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Alternative Narratives on Economic Growth: Prototyping Change at the System Level

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Abstract: Increasing inequality, rising social unrest and climate change suggest new approaches to economic growth are needed. Motivated to understand what a human-centered approach might bring to the challenge, this paper explores taking the value of design thinking and a prototyping mindset beyond service delivery to the level of policy research, design and development. Causal Layered Analysis is used to understand and comparatively analyze the current growth-first narrative, an emergent participation narrative and a speculative freedom narrative. This analysis informs a reframe of economy and a participatory experience for stakeholders in the larger economic system to explore how change might happen. Responses to the role play experience show the power of a participatory approach and provide insight into engaging diverse stakeholders as contributors in the future of economy, not just as the passive receivers of policy. Proposals for change are presented based on candidate strategies generated in the role play.

Keywords: growth, economy, narrative, causal layered analysis, role play, reframing, system-level change

1. Introduction

A number of interrelated ideologies prevail within the current growth-oriented economic context. Among them is the notion that growth will ‘float all boats’. As economist Joseph Stiglitz (2016) describes, the rising tide hypothesis evolved over time to favour the rich and assumed that improved welfare of citizens and society as a whole would be the outcome of resources received at the top (p. 134). But with growing inequality, as Stiglitz (2016) and other prominent sources on the economy have pointed out, the promise and benefits of economic growth have not trickled down to the greater society (Lin & Tomaskovic-Devey, 2013; Milanovic, 2016a, 2016b; Milanovic & Roemer, 2016; OECD, 2017; Piketty, 2014; Saez, 2018; WEF, 2015, 2017a).

Another prevailing belief is that productivity is everything. Or as economist Paul Krugman describes in *The Age of Diminishing Expectations*, “Productivity isn’t everything, but in the long run it is almost everything. A country’s ability to improve its standard of living over time depends almost entirely on its ability to raise its output per worker” (as cited in OECD, 2008, p. 11). Productivity output continues to be a primary indicator of economic growth, but with automated technologies and the rise of fragmented service-based work (Davis, 2016; Lowe and Graves, 2017), the role of the worker and how human labour continues to factor into production is in question.

A closely related third ideology is that innovation is seen as a kind of ‘holy grail’ of growth. Although innovation is defined in broad terms by the OECD (2005) to cover novelty in products (goods or services), processes, marketing and organizational methods (p. 46), advances in digital and emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence, robotics, 3D printing, blockchain and virtual and augmented realities (World Economic Forum, 2017b, p. 63-64), have come to dominate the discourse around innovation. However, as economist Robert Gordon (2016) argues, although the more recent digital technologies have led to wide-spread access to information and services, they are benefiting far fewer people than the “only once” general purpose innovations of the second industrial revolution during and following what he calls the “special century”, from 1870-1970 (p. 1).

These ideologies and the dominant growth focus are what Ivana Milojević and Sohail Inayatullah (2015) might refer to as a “used future”, which is one with entrenched thinking and systems based on old assumptions that are out of date with significant changes in the economic, ecological, technological, demographic and cultural environment (2015, p. 155). Growing inequality, rising social unrest and climate change suggest alternative ways of thinking about the economy are needed.

Motivated to understand what a human-centered approach might bring to the challenge, this paper explores taking the value of design thinking and a prototyping mindset beyond service delivery to the level of policy research, design and development and asks: How might reframing growth enable change to a more desirable alternative?

Reframing, as described by American cognitive linguist, George Lakoff (2004), is believed to be necessary for constructing change by enabling people to see a situation through a different conceptual or emotional perspective, and do so through conscious and repeated usage (p. xii-xiii). In

Metaphors We Live By, Lakoff and coauthor Mark Johnson (1980) state that “much of cultural change arises from the introduction of metaphorical concepts and the loss of old ones” (p. 145). These ideas for reframing informed the use of Sohail Inayatullah’s (1998) Causal Layered Analysis (CLA), with its inherent inquiry into alternative metaphors and the development of alternative narratives, in combination with role play with diverse stakeholders. A key outcome of the study is that together CLA and role play offer a unique combinatorial means of reframing and iterating toward transformative system-level change.

The scope of interest of the study is Canada, but the topic of economic growth is explored in relation to, and informed by, the larger socioeconomic context of advanced Western economies.

This paper provides an overview of three narratives on economic growth: A growth-first narrative, an inclusive growth narrative and a wellbeing-first narrative. A comparative synopsis is presented as a snapshot of the attributes, values, goals, causes, processes and outcomes across the narratives. Insights from CLA on the emerging mainstream alternative are presented followed by a description of the process and outcomes of using a speculative alternative for exploring change through role play.

2. Methodology

This study was structured in two phases: Understanding the Narratives and Exploring Change.

2.1. Understanding the Narratives

Interviews were conducted with six subject matter experts in the areas of economics and economic policy. The purpose was to understand how people working in these areas think about growth and the economy. CLA was used to analyze the interviews for themes, underlying metaphors and orthodoxies, and alternative ways of framing the economy.

CLA was chosen because it provides a framework for deconstructing perspectives on the current focus with increasing levels of depth (Inayatullah, 1998, 2004, p. 8) and for iteratively reconstructing hopeful alternatives. Figure 1 shows this iterative flow. According to Inayatullah (2004), CLA “is also likely to be useful in developing more effective—deeper, inclusive, longer term—policy” (p. 8). This potential for guiding policy makes CLA a useful methodology for exploring alternative narratives to economic growth and offers a way to comparatively understand them.

