

Catalyzing Sustainability

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For those of us who are working hard toward sustainability it's easy to become impatient and disheartened. We don't understand the reluctance of others to recognize that people around the world have been damaging the earth and all things living to a degree that it is now heartbreakingly apparent to us. What, we wonder, will it take to get people to pay attention to the havoc we have wrecked and learn to work with nature toward restoration of the life support systems we all need?

Environmental leaders have been working diligently for many years to make the destruction apparent to us. In the 1990's the frameworks of The Natural Step¹ and Natural Capitalism² were developed to help overcome the inertia that may be rooted in our resistance to giving up the lifestyles we enjoy in the US. Many have read about these frameworks and attended workshops, learned the System Conditions of the Natural Step (which show the reasons we **must** change the way we live) and the four Natural Capitalism principles (which mark a path to creating change and increasing prosperity).

There is ample evidence that there is need for change, and now some guidance as to where and how to begin. Yet to those of us who know the time is now, needed changes in lifestyles, communities, organizations, government, manufacturing processes, and ways of doing business, seem very slow in coming.

We have looked to the social sciences for help. Books like The Tipping Point³ give us clues on how to get others to use the many improvements that have now been designed and demonstrated. Yet adequate diffusion of these innovations seems beyond us in the near term.

We have not, though, looked sufficiently within ourselves to learn about natural processes of change that humans use to learn and grow. Doing so could make us more effective leaders and bring the significant progress that we long to see. It's just possible that, in not knowing that a natural and reliable learning process is going on, the techniques we use to draw attention to our agendas undermine it. Instead we could be exploring human developmental

capacity, learn to work with it, become catalysts for change, and see what happens next. This paper describes one such process of change in the hope that learning to see it, understand it, and work with it will strengthen us in our resolve, expand our expertise, and hasten our success.

In their book Profit Beyond Measure⁴, Tom Johnson and Anders Broms eloquently describe the critical need for business practices reflecting the nature of living systems, which depend on their wholeness to thrive. They explain that every business practice must be considered in light of the whole organization, including its customers, vendors, community, and other stakeholders. They describe how traditional business practices break apart the whole and therefore undermine potential profit.

Likewise, the implementation of change in communities and organizations must reflect a natural living process that is not broken apart. Otherwise change efforts will not result in the success we hope for. Catalyzing Sustainability is a different way of working that takes into account a natural human development process of growth and change. And it explains basic elements through which our work together is naturally organized. Working together, after all, is required if we are to become a sustainable society. And using basic natural patterns of living systems will help.

My Perspective

As a consultant, I have worked for organizations, large and small, for 22 years. I first became interested in the science of living systems and self-organizing systems 10 years ago and joined with colleagues at the Berkana Institute⁵ to develop a theory for applying them to social systems. Five years ago I recognized the need to use this theory in the service of working toward sustainability. Now, in addition to consulting, I serve as a director of the Institute for Sustainable Ethics and Economics (ISEE)⁶ in Eugene, Oregon. After successfully using self-organizing systems concepts in organizations for several years, ISEE has given me the opportunity to try them on sustainability work in the community setting.

⁴ H. Thomas Johnson and Anders Broms, Profit Beyond Measure: Extraordinary Results Through Attention to Work and People, Free Press, 2000.

⁵ The Berkana Institute dialogues on self-organizing systems took place 1993-1996 in Sundance, Utah, and were led by Margaret Wheatly and Myron Kellner-Rogers.

⁶ www.ISEEinfo.net

¹ www.tns.org

² www.natcap.org

³ Malcolm Gladwell, The Tipping Point: How Little Things Can make a Big Difference, Little, Brown and Company, 2000.

For more than two years, my ISEE colleagues and I have been experimenting to discover what draws people into considering sustainability and their role in bringing about a sustainable world. We are making headway by offering a series of programs and activities designed to build 1) ongoing relationships with people throughout our region, and 2) partnerships that allow different groups to work together and share resources. We serve as a catalyst for change. By engaging resistance and paying close attention to the basis of the polarities that have existed in our community for quite some time, we find the obstacles melt away as more effective conditions are established.

