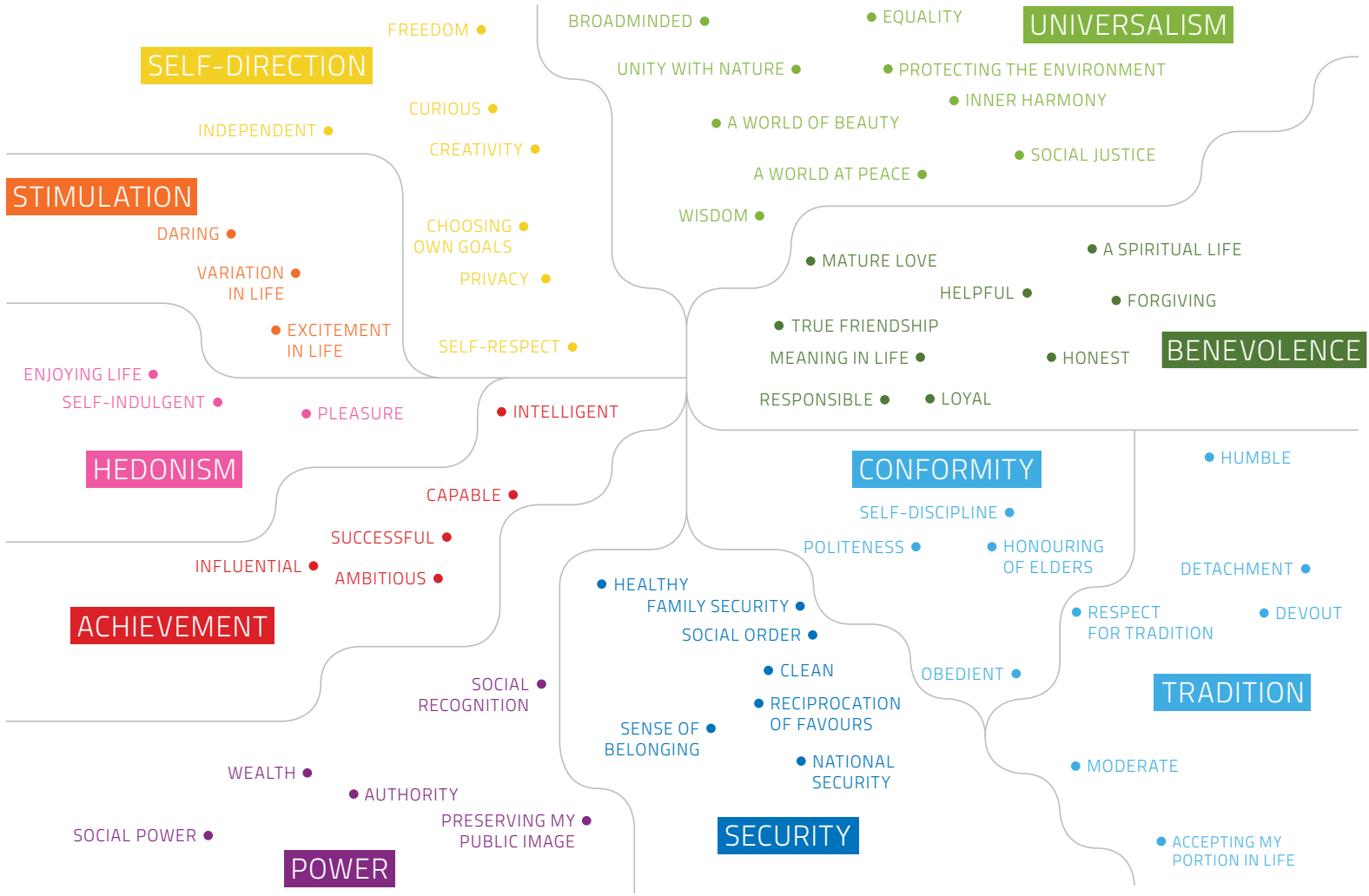
The Role of Values in Transformational Change



