

# TRANSFORMING A SOCIAL MOVEMENT: LEARNING FROM ORGANISATIONAL TRANSFORMATION

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This paper presents a perspective on a methodology used to cause deliberate, large scale organizational transformation at companies such as Lucent Technologies, Owens-Corning, Pacific Bell, General Electric, DuPont and others. For Georgists, this may hold two important possibilities: 1) using the methodology to transform our movement and become more effective, and 2) using the methodology to transform society or social institutions to embrace our philosophy for creating a world of prosperity, peace, freedom, and community for all.

Figure 1 provides an image of the structure within which this kind of transformation can take place. The structure is built on relationships, focuses on a strategic outcome (strategic intent), and is shaped by the architecture, values and culture of the organization. Transformation comes through breakthrough projects that build this structure and deliver the strategic intent. Breakthrough projects are designed to make significant movement toward the strategic intent in ways that are not currently possible within the current organizational context. (Context, in this view, consists of the entirety of the culture, structure, rules, and relationships existing in an organization). The following elaborates how the process works.

**Relationships** form the foundation for all results. In the face of inauthentic relationships, accomplishing anything requires excess effort, drains energy, requires repetition, and restricts many behaviors. Inauthentic relationships turn options and possibilities into positions for winning and losing. Groups with authentic, trusting relationships can explore and invent together, generate energy and vitality, and discuss options with speed and openness that lead to alignment, commitment, and action. Authentic relationship is not "making nice" or "avoiding conflict."

Authentic relationship arises from sharing and acknowledgement, from regular expressions of commitments and values, and from being honest, but with compassion. Within authentic relationships one finds trust, possibilities, opportunities, satisfaction, action, self-expression, results and accomplishment.

## **Questions for where we stand:**

What are the characteristics of the relationships we Georgists currently share?  
What degree of trust, mutual respect and freedom to express ourselves do we share? Do we actively build and nurture authentic relationships among ourselves?  
What kinds of relationships do we create with those we would like to enroll in our vision of the world (both our natural allies and those who might resist us)? What would be possible from powerful relationships between us and with the rest of the world?

**Strategic Intent** expresses a bold, focused statement of the future that is compelling to all the stakeholders of an organization. In the transformation process it is time-bound and measurable. It is also outside what is currently considered possible. This bears repeating: Strategic intent lies outside what is currently considered possible. It is living

with the unknown that creates the space for transformation to occur.

However, strategic intent is not simply unfettered ambition. The concept also embraces a management process that includes: focusing attention on the target; motivating by communicating the value of the target; leaving room for individual and team contributions; sustaining enthusiasm by providing new operational definitions as circumstances change; and using intent to guide resource allocations.

Strategic intent is not generated by an individual. It is a creation or declaration that emerges from deliberate conversations where participants share their values, commitments, and dreams of possibilities. From the conversation, all participants freely commit to it. Generating strategic intent requires a base of authentic relatedness as described above. Building strategic intent is a place to build relationship, too, but a basic level of trust must exist to have any conversation of intent.

#### **Questions for where we stand:**

We have a glorious vision: a world with economic justice such that peace, prosperity, freedom and community are possibilities for everyone. Would our actions shift if we committed to a bold strategic intent in the service of that vision? (Say, for example, "We intend that by the year 2010 all public functions on a continent will be completely financed by ground rents, user and natural resource fees, and privilege fees.") What would be available to us in pursuing such a bold statement of strategic intent? What would we have to give up to deliver such on such an intent? What would we have to create in pursuit of such an intent?

**Culture and values** give shape to and animate individuals and organizations. Often organizations adopt values that conflict with individual values. For example, many organizations hold that "Everyone must obey the leader and follow the rules." This kind of value turns off the contribution most people would like to make. A bold strategic intent (typically) calls for an empowered, turned on set of participants. Usually this means deliberately shaping organizational culture to create a context where contribution is welcome and acknowledged, innovation is treasured, and cooperation and leadership are natural and widespread.

Often the path to transforming culture starts with recognizing "what is" (i.e., what really happens and how people really behave, not our interpretations of motives, causes or intentions). It then asks, what does each participant hold important - as values and commitments - in the world? By sharing both those, participants in the transformation see that the values they embrace in the organization often do not match the values they embrace in the rest of their lives. Also, their actions may not match the values and commitments they hold important.

Uncovering "what is" presents an opportunity to see what are shared values and commitments and what are not shared. Where organizational values or elements of the culture are inconsistent with personal values, the participants may choose to remove cultural elements and insert others to create greater consistency in purpose. This process also adds to relatedness and clarifies the source of the strategic intent.

