

TURNING THE TIDE

A BRIEFING ON SHIFTING
ECOLOGICAL CONSCIOUSNESS

by Andy Kenworthy



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Fund Together

“At the heart of consumer psychology is a perception of the self that sees humans as separate from, and usually superior to, the rest of nature, as if the rest of nature were there exclusively for human benefit. This view of a separate, superior self is so all-pervasive in industrial culture that we often take it for granted (Washburn, 1995; Naess, 1986). But it is in direct conflict with our biology, which knows our lives to be utterly dependent on our ecological context. Ecopsychology suggests that it is vital to challenge this notion of the ‘separate’ self, if we are to address the extent, scale and speed of the social change required to live sustainably. In addition a chronic lack of time to reflect, explore and share our deepest feelings may well contribute to our ecologically unsustainable lifestyles (Kerr & Key, 2011a; Firman and Gila, 1997).”

The Natural Change Project: Catalysing leadership for sustainability. WWF-UK 2011

“The way we see the world shapes the way we treat it. If a mountain is a deity, not a pile of ore; if a river is one of the veins of the land, not potential irrigation water; if a forest is a sacred grove, not timber; if other species are biological kin, not resources; or if the planet is our mother, not an opportunity—then we will treat each other with greater respect. Thus is the challenge, to look at the world from a different perspective.”

David Suzuki

“... by continuing to deny ourselves this profound, ancient, intimate relationship with Nature, I fear we are compounding our subconscious sense of alienation and disintegration, which is mirrored in the fragmentation and disruption of harmony we are bringing about in the world around us.”

The Prince of Wales



This is a brief discussion document on human/personal values, and how they might be consciously directed towards greater ecological awareness and action.

It was prepared for the GulfX Project, an initiative of the Sustainable Business Network. This project received funding from Gulf Innovation Fund Together (G.I.F.T) - a Foundation North initiative.

The aim of the project is to:

“Connect more people with Tikapa Moana (The Hauraki Gulf) and in doing so work to restore the relationship between the gulf and those who live around, rely on, and impact upon her waters.”

In initial discussions between the Sustainable Business Network and our main funders Foundation North it became clear we wished to explore a deeper engagement between business people and the natural environment of the Hauraki Gulf. Our contention is that only this can build the unstoppable momentum required to restore these waters.

This presents special challenges and opportunities for the campaign. Usually the challenge for a campaign is to demonstrate influence by inspiring action. We want to go beyond that. Our aim is to establish positive lifelong changes in people’s fundamental beliefs about the Gulf and their behaviour towards it. This is what will make protection and restoration of Tikapa Moana a default setting.

This document calls on relevant expertise from New Zealand and beyond. It is our first step in refining an effective theory of change for value shifting work in New Zealand. It will inform our approach and activities.

We discuss four of the many modalities on offer.



Modality #1:

An indigenous perspective in Aotearoa

“A culture creates its present and therefore its future through the stories its people tell, the stories they believe, and the stories that underlie their actions. The more consistent a culture's core stories are with biological and physical reality, the more likely its people are to live in a way compatible with ecological rules and thereby persist.”

E.O.Wilson

Aotearoa/New Zealand's indigenous Maori culture provides a unique set of values and beliefs founded on and grounded in an ecological spirituality.

This includes the concept of mauri, which can be defined as:

“Life principle, life force, vital essence, special nature, a material symbol of a life principle, source of emotions - the essential quality and vitality of a being or entity.”[iv]

This principle was discussed in a 2017 article produced by Professor Mary A. Sewell, Dr Daniel Hikuroa, and Emily Frost (University of Auckland); Lucy Tukua (Ngati Paoa, Ngati Whanaunga, Ngati Tahinga) and Richelle Kahui-McConnell (Ngati Maniapoto):

“Mauri is part of a holistic system, ki uta ki tai (from the mountains to the sea), with the kaitiaki (guardians) tasked with ensuring that whole systems are in balance, in both nature and people. If the mauri of our waterways is compromised, then so too is the health and wellbeing of our people.