Notes from a roundtable discussion with

Tom Crompton, founder of the Common Cause Foundation

25 June 2015, Edinburgh

by Osbert Lancaster and Anne Marte Bergseng

We wanted to start a stimulating conversation

We have worked for some time with the "Common Cause" approach to values, a concept developed under the lead of Tom Crompton. Through this work we have come to believe that understanding and working with values is essential to help bring about transformational change towards a more just, democratic and sustainable world. As Tom was visiting Edinburgh to speak at a conference, we took advantage of his presence and created a space to start a conversation about the role of values in transformational change. We invited people with an interest in transformational change to join us. The event didn't have any specific intended outcome, beyond starting what we hoped would be a stimulating conversation, and seeing what, if anything, emerged.

Interest in the event was greater than expected with around 30 participants. As a result we dropped our original plan for a literal round-a-table-discussion, and designed a more structured approach which created a powerful mix of strategic input, stimulating discussion and deep personal reflection.

The notes below outline the main stages and attempt to share some of the key points. As conversation rather than any specific output was the main aim we were too busy facilitating and participating to make notes for a full report!

Tom briefly outlined how values work and suggested their relevance to transformation

A more just, democratic and sustainable world will surely be characterised by a society where intrinsic values of curiosity, creativity, care and concern for others and the rest of the natural world will be more prevalent and held to be more important than extrinsic values concerned with image, status and wealth (see appendix A below).

However, some of the most influential institutions in society, including government, the media and the advertising industry, promote and celebrate extrinsic values – and hence, because of the antagonistic relationship between these two groups of values, suppress intrinsic values. Unfortunately many campaigns for social justice, sustainability etc, despite the best of intentions, often inadvertently cue extrinsic values.

A transformation to a just, democratic and sustainable world is unlikely without a profound shift in values celebrated, endorsed and exemplified across society. The question then is – how *do* we re-balance our values?

We discussed the challenge presented by Tom

The room buzzed as first in pairs and then in groups of 5 or 6, people discussed the issues raised by Tom's presentation with each other. Have I understood it right? Do I recognise his analysis? Does it make sense? How does it relate to my experience and my work? Do we share similar perspectives? Are themes emerging?

With our minds fired up we moved into a 'fish bowl dialogue': a central circle of nine chairs, one for Tom, one for Osbert (facilitating), one for someone from each of the small groups – and one left empty.

In this 'fishbowl' we discussed the issues identified in the groups and a deep conversation developed – mainly between the participants as they related the issues Tom highlighted to their experience and the practical implications of this for their work. The rest of the participants listened to the conversation and whenever anyone wished to join in they took a seat in the empty chair – and someone who felt they had nothing more to contribute moved away. Topics included:

- Cultural narratives run deep – e.g. make money to then be able to 'save the world' without a deeper analysis of the environmental/social impact of production
- There is a conflict between personal and institutional values.
- How can we make values visible to show that most people hold the same values as you do?
- How can we make institutions question and debate their values?
- We need to turn I-values into we-values and remove the fear of doing what we genuinely believe to be the 'right' thing to do

Tom outlined the results of some recent research by him and his colleagues (to be published soon). It shows that people in the UK do hold intrinsic values to be important, and that this is not as a result of a 'social desirability' bias in responding to the survey. It was also found that most people believe that a typical compatriot holds intrinsic values to be less important than they do, and extrinsic values to be more important than they do.

Furthermore, most people believe that a range of different social institutions encourage extrinsic values more than they value these themselves. So it seems that most people do not believe that social institutions offer particular encouragement to express those values associated with either social or environmental concern, or various forms of civic engagement. This underscores the importance of challenging and changing institutions' values. It also raises the questions: why do we believe that other people hold different, more extrinsic, values to ourselves? What might change this situation, so that we recognise people are generally more caring and concerned for others that we think?