The natural developmental process described herein -- the Rhythms of Change – provides guidance to our work with one another and with various constituencies in our region. After describing the basic patterns, I'll use three of our projects (our partnership with the Sustainable Business Symposium, our Hydrogen Alliance, and our Sustainable Economic Development project) to show how we have seen them unfold and how we work with them.

The Rhythms of Change

It is not uncommon for people to think of changes as discrete events that have beginnings and endings, even though life teaches us that change occurs continuously, in multiple and simultaneous processes that are not linear. Change does not usually happen in the series of steps outlined in a plan. More often it is messy, meandering, circuitous, and chaotic. If we pay close attention to the sensations we experience as changes occur, rhythms teach us how to prepare ourselves for the future. They guide us through the developmental process of learning and growing – the process of life itself.

On the next page, the Rhythms of Change appear in a spiral because they are elements of a pattern that each of us moves through continuously. This Spiral bypasses our existing frameworks, mental models, habits of thinking, filters, lenses and expectations of how change occurs. The Spiral offers an unusual view of our natural development process and an opportunity to gain deeper understanding of our capacities for change. Think about your own example of living through a challenging life situation, perhaps a change that you had doubts you could deal with, as you read about the Rhythms. See if they describe your experience.

The Rhythms are expressed in a language of sensation⁷: Flowing, Staccato, Chaos, Lyric, and Stillness. New language is useful in breaking old habits of thinking about change. It helps us reconsider how change occurs and what we might attend to if we wish to know more about what is emerging, how we

⁷ The names of these Rhythms were first used by Gabriella Roth in dance.

and others are responding, and what can be done to support the development process.

Potential

The Spiral starts with *potential*. I mean to emphasize this word. It is often used, but perhaps not well considered in terms of meaning. My dictionary says that potential is latent excellence that may or may not be developed. (Latent excellence in a child; in a partnership between colleagues; in a group; in an organization.) Potential can also be described as hidden doorways of opportunity that contain the means to fulfillment. Potential is infinite possibilities, mostly unimagined. Potential is complex, unbounded, unquantifiable, unqualifiable and absolute. There is always potential for growth and change, except when there is death. And yet potential in any given circumstance is constrained by our expectations.

Flowing

Flowing is the first Rhythm of change. When we are moving along without interruption and things are working as we intend them to, we are in the experience of Flowing. Our own energy is in sync with what is happening around us. We seek and handle new information about unfolding events in an easy-going manner. Our language evidences natural inquisitiveness and curiosity: *"Do you know...? Have you heard...? Do you know what I just learned?"* We experience the feeling of being in sync with others because we believe they are looking at the same information with the same purpose and working toward the same goals.

Staccato

Flowing is interrupted by the sensation of Staccato, a feeling of being abruptly disconnected or detached. It is a subtle indication that something is changing. We may feel startled, surprised, jarred or blocked in some way. Staccato signals the need to look closely for what is different and direct our attention to what is trying to emerge so we can determine how to be with it. If we listen to this signal, our questions are: *"What is changing? How do I work with it? What is required of me?"*

If we are not paying attention or didn't notice the subtle indication, we begin to lose our place in the change that is unfolding. This can happen for several reasons. Perhaps we simply were not attentive enough, or the information about what was happening stopped flowing in our direction. Perhaps we evaluated the need for the change being suggested, and did not agree that change is necessary, or we don't believe that it has anything to do with us. Maybe we are over-confident in existing habits of thought and behavior, or believe we can control what happens next so we don't have to change.

