

The Parable Proxy of Possibilities

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Definition

The Parable Proxy of Possibilities is an innovation framework that enables organizations to safely interrogate the perspectives that materialize and maintain the status quo to generate system-wide transformation. The status quo is a convention that provides the knowledge needed to navigate and sustain culture, creating meaningful relationships that enhance people's emotional and physical well-being (Lakoff & Johnson, 2008). However, it also suppresses innovation by stifling perspectives that question its truth. Culture gives society a shared meaning that makes its members feel emotionally centered and secure as it anchors them in the world. Culture creates its narratives with the myths and metaphors that materialize as its objective reality. Without the sense-making of culture, people feel displaced, so they suppress perspectives that can contradict the status quo – their truth. However, the status quo is not a sacred state. It is a metaphor for a culture's collective agreement of reality that limits knowledge production by excluding other epistemologies. Today, society is in desperate need of new ways of thinking about the planet's social and climatic challenges. It needs to increase the resilience of the status quo to embrace new knowledge without its members feeling displaced. The Parable Proxy of Possibilities is a framework to help new perspectives be incorporated into the status quo to engender more possibilities. It does this by demonstrating the *similar differences* (Bohm, 2004, p. 60) of others' perspectives to enable new relationships to be discerned to enlighten and safely expand the worldview of the status quo. In this light, as the name reflects, the Parable Proxy of Possibilities is a creative insights generator rather than a creative problem-solving process model.

Keywords

Creative Insights, Status quo, Imagination, Perspectives, Possibilities, Diversity, Culture, Creative Problem-Solving, Innovation

The Parable Proxy of Possibilities is an innovation framework designed to help people and organizations materialize and sustain transformational system change. It does this by providing a safe mechanism to re-evaluate its cultural knowledge to shift the center of its status quo. It incorporates tenets from Confucianism, ancient Greek mythology, Celticism, Aboriginal Australianisms and marries it with the status quo to demonstrate the *similar differences* of the knowledge systems. By uniting these diverse worldviews into one framework, new relationships can be discerned, providing more ways to work with knowledge. This approach can enrich, enlighten and expand the potential of the status quo.

Creative insights start with the “perceptual discrimination of similar *differences* and *different similarities*” (Bohm, 2004, p. 60) to create new relationships that enrich a culture’s understanding of its world. An example is Einstein's general theory of relativity that altered the course of the status quo. A significant factor in developing his theory was his isolation from academia – he was working at the Swiss Patent Office at the time. This separation from the status quo enabled him to freely combine domain-specific knowledge to discern new relationships (Clark, 1973).

Einstein was a trained scientist who pursued a university career after graduation but was never employed. By the time he published his ideas, he had accepted a non-academic career path. So, there was no longer any social risk in posing a radically new idea as he was not part of the scientific establishment. Einstein was, however, a member of the status quo with his education, promising career and marriage, so his creativity was a product of his culture (Glăveanu, 2010). His patent office training helped him describe complex phenomena with accessible metaphors, which contributed to his ideas catching on. "Einstein's relativity of time is a reform in semantics, not in metaphysics" (Clark, 1973, p. 62). Freedom from academia’s domain-specific ideals enabled him to perceive new, undiscerned relationships and characterize them as *similar differences* (Bohm, 2004). After his theory was published, he became a university professor. His ideas were integrated into the status quo creating new knowledge that has exponentially increased the number of possibilities taken for granted today.