We reflected on the role of values in transformational change

At the close of the event participants were asked to reflect on and complete the sentences *The Role of Values in Transformational Change is…* and *Therefore I would like to…* Their responses are summarised below (and listed in full in appendix B):

The Role of Values in Transformational Change is…

- Fundamental and complex
- Important to understand
- Relevant to meaning and narratives
- As a framework for reflection
- As a framework for engagement

Therefore I would like to…

- Understand more about values and how they work
- Open up meaningful conversations
- Explore and use narratives
- Work with organisational values
- Bring values into what I do

What next?

While we had no specific purpose in mind, beyond stimulating dialogue, we are happy to facilitate further activities to pursue some of the ideas that have emerged. Those identified at the event include:

- enabling participants to make contact with one another to open up meaningful conversations
- provide a mechanism to review and give feedback on the draft report of Tom's recent research

Please contact us, details below, if you would like to explore these or other ideas further. We would also welcome other opportunities to work collectively or one to one with participants and others on the role of values in transformative change.

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Further information

For more information about Common Cause, see valuesandframes.org. Tom Crompton can be contacted at tcrompton@commoncausefoundation.org

Wholehearted is the Scottish hub of the international Common Cause network. Drawing a wide research base and the practical experience of ourselves and others, we offer talks, training workshops and programmes to help people develop their capacity to lead and support change.

Sniffer is a registered charity delivering knowledge-based solutions to resilience and sustainability issues. We create and use breakthrough ideas and collaborative approaches across sectors, to make Scotland a more resilient place to live, work and play.

Osbert Lancaster is a facilitator and consultant working with people who recognise that new approaches, rooted in a concern for others and the rest of nature, are essential for our communities, organisations and society to flourish.

The event was also supported by the University of Edinburgh.

Appendix A: How values work[1]

Values are aspects of people's identities that reflect what they deem to be desirable , important and worthy of striving for in their lives. There are two types of value that are particular relevant to transformational change: intrinsic and extrinsic values.

Intrinsic values include 'curiosity', 'creativity', 'broadmindedness', 'a world of beauty', 'a world at peace', 'equality', 'protecting the environment', 'social justice', 'helpfulness', 'forgiveness', 'honesty', 'responsibility', 'self-acceptance', 'affiliation to friends and family', and 'community feeling'.

Extrinsic values include 'achievement' (defined as personal success through demonstrating competence according to social standards), 'power' (social status and prestige, control or dominance over people and resources), 'authority' (the right to lead or command), 'social recognition' (respect, approval by others).

These values are related to one another. This is true in two ways:

- First, when one of these values is temporarily engaged (that is, when a person's attention is drawn to one of these values – perhaps very subtly) other values in the same group are also likely to become temporarily more important to that person.
- Second, if a person holds one of these values to be particularly important in a more permanent or 'dispositional' way, then she is also likely to hold other values in the same group to be important.

Many studies have shown that people who hold intrinsic values to be more important display deeper concern about environmental and social issues, and stronger motivation to engage in various forms of civic action.

Values behave like a see-saw: if benevolence or universalism for example is 'up', achievement and power will be down, and vice versa.

[1] Adapted from Common Cause Communication: A Toolkit for Charities

Appendix B: Participants' responses

The Role of Values in Transformational Change is…

Fundamental and complex

- Pretty fundamental to the way people understand the world, but not *simply* connected to their actions, especially in organisations with conflicting cultures.
- Fundamental to [transformational change]
- Fundamental
- Essential.
- Multi faced & anti non-definitive complex but fundamental
- Under-recognised.
- A source of hope that transformational change could be possible.
- To make a better future and world.
- Complicated.
- Constrained by institutions, power elites, technology, modes of provision.

Important to understand

- To give people a 'banner' to hang from their actions/arguments?
- To ground participants and provide a common understanding of motivations we can appeal to in advocating any review of personal or organisational objectives.
- Critical. Everyone holds a set of values, a set of priorities that dictates their actions and decisions. To change someone's values we must understand what motivates this someone to hold these values.
- To become aware of mindfulness/ignorance/prejudice, bias, [?]
- Understanding that there is the will to change in everybody and that bringing these values to the fore that will ensure it happens.

