

# Applying Design Thinking to Large-Scale Social Change

Andrew Gaines

*This article introduces a new paradigm for thinking about social change. It shows a way that the environmental-progressive movement can align to be vastly more effective at affecting public consciousness. It introduces the Great Transition Initiative as a platform to support innovative communication.*

“Humanity sits at a crossroad between tragedy and transformation, with seemingly little idea of where we wish to go, or how we intend to get there.” This is the introduction to a conference on *Leverage point for sustainability transformation*.

How apt!

I believe that our proper goal is to *transition to a life-affirming global culture*, rather than continuing down our current path of ecological self-destruction. Author Jeremy Lent describes this as *redirecting humanity away from impending catastrophe towards a flourishing future*. For this shift to occur we must inspire thoughtful mainstream commitment to transformative systemic change.

In what follows I will outline a way that the environmental-progressive movement can align to be vastly more effective in affecting mainstream consciousness. I apply a version of ‘design thinking’ that is often used in architecture and business planning.

Although social change is obviously different from architecture, we can go through similar stages from vision to practical execution. I think it is useful to identify five stages.

The stages are:

1. A situation analysis – what is the current situation, and what is needed for success?
2. Clarifying the goal
3. Asset mapping – what resources do we have or need?
4. Planning: strategy and tactics; thinking through everything needed for success
5. Execution

## **DesignShops integrate goals, a situation analysis, and practical planning**

DesignShops are a way of facilitating large corporations to find innovative solutions to challenging problems. Sometimes these situations where the survival of the corporation itself is at stake. Typically they run for three days.

DesignShop facilitators recognise that often people want to *jump immediately to solutions*. In DesignShops this is *actively prevented*.

Instead, the group may spend the first day and a half exploring their situation from many different perspectives. They may review their history, consider trends in their industry and the larger society, look at the future, look at the competition, take account of technological innovations, and muse on how their business operates as a system. Stimulated by this cross-fertilisation of ideas and perspectives, at some point somebody – perhaps a shop floor foreman, perhaps the CEO – will come up with a breakthrough idea that the whole group resonates with. They have ‘discovered’ their goal. The rest of their time is spent working out in detail how to make the new approach work. People leave the DesignShop with action assignments that they are committed to.

Let's go through these stages.

### 1. The situation analysis

In business the situation analysis is part of a business plan. You gauge customer interest, as well as taking into consideration competing products, emerging technologies, and current social trends. In medicine, you try to work out the underlying causes, rather than immediately jumping in to treat symptoms. In architecture you combine a site analysis with a consideration of what the client wants the building to be used for. Put in colloquial terms, you 'suss out' the lie of the land.

I apply similar thinking as a Feldenkrais practitioner. Feldenkrais practitioners help people move better.

I do a situation analysis at the beginning of each session. Suppose somebody comes with pain in the left knee. I do not try to fix the left knee. Rather, I ask, 'What is he doing with his shoulders, back or ankles that puts stress on the left knee but not on the right?' This is a situation analysis (or systems analysis, as I sometimes call it). I then help him discover how to move his whole body in a more integrated way, so that the knee is no longer stressed.

To generalise, the great Feldenkrais question is:

*How is this system organised to produce the symptoms that we do not want?*

We can usefully apply this question to any human system at any scale. We apply it to large-scale social change.

Einstein reportedly said that given a really serious problem he would spend most of his time understanding the problem before he moved to solutions. Regrettably, often activists neglect the situation analysis. They sometimes respond to one part of the problem without taking the whole context into account.

### 2. Clarifying the goal

The situation analysis positions us to generate our goal. In their interesting book [Breakthrough Thinking](#) Habino and Nadler introduce the idea of a 'hierarchy of goals'. Some goals are more comprehensive than others. Others are more specific and local. Skilled thinkers look for the 'sweet spot' – the level of goal most suited to the current problem.

The goal could come first. If the goal is clear from the start, then a situation analysis provides the necessary framework for working out how to achieve the goal.

When the goal is clear, it is valuable to ask *What resources do we have that can help us achieve it?* Which leads us to *asset mapping*.

### 3. Asset mapping

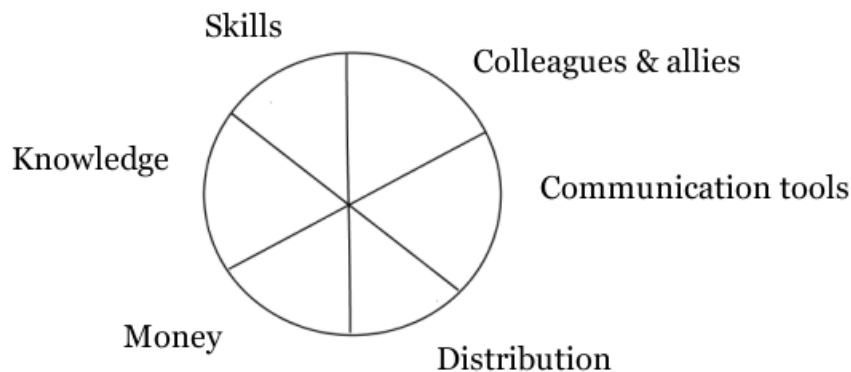
#### **The goal and the situation analysis work together.**

They inform the strategy and tactics.

For example, in modern armies soldiers are no longer expected to follow orders blindly. On the contrary, they are briefed on the tactical situation and why a specific tactical objective, such as destroying a bridge, is important. That way if the officers get killed, or the situation changes in unforeseen ways, they can apply their creative intelligence to continue to accomplish their objective.

An asset map is a list of resources you have – or would like to acquire – in order to achieve the goal. In our example of the architects designing a building, the budget was one of the assets.

In the context of large-scale social change a useful approach is to consider the following six categories of resources:



The idea is to review your assets (loosely defined) as a preliminary step to developing an effective course of action. In terms of social change, what communication tools do we have to help people deepen their thinking and commitment? What means do we have to engage mainstream society? ‘Money’ could include the capacity for many individuals and organisations to reproduce communication materials such as flyers inexpensively, thus obviating the need for a big budget.

