

TAMARACK
INSTITUTE

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UPSIDE DOWN THINKING

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Upside
Down
Thinking

THINKING UPSIDE DOWN IS NOT NEW



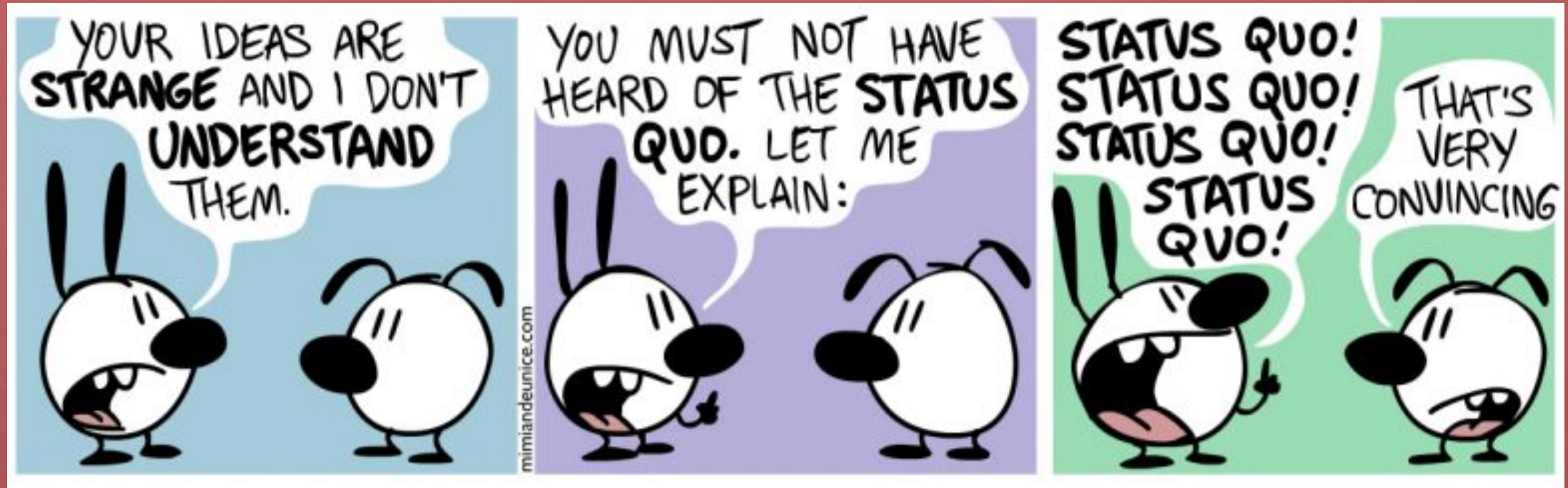
Thinking Differently is often about breaking the rules

X	O	X
O	O	X
X	X	O

X	O	X
O	O	X
X	X	O

~~O~~

Thinking Differently is about disrupting the status quo





"Never, ever, think outside the box."

What stops us
from thinking
well together?

- We don't really know each other.
- We're doing just fine. A few small changes is all we need
- Hierarchy or perceptions of it.
- Fear of thinking the “wrong” stuff
- Comfort is where I am at.
- Wanting to belong, not be an outlier.
- Laziness
- Prefer predictability and homogeneity.
- Either-or habit.

WHAT STOPS US FROM THINKING WELL TOGETHER?



Story Teller
Visually Minded
Systems-Oriented
Associative
Logical
Lateral
Organizer
Builder
Intuitive/Creative
Linear/Sequential
Visionary

WHAT KIND OF THINKER ARE YOU?

Pair up:

Share how your approach to thinking can be an asset to a group... And then talk about what kind of thinker frustrates you the most and why?

**THINKING WELL
TOGETHER IS ABOUT**

**Diversity (the mix)
and
Inclusion (the mixture)**



THINKING WELL TOGETHER

Thinking well together is about engaging with one another about the multiple truths in the world.

