Applying design thinking to large-scale social change

Andrew Gaines

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I submit that our proper goal in our time of ecological emergency is to *transition to a life-affirming global culture*. For this to occur we must inspire mainstream commitment to transformative systemic change.

In what follows I will outline a mode of thinking that can be very useful for this. It is a version of 'design thinking'. Some of the ideas here are novel. To help you grasp them I will include examples from a number of different fields. Therefore it may seem that I jump around a bit, but there is a purpose to it all.

Design thinking has been a buzzword in the worlds of product and service design for some time. Designers look carefully at interface between user experience and product design. But the tradition is much older. Design thinking has been part of architecture for millennia.

The stages of designing and building a house are common to many kinds of practical design projects. As we will see, they can be applied to catalysing large-scale social change. I believe that doing so will greatly increase the effectiveness of the environmental/progressive movement.

When an architect is commissioned to design a house, he or she starts with a situation analysis. That is, they enquire into what style of building the owners want, and what its purpose is. They take into account the nature of the site, relevant building codes, and of course the budget.

This leads to the goal. The architects drafts rough sketches which are reviewed with the owner. One is selected.

The rough sketch represents an *aspiration*. Next comes the detailed planning and execution. The architects develops detailed working drawings. Builders are engaged, contractors hired, and a wide variety of tasks from laying the foundation to completing the final landscaping are carried out.

Although social change is obviously different than architecture, our thinking can go through similar stages. I think it is useful to identify five stages. One or more of these stages are often neglected by social change agents.

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

Let's go through them.

1. The situation analysis

Skilled thinking often starts with what might be called a 'situation analysis'. In business this 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 am a Feldenkrais practitioner, which is to say that I 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 an integrated way, so that the knee is no longer stressed.

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. Later we will see how to apply it to global warming.

Not everybody does a situation analysis. It is easier to simply jump to the first idea that that comes to mind.

2. Clarifying the goal

The situation analysis positions us to generate our goal. Einstein reportedly said that given a really serious problem he would spend most of his time understanding the problem before he moved to solutions.

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 and the situation analysis work together, and 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.

Of course the generals will have a larger perspective and more encompassing goals. Even here, there can be great differences in perception. One general might think that the goal is to *destroy the enemy forces*. Another, following Sun Tzu's classic *The Art of War,* might hold the view that the goal is to *defeat the mind of the enemy general.*

There is a brilliant technique of creative group problem solving called Synectics. Synectics has an interesting way of defining the goal.

One person presents a problem to the group. Typically it is a really tough problem with no obvious solution.

The Facilitator asks each group member to produce a *definition of the problem as they see it*. This generates a variety of definitions of the problem. Some may show exceptional insight into the problem. The facilitator picks one of the definitions, and guides the group to use the Synectics procedures to generate an innovative approach to solving the problem as defined.

Clarifying the goal and the *situation analysis* clearly work together. If the goal is clear from the start, then a situation analysis provides a necessary framework for working out how to achieve the goal.

As suggested, the goal can emerge out of the situation analysis. This occurs in DesignShops. DesignShops are a way of facilitating large corporations to find innovative solutions to challenging problems.

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

Instead, the group may spend a 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.

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

3. Asset mapping

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 one useful approach is to consider the following six categories of resources:
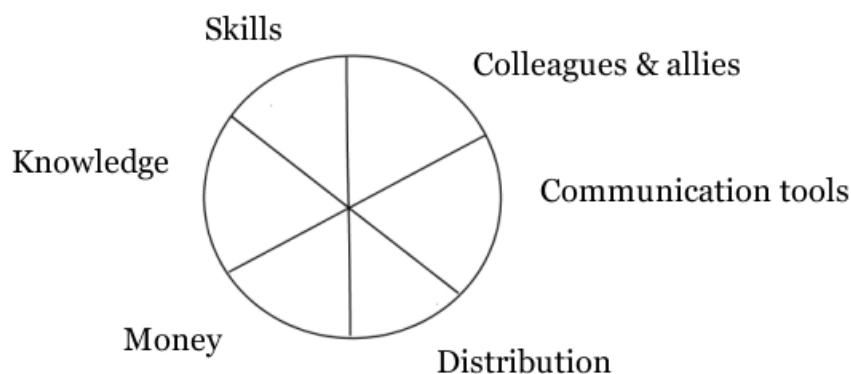
The idea is to review your assets (loosely defined) as a preliminary step to developing an effective course of action. What communication tools do we have to help people deepen their thinking and commitment? What means do we have to engage mainstream society? 'Money' could include the capacity for many 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 & 5. Planning and execution

It is not sufficient to just have a 'good idea'. We must think through how to make it work – and then follow through to actually make it work! This is the equivalent of the architect making working drawings, and the builder hiring contractors and actually building the building.