Creating an asset map can make us aware of many resources that we might have overlooked.

#### **4. Planning**

It is not sufficient to just have a ‘good idea’. We must think through how to make it work. This is equivalent to the architect making working drawings, or to developing a well thought out business plan.

#### **5. Execution**

Just as it is not sufficient to ‘have a good idea’, nor is it sufficient to just make a ‘call for action’. We have to mobilise the resources to make it work.

I often see heartfelt calls for action unaccompanied by any evidence that the person making the call is putting in the sweat equity to make it work. A rocket without fuel won’t go anywhere.

# Applying these design steps to large scale social change

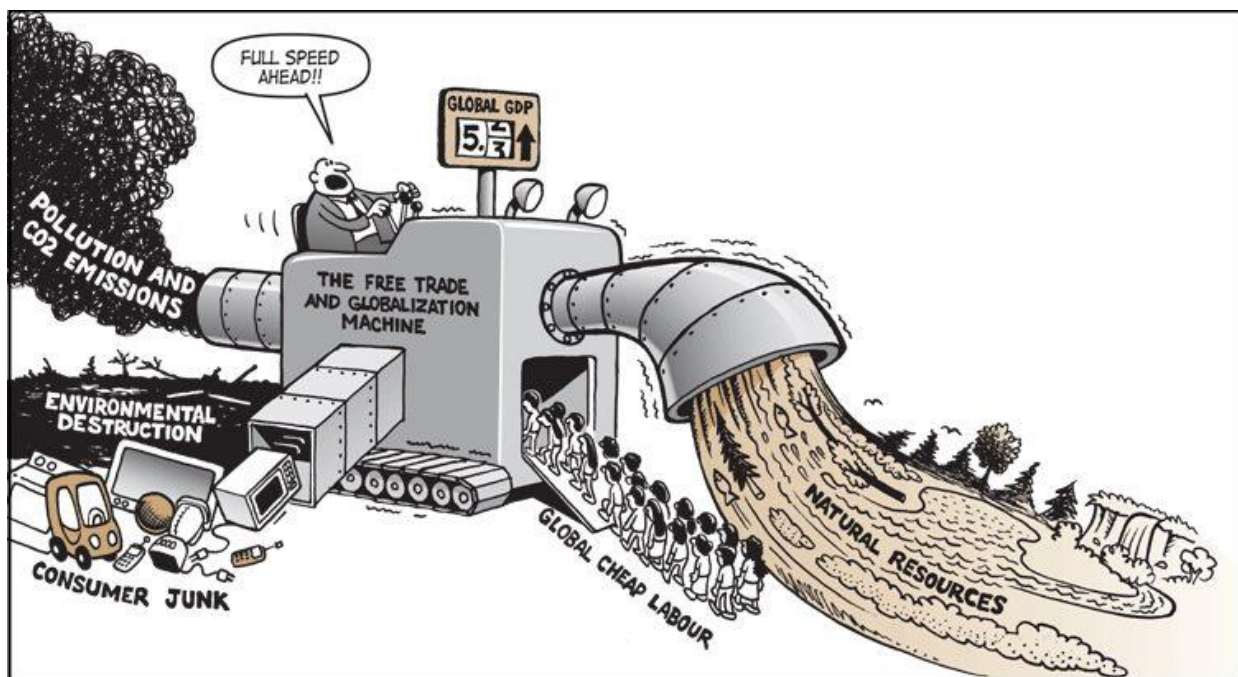
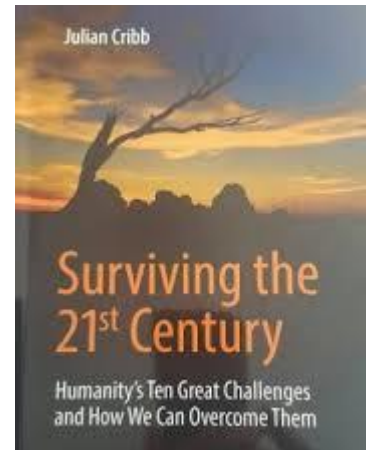
## 1. Our current situation

Here we will review a number of pertinent aspects of our current situation.

□ All of our environmental and social change work occurs in the context of a global civilisation that is ecologically self-destructing. Science writer Julian Cribb's *Surviving the 21st Century* is a well-researched presentation of the 'doomsday case'. There are others. On current trends we are in an *existential emergency* – meaning that the viability of civilization, and perhaps even the human species, is in jeopardy.

□ It is not just about climate. The grim litany of issues includes ocean acidification, species loss, soil depletion, and fresh water depletion. And at another level we have the potential use of weapons of mass destruction, including nuclear weapons.

We are dealing with a systems problem. Much of our society operates in ways that make our existential threats worse. This cartoon kind of sums it up:



□ The power elites are, literally, deranged. They make decisions that accelerate planetary destruction. As was so clearly portrayed in the movie *Avatar*, large financial and commercial interests willingly destroy communities and the environment for the sake of massive profit. And they subvert democracy by buying politicians, spreading disinformation, and pushing global trade agreements.

□ There is concern about climate change and other issues in the general populace, but little understanding of what to do about it.

There is also massive ignorance. By and large people do not really know what's coming down the pike and how devastating it will be. And relatively few people connect the dots and see how the operation of society as a whole makes things worse.

□ The good news is that there is also a huge movement for positive change underway. Some call it the Great Transition, or the Great Turning. It comprises millions of groups working on various aspects of environmental, community and spiritual well-being.

## 2. Clarifying a common goal

Overall the environmental/progressive movement is fragmented. Attempts to bring leaders together to agree on projects have been contentious. Each group thinks their own approach is important – and they are right!

Anthropologist Ruth Benedict pointed out that every culture has an overarching aspiration that tends to organise its behaviour. In our globalised civilisation, that goal is *economic growth*. We need a publicly accepted alternative to orient our collective action.

