

## Working with Processes of Change, Particularly Psychological Processes, when Implementing Organic Farming.

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This paper, which deals with the psychology of change, is part of a necessary expansion of the boundaries that are usually put around discussions about agriculture and the food system - necessary, I believe, if we are really serious about both addressing the causes of the problems and about taking effective action to improve the situation.

It is common for proposals for change, which usually imply criticism of current practices, to bring up fear and a diverse range of defensive behaviours. These extend from withdrawal, non-compliance and argument to ridicule, angry confrontation and even violence. Attempts to deal with this usually focus on strengthening the case for change, often by doing more research, and seeking legal and political solutions. While these initiatives are often essential components of the change process, they can never adequately address the psychological and emotional barriers to change. Because they are usually not acknowledged they invariably undermine and weaken all other efforts to bring about lasting change. These barriers have their roots in personal histories, particularly during childhood, of having to adapt repeatedly to disempowering experiences such as repeated exposure to violence, ridicule, rejection, abandonment, and lack of respect.

This adaptive process usually results in loss of access to one's potential, lowering and narrowing of awareness, loss of creativity and vision, lack of clarity concerning values, and the development of numerous compensatory behaviours. All of these are reversible. Compensatory behaviours are so common in our societies that they are widely regarded by many as the norm. They include a wide range of consumptive, stimulatory and distractive activities, as well as attraction to symbols and illusions of power and control. This is partly achieved by owning impressive properties, powerful machines, the simplification of designs (such as monocultures and a monetary system of values) and processes - to make them easier to control - the division of the world into resources and enemies, and the excessive use of overkill solutions to control and eliminate the latter. The aggressive seeking of positions of power within hierarchical organisations and within hierarchical organizations, and within society in general - often by using inequities of gender, age and race - is also part of this compensatory and often addictive process. So, paradoxically, many of our so-called leaders and public figures are, in reality, disempowered individuals who are attracted (largely subconsciously) to such positions to compensate for their internal sense of powerlessness. Such an understanding makes their common lack of genuine leadership no longer a puzzle.

In a study of health in the UK it was found that 60% to 70% of all behaviours were of this compensatory, adaptive nature (Stallibrass 1989, Williamson & Pearce 1980). With such behaviours as the dominant way of being in the world it is not surprising that we have largely designed adaptive political, religious, economic, work, welfare and recreational structures and processes to support our compensatory patterns of behaviour. It is also not surprising that most efforts to reform these are resisted, and when 'successful' result only in temporary or very minor change. Indeed, because of the early nature of the establishment of most adaptive compensatory behaviours, efforts by others to

change them are often experienced - largely subconsciously - as threats to one's survival, and so responses often have desperate or irrational characteristics.

With this understanding it is also no longer a puzzle as to why it has been so difficult to develop and implement genuine, ecologically sustainable systems of food production, handling and consumption.

Thus, to bring about such change our maps and models of the processes involved need to include these psychological factors (Hill 1998, 1999 a, b, c, in press). These maps also need to integrate our understandings and actions within the personal, socio-cultural and environmental domains. We need to know much more about how individuals, groups and ecosystems function, and how they relate to one another in the processes of health and wellness creation and maintenance. Also, we need to have a better understanding of our psychosocial history (deMause 1982 provides a controversial and challenging view of this), of our coevolutionary potential (Norgaard 1994) and of the processes involved in benign change (Beck & Cowan 1996, Heron 1996, Hunter *et al* 1997, Lewin 1935, Peavey 1994, Rowan 1993). And we particularly need to revise our ideas about child rearing (Sazanna 1999, Solter 1989, Stellibrass 1989) and about the importance of forming mutualistic relationships (Josselson 1996, Shem & Surrey 1998). With respect to child rearing, I believe that it is particularly important to foster the development of autonomy, mutualistic relationships and a sense of place (Hill in press). These three competencies are foundational for the accumulation of personal capital, which is a pre-requisite for the building of social capital, itself a pre-requisite for both the conservation of natural capital and the design and maintenance of just, humane and sustainable societies (Roseland 1999).

One framework for understanding the psychological structures and processes involved in change.

