



Nigel Green

Making Sense Of A Pluralistic World

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Many organizations today are getting to grips with a more complex world; a world where simple “billiard ball” cause-and-effect doesn’t always apply, a world where a multiplicity of unfolding events can have deep, and lasting, impact.

To help make sense of this world we need to see it through a lens that differs in perspective from that of traditional methodologies. As [Richard Veryard](#) puts it:

“...many twentieth century systems methodologies were based on simplistic assumptions – for example, that there should be a single ordered set of goals and objectives, completely and consistently driving all system activity; that there should be a single ordered set of policies, rationally decided by management according to best-practice strategic principles.”

Richard describes the VPEC-T thinking framework as just such a lens:

“VPEC-T is based on a profoundly radical philosophy of plurality. Instead of a single centralized value system (as found in top-down command-and-control organizations), we expect to find a range of different (overlapping, conflicting) value systems. Instead of a single coherent set of policies, we expect to find complex interaction between different kinds of policies (commercial, security, safety, corporate responsibility, and so on). Instead of a simple set of routine events, the post-modern organization is faced with a dynamic set of

emerging events. Instead of a rigid set of database records, systems content is rich and evolving. And finally, the whole human activity system is underpinned by a complex set of trust relationships between people and organizations”.

We're surrounded by systems that have been designed according to simplifying ‘top-down’ assumptions – systems that are inflexible and that serve a small set of stakeholders . The design of these systems are dominated by a traditional, “[Tayloristic](#)” management philosophy, and reductionist, “[Six Sigma](#)” like, practices. (See a commentary on traditionally a strong Six Sigma advocate, [GE, embracing alternative thinking](#)).

The digital-native [Unicorns](#) see the world differently: they seem to naturally understand the plurality of values, policies, events, content and trust. And they design systems that cater for that. They design software that is built to evolve from the start, and recognize the need for regular customer/community feedback, to constantly improve and evolve the design.

Richard Veryard concludes his article with:

“VPEC-T is not just a tool for making sense of complex human activity systems, but also a tool for communicating and telling stories about these systems. This is important for three reasons

- Firstly, because any single view of a complex system is necessarily unreliable and incomplete. We need multiple lenses and multiple voices to give us greater coverage of the issues, and greater confidence in the analysis.*
- Secondly, because the philosophy of plurality makes it necessary for us to work collaboratively with other people, not only with different perspectives but with different value systems. So we need a language for collaboration.*
- And thirdly, because of the reflexive nature of trust, which requires transparency of the models and assumptions on which the system is based. Ultimately, VPEC-T cannot be a private matter for a closed elite group of system designers without compromising trust principles”.*

Could VPEC-T help evolve both our human and software and systems? Why not give it a try on your current or next project – you might come up with some unexpected results?

I encourage you to read Richard Veryard’s [full article](#). And a great summary of [VPEC-T](#) from [Roy Grubb](#).

If you found this article interesting, please come and join the discussion @ "[Horses and Unicorns](#)" blog - this is where son-of-vpect is being "incubated" - contributions, observations &

challenges welcome!

Twitter hash: [#horsesunicorns](#) [#vpect](#)

Declared bias: I'm a co-author of VPEC-T.

Please take a look at the work-in-progress [VPEC-T Metro Map](#) and a [VPEC-T "How to Guide"](#).

Written by



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