We understand through thinking.
Understanding is not about Agreement.
Collaborative Thinking is not about Either-Or.
It is about Either-AND-Or.



We create our
own environment.

FOCUS: 4 TYPES OF THINKING DIFFERENTLY

- DISRUPTIVE INNOVATION
- TURNING NORMS UPSIDE DOWN
- WICKED QUESTIONS
- UPSIDE DOWN THINKING: HERETICAL PROPOSITIONS

DISRUPTIVE INNOVATION

Disruptive innovation is about creating new products and services as well as technologies that either provides a low cost alternative to “forgotten” consumers in a market or a new offering to a new market.

“Disruptive” does not mean to cause chaos or disorder, but rather denotes “replacing” the usual or the norm with something new that people will buy.

DOMINANT PLAYERS AND THE DISRUPTORS

Dominant Players:

- maintain innovation,
- cater to their best customers
- add features, bells and whistles
- Seen to dominate the market

Disruptors

- Create a product or service that provides a good enough product for a lower price for the “forgotten” customers OR
- Create a product for a new market.

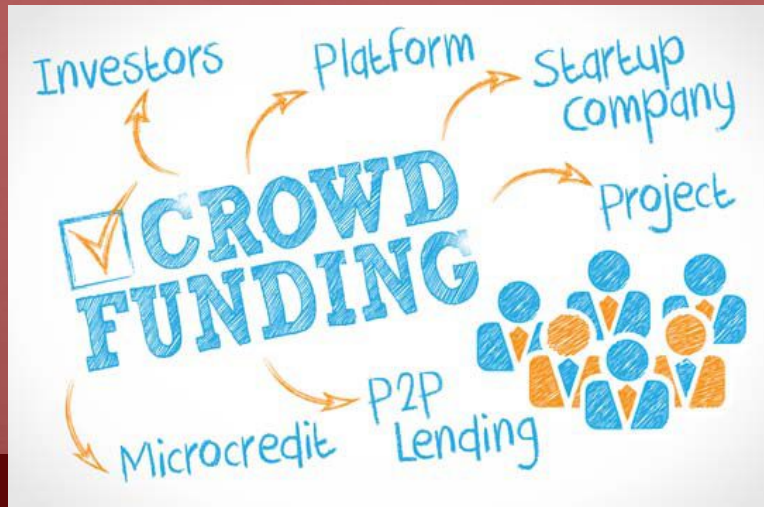


DOMINANT PLAYERS AND THE DISRUPTORS: NON PROFIT EXAMPLE

Dominant Players:



Disruptors:



TURNING “NORMS” UPSIDE DOWN



NORMS INCLUDE: Purpose, Key Features, Key Benefits, Value Proposition, Brand Image....



Soda Norms

Soda is inexpensive.

It tastes good.

It's cool and fun.

It's refreshing.



Upside Down Thinking

Soda is expensive.

It tastes bad.

It's practical.

It energizes.





Car Rental Norms

Have to see client.

Paperwork is necessary.

Rent by the day or longer.

Many Choices, various prices



Upside Down Thinking

Don't see the client.

No paperwork.

Rent by the hour or longer.

Minimal Choice, low fees.





Housing First Norms (Edmonton)

House the Chronically Homeless First
Formal Collaboration Across many teams.
Centralized Intake
Provide a range of supports directly from team/ case management
Complex system dependent on significant data collection to “prove” success.
Cheaper than homelessness.



Upside Down Thinking

House any homeless person.
Prevent Homelessness
Just do it ourselves.
Go to where the homeless are.
Housing the homeless is the only focus.
Refer out for support.
Minimal process, minimal paperwork.
Cheaper than Housing First

OHT

**COMMUNITY
BRIDGE**

Turning norms upside down: Community Bridge

Conventional Emergency Funds	The Community Bridge
Low ceiling for financial help.	No preconceived ceiling.
Help only available once.	Come again if you need to.
Proof of need requires documentation.	Only criteria: eviction is imminent.
Time consuming process.	Rapid fire engagement.
No other support provided.	Help and support provide during and after.
Rules-based decision-making.	People-first decision-making.
Focus on people who will cheat.	Focus on people who need help

What are your norms?

