

Chapter 13 Using marketing for cultural transformations

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Human Ecology Forum's Transforming Culture stream has so far mainly focused on theoretical models and academic discussion. Running through that has been a theme about the narratives we tell ourselves, how those narratives become our identity, and that those narratives will need to change if civilization and life on Earth as we know it is to survive.

This session aims to spur the Forum into practical discussion about how cultural transformation might be effected. Drawing on traditional fairytales, marketing, and practical empowerment movements, I will introduce some models to help stimulate creative thinking and research that is oriented towards the practicalities of change. Our discussion will focus on developing alternative images, stories and language that might replace the ones that currently dominate our world.

Synopsis

Shaping public opinion and societal behaviour is already being done by marketing experts using the learnings from psychological research. In using these techniques to bring about a cultural transformation, we need to recognise and abide by the ethical principle that we use these techniques for good.

King describes the fairy tale as the ultimate narrative: a journey on which we are beset by villains from whom we are rescued by a hero, Prince Charming, assisted by a Fairy Godmother. However two issues arise: first this is the ultimate outsourcing of responsibility, reinforcing the image of us as helpless victim. Second in our story, because both the villain and the hero in our drama is ourselves, (and there is no Fairy Godmother) we cannot resolve this dilemma and so remain inactive.

Current empowerment movements (March Australia, Kitchen Table Conversations, Divestment Campaigns) seek to replicate the successes for societal change of previous movements such as Women's Suffragettes and the anti-slavery campaigns. However will they be powerful enough to transform culture?

What are some practical models that can be used to change behaviours and minds?

Gillian introduced the Sales Model as one such method. The Sales Model for behaviour change uses marketing techniques to reframe the situation in a way that motivates individual behaviour or attitudinal change.

The bones of the model are:

Pain Island, Pleasure Island and The Boat.

Pain Island is where one is now. Pleasure Island is that wonderful place where there is no pain and all is good. The Boat is the mechanism to get there.

In more detail from a marketing perspective:

1. I understand your pain, (then rub salt into the wound to increase it)
2. This is the better, happier and 'funnier' place that you could be (free from your pain)
3. Here is the Boat to take you. Join me, your Captain and Hero on the Boat, and I can take you to Pleasure Island.

This is an emotional experience. The juxtaposition of pain and pleasure, and the relief at accepting a way to ameliorate the pain and gain the pleasure by getting on the boat, draws people in. In designing the experience, getting on the boat has to be easy emotionally. Relief has to be palpable.

Applying this model to creating actual change for transforming culture, Pain Island is the Anthropocene, Pleasure Island the future ideal alternative and the Boat is the process of cultural transformation. In painting the Anthropocene, one would use people's own stories of distress and unease. In so doing we would empathise, agree with them, and use their language and imagery to feedback our sympathy to them. In opening the vision of a real alternative future, again using their concerns as the initial focus and help them to visualize what this new future could be like. Help them to feel how much better for them this could be than the present.

The workshop then explored what elements of a narrative about this change would include. A list of The Stories of the Anthropocene was produced (Appendix A). As this emerged several factors about the items in the list emerged:

- We ourselves are stuck in the story; it is part of ourselves.
- It is given with the authority of accepted truth and has strong currency.
- Most people are lead to believe that the Anthropocene is Pleasure Island. While we may think this is a con, many do not. In fact the power elites and those wishing to emulate them identify strongly with this story.
- This narrative requires *countering* (undermining) rather than direct assault.

It became obvious that both Pain and Pleasure Island contain both positive and negative aspects and a person's perception of these depends on their personal framing of them. So in the alternative narrative we need to recognise this. Tailoring stories for individuals means that a matrix of narratives will be needed.

Matthew Rimmer made the following points:

Several strategies are needed for countering:

- Positive narratives
- Culture jamming and myth busting
- Exposing the marketing of the current narrative
- The multiple aspects of each theme can be framed to undermine the present or promote the future; one example is the use of civil rights language.
- Counter-branding (eg Lock the Gate)

A similar complex emerged in listing the aspects of the envisioned future (Appendix A).

Building the boat requires a framework for system change. Although the boat was unfinished, a scaffold is provided by Robert Cialdini (1984, Influence, the psychology of persuasion) around which we can design it.

Cialdini's six Principles of Influence:	Implication
Reciprocity	People repay debts. Creating obligation will influence people to come along and try what we have to offer
Commitment & Consistency	People have innate drives to be consistent with their values including fulfilling obligations. They do this to avoid cognitive dissonance. People will change either their mind or behaviour to minimise dissonance.
Social Proof	People do what everyone does. So promoting what everyone does, helps people conform to social norms.
Liking	We listen to people we like / admire. So to excite change we use well liked people (although who will depend on the audience to be influenced).
Authority	People obey authority figures, even when this may clash with their values. The drive to do what is expected of us overrides other values.
Scarcity	Creating the illusion (or reflecting the reality) of scarcity generates demand. This plays on psychological drives to avoid loss or even loss of potential gain.

