

Inner dimensions of transformative climate action

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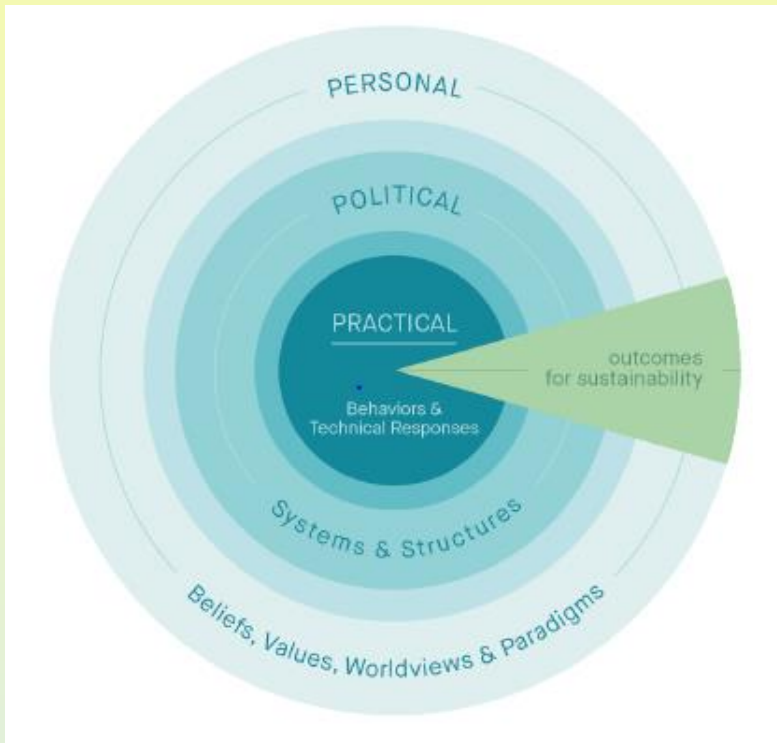
What is “transformation” in the context of climate action?

- Human-induced climate change is as much a cultural and social phenomenon as an environmental one, as both the causes and the solutions lie with humans, both individually and collectively.
- However, dominant approaches to date have largely failed to account for the influential role played by inner dimensions such as worldviews, values and beliefs in shaping how we understand and respond to the challenge of climate change.
- *“Paradigms are the sources of systems... from shared social agreements about the nature of reality come systems goals, information.... feedbacks, stocks, flows and everything else about systems” (Meadows, 1999)*

Transformation as integration

- “A regime shift cannot occur without changing worldviews, institutions, *and* technologies together, as an integrated system” (Beddoe et al., 2009)
- The Three Spheres model as a lens to understand and integrate approaches to climate transformations (O’Brien & Sygna, 2013; O’Brien & Leichenko, 2019).
- This framework sees transformation as a process that takes place across three embedded and interacting spheres.

The Three Spheres of Transformation



Source: O'Brien & Sygna, 2013

Practical sphere: behavior change, technical solutions and institutional reform to address climate change.

Political sphere: governance systems, cultural & social norms and political / institutional structures that create the conditions for practical sphere actions.

Personal sphere: individual and shared beliefs, values, paradigms and worldviews that:

- shape the ways that the systems and structures are understood and designed
- influence what types of practical solutions are considered possible.

Example of integrated climate change action

- Food waste contributes 8-10% of global GHG emissions
- **'Practical'** sphere actions include households reducing the amount of food waste they generate and also composting food waste.

However: these will not be successful or enduring unless accompanied by:

- **'Political'** sphere actions such as food waste collection systems, re-use of stock nearing end of life (e.g. "Food Cloud") and changing norms around 'use before' / 'best before' dates
- **'Personal'** sphere actions to change beliefs about leftover food and giving households an incentive to change habits (e.g. financial savings)

Focus on 'personal' sphere / inner dimensions of climate transformations

- All actors motivated and influenced by their inner mental processes, as well as their personal desires, motivations and emotions (Pender, 2023)
- “For individuals, there is no behaviour without the interior motivation that drives it; for collectives, there is no system without the interior culture that supports it... The *why* resides in our interiors.” (Brown, 2005, p.3).
- Focus here on 'worldviews' and how they shape our understanding of climate action
- *“If a factory is torn down but the rationality which produced it is left standing, then that rationality will simply produce another factory. If a revolution destroys a government, but the systematic patterns of thought that produced that government are left intact, then those patterns will repeat themselves...”* (Pirsig, 1974).