Most psychotherapies are explicitly or implicitly based on a 'model' of each of us having a 'true', essential or core self that can be spontaneous, autonomous and experience mutualistic and caring relationships with one another, other species and with place. The model also assumes that we have a range of adaptive, distressed, patterned selves (or expressions of self) that are what we have had to become at various times to survive often repeated external insults. In this adaptive process we give up our consciousness and ability to live proactively -- from the inside out -- and we increasingly become expert at living primarily responsively and often fearfully -- from the outside in. In such a state we are vulnerable, to varying extents, to manipulation, colonisation and also violence; and we tend to do to others what has been, and is being, done to us. This constitutes our 'negative' cultural inheritance and it undermines our 'positive' cultural inheritance (named 'memes': by Dawkins 1989).

a MEME (or values-attracting meta-meme) reflects a world view, a valuing system, a level of psychological existence, a belief structure, an organising principle, a way of thinking or a mode of adjustment. It represents...a *core intelligence* that forms systems and directs human behaviour.... it *impacts upon all life choices* as a decision-making framework.... [it] can manifest itself in both *healthy and unhealthy* forms...[it provides a]...*structure* for thinking, not just a set of ideas, values or cause...[and] it

can *brighten and dim* as the *Life Conditions* (consisting of historic *Times*, geographic *Place*, existential *Problems*, and societal *Circumstances*) change.

(abstracted by R. Lessem in the Introduction to "Spiral Dynamics" by Beck & Cowan 1996, pp. 4-5)

Although I am presenting some of these ideas in a dualistic way, I am aware both of the dangers of dualistic thinking and that the processes that determine our behaviour are undoubtedly much more complex. Nevertheless, I believe that the model I am describing can still help us to think creatively and responsibly about the issues being discussed here.

In the book 'Alternative Futures for Prairie Agricultural Communities', I traced two contrasting ways of designing and managing agroecosystems -- conventionally and ecologically -- back to their possible roots in the contrasting two expressions of the self described above (Hill 1991, Fig. 4), and in Hill & MacRae (1995) to their collective manifestations in our institutional structures and processes. Similar analyses could be done for our political systems, economic systems, technologies, religions, and even our psychotherapies. Our multiple selves (core plus adaptive selves) have very different interests, priorities, values, and ways of relating to others, to place and to problems (Hill 1998, Table 4). Predictably the cost of maintaining these different selves, based on their associated resource requirements and personal, social and environmental impacts, may often differ by orders of magnitude. Because our core selves have no need for compensatory consumption or for impressing others they are likely to be both less expensive to maintain and more effective and efficient. As we are all made up of these multiple selves, it should not surprise us that much of our lives have a grey and contradictory quality, this partly being the result of our various selves constantly competing for centre stage. Because of this psychological complexity it is impossible to accurately identify the specific roots of any observed action. Yet the implications of this psychological understanding are clear. There would be enormous benefits -- personally, socially and environmentally -- from doing whatever it takes to live as much as we can from the core self end of our psychological spectrum. Indeed, this is a prerequisite for effectiveness in efforts to conserve and build personal, social and natural or ecological 'capital'.

Lest it be assumed that I am unaware of the social aspects of the problematique I have been discussing, let me say a word about that. I am certainly not implying that 'to change the world' all that is required is for each of us to reconnect more with our core selves. Such connected individuals would still be stuck with having to live within cultures that are often largely the product of adapted selves. These cultures are characterised by compensation, oppression, regulation, judgement, fragmentation, exclusion, hierarchy, and adversarial and uncaring relationships. Acting in contradiction to these 'norms' alone, or even as a member of a mutually supportive group, may still result in marginalisation, ridicule, persecution and, in some societies, even death. Various thresholds of 'enough active core selves' and 'enough mutualistic relationships' have to be reached to start to be effective in deconstructing and redesigning our various maladaptive institutional structures and processes.