Applying these design steps to large scale social change

1. Our current situation

Here we will note 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 clear well researched presentation of the 'doomsday case'.) On current trends (including the dire possibility of feedback loops that will trigger uncontrollable runaway global warming) we are in an existential emergency – meaning that the viability of civilization, and perhaps even the human species, is under threat.

□ 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: weapons of mass destruction, including the ongoing threat of nuclear war.

□ 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 such as the Trans-Pacific Partnership.

□ There is concern about climate change and other issues in the general populace, but with 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 what is going on works as an integrated system.

□ At the same time, there is also a huge movement for positive change underway. Some call it the Great Transition (or the Great Turning) to a life-affirming global culture. It comprises millions of groups working on various aspects of environmental and community well-being. As of 2005 'cultural creatives' comprised about 35% of the American population. Figures may be similar in Australia, and the proportion of culture creatives in the population has been growing.

□ As mentioned, for any dysfunctional human system, including our global civilisation, it is useful to ask:

> *How does this system operate to make the symptoms that we do not want worse?*

In terms of global warming, this question becomes:

> *What factors in the way our society operates make global warming worse?*

This takes us into what I call the 'Big Picture analysis of the drivers of global warming'.

A useful starting point is the 'Ecological Equation'.

The 'stuff "we produce and consume is closely coupled with environmental damage involved in acquiring raw materials and manufacturing the products. The following diagram works as an equation: the more STUFF we produce, the more we increase CO2 and other environmental damage.


The Ecological Equation
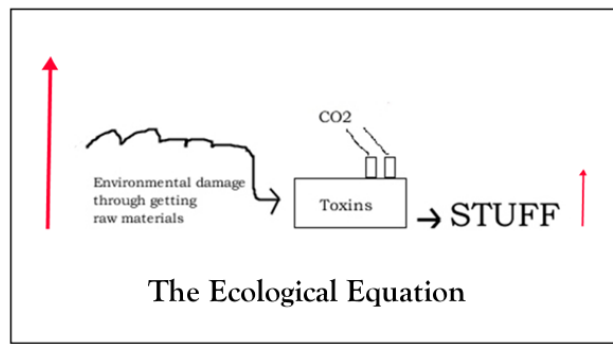
By looking at the factors that increase the amount of 'stuff' we produce we can easily identify the factors that make environmental damage and emissions go up. (To keep it simple, in the following diagram we focus on CO2, although industrial agriculture, deforestation and loss of estuaries also contribute to global warming.) Increases in the amount of 'stuff' are a proxy for increases in CO2 emissions.
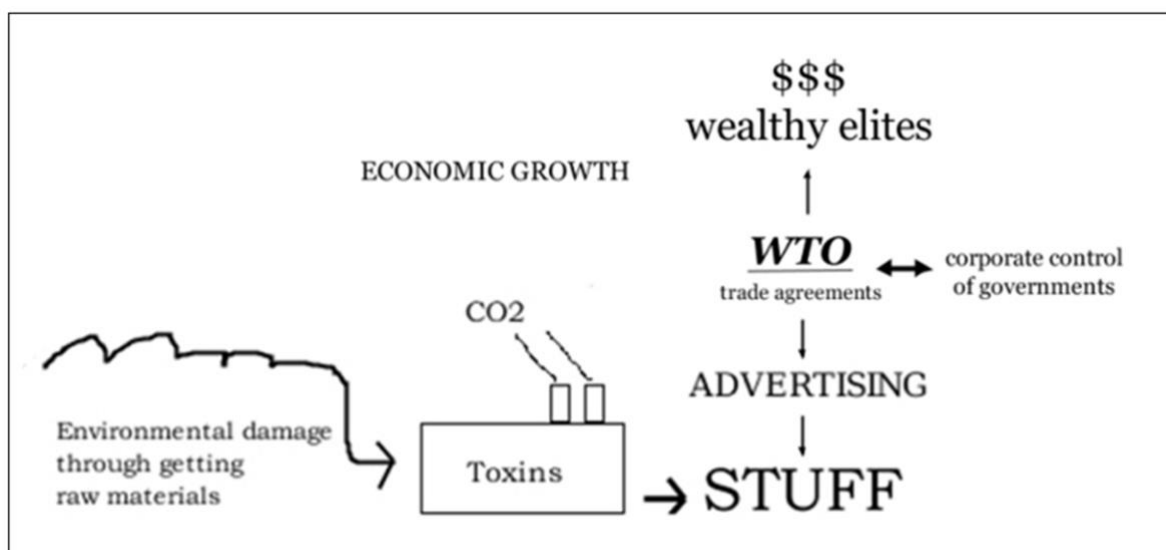
Major institutional factors include advertising, the World Trade Organisation and 'Free Trade' agreements, as well as corporate influence on governments. This whole system is set up to make the wealthy elites even wealthier.

