylum to escape from abuse
  • relocation within a country in pursuit of: a new career, better contacts, pioneers (gold rushes, etc)
  • drift from rural areas to the city in pursuit of excitement and opportunity
  • moving to a place of retirement
  • off-planet relocation may be cultivated as a high-tech possibility, even as the future of humanity, avoiding the issue of the practicalities and the destination. More problematic is evasion where-questions that might draw attention to the selectivity of any such advantages.

• **Directions**: The reluctance of men to ask for directions is widely recognized (cf Richard C. Francis, *Why Men Won't Ask for Directions: the seductions of sociobiology*, 2003; Mark Sichel, *Real Men Don't Ask for Directions*, 2004)

• **Waste disposal**: Increasingly communities are faced with major issues of waste and the challenging where-question of its disposal. The where-question is readily avoided, notably by the assumption that others will deal with the issue. It may be evaded, notably by politicians, by creating the false impression that there are simple solutions that will not give rise to other difficulties. The issue is all the more challenging in the case of radioactive waste disposal.

• **Availability of land**: Rapidly increasing population puts ever-increasing pressure on the availability of land. The question of where
people will be able to establish themselves is readily avoided by focusing on other matters. More dangerously, the question may be evaded -- notably in promoting population growth -- by misrepresenting or denying the nature of such population pressures or the nature of the real need, whether now or in the foreseeable future:

- housing construction, namely the land surface for shelter, let alone quality housing
- arable land, namely that available for agriculture and husbandry
- forests, namely that required for the reoxygenation of the air
- wilderness areas, namely that required as habitats for species, many of them endangered

**Which-question avoidance / evasion:** Processes of avoidance (distraction) or evasion (dissimulation) by the "which shy" may be distinguished with respect to which-questions such as the following:

- **Governance:** The principal challenge for governance, whether global, regional, national or local, is which policy option to favour and which to reject. In the case of challenging issues, discussion of them may simply be avoided by giving priority to other business. Much more problematic is the misrepresentation of controversial policy options -- reframing them so that questions relating to them are evaded, possibly to ensure that only one "choice" is appropriate (a "no brainer"). Examples of such reframing include:
  - security: By claiming (or falsely exaggerating) that an issue has security implications, further discussion of associated which-questions may be evaded (eg as in the case of mistreatment of prisoners)
  - health: By claiming (or falsely exaggerating) that an issue has health implications, further discussion of associated which-questions may be evaded (cf as in the case of medical experimentation on animals).

- **Life-choices:** The life choices faced by individuals take the form of which-questions that may be avoided. They may also be evaded by misrepresentation and denial. Various processes may be used to avoid which-questions through seeking advice in some form in order to have the choice determined by others -- without it actually having to be made. Waiting for such advice, without actually seeking it, may also be used as an avoidance mechanism. Failure to obtain advice in this way -- indicating which choice to make -- may be used to avoid any actual decision (eg "waiting for a sign"). Which-questions, especially "alternatives" implying radical change to one's own behaviour patterns, may be evaded by interpreting the absence of guidance in a fatalistic ("It is the Will of God") or nihilistic manner. They may also be evaded by procrastination, negating the arguments (or marginalizing those providing them) so that no choice is necessary, or seeking advice in such a way that it can be readily rejected as inappropriate:
  - consultants and advisors
  - divination systems: I Ching, Tarot, etc
  - determining an "auspicious" moment: astrology
  - guidance from other planes: prayer, channelling

**How-question avoidance / evasion:** Processes of avoidance (distraction) or evasion (dissimulation) by the "how shy" may be distinguished with respect to how-questions such as the following:

- **Governance:** In this case how-question avoidance is achieved by a spectrum of processes employed by politicians (as noted above), including forms of distraction and news management ("spin"). Avoidance may be achieved by skillful consultative prioritizing (cf Frederick C. Van Bennekom, *How Question Format Affects Survey Data Analysis*, July 2005; Norbert Schwarz, *How Question-Order Affects Answers, Michigan Today*, Fall 2001). How-question evasion is notably achieved by conscious misrepresentation, especially of statistics. Evasion may include making (electoral) promises without any intention to fulfil such commitments. The challenge is particularly significant in the case of:
  - managing globally
  - achieving sustainability
  - achieving the political will to change

- **Decision-making:** Whilist the necessity of decisions may be evident, how-questions relating to the process whereby they can be made may well be avoided through a variety of techniques. Information may be deliberately misrepresented to evade how-questions regarding decision-making. Windows of opportunity may be lost as a result.