Relevant to meaning and narratives

- To help us explore the required shift in cultural, global, personal narratives we live by (implying the actions we then chose to take).
- The way they inform cultural narratives and societal world-views, and how they could contribute to alternatives.
- The field on which the meanings, processes and the shape of transformational change is played out
- What battery are you running on

As a framework for reflection

- Self enquiry, re-assessment of life goals & directions, reimagining of purpose
- As a production, a leveller and an opportunity to challenge people to reflect/self enquiry
- The springboard to action to enable honest self reflection about what is important at the individual and collective level
- To connect with your inner self to guide your decision making and interaction with others

As a framework for engagement

- To connect with each other by opening up meaningful conversations.
- A way of bringing people together around issues/concerns/aspirations that they share, and to find positive and universally beneficial ways forward.
- Key to enabling some set of positive behaviour change – values inform our attitudes & behaviours. Its about changing hearts & minds.
- To make people aware of significant motivations/energies behind what they are doing at the moment & what next
- Can be effective for moving from an individualistic to collective view.
- Being able to identify clearly what these are either at the individual level or organisational level – sometimes these are nor clearly communicated or they are not aligned
- The change I want is from "I" to "We" values recognising that "we" is made up of lots of "I"s, many quite different.

Therefore I would like to…

Understand more about values and how they work

- Understand values better (my own and those of people around me).
- Understand where values *come from*; how/why they have shifted over the last 50 years in the UK.
- Better understand the reflections of values and how to engage awareness that is motivational.
- Learn more about the social science and practical demonstrations of attempts to use values in transformational changes particularly thinking about pluralism.
- Are values apparent in every action or do we do something in a value vacuum?
- Understand more about how values shape a transformed life/world; and what actions practice follow on
- Explore more how to influence this change in a non-judgemental way, open and honest.
- Talk to Tom about the work he mentioned re civic engagement.

Open up meaningful conversations

- Have the courage to have those [meaningful] conversations!
- Open up discussions that make people think about what's important to them.
- Encourage disruption/disruptive thinking, ask people more searching questions around 'why?' they think or do things
- Develop spaces and processes that enable folk to foreground their "we" values and find "I" merit in promoting these.

Explore and use narratives

- Explore how best to be a part of creating new narratives and enable us to close the value-action gap.
- Think more about how to incorporate story-telling into my work.
- See new stories told across the societal spectrum that create deep and meaningful narratives for positive change. And that in conjunction with these new stories, the old/dominant narratives are challenged and exposed for the hollow promise they are
- Develop a succinct narrative which helps orient people to values and frames.

Work with organisational values

- Investigate how an organisation changes values.
- Look at values in terms of my organisation work – organisational values versus individuals values
- Approach organisation and their leaders to work through identifying these and how they are being empowered by those who engage with the organisations

Bring values into what I do

- Be more open & honest about the values that are motivating me to do what I'm doing
- Continue to be more mindful of how I react to situations & emphasise with others – e.g. doing mapping exercise where she applied changes
- Understand more often what people think they value
- Raise awareness of conflicting value sets promoted by narratives, institutions, organisations etc, which cause cognitive dissonance in individuals.
- Communicate environmental messages and universal values in terms of everyone else's values whether those values are extrinsic or intrinsic. I would like to be able to express extrinsic values in terms of intrinsic values and vice versa.
- Help with this transformation by providing unbiased evidence to the decision makers and the public.

- To practice mindfulness, and to engage compassionately with the finance profession to explore further the values approach to help them overcome the mis-perception of sustainability, and to show that values will help to create a flourishing and prosperous society
- I – We values how we replace fear. We should need to be more honest about the values that underpin our own actions
- Think about how to best activate pro-social / pro-environmental values in my students (reflect on practice).
- Ensure that the self consideration of [the role of values in transformation] become core process to all postgraduate programs and courses I write especially explaining espoused values in action