I recognise that these points may not be new to you. My purpose here is to show a way to connect the dots so that ordinary people see the bigger picture.

There are psychological drivers of excess consumption as well: many people compensate for inner psychological malaise through retail therapy and striving for the appearance of status.
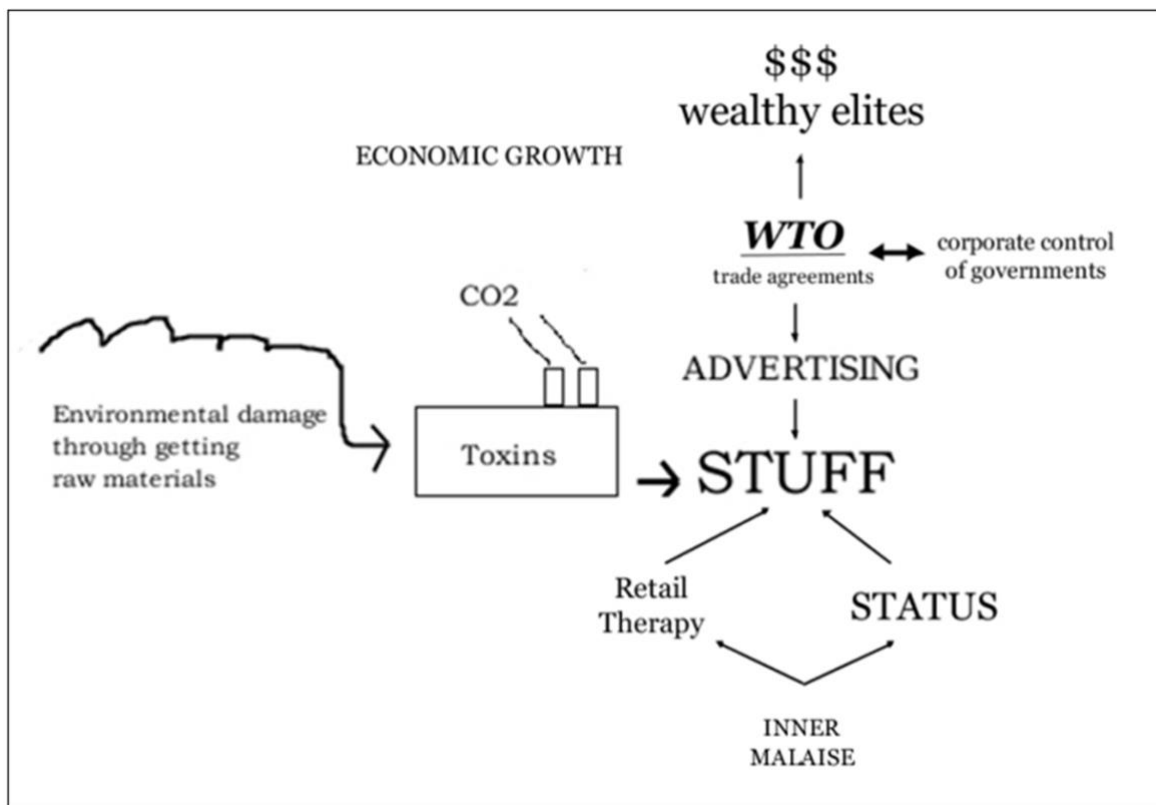
This diagram is developed in more detail in the [Kitchen Table Conversations Manual](). Although it may look complex at first sight, it is easy for people to understand when it is talked through (which we do in Kitchen Table Conversations).

