Theory of Change, Power Dynamics and Leadership:
How do we address drivers of climate change?

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My background:

Natural Sciences

- BA Biology (Augustana College), MS Ecology (Univ. WI-Madison)
- Ecologist, The Nature Conservancy (ND, SD)
- Instructor (human biology, environment), Oglala Lakota Tribal College (SD)

Social Sciences

- Project Manager, NIH cancer research project for 3 tribes, Rapid City Regional Hospital (SD)
- PhD Cultural Evolution, Stanford University (CA)
- Academic Officer, International Human Dimensions Programme on Global Environmental Change, UN (DE)
- Affiliated Researcher, Stanford University, Institute for Research in the Social Sciences (CA)

My background:

Activism

- Environmental Scientist, Center for Alternative Mining Development Policy (WI)

- Director, Technical Information Project – public interest research (SD)

- Chair, Bridges for Intercultural Understanding (SD)

- Stanford Labor Action Coalition (CA)

- President, Initiative for Equality (US/global)

I. Theory of Change

You can't be effective at changing something if you don't understand it:

- Underlying causes: motives & incentives, psychology, systemic drivers as well as contingent history?

- How does change take place?

So, how can we make progress on climate change?

We first need to understand the drivers – not the biogeochemistry, but the drivers of human behaviors that lead to climate change.

Some think it is about knowledge

If lack of knowledge → problem

then knowledge → solution!

Right?

It is disappointing to learn that when you provide detailed, accurate information, many people don't care, or don't believe you, or promote disinformation.

So where could the causation lie? A few possibilities:

- Economic incentives (profits vs meeting human needs & protecting environment, risk of failure when starting something new)

- Political system (driven by short-term election cycle, pressure from money)

- Technologies (people feel locked into current approaches)

A few more possibilities:

- Belief systems (dualism, hierarchy, social status, individualism, authoritarianism, …)

- Emotions (fear, guilt, unwillingness to change, poor relationships, lack of confidence, …)

- Inequalities (anger at those with more, fear of slipping downward towards those with less, lack of solidarity in developing solutions, …)

Which drivers are involved?

...and how do we address these to create change?

It's complicated...

- Cultures consist of interlocking sets of approaches. You cannot change just one thing at a time.

- If you are trying to change something that is pervasive and fundamental, you will need to understand the underlying systemic relationships within the society.
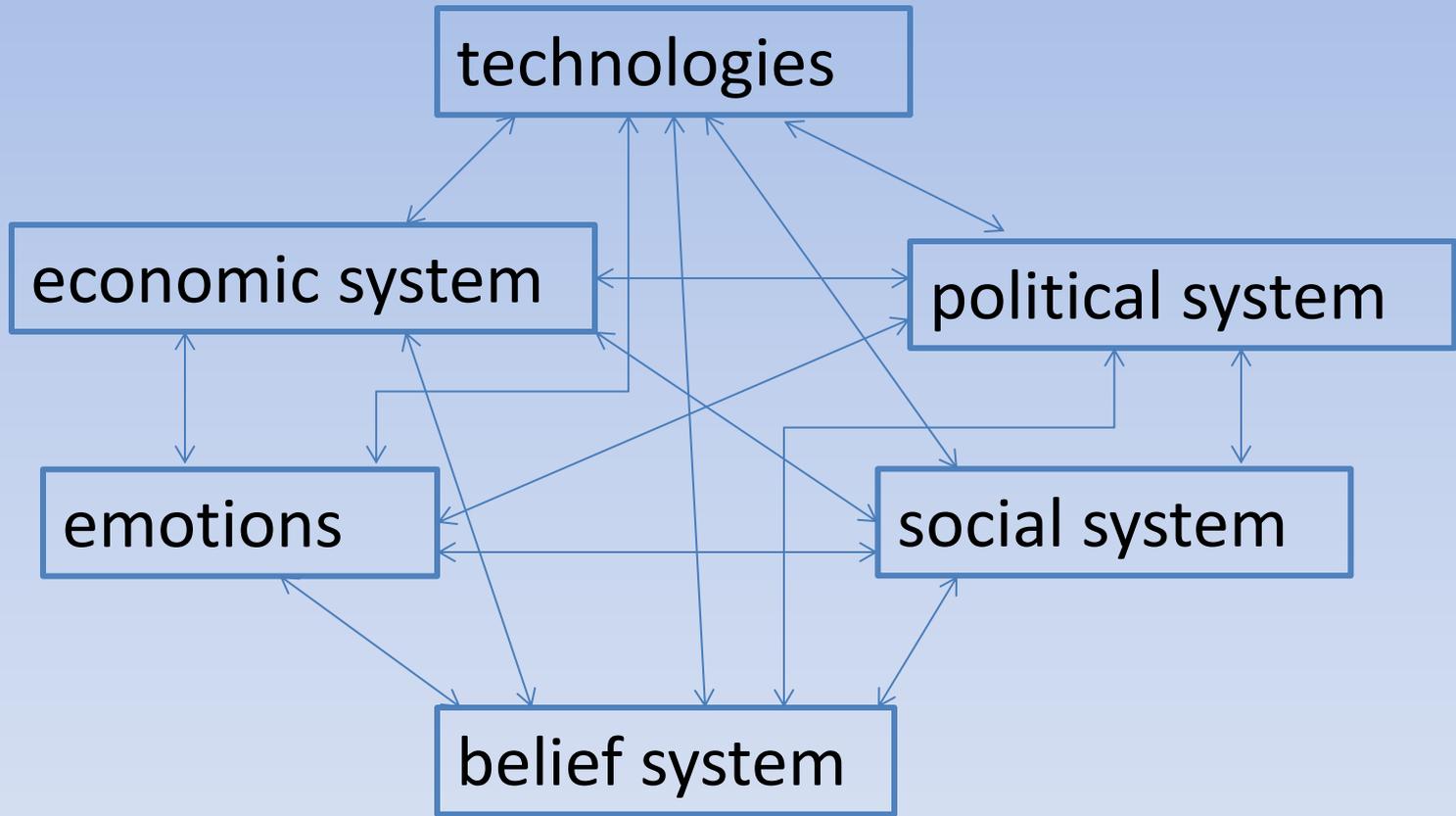
It's tempting to simplify:

- We don't have time to change everything!

- We need to stop climate change right now!

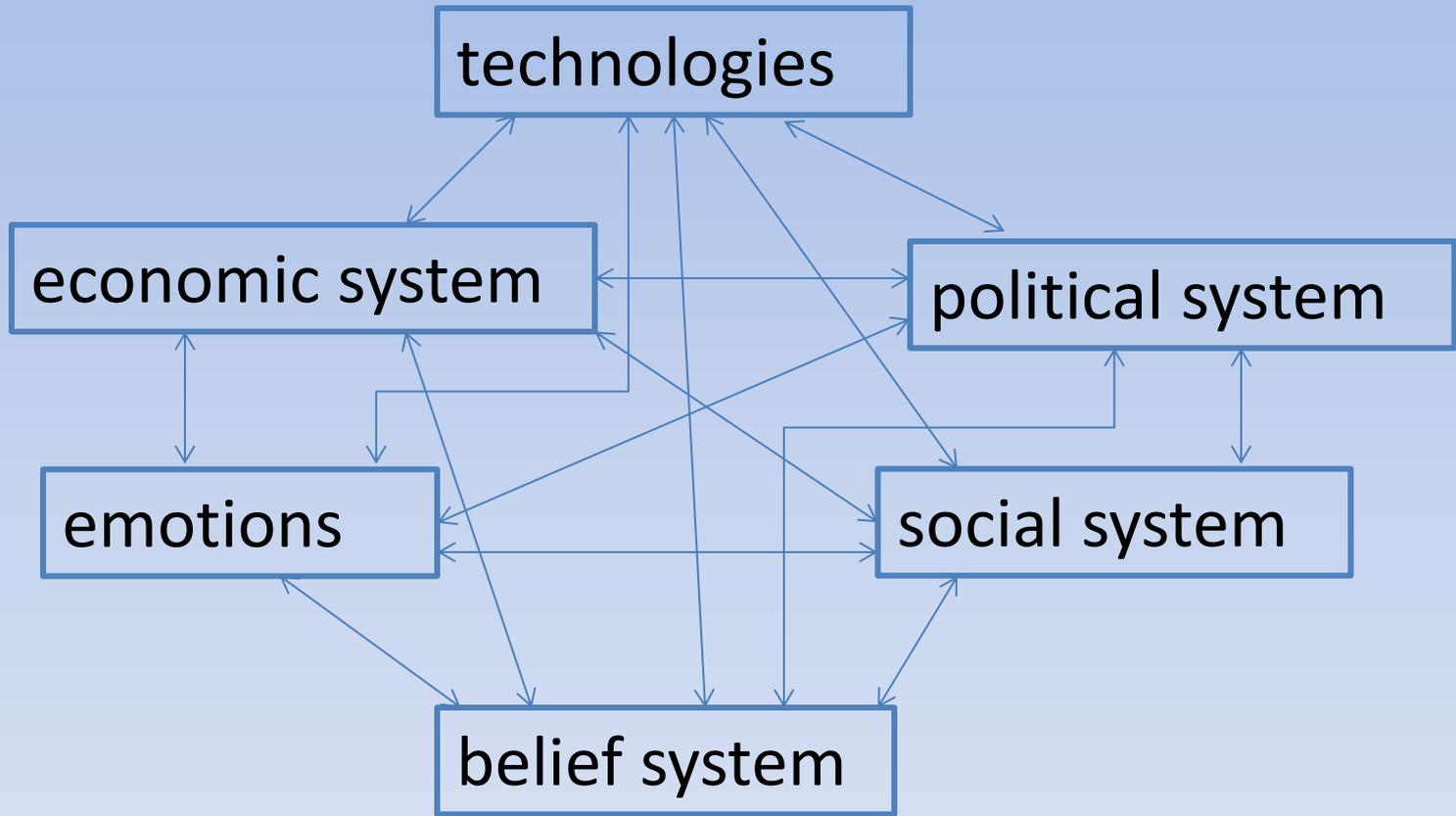- Then we can worry about the other things.