#### **Questions for where we stand:**

Do Georgists agree that our values include some variation of a world where all may enjoy opportunity, prosperity, freedom, spirit, peace and community? Does our movement value and create opportunities for participation and contribution? How do we feel about personal prosperity? What kinds of freedom do we give ourselves or others within the movement? Do we have peace in our movement? Are we filled with the spirit of possibility or dominated by cynicism and resignation?

Where do we have community? What would be possible if we lived our lives from a place of prosperity, peace, freedom and opportunity?

**Architecture** includes the rules (written and unwritten), organizational structures, reward systems, project designs and other infrastructure of organization. Architecture may support or inhibit the strategic intent and cultural values. Architecture, by its nature, creates boundaries and constrains some behavior and possibilities while enabling others. Obviously, a rigid hierarchy with rewards that support obedience constrains innovation or risk taking while producing control and predictable behavior. Too little structure leaves participants disconnected from the strategic intent, unrelated, and less effective than they would be within a clearer structure, but allows great personal latitude.

Architecture evolves as transformation occurs. It is difficult to predict what kind of architecture will be appropriate as relatedness improves, culture shifts, and intentions come into focus. Some parts of the transformation will run up against existing architecture like a car against a wall; the wall must be moved/removed or the transformation will crash. In other instances, the transformation will beg for additional structure, a place to stand for the next level of achievement, and that structure must be added to move forward. Transformation will repeatedly raise the questions: "What needs removing?" and "What is missing, that if added would move us forward?"

**Questions for where we stand:**

Is the Georgist movement moving (or if you prefer, moving as quickly as we like)? Do we know enough about where we are going to know what needs to be added or removed from our architecture? Does our organization provide a structure for building relatedness and strategic intent? Do our "rules of engagement" - such as the structure of our conversations (a topic below) - lead us to action?

**Breakthrough Projects** call for outcomes beyond what organizations or individuals known how to accomplish. By striving for the currently unobtainable, participants must reinvent themselves and their understanding of the world. They must invent new solutions, go places they have never been, and ask of themselves and others things they think are not reasonable. It is in this shift that transformation takes root and comes alive.

**Questions on where we stand:**

What breakthrough projects would advance our movement from within? What breakthrough projects would enroll others in our vision? What power do we lose in creating breakthrough projects without a strategic intent? Could we develop a strategic intent through exploring breakthrough projects?

**Conclusion**

This paper has given a bare outline of a process for transformation. The transformation is driven by conversation. We come to know our world and ourselves through conversation. All agreement arises in conversation (as does conflict, too). For example, the idea of ownership of land is an agreement developed in conversation.

Our use of language shapes not only our thoughts and agreements, but it shapes our actions. If we have a conversation around "someone should do [something]," that is not a conversation for action. It is a conversation of expression - perhaps frustration, hope, dreams, or something related to action - but it has nothing to do with generating action. Conversations for action have three elements - requests, offers, and promises. An example might sound like "I request that you provide me funding [of some amount] by [some time]." The response could be acceptance ("I promise I will provide the funding . . ."), decline ("I do not promise

...”), or counter-offer (“No, But I can offer half your funding request.”) Working in this realm leaves participants in motion, committed to outcomes by a certain time.

As the Georgist movement looks to the next millennium, we have a choice. We can continue the regression line of our past hundred years. Some have argued, with good evidence, that eventually the time will come when the Georgist paradigm will prevail. Many groups - from environmentalists to neoclassical urban planners - have embraced elements of our philosophy and are moving it forward. Within our ranks, champions such as Fred Harrison, Nic Tideman, Steven Cord, Godfrey Dunkley, Alanna Hartzok, Lindy Davies and others have carried on, almost in isolation, keeping our dreams alive. We may prevail in time.

However, we may not prevail, or “in time” may be at some future millennium. If we can harness this transformation process for our movement, we will alter the world as a deliberate act, at an accelerated pace, and probably with greater joy than we now share. In this process, we might achieve what we currently consider impossible . . . in our lifetime. In keeping with the spirit of a conversation for action, I make an offer and a request. To move this forward, I offer to find and make available the resources to conduct a formal transformation process, as outlined above, for any of our organizations or for the whole movement. I request that the International Union, at this year’s business meeting, commit to engaging in this transformation process to begin by the next conference. How do you respond?

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**Figure: The Structure of Transformation**