The thing to note is that in fact there are only a few major elements (albeit with massive detail underneath). Each of them is a critical leverage point for change. The intent in designing the diagram was to find a level of abstraction that would enable people to grasp the big picture without being overwhelmed by complexity.

Here we are doing a systems analysis of what needs to change to reverse global warming and transition to a life-sustaining society. To make this analysis more complete it is helpful ask:

> *What are the core operating principles of a life-affirming global culture?*

I think that we can boil it down to two major operating principles.

- A life-affirming global culture will be **ecologically sustainable** in the real world sense of operating within planetary limits.

- And it will operate on good willed **'partnership-respect'** values' (promoting the well-being of communities and the natural world) rather than on 'domination-control values' that underpin ecological destruction, war, and massive accumulation of wealth.

One merit of identifying the operating principles of a life-sustaining society is that we can put them into practice. Thus there are many ways we can train ourselves to become more skilful at partnership-respect relating; we know how to reorganise schools and businesses to embody partnership-respect values; and organisations such as the United Nations have already been established as vehicles for partnership-respect relating at international levels.

Likewise a great deal is known and practised concerning embedding ecological sustainability into businesses.

All of this is spelled-out in more detail in *Understanding Whole System Change*.

2. Clarifying a common goal

As a whole 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!

However, I suggest that we can all make common cause at the meta-level of intending to *transition to a life-affirming global culture*.

Transitioning to a life-affirming culture is also the proper goal for our global civilisation. Currently most government policy is devoted to *economic growth*, and the mass media reinforces this. However, the ecological damage associated with ever increasing industrial production (which is the basis of economic growth) will destroy us. We are on the brink of runaway global warming already, and there are at least eight additional civilization threatening trends.

'Transitioning to a life-affirming global culture' is an overarching goal that encompasses the values and practical action of most of the environmental-progressive movement... as well as spiritual values.

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 doing everything required to transition to a life-affirming global culture, rather than continuing on our present course of ecological self-destruction.*

Business people and activists in the environmental-progressive movement can embrace the goal of transitioning to a life-sustaining society 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?*

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

3. Asset mapping

I am suggesting that to solve global warming and other large-scale 'wicked problems' we need to mount a *citizen led communication campaign that is so effective that we succeed in changing the direction of society*.

Massive innovation is required, because despite some successes overall our current techniques are not succeeding.

As I see it our communication challenge is to enable people to *develop a coherent mental framework* for understanding the systemic nature of the great issues of our times, so they can exert constructive leadership for transformative change within their sphere of influence, and support leadership for large-scale transformation when it appears.

To succeed we must engage the 'unengaged' – people do not seek out information about environmental and social trends.

In what follows I will review some of our assets, using these categories: *colleagues and allies; communication tools; distribution; money; knowledge* and *skills*.

A. Colleagues and allies

As Paul Hawken showed in *Blessed Unrest*, there are millions of groups working on various aspects of environmental and social well-being. Millions. We are all part of a vast movement for positive change.

The movement is fragmented. Mostly each group does their own thing.

The reach of any one group is limited. And at times groups may be in competition with each other for membership or funding.

However, we can make common cause in the aspiration to *transition to a life-affirming global culture*, and by recognising that communication to 'engage the not yet unengaged' is essential for our common success.

The members of many of the groups are relatively passive. Many simply pay dues or sign petitions. If they were to lift their game and actively communicate about transitioning to a life-sustaining society with their friends, business colleagues and broader networks, we would become a vastly more powerful force for change. We would have a dynamic way of bypassing the mainstream media and catalysing the thinking necessary to make the Great Transition to a life-affirming culture work.

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.

Here are a number of useful communication tools.