The primary barrier to the development of autonomy, mutuality and a sense of place in children is that those who influence us, particularly our parents, and the environments in which we live, are adapted and designed, respectively, largely in ways that both

accommodate a loss of these three qualities and regard a comprehensive range of compensatory behaviours, and their supportive social structure and processes, as 'normal'. To put this another way, it is difficult to give what one has not received, does not have or is unfamiliar with. Our common inability to pay loving attention to children while they cry and recover from their hurts -- the crying being a necessary part of their healing process -- illustrates this point. The deprivation of such opportunities for recovery leaves residues of unhealed hurts in our subconscious, which is uncontrollably awakened by the sound of a child's cry. It is predictable that we would try to stop children crying, driven by our subconscious, which is protecting us from painful memories (an adaptive response), while we consciously reason that we have solved the hurt problem by stopping the crying (Solter 1984, 1989). This is just one example of numerous similar adaptive patterns of behaviour that, in the face of crises, get established as solutions that are beneficial in the short-term, but that have considerable, largely hidden, long-term personal, social and environmental costs. A parallel process to this at the physiological level has been labelled by some in the field of environmental medicine as the 'adaptation, addiction, allergy, degeneration syndrome' (e.g., Rea 1992-95). When our potentially beneficial and needed capacity to adapt in the short term becomes overloaded, it results over the longer term in maladaptations, which may eventually result in immune system breakdown, chronic fatigue, isolation, severe depression or other expressions of system overload and degeneration.

At one time or another, most of us feel some degree of emptiness, loneliness, inadequacy, idealism, or spiritual longing. We recognise the ... desire to escape pain, and ... seek answers in activities, substances, or relationships... The irony is, no external activities or substances satisfy the initial craving or the feeling of emptiness... This intense and at times painful craving is deep thirst for our own wholeness, our spiritual identity ... or core.... this fervent thirst for wholeness, as well as the discomfort with it, is the underlying impulse behind addictions. (Grof 1993, pp. 12-17).

I have mentioned the above examples of children crying and system breakdown to acknowledge how challenging it is for most of us to think clearly about what might actually be required to develop a framework for understanding and for supporting the development of autonomy, mutualism and sense a place in children. I believe that the framework recently proposed by Ruthellen Josselson (1996) for the development of 'relationship competencies' can also be used to deepen our understanding of the development of these three qualities. Based on an extensive review of the literature, Josselson recognises eight overlapping and mutually supportive processes, four that are sensory grounded (holding, attachment, passionate experience, and eye-to-eye validation), and four that are cognitive (identification and idealisation, mutuality and resonance, embeddedness, and tending and caring).

In working therapeutically with clients to resolve relationship problems and develop relational competence, Josselson finds that she can recognise deficiencies in one or more of these developmental 'stages'. She finds that by addressing them, rather than accommodating (adapting to) them, she is able to help her clients resolve their relationship problems and deepen their experiences of relationship. A compatible and equally impressive approach is that of Shem and Surrey (1998), who emphasise focusing on a separate 'we', rather than on 'you and I' and our deficiencies, when working to improve relationships. I would like to emphasise again here, however, that such change

work is likely to be most effective if it is part of an integrated approach that includes both personal and political components. If either type of change is conducted in isolation it will sooner or later be limited by barriers associated with the other.

Awareness of Josselson's eight expressions of relationship could help parents, teachers and others to take actions that would facilitate exposure to experiences supportive of their development (such as those advocated by Van Matre 1990). This might involve modelling and mentoring, proactive planning and the setting aside of time and resources to make such experience possible, co-experiencing (where the experience is new for all involved) or delegation (when additional expertise is needed). Community and special interest groups, clubs, educational institutions, and commercial service providers can play important supportive roles in this area, as can an empathetic media. For the needed developments to take place, the boundaries around what constitutes effectiveness (parenting, media, public policies, education, etc.) need to be extended, as do those around responsibilities within our health and social systems.

Applying this psychological understanding to working with farmers, and others, in the transition to organic farming.

Usually change agents are over-eager to quickly firm up plans and implement actions. Behind plans and designs, however, are ideas and visions, and behind these are loves, passions and feelings, all of these existing within a context of one's worldviews, values and beliefs. Thus, as change agents, rather than rushing to discuss plans and actions, it is more effective to start by opening up a space to talk about these 'background' influencing factors, where often greater agreement can be reached. Also, appreciation of the diverse positions within the group is a valuable pre-requisite to subsequent effective collaborative planning and action.

My experience of working in this way has been one of repeatedly being amazed as I listened to farmers talking about their deep love of the land, the wonders of nature, and of mateship and community.