In any case, when we resist, discount, or fend off the sensation of Staccato, it gets bigger and louder. Our resistance is about holding on to the ways in which

The Rhythms of Change

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This spiral shows a natural progression of rhythms as we move from potential to expanded meaning and purpose. We encounter them as we become aware that change is occurring and engage with it. We cycle through a series of sensations, including confusion, resistance, and even fear, until we make sense of what is going on. Our "sense making" occurs as we use new information to understand what is shifting in our relationships – with people as well as our thought patterns and mental frameworks – and what we identify as the whole – choice of reference, the whole we choose to see and be a part of. As we move through the rhythms, we are expanding consciousness. We have a growing sense of how we are connected to everything else. This awareness and understanding is about recovery...recovery of wholeness.



we have seen things in relationship to one another – well established mental models and behavior patterns that inform us as to how we see ourselves, how we see others, and how we all relate to a larger whole (e.g. the community, the world). We are insisting that things will remain the same for us – that we will stay in relationship to the people around us just as we have been. In fact, relationships are changing and this is the time to renegotiate our place in the scheme of things. In essence we are bumping into information that disconfirms our existing beliefs, mental models and patterns of behavior. But rather than taking in the message, we may find ourselves and others saying things like: *“We’ve heard all this before...there is nothing to be gained by changing...I can handle this...this is just a small disruption that I don’t have to pay attention to.”*

Chaos

When information continues to be so disconfirming that we literally feel things are breaking apart, we are in the abyss of Chaos. Our mental models or ways of making sense of things no longer hold up. In efforts to control events, we try to move away from our anxiety by doing something...anything. No matter what we do, no matter how hard we try to fix it, things don’t work the way we believe they should. We speak of what is going on like this: *“Everything is breaking apart...things are out of control...this is not working...who is in charge?...why don’t they do something?...what do you mean I have to try harder?”*

It’s our tried and true ways of making sense of things that are not working. We suddenly know that we no longer have a way of explaining to ourselves and to others what has happened or why. We busy ourselves with activity and become frantic. Our energies are scattered in many directions with no sense of accomplishment. Frustration can give way to cynicism. We confuse the need to do something – *doing* – with *being* – being present with what is happening and learning about how we are connected to it.

Chaos is less of an abyss if we recognize that its purpose is to break apart our old habits of thought and behavior, and explore new prospects. Our old habits no longer serve us. We can ask ourselves: *“What is Chaos teaching us? What has changed? What new information is being presented to us? What new relationships or connections are apparent or required? Where do I fit in this new scheme of things?”* As we explore these questions, we move away from the harsher aspects of the experience and get in sync with learning and change. Doing so hastens our entry into Lyric.

However, even old hands at the change Spiral can lose their confidence in the midst of Chaos. The changes we are confronted with in our cities, organizations, society and the world these days are

extremely challenging. No amount of skill can ensure that change does not become painfully chaotic. Fortunately, the shift into Lyric also happens when we get tired of fighting off those changes we fear. At some point we exhaust ourselves, or see that all of our activity is feeding into a vicious cycle of more anxiety and more activity. With fatigue comes surrender, acceptance of change, and a segue into Lyric.

Lyric

When we are learning, we lean into our anxiety. We see that our resistance can teach us about what is important to us and why it is worth saving, or not. In Lyric, which is light and graceful, we slow down so we can attend to what has emerged. Our energy is paced, we are able to get rest, and think more clearly. We allow what has happened, rather than busy ourselves with activities aimed at controlling what is. We begin to notice and investigate new relationships between people and the work they do. We find ourselves and others saying: *“Something is new here...isn’t this interesting...do you see this? I hadn’t noticed it before...what does it mean?...how can we learn more about it?”*

Stillness

As we move into Stillness, we see ourselves differently. Our choices of reference – how we refer to ourselves in the newly understood scheme of things – develop and expand. We begin to identify with and connect to a larger whole – something outside of ourselves that has value for us. We have a greater sense of relatedness and belonging. This awareness quiets and replenishes us. We say things like: *“I can see it clearly now...we’ve found something important...this really makes sense...I wish I had understood this before.”*

From the larger whole, new patterns of connections become apparent and what we pay attention to begins to shift. Different pathways that were impossible to see before become available. Out of this new understanding, new **meaning** is created and a renewed and expanded sense of **purpose** emerges, which opens us more to **potential**. And then what flows from potential is more than before.

People have asked how Stillness is a rhythm. The experience of Stillness can be described as the pause between the notes. It is the timbre of a bell – the clear sound that fades slowly and imperceptibly after metal has been tapped. It is watching a sleeping child breathe. It is music that makes us feel still inside. It is stepping onto the back porch at dusk as the crickets start up. It is waking at sunrise to the birds calling. It is being in sync with nature. It is the rhythm of heartfelt quiet and renewal.