Such an alternative goal must be encompassing enough to include the wide variety of positive initiatives going on, and it must be appropriate to the scale of humanity's existential emergency.

I suggest that we can make common cause at the meta-level of intending to *transition to a life-affirming global culture, rather than continuing on our present course of ecological self-destruction*. Other terms could do here, such as *transitioning to a flourishing future*.

To achieve it we must *inspire thoughtful mainstream commitment* to doing everything required. Without such commitment the continuation of business as usual will take us over the ecological edge. With it, our individual projects will gain much more traction.

So I suggest that the environmental/progressive movement adopt as our goal:

**Inspiring mainstream commitment to transitioning to a life-affirming global culture, rather than continuing on our present course of ecological self-destruction.**

Businesses and activists in the environmental-progressive movement can embrace this goal while still pursuing their individual missions. There is no contradiction between the two levels; they work synergistically.

The idea of gaining mainstream commitment – and actually transitioning to a life-affirming global culture – can seem impossible.

However, adopting the 'innovator's attitude' can be helpful. Great innovators undertake to do the apparently impossible. Rather than being deterred by obstacles, they ask: *If I were to pull this off, how would I go about it?*

Let's adopt the innovator's attitude and see how far we can go with it.

## 3. Asset mapping

Let's review the assets we have the categories of *colleagues and allies; communication tools; distribution; money; knowledge and skills*. Collectively, environmental progressive movement has many more assets than we may have realised.

## A. Colleagues and allies

There are millions of groups that care about environmental and social well-being. Millions. As Paul Hawken pointed out, we comprise a vast unseen movement for positive change. The movement is fragmented. Mostly each group does their own thing.

However, as mentioned we can make common cause in the meta-goal of *transitioning to a life-affirming global culture*.

Communicating to *engage the unengaged* is essential for our common success. But how can we reach people who do not seek out information about environmental trends and their consequences?

Well, the combined personal networks of the *members* of these groups is huge. They are a hidden asset. Our networks reach into every level of society. If we can inspire many members of these groups to communicate with their friends and business colleagues about transitioning to a life affirming culture – and also communicate with the general public – then we have a means of *bypassing mainstream media* and powerfully affecting public consciousness.

The Great Transition Initiative has been set up as a platform to support volunteers citizen educators in communicating about transitioning to a life affirming culture. Our strategy is to engage as many organisations as possible. They will encourage their members to act as citizen educators and thought catalysts. We provide communication tools ranging from simple emails to highly engaged Kitchen Table Conversations.

## B. Communication tools

It is often noted that people are time poor, and many people have relatively short attention spans. Nevertheless, we must do more than provide slogans and sound bites. We have to help people think more comprehensively than many are used to.

The [Resources](#) section of the Great Transition Initiative has a robust set of communication tools. They include draft emails, workshop designs, guerrilla marketing tactics and Kitchen Table Conversations (see side bar).

The purpose of these tools is to orient people to the aspiration of transitioning to a life affirming culture, and enable them to grasp the systemic changes necessary to succeed.

### **Kitchen Table Conversations**

[Kitchen Table Conversations](#) are purpose-built for conducting face-to-face conversations about the big picture drivers of climate change, ocean acidification, soil depletion, and the like, as well as considering major issues such as corporate control of governments.

Kitchen Table Conversations help people connect the dots with things they already know (plus a few new ideas). Participants develop an integrated mental framework for making sense of social change that they can act on.

There are other communication tools that are helpful. They include

- *The Story of Stuff* series

Annie Leonard's engaging animated video series enables people to see the links between economic growth, the banking system, consumerism and environmental destruction. It covers the ground of whole system change to a life-sustaining society.

People can easily show the [Story of Stuff](#) to friends in their lounge rooms.

- The *Awakening the Dreamer* Symposium

Symposiums bring people to a heartfelt sense that this Earth is our Home, and we should take care of her. Symposiums are best done live with a facilitator, but a group of friends can also go through the [DVD](#).

These tools orient people to looking at the big picture. There are other books and videos that do an excellent job with this as well. In addition, there are masses of videos on the Internet that dig into the detail.

### **C. Distribution**

Relatively few people seek out the brilliant books and videos that are available about social change. And typically it is just a small number of the 'converted' who come to lectures on climate change, trade agreements and the like.

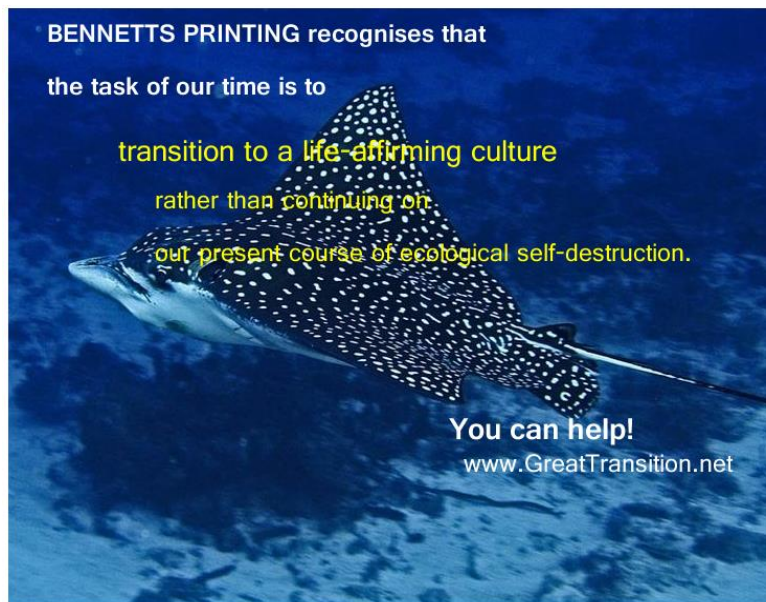
So how might we go past 'preaching to the converted'? How might we seed transformative ideas into mainstream culture?