What could you learn,
understand and/or create
by turning them upside
down?

PAIR AND SHARE

What are some NORMS
about board meetings or
board governance?

BOARD MEETINGS

Conventional Board Meetings	Upside down norms
We have a pre-set agenda to address.	We have agenda-less meetings guided by a few questions or a theme
We focus on reviewing financials	We focus on discussing capacity
We focus on statistics	We focus on stories
We all sit around one table	We break into small groups or dyads
We focus on policy	We explore innovation
We limit the executive director	We liberate the executive director
Stewardship is about costs	Stewardship is about changing lives

UPSIDE
DOWN
THINKING
AND WICKED
QUESTIONS





WICKED

Provocative inquiry that
has no simple answer,
if it has an answer at all.

Example:

How can we commit to achieving outcomes while remaining open to the possibility we are measuring the wrong outcomes?



Wicked Question | Examples

How do we change or dismantle systems that we are required to implement and control?



How can I authentically promote DIVERSITY when I have little if any understanding of, or connections with, the people and groups I want to include?

Upside Down Thinking is a **heretical** proposal.

Upside Down Thinking is about breaking out of, or breaking through, conventional thought. It's about refusing to be limited by logic or "what's been proven." The status quo is its enemy.



UDT EXAMPLES

Outcomes and Logic models destroy creativity and innovation.

Duplication of Services is a GOOD thing. We need lots more of it.



UPSIDE DOWN THINKING PRINCIPLES

- Go against the grain
- Reject your “religion”
- Turn problems into solutions and vice versa
- Make the negative positive
- See the obstacle(s) as the path
- Seek, not sweep, truth under the carpet
- Invite the outsider, the boat rocker
- Work with hidden agendas
- Suspend hierarchy
- Point fingers at possibilities

EXAMPLES OF HERETICAL PROPOSITIONS: MUSEUMS

What are some
NORMS
about Museums?

- Museums are a waste of time. You don't learn anything useful there.
- Museum exhibits should be designed by comedians, dancers, and poets.
- 15 year olds be on the boards of museums.
- Forget the past. Museums should be only about the future.
- Museums should be about solving today's social problems.
- Museums should be gift shops and exhibits a marketing strategy.

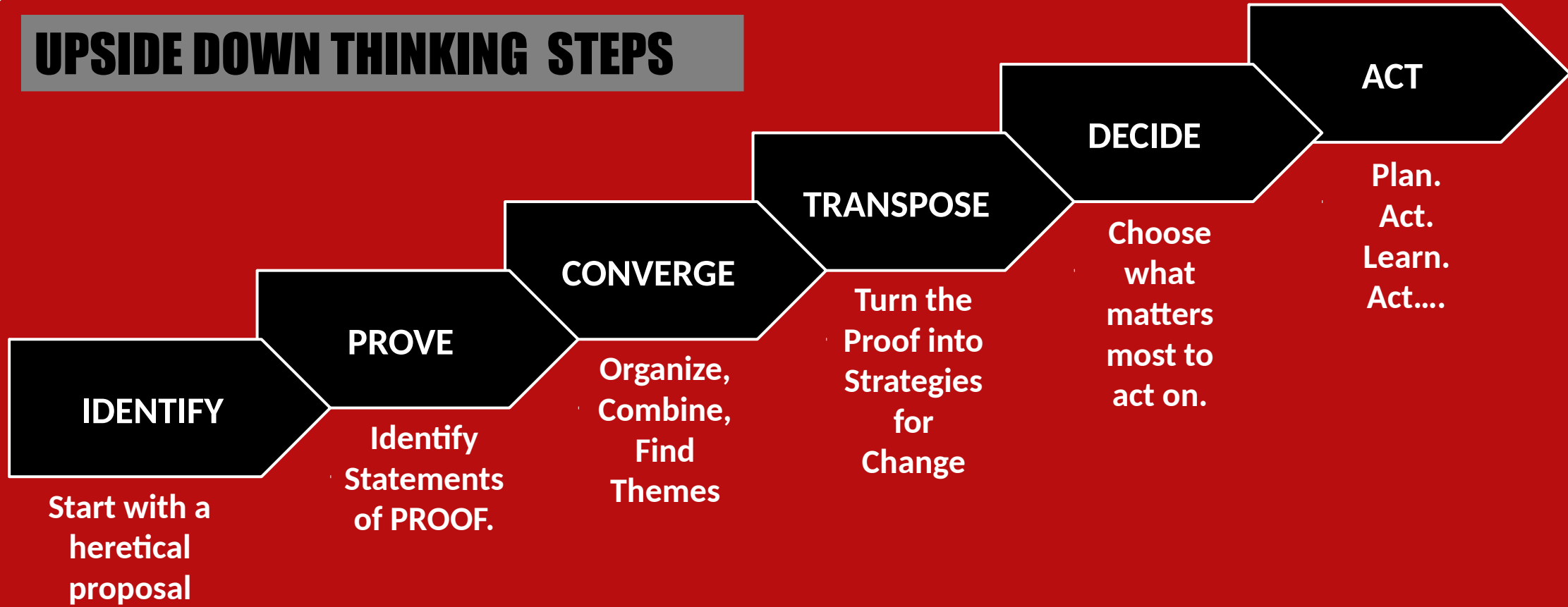
EXAMPLES OF HERETICAL PROPOSITIONS: NON-PROFITS

