

# Chapter 1 Transforming Cultures Key Themes and Lessons

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Transforming cultures is a mix of theory of culture, methods of system change and practice of creating attitude and behaviour change.

In this chapter I list the major assumptions and values that arose from discussions. Then, I summarise what we have learnt about the major processes of transformation, using two different typologies to demonstrate differing aspects of cultural transformations.

Finally, to ensure an ethical process occurs, the participants in the wrap up workshop suggested that the founding assumptions, our values and a set of principles to direct the guiding coalition have to be made explicit. Such principles are in a state of evolution but suggestions to date are:

## Values and Principles:

- The process of change must be ethical and grounded in a set of values
- Value dissent
- Respect for diversity of knowledge and approach
- Recognise change is an emotional process
- Recognise we are designing influence not change
- Recognition that communication (whatever medium) is an iterative dialogic process
- Be reflective

## Assumptions:

1. There is an overarching assumption that the continuation of the human species on the planet carries value, as least to humanity.
2. At the next level, a meta-purpose of society is the wellbeing of its members and the survival and continuation of the group.
3. Human collective behaviour as manifest as culture. The dominant cultural worldview is disrupting the ecological foundations that support human society and the existence of other species.
4. Transformation of the current dominant world culture is imperative to ensure human survival and minimise disruption to the ecosystem and other species.
5. This transformation will need to reassert the biophysical realities within which we live and promote a culture which is sensitive to and respects nature and its limits.
6. There is still time to take effective action to minimise disruption to human society.
7. Systems are resilient but adaptable.
8. It is possible to attempt a transformation by designing a change that will influence the system
9. It is possible to influence complex adaptive systems but not to control the effect.
10. While an intent for transformation might be agreed, all other details of all other aspects, even final outcomes, are open to varying degrees of contestation and disagreement, but these are worked out within the larger, collective concordance about intent.
11. Human wellbeing and the natural world would be optimal if human societal behaviour was to accede to a set of values including but not limited to: biosensitivity, better resource use, externalities reflected in costing decisions, recognising biophysical realities/limits, in other words having ecological sustainability

## Processes of transformation – what have we learnt

Firstly, in Chapter 3 we outline one possible model of change process. Each step in this framework as a primary task, which in turn can be broken down further into other tasks (see figure 1). This will be discussed later.

We have collected a set of values and principles and clarified our assumptions.

Next, we have accrued a set of recurrent themes that pertain to undertaking cultural change. A couple of different and non-exclusive ways to assemble these are given below to facilitate discussion.

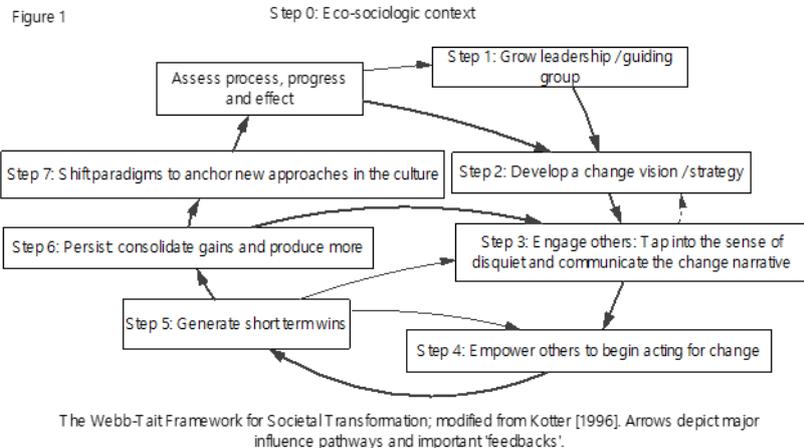
A theory, methodology or practice framework, proposed at the beginning of the Human Ecology Forum theme, provides the first take for reflection.

### Theory

- Culture is communication within society and across the generations of a society
- Culture is about exercising power by establishing the operating system for a society. Therefore, it is political, socially constructed and so subject to being changed.
- Cultural transformation as an evolutionary process reveals (unfolds) an approach to systems change that regards influences into the system as selection pressures.
- Recognising culture is a hyperobject (reference Liz B) provides a method for adjusting frames and identities.
- Change requires thinking “outside the box”, envisioning requires us to consider what is needed not what is possible.
- Change involves transgression and subversion leading to disruption to existing power relationships and hence conflict will occur

### Methodology

- System models provide a method for understanding and analysing a system, and provide a language to negotiate and share that understanding.
- Scenario planning gives a methodology for envisioning, and testing out, a set of possible futures.
- The collective mind is a methodology for working with groups of people to help them achieve a common purpose. The agreement about the purpose is the collective mind.



## Practice

Practice revolves mostly about marketing, which is about communications that draw on and apply research in psychology and neurobiology.