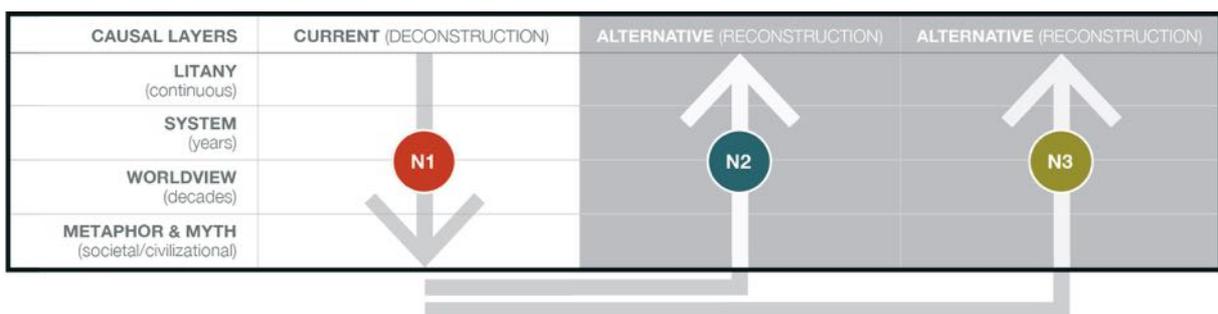


Figure 1. Iterative flow of CLA

2.2. Exploring Change

In the second phase, an alternative metaphor and narrative were used to reframe growth and engage two groups of stakeholders in a simulated role play experience addressing how a more inclusive economy might be achieved. The adoption of role play was inspired by the work of George Lakoff and Mark Johnson (1999) on embodied realism. As a form of embodied realism, the hands-on experiential nature of role playing has greater transformational potential for reframing than a using a purely intellectual approach (Chen & Martin, 2015, p. 92; Daniau, 2016, p. 424).

The role play was structured around Roman Krznaric’s “Rough guide to how change happens” (2007, p. 30-32). Twelve non-expert participants were engaged in a generative activity exploring:

1. What is the change we wish to explain?
2. Who might be involved in the change?
3. What strategies might be used to bring about the change?
4. What contexts might affect how the change happens?
5. What might be the process or pathway to the change?
6. What are the main elements from above that might lead to change?

Of the ideas generated, five candidate strategies were developed as proposals to encourage policy makers and policy influencers to adopt and evolve a richer set of research and development tools.

Figure 2 shows the overall approach with Phase I: Understanding the Narratives on the left, and Phase II: Exploring Change on the right.

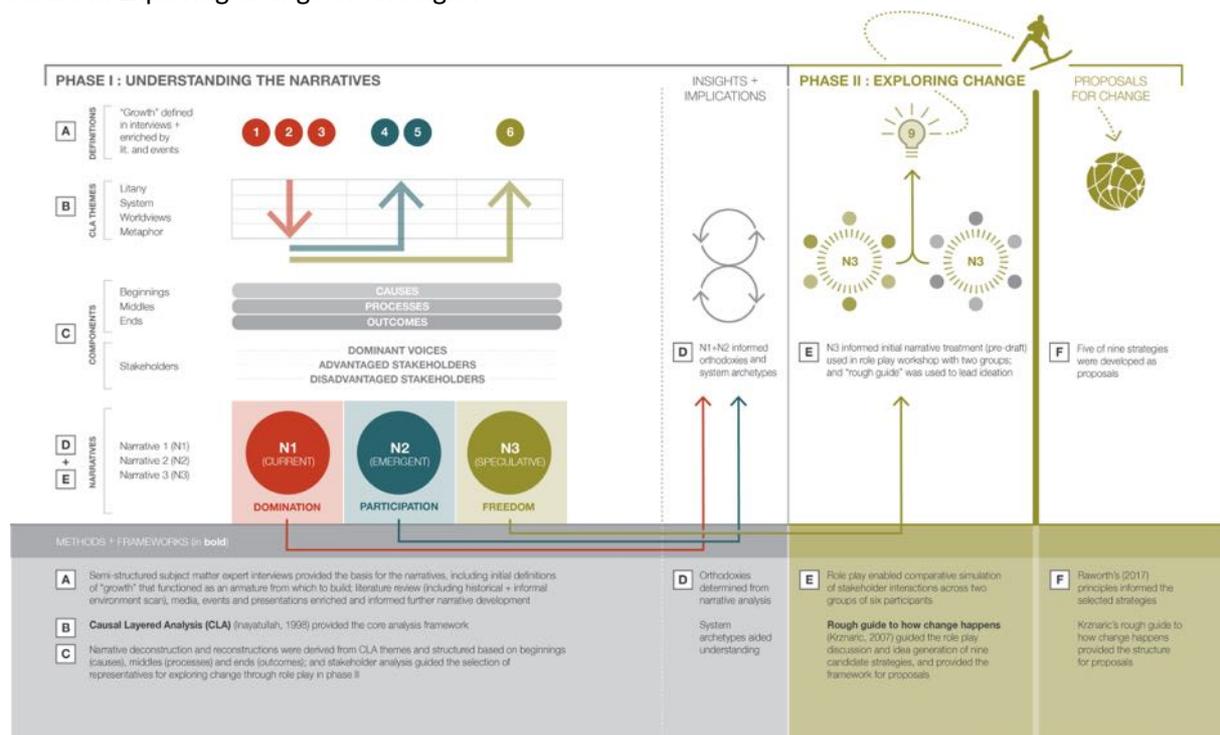


Figure 2. Project Structure & Methodology Overview

3. Understanding the Narratives

The three narratives that emerged through the interviews were the current growth-first narrative, which came to be called ‘domination’ based on its dominance-based logic and the self-interest that exemplifies market fundamentalism; an emergent narrative, named ‘participation’ for its orientation toward increased social and economic participation within international and national agendas for inclusive growth; and a speculative narrative, which was given the name of ‘freedom’ because it embodies notions of independence, self-determination, autonomy and democracy.