What are worldviews?

- Worldviews as the fundamental ‘lenses’ through which we see and filter reality.
- Developmental psychology perspective: there is a distinct structure and sequence to the way we as humans come to understand and make meaning of the world around us and our place in it .
- As a result, the worldview we operate from has the potential to evolve and deepen through our life from birth to adulthood.

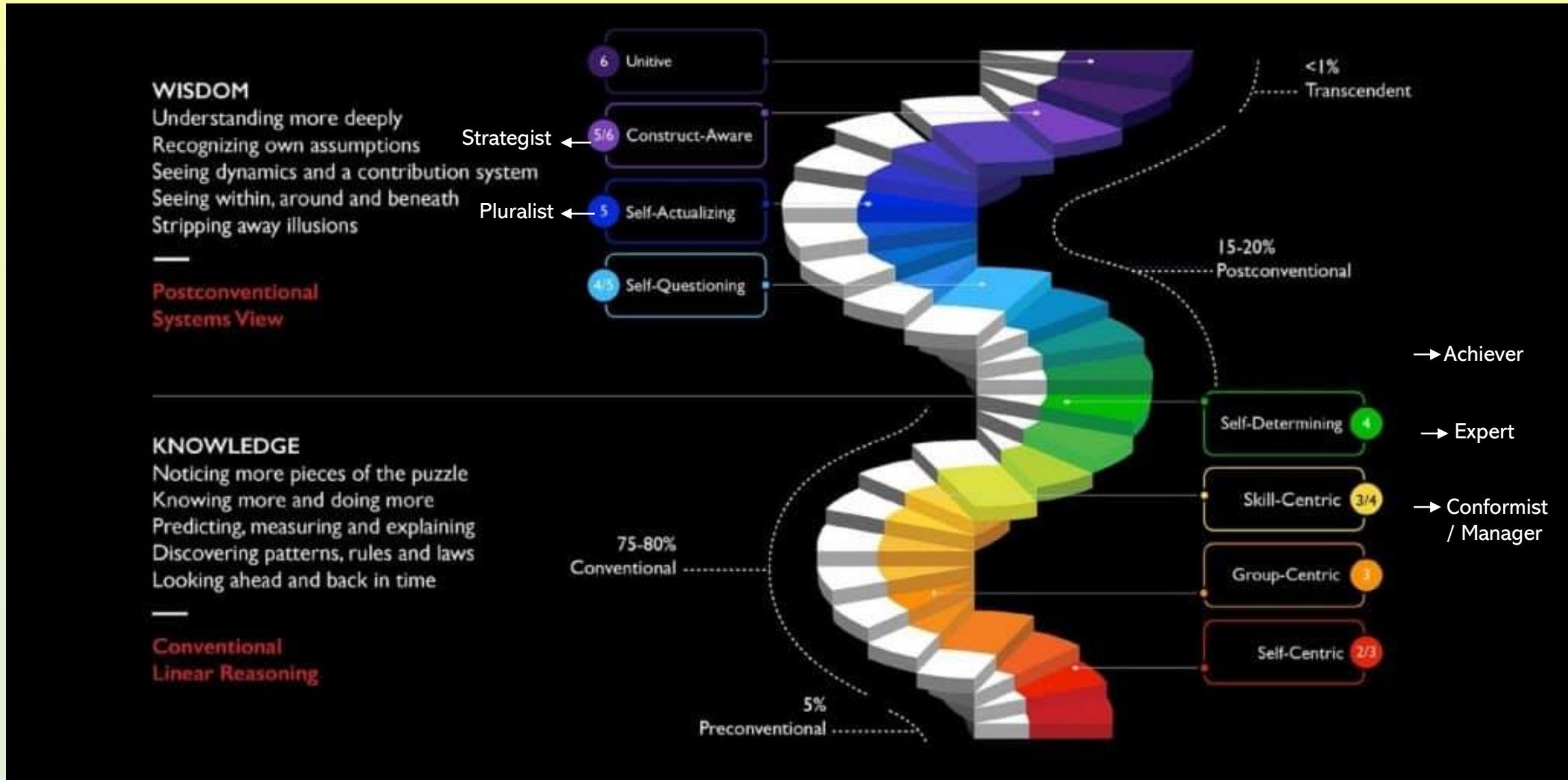
“Our life is an apprenticeship to the truth that around every circle another can be drawn; that there is no end in nature, but every end is a beginning, and under every deep a lower deep opens.” - Ralph Waldo Emerson