“Te Mana o te Wai pertains to the innate relationship between Te Hauora o te Wai (the health and mauri of water), and Te Hauora o te Taiao (the health and mauri of the environment), and their ability to sustain Te Hauora o te Tangata (the health and mauri of the people). What we believe this means is that the first right is for the river to be a river, the second right is for a river, its catchment and its inhabitants to be healthy, and then, once we are satisfied that the river can be a river, and its inhabitants are safe, we may use the water.”[v]

This way of thinking is not currently well embedded in SBN. Our approach to date is one of humble exploration and listening to learn.

The restorative potential of this kind of approach was recently described in an initial conversation with Te Aroha Grace, innovation officer for Ngati Whatua Orakei Whai Maia.

“Personification is the foundation of conservation,” he said. “Because when you relate to a mountain, a river or the sea as another being you won’t abuse it.”

“This isn’t about a technical clean up. It’s about an attitude clean up. It’s all about emotions. What is it that people need to know? It’s not necessarily Maori. But connecting Maori back to their land is going to help everyone. This curriculum is not just for us, it’s for everyone.”

Grace cites how this perspective is enshrined in legislation around Te Urewera and the Whanganui River. But he makes the distinction between including these ideas in our systems and legal compulsion, which forces the concept upon people.

“If you look at the anatomy of Aotearoa all we have done is recognised a fingernail and a hair,” he explains. “How do we do that for the rest of the body?”

One way is to look at how power and control is expressed in our systems. Grace says: “When we start off talking about ‘consumer psychology’ I think its true name is ‘western capitalism’. I think those terms evade the true conversation around where the origin of our emotional, environmental and social woes come from today. The tiny minority that have power and authority over so many resources is not leadership anymore.”

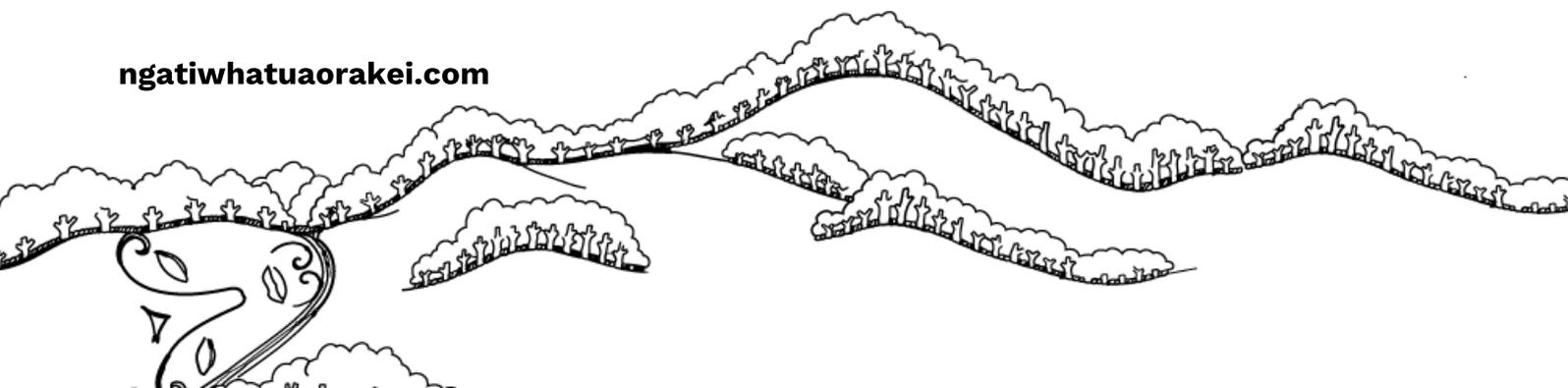
Another key way is to engage in processes of developing intergenerational environmental guardianship. It can begin with something as simple as ensuing every school around the Gulf has a pepeha (formal introduction statement) that includes the connection to Tikapa Moana. Schools, business and other organisations should also be encouraged and assisted in identifying the catchments they belong to, the relevant iwi and the cultural curriculum that goes with it.

“That’s the curriculum,” says Grace. “It’s part of shifting the mindset so that we can develop genuine social economics. That includes emotional capital, environmental capital and social capital.”

There remain cultural barriers and challenges in making this shift. They include the need to continue to improve the status and equity of Maori people in Aotearoa.