The Rhythms of Change go on forever, drawing us into different experiences, untried approaches, and

remarkable outcomes that punctuate a landscape of uncharted territory. Changes that once seemed very threatening turn out to have a “silver lining.” We have this choice: force our old ways of seeing onto the events unfolding around us, thereby constraining what is possible; or explore potential with this natural process of change, which can be a source of renewal, replenishment and sustainability.

In the Spiral, the Rhythms appear in a certain order; however, they do not necessarily become apparent in this order. Some Rhythms may be hardly noticeable. Some may take up a lot of time and space. Each Rhythm is instructive. None is better than another. Each contains new ways of knowing what is changing. And each directs us to how we can learn more about what is trying to emerge: learning and growth. This process is generative as nature is generative.

We already are familiar with the Rhythms of Change. They are natural to us. We have had the experience of Flowing and Staccato. We have had the experience of a crisis in which everything feels as if it is breaking apart. We know what it is to recover from a crisis and find that we were indeed capable of recovery. These experiences and this knowledge show us that we do not need to resist what wants to emerge in order to survive. Nor do we need to insist on maintaining the status quo. When we accept Staccato and Chaos as part of the process of emerging order and realignment rather than something to avoid, we can thrive. We can be willing to look at the impact of disruptions and crises on the existing relationships between people and things with curiosity rather than fear. We can be better able to see the potential inherent in new relationships. And we can tap into a greater sense of connectedness and belonging that brings renewed meaning and purpose to our lives.

Catalyzing Change

Those of us who have been struggling to fix the mess we humans have created are also moving through the Rhythms of Change. There are times when we are accused of not listening, polarizing the issues, defensive posturing, not being interested in solving real problems or understanding the needs of others, being anti-business, etc. When we are in the Rhythms of Staccato and Chaos, which can easily be triggered by alarming news, these accusations could be true. At those times we are not drawing on creativity and expertise. We are struggling to maintain ourselves.

Catalyzing change effectively over time requires that we keep ourselves healthy and strong in our individual pursuits. Investing in our own learning and growth is something we cannot afford to ignore. Supportive colleagues who help us make sense of the change dynamics around us are also essential to the ongoing effort.

Moreover, the difficult behaviors listed above do not help people who resist our viewpoints move through their own Spirals to learning and change. If we don't understand that resistance is a likely reaction to Staccato or Chaos, we may respond in a way that is not helpful – with our own resistance to what we've just encountered. Our impatience gets in the way. At such times cynicism can get the best of us.

There are other ways we can approach and work with people that entice them into learning, experimentation, and discovery. Helping them discover the potential of the changes we are proposing is fundamental to new, productive relationships. For example, when you see resistance (e.g. harsh questions, annoyance expressed through words or body language, anger, distancing, etc.), remember that old frames of reference need to break apart in order for new ones to form. This process is at least unnerving and, at worst, frightening. But, instead of sulking or being offended, ask yourself “What can I do to support change?”

Understanding the Rhythms of Change gives us a basis from which we can lead others and guide changes that need to occur. The Spiral is a framework in which to consider what will support people in moving through their development and what help looks like in various stages of growth. The three keys to providing support are found in the Spiral itself – information, relationships, and choice of reference.

The Spiral corresponds with three dynamic elements that are fundamental to the ways all living systems organize themselves. People, families, communities, work groups and organizations are all living systems. The “Three Domains of Self-Organizing Systems”⁸ are:

Information: the ways in which we get, generate and use information.

Relationships: the ways in which things are connected – people to people, work to work, the purpose of one initiative to another, all the parts of a whole system, etc.

Self-Reference: the ways in which we think of ourselves (reference ourselves) in the context of what is happening around us.