- **Implementation:** How-questions may be both avoided and evaded as illustrated by the following:
  - strategic and tactical challenges: as with questions relating to how to obtain resources or how to achieve a quality lifestyle
  - means: as with questions relating to unpleasant modalities, "biting the bullet", " clean" methods vs "dirty tricks"
  - responsibility: as with questions relating to how to assume or avoid responsibility (eg ensuring denial of culpability)

- **Communication:** Both avoidance and evasion are evident with regard to how-questions relating to communication, as in the following cases:
  - announcing unpleasant decisions
  - making unwelcome announcements
  - implementing painful processes

- **Technical challenges:** These are the characteristic "know-how" technical questions. The how-questions may be avoided in optimistic presentations which focus attention on potential achievements and benefits without "entering into detail" on means. Evasion of how-questions may be deliberate when there is no currently feasible means. One technique is to devote considerable resources to some highly visible priority area so that attention is distracted from priorities thereby marginalized. This may constitute evasion as in the case of the exploration of outer space when no resources are allocated to common social problems.
The following illustrate the range of cases allocation of resources sats

- how to: absorb green house gases, dispose of radioactive waste, ensure future water supplies, deal with global warming
- how to alleviate conditions of marginalized peoples: gypsies, "travelers", indigenous tribes

**What-question avoidance / evasion:** Processes of avoidance (distraction) or evasion (dissimulation) by the "what shy" may be distinguished with respect to what-questions such as the following:

- **Clarification:** A major area of what-question avoidance is that relating to clarification of the nature of any challenge to which a response, possibly a new kind of response, is required. Typically, notably in the case of politicians, what-questions would simply be sidetracked through focus on "business as usual" and predetermined priorities. But bodies needing to ensure the viability of their activities (whether commercial, industrial or scientific) may be quite attentive to the need for what-questions to detect anomalies requiring corrective measures. Highly problematic situations arise when information is presented selectively, or suppressed, in order to evade any need for what-questions -- to the point of denying the existence of the phenomena that might have elicited them. Examples of concern include:
  - concerns with "what the real issues are", typically when there is any sense that acceptable phenomena may be concealing the existence of highly problematic issues requiring attention (as with the O-ring problem of the Challenger space shuttle)
  - concerns with "what is really going on", as highlighted by the preoccupations of conspiracy theorists and the manner in which they are marginalized (despite the classic case of the Pentagon Papers, and many more recent examples relating to promotion of the weapons of mass destruction thesis in relation to Iraq); also evident in the case of controversies with regard to environmental impacts (dating from the denial of acid rain by Margaret Thatcher) and global warming (and interpretation of facts to deny its significance)
  - concerns regarding "threats to security", typically the preoccupation of the intelligence agencies and security services
  - evaluation of institutional response failures, as in the case of the "failure of imagination" and "intelligence failure" in the case of Iraq, and the response failure in the case of hurricane Katrina
  - concerns about "what business we are in", exemplified in the management literature by the early recognition by IBM that they were no longer in the typewriter business but in the word processing business: "For years Underwood and IBM dominated the typewriter business. The Underwood brand is gone now because its management thought they were in the typewriter business. But IBM's management knew they were in the business of taking words out of the consciousness of their customers and putting them on a permanent medium." [more] Also exemplified by the strategic adage: "Having lost sight of our objectives, we redoubled our efforts".

