

The logic of what might be

Posted on 12 June 2011. Tags: [abductive logic](#), [creative](#), [ideas](#), [innovate](#)

by Roger Martin

We are all utterly capable of being 'future ready' but most of us in most organizations switch off our future readiness without realizing it. Increasingly, we are taught to be rigorously scientific. What rigorously scientific means is that we should prove a proposition to be true through either deductive or inductive logic before taking action on it. That sounds good: if you can't prove something is truly a good idea, why would you want to do it? It would be decidedly unscientific to embark on something unproven.

While this sounds very good and highly rigorous, this pattern of thinking has a downside: it is not possible to prove any new idea in advance with deductive or inductive logic. This was the important but all-too-obscure insight of a turn of the 20th century American pragmatist philosopher by the name of Charles Saunders Peirce. New ideas come about not through strict deduction or induction but through what Peirce referred to as a 'logical leap of the mind' or 'inference to the best explanation' and gave it a name: abductive logic. However, if after we have a logical leap of the mind that produces a new idea and then think that to be scientifically rigorous we must revert to deduction and induction to prove it, we will inadvertently kill it. The consequence is that the future will simply be a logical extension of the past not an invention of something new and better.

So to be truly future ready, we have to embrace the third fundamental form of logic: abductive logic or as I call it, the logic of what might be...