Although they have a huge effect on how people approach problem solving and change, very often the dynamics within and between these elements are not visible or noticed. For instance, how people hear information depends on the relationships they have with the communicators. Whether they take action on

⁸ The Three Domains of Self-Organizing Systems were identified during dialogues at the Berkana Institute. They were derived from self-organizing systems science for social systems.

the basis of the information provided depends on whether they believe themselves to be responsible for making change occur, or whether they feel able to have an impact.

When we don't notice how the three elements are interacting, assumptions and old habits of thought can unintentionally get in the way of working with others toward change and innovation. We can explore the patterns of connections – call them into consideration – with open questions and continuing dialogue that make them visible. This has the effect of “jiggling” the most basic elements in the whole system, and that results in people choosing to re-organize themselves on the basis of new ways to deal with information, relationships, and/or self-reference (choice of reference). As you experiment with this, you will notice that *things begin to change as soon as the patterns of connection become visible*. People can see that old ways of doing things don't serve their purposes. This shift opens the way for development and creativity.

In other words, system dynamics and the developmental processes of individuals operate on the same basic elements. Working with these elements as we organize to catalyze change directly effects how people respond. The ways in which Information, Relationships and Self-Reference work in your community is an important consideration when leading change. Watching and listening to reactions of people provides a lot to work with. They tell us what rhythms they are in.

In response, we can ask questions that generate more information and understanding – in them and in us. The questions that follow serve as a place to start.

Flowing – Did you notice this? What does it mean to you? How do you think it affects what you are trying to accomplish? Is this an effort you could be a part of? What would convince you that this is an issue you need to attend to? What do we need to know about this community (organization) to make sure we address your goals?

Staccato – What do you think is happening? What information do you need to go forward? What needs to be done? Do we have to work differently than before? Why? How can we work together?

Chaos -- What would you like to see happen? Suppose you can't have what you want, what then? What if we could find a way to work together? How can we work on both our agendas at the same time? How can we discover what is possible now? How is cynicism getting in our way? What is the end result we all hope for?

Lyric – What have we learned? Why is it important? What needs attention? What is possible now? How do we need to be connected to others?

Stillness – How do we see ourselves now in the scheme of things? What role do you want to play? What is our purpose? What is possible for us? How can we proceed?

We can also use the three elements (Information, Relationships, Self-Reference) to Catalyze Sustainability by designing opportunities for ongoing dialogue that allows people to process what is happening together. This provides a context in which people can find what they need for their individual developmental processes. It also helps us make sure we are not doing anything inadvertently to hinder movement through the Spiral because if we are, it will become apparent.

Here are examples of how we at the Institute for Sustainable Ethics and Economics organize our work using the elements described above.

Information

Providing the best information you have about the change being proposed is not enough. This element is just as much about **generating** information *with those who will be touched by the change* for they must be engaged in developing solutions. On-going dialogue gives leaders of change more information about what the change entails, how it affects others, and what kinds of supports will make a difference for coordinated implementation.

At ISEE we've noticed it may take many conversations to get our new messages and requests across to people we meet with. We meet with nice people and have cordial conversations, but we discover later that we haven't been heard because there was no common frame of reference for exploring the possibilities we were trying to consider. When we encounter this dynamic, we shift our focus to relationship building.

One such example occurred when we were beginning our Hydrogen Alliance program (March 2001), which asks all the public agencies in the community (local governments, utilities, transit district, etc.) and citizens to consider what it will take to build a hydrogen fuel infrastructure. The transition to hydrogen will enable us to use less environmentally intrusive power sources in the future. For quite a while, the people we approached thought we were talking about only fuel cells, which run on hydrogen, because that's what they had heard about. We encountered resistance because it's common knowledge that fuel cells aren't ready for prime time, and it's uncertain when they will be. Jason Denner and Christopher Juniper from the Rocky Mountain Institute⁹ had been teaching us that hydrogen can be thought of in a much larger

⁹ www.rmi.org

context¹⁰, but it took persistence and patience to deliver that message and invite others into imagining with us what we can do in this community.

Targeting agencies with which we need strong, productive relationships, we kept talking in various venues about the many ways in which hydrogen will soon be able to power a community. Since launching this project, there has been a lot of momentum-building news regarding hydrogen and fuel cells reported in the press as well. After nine months of patient dialogue, we have gathered significant interest and energy in planning for this possibility, and the dialogue continues with much less resistance.