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. They 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.

The Story of Stuff series

Annie Leonard's engaging animated video series enable 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 could easily show the *Story of Stuff* to friends in their lounge rooms, as a way of helping them grasp the systemic changes we need to evolve a life-sustaining society.

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, but a group of friends can also go through the DVD.

Great Transition Initiative sample emails and guerrilla marketing tactics

The Resources section of the Great Transition Initiative has ready-to-use sample emails and guerrilla marketing tactics.

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. Millions of groups that care about environmental and social well-being, and the combined scope of our networks is huge.

So we can actively affect the 'mainstream' by actively 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 apply guerrilla marketing tactics, such as placing plaques and flyers about *transitioning to a life-affirming global culture* in professional offices.

This Business supports the transition to a life-affirming global culture.

It feels good to be part of the solution!

www.GreatTransitionInitiative.net

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'), although sometimes new people come in as well. They are motivated enough to come to the lecture.

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.

People who attend environmental and social justice events are a huge untapped resource for communicating about transformative change. I suggest that the end of each presentation the audience should be invited to become active Great Transition Catalysts, and to go to the Inspiring Transition [website](#) for communication tools to use with their networks.

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.

E. Knowledge

The high-level aspiration to transition to a life-affirming global culture needs to be grounded by understanding the major drivers of environmental damage and social deterioration, because these are the things that must be changed.

The *Big Picture drivers of global warming* diagram above provides the necessary systemic understanding. It provides an integrated overview of what's involved. It takes us out of silo thinking, and it enables people to see the big picture.

This overview is intentionally simplified. It is meant to be easily absorbed.

We are talking about profound systemic changes about the way society operates. To go further into this, here are several resources that provide a more detailed understanding:

- 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*

Obviously no one of us can do everything. It is critical to devote part of our efforts to 'engaging the unengaged'; we can do this while still focusing on our immediate projects.

F. Skills

Communicating about transitioning to a life-sustaining society is a skill that can improve with practice.

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. What is clear is that if we do not attempt to communicate a positive way forward, *de facto* we are colluding with the *status quo*. What is most needed now is a multitude of us *exerting personal initiative* to engage people we know in conversations focused on coming to terms with the reality of climate change and environmental decline, and becoming committed to turning things around.

Such in-depth conversations cannot be done off-the-cuff. Often people will accept an invitation to dedicate time to a thoughtful conversation. Invitations are powerful.

Sending emails, and even conducting personal conversations about systemic change do not require a high level of expertise. Understanding the major drivers of climate change, for example, is not hard. As we saw our *Big Picture drivers of global warming* diagram above boils it down to just one page.

The *[Kitchen Table Conversations Manual](...)* has about a dozen modules. They are straightforward and easy to follow. If you've ever coached a child with homework you have the communication skills necessary to conduct these conversations (you might start by going through the modules with a friend just to get the hang of it).

It is like learning a new recipe. The process can feel awkward at first. The first time you go through it slowly, step by step. But with experience you become more confident, fluid and creative.

4 Planning

If we accept the goal of transitioning to a life-sustaining society, and recognise that communicating to gain mainstream commitment is necessary for success, how can we make it work?

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-sustaining society through their networks.
- Provide ready-to-use tools to make communicating as easy as possible.

This approach is the basis of the [Great Transition Communication Initiative](...). Three important features of the Great Transition Communication Initiative are:

- It does not involve a central organisation that decides policy and direct what people do.
- We do not assume that people are dumb or selfish. We appeal to people's intelligence and goodwill.

- We focus on education to make people's frameworks of understanding more realistic, comprehensive and compassionate.

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

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 still turn things around at least enough to make a difference.

A high degree of commitment – perhaps based on caring for future generations – is required. 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 Great Transition Initiative is a support platform for actively communicating to engage mainstream commitment to changing change the direction of society as a whole.

Individuals, organisations, academics, businesses and professional practices champion the idea that

> *We are in a Great Transition to a life-affirming global culture*

and we need to accelerate it. We communicate with our networks about accelerating the Great Transition. Ready-to-use communication tools are on the [website](#).

