

## Models, Snapshots and other Lies

*Time dissipates to shining ether the solid angularity of facts.*

Emerson

Look at the book in your hand. It has three dimensions - height, width, and depth (no jokes please). Look around - three dimensions everywhere you look. Everything has height and width and depth. We view the world in three dimensions. However, when you want to draw a picture of something - be it a person, or an organization or the flow of money, or the direction that profits go, a building or building plan...or nearly anything else, we use two dimensions - height and width. If you draw a picture of this book, it will be in two dimensions. You might try to draw it to resemble three dimensions, but if you are using two. That's ok. We are pretty used to it. It makes things simple enough to think about. Plans or graphs or charts or blueprints - we have become used to looking at two dimensions and making the mental leap to three dimensions without even thinking about it.

**Now, here is a big problem that causes lots of other problems.**

We analyze the world in **two dimensions**, with scratches on paper and **mentally make the jump to three dimensions.**

The problem is that the **world REALLY** exists in **four dimensions** - height, width, depth and **time**. Take two blueprints of houses. They look very similar. Now, add a date of 1644 to one and 1944 to the other. It's the same house as far as the blueprint is concerned. Think it's going to be different?

It is this messy fourth dimension *time* that really throws sand in the machine. It is very confusing to think about things changing over time and what effects that generates, so we tend to ignore it.

We become so used to diagrams and flow charts that we ignore the importance of the **point in time in which an event occurs**.

However, innovation, learning, and activity are all temporal events.

We are not trying to capture an **object** in a KM system, we are trying to **capture a moment**.

**Knowledge transfer is an event.**

*So what?*

Have I so quickly descended into meaningless philosophical hair-

splitting?

No.. **this is useful...even essential**. The crucial difference is this - when we look at objects- the piece of knowledge or the idea that is an innovation then in one stroke we

*lose the user...*

**lose the situation...**

**and lose any real chance to effectively support the USE of the object.**

**You don't really care about the thing you care about the end performance.. the *result*.**

The focus is put on the object because it is clean and relatively easy to file, transfer, put in different forms. However, without keeping clearly focused on how it is *used by users* - usefulness is more a result of dumb luck and the skill of a developer to snatch a fish from a rushing river than it is the planning or diagrams.

I always used to be amazed that architects and builders could look at a set of drawings and see the building it was to become. It was not until I lived through a remodeling project that I realized that the drawings were used as only a starting point. The wall was to wrap around two rooms. The plan said it was to be 6' tall. The builder came to us and said, "Where would you like it to be 6'? The floor is not even. If we build it all at 6', it will look crooked at the top. Pick a point for the height and we'll make it level."

Christopher Alexander, an architect who explores making structures with life (more about him later), starts with a very rough plan and marks it out *on the site*.

Then, the users "sit" in the various "rooms" and experience the "building" and let the plan evolve from their **use** of the structure, before it is any more than stakes and lines in the dirt.

### **Models are useful.**

However, remember Plato's cave. Plato wrote of people trapped in a cave, only able to look at a wall in front of them. Behind them (out of their view) was a fire. Between the fire and the people's backs, puppeteers enacted plays. The people, viewing only shadows, accept the shadow play as reality.

**Models are shadow plays** - a dim representation of what is going

on outside the cave. I would rather look at a model than a blank wall. Models are useful to help us grasp and consider a far too complex world. They allow us to simplify life enough to begin to develop strategies.

### **The danger for us is to view the blueprint of a shadow as the final project.**

It's ok to build castles in the clouds, just don't move in.