As the starting point for the interviews, the first question experts were asked was how they might define growth in a tweet or news headline. These definitions fall along a spectrum and served as an armature on which the three narratives were based.

3.1. Causal Layered Analysis

Key points distilled from the interviews are aggregated within the CLA framework. To contextualize the interviews, participant definitions are accompanied by additional context for each narrative.

Narrative #1: Growth-First (Current) – “Domination”

Definition: (1) Growth is defined by GDP, which is the money value of all products and services in an economy. And, (2) growth is an economy that is growing in its outputs and eventually leads to benefits for society overall (based on interviews).

Context: The fixation on growth and counting the economy in terms of its production was set during the Great Depression with the introduction of Gross National Product (Kuznets, 1934)—later Gross Domestic Product (GDP). Not intended to reflect the long-term welfare of a nation (Abramovitz in 1959, p. 21; Kuznets, 1962, p. 29), GDP has come to be the primary indicator of a country’s wealth and is used comparatively for economic ranking in the larger global market. Inherently competitive in nature, the market economy has been entrenched since the early 1980s with the embrace of neoliberal ideology by Margaret Thatcher in the UK and Ronald Reagan in the US (Palley, 2005).

This market orientation values short-term over long-term, wealth over people, self-interest and a dominance-based logic over equality (Klein, 2017, p. 233).

Metaphor: In this narrative, the economy is a *frontier of infinite colonies*—conveying the quest for scale and domination over markets, lands, peoples and, eventually, planets.

Goal: The goal of economic growth, as economist Kate Raworth (2017) describes, is to grow the economy by increasing output of goods and services, regardless of whether or not people thrive (p. 227).

Figure 3 shows the aggregated inputs for the current growth-first narrative. Similar aggregates were developed for the other two narratives but are not shown.

	INTERVIEW 1	INTERVIEW 2	INTERVIEW 3	INTERVIEW 4	INTERVIEW 5	INTERVIEW 6	
LITANY (continual)	Access to social and environmental measures not readily available. Quantitative sources for government reports primarily from Statistics Canada. Qualitative sources include feedback from consumers, newspaper articles, discussions with regulators and with other countries	Media reflects government messaging on the economy and fixation with GDP as a measure for how the country is doing	GDP is used as a political tool for manipulating public sentiment. GDP summarizes both good and bad of society but that is not in public conversations. Negative activities show growth but are not good for wellbeing	People feel a disconnect with growth messaging from government and media, and their own with lack of wage growth and diminishing job prospects. Traditional economic measurements permeate government reports, which are then conveyed by media	GDP doesn't reflect what is happening in society and the environment, but it will not change as an indicator. People are comfortable with it and how it is calculated. But growth for growth's sake is scary. Increases in crime and waste production might correlate with higher GDP but give a false picture of an economy's health	There is a growing awareness in many countries that growth is not equal to wellbeing. Economic growth is no longer enough. Countries seek guidance on trends such as issues with inequality, minorities, gender, and environmental degradation	LITANY (continual)
SYSTEM (years)	Environmental issues, failed states, population immigration, and people living longer are all converging. Disruptive technologies are displacing people and threatening incumbents	GDP indicators bounced back after the financial crash, wellbeing indicators did not. Living standards and time for leisure and self are diminishing	National sentiment votes (e.g., Brexit, Trump) show that people are frustrated with the economic situation	The Canadian government is struggling for ways to stimulate growth. We can no longer rely on natural resources. Globalization has given multinationals the upper hand with their ability to move operations and capital, negatively impacting communities. Productivity and innovation are in focus	Increases in poverty and violent crime suggest economic growth is leaving people behind. People are feeling downgraded from employed to unemployed. If a society will be judged by how it treats its weakest members, we have to re-evaluate the model. Level of education is a key	Getting an innovation engine going is key. Providing the right type of environment for innovation to take place depends on what a country's needs are (developing countries vs. advanced economies)	SYSTEM (years)
WORLDVIEW (decades)	Technology services, communications and the sharing economy provide opportunities for more people to contribute to growth	"It's the economy, stupid". The belief is that the economy matters first and foremost, and that GDP is a good guide for how a country is doing overall. It will "float all boats"	It is believed that you either have unemployment or you have economic growth. This is the productivity trap. Machines contribute to growth by increasing productivity. Because growth and productivity are tied, automation is viewed as a threat to jobs	There is a belief that there is no societal progress without growth. Innovation, in particular technological innovation, is seen as the panacea for growth. With that comes the threat to jobs	Technology is going to take a lot of jobs and displace a lot of people, particularly aging workers. The future does not hold much hope for young people	Innovation plays a significant role in contributing to both economic growth and wellbeing	WORLDVIEW (decades)
METAPHOR & MYTH (societal/cultural)	The economy is a frontier of INFINITE COLONIES, ever growing and expanding to other territories and, eventually, other planets	The economy is a MACHINE to be tuned and maintained. Politicians are seen as "the fixers"	The economy is a MACHINE, including nature, to be managed like services	The economy is (traditionally) ORGANIC, with a dependency on natural resources Growth traditionally comes from the ground up, based on the natural resources a country is endowed with	The economy is a DEPENDENT PATIENT to be diagnosed and treated by the doctor (government) who knows best	The economy is a PIE to be made bigger, then shared	METAPHOR & MYTH (societal/cultural)