It won't work.

Sorry.

How do you change complex systems?

Find the leverage points in the system.

What are the key aspects that have huge influence over the structures, processes, and drivers?

Leverage: Proposals

- Rational choices based on information?

  Already shown to fail as a strategy for leverage.

- Human technologies?

  Would have a big impact, but how do we change it?

Leverage: Proposals

- Human nature?

  People lived for hundreds of thousands of years without destroying the earth.

- Human cultures?

  This has changed with ever-accelerating speed over the past 10,000 years.

What happened 10,000 years ago?

1. Agriculture (and associated land ownership, sedentary living, accumulation of wealth)

2. Hierarchical social structures (social status, wealth disparities, political power)

II. Power Dynamics

- We live in a hierarchical societies where social status, wealth, ownership, and power go hand in hand.

- No one wants to be left out.

- This creates systemic incentives for profit, accumulation, and growth, and against sharing, protection, and precaution.

Decision-making

- Decisions are made in the context of these social, economic and political incentives:
  - **Social incentives**: people want to be higher on the status hierarchy, and are afraid of slipping lower; this is often tied to consumer goods
  - **Economic incentives**: businesses need growth & profit in order to survive; other considerations are secondary
  - **Political incentives**: mandate responsiveness to economic power and to short-term election cycle

Decision-making

Decisions are <u>not</u> made based on the common good, long term considerations, human well-being, environmental sustainability, and protection of all nature.

Decisions are made in the wrong ways, for the wrong reasons

...and <u>that</u> is the leverage point.

How can we change the way decisions are made?

- Open up who has an effective voice in decisions
- Open up who has social, economic and political influence
- Alter the social incentives (status & consumption)
- Alter the economic incentives (profits & growth)
- Alter the political incentives (short-term, responsive to money)

Sounds great!

…but how can we do this?

Lobbying

- **Lobbying** brings voices of the few (generally economic or educational elites) to decision-makers

- It may be successful at changing a particular decision

- no matter how well-done, it does not change power dynamics or challenge the status quo in how decisions are made

Organizing

- **Organizing** brings in a large new spectrum of voices – people who demand to be heard,

- thus challenges the status quo by changing power dynamics

Short-Term, Longer-Term Strategies

- Urgent short-term strategy:
  - organize and bring in vast numbers of people, united in demanding change

- Longer-term strategy:
  - Develop alternative approaches at the local and regional level; help them to spread
  - make fundamental, systemic changes in the structures and incentives

Urgent short-term strategy:

- Open up who has an effective voice in decisions; who has access to social, economic and political influence
  - Networking
  - Community organizing
  - Form alliances
  - Develop joint strategies
  - Coordinate and collaborate
  - Effective news media strategies
  - Use technology effectively (not just "clicktivism")
  - Go viral with information, strategies, and input

Difficulties in organizing

- Very hard and labor-intensive (requires one-on-one talking)
- Requires a skill set that is not widely taught
- Requires a different type of leadership
- Requires ability to work with many different types of people
- Knowledge gaps can create dangers (incorrect statements)
- Cultural differences can create friction
- Differences of opinion can cause arguments
- Competition among groups for limited funding and members can block collaboration

Benefits of organizing

- Educates people on issues and strategies
- Brings new voices into decision-making
- Allows independent groups to collaborate
- Can spread information and strategies much faster
- Creates unity and solidarity among previously fractured groups
- Creates much greater political influence
- Challenges existing myths about what is needed or possible
- Brings broader spectrum of experience and knowledge into decision-making

How can technology be used effectively?