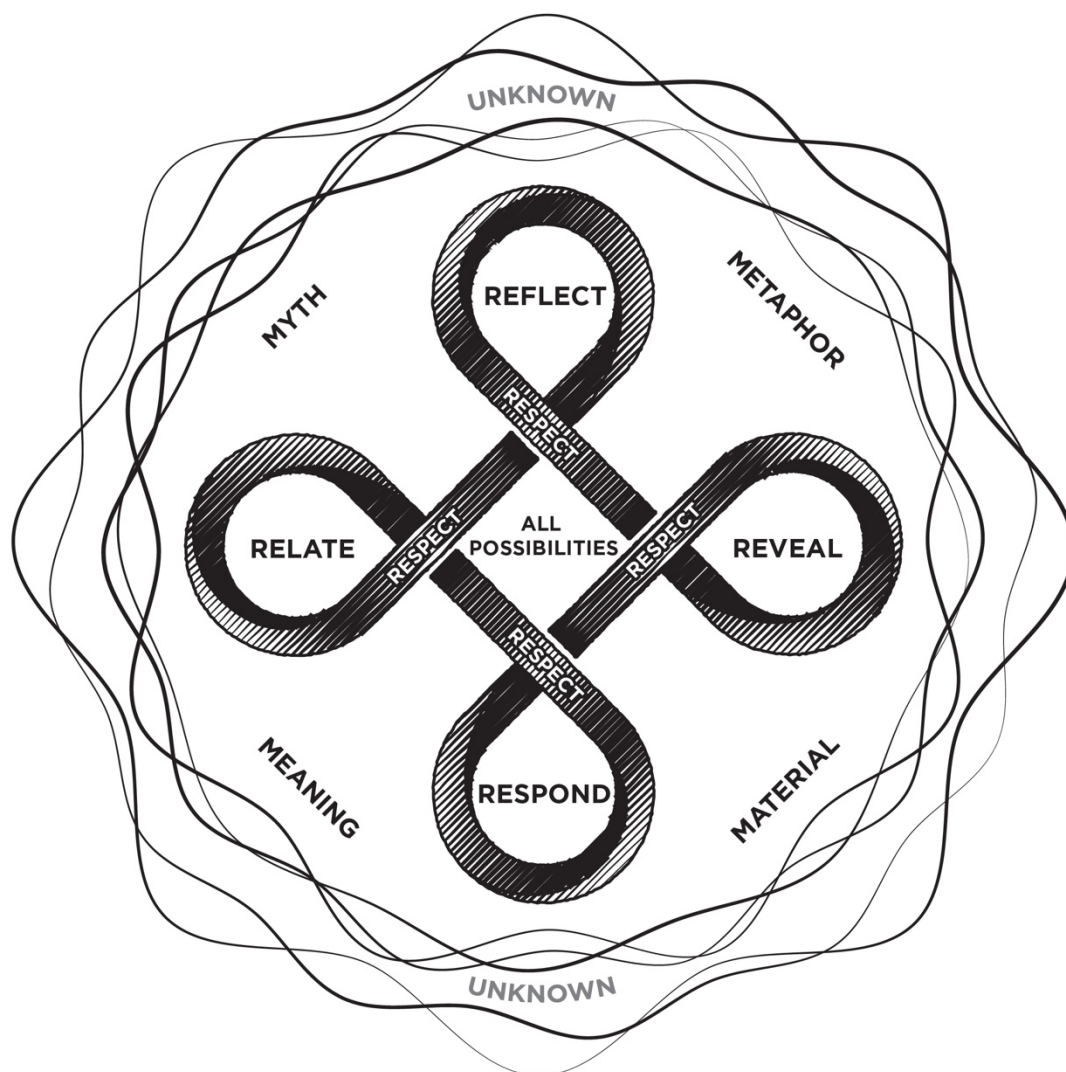
Without the creative insight generated by Einstein's breakthroughs, the world would be greatly impoverished. Diversity should not be a tick box exercise that allows others' perspectives. The status quo is not structured to hear its perspective and respect how it works with knowledge. As Csikszentmihalyi (1997) said: "We have repeatedly seen, most creative achievements depend on making connections among disparate domains" (p. 338). However, a culture or domain's shared language tends to screen out those who do not speak the codes, limiting its potential and stifling its growth. Fortunately, Einstein had not sought the experts in the field's approval before actualizing his theories. "We shouldn't turn perspectival worlds from an ontological reality into a normative ideal" (Glăveanu, 2020, p. 95). Education and career specialization excludes diversity with its closed knowledge systems. In this way, a culture maintains its status quo. However, limiting possibilities and perspectives also makes organizations susceptible to destabilization. Disruption does not need sanctioning from the status quo to occur.