- All the attention we pay to ensuring Diversity is “in the room” has increased the stereotyping and marginalization of people.
- Social inclusion is our way of ensuring an acceptable amount of social exclusion.
- Intake criteria are the rules we create to say “NO” to those we don’t want to help
- Volunteer programs have destroyed people’s desire to help others.
- Funders should apply to agencies to deliver their funding..

OTHER EXAMPLES OF HERETICAL PROPOSITIONS

- Agendas are tools we use to avoid talking about what really matters.
- We need a maximum wage and it should be set by low income people.
- The Child Tax Credit is a subsidy to employers and allows them to keep wages low and maximize profits.
- Public Consultations should be called Public Manipulations.
- The purpose of subsidies is to make those who don't need them feel good about themselves

UPSIDE DOWN THINKING STEPS



Heretical Thinking as a Tool for Change

DISCUSSION

PROVE THIS HERETICAL PROPOSITION TO BE TRUE:

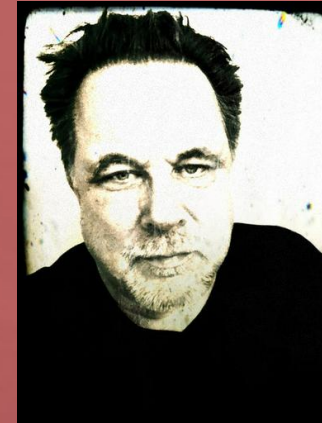
**BOARDS ARE WHY AGENCIES ARE INEFFECTIVE AND
INEFFICIENT. HERE'S THE PROOF...**



This is what the goose did to land in tumultuous winds. In other words, turning itself upside down served as an act of “whiffling” which allowed the bird to overcome the wind and land safely.

ABOUT MARK HOLMGREN

- Director of Vibrant Communities with Tamarack Institute
- CEO of two Inner City Agencies devoted to ending poverty and homelessness.
- Strategy and change consultant for more than 20 years.
- Former executive staff at two United Ways.
- Project Developer of numerous supportive housing ventures.
- Blogs often about strategy, innovation, collaboration, and upside down thinking.
- Researcher, Analyst, Advocate.
- Tamarack Institute "Thought Leader." for three years.
- Instructor at two universities.
- Published poet and fiction writer with dozens of publication credits.
- Singer/Songwriter/Musician
- Partner, Father, Son
- Chicken soup maker.



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