- Each worldview forms a ‘building block’ of our capacity to understand and engage with the world (like rungs on a ladder)
- Each contributes a ‘piece of the puzzle’ – partial but also essential
- Later worldviews are not necessarily “better” than earlier ones: e.g., children may lack the capacity to understand complex systems but they do have the capacity to engage with and embody systems in a way that many adults cannot :

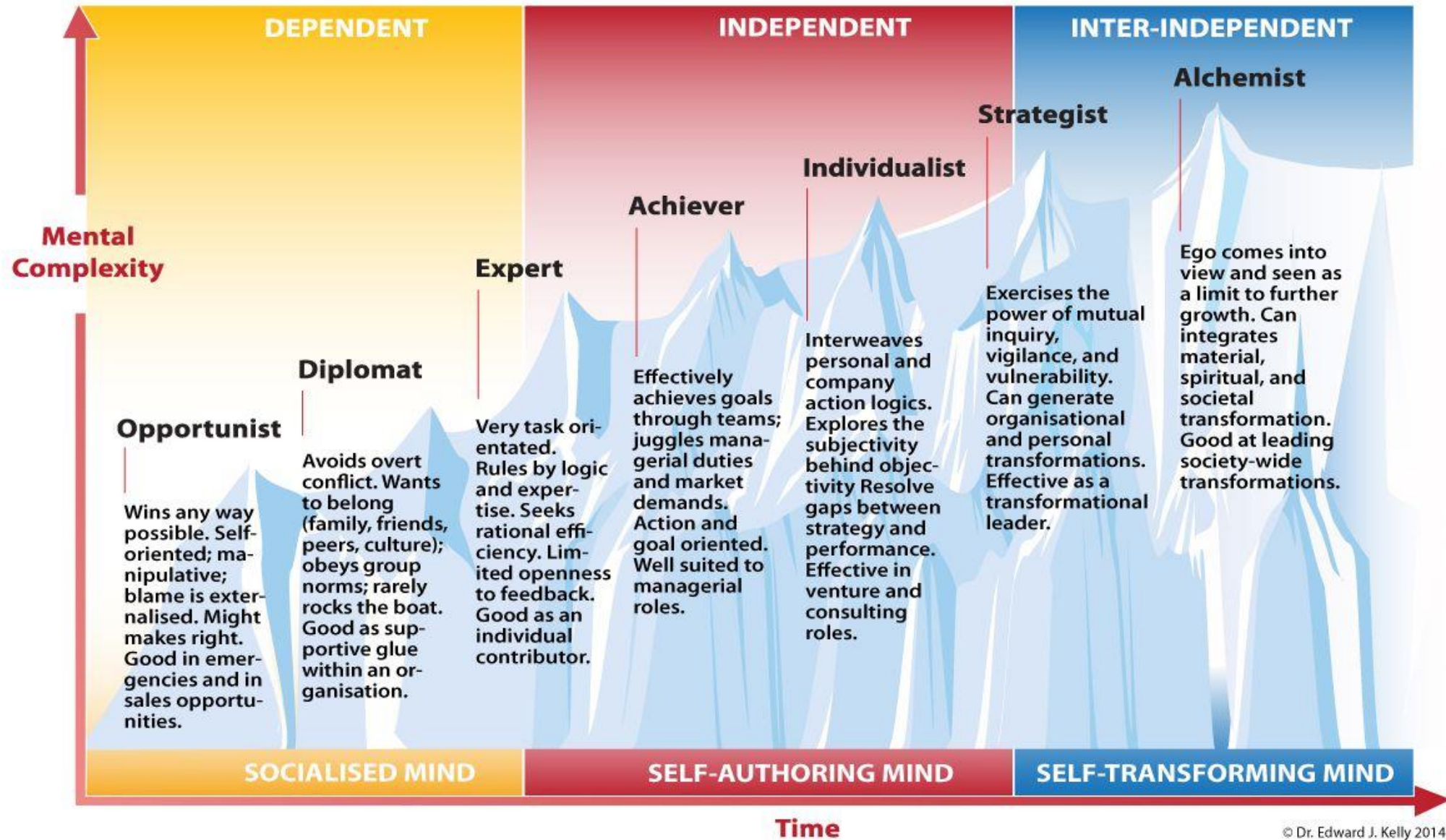
“The children were playing about, but they never looked at that lovely spring day. They had no need, for they were spring. Their laughter and their play were part of the tree, the leaf and the flower.” (Krishnamurti, 1970)

