



The Sarkar Game

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The [Sarkar Game](#) was created in 2004 by Peter Hayward and Joseph Voros at the Strategic Foresight Institute at Swinburne University of Technology in Melbourne, Australia. Sohail Inayatullah, a visiting professor at the Graduate Institute of Futures Studies at Tamkang University in Taipei, Taiwan described Sarkar's theory and the game in an article in the [Journal of Futures Studies](#) (September 2013, 18(1)) entitled "Using Gaming to Understand the Patterns of the Future The Sarkar Game in Action." The article provides an overview of the Sarkar Game, shares results from several case studies of the game in use, and quotes numerous "lessons learned" comments from participants in the game

Overview

The Sarkar Game is a foresight role-playing game designed to glean insight into social reality and help players discover other ways of knowing, thus to better understand and appreciate alternative futures. The Sarkar Game specifically helps players (individuals and organizations) comprehend macrohistory – the timing of the future – as well as the structured shape of the future(s). The game also helps players scrutinize the leadership characteristics for themselves and for their organization or institution.

Theory

The game is based on a model of social change from Indian philosopher and macrohistorian Prabhat Ranjan Sarkar. Sarkar developed a cyclical theory of social change with a belief that understanding history boosted the stimulation and creation of alternative futures. His emphasis was on creating a new type of leadership spiraling to a transformational future.

Sarkar identifies macro-sized, evolutionary categories that describe long swathes of human development. Frequently, a revolution or evolution takes place when each cycle concludes. Then the cycle begins once more. Four types of power (*epistemes*) are drawn from these historic cycles: the worker, the warrior, the intellectual and the capitalist (merchant). No type is ideal because each contains a negative (backward reasoning) as well as positive (forward looking) aspect. Sarkar noted the

turbulence between cycles and the subsequent potential for creation of a new class of leaders with a planetary-wide sense of identity (neohumanism¹).

Sarkar's planetary model is also applied to organizations and institutions. Subsequently, the Sarkar Game provides opportunity for players to examine their leadership style and think about *personas* they may have repressed, projected or disowned. Organizations are presented with probing the types of leadership styles active throughout their institutions and its associated power dynamics. With such insight comes the opportunity and ability to change the future.

Play

The facilitator separates players into groups. Each group plays the role of one of the types of power by following a script the facilitator provides and using tools provided for each role. For example:

Workers get tools for labor and this script:

I am a worker or a simple peasant. I have individual wants; first - safety, security, food (to be free of my environment). When these are met I want belief, inspiration, faith (to be free from my suffering and fear of death). When these are met I want material comfort and wealth (to be free from want, work, discomfort and struggle). My power is chaos, the ability to disrupt. When satisfied I am quiet (for a while) and then I want, and demand, more from the system. I can stand against the system and bring it or myself down.

Warriors are given plastic guns, and this script:

We are the warriors. We honor loyalty, courage and unity. We serve to protect the system from danger and chaos. We bring order where there is none. We enforce the wishes of the system. Our power is the ability to dominate the environment. Only we have the weapons.

Intellectuals are given books, and this script:

We are the intellectuals. We search for the truth. We remove error and confusion. We use words and speech to convey ideas that give knowledge. We value ideas. Some of us have knowledge of scientific reality and some of us have knowledge of spiritual reality. Some of us as well use art, poetry and story to understand the past and present and create different futures. Our power is ideational. Only we can create ideas to believe in. We create the enlightenment.

Capitalists are given cash, and this script:

We are the capitalists. We seek to apply ideas to create material growth. We seek opportunities to be successful. The more we have the more power we have. Our power is economic. Only we can create material wealth.

The facilitator introduces one group at a time, beginning with the workers. "The workers are asked to begin the game. As they work – build, clean, type - (or not), after a few minutes the warriors are invited into the game. They may suggest improvements, for the workers to work harder or with more honor, or they may construct the workers as lazy and shoot them. As a discussion between workers and warriors

1 Sarkar, Prabhat Ranjan (1982). *The Liberation of Intellect: Neohumanism*. Kolkata: Ananda Marga Publications. ISBN 81-7252-168-5

begins, after five minutes or so, depending on whether there is 'regression', the intellectuals are brought in. They may engage in dialogue directly with the workers or with the warriors. After another five minutes or so, the capitalists are brought in. They can negotiate with any of the other three groups. At this stage, all four groups are active in playing out the dynamics of power. The game can then conclude, either with a resolution or a total system collapse."

A period of reflection takes place after the game concludes. People discuss their experience from a personal and group perspective: "What did they experience? How did they experience the other groups? What was their self-learning? What does this tell them about their own organization? What is needed in terms of governance at the planetary level?" Often there is an observer appointed to evaluate the reflection discussion and present an award to the group deemed most successful. Lastly, the observers and participants share their reflections

Lessons Learned

As the groups interact, with the facilitator's guidance, the players uncover their assumptions about role, power and alliance that normally operate unconsciously in the background (personal, organizational and global paradigms). The Sarkar Game helps define personal and organizational leadership styles and comprehend power dynamics in cyclical change. Understanding social change and the strengths and weaknesses of each role group opens up the possibility of transformational leadership.