“Diversity has the risk that people assume they can think like a woman, or a Maori, rather than provide true representation and access,” Grace says. “The other trap is you just employ a woman or a Maori to do some kind of diversity role for you. They have much wider expertise than that, which may not be being used.”

ngatiwhatuaorakei.com



Modality #2

Common Cause



Dr Tom Crompton holds a Phd in the Evolution of Altruism. One of Tom Crompton's task at WWF-UK in the early 2000s was to seek answers to an important question. If the environmental movement is telling the truth about our world, then why is it not winning?

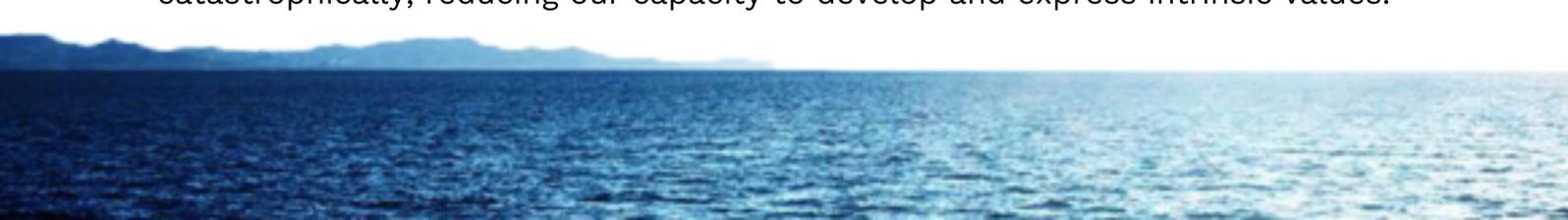
His research eventually led to the establishment of the Common Cause Foundation. One of the key insights Common Cause is based on is about the nature of human values. Research shows the development and pursuit of intrinsic values (things that we experience as having value in and of themselves, like love, doing good deeds, well-being) tends to occur in dynamic opposition to the development and pursuit of extrinsic values (money, fame, material wealth). When we have more of one, we tend to have less of the other.

Here's an example. One study exposed a group of people to messaging related to intrinsic values. Another group was shown messaging based on more extrinsic values. When asked how much time they might volunteer for another study, the intrinsic group consistently offered more.

Another study has confirmed a correlation between extrinsic connectedness to nature with deliberate environmental behaviours, while intrinsic connectedness was positively correlated with spontaneous environmental behaviours. In other words if we say we are really into nature, we will probably take deliberate action to express environmental care in our daily lives. But if testing shows that we have a deeper psychological connection to nature we are more likely to take spontaneous pro-ecological action, without necessarily thinking about it or needing to weigh up the pros and cons.[iii]

Other experiments demonstrate that the promotion of intrinsic values tends to promote positive behaviour, regardless of the issue. The priming effect are similar, whether the request that follows is along the same lines, or for an entirely separate progressive cause. People exposed to intrinsic values based on social issues appear just as likely to support action on environmental issues, and vice versa.

Crompton argues that this exposes the profoundly negative influence of much of the messaging of our dominant culture. We are daily bombarded with marketing material and other media that tends to reinforce extrinsic values. ("Buy this thing". "Ape this celebrity and the things they own". "Treat yourself". "It's all about you", etc). Research suggests this is chronically, even catastrophically, reducing our capacity to develop and express intrinsic values.



This reveals limitations in the campaign work of many progressive groups. Environmentally and socially progressive groups have increasingly tended to compete for donor funds, media exposure and attention on social media. This tends to hinder collaboration and reinforce an extrinsic value: competition over resources deemed to be scarce. This would seem to be counterproductive when evidence suggests the non-competitive promotion of progressive causes tends to be mutually supporting.

There's also been a widespread adoption of extrinsic messaging and incentives in fundraising and campaigning. In recent decades progressive organisations have increasingly adopted the cultural norm of conceptualising in extrinsic terms. This ranges from offering prizes, discounts and other incentives, to claiming a certain action makes you 'cool'.

At the same time there's been a movement towards expressing the value of social or environmental action in financial terms. We talk about the money 'saved' by doing the right thing. We highlight the financial value of environmental services or reducing pollution.

The scale of these organisations and their fundraising has also been maximised.

While this may often be successful, particularly in the short term, it comes with a number of problems. It reinforces the power of extrinsic values as a whole in our culture, by accepting and adopting the same kind of values: bigger is better, it's all about money etc. This tends to increase the likelihood of selfish or anti-social behaviour. It reduces positive behaviours like sharing, which support environmental and social well-being.

