Rich pictures activity

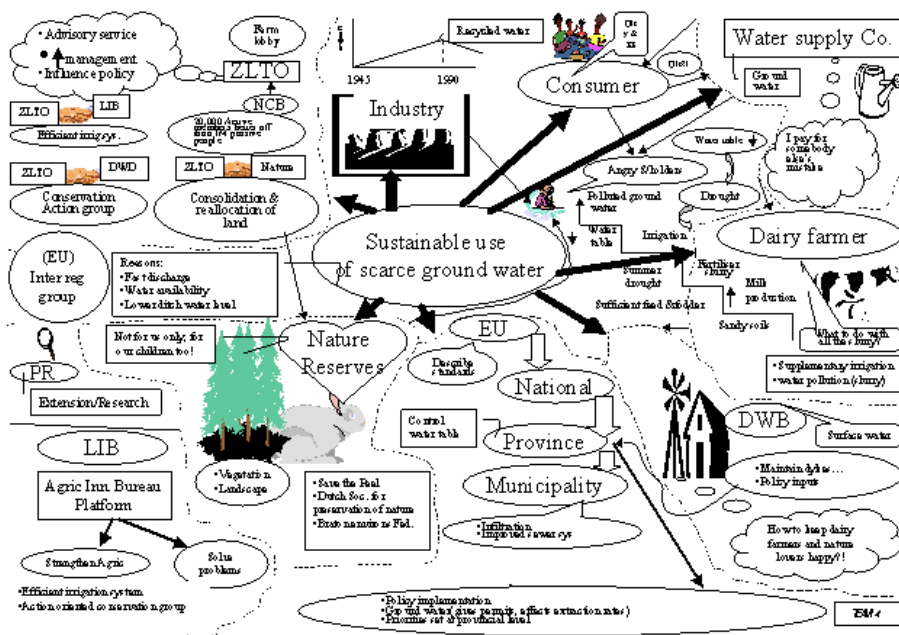**JOHN BESSANT**

Managing Innovation

Rich pictures activity

1. Read the description below of rich pictures and how they can be used as a tool in strategic exploration

2. Pick a challenge in innovation management – launching a new product/service, introducing a major process change, analysisng competitive rivalry in a new industry, etc. – and represent it as a rich picture

3. Discuss the new insights and perspectives which representing it in this fashion opens up

4. Optionally get different people to do individual rich pictures and then compare their different ways of representing and capturing the dimensions of the challenge.

Rich pictures

Rich pictures offer a powerful way of representing complex problems and identifying possible routes through to their solution. Based on the principle that 'a picture is worth a thousand words' the idea is to capture the complexity and interrelationships in a system through pictures. The problem could be developing and launching a new product, or introducing some process change in an organization, or finding a strategy in a complex competitive environment. Step 1 is to capture the picture and make it available for discussion and exploration.

An example is given below:

Rich pictures are particularly associated with the work of Peter Checkland who did extensive work in the area of what came to be known as 'soft systems analysis'. It draws on research which shows that solving problems in creative fashion benefits from engaging different areas of the brain – in this case tapping into centres associated with intuition and pattern recognition. Their value is that in making explicit through a drawing or a picture some new angles or insight may emerge.

There are no 'rules' for drawing rich pictures – rather they should be a combination of cartoons, images, stereotypes, anything which helps capture the elements in a problem and the interrelationships between them. It is a good idea to avoid or minimize the use of words – the effort of trying to use images and pictures triggers different associations in the brain. They can include points of view and perspectives – and one variant is to get several people involved in a situation to draw their own rich pictures of it and then compare notes/pictures.

Although a powerful tool in systems analysis it is helpful not to begin with the systems but rather simply represent the elements in the situation and later examine the rich pictures to see if particular systems and interconnections occur.

Variations on the tool involve putting individual elements on to Post-it notes or in a mind map and then linking them together to create a complex representation of the problem under study.