However, we should not consider Einstein a lone genius operating outside his culture. Instead, his creative insights were a discontinuous break from his culture's continuity of thought (Weisberg, 2006). Situating his creative insights as *similar differences* enabled the status quo to accept his ideas without feeling threatened. By demonstrating the complementary nature of his breakthrough, the status quo's narrative could incorporate the insights to create new orders of knowledge. "We tend to think of things, not relationships, as the heart of reality. But most often, the opposite is true," says theoretical physicist Stephon Alexander (as cited in Cole, 2019). Respecting and augmenting the current myths and metaphors to create new orders of thought can be a more effective strategy for diversity than replacing one ideology with another's. It maintains the safety and security of the status quo while stretching what it thinks is possible to create more potential.

Likewise, the Parable Proxy of Possibilities (PPP) does not seek to homogenize or create false harmonies amongst diverse perspectives as this does not lead to creative insights. Instead, the PPP reveals new relationships by highlighting *similar differences* to lead to new orders of thinking that can safely enlarge the status quo. The PPP also facilitates creative insights to generate discontinuous breaks in the continuity of culture to increase the potential of the status quo. That is why Figure 1: *The Parable Proxy of Possibilities* has a diamond-shaped heart that embodies *all possibilities* whilst pumping the lifeblood of *respect* throughout its arterial network.

Figure 1

The Parable Proxy of Possibilities



The notion of *respect* is a simple but profoundly deep concept because it does not judge but seeks to understand, and it cannot be separated from the PPP’s heart of *all possibilities*. The two are organs of one system because denying another’s perspective does not mean it ceases to exist. It just limits its ability to materialize in a way that can benefit the status quo. Using *respect* instead of the more familiar concept of *deferring judgment* from the Creative Problem Solving (CPS) methodology was deliberate. In CPS, deferring judgement means evaluation is held later to “entertain” (Puccio et al., 2012, p. 51) alternatives that could be novel and useful challenges to the status quo (Puccio et al., 2012; Runco & Jaeger, 2012). This approach has

its issues by retaining the concept of judgement and enshrining the status quo as the standard to assess the value of new concepts. In doing so, this approach suppresses epistemological knowledge that could enlarge the potential of the status quo.

Instead, the PPP uses the concept of *respect* from an Australian Indigenous Knowledge system, which “accepts that diversity is the basis of creativity and adaptation; therefore, it does not strive to convince others to become the same” (Sheehan, 2011, p. 69). The PPP’s lifeblood is *respect* because it embodies freedom from the status quo whilst maintaining its relationship. It does not subscribe to replacing one ideology with another, reinforcing a win/lose mentality. When that mindset is deployed, losses are characterized as having a greater psychological weight, so people will work harder to avoid them, even if it prevents them from realizing other possibilities that may be better in the long term (Kahneman, 2011). “How we imagine the world determines what we think important in it, what we select for our attention” (Samuel & Thompson, 2021, p. 13).

The usage of the status quo as a cultural balance sheet has real-world consequences that can create inequity (Buchanan, 2004). It reflects what a culture values (and does not), which is treated as truth and materialized accordingly as an objective reality (Lakoff & Johnson, 2008). Typically, society treats *its* beliefs as the truth, *yours* as a mistaken conviction and *theirs* as a myth (Pettigrew, 1979).

However, this reliance on the status quo for security promotes short-term thinking as it is not that stable. Just look at the rise of cancel culture and the #metoo movement. Condoned behaviours accepted as an inherent part of an organization’s culture can now make a highly ranked member a social pariah.

Further, power imbalances that are advantageous to the status quo in the short term tend to converge with the “disadvantaged” and “marginalized” over time. As an example, look at the environmental damage caused by industry. In the short term, profits and cheap consumer goods seem more important. However, when a culture embodies the meta-perspective of *respect*, which treats *all possibilities* with reverence, it can see that its interests are much more aligned than it may, at first, realize. Society finds that it cannot destroy someone else’s environment without damaging its own, with severe ramifications for its health, security and well-being.

People rely on the status quo for their safety, security, health and well-being. However, when a culture stifles its growth by not *respecting* another's epistemology, it hastens its collapse by being willfully blind to the unintended consequences represented by *all possibilities*. *All possibilities* remind people that a social collapse is possible without *respect*, and denying it does not make it less probable. Reality, when it is mistaken for truth, is unstable. "Culture is epistemological because it makes our experience understandable, and makes us feel as if we know our world and our places in it" (Demerath, 2002, p. 208).