Thus, when working as a facilitator with farmers, and with other groups interested in improving situations, I start by opening up a space for participants to share their passions, interests, fears and hopes. Gradually an agreed upon focus for that particular meeting emerges - perhaps better soil or pest management, bush regeneration or windbreak and wildlife corridor design - and my first question (as a go-round) is 'what have you already done towards making progress in this area?' My experience is that most change agents are so eager to inflict their ideas on others that they neglect to check what the present levels of understanding and competence are, and what has already been done. More important, usually they fail to acknowledge and celebrate the latter.

By sharing these *first steps*, participants have opportunities to connect with others with similar interests, and a context is created in which they automatically start to think what their next steps might be; and, in fact, this is my next question.

Usually, again, connections are made across the group, particularly offers of and requests for help. Such very basic community building processes considerably increase

the chances that any plans we come up with will actually be implemented. One can then use a combination of Lewin's (1935) *force field analysis* and Fran Peavey's (1994) *strategic questioning* to see what the resources and supports needed, and barriers, are to taking these next steps; and to see how any needs and barriers might be addressed - as Peavey says, 'what will it take for you to actually do this?'

Because we live in a culture that over-values *Olympic* scale initiatives, which are impossible for most of us to be involved in, we should make a special effort to emphasise the importance of *small, meaningful projects that individuals or small groups can guarantee to carry through to completion*. Indeed, I put forward the fairly revolutionary idea that by celebrating these publicly (for example, through the local media and social gatherings) they are likely to be copied by others and, paradoxically, be much more likely to bring about positive sustainable change in society than the mega-projects that currently attract most attention and resources. These latter rarely deliver on their promises, often have unexpected harmful side-effects, they generally undermine community ownership and participation, invariably give a poor return on investment, and are often unsustainable. Classic examples are the building of large dams, versus small dams together with integrated, community-based water management programs; and the widespread spraying of biocides or release of biological controls versus the creative local redesign of agroecosystems to make them less favourable for the offending pests and more favourable for the crops and their natural controls (Hill 1990, Hill *et al* 1999).

The next step in the facilitation process is to help clarify the actions that will be taken, identify who will support whom (to contradict another dominant message in our society that 'you have to do it alone'), and re-frame these actions as 'commitments' (contracts with oneself and the group) with specified outcomes and time frames. When we get together again, in a month for example, we check what has been done, and acknowledge and celebrate it, and identify what were the barriers for whatever was not done and see how these can be addressed. We then go through the cycle again. Usually there is a high level of participation, commitment and follow-through when employing this approach. It is both enjoyable and productive -- and it has important side-benefits such as community building and meaning making for the individuals involved.

### **Outcomes**

As a result of doing this sort of work over the past twenty years I have found that the initiatives that are taken tend to evolve from strategies that focus on *efficiency* (for example, more accurate and controlled uses of inputs and minimisation of waste) to *substitution* (for example, from more to less disruptive interventions, such as from biocides to more specific biological controls and other more benign alternatives) to *redesign* -- fundamental changes in the design and management of the operation (Hill & MacRae 1995, Hill *et al* 1999). Examples include the design of complex crop rotations and the use of inter-crops and planned field borders, rotational grazing, composting, solar and renewable resource based energy systems and the more radical design of information-rich, multi-storey polyculture systems (Mollison & Slay 1991). This progression generally involves a shift in the nature of one's dependence -- from relying primarily on universal, purchased, imported, technology-based interventions to more specific locally available knowledge and skill-based ones. This usually eventually also involves fundamental shifts in world-views, senses of meaning, and associated lifestyles (Hill 1991). My experience is that although efficiency and substitution initiatives can make significant contributions to sustainability over the short term, much greater

longer-term improvements can only be achieved by redesign strategies; and, furthermore, that steps need to be taken at the outset to ensure that efficiency and substitution strategies can serve as stepping stones and not barriers to redesign ones. The institutional implication required for the implementation of such changes have been discussed more extensively in previous publications (MacRae *et al.* 1989a, 1989b, 1990, 1993; Hill & MacRae 1995).

Using the approach advocated here with Quebec farmers interested in organics and in adopting more sustainable systems of farm design and management led to much higher rates of change than had been achieved elsewhere using the more conventional top down, preaching or shaming approaches (Hill & MacRae 1992).

People often ask me if I am optimistic or pessimistic about the future. I am definitely optimistic, partly because this is my nature and because we have only just begun to take the sorts of initiatives that I have described above. As we do this I am confident that significant improvements will follow. Let us not postpone this collective project a day longer.

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