If you don't know that the old frames of reference – conventional thinking -- need to break apart before the new possibility can take hold, it's easy to assume people just don't want to cooperate. Had we assumed that early with the Hydrogen Alliance, we would not be enjoying the progress we've made to date.

Relationships

In a living system, like a community, every part is connected to, affects, and is affected by every other part, directly or indirectly. It's hard to see all of the interplay between parts of the whole system because the pattern of relationships is so dense. Again, on-going dialogue will highlight relationships that need to be attended to as initiatives go forward. New ideas and solutions bubble up as more connections become apparent, because people are in conversation with one another.

In the context of sustainability work, our relationship with the earth seems most central. But, I would argue that productive relationships with each other are essential to rediscovering harmony with the earth. Johnson and Broms say "outcomes in the natural system are produced by relationships among parts, not by the parts themselves."¹¹ That suggests our only way home is through connection with each other.

At a Berkana Dialogue several years ago, scientist Fritjof Capra¹² told us why he had founded, as his method of creating change, the Center for Ecoliteracy in Berkeley, California, a nonprofit organization that works with schools. He said that he'd had many conversations with CEO's of large corporations. He could manage to get in the door, but it was harder to impress them. On the other hand, when a small child

asks his or her Daddy why his company doesn't take better care of the earth, it's harder for Daddy to ignore.

This image raises important questions for us. What kinds of relationships do we need to have with others in order to get the opportunity to influence them? How can we develop those relationships? ISEE's strategy is to invite people to be involved with our initiatives again and again until, one day, miraculously, they get curious and involved. We also encourage them to ask hard questions about what we are doing and why, because then we are in a position to ask what's important to them and why. Staying in relationship and continuing the dialogue gives us the opportunity to influence.

Another ISEE strategy is to conduct our work through partnerships in which resources are shared and credit is given. Just as nature's diversity is generative, so is the coming together of diverse community resources including private and public sector entities, people of all ages and backgrounds, and interests of all kinds. Creativity and patience are always necessary to successful partnerships in which many differences are represented, but they pay big dividends.

One of ISEE's best examples of progress that comes through relationships is our partnership with the Sustainable Business Symposium¹³ at the University of Oregon. For five years students have volunteered to serve on the team that offers the three-day Symposium in November of each year. For the last three years ISEE has played an increasingly important role in the Symposium's success. When we first approached the student management team in 1999 to offer help, they didn't quite know what to do with us. Our repeated efforts to offer resources were met with no response or mild suspicion. Gradually, by delivering what we promised, we became trustworthy. Through the participation of ISEE Board Members and consultants, we now provide a day long workshop on the first day, assist with fundraising, serve on the Advisory Board, and provide moderators for panel discussions. Our ongoing participation lends continuity as one management team hands off to the next for the following year.

Personally, I very much enjoy working with the student management teams. Young people don't seem to have the constraints and frustrations that adults have about working on sustainability. I find their enthusiasm refreshing. Beyond that, ISEE has benefited from our association with the Symposium in many ways. Because the students appreciate what we do for them, they promote ISEE in print and through their connections at every opportunity. Consequently our presence in the community and beyond has grown significantly. The joint effort allows us to raise funds for ISEE as well as the Symposium.

¹⁰ One example: "The Hydrogen Experiment," World Watch, November/December 2000. "In Reykjavik, Iceland, scientists, politicians, and business leaders have conspired to put into motion a grand experiment that may end the country's – and the world's – reliance on fossil fuels forever."

¹¹ Profit Beyond Measure, p. 50.

¹² Fritjof Capra, a theoretical physicist, has written and lectured extensively on the philosophical implications of modern science.

¹³ <http://darkwing.uoregon.edu/~sbs.org>

Panels held throughout the Symposium enable us to showcase our projects. Attendees who return each year notice and applaud our progress. Because of that, we are invited to provide leadership to local initiatives promoted by other groups. We also become well known by students who then want to serve as ISEE interns. Continuing relationships with students after their graduations lead to additional staffing and partnership opportunities. The manner in which we share resources and responsibilities with the Symposium staff serves both organizations very well.