- **Action:** In this case the what-question relates to determining appropriate action and whether the question is avoided or evaded, notably in the case of
  - "what should be done"

- **Historical interpretation:** The what-questions may be avoided with regard to exactly what occurred at some highly controversial moment in the past, possibly with efforts to evade (and especially to deny) the issue by what is claimed by some to be misrepresentation. Examples include:
  - "massacres" and the complicity of various parties in them, notably the Armenian massacre (1915-17) and its interpretation by Turkey in seeking entry to the European Union
  - Holocaust: as exemplified by "Holocaust denial" and the legislation in response to it
  - slavery and the presentation and mispresentation of arguments for reparations
  - treaties by colonial powers with indigenous peoples

- **Consequences:** Here the concern in the first instance is with avoiding what-questions about the consequences of any action, notably any action that is seemingly desirable and feasible -- the effects that may follow from actions that otherwise seem innocent of significant harms to others. To ensure its feasibility it may be very helpful to present it so that attention is not drawn to its problematic consequences and the associated costs. More problematic are the situations when the problematic information regarding those consequences is manipulated or suppressed. Examples include:
  - introduction of species and their effects on naturally occurring species and ecosystems (as with rabbits and cane toads introduced to Australia)
  - introduction of new technology, including genetically modified foods, nanotechnology, and especially nuclear power (with the problematic consequences of accidents, waste disposal, decommissioning, etc)

**Who-question avoidance / evasion:** Processes of avoidance (distraction) or evasion (dissimulation) by the "who shy" may be distinguished with respect to who-questions such as the following:

- **Identity, status and kinship:** Efforts are typically made to avoid who-questions in situations where precise knowledge of identity and status determine the credibility of communications and access to certain environments -- through "gatekeepers". Who-questions may be evaded by misrepresentation of identity, given the high degree of importance attached in certain circumstances to being "known" rather than to being a "nobody". The range of examples includes:
  - falsifying identity documents and qualifications, notably in extreme cases of fraud and identity theft.
  - stereotyping may be used to misrepresent people through simplistic labelling and profiling
  - contacts, vital to positioning a person in an in-group and guaranteeing further access, may be misrepresented or falsely claimed, notably through "name dropping"
  - existential doubt may be experienced through questions such as "who am I" or "who are we", which may be avoided or evaded (notably in self-development situations, those calling for therapy, or even with respect to any belief in
reincarnation); this may extended to collectivities concerned at their presumption in acting in a certain way (eg men with respect to women, industrialized countries with respect to development countries). The "who am I" question may be considered fundamental to spiritual disciplines and meditative techniques such as yoga. For example, the Jnana Yoga teachings of Ramana Maharshi (cf Who Am I? - (Nan Yar?) focuses on a number of WH-questions in amplifying "who am I", including: What is the nature of Awareness? When will the realization of the Self be gained? Why? How will the mind become quiescent? What is the nature of the Self?

- **Responsibility:** Here the determination of responsibility for problematic consequences through a who-question is avoided by typical forms of distraction. The situation may become more problematic when misrepresentation is used to evade the who-question, especially when it is presented so as to attach the blame to an innocent party. Examples include:
  - determining responsibility for who mandated an action
  - determining "who is behind" an initiative, as typical of the preoccupations of conspiracy theorists
  - determining who is to blame for failures and disasters, as is the case with hurricane Katrina and the complicity of those variously (un)involved
  - determining who should take action in response to need and the complicity of those failing to act or expecting others to act

- **Contacts:** In this case the focus is on avoiding acknowledgement of the challenge of whom to contact, or evading the question of who might be contacted. Examples include:
  - whom to contact in case of need, typically avoided in the case of those whom others perceive to "need help"
  - avoidance of recognition of who one's friends are, or evading the question of whether one has any
  - avoiding the question of who one's elected affinity or partners might be

**Why-question avoidance / evasion:** Processes of avoidance (distraction) or evasion (dissimulation) by the "why shy" may be distinguished with respect to why-questions such as the following:

- **Therapy and self-help:** Although the why-question is fundamental to the explanation of individual differences [more], a why-question, especially in conventional therapeutic contexts, may then be framed as disempowering "negative" to the highest degree. Such aversion may even amount to why-phobia. This might be understood as favouring a questioning process that would amount to what could be described as a cognitive form of the current lifestyle trend of cocooning -- enabling only those questions that sustain what has now been recognized as a "psychological cocoon" (cf Dynamically Gated Conceptual Communities: emergent patterns of isolation within knowledge society, 2004). Disruption of an agenda, righteously and unquestionably assumed to be appropriate, is then naturally seen as inappropriate:
  - For Garry Zancanaro (Why Questions Are The Answer! 2006): "We all need to make a concerted effort to ask ourselves empowering questions that encourage and promote positive thoughts, rather than destructive questions that reinforce negative thought patterns and behaviour."