Figure 3. Aggregated CLA for current growth-first narrative. Read from top down for a deconstruction of existing context. Read from left to right for a comparative view across the six subject matter experts.

Narrative #2: Inclusive Growth (Emergent) – “Participation”

Definition: (1) Growth is an economy that serves citizens better with more accessible, sustainable, and higher quality goods and services. And, (2) Growth is improvements in a range of social and economic dimensions that contribute ultimately to wellbeing. (Informed by participants.)

Context: Originating from the World Bank (Ianchovina & Lundstrom, 2009), and promoted among OECD countries, this mainstream alternative narrative embodies notions of government-enabled access and participation and, in the Canadian context in particular, a growing and strong middle class (Government of Canada, 2017). Considered by its advocates as the only sustainable path to poverty reduction, inclusive growth is encompassing of all sectors and promises broad-based participation opportunities for people to both contribute to and benefit from economic progress.

Metaphor: In this narrative, the economy is a *pie* to be shared and made bigger together.

Goal: In inclusive growth, according to the World Economic Forum (2015), the goal is an economy that expands social participation in the process and benefits of economic growth (p. 1).

Narrative #3: Wellbeing-First (Speculative) – “Freedom”

Definition: Growth is evidence that we are striving and achieving the highest possible quality of life and wellbeing for all. (Informed by participants.)

Context: Developed as a composition of signals, this speculative narrative embodies notions of independence, self-determination, autonomy and democracy. It puts choice at the center of economy, giving people the freedom to choose for themselves what the narrative will be or to participate with others in crafting it through both physical and virtual community-level approaches to value exchange.

Metaphor: In this narrative, the economy is a *web*—connected, and interdependent with others and with nature.

Goal: In the wellbeing-first narrative, the goal is an economy in which people are able to thrive, and while growth might be an outcome it is not the goal (Raworth, 2017, p. 227).

Distilled to core themes, interviews are summarized in a comparative view in Figure 4.

CAUSAL LAYERS	CURRENT (DECONSTRUCTION) NARRATIVE #1: DOMINATION THEMES	ALTERNATIVE (RECONSTRUCTION) NARRATIVE #2: PARTICIPATION THEMES	ALTERNATIVE (RECONSTRUCTION) NARRATIVE #3: FREEDOM THEMES
LITANY (continuous)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Overuse and misrepresentation of GDP Disconnect between lived realities of citizens and what government and media report 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reflecting lived realities and guiding decisions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Connecting realities of people and system
SYSTEM (years)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Need for more holistic and inclusive approaches to measurement and reporting Traditional drivers, the quest for growth and the convergence of major global trends 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strengthening the middle class and helping those working hard to join it Measuring and reporting lived realities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Forging new social and ecological contracts Measuring what matters
WORLDVIEW (decades)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Economic growth will 'float all boats' Productivity is (almost) everything Innovation is the 'holy grail' of growth 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Inclusive growth and sustainable growth reinforce each other Vulnerable populations have more opportunities and voice Innovation increases opportunities to participate 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What matters to you is what matters most
METAPHOR & MYTH (ecological/civilizational)	The economy is ... <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A frontier of infinite colonies Organic A machine A dependent patient A pie to be made bigger, then shared 	The economy is ... <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A small fragile planet A pie to be shared and made bigger together (or better, a garden) Synthetic 	The economy is ... <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A self-healing patient, participating, informed and co-responsible for change A garden, where we plant the seeds for change A web, connected, interdependent with others and with nature

Figure 4. Comparative view of CLA of interview themes

4. Insights & Implications

In addition to understanding interview themes comparatively, developing a comparative picture of attributes, values, goals, causes, processes and outcomes proved useful for seeing differences between the current and alternative narratives, as well as which of the alternatives to explore as a more hopeful and inclusive representation of the future (see Figure 5).

When these details are considered in close proximity, what is ostensibly a continuum between three narratives—with inclusive growth being the bridge between growth and wellbeing—is more a dualistic choice between growth and wellbeing. The comparative exercise reveals that although inclusive growth feels good and appears to be something different than the current growth orientation, the participation focus is more an economic imperative than a moral one.

System archetypes provide some prospective insight into why inclusive growth may be at risk of achieving its goals for greater inclusion and why it might remain largely aspirational.