Self-Reference

People choose to make a difference when they can see themselves as able to make a difference. Kids who learn about recycling and energy conservation at school become tyrannical at home, insisting that the adults in the house follow the new rules. Neighborhood residents clean up parks and streams around their homes because they believe it is their responsibility to do so and they prefer to live in a healthy environment. The University of Oregon Sustainable Business Symposium students set out to create a yearly conference that draws people from around the US because they see a need and believe they can fill it bigger and better each year. These are examples of people who see themselves as able to have an impact.

In contrast, there are many business people who believe environmental compliance is a cost of doing business that reduces profits and make decisions in that context. There are also experienced planners who have worked within their disciplines to create livable cities not realizing that elements of what they set into motion produce unintended consequences. All of these are examples of people acting out of their own self-references. What kinds of experiences will create shifts in self-reference such that many more people will see themselves as able and willing to work together toward sustainability?

ISEE's Sustainable Economic Development program may be our most ambitious to date. In Oregon's Southern Willamette Valley we have several local governments and public agencies trying to improve one regional economy. No one is "in charge." The City of Eugene is responsible to that city. The City of Springfield is responsible to that city. Both are within Lane County, which feels more responsible for the small towns and rural areas surrounding the two cities. In addition there are several separate utilities that provide energy services throughout Lane County.

ISEE's challenge: promote sustainable economic development throughout our region. Why us? Because we know how to do partnerships and we see ourselves as able to connect and encourage the needed resources. ISEE's working definition of sustainability is "long-term community, economic and ecological health and vitality." In the last two years we have explored through different activities with many

others what that means. This latest experiment builds on the relationships we have been establishing and on our learning from other projects.

With the help of Christopher Juniper, now with EcoLogic Resources¹⁴, we are introducing a framework that shows how sustainable economic development depends on the healthy interplay between land, air, water, energy, solid waste, affordable housing, business practices, human capital, and the carrying capacities of our natural capital. Most of the people we have spoken to so far have been looking for ways for their organizations to work toward sustainability. They want to see themselves as effective in this challenge. We are offering them an opportunity to join with partners who are working toward a sustainable future for this region. We want them to experience effective partnerships that utilize many disciplines and work toward the organizational goals of all involved. The relationships they develop in this project will influence how they work together in the future as well. The project will create a shift in reference to "each agency has a role to play as we all serve the whole community."

What is possible?

The term "reasonable environmentalist" is gaining stature these days. What is it they do differently, and why are they welcomed by people who have resisted "environmentalists"? I suspect it's because they choose to be in conversation about what they have learned and how their work can promote prosperity as well as environmental protection. I imagine that they choose to provide support instead of accuse and make dire predictions. Understanding that we all need to be in relationship to one other to solve the problems we've created, they have become skilled at building productive relationships with the people they want to influence. They intuitively tap into the natural development process described herein.

Catalyzing Sustainability requires this much patience and skill. We need to acknowledge the natural human patterns of development and work with the capabilities inherent in all of us in order to influence the thinking and behavior of the people we're trying to reach. We need to support the developmental patterns of others. What will it take to get their attention? You never know what will get through and cause a shift in thinking unless you try and keep trying, working carefully through the Rhythms of Change.

This framework suggests that recognition of natural capacities of growth and development can make the difference. Mother earth is giving us the same message. What I find promising about this way of working is the coherence of it. Recovery of our

¹⁴ Christopher Juniper:
cjuniper@ecologicresources.com

wholeness corresponds with recovery of wholeness in nature – it is logically connected. We can find and benefit from an orderly relationship of the parts – us and them -- if we look to our natural patterns and restore what nature has given us.

As the Spiral suggests, we learn by engaging with each other in important work, and then discovering what happens as we go forward. It goes on forever, as we always have more to learn. If we intend to Catalyze Sustainability, we must make room for the nature in us as well as the nature around us. My hope is that this framework provides a map that supports us in our continuous exploration and movement toward sustainability – through empowering the process of life itself.