The first thing to note is that 'the mainstream' is not some distant amorphous mass; we are all embedded in the mainstream. *The mainstream comprises our friends, neighbours and business associates.* The mainstream includes our customers, clients and suppliers. The mainstream is our Facebook networks, LinkedIn contacts and more. As mentioned, the combined scope of the millions of groups that care about environmental and social well-being is huge; we reach into every level of society.

Provided we can take the Great Transition initiative to scale, we can bypass the media and affect the mainstream. We can do this by each of us individually communicating to people in our networks and to the wider public about transitioning to a life-affirming global culture.

We can use emails and social media. We can organise events and conduct personal conversations. We can also use guerrilla marketing tactics – inexpensive ways of attracting attention.

Here is an example of a plaque that can be put in a business or professional office.



An especially important potential resource is *the people who come to lectures, panel discussions and conferences* on environmental and social issues. These people are generally well-informed (we might think of them as ‘the converted’) and they are motivated enough to come to the events.

At the end of the lecture they go away somewhat better informed, and reinforced in their view that we should ‘do something’. But usually it ends there.

I suggest that at the end of each presentation the audience should be invited to become citizen-educators, and to go to the Great Transition Initiative [website](http://www.GreatTransition.net) for communication tools to use with their networks. If we appeal to people to become proactive leaders within their sphere of influence, some will respond.

#### **D. Money**

People imagine that a massive social change marketing campaign would require a huge budget. And it would, if it were done through the usual means of paid advertising.

But emails and social media cost virtually nothing. Kitchen Table Conversations can be conducted in a café for the price of a cup of coffee. Businesses and professional practices can print flyers inexpensively. Even promotional videos don’t cost that much these days. The financial resources we need are already available; they are distributed within the individuals and groups that care about a life affirming culture.

#### **E. Knowledge**

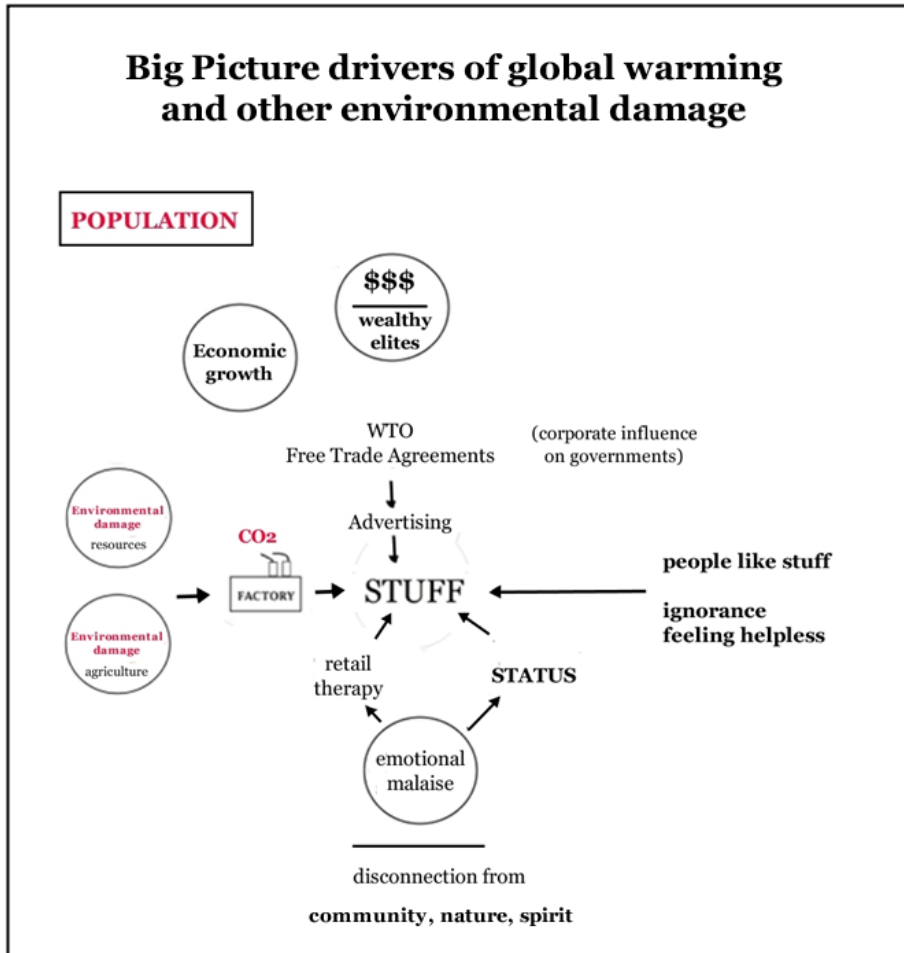
We have a high-level aspiration: *transitioning to a life-affirming global culture*. This needs to be grounded by *understanding the major drivers of environmental damage and social deterioration*, and understanding the *core operating values of a sustainable society*.

This *Big Picture drivers of global warming* diagram below was developed to enable people to quickly grasp how our system as a whole operates to make global warming and other environmental issues worse. It highlights the main elements that must change if we are to



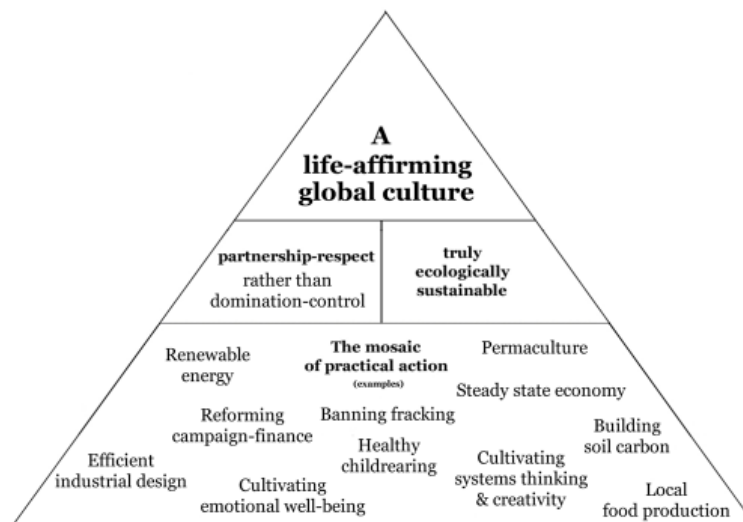
transition to a flourishing future. People get to see this as a whole, rather than just focusing on isolated issues.