- **Social change:** As with the therapeutic context, there is a tendency to deprecate the use of why-questions. Such avoidance may be purportedly favoured to avoid "negativity" and encourage an exclusively "positive" approach framed as essential for social change (cf Being Positive Avoiding Negativity: management challenge -- positive vs negative, 2006). However such arguments may also be used to evade why-questions vital to any social change:
  - For the Synergy Community (Communication Guidelines): "Questions beginning with 'why' imply criticism and lead to never-ending chains of explanation and verbalization. Instead of posing 'why' questions, communicate directly and cope actively. A strategic question avoids 'Why.'"
  - For Fran Peavey (Strategic Questioning: an approach to creating personal and social change, In Context, Spring 1995): "Most 'why' questions force you to defend an existing decision or rationalize the present. 'Why' questions can create resistance to change". In a different version of the same text this continues with: "The openness of a particular question is obvious at the gross extremes, but becomes far more subtle and subjective as you deepen your understanding of the skills of strategic questioning. For example, can you feel the difference between asking, "Why don't you work on poverty ?", and, "What keeps you from working on poverty ?" Sometimes a Why? question is very powerful as you focus on values, and meaning. But in general it is a short-lever question." (Shaping a Strategic Question)

- **Technological innovation:** Why-avoidance may be considered an inhibitor of innovation. Why-evasion even more so. The importance of the question is illustrated by the following comments of Greg Githens (Radical innovation success starts with asking the question; why are we doing this project? Vision -- Product Development and Management Association, July 2004):
  - "The 'why' question is useful because it stimulates a learning environment. Projects that learn well perform better at radical innovation. The high levels of uncertainty distinguish radical innovations, compared to incremental innovations. The simple rule to remember is this: 'Projects that are fastest to learn are fastest to market.' Asking 'why' encourages people to reflect and learn".
  - "asking 'why' is something of a reality test of the market's need. The program's funding should be commensurate with the ability to answer the question. Inherent in the question 'why' is an external market view of reality".
  - "why' clarifies organizational capabilities, capacity, and co-development agendas.... There are plenty of differences in values, goals, and cultures of co-development partners. Asking the question "why? can help assure a better understanding of each party's interests.... It improves dialogue This question is also a tool for improving dialogue"

- **Business:** In contrast to such perceptions by those identified with psychosocial change, a commitment to why-questions is to be found amongst those concerned with change in the business world, although patterns of avoidance and evasion are also evident in
connection with "cover-ups":

- In the executive magazine Darwin, John Baldoni (On Leadership Communication: The Power of Why -- For those times when the status quo just won't do, May 2004) identifies ways in which leaders can use the why-question:
  - Burst preconceptions
  - Question assumptions
  - Raise the stakes
  - Enlist support
  - Identify new challenges
- The value of the why-question is stressed in marketing (cf Sean D'Souza, The Power of Why: your psychological ally to marketing success! Conversion Chronicles)
- For Michael Abney, Mark Mayfield and Jill Nicola (Streamlined Object Modeling: Patterns, Rules, and Implementation, 2001):
  - Conceptual planning for a business goes through three phases: why, what, and how.
  - During the "why," or business strategy phase, the business entrepreneurs flesh out the purpose of the business endeavor and answer questions such as: Why undertake this endeavor? Why will it succeed? Why will customers come to it, use it, or buy it? Why will they return to it, continue to use it, or buy more of it? Answers to the "why" questions contribute to the business strategy for the endeavor.

Transformation of WH-questions as part of the avoidance / evasion process — towards a science of "spin"?

