

CRITICAL SYSTEMS FORUM

Draft Development Plan

Paul Barnett

Introduction

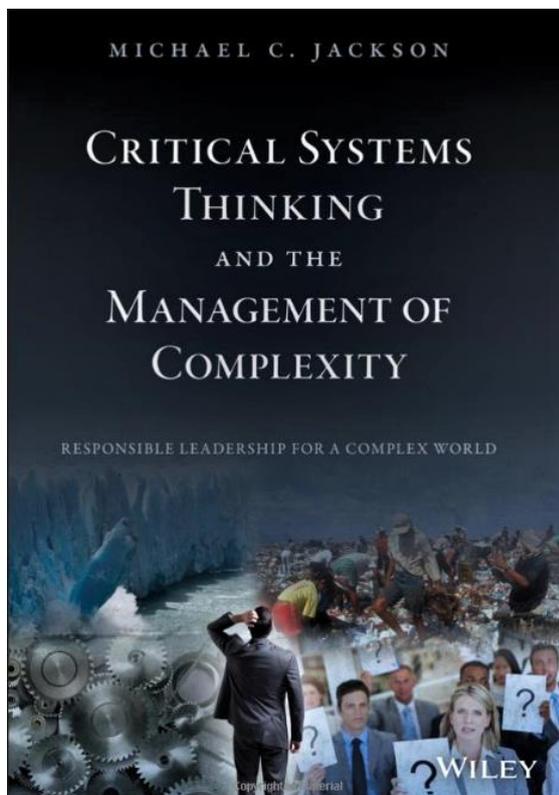
Mike Jackson invited the Enlightened Enterprise Academy to establish a 'think-tank' with a focus on Critical Systems Thinking applied to major social, environmental, and organisational issues, and by businesses and organisations in all sectors.

The invitation followed separate discussions regarding the design of executive education courses in Critical Systems Thinking and Practice (CST&P). And that conversation was itself preceded by Mike Jackson's participation in the conference "Undaunted: How Successful Leaders Face Up to Wicked Problems and Avoid Predictable Surprises" which took place

in March 2020 at the Royal Society of Arts in London. The focus was problem solving, complexity, decision making, risk, systems thinking etc. Paul also spoke on the same topic to a conference of Warwick Business School DBA cohorts prior to that and has run related conferences on topics such as overcoming the problems of organisational silos.

Additionally, Paul has read Mike's book: *Critical Systems Thinking and the Management of Complexity: Responsible Leadership for a Complex World* (Wiley 2019). He is currently writing a review of it in several parts.

Enlightened Enterprise Academy



The Enlightened Enterprise Academy (EEA) was recently launched and incorporates the Strategic Management Forum which I have been leading for several years. It is being established as a global multi-disciplinary faculty of experts who believe sustainable

widely shared prosperity should be the goal of all enterprises.

It will provide a platform for progressive thinkers from a broad range of disciplines to share their ideas about the way enterprises of all types must evolve if we are to solve major global challenges and achieve sustainable widely shared prosperity defined in terms of human flourishing and wellbeing.

The focus will be on the search for practical and pragmatic solutions to improve the design and management of the systems upon which we depend to achieve this goal: natural, political, economic, social, technological, educational, health systems, for example.

The Purpose of This Document

This document will be shared with the people Mike and I have contacted to discuss the concept of the 'think-tank', and to ask if such a concept is something they would support and be interested in being involved in. The purpose is to summarise the concept and outline our initial thinking about its design and development. This is preliminary thinking intended to inform further discussions. It should therefore be treated as a draft document that reflects the current thoughts of Mike and I.

Aims and Scope of the Forum

The current global pandemic has highlighted many weaknesses in the critical systems we rely upon for the proper functioning of society, systems that were already struggling in a Volatile, Uncertain, Complex and Ambiguous (VUCA) world. The negative impacts on our ability to achieve sustainable widely share prosperity, measured in terms of human flourishing and wellbeing, are very evident. The impact on our ability to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals, already in doubt, is a case in point. The weaknesses in health and care systems, shown up by Covid-19, are other examples. There are a number of

interrelated problems to address if we are to flourish in the VUCA world:

- The inability to view complex issues holistically as systems-of-systems
- Failure to recognise how problems and systems may be interrelated, interdependent, or co-dependent
- Inability to manage and mitigate the associated risks, and take advantage of the potential opportunities
- The difficulty people have determining type/s of problems (tame, messy, wicked)
- Insufficient appreciation of the ways different types of problems can best be addressed
- Inability to recognise the quite different nature of different types of systems (mechanistic, natural, social etc.)
- The tendency to apply one analogy - usually the mechanistic analogy - as the lens through which to view all problems
- The tendency to apply favoured approaches and methodologies to problem situations, rather than consider which have most relevance in the search for solutions.