The *Big Picture drivers of global warming* diagram is one of the Kitchen Table Conversations modules.



There are two fundamental core operating principles of a life-affirming culture. One is taking care of people and the planet. The other is operating within the planet's capacity to support us. Systems thinker Riane Eisler calls 'taking care of people and the planet' *partnership-respect relating*, in contrast to *domination-control relating*.

The aspiration of a life affirming culture, applied through the operating principles of a life affirming culture, manifests as a multitude of practical on the ground projects. People tend to see the aspiration and the individual projects in isolation. This diagram shows how they fit together:



We have been developing a big picture overview of the systemic changes required to transition to a flourishing future. It is helpful to fill in this schematic overview with more detailed understanding. Useful resources include:

- Naomi Klein [\*This Changes Everything\*](#)
- David Korten [\*The Great Turning: From Empire to Earth Community\*](#)
- Liz Elliott [\*a New Way Now\*](#)
- Geoff Mosley [\*Steady State - Alternative to Endless Economic Growth\*](#)
- Annie Leonard [\*The Story of Stuff\*](#)

A special methodology underpins the Great Transition Initiative communication approach. It is based on insights into the neurology of improving human performance. We are not just communicating information about something ‘out of there’. Our aim is to affect people’s *frameworks of understanding*, or *paradigms*, as Dana Meadows puts it.

## F. Skills

The Great Transition Initiative materials have been designed to make communicating as easy as possible. Beyond reasonable intelligence and common sense, no great skill is required.

Sending emails is simple (sample emails are on the Great Transition Initiative website).

Using the *Kitchen Table Conversations Manual* to conduct personal conversations about systemic change does not require a high level of expertise. If you’ve ever coached a child with homework you have the necessary communication skills.

We use physical models to help people keep track of the conversation about systemic change. We made our model of the Big Picture drivers of environmental destruction as simple as possible while still covering the ground. We didn’t want to overwhelm people with too much detail; the detail can come later.

The process conducting Kitchen Table Conversations can feel awkward at first. The first time you go through it carefully, step by step. But with experience you become more confident, fluid and creative.

Some people feel intimidated by the prospect of communicating directly with people they know about climate change and the systemic changes necessary to transition to a life-sustaining society. Possible concerns include:

- I don't know enough.
- I don't want to proselytise.
- I will be breaching social conventions.
- My friends won't be interested.
- I will lose business because I will be considered radical or Green.

Such fears may or may not have some basis in reality. But we know that unless we communicate to shift public attitudes, our current ways of doing things will take us all to our doom. For the sake of our common well-being, including the well-being of coming generations, we should go past our fears.

In this section we have talked about communication skills at the level of shifting people's overall framework of understanding of our ecological crisis and what we need to do. However, to a degree the crisis – and our collective failure to deal with the crisis – is a result of a deeper psychological dynamic.

Futurist Riane Eisler talks about the difference between *domination-control relating*, where people seek power over others, and *partnership-respect relating* where people work for community and global well-being.

Humanity has a long history of domination-control relating – think of patriarchy, the empires of the past, and today's nuclear weapons – and the dominator way of thinking is common. However, humanity's journey has reached the point where the continuation of domination control as our primary mode of organising human affairs will destroy us. We must shift to partnership I think respect relating, or will do ourselves in through either ecological collapse or nuclear war.

So, cultivating psychological/spiritual development is one of the profound aspects of evolving a life affirming culture.

Fortunately, many people are spontaneously healthy enough to act on partnership-respect values. In addition there are ways to train to become more skilful at partnership-respect relating. And there are ways to embed partnership-respect relating in organisations.

Note: This completes the *Asset mapping* phase of our design sequence. The next step is *Planning*.

## 4 Planning

If we accept the goal of transitioning to a life affirming culture, and recognise that communicating to gain mainstream commitment is necessary for success, how do we reach the mainstream?

I suggest an astonishingly simple answer:

- Inspire as many as possible of the millions of individuals and groups that care about social and environmental well-being to communicate about transitioning to a life affirming global culture through their networks.
- Provide ready-to-use tools to make communicating as easy as possible.

The Great Transition Initiative is a platform to support a ‘movement of movements’ communicating about transitioning to a life-affirming culture.

The Great Transition Initiative is not an organisation usual sense. There is no central group that directs what other people do. Each individual and group that participates the Great Transition Initiative acts as an autonomous agent. We are aligned in our commitment to transitioning to a life affirming global culture, and we recognise that communicating to inspire mainstream commitment is essential for success.

By *not* forming a peak body or trying to coordinate representatives from groups we bypass a great deal of unnecessary contention. A super-organisation is not needed; alignment is sufficient.

This model requires *a high level of self responsibility* – and two acts of faith. The acts of faith are:

1. I will not be acting alone. Other people will be acting as communicators as well, even though I may not necessarily know them.
2. If collectively we decide to, we can avoid the worst of our looming ecological disasters.

A high degree of caring is required for us to go beyond our comfort zone. I would like to think that everybody involved in the environmental-progressive movement has this caring. Why else would we be doing what we are doing?

## **5 Execution: The Great Transition Initiative**

The support platform the Great Transition Initiative is well-developed. We have a robust set of communication tools. They include draft emails, workshop designs, guerrilla marketing tactics and Kitchen Table Conversations.

The next phase to engage organisations and thought leaders in the Great Transition Initiative. This process is underway.

Thought leaders will write about transitioning to a life affirming culture, and encourage people to become citizen educators. Organisations will publicise transitioning to a life affirming culture, and encourage their staff members to become citizen educators.