- Crowdsource and disseminate information

- Alert people to upcoming events

- Brainstorm, agree on, and implement strategies

- Crowdsource and coordinate solutions

- Share stories and videos to motivate people

- Raise money to support efforts

- Take polls to learn what people are thinking

- Strategic use of petitions to advance issues

- Generate lots of voices to pressure decision-makers

Misusing technology

- Satisfying people's urge to get involved through signing ineffective petitions
- Diverting people's involvement and resources away from local efforts with sophisticated global social media campaigns
- Using social media to disseminate top-down strategies and solutions
- Using mobile phone apps as a substitute for organized political engagement

But we are running out of time!

How can we speed the process up?

We need solutions to "go viral"

- An idea, concept, product, video or other cultural meme exponentially increases in popularity

- This takes place because it is passed along from person to person, not just from some central source.

- This is the only way we can create needed change fast enough to avert catastrophic outcomes.

- This cannot be done using elite lobbying strategies.

- We need networking, organizing, and global collaborations in order to go viral with information, voices, strategies and solutions.

"going viral" requires opening up:

…who is able to participate,

…how they are able to participate, and

…why they participate: they must feel hopeful that their actions will create change.

This means challenging the power dynamic.

Challenging the status quo

Make no mistake: these approaches challenge the existing power structure

- Challenges social paradigm (those with high status deserve to be heard, deserve to benefit)

- Challenges economic paradigm (profits and growth are primary objective; those with wealth are the main actors)

- Challenges political paradigm (decisions made by and for those with insider access)

What happens when existing power relations are challenged?

1. Resistance to change
2. Denial of information and conclusions
3. Discrediting opponents
4. Secrecy and control of information
5. Crowding out new voices and input
6. Economic control (through jobs, prices, trade relations)
7. Laws to block new social, economic and political approaches
8. Arrest, imprisonment, or worse

It's difficult.

It's also necessary.

III. Leadership for Change

Leadership is considered authoritarian by some:

- Occupy movement suppressed concentration of influence and overt political decision-making

- Consensus decision-making is seen as a more egalitarian process by some

- Others dislike "politicians," viewing them as corrupt and self-serving – and thus dislike "leadership"

Leadership…bad and good

- Authoritarian, top-down, controlling, hierarchical

- Narrow base of information, inputs and viewpoints

- Serves elite interests

- Democratic, participatory

- Broad-based inputs, information and viewpoints

- Serves public interests

Leadership...bad and good

- Uses power to implement decisions

- Self-serving, meets personal needs for approval, messianic

- Charismatic → cult of personality takes over

- Builds consensus and widespread support

- Has interests of others in mind, stable personality type

- Charismatic → focused on good communication and process

Leadership...bad and good

- Manipulates the situation

- Secretive, deceptive, corrupt

- Consolidates power and protects the status quo

- Empowers the decision-making of others

- Transparent, open, honest, purposeful

- Provides a helpful vision of the future and inspires change by all

Can some leaders have a mix of traits?

Absolutely.

You know some of them.

Encouraging BAD Leadership

How do we accidentally encourage BAD leadership?

- – Don't pay attention to issues or leadership
- – Don't participate in democratic processes
- – Complain that "leadership" is illegitimate
- – Don't train people to exercise leadership well
- – Reward "strong man" behaviors with positions of power
- – Engage in cult of personality (idolize people)

Nature abhors a vacuum

What happens when you refuse to have well-organized decision-making and leaders?

- Insecure, messianic, or predatory individuals can be found everywhere

- If there isn't a good mechanism for well-organized leadership, they take over, exercising informal power through manipulation, bullying, and charismatic cultish leadership.

Good leaders…

- Recruit broad participation for an inclusive movement, not just in-groups or special interests

- Take input and listen; empower members to make decisions and implement projects democratically

- Build outside alliances strategically: some coalitions build strength, while others reduce it

Good leaders…

- Facilitate the development of clear goals and effective strategies

- Break strategies into clear steps that can be accomplished in a reasonable time frame

Good leaders…

- Do not raise issues publicly without simultaneously presenting opportunities for involvement

- Encourage commitment and involvement by finding a role for everyone; training and coordinating well

- Are not afraid to ask people for donations and help: this is a necessary and well-understood request

Good leaders...

- Are always factual and accurate in public statements; clearly distinguish between facts and values

- Know that it's more important to frame the questions than to have all the answers

- Ensure that only authorized public statements are made; unauthorized statements destroy organizations' strategies

Good leaders…

- Communicate well to all kinds of people by speaking about things they care about, using their language

- Tell powerful stories

- Start from where their listeners are thinking – not from what they themselves have concluded

- Realize that the most important message is often left unspoken

Good leaders…

Inspire hope, not discouragement.

Thank you!

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