

The power of intent

by Maree Conway

I can't remember when I first heard about the Three Horizons model but it resonated immediately with me in that way that was both significant and enigmatic. Since then, I've been looking for a way to use the framework in my work—I've read papers, listened to Bill Sharpe talk about the Three Horizons at the APF Gathering in Oxford, and then came the book. Reading the book I came to realise that the text not only explains the framework and how it can be used, but it also positions the framework in something deeper, something potentially transformational, related to the emergence of a collaborative future consciousness.

I read a lot about transformation but have never really been able to use the term in my work in a way I thought meaningful and relevant. The most transformational experience in recent years for me was when a deep immersion in the Enneagram turned on a raft of light bulbs all at once which was both overwhelming and exciting—a shift in my individual consciousness. I hope it is not too much to suggest that I felt much the same while reading this book.

Transformation in a practical sense began to have greater clarity for me, beginning by acknowledging the need to 'step out of our individual mindsets into a shared space of creative possibility' in order to move people to 'transformative dialogue' (A Shared Future Consciousness). None of this is terribly new, but Bill Sharpe manages to describe, dig into and explain transformation in a way that makes it seem eminently real and possible for

anyone to experience, both individually and collectively.

The book is divided into four sections. The first explains the Three Horizons framework, the second discusses the practice of future consciousness, the third provides a range of case studies and the fourth is about the patterning of hope. Together, the author indicates that "the four parts of the book can be taken as four essays around this theme of how we work with the known while responding creatively and skilfully together to the unknown" (Introduction).

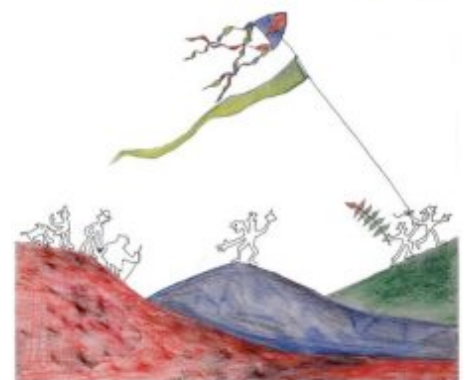
For me, it is the second and fourth parts of the book that are the most valuable, although I recommend reading them sequentially—the power of Bill Sharpe's writing comes from following the narrative through from beginning to end.

I can't do justice here to the discussion of future consciousness in the book. It is described as 'this flexible awareness and skill that we can develop together because it is an awareness of the future potential of the present moment' (A Shared Future Consciousness). There are five propositions that capture the core of it, as listed here.

1. Future consciousness is an awareness of the future potential of the present moment.
2. Transformative change is that change which requires a re-patterning of our collective lives rather than an extension of the current pattern.
3. Transformative innovation can be understood as working with three different qualities of the future in the

THREE HORIZONS The Patterning of Hope

Bill Sharpe



The Three Horizons: The Patterning of Hope

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present that we characterise as the three horizons of future consciousness.

4. Three Horizons provides a notation and framework for the collective practice of future consciousness for transformative innovation in a simple way – it brings all the perspectives and voices into the room with the potential for constructive dialogue.
5. Future consciousness can only be fully developed as a universal shared practice in which every person is a unique source of transformative insight and human potential.

Ultimately, it is the combination of the personal with the three horizons is valuable for me. Like Causal Layered Analysis, Three Horizons is more than a

one of those convergence moments with my return to hope theory earlier this year (and thanks to Rowena Morrow for some fantastic work on this which was very helpful), and this section again demonstrates the importance of hope in thinking about the future.

Bill Sharpe describes this often unspoken sense that renewal is possible as ‘the third horizon imagination in the present, a way of living into the future rather than knowing our way’ (Knowing and Living) and that ‘...we act with hope, with a belief that whatever the current circumstance there is a way to act that expresses the possibility of a renewal of the human’ (Hope).

Like all frameworks, the Three Horizons is only useful and relevant if it fits the context in which one is working

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tool to describe the Litany of change. It’s also a way to surface different perspectives on an issue in a very overt way, and to move beyond those seemingly intractable perspectives to collaborative ways of thinking about possible futures, or ‘holding transformational dialogue which informs our action in the complexity of the present while respecting the unknowability of the future [which is] a skilled cultural practice like language, something we have to learn to do together... (Stepping into Future Consciousness).

The fourth section on patterning of hope was for me

and living. So far, I’ve found it useful in different ways in client contexts and in my own scanning as a way to map out the scope of change being faced. The Three Horizons is not just a tool for understanding change and transformation though. It’s also a way to understand the power of intent and hope—individual and collective—as we look towards the future. And like all things transformational and developmental, once the Three Horizons is understood and embedded in thinking and working, there’s no going back. C

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