By taking this approach to individual issues and causes, campaigners are likely to be reducing the influence of intrinsic values. These are the values more likely to lead to progressive social and environmental behaviour in the long term. This is also likely to create competition between causes keen to show their issue is more important than others. This can lead to exaggerated or even false claims being made, further undermining the integrity of progressive causes.

Another major piece of Common Cause research is its UK Values Survey. In that survey 74% of respondents place greater importance on compassionate values than selfish values. This is irrespective of age, gender, region, or political persuasion. 77% of respondents believe that their fellow citizens hold selfish values to be more important, and compassionate values to be less important, than is actually the case. In addition, people who hold this inaccurate belief about other people's values feel significantly less positive about getting involved in activities like meetings, voting, volunteering or activism. They report greater social alienation. They feel less responsible for their communities. They are less likely to feel that they fit in with wider society than citizens with more accurate perceptions of a typical person's values.



Other research by Common Cause and others has demonstrated that the effectiveness of appeals to intrinsic values is unaffected by the person's value positions. In other words, even what we might think of as the most grizzled, cynical power player is as moved by appeals to our common values as anybody else.

Common Cause highlights steps organisations and individuals can take to address this gap:

- Promote compassionate values through role models
- Convey a more accurate perception of others' values
- Challenge assumptions about the values that most people hold to be important.

valuesandframes.org



The danger of false comparisons

“If you really think that the environment is less important than the economy, try holding your breath while you count your money.”

Dr Guy McPherson

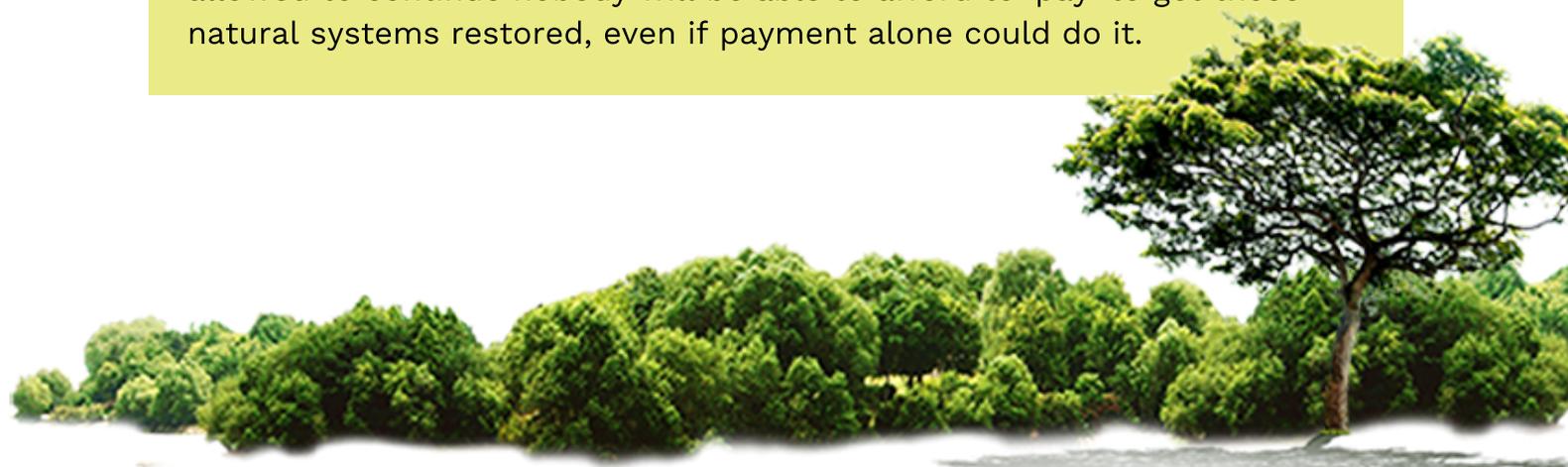
Framing environmental and socially progressive thinking and action in extrinsic terms adds to confusion about our cultural values.

For example, on a personal level we might seek to ‘offset’ poor social and environmental behaviour donating to charities or other good causes. Meanwhile, the process of earning this money, and the extrinsically driven lifestyle that goes with it, are often very closely associated with the poor social and environmental behaviour we then feel the need to offset.