We have a team working on engaging thought leaders and organisations. Some of us are conducting personal conversations. We would be pleased if you would consider lending your influence as well.



We have mentioned that there are millions of organisations working on different aspects of environmental and social well-being. What they do has some effect on public consciousness. This is good. But because their messages are so diverse, they have far less cumulative effectiveness than they might. They lack 'stickiness'.

## Stickiness

An event has 'stickiness' to the extent that it contributes to building momentum for large-scale transformative social change.

The reach of any one organisation is inherently limited. To illustrate this I sometimes invite people to observe carefully what happens when I drop a drop of ink on a paper towel. The ink spreads and then stops.



Organisational growth is like this. From an initial idea and a few interested people an organisation may grow slowly or rapidly, but ultimately its reach is limited. This applies to environmental and social justice organisations. Any one organisation reaches only a small portion of the population.

Those of us who have lived in snow country will recall rolling balls of snow to make snowmen. The wet snow sticks, and the ball becomes larger.



Such snowmen can last for weeks after the weather gets warmer, whereas a single snowball will melt right away. The isolated snowball has no *stickiness*.



*Stickiness* is about building up cumulative impact. It is analogous to adding energy to a flywheel. Many small inputs can add up to massive momentum.

I have been to brilliant talks about climate change, species loss and social justice. As mentioned above, I observe that most people who come to such talks are already *au fait* with the topic. The presenters are 'preaching to the converted'. The audience may be temporarily inspired or

edified, but in terms of catalysing transformative cultural change there is little cumulative effect. Giving a talk to thirty or a thousand people in a city of say four million people is generally of little consequence, unless there is some way to link it to a larger movement. It is just a ripple, when we need a tidal wave.

In contrast, the elite power structures are adept at creating stickiness for neoliberal ideas. When they run a communication blitz, many different voices use the same language to make the same points. The public hears the message from many different sources, and this affects public attitudes.

Perhaps the stickiest of all neoliberal messages is the mantra '*jobs and growth*'. Large businesses and the media continually assert the importance of economic growth. This meme is so sticky that almost everybody takes it for granted, and many people are surprised or frightened when growth is questioned. The importance of growth is reinforced by daily reports on the stock market. If the stock market goes up it is presented as good news. Compared with how effective the power elites are at this scale, we are amateurs!

What might stickiness look like in terms of catalysing a cultural shift to a life-affirming global culture?

- We would see not just a few organisations, but hundreds of thousands of organisations and their members *championing transitioning to a life-affirming global culture*.
- At the end of presentations, panel discussions, and workshops about environmental and social well-being we would see the presenters encouraging members of the audience to become active citizen-educators,
- Writers who post blogs analysing environmental and social issues would encourage their readers to communicate with their networks about transformative change. They would refer people to *GreatTransition.net* for ready-to-use communication tools.

Perhaps only a few people would respond actively to such calls at first. But everybody in the audience would be introduced to the meme *the task of our time is to transition to a life affirming global culture, rather than continuing on our present course of ecological self-destruction*.

And they would hear the call to lift their game and become active communicators. In time many more will respond.

Marketers sometimes comment that people need to hear a new idea seven times before it begins to register with them. Business leaders are advised to constantly reiterate the company's purpose to their staff. At the point where the business leader is tired of saying it, the staff are beginning to hear it. Constant repetition builds stickiness.

Importantly, repetition by a multitude of voices builds stickiness. Hence the idea of many organizations and their members all championing *transitioning to a life-affirming culture* through their networks and to the general public.

But there is more. *Thinking* builds stickiness. Ideas stick when people have thought them through and they make sense. So, we help people *think better*, rather than just playing on emotions. And we urge people to take personal responsibility for transitioning to a life-affirming global culture at emergency speed.



## How organisations rate in terms of stickiness

As far I can tell our Great Transition Initiative model is unique in its aspiration, reach and simplicity. People sometimes say, “But there are lots of organisations doing this.” I would be pleased to find just one. Had I found one years ago, I would have joined it. I looked.

However, there are organisations working on important pieces of the puzzle. In what follows I will review some of them, highlighting their good work, but also commenting on why I think their model is incomplete.

This is not meant to denigrate them. The plain fact is that if major leaders in the environmental-progressive movement are not guiding us along a path that is adequate to dealing with our existential challenge, we will fail. And at the moment we are failing big time; key environmental and social indicators are rapidly getting worse. Therefore we need to bring rigorous critical thinking to social change.

I am aware that people do not like to be criticised. And I am aware that most of us are unaccustomed to critically but respectfully analysing what leaders say and do. However, we are in an ecological emergency. We need clear thinking. It is more important to be rigorous than to be popular.

### 1 Tellus Institute

Tellus Institute is an academic think tank with a global reach. They research and report on various aspects of environmental sustainability and social justice, and offer insightful analysis of current social trends.