Unique features of our approach include:

- Engaging as many of the *millions of groups* that care about environmental and social well-being as possible to champion systemic change, rather than relying on just a few organisation to communicate about systemic change.
- Encouraging individuals to act as thought catalysts and citizen educators.
- Providing tools to make communicating as easy as possible.
- Developing a variety of guerrilla marketing tactics.
- *Not* attempting to form a large organisation to coordinate actions, but catalyzing aligned independent action by autonomous colleagues.

Stickiness

An event has 'stickiness' to the extent that it contributes to building a 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 has relatively little effect, unless there is some way to link it to a larger consciousness shift movement. It is just a ripple, when we need to build 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 most sticky of all power structure messages is the mantra '*jobs and growth*', and the continual reiteration of the importance of economic growth. It 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 such 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 the Great Transition (the Great Turning) 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 assert that *we are in a Great Transition to a life-affirming global culture, and we need to greatly accelerate it*.

  They would go on to encourage members of the audience to communicate with people they know and their wider networks about transformative change. Members of the audience would be referred to the Great Transition Initiative website for ready-to-use communication tools.

- Writers who post blogs and articles analysing environmental and social issues would conclude by encouraging their readers to communicate with their networks about transformative change.

Perhaps only a few people would respond actively to such calls at first. But everybody in the audience would be introduced to the idea that we are in a Great Transition to a life-affirming global culture, and we need to greatly accelerate it. And they would hear the call to lift their game and become active communicators, even if at first they do not pick up on it. 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 getting a multitude of organizations and their members all championing transitioning to a life-affirming culture through their networks and to the general public.

But there is more, as we have said. People have to understand what is involved, and see how they can act on it. We are helping people think better, and take personal responsibility for transitioning to a life-affirming global culture at emergency speed.

Appendix: How organisations rate regarding 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. If I had 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 blow my own horn. The plain fact is that if major leaders in the environmental-progressive movement are not guiding us along a path that has a real prospect of success, 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 our unflinching critical intelligence to social change.

1 Tellus Institute

Tellus Institute is an academic think tank with 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. However, they have little means for engaging the general public

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 cumbersome. Let's have a look.

This diagram is their introduction:
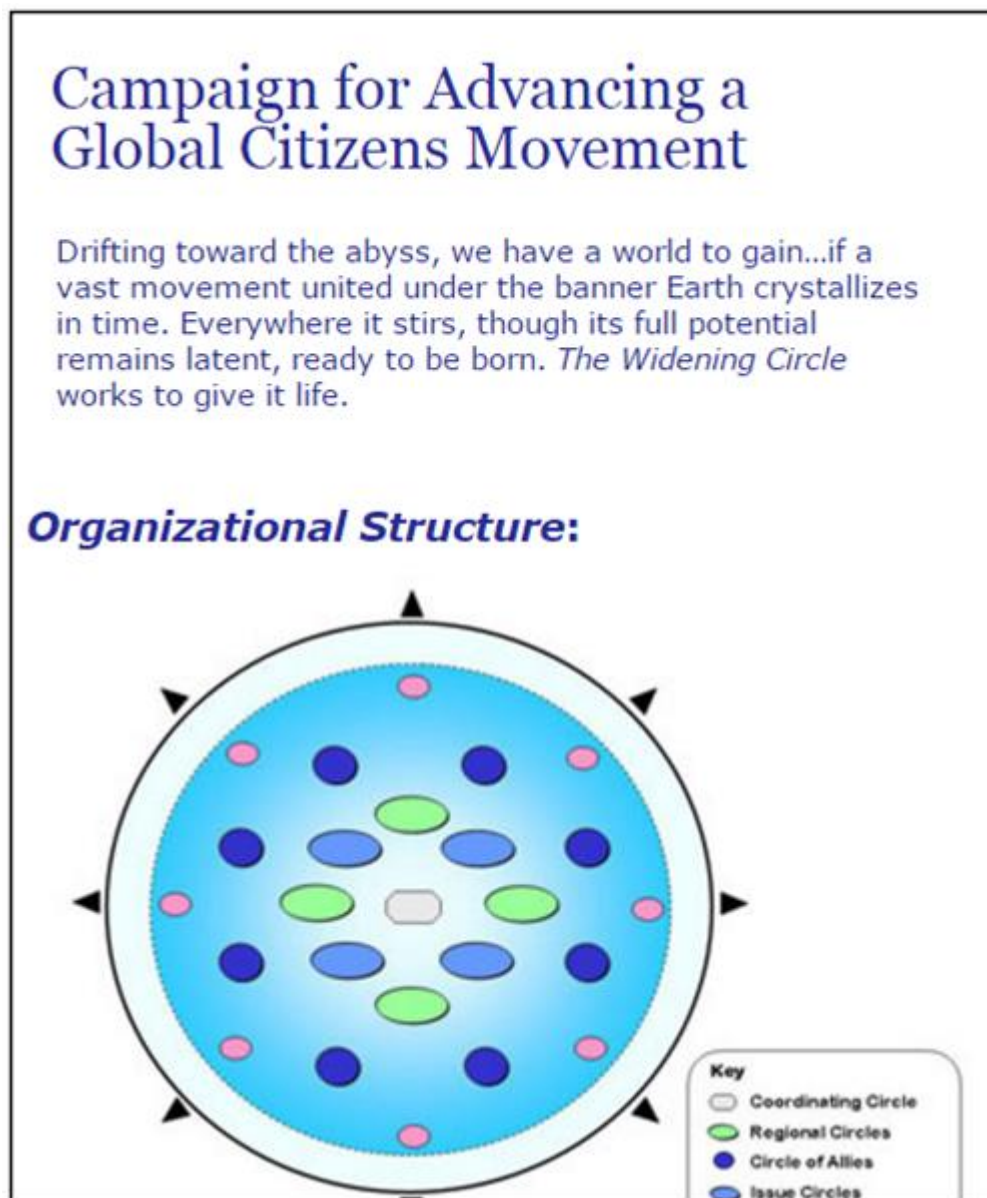
I think this introduction is beautiful, and to the point. However, if you look carefully at the key you will see that the organising model involves establishing a Coordinating Circle, Regional Circles, Circles of Allies, and Issue Circles. This is a lot of organising.