This has played out on a macro scale in such things as carbon trading. Nations essentially pay money to continue behaviours which have impacts that money cannot undo.

Similar thinking has appeared on the political scene. Many centrist politicians claim to be ‘balancing’ environmental and social justice on one hand, with continued economic growth on the other. But the value of money in 2019 bears only a tangential relationship to any form of real value, other than by increasingly tenuous mutual agreement. So this thinking falsely equates the value of very real, priceless, complex and fragile ecological and social systems with the largely fictitious and highly variable value of modern currencies. The idea of ‘balancing’ is entirely false. This is even before considering the extent to which economic growth is coupled to environmental and social problems.

It takes more than money to restore ecological and social systems. But humanity has disrupted most of the world’s natural systems in the pursuit of economic progress. As the world’s natural systems reach crisis point they are undermining the world’s economy. If this is allowed to continue nobody will be able to afford to ‘pay’ to get those natural systems restored, even if payment alone could do it.



Modality #3

Psychology for a Better World

Dr Niki Harre is Associate Dean Sustainability in the Faculty of Science at The University of Auckland.

Her teaching and research is in the area of community psychology and the psychology of sustainability. She is the author of *Psychology for a Better World* and *The Infinite Game: How to Live Well Together*.

Her most recent research addresses issues of sustainability, citizenship, values and political activism. The question that drives it is how to engage people in creating a more sustainable and equitable society. She has an ongoing project at Western Springs College in Auckland. This investigates the creation of a 'sustainability culture' in a secondary school setting.

Harre describes her work as being about cultural shift. She takes her starting point as the assumption that humans are biologically and evolutionarily social creatures. The natural stimuli of our emotions is predisposed towards socially positive behaviour. We may feel short lived elation when we exact revenge, overcome an enemy or get rich by plundering others or the environment. But we fundamentally feel better when we do the right thing by the community around us as well as ourselves, and enjoy the social rewards this brings. In practical terms this means working on the assumption that everyone in a given room will agree to the value of social and environmental restoration in principle, given the right framing and prompting.

For Harre: "what detracts from that are the layers of bureaucracy, competition, jealousy, history and all the things that sometimes make it difficult for us to connect with our basic human character, which is, if you like, 'good'."

This means that our aim in promoting progressive causes is to uncover those core values and shift culture to where they are more readily available, rewarded and nourished.

In New Zealand, this insight is reflected in the annual Colmar Brunton Better Futures report. In the survey the majority of respondents agree to the importance of sustainability. They profess concern about a host of social and environmental issues. They state they have a medium or high commitment to a sustainable lifestyle. This includes a willingness to pay a bit more to get the best organic, sustainable and ethically produced products available. It also includes a commitment to stopping buying a company's products if they hear about them being irresponsible or unethical.[vi] However, New Zealand's ecological footprint in 2012 was the 36th highest in the world. This highlights the limitations of such studies. There is very often a significant gap between self-reported values and action. [vii]



Harre's approach is to start from the general agreement. It can be used as a common basis upon which to create an open-minded vision of how we would like a situation to be. This should be established without any limiting factors or frameworks, which include perceived practical limitations. From there we can move on to agree what single action can be taken to move us closer to that vision.

"You start with simplicity first," she says. "Then you move into complexity. Then you establish one thing that you can do. Then you return to the simplicity of remembering what we really value."

A progressive culture then is one in which groups of people can gather and consistently repeat this process to make progress. As Harre puts it: "A community is a place in which people do this together over time, holding each other to account and figuring out how to do it."

So how do we create such communities?

Our discussion with Harre offers some useful guidance.

1. Make culture building your core goal

Harre says: "The idea that something is 'all hui and no doey' (all talk and no action) misunderstands how social systems work."

Action is required, but principally as a means to organise culture around shared activity.

2. Address the whole person

Hospitality (manaakitanga) is fundamental to building community and culture. This means people need to feel the physical, emotional, psychological and spiritual value of sharing and participation.

This requires a level of authenticity.

"Some groups realise that ritual is a part of cultures, so they create rituals. But they are not rituals that have grown out of something deep and fundamental. They are stuck on, which some people will find really glitchy."