NARRATIVE CONTINUUM	N1 DOMINATION GROWTH FIRST The economy is a frontier of INFINITE COLONIES, ever growing and expanding to other territories and, eventually, other planets	N2 PARTICIPATION INCLUSIVE GROWTH The economy is a PIE, to be shared through participation and made bigger together	N3 FREEDOM WELLBEING FIRST The economy is a WEB, connected and interdependent with others and with nature
ATTRIBUTES	Market-led, power at the top, trickle-down guided, competition-oriented	Government-facilitated, centralized, market-informed, participation-oriented	Relationship-driven, decentralized, participatory, community-oriented
VALUES	Wealth over people, short term gain over long term frame and eschews equality in favour of self interest and dominance-based logic	Participation over redistribution and a strong and growing middle class	Community, a shared narrative, purpose and collective wellbeing
GOAL	An economy that needs to grow, regardless of whether or not people thrive	An economy that expands social participation in the process + benefits of economic growth	An economy that allows people to thrive, regardless of whether or not it grows
CAUSES (beginnings)	Market fundamentalism (and financialization)	Low productivity, aging pop., tech disruption, global connectivity, low commodity prices	Diminishing trust in government, business and media; unemployment; tech change, with increased automation
PROCESSES (middles)	Globalization, technological change, capital shifts and financialization	Innovation, training and education, immigration, infrastructure	Increased activism, public and employee ownership and redistribution models, focus on SRI investing, open gov.
OUTCOMES (ends)	Income + wealth disparity, polarization of society, cyber dependency, national sentiment, aging pop. and climate change	Growing economy with stronger middle class. Key metric of success is an additional \$15,000 in median household income by 2030	Collective wellbeing, balanced stories through media, embrace of bottom-up approaches to economy

Figure 5. Comparative view of narrative attributes, values, goals, causes, processes, outcomes and voices

4.1. Eroding Goals Archetype

In the Eroding Goals archetype, goals are changed to something more attainable when there are delays in seeing desired outcomes (Braun, 2002, p. 6).

How this archetype applies (see Figure 6 for a visual representation):

Goal: In the participation narrative, the goal is an economy that expands social participation in the process and benefits of economic growth. It is believed that increasing participation will lead to growth and wellbeing for all. These notions have commonality with worldviews of the growth-first narrative, notably that productivity is (almost) everything and economic growth will ‘float all boats’.

Gap: The need to increase workforce participation is due to a gap in productivity performance over several years—in Canada the time period this applies to is ~2011-2016.

Corrective actions: Long-term corrective actions to increase participation include government, businesses and other organizations investing in training and funding opportunities for disadvantaged groups, or exploring alternative models such as reduced workweeks for individuals to increase participation through work-share programs.

Actual rate: Given the delay in seeing the effect of these corrective actions, the actual rate of participation declines through processes like increased numbers of retiring individuals due to an aging population, and time needed to train and integrate new immigrants in the workforce.

Sustained gap: The gap in productivity performance remains open if not widening in the short run.

Pressure to lower goal (short term): When the gap in productivity performance fails to close quickly, pressures to find short-term measures increases. Short-term measures might include firms increasing investment in automating technologies instead of people and decreasing the number of employees to reduce costs or increase profit.

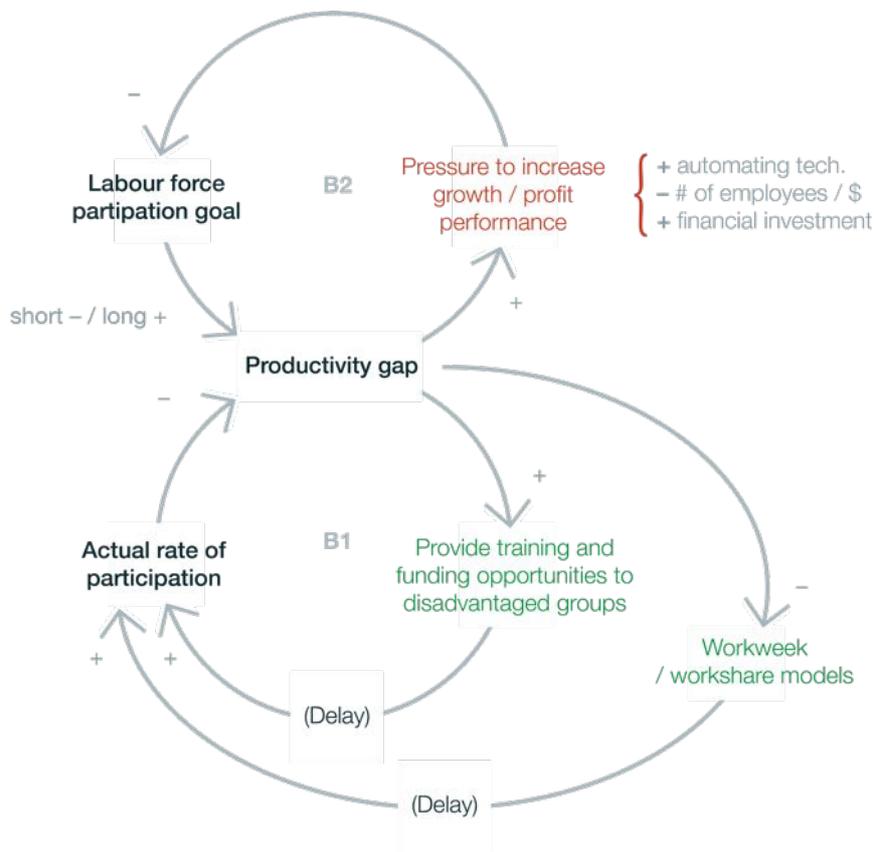


Figure 6. Eroding Goals system archetype example (start with the goal in the upper left)

Countering effects: Government and businesses need to overcompensate to the inclusive side of inclusive growth or growth-first will continue to dominate, along with the widening inequality gap. Although short-term measures might be necessary, ideally they are balanced with long-term corrective actions and the original goal for increasing participation.