The continued usage of the status quo as a cultural balance sheet materializes as a resistance to change characterized by winners and losers, decreasing its potential. As Kahneman (2011, p. 305) said:

In human affairs, the same simple rule explains much of what happens when institutions attempt to reform themselves, in "reorganizations" and "restructuring" of companies, and in efforts to rationalize a bureaucracy, simplify the tax code, or reduce medical costs. As initially conceived plans for reform almost always produce many winners and some losers while achieving an overall improvement. If the affected parties have any political influence, however, potential losers will be more active and determined than potential winners; the outcome will be biased in their favor and inevitably more expensive and less effective than initially planned,

When the status quo disrespects others' perspectives by denying their *similar differences*, it puts its safety in danger. An organization can limit its potential with its inability to respectfully listen to diverse perspectives by inhibiting the generation of creative insights that could enrich it with new orders of knowledge.

However, disrespecting others' perspectives by not seriously considering their views as a valid truth does not prevent any of the unexpected consequences contained in *all possibilities* from coming to fruition. Just look at the disruption caused by COVID-19, which was not wholly unpredicted. It was an incredibly destabilizing event with devastating consequences that also demonstrated the fragility of the state of the status quo and the need for greater resiliency.

Disrespecting others' perspectives decreases an organization's resiliency. It cannot assume that its future is continuous from its present. When an organization is rigid in the face of inevitable change, it becomes brittle, not flexible (Aerts et al., 2012). However, organizations fear chaos, so they struggle to embrace the notion of discontinuous change. Whilst healthy systems that embody change and chaos are more resilient and adaptable. "New structures emerge not in changing the state of equilibrium but in the state far from equilibrium. It is the fluctuations that enable a system to move from one state to another" (Aerts et al., 2012, p. 109). Stability, when used in systems thinking, contains a "hidden assumption of linearity, associated with predictability (return to equilibrium state after disturbance)" (p. 112). The original meaning came from the concept of "ultrastability" (p. 108), which means a system is adaptive and flexible to retain its overall structure. A healthy system uses ultrastability to create possibilities by metamorphosing with chaos to make itself more robust.

When an organization labels diverse people as "marginalized" and "disadvantaged", it is disrespectful because these labels act as a proxy for the truth (Lakoff & Johnson, 2008). They can also, unintentionally, suggest and permit people so labelled to be treated like that. It is difficult for people classified as marginalized to feel they can share their perspectives perpetuating the issue (Hughes, 2016). Likewise, it is hard to hear marginalized voices as their disadvantaged perspective is labelled as different from the status quo.

The more an organization accepts these categorizations like "marginalized" and "disadvantaged" as part of their status quo, the more they become entrenched in that perspective and resistant to contradictory ideas. "The more we know about something, the more gratified we are by reinforcements of that knowledge, and the more upset we are by contradictions" (Demerath, 2002, p. 209). This way of thinking leads to a suppression of perspectives that could enlighten the organization because it seemingly threatens the status quo. These "marginalized" perspectives are cast as different, e.g., dangerous, because their views lack the metaphorical scaffolding that demonstrates their relational similarities. Without this, their perspective is a threat when it could be helping enlighten the organization to create new possibilities. As Kahneman (2011) said, if the "losers" have clout, they will use it to stymie progress – limiting potential.

Society fears diversity because it introduces complexity, conflict, and chaos (Bassett-Jones, 2005), whilst not fully realizing that their metaphorical characterization of events contributes

to how they experience it. When they say they are *divided* or *conflicted*, it becomes their reality (Lakoff & Johnson, 2008). “The language of argument is not poetic, fanciful, or rhetorical; it is literal. We talk about arguments that way because we conceive of them that way – and act according to the way we conceive of things” (Lakoff & Johnson, 2008, p. 5).