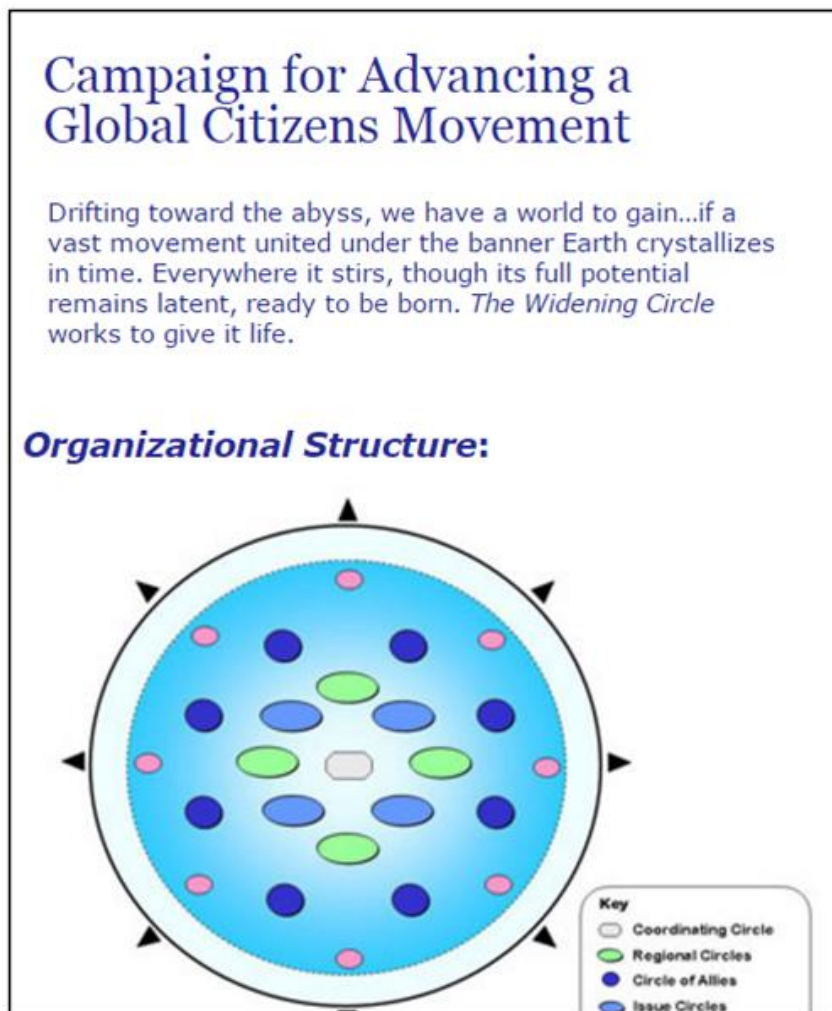
Paul Raskin and his colleagues wrote an important paper called *Great Transition: The Promise and Lure of the Times Ahead*. It puts forward four plausible scenarios for the future. Two of them involve transformative change to a benign future. And two are dystopian, leading to ecological collapse and a totalitarian state.

Tellus Institute is clearly committed to transitioning to a life-affirming global culture, and they articulate the core values brilliantly.

Tellus Institute has a [Great Transition Initiative](#). Their Great Transition Initiative is an academic think tank. Ours is a citizen-led educational movement for inspiring intelligent mainstream commitment to transitioning to a life-sustaining society. Philosophically we are in complete alignment.

Some years ago Paul Raskin tried to start a [Widening Circle](#) program with a view to engaging organizations as a network of communicators to engage the general public. It did not catch on. I suspect that to some extent this was because their organizing model was time-consuming and cumbersome. Let's have a look.

This diagram presents the Widening Circle vision:



This introduction is beautiful and to the point. However, if you look carefully at the key you will see that the organising model involves establishing a Coordinating Circle, Regional Circles, Circles of Allies, and Issue Circles. This is an old-fashioned hierarchical structure, cumbersome and time-consuming to execute.

The Widening Circle didn't get up. Even if it had gotten up, it appears to have had no clear mechanism for reaching ordinary people. This, even though it flew the flag of 'advancing a global citizens movement'. Hmm.

## **2 The Pachamama Alliance**

The Pachamama Alliance has a heartfelt story behind it. The Achuar tribe lives in the Amazon along the borders of Ecuador and Peru. They realised that the forests they live in are under threat from oil companies, and they invited a group of North Americans to visit them. Members of this group returned to the United States with a mission to 'change the dream of the developed world'.

They formed the Pachamama Alliance, and created the *Awakening The Dreamer* Symposium. The Symposium brings people to a strongly felt sense that this Earth is our home, and we should take care of her. Thousands of people have gone through the Symposium.



And what have we to show for it? Granted, many people have made personal changes in lifestyles. In Australia at least one group regularly shows videos about things such as Permaculture and local self-reliance. One activist in Perth organises many climate change events. There may be other spin off groups that I am not aware of, but they are not very prominent. In terms of transformative cultural change, I think the Symposiums have had relatively little influence.

At the end of Symposiums many people are moved and enthusiastic. The natural question is: *what should we do next?* Until recently Symposium graduates were left to work this out for themselves. There were no suggestions as to how participants might contribute to the deep systemic changes necessary to stop massive environmental destruction. There was no invitation to exert personal leadership to contribute to large-scale transformative change. There was no stickiness.

The Pachamama Alliance leadership now recognises the need to catalyse systemic change. They have added an online [Game Changer Intensive](#) that educates people about systemic issues. They encourage people to engage with [Move to Amend](#) and the [Community Environmental Legal Défense Fund](#) – key players in the growing movement to get corporations and money out of politics in the US. And they work with [Citizens Climate Lobby](#) to support of the movement in the U.S. to establish a price on carbon emissions.

Success on these fronts would indeed be game changing. These initiatives are worth supporting. However, they are only parts of the puzzle, *albeit* critically important parts.

Supporting such initiatives is not the same as encouraging Pachamama Alliance members to act as citizen educators. It seems to me that the Pachamama Alliance *positions the Pachamama Alliance leadership as the font of knowledge*, and do not encourage their members to act as autonomous change agents using knowledge they already have or can easily acquire. For example, they say:

### ***Pachamama Alliance Resources***

*We offer resources for every step of your journey to help you stay connected to our work. Stay up-to-date with news, connect on our blog, find events in your area, and explore even further with our webcasts, videos, and e-guides.*

I would like to see the Pachamama Alliance go further, and encourage their members to act as autonomous citizen-educators using tools on the Great Transition Initiative [website](#) and others.

I would also like to see the Pachamama Alliance using their influence to invite other organizations to participate in the Great Transition Initiative.

### **3 Australia Conservation Foundation (ACF)**

The ACF has long been committed to environmental protection. They produce cutting-edge research and policy proposals, and organise protest campaigns. Their newsletter informs their large membership about current issues. There are initiating a new program to catalyse One Million Conversations. Good idea! But they do not yet encourage their membership to champion whole system change. Instead, they focus on protecting the ‘places you love’.