3. Don't make every gathering a planning meeting or working bee

People's time and energy is limited. Their participation should not be contingent on their activity. If they believe they will be assigned a task whenever they participate and/or suffer some form of recrimination or exclusion if they do not, many people would rather not participate at all.

"You have to create space for people who never make a commitment, who never put up their hand. It seems like a bad thing, but it's the way to get widespread engagement. It's how you get the numbers."

It is unwise to force decisions and actions before a culture is fully formed, as this too often leads to fractures and divisions.

4. Structure your gatherings for culture building and binding

This requires a certain amount of planning and formality to achieve.

5. Don't define every action centrally

Centrally controlling all the activities can lead to failure through lack of shared interest or real commitment. This in turn can lead to recriminations and further division.

Once core values have been properly established, individuals should be relatively free to undertake whatever actions fit with those core values. Clusters of activity form naturally around points of interest and momentum. This also triggers fortuitous connections and further actions.

6. Be patient

The dangerous message urgency may send people is that if we can't act now to create a speedy solution then nothing positive can be done at all.

"It has to be done slowly. There is this huge urgency. Which is all very well, but just saying 'it's urgent' doesn't get people to act in the way that you hope.

However urgent it is, it needs to work at a human pace. There's a delicate balance between bringing all the elements of culture and the group with you while getting some traction, and the sense that there is something real in this."

The book: elibrary.bsu.az/books_400/N_350.pdf

Modality #4

Natural Change

Methodologies for reconnecting human consciousness with nature are ancient, and appear in almost all forms of indigenous culture.

Natural Change, created by David Key, is a modern take on these traditions, developed in line with Key's experiences as an outdoor educator, psychologist and environmentalist.

"My work came from witnessing transformational changes in people in just five-days of an outdoor programme." he says.

At the heart of that work is the notion of an "ecological self" - a self that is continuous with the rest of nature.

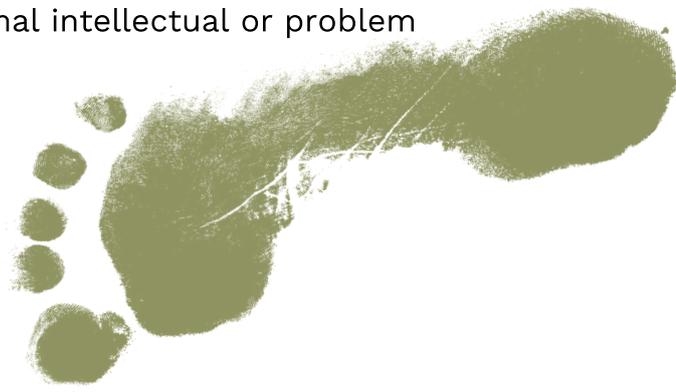
"People are like a wave in a river," says Key. "If you scoop the wave out of the river, it no longer exists as a wave."

We change our sense of self according to our social, psychological and physical context. We may be a wave in one place, but we are something else - someone else - in another.

When people are immersed in natural ecosystems they experience their ecological selves. They adjust their sense of self to one that is part of nature. At the most fundamental level of existence, this is who we really are, because without nature none of us would exist. This is our authentic self.

In our everyday lives we have created technologies and environments that allow us to form identities based on a false premise: that we can exist without nature. Once we realise this, we instinctively behave in pro-ecological ways. "This is not an intellectual exercise where people think of themselves as ecological beings - which is the project of environmental education as a whole, and the way our culture approaches every problem - but one based on experience. People change their behaviour towards the rest of nature once they have experienced themselves as part of it."

The process generally involves a multi-day group wilderness experience in which Key uses various techniques to invite participants to experience themselves as part of nature. This may include entire days alone, or experiencing nature in ways that avoid the normal intellectual or problem solving responses.



Part of this work is around 'isomorphic framing'. In outdoor education isomorphic framing creates a metaphorical relationship between the outdoor activity and other aspects of the participant's life. This can enable the participants to change the way they think and behave in other situations.

But Key takes this one step further, to express how we can change the nature of the outdoor experience itself by framing it differently. Someone could be climbing a mountain, for example because someone has paid them to do it, they are in a race, or trying to show off to someone. Alternatively, they could climb the same mountain on the same day but as an open minded meditation on love or nature, with no other goals, commitments or expected outcomes. Doing each of these would create very different experiences. In the Natural Change process Key and his team use a variety of techniques with the group to gently reframe their experience of the outdoors, to ultimately provide the epiphany of an ecological experience of self.