However, in Greek mythology, chaos is undifferentiated potential (Wheeler, 1995), meaning diversity is part and parcel of harmony. Ancient Greek mythology characterizes chaos as a force *of nature* as in one with it. Similarly, in ancient Chinese philosophy, “a harmonious world must be a diverse world. This is so because a healthy and prosperous world relies on its diverse things to go together” (Li, 2006, p. 585). *All possibilities* at the heart of the PPP framework embodies all these epistemologies as related concepts with *similar differences*.

The PPP framework does not seek to solve problems by blending or suppressing epistemologies because it limits possibilities. Instead, it generates creative insights by recognizing that the possible is not in an either/or relationship with the impossible. The two are in a dynamic dance, and the gap widens or narrows depending on the perspective. When the two are closer, it is easier to discern that they are *different-similar* perspectives of the same system. Working respectfully *with* the status quo enables the generation of creative insights to affect transformational system change.

Limitations of the Creative Problem-Solving Process Models

Problem definition, or how an issue is framed, suggests it has a solution and steps to solve it (Bardwell, 1991). That is not an issue per se, as all perspectives reveal and hide information (Glăveanu, 2020). “Being able to redefine or reframe a problem and to explore the "problem space" can help broaden the range of alternatives and solutions examined” (Bardwell, 1991, p. 603). However, categorizing challenges as "problems" and outcomes as "solutions" can obscure its metaphorical use and mythical connotations. It implies that the problem-solver can control their environment and materialize outcomes that fix the system. However, since the system is interconnected, it cannot be changed without altering the whole. These changes will then generate unintended consequences that will be experienced differently depending on one's perspective. A problem solved, like eliminating environmental waste, is an issue for someone else when it appears in their backyard.

Compounding the problem/solution paradigm's limitations is that "people tend to solve problems in ways that fit into their preexisting maps; they do what they did before. At its best, this means one has an adequate map for dealing with a new situation. Unfortunately, this also means that ... more effective options are over-looked" (Bardwell, 1991, p. 605). The problem/solution paradigm combined with the creativity of the solution being assessed in terms of its novelty and usefulness versus the status quo limits possibilities. It also can create inequities by not considering the consequences of the "solutions" apart from the perspective of the status quo. There will always be unintended consequences. However, that does not mean that an organization can willfully ignore the consequences of its actions on others.

That is why the PPP encourages the embodiment of as many different perspectives as possible. It does this with its use of the Celtic four-leaf clover device, representing the embodiment of knowledge as in Figure 1: *The Parable Proxy of Possibilities*. The Celtic knot flows in many directions, even reversing and crossing paths to form a pattern. Like how knowledge flows, as it creates new *meanings* from its *myths* and *metaphors* to *materialize* new realities. The Celtic knot also represents the "boundlessness of the imagination to the order of reality" (Heinz, 2008, p. 14).

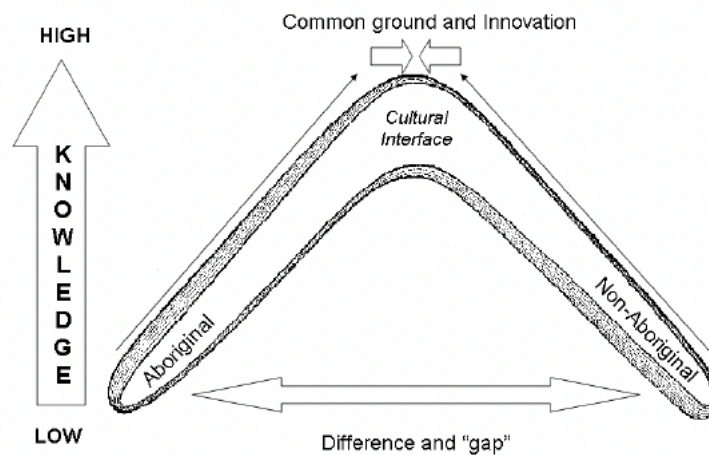
The PPP creates knowledge bridges between epistemologies by co-creating the flow of boundless imagination to generate new myths and metaphors to enhance the status quo. It creates an embodied experience with the Celtic knot symbolizing a human body. The head is represented by *reflect* and is the mind of culture using *myths* and *metaphors* to conceptualize its world. The left arm reaches into the past to illustrate how a society *relates* to knowledge, how it uses *myths* to create *meaning* it treats as truth. Simultaneously, the right arm reaches for the future to *reveal* what society is becoming with its changing *metaphors* that are *materialized*. The feet *respond* grounded in a *material* reality that has a shared *meaning*. The outermost rings represent the *unknown* forces that influence the system but cannot be detected from the perspective of the status quo.