4.2. Success to the Successful Archetype

In the Success to the Successful archetype, those who perform well are rewarded with more resources. This is based on demonstrated merit but does not recognize the initial conditions that enabled strong performance by some while hindering performance of others (Braun, 2002, p. 10).

How this archetype applies (see Figure 7 for a visual representation):

At the worldview level, inclusive growth is about social not just economic inclusion, vulnerable populations having more opportunities and voice, and innovation contributing to greater wellbeing

by enabling increased participation. Realization of this potential is largely dependent on government to establish the policies and programs that allow for broader participation.

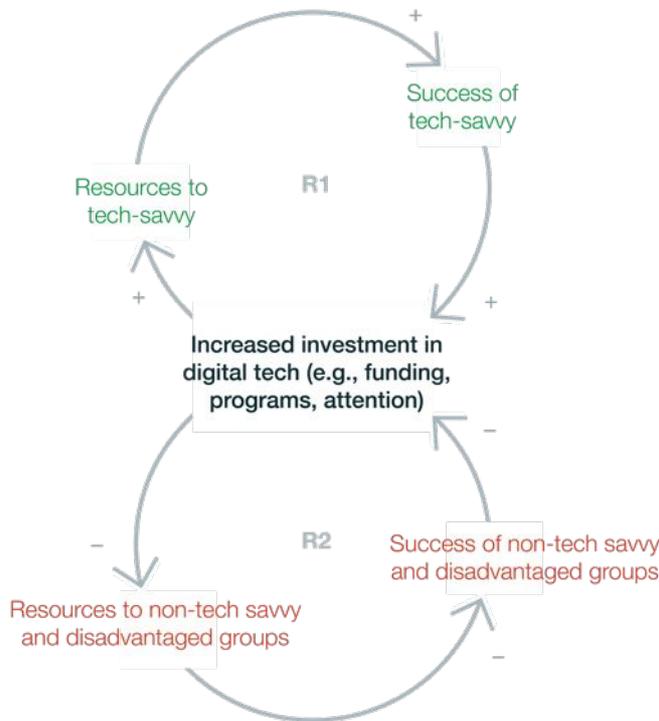


Figure 7. Success to the successful archetype example (start with the goal in the centre)

Examples of Success to the Successful include advantaging:

- Digital technologies and people working in it, reinforcing the digital divide between those who have access to information and communication technologies and those who do not
- Science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) education
- People with means to pay for ongoing education and retraining
- Those included in data collection and reporting, reinforcing data poverty through the omission of populations from data collection and reports used to inform policy

Countering effects: Increased awareness of who is advantaged; promoting and celebrating education beyond STEM to areas that foster creative pursuits and critical thinking (STEAMD – A=Arts and D=Design); and more holistic and inclusive data collection, measurement and reporting.

5. Exploring Change

As context for the role play participants, the economy was reframed as a *web*—connected, interpersonal and interdependent with others and with nature—and presented with an initial treatment of the speculative freedom narrative.

5.1. Stakeholder Representatives

Based on the stakeholders that emerged from interviews and other sources analyzed, six profiles were developed. These included a mix of dominant voices and disadvantaged groups within the Canadian context that were identified in the growth-first and inclusive growth narratives.

Not all stakeholders identified during the first phase were included because of the limited number of available participants, limited time, and the limited depth of research into all representatives suitable for participating. Given these limitations, the role play was considered a prototype that could inform similar future activities using the learning from the initial workshop.

Twelve participants signed up for the workshop and were split into two groups of six. This opened the possibility for more ideas to be generated, as well as comparative data that could be used to iterate on in future role plays.

Figure 8 shows the participants in their stakeholder roles within each of the two groups.



Figure 8. Role play participants in shown as the stakeholders they represented in two parallel groups of six

A profile was developed for each of the six stakeholders that included an overview, name, role, affiliation, interests, challenges and potential relationships (alliances and tensions). See Figure 9.



Figure 9. Stakeholder profile cards

5.2. Anticipated Stakeholder Relationships

The potential relationship dynamics presented in each of the profile cards were based on research done in the first phase of the project, but were also hypothetical. The purpose of this information was to provide a starting point for participants to engage, and to use observation to inform future iterations on the role play.

Radial convergence maps, shown in Figure 10, were created to understand anticipated alliances and tensions that might form within the role play, as well as who might be absent from the conversation.