The Widening Circle program never got going. Paul felt that he got pushback from people's egos. I have no doubt that this was the case. But putting that aside, I am not surprised that The Widening Circle did not get up. It is administratively cumbersome and time-consuming. And it appears to have no clear mechanism for reaching ordinary people. I think that it would be very difficult to make it work.

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 – perhaps 10,000 in Australia.

And what have we to show for it? Granted, many people have made personal changes in lifestyles. And there is an ongoing group in Bondi that regularly shows videos about 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 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 was 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.

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 Defense 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 they position 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 citizen-educators communicating through their personal networks to engage the unengaged, using their tools, those provided on the Great Transition Initiative website, and others.

I would also like to see them using their influence to invite other organizations to participate in the Great Transition Initiative by asking their members to act as citizen educators and thought catalysts.

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. But they do not yet encourage their membership to play an active role in championing systemic change.

5 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-sustaining society

Bill McKibben

Bill McKibben devised a way to continually advertise the goal of reducing CO2 levels to 35 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, the divestment campaign may be instrumental in blocking the proposed Adani coal mine in Australia. 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'.

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?

It is insufficient to passionately say '*we need to deal with climate change'* without also addressing the systemic transformational changes it will take to succeed.

6 Individuals

There are many brilliant individuals who are acutely aware of our environmental and social issues. I know a number who are unwilling to commit time and energy to catalysing a citizen-led educational movement for transformative change because they place more priority on their own special projects. They may be writing (yet another) book, or even organising events talking about our coming doom, but they do these events as standalone projects.

Their reach, like that of all of us, is limited, yet they behave as though their small projects are hugely important. In the great scheme of things, at a point in time when we need to catalyse a massive cultural shift at emergency speed, generally they aren't.

The same lack is to be found in many prominent presenters, such as David Suzuki and Paul Ehrlich. People are attracted to their talks because they are famous (and interesting). They have original things to say. But they fail to invite their audience to exert leadership. Their talks have no stickiness.

This failure is not surprising. What I am proposing has not occurred to most people. It is outside their repertoire of ways of thinking. In addition, for an invitation to exert leadership for transformative change to be meaningful to people, it would be helpful to have the means for acting on it already developed (which we have).