The realizations gained embodying the PPP will encourage more equitable outcomes. By internalizing another's perspective, an organization can discern relationships that can help expand its potential. Meaning acknowledging and even privileging another perspective cannot take something from the status quo; it can only add possibilities that enable transformational change. Indeed, more than additive, new perspectives could be multiplicative.

Though a person cannot objectively know what it is like to be another being, "at present we are completely unequipped to think about the subjective character of experience without relying on imagination" (Nagel, 1974, p. 449). Organizations still have an ethical obligation to try.

The PPP recognizes a “higher level of knowledge” – spiritually and intellectually – than the status quo. The status quo concerns what exists, which does not have a linear relationship with what will exist. As Figure 2: *Boomerang Interface of Cultural Interface Knowledge* demonstrates, a society’s understanding increases when it perceives its *different similarities* rather than just its differences. These insights enable learning “*through* culture, not about culture”, with the new perspectives getting “*built in*, not bolted on” (p. 4).

Figure 2
Boomerang Interface of Cultural Interface Knowledge



The status quo is an emergent social state that reflects a culture’s values. It is a perspective sustained by its myths and metaphors. However, healthy systems are chaotic, requiring resilience and adaptability (Aerts et al., 2012), including responding to change and innovation. When a culture undergoes a transmutation, like in the example of Einstein, its myths and metaphors move in sync, creating an embodied perspective to anchor it in the newly formed status quo. In this light, the PPP is a framework for generating new perspectives to increase potential by enabling an organization to safely *alter* the status quo rather than a creative problem-solving process model that produces novel and useful ideas *versus* the status quo (Runco & Jaeger, 2012; Stein, 1953). “Prominent ideas cannot die until the problems that arise within them has been resolved” (Samuel & Thompson, 2021, p. 15).

That is why the PPP preferences imagination over creativity. It encompasses an expansive array of perspectives, and it is not as constrained by social consensus that can limit possibilities as epitomized by the status quo.

The Importance of Imagination

Since the PPP is powered by imagination, it is worth clarifying this concept as it has received less research attention than creativity. Runco and Pritzker (2020, p. 637) define it thus:

In the psychological research ‘imagination’ is becoming a broader term that encompasses the multi-faceted capacity to transcend our current time, place and/or circumstances to think about what might have been, plan and anticipate the future, create fictional worlds, become absorbed in the narratives created by others, and consider remote and close alternatives to actual experiences. With this definition, imagination includes everyday mundane thoughts (e.g., plans for dinner), as well as the creative insights that lead to progress in art and science. This definition also distinguishes imagination from imagery, with the latter being a tool of the imagination rather than equated with it.

Imagination is not the same as *imaginary* because “imaginative processes have real world effects on our behaviour” (p. 637). In other words, imagination carries with it the potential for action and actualization while the imaginary is trapped in the abstract. Nor is imagination just the domain of children. Strategizing and remembering are all done using imagination. People pretend when they evaluate options by converting them into narratives that run through their minds. Fantasy, pretending and storytelling are vital and ageless undertakings that enrich cognitive capacities.

In these “postnormal times” characterized by the 3Cs: complexity, chaos, and contradictions, Sardar (2010, p. 443) argues that society needs imagination more than ever.

The most important ingredients for coping with postnormal times are imagination and creativity. Why? Because we have no other way of dealing with complexity, contradictions and chaos. Imagination is the main tool, indeed I would suggest the only tool, which takes us from simple reasoned analysis to higher synthesis. While

imagination is intangible, it creates and shapes our reality; while a mental tool, it affects our behaviour and expectations. We will have to imagine our way out of the postnormal times. The kind of futures we imagine beyond postnormal times would depend on the quality of our imagination. Given that our imagination is embedded and limited to our own culture, we will have to unleash a broad spectrum of imaginations from the rich diversity of human cultures and multiple ways of imagining alternatives to conventional, orthodox ways of being and doing.