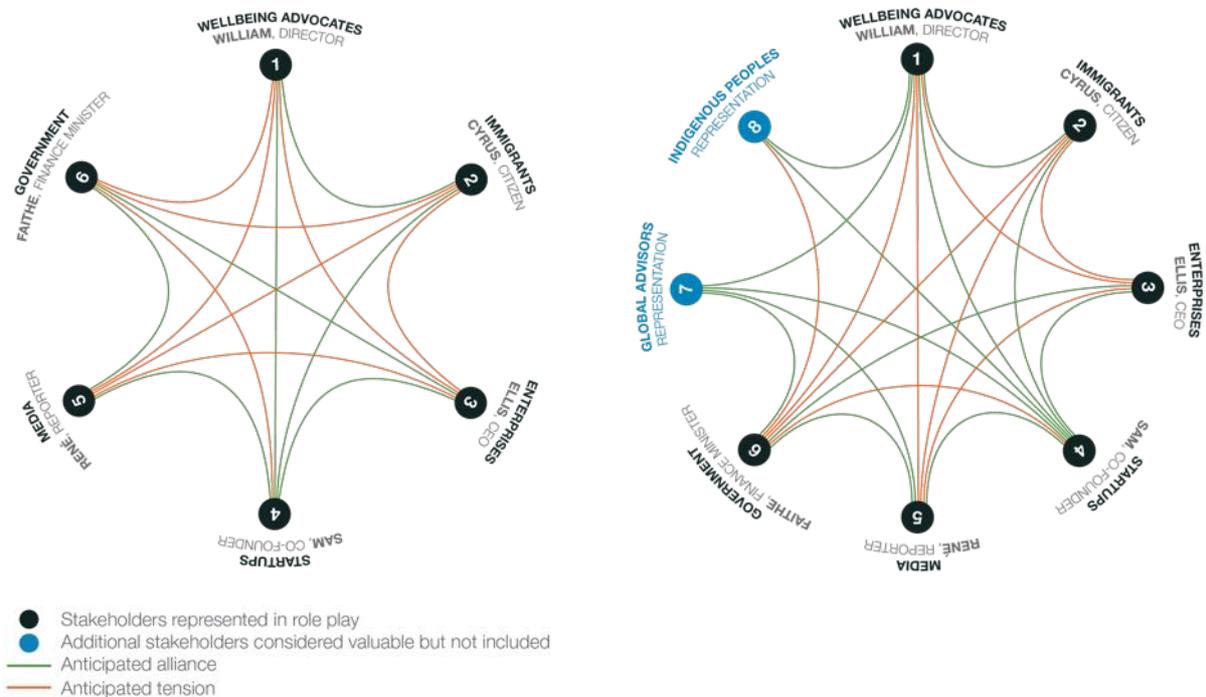


Figure 10. Anticipated relationships *before* the role-play of stakeholders represented (left), and stakeholders identified but not represented in the role play (right)

5.3. Observations & Outcomes

The following results are a summary of inputs and outputs from the activity within five themes:

1. Role play for its transformational potential
2. Role play for empowering non-experts
3. Role play for discovering potential relationships
4. Role play as a generative source for strategies for change
5. Role play as a rehearsal method

These themes provide rationale for the benefit of using role play to explore change at the system level as well as learning for future engagements.

Role play for its transformational potential

The most notable aspect of using role play as a form of embodied realism was the emotional connection of participants to the stakeholders they represented. The degree to which individuals were able to relate to their roles informed how much they were able to productively channel their contributions in the group. On the other side, the more distant participants felt from the values they perceived their stakeholders to have affected how well they were able to represent that voice. At the group level, each experienced different paces to their immersion affecting how quickly and deeply they were able to respond to the guiding questions.

A few enablers were identified through observation and post-workshop reflections that could inform future workshops of this kind:

1. While it is a known challenge in role play for participants to suppress their own viewpoints and interests and represent those of others (Popper, 2008, p. 59), the unexpected emotional response by one of the participants to the stakeholder he was representing allowed for his group to immerse in their roles and the activity more quickly than the other group. This gave rise to the idea of having a 'plant' in each group who takes a performative role and uses storytelling to express their interests and bring others in.
2. Another recommendation was to send the narrative and profile cards in advance to allow participants time to immerse in the ideas and roles.

Role play for empowering non-experts

Recognized for its use with, and potential empowerment of, representatives who might be outside typical decision makers, role play can be used as a simulated interaction to elicit novice judgment and as a generative medium for guiding decisions (Armstrong, 2001, p. 26-27; Green, 2002, p. 334; 2005, p. 467). In the context of this study, it was intended to elicit new perspectives on the larger socioeconomic challenges without the constraints of having experts in the room.

A number of the participants expressed a feeling of powerlessness in the role play. The need for change felt real but bigger than what they thought they could affect. In spite of individual discomfort and uncertainty, both groups were able to generate a number of ideas toward enabling change.

Role play for discovering potential relationships

Observation during the role play provided insight into potential participants to involve in a future role play and potential partnerships that could be fostered within the larger system.

Potential future stakeholder participants: Group reflection after the role play indicated that the *youth* voice is not well represented and should be equal among others.

Potential and non-obvious partnerships: Alliances reinforced through the activity, and common to both groups, led to a set of partnerships to explore, notably between:

- *Media and Wellbeing Advocates*: as a way to address more balanced representation of measurement and reporting.
- *Enterprise and Social Impact Startups*: as a way increase investment in social infrastructure and value-creating activities.
- *Social Impact Startups and New Canadians*: as a way to support both economic and non-economic immigrants and encourage socially minded new businesses.

Role play as a generative source for strategies for change

Of the ideas generated in the role play, five were distilled into candidate strategies for policy makers and influencers to consider:

1. Build a holistic and inclusive data source
2. Promote a shared narrative that connects people to system
3. Engender a prototyping mindset across government
4. Integrate behavioural approaches into planning and programs
5. Foster positive alternatives to the threat of automation

Each strategy is accompanied by key elements enabling change in Krznaric’s rough guide and tagged with guiding principles proposed by Raworth (2017). It is beyond the scope of this paper to provide detail on all proposals. Figure 11 conveys the structure and content of the candidate strategies.