#### **4 Avaaz, GetUp!, SumOfUs and MoveOn**

These are large online protest organisations. Sometimes they are successful in exerting effective pressure on specific issues. These successes are to be applauded; it is indeed imperative to block as many disastrous decisions as we can.

However, even as we win a few battles, we are losing the war. Nationally and globally the dynamics that drive global warming and other massive issues remain unchanged. Major environmental statistics are worsening, international tensions with the threat of nuclear war are increasing, and in countries such as the United States and Australia the populace elects leaders who do not have their best interest at heart. ‘The populace’ does not have an integrated understanding what’s going on.

Again, their members could be encouraged to act as citizen educators championing transitioning to a life-affirming culture.

#### **5 Bill McKibben**

Bill McKibben devised a way to continually advertise the goal of reducing CO<sub>2</sub> levels to 350 parts per million. 350.org does this through symbolic events that highlight the number 350. They also mount protests at places such as coal terminals – all with a view to getting media attention.

350.org has also kicked off a fossil fuel divestment program which has grown massively. Although divestment does not challenge the financial viability of the large oil companies, in Australia the divestment campaign may be instrumental in blocking the proposed Adani coal mine. This would be a major win.

Bill has also been instrumental in organising protests against the Keystone Pipeline.

Bill and his team published *Fight Global Warming Now: The handbook for taking action in your community*. It offers

‘Practical advice and helpful tips for environmental and other community activists, whether they have been in the movement for years or are organizing their first rally or campaign’.

Which is to say, they are thinking in terms of *rallies and campaigns* – not in terms of citizen education. This is not to blame them. I am critiquing their approach in terms of how relevant it is to successfully transitioning to a life affirming culture.

The book describes how to:

- jump-start volunteers with quick, ad hoc actions
- generate persuasive and meaningful political pressure
- plan creative events that draw media attention
- launch grassroots campaigns online
- rally diverse groups that all have a stake in the crisis—whether they know it yet or not.

As you can see, Bill thinks in terms of *publicity*, not education for systemic change. We need more than publicity; we need to help ordinary people think better.

This critique applies to the call Bill and others are now making for a ‘World War II-type emergency mobilisation’ to solve global warming. It’s a great call; we do need it. But the questions remain: *how do we reach a mainstream audience? And is it sufficient to just focus on climate change when there are a multiplicity of interlocking issues, all of which threaten the viability of our global civilisation and the human enterprise?* Even if the general public does come to accept that climate change is real (perhaps we are close to that point), will that be sufficient if people have no framework for working on the systemic changes necessary to succeed?

## Individuals and stickiness

*The challenge of our time is to change the direction of our culture as a whole. The age of isolated leaders is over. What we need is a way for the millions of individuals and groups that care about a flourishing future to align to affect mainstream consciousness.*

Researchers research. Academics write. Understandably each of us is interested to do what we are good at within our field of specialty. Yet no matter how brilliant, our books may be washed away in the great unravelling that is coming.

There are people in positions of influence who would rather continue doing what they have done in the past, rather than apply some of their time and effort to catalysing large-scale transformative change. Their efforts, while interesting, may not be that relevant to the need of our time.

There are many ordinary people who care about the environment, and who do their bit by reducing car trips, recycling and the like. In contrast to this, advertising, government policy, and the economic imperatives of our debt-based economic system all drive increased overall consumption.

It is true that we should all choose to live materially modest lifestyles. In addition, individuals should become citizen educators.

Understandably, people can be reluctant to do this. They can be concerned about being seen to be ‘selling an idea’; breaking social conventions; or taking themselves and their friends out of their comfort zones. People may feel that they don’t know enough, or that their friends will think them weird. So their personal actions, while appropriate, have little stickiness in the larger scheme of things.

And some people, I think, just like to be the spotlight. They like to be seen as the font of knowledge. They may have deep insight into environmental issues, but they do not want to integrate what they do into a larger movement.

I suggest that each of us should devote some time to lifting the level of thinking of people around us – people we know. This is not necessarily easy. It can seem to be easier to write a book than to try to talk directly with people who think differently than we do.

In any case – the hour is late. Either we align to shift public understanding and intention, or we will all go through the ecological unravelling together.

## A checklist re stickiness

An organisation, event or individual activity has *stickiness* to the extent that it contributes to building momentum for large-scale transformative social change.

This is a checklist of factors that I believe are essential if the environmental-progressive movement is to *win* – where *winning* means reversing disastrous environmental and social trends to the extent possible, and transitioning to a flourishing future.

	Proactive attitude: not just protest or analysis, but intending to win	Has a well thought through model of what it will take to win	Includes the meme <i>transitioning to a life-affirming global culture</i> , or similar ideas	Articulates whole system change	Encourages people to communicate with their networks about systemic change	Provides ready-to-use communication tools re systemic change	Appeals to people's intelligence and caring
Tellus Institute			✓	✓			✓
Pachamama Alliance	✓		✓	✓			✓
David Korten	✓		✓	✓			✓
Australia Conservation Foundation							✓
Avaaz, GetUp!, SumOfUs and MoveOn							✓
Your own projects?	?	?	?	?	?	?	?
The Great Transition Initiative.net	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

You will notice that the Australian Conservation Foundation and the online protest groups barely get a tick in terms of stickiness. This is not to denigrate their work. Their work is important. But they primarily aim at policy and protest. Their work would contribute more powerfully to building momentum for transformative social change if they also began to use the meme *transitioning to a life-affirming global culture*, and invited their members to act as citizen educators. I look forward to the time when they do this.

If you are an individual 'doing your bit', I would encourage you to review your work against this checklist. If you are honest with yourself, you may find that you tick few or none of the boxes as well. No blame! What you have done up to now has prepared you for something

more. Probably you could tweak what you are doing so that your work contributes to building momentum for transformative social change.

*The task of our time is to transition to a life-affirming global culture at emergency speed. If we succeed in turning things around, future generations will thank us – profoundly!*