At times I am puzzled by some people's unwillingness to investigate and consider participating in the Great Transition Initiative when they are directly invited to do so. If this is merely attachment to their own little projects (little in comparison with the need to mobilise massive public will for transformative change), then perhaps they are to be chided for thinking small.

Some, I suppose, enjoy having the spotlight on themselves and being seen as a font of knowledge. Perhaps others, despite their intelligence, may find it difficult to grasp an original way of thinking that is different than their own. Or they are unwilling to make the effort.

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. Therefore it can seem to be easier to write a book than to try to talk directly with people who think differently than we do.

Likewise, it can seem to be more interesting to push our own wheelbarrow than to attempt to join with others in an arduous undertaking with no certainty of success. It can be more satisfying to cry out about the dangers of climate change, or to protest, than to get down to the nitty-gritty of communicating directly with people about transformative change.

People 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. Or there can be a bit of 'not invented here' going on – resistance to picking up on a new idea because 'I or my group' did not originate it.

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

Here is a checklist of qualities.

	Proactive attitude: not just protest or analysis, but intending to win	Has a rigorously thought through model of what it will take to win	Includes the meme *transitioning to a life-affirming global culture*, or similar ideas	Articulates whole system change	Encourages people to communicate with their networks about systemic change	Provides ready-to-use communi-cation 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	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

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 and transitioning to a sustainable society.

You will notice that the Australian Conservation Foundation and the online protest groups do not 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 as 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.

Designing for success review

In terms of big picture issues such as global warming and ocean acidification, I think that we should always carry these background questions in mind:

- *What will it take to win? What will it take to turn things around?*

Rigorous thinking for catalysing transformative social change includes thinking through these elements: getting clear about the goal; doing a systems analysis of what actually needed for us to succeed; thinking through the strategy and tactics to achieve the goal; doing the practical planning to make it work and finally following through by engaging people and organisations to reach a mainstream audience.
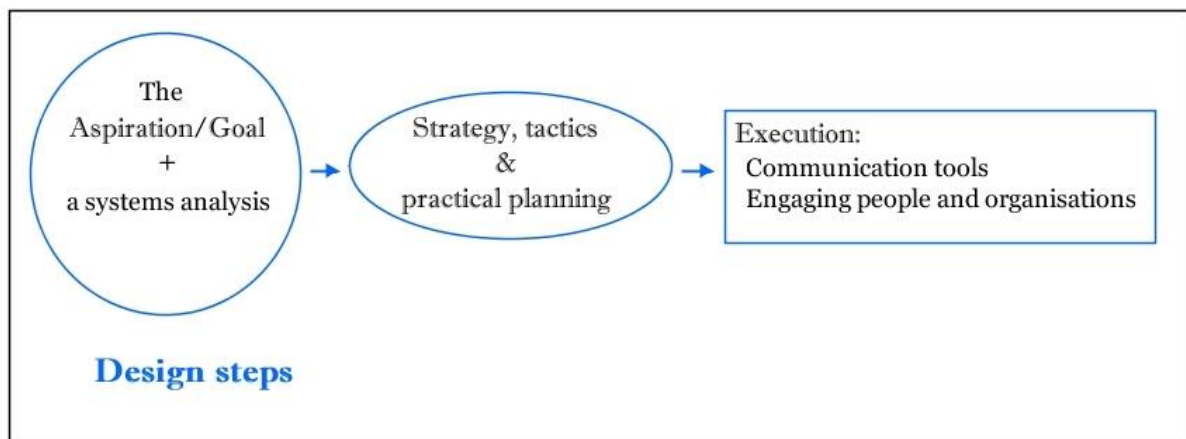
A *goal or aspiration* without a path to success is simply dreaming.

Strategy without garnering resources to carry it out is like a rocket without fuel.

Protest may win local battles, but it will not stop the larger tide of destruction. We need both protest and transformative cultural evolution.

Of any specific action we may query:

- What is the action aiming to achieve?
- Is the approach adequate to our challenge?
- Does it have *stickiness* – does it contribute to building momentum for transformative social change?

Adjusting our approach in the light of these questions can make us much more effective as social change agents! I would like to think that you will want to consider these factors if you haven't already.

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