



Rich Pictures



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'What is the use of a book,' thought Alice, 'without pictures or conversations?'

LEWIS CARROLL

What's it all about?

The rich pictures technique was developed as part of a project looking at gathering information about complex situations (Checkland, 1981; Checkland & Scholes, 1990). The idea of using drawings or pictures to think about issues is common to several problem-solving or creative-thinking methods because our intuitive consciousness communicates more easily in impressions and symbols than in words. Drawings can both evoke and record insight into a situation and different visualisation techniques have evolved to help us gain this insight.

What's it for?

Rich pictures are used at an early stage in a process before all the elements of a project or process have been decided and the thinking can be kept very open. The approach is intended to unravel existing viewpoints and help you discover novel solutions or ideas. It can help change patterns of thinking in a group if you are doing it with others. The purpose of using the tool is to consider future opportunities for your business.

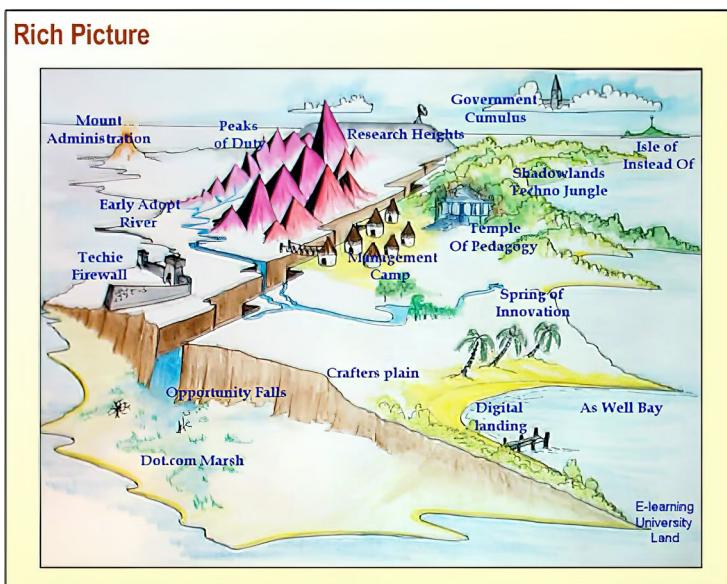


Figure 1 Rich picture of an e-learning strategy by Prof. Gilly Salmon

Using the tool

There are a number of steps to follow to use this technique:

1. Write up a statement or question that captures your view of the future of the business
2. Draw two pictures, which may be metaphors for the business. The first drawing should be a view of the business in the future. The second picture should be a view of the present
3. If you are working with a group, describe the picture of the present first. Make sure you describe both the picture and the properties of the objects that have been drawn
4. Describe the picture of the future in the same way
5. Now discuss the issues that have been raised and start generating ideas
6. Look out for elements of structure in the situation. Then look for elements of process. Finish by considering how the elements of process and structure interact
7. Collect all the data you have gathered and consider how this informs your future vision

What next?

Identify a problem you want to think about. Work through the steps above. What new insights have you gained? How else might you use the technique? Try the technique on your own and with a group, notice any differences in outputs and outcomes.

Quick tips

- Be aware that people may feel inhibited by drawing. Encourage them to give it a go and reassure everyone that they don't have to be works of art. It can help to talk about 'illustrating' an idea rather than drawing
- Really encourage participants to discuss all aspects of their drawings/images
- Avoid too much writing, either as commentary or in bubbles
- Ensure you don't impose any style or structure on your pictures

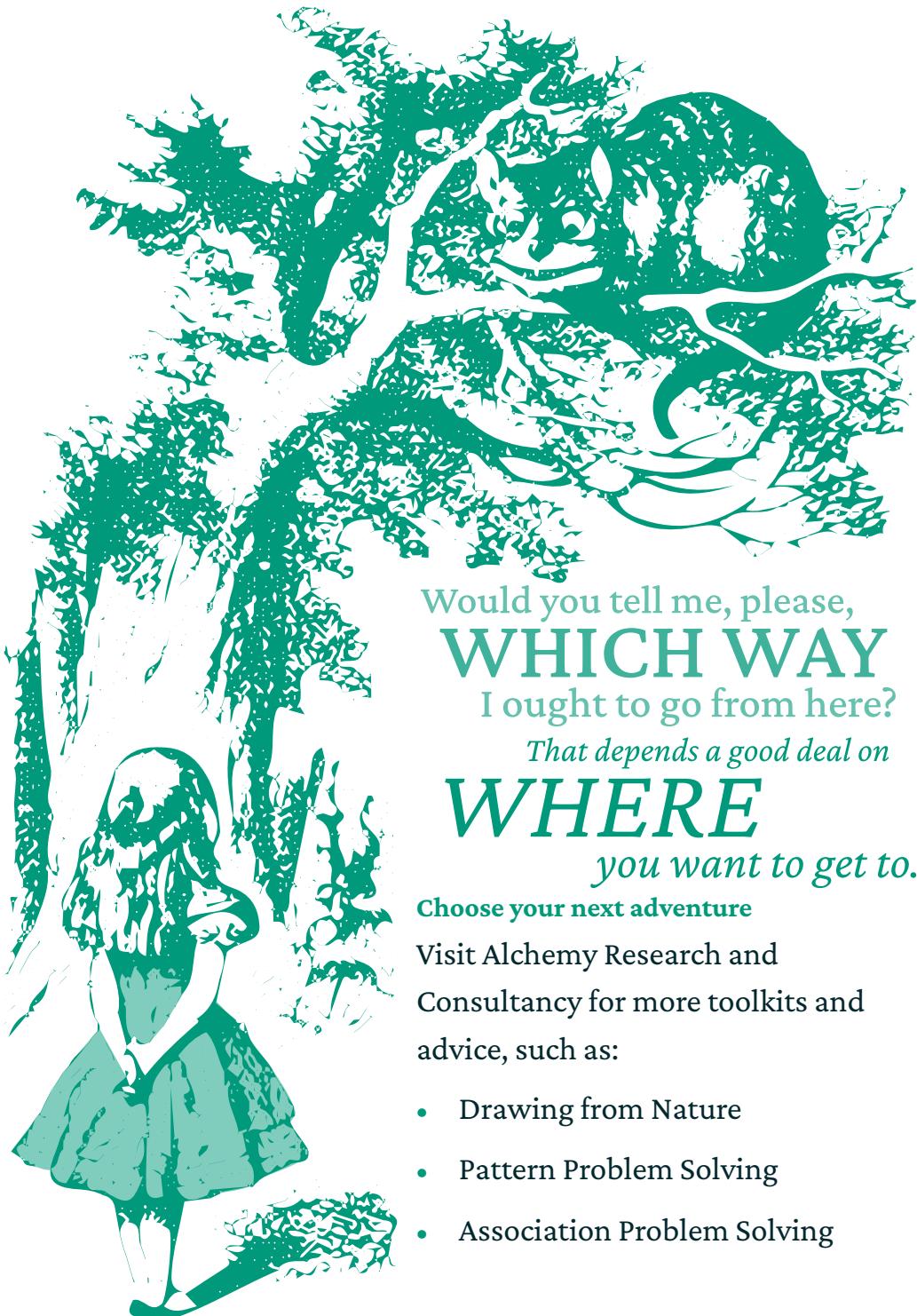
References

Checkland, P. (1981). Systems Thinking, Systems Practice. Chichester: Wiley.

Checkland, P., & Scholes, J. (1990). Soft Systems Methodology in Action. Winchester: Wiley.

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