In this context we believe that CST&P offers a better way forward to achieving what is wanted and needed, and to respond effectively to the issues we face. It is transdisciplinary, multiperspectival, and multimethodological in approach, and CST&P seeks:

- To provide a fuller appreciation of the complexity of any given problem situation
- To provide an understanding of the capabilities of different systems methodologies, models, and methods
- To use appropriate systems approaches flexibly in an intervention to enable meaningful improvements
- To provide a comprehensive evaluation of the outcomes
- To promote a critical systems thinking mind-set in those involved

The aim of the CSF is to establish widespread understanding of the benefits of CST&P to government, business, and organisations of all types in all sectors. The benefits this will bring include being able to:

- Mitigate system failures and underperformance.
- Maximise the chances of positive outcomes from systems design, change, and management
- Demonstrate systemic leadership
- Address problems holistically
- Take better decisions
- Be more innovative
- Undertake organisational transformation
- Get the best out of people and teams
- Provide service excellence
- Demonstrably contribute to societal and environmental improvement
- Promote inclusion
- Access a body of knowledge whenever it is needed
- Read or watch up to date research and interviews from a wide range of international sources

Activities & Outputs

Given the main goal is to improve societal, business, and organisational value, our focus will be the creation and aggregation of research, thought leadership and best practice. This we will achieve through research-based initiatives conducted with or supported by others. The body of knowledge we establish will be made as widely available as possible using the multi-media publishing platform that the Enlightened Enterprise Academy is creating.

Additionally, we will create executive education courses to be offered by the Enlightened Enterprise Academy. Such courses, in addition to achieving our purpose, will provide a source of revenue.

The full list of activities and outputs may be expanded over time, but we will begin by

deciding on a range of core activities to include short and medium-term development plans.

Policies & Politics

Critical Systems Thinking and Practice has to address political issues in dealing with problem situations. Practitioners should be guided in their decisions by certain principles. The primary objective should always be the creation of societal value defined in terms of a contribution to sustainable widely shared prosperity, measured in terms of human flourishing and wellbeing. Achieving this may mean trade-offs, but a transdisciplinary, multiperspectival, and multimethodology approach, such as CST&P, aims for inclusion and the creation of benefit for all. Wherever possible the objective will be to avoid having winners and losers, and methods such as constructive conflict, integrative thinking, and value sensitive design will be employed to ensure positive sum outcomes. It should also be remembered that where trade-offs are unavoidable any solution should only be considered a temporary. Better solutions should continue to be sought.

Critical Systems Thinking and Practice should also be used as a means to hold those managing projects to account, accountability being a key source of pressure for better value-creation focused outcomes. With this in mind, CSF will both support those leading projects and those holding the leaders of such projects to account.

Values

Above all we will be human-centred - driven by our goal of sustainably improving the human condition globally. This means we will be global in perspective, open and accessible. Our research-led agenda, and desire to continuously improve the societal value of CST&P, mean we will be forever curious and striving, never satisfied or complacent. And we will provide as much support as we can to those who share these objectives.

Governance

An Advisory Board will consist of people that are distinguished themselves as leaders, policymakers, subject matter experts, and in running organisations similar to ours. They must also be people who are able to dedicate the time we require of them under pre-defined terms, and who share a passionate belief in our objectives. This board will be formed within the first 6 months of operation on the recommendation of a preliminary Steering Committee.

Executive

The Executive Team will be small to start with and will remain lean. It will provide a development, management, and administrative function, ensuring an agreed strategy and plan are effectively executed. And that sufficient funds are available to execute them and maintain the operation.

Organisational Structure

In addition to the Advisory Board and Executive Team, all other elements of the organisational structure will be designed as self-organising multi-disciplinary teams focused on research-led projects. As an initiative of the Enlightened Enterprise Academy CSF will have administrative support and access to a range of resources including multi-media publishing, marketing and promotions, fund raising etc.

Marcoms & Branding



We believe the name Critical Systems Forum encapsulates its concern for the improvement of the critical

systems vital for human well-being and its commitment to employing, in a critically informed manner, the most appropriate

systemic approaches to tackle the problem situations we are confronted by. The brand, identity, website etc. will be created and maintained by the Enlightened Enterprise Academy. The relationship with the academy will be made clear, in the same way that all other sub-brands are treated in branding terms. The domain name for the website will be CriticalSystemsForum.com which has just been registered.

Funding Formula

CSF will aim to attract multiple sources of funding: Individual or organisational donors (local, international, private or public sector donors), Membership fees, Speaker fees, Event fees (for example, annual conference; topic specific events), Government, local or international consultancy contracts, Subscriptions, Subsidies, Other research funding. A comprehensive funding formula will be detailed in a strategy and plan that is being developed.

Costs & Accounting

CSF will be operated and accounted for as a business unit / cost centre of the Enlightened Enterprise Academy. The Academy will expect it to be self-financing as soon as possible, thereafter it will be run on a not-for-profit basis.

For further details:

contact@enlightenedenterprise.ac