"The delivery of the epiphany that you are part of nature is in some ways fairly well-rehearsed," he says. "The difficult bit is translating that into our everyday lives and behaviour. Especially because our culture is completely hostile to people who have an ecological sense of self. Making the translation can be a traumatic experience.

In New Zealand/Aotearoa, Key is working with regenerative practitioner and leadership coach Rosie Walford to explore how the Natural Change process can flow more easily into pro-ecological leadership in business.

In the Oceanic Leaders Project, Key and Walford support participants through coaching and peer-group work as they endeavour to incorporate their new way of being into their personal and professional lives. Leaders learn to diagnose their organisation and industry's cultural assumptions. They consider how these are interdependent parts of a larger system of life and how they impact that system. This enables them to find strategies and interventions to lead real, meaningful change in ways previously invisible to them.

"If you want to achieve deep, enduring change you have to work in a multi-dimensional way," says David. "One way of looking at that is in three spheres; the personal, cultural and structural.

"You can experience your ecological self personally and reap all kinds of benefits. But this might not impact the culture you live and work in. Equally, you may find ways to have cultural impact only to find that you quickly come up against organisational, legal and social structures that will not let you change. And perhaps you can change the structures only to find that the cultural and personal changes needed to engage with them are absent.

“At best some programmes might address two of these areas, for example cultural and structural. However, they may omit to work at a personal, psychological level with the people making these cultural or structural changes. Or you might get someone doing high level structural change who is very highly coached individually, but then lacks the ability to influence culture, so that their personal and structural changes are ineffectual. We very consciously work in all three realms simultaneously.

“We start with a deep personal process. This evolves into a small-group cultural experience where we develop a strong community with its own language and narrative. We then work to spread that narrative into the wider cultural system - beyond the small group into organisations and communities. Finally, the people we select are already in powerful positions in their respective systems. This brings personal passion and commitment together with cultural tools and structural positioning. The outcome is pro-ecological leadership with long-term, far-reaching impacts.”

assets.wwf.org.uk/downloads/wwf_naturalchange2.pdf



Now it's over to you, no really

One of the greatest joys of this work so far is that I have no idea exactly where it will lead. At this stage I don't want to - I think that would limit it's potential. But I do need help on where our next steps should go.

So that you can play your fullest part in this, please take the time to read it through carefully as many times as you need to. Make notes, draw on it, do whatever it takes to make it real for you.

There may be modalities touched on here that intrigue or interest you more than others. There may be ones where you are excited by the fact that you have some prior knowledge, or you are excited by the fact that it's so new. Let it take you somewhere. Follow some of the links, do your own reading, take some time to think about how you would like ideas like this to become real in your everyday work.

This is an opportunity to transform our work to a new level of connectedness, where we can bring more of ourselves to work and do more of our growing and learning there, individually and as a group.

As some promptings, here's some things we could think about:

1. If we see our work teams as a community of practice in some form of sustainable connectedness, what would that look like? What sort of things could we consider doing, or doing differently? How could we ensure we maintain these approaches over time?
2. How might we show up differently in meetings, and our everyday dealings if we kept ideas like this in the forefront of our minds?
3. How could we create a larger community of practice with some of these ideas in our business networks? How could we build this? What would be different?
4. How could we approach the events that we run differently with these ideas in mind?
5. Are there other approaches you would like us to consider? What would be the most effective way of sharing them?

But please do not let these questions limit you. Let your thinking wander far and go deep, so we can explore this fully together.

- [i] The David Suzuki Reader, p. 11. <https://bit.ly/2B0kNMD>
- [ii] Harmony: A New Way of Looking at Our World, ch. 1, p. 27.
- [iii] <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4436134/>
- [iv] <http://maoridictionary.co.nz/search?&keywords=mauri>
- [v] <https://www.newsroom.co.nz/@future-learning/2017/09/11/47259/dirty-rivers-destroying-mauri-of-our-oceans>
- [vi] <https://www.colmarbrunton.co.nz/news/better-futures-report/>
- [vii] <https://econation.co.nz/ecological-footprint/> and <http://data.footprintnetwork.org/#/compareCountries?cn=all&type=EFCpc&yr=2014>