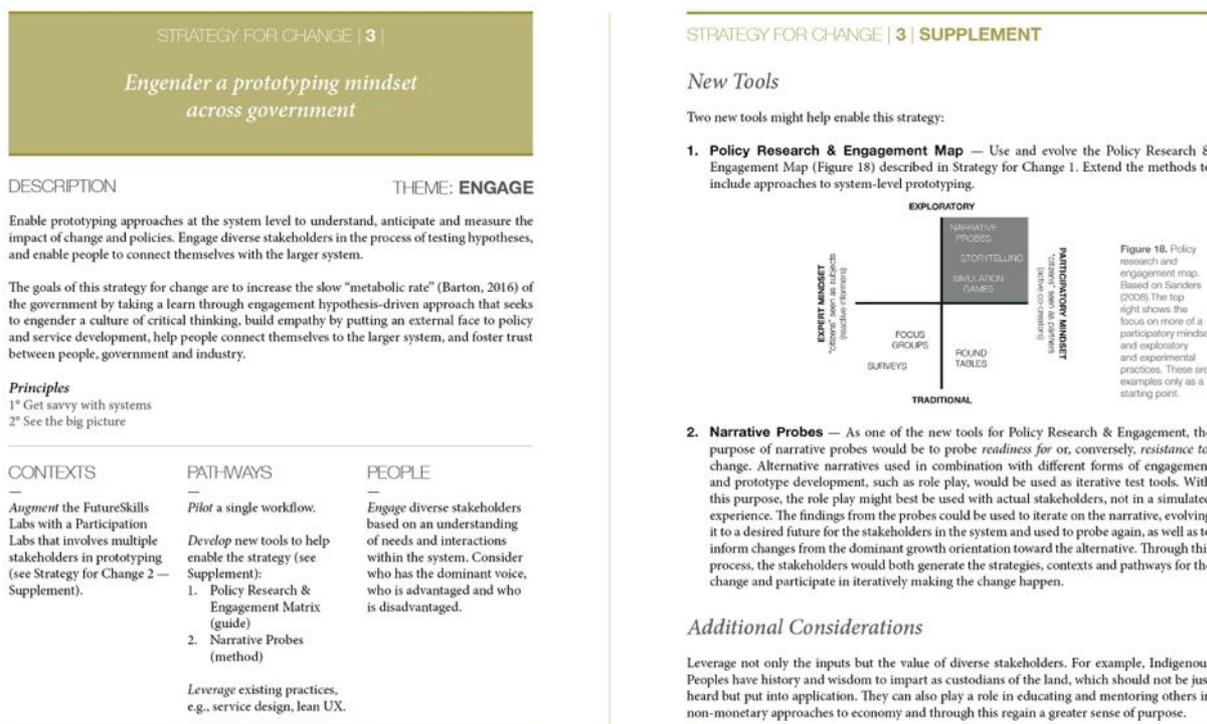


Figure 11 Example candidate strategy for change distilled from the role play

Role play as a rehearsal method

As a participatory research method, role play provided a safe and low-stakes way to explore how interactions between stakeholders might play out in the actual system, identify potential partnerships and generate candidate strategies toward change.

The notion of rehearsal also applies to exploration of narratives. More specifically, although an initial speculative narrative was useful as an input to the role play, outputs from the activity can be used to evolve future iterations of the narrative.

Building on the use of role as a way to iterate on the narrative, the more powerful outcome, which arose through group reflection following the workshop, is that alternative narratives have the potential to be used as ongoing probes for readiness for, or resistance to, change. This suggests that narrative probes be developed in a simulated context, as in this study, and tested when possible with actual stakeholders. In this way, narratives can be used as both representatives of the change desired as well as probes for change and, through simulated enactment of an alternative, stakeholders in the system might themselves begin to enact the change in the world.

6. Conclusion

Motivated to understand why the current economic system appears to be failing us and what a human-centered approach might bring to the challenge, this study investigated both current and alternative narratives on economic growth and how reframing might enable change to a more desirable alternative.

This paper described the two phases of primary research—Understanding the Narratives and Exploring Change—and the outcomes of each phase. Through comparative analysis of subject matter expert interviews and the current, emergent and speculative narratives, the first phase revealed that the mainstream alternative ‘participation’ narrative on inclusive growth shares the same underlying growth focus as the current ‘domination’ narrative. Although the goal of inclusive growth to increase social and economic participation is positive, participation is motivated more by an economic imperative than a moral one. Because the wellbeing-oriented ‘freedom’ narrative provides a more significant departure from growth-first, it was selected as the hopeful alternative around which to explore change in the second phase.

Role play with Krznaric’s rough guide proved powerful for use with non-experts as a generative method for exploring change and probing potential relationships for future engagements. For those able to ‘get into character’, role play provided greater transformational potential for reframing than a purely intellectual approach. Participants reinforced it as a tool for building empathy and suggested it be used with actual stakeholders where they would play the role of others.

A key outcome of the study is that CLA and role play in combination offer a unique approach to reframing, probing readiness for change and enabling stakeholders to iterate on both the reconstructed hopeful narratives and the realization of change in the world.

If the growth orientation continues to dominate, there might be significant work with government, business and the public to co-create strategies that guide transition and foster adaptation to more hopeful alternatives for all. The participatory approaches discussed in this paper provide input to this future learning.

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