- Key question to be asked of any worldview: *Is it a good fit for the task at hand?* (Laloux, 2014, p.17)

Sequential model of worldview development



Adult Development: The Three Major Transformations



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Sequence of five most common worldviews and their understanding of climate change

Manager / Conformist

- Prioritises achieving emissions reductions through conservative, top-down institutional reform driven by regulation and scientific expertise
- Good for 'keeping the show on the road' but not for radical change in structures, systems or values - most government institutions and agencies have a Conformist culture
- Short time horizon

Expert

- focus on rules, expertise, and knowledge - essential in generating the scientific and technical knowledge and insight on climate change
- can lead to over-emphasis of 'practical' sphere actions (e.g., tech-fixes) and 'information deficit' approaches

Achiever

- Values freedom, individual rights and self-interest: thus, prefers market-led solutions: e.g., emission trading schemes, carbon taxation and technological innovation.
- Still operates within the context of reforming current institutions and economic systems rather than challenging or radically transforming them
- “might pay lip service to the values; but when the rubber hits the road and leaders have to choose between profits and values, they will predictably go for the former.” (Laloux, 2014, p.374)
- Medium time horizon

Pluralist

- Emergence of capacity to comprehend the interconnected ecosystemic nature of the world.
- Motivated by value and care for both people and planet and open to more radical alternatives for climate change solutions.
- However, as with prior worldviews: tend to assume that others share their values and are motivated by the same justifications as themselves.

Strategist

- Emergence of understanding that our own perspective is not the only one and that all visions and values must be respected and included if effective and enduring change is to be achieved
- Understands that transformation requires adaptation of internal 'self' as well as systems and structures 'out there'.
- Has capacities for systemic and interdisciplinary thinking and acting, as well as holding an intergenerational aspect - long time horizon
- Seeks to prioritise action for transformation across multiple scales, from local to global and from personal to systemic.

“The more I can see, the wiser, more timely, more systematic and informed my actions are likely to be because more relevant information, connections and dynamic relationships become more visible.”

(Cook-Greuter, 2004, p.277)

Value of understanding worldviews for transformative climate action

- Up to Pluralist worldview: assumption that everyone sees the world as we do
- Thus: many of the strategies and responses developed to address climate change are often based on the assumptions and values of our own dominant worldview only
- But: “if we hold in our minds a mental model that wrongly captures what causes a problem, our response to the problem will be equally inappropriate.” (Bostrom & Lashof, 2007, p.31)
- Capacity for systems thinking and complexity, as well as integrated long-term responses only starts to emerge from Pluralist worldview onwards
- By recognising and harnessing the potential of each worldview, we can create responses that everyone can engage with and find meaning in.

Understanding and integrating multiple worldviews

- Being able to recognise, understand and integrate multiple worldviews / perspectives is a key capacity for enabling truly transformative action
- This requires more than just 'scientific' knowledge
- Value of the humanities and the arts (social sciences, literature, music, cinema, painting, etc.) in broadening and deepening our knowledge

They can:

- enable us to see things through a different 'lens' than our own habitual one
- enable us to see additional dimensions of a system and thus generate richer perspectives
- present a different way of 'knowing' that complements that from the sciences, business, etc. (e.g., Nora Bateson's 'warm data' concept)

Example:

- Extract of “I consider a tree” by the philosopher Martin Buber (from his 1923 book, *I And Thou*)

Final quote:

“The actions we pursue are largely defined by the mindset we cultivate in advance of the doing. Faced with an urgent task, it may feel counterintuitive to first look inside ourselves, but it is essential”

- Christiana Figueres and Tom Rivett-Carnac (2020)

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