Note: these are similar to the discussion about the Reuben Anderson's 10 Myths of Behaviour change from the introductory talk.

It behooves us to remember that these tactics are only to be employed ethically.

That said, use of marketing expertise that is grounded in the knowledge of psychology can provide invaluable help to us in creating a better world. As Bob Douglas' talk presented, a bold, clear, vital, even daring and daunting but inspiring vision of a possible future is needed.

The who, where and how questions were passed over to another time.

Q&A

Franzi Poldy pointed out that previous examples of transformational change have been going with the flow of history [others have pointed to this factor being technological change]. For instance the use by Kennedy of the space program to inspire effort was in the context of the cold war contest with the Russians, and fitted firmly into the military-industrial complex's agenda. Extricating ourselves from the Anthropocene is going against this flow.

Discussion suggested that in this case we need to create the new context for change.

Val Brown reminded us that we cannot plan this change; in response I proposed that we can mindfully meddle.

Franzi Poldy also suggested that rich systems, such as complex industrial society, can tolerate meddling and resistance but that if the resilience of the system is activated by this meddling, then we will not be tolerated by the system and removed. In response, this resilience needs to be anticipated.

Overcoming the anxiety about getting on the boat that is the anxiety about change, and people opting sometimes for the 'evil they know', is a real but unaddressed factor in this workshop.

THMs

Use of marketing expertise that is grounded in the knowledge of psychology can provide invaluable help to us in creating a better world.

It behooves us to remember that marketing tactics are only to be employed ethically.

The Sales Model for behaviour change uses marketing techniques to reframe the situation in a way that motivates individual behaviour or attitudinal change.

The success of the model is in the juxtaposition of pain and pleasure, and the creation of relief at accepting a way to ameliorate the pain and gain the pleasure, is a powerful emotional experience. It taps into people's unconscious psychological processes.

A bold, clear, vital, even daring and daunting but inspiring vision of a possible future is needed.

Subverting the dominant western liberal narrative requires *countering* (undermining) rather than direct assault.

We cannot plan this change; we can only mindfully meddle.

Unlike during previous transformations when change has been within the context of historic or technological flows, in the current situation we need to create the new context for change.

Synopsis week 2

A review of the sales marketing model as a method for driving transformation opened a broad ranging discussion whose outcomes included:

- An explanation of marketing as a discipline
- How the knowledge in the discipline can be applied
- The necessity for one's assumptions to be repeatedly spelt out during the process and overt recognition that this is a normative process (Julia Torbert-Jones) Val Brown, Bob Webb).

The Discipline of Marketing (Gary Buttress)

The key pillars of marketing are: product, place (distribution), price and promotion.

A traditional neoliberal USA based view is the 'value-in-exchange' model in which a product is worth what you can buy/sell it for.

An alternative, European view is the 'value-in-use' model, which is a relational (service dominant) view and focuses on what utility the product or service is to you. The views of stakeholders are also of value to the producers/ sellers.

Applying Marketing Experience/Knowledge

This was less completely teased out. Themes:

a new story is required, but

the need to focus on the process of transformation as much as if not more than the end point, given that the end point is subject to differences in vision, definition of better / worse, although is a meta level agreement on 'good' or 'better' possible? (Annas Sam, Bob Webb, Peter T)

what are helpful framings to induce willingness to try change, to aid people to reveal to themselves what Pleasure Island might be for them, so

multiple audiences need to be catered for. Research is required to identify the different framings and languages for the range of audiences

How to identify the market mavens?

In initiating change, people need assistance over the hump of initial resistance; this is getting people onto the boat.

Getting People on the Boat

To be further explored.

Commentary

Peter Tait

Need to clarify the role of marketing in social change; social marketing can be useful (see Doug McKenzie-Mohr's work) and clearly the accumulation of multiple efforts at changing behaviour at community level can help. But what is the role of marketing in the bigger picture? How can it help transforming culture?

Unlike advertising, which is a short term enterprise aimed at getting immediate or at least short term behaviour change – ie purchase of a product, cultural transformation is a longer term and ongoing process. In the marketing exercise in advertising product, getting people on the boat from Pain to Pleasure Island revolves around a tangible product. There is an object (or service), a brand, a set of emotions some distressing and some offering relief, and a fairly immediate action – buy.

Getting people on the boat of cultural transformation, requires sustained behaviour and attitude change over a long time, years. Further the brand of a better future is more contested and diverse than a product. It requires a leap into uncertainty. The comfort of the present is a stronger anchor than manufactured desire over product.

Using the experience of social marketing in public health (refs needed: smoking, seatbelts, drink driving) and other changes () it is clear that the marketing campaign is only one part of a much broader set of activities to inform, change behaviour and attitude, and sustain that behaviour / attitudinal change.

Does it come back to engaging people in the governance system?