However, Vygotsky's (2004) "first law of the imagination" states that the ability to be creative depends on the "richness and variety" (p. 14) of a person's experiences because that powers their imagination. The richer the person's range of experiences, the more they can indulge in fantasy, embody stretching narratives, and construct complex and layered storylines. The PPP's design reflects this by providing a structured way of creating new storylines to help users continuously shift their perspectives, regardless of the richness of their experiences. Its use of narrative devices helps to question what "they know" to create what does not yet exist. These scenarios can be realistic or fantastical, probable, or even impossible – it does not matter – because it is a matter of perspective. By imagining it, it helps materialize it to close the gap between the possible and impossible.

That is why the PPP is a creative insight generating framework rather than a creative problem-solving process model. By approaching complex challenges this way, the PPP overcomes significant drawbacks of creative problem-solving process models – their narrow perspectives and use of the status quo limiting innovation.

Storytelling

The PPP embodies the wisdom of a multitude of perspectives to continuously generate more possibilities and safely brings them into being with storytelling, which is arguably the most subversive communication medium because it is accepted unquestioningly. "Any writer worth his/her hire knows that all writing, one way or another, is subversive. It is guerrilla warfare against the status quo" (Ellison, 1997, p. 247). Stories provide coherence to events that are recast as a truth that enables an organization to survive and thrive (Lakoff & Johnson, 2008). Storytelling is weaved through every cultural medium because it is how society constructs meaning.

The PPP is called a framework, but it is alive and metabolizing its culture's knowledge – the stories that create reality. These narratives give an organization coherence, connection and kinship. Hence, the PPP has a 3D and hand-drawn element; it emphasizes that it is anchored and embodied.

The inclusion of the word parable in the *Parable Proxy of Possibilities* borrows from the allegorical literature to emphasize that it is a storytelling framework with a moral compass – the spirit of respect. It is not a pre-ordained morality; it is created in the spirit of Confucian philosophy where there is no predetermined truth, so users need to take personal accountability for how they move forward in the world (Li, 2006).

The PPP creates narratives using perspectives and storytelling devices like myths and *metaphors* working with the imagination "as a form of enrichment or expansion, of one's experience and understanding of the world" (Zittoun & Cerchia, 2013, p. 2). The PPP enriches a culture's potential by embodying a range of perspectives to create relational bridges to the myths and metaphors of the status quo to materialize new possibilities. Therefore, it respects rituals and traditions as well as what is novel and useful (Runco & Jaeger, 2012; Stein, 1953) because both can engender an "experiential gestalt" (Lakoff & Johnson, 2008, p. 234) that creates a coherence through actions to concretize a new reality.

Summary

The PPP is created from the conviction that humankind needs to integrate new perspectives to engender a more inclusive and respectful embodiment of this culture's status quo. This culture's current narratives of the future reinforce a win/lose, either/or mentality (Lamp, 2020). It contributes to society losing sight that we are interconnected and dependent. The world is pregnant with possibilities; however, the languaging of today determines what will be available tomorrow. The status quo suffers from a lack of diverse perspectives needed to materialize more opportunities for transformational change. Instead, it appears we are destined for an extension of the present state.

Narratives "contribute to the perspectival nature of reality and open it up to the possible" (Glăveanu, 2020, p. 81). Therefore, it is essential that society critically examine how it categorizes knowledge. Instead of characterizing it as different, society could view new

perspectives as having *different similarities* or a *similarity of the differences* (Bohm, 2004, pp. 60-61). This deliberate languaging allows a culture to play with diversity while respectfully creating discriminations that contribute to knowledge that deepens its understanding.

The PPP is created from the conviction that humankind needs to integrate new perspectives to engender a more inclusive and respectful embodiment of the status quo. It can alter the elaboration of this culture's current languaging *from* reinforcing the structures that support and maintain the systems of power (Pettigrew, 1979) *to* languaging that materializes a more enlightened status quo with more inclusive myths and metaphors to engender more possibilities. In this way, the PPP acts as narrative pedagogy that can help shift the relationships between seemingly different groups onto a higher plane.

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