WH-questions can in practice be transformed from one to the other for the purposes of avoidance or evasion. The advantages are seen from the following cases of transformation of a WH-question into:

- A when-question: this serves to distract attention from the precision of where, which, how, what, who and why
- A where-question: this serves to distract attention from the precision of when, which, how, what, who and why
- A which-question: this serves to distract attention from the precision of when, where, which, how, what, who and why
- A how-question: this serves to distract attention from the precision of when, where, which, how, what, who and why
- A what-question: this serves to distract attention from the precision of when, where, which, how, what, who and why
- A who-question: this serves to distract attention from the precision of when, where, which, how, what, who and why
- A why-question: this serves to distract attention from the precision of when, where, which, how, what, who and why

These processes could be understood as a form of "conceptual gerrymandering" to frame contexts in which radical questions do not need to be asked -- by transforming such questions into non-threatening substitutes (cf Being Positive Avoiding Negativity: management challenge -- positive vs negative, 2006). Of particular interest, as a process of avoidance, is the transformation of a "more powerful" question into a "less significant" one of lower complexity (cf Engaging with Questions of Higher Order: cognitive vigilance required for higher degrees of twistedness, 2004).

Management of question avoidance and evasion

The challenge of determining the appropriateness of questioning is highlighted by interrelating the set of WH-questions in the following table. A similar 7x7 table based on WH-questions has been produced by Chris Lucas (Questioning Our Methodologies, 2006) focusing however on questions and answers. An approach to interrelating the 7 questions in a 3 x 4 table is presented elsewhere (Functional Complementarity of Higher Order Questions psycho-social sustainability modelled by coordinated movement, 2004) The cells of the 3-part table indicate the existence of particular conditions. The neutral pattern is as presented. A second pattern, focusing on conditions of avoidance, is obtained by substituting "avoid" for "ask" in the text for each cell. Similarly a third and more challenging pattern is obtained by substituting "evade" for "ask" in the text for each cell. The challenge is "when" to use the first set of neutral conditions indicated, "when" the second, and "when" the third -- and to envisage "where", "which", "how", "what", "who", and "why" to use them.

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3-part Template of WH-question variants:

(i) neutral, based on asking a question (as shown below)

(ii) question-avoidance: based on substitution of "avoid" for "ask" in the following.

(iii) question-evasion: based on substitution of "evade" for "ask" in the following.
The table above is coloured to distinguish four segments as a consequence of distinguishing:

- (a) the 4 WH-questions (when, where, which, how) more concerned with navigating tangible realities
- (b) the three others (what, who, why) more concerned with inferred realities.

The coloured segments are:

- one 16-fold segment combining only those of type (a)
- two 12-fold segments combining (a) and (b)
- one 9-fold-segment combining only those of type (b)

Presumably the elements of the table, without the avoidance/evasion substitutions, are the modalities of the art of questioning appropriately. This would include the capacity to ask "nasty" questions (Checklist of "Nasty" Questions to Pose -- regarding development analyses and initiatives, 1981) -- as does Andreas Agiorgitis, following this adaptation of a classical adage in relation to WH-questions:

There was an opportunity for a real transformative change initiative. Everybody was sure that Somebody would take the opportunity. Anybody could have done so. But Nobody did. Somebody got angry about that, because it was Everybody's responsibility. Everybody thought Anybody could do it, but Nobody realized that Everybody was failing to do so. It ended up that Everybody blamed Somebody when Nobody did what Anybody could have done!

The approach taken here assumes that the challenge of the times may be associated more with how they are understood rather than what they are understood to be -- more with how they condition, and are determined by, thinking and less with the effects they appear individually to produce.

Any such perspective on social change points to the merit of classifying the 30,000 "world problems" in terms of the WH-questions (unasked, if not unaskable) that they particularly imply -- or which inhibit articulation and implementation of the 35,000 "strategies" for their alleviation (cf Encyclopedia of World Problems and Human Potential)

The challenge is when to ask what question and why. One indication is provided by Arthur Young (Geometry of Meaning, 1976) who pointed out that a minimum of six observations is required to determine the behaviour of a free agent (and consequently in a position of power) -- six questions to determine the behaviour, plus an additional one to determine why? [more] This may respond to the dilemma of social change, succinctly stated as:

When and where can which facts be proven; how can this be achieved with any credibility -- by whom, signifying what, and why would they endeavour to do so?

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