- Stories (narratives) are central to our identity, and for staying in status quo, and equally critical in bring about change. Our stories give us meaning and understanding of the world. New stories that give new meaning, purpose and describe how things might be are needed to replace the current stories and to help forge a new identity. Changing identity is challenging. It requires changing the frames (including the narratives and metaphors) that give us identity, to permit a new identity to emerge. It requires addressing the emotional responses to the change and using the emotions to shift the frames.
- Because words carry multiple meanings, to appeal to the emotions communications need to draw on multiple media: tell stories, dance, sing, play, draw, paint, cartoon and sculpt.
- Applying the seven ways of knowing and the collective mind process for designing intentional influence into a system opens reframings necessary to trigger change.
- Marketing, applying psychological knowledge and theories of change, can be used ethically to guide strategy and tactics to reframe situations and help change individual and group identities to bring about cultural transformation.
- Besides marketing, transgression and subversion leading to disruption to existing power relationships is necessary.
- Technology and infrastructure, the hardware of society, affect the boundaries and abilities for change to occur. Putting effort into changing these adjunct systems can facilitate culture change. Two examples are:
  - More generally novel technologies provide means for changing cultural structures; examples the abolition of slavery by machines (industrialised capitalism); creation of capitalism by technologies to better harness energy: developments in wind, water and lastly fossil fuels technology. So in future synthetic photosynthesis may provide opportunity for another change.
  - Specifically energy systems are fundamental to both political and literal power within society. Changing the energy system can open opportunity for change in political and economic power. This is particularly relevant for the transition from fossil fuel to renewable energy sources. Additionally efficient use of energy and an overall reduction in the amount of energy used will press for change in cultures, as well as being an outcome of the primary culture change.
- Disruption to existing power relationships will provoke resistance to change and the resultant conflict will need to be managed.

## **An alternative typology might be:**

### About culture

- Culture is communication between and across the generations of a society

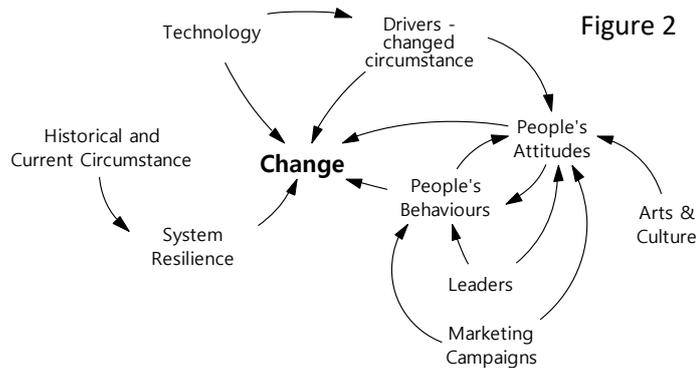
- Culture is about exercising power by establishing the operating system for a society. Therefore it is political, socially constructed and so subject to being changed.
- Recognising culture as a hyperobject directs attention to transformation as a process of changing frames and identities.

### **About change**

- System models provide a method for understanding and analysing a system, and provide a language to negotiate and share that understanding
- Cultural transformation as an evolutionary process reveals (unfolds) an approach to systems change that regards influences into the system as selection pressures.
- Change requires thinking “outside the box”, envisioning requires us to consider what is needed not what is possible.
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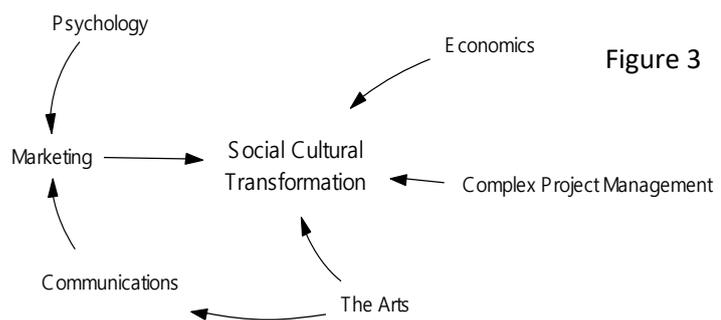
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Another way to considering these elements is diagrammatically. This first diagram (Figure 2) summarises the major elements that were identified as helping to drive specifically cultural transformation.



The second (Figure 3) looks at a slightly different set of influences on change.

Finally returning to the Kotter-Webb-Tait framework (Figure 1), I assemble the ideas elaborated above into the framework it provides. I embed the parallel Kotter stage labels Goals, Framing, Knowledge and Technology, Institutions, Paradigms into the steps of the model since each Kotter stage will have elements of all.



## An aside on communications and marketing

The role of communications is relevant to all of the Steps (Adam Ferrier book, *The Advertising Effect: How to Change Behaviour*, is an invaluable resource). The word marketing as used here, is a communications process that uses a variety of techniques based in the neurocognitive and psychology disciplines to attract, interest and engage people, lead them on the journey to discover what it is that transformation can help them achieve. It talks to people's emotions at the same time as their reason. Marketing does not have to be advertising, nor manipulative (although it often is used this way). As a communication process it is a tool to help achieve our purpose.