Think Sustain



A CURATION OF IDEAS
TO HELP YOU SUSTAIN CHANGE

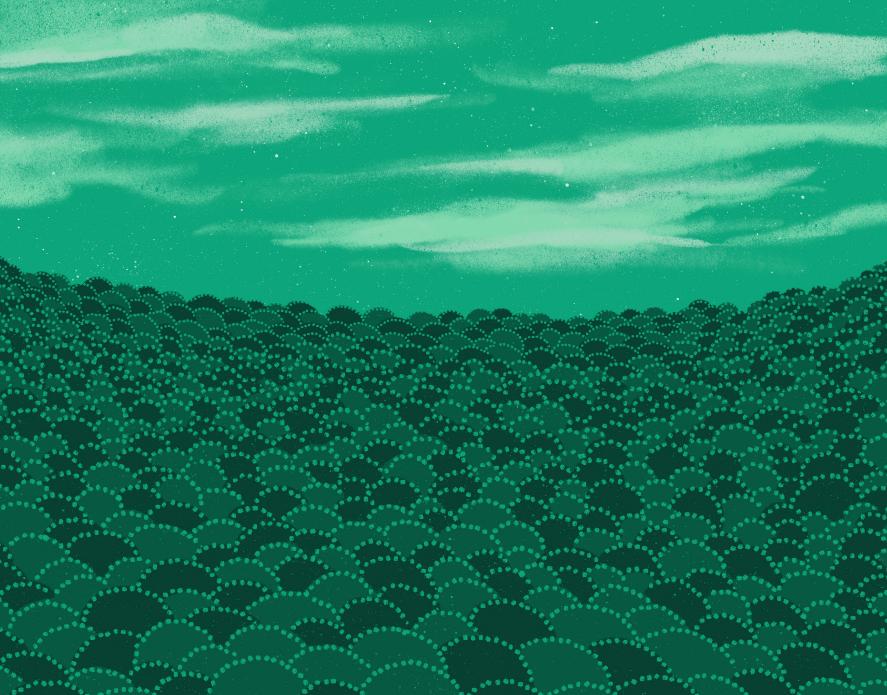
THINK SUSTAIN

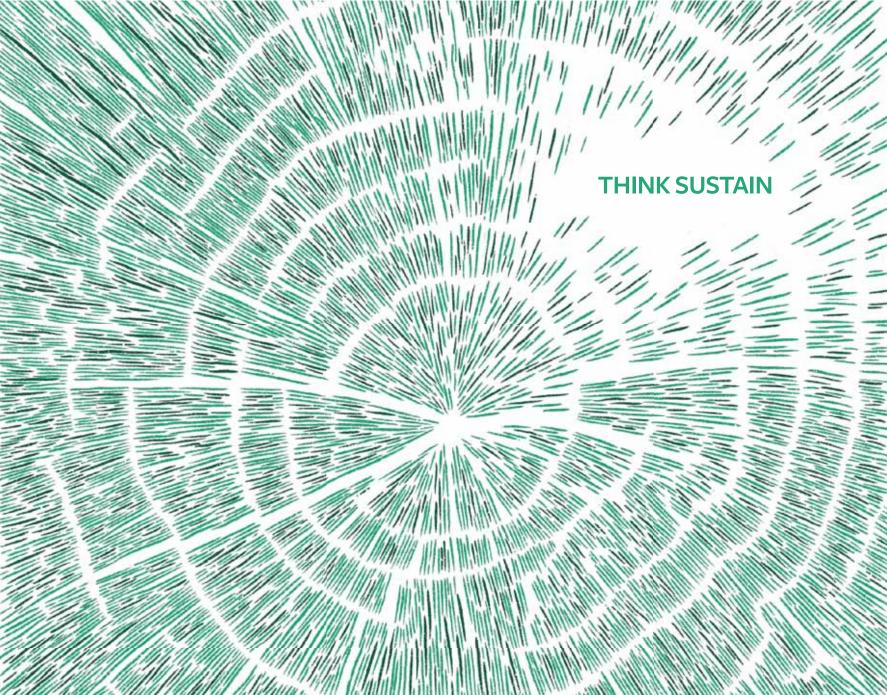
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THINK SUSTAIN THINK SUSTAIN

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THINK SUSTAIN THINK SUSTAIN

For

Societal Leaders

The Unreasonable Restless Pioneers

Who do not accept where we are Who disagree with the pace of change Who lead us towards where we all wish to be

Together.



Contents

Introduction

A marathon is not a lengthy sprint.

Change sustains at a better equilibrium.

Priorities oscillate. Change must persist.

Change sustains when habits change.

Standards prevail, prescriptions don't.

What can't be seen, can't be sustained.

Data inspires quality, opinions don't.

Cost of change must tend to zero.

Shared governance ensures balance.

Together we sustain, divided we stall.

Societal Thinking
Pause to Reflect
Acknowledgements
References

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Sustain /sa'stein/

SUSTAIN | VERB

Allow something to continue for a period of time.

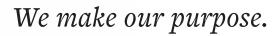
SUSTAIN | VERB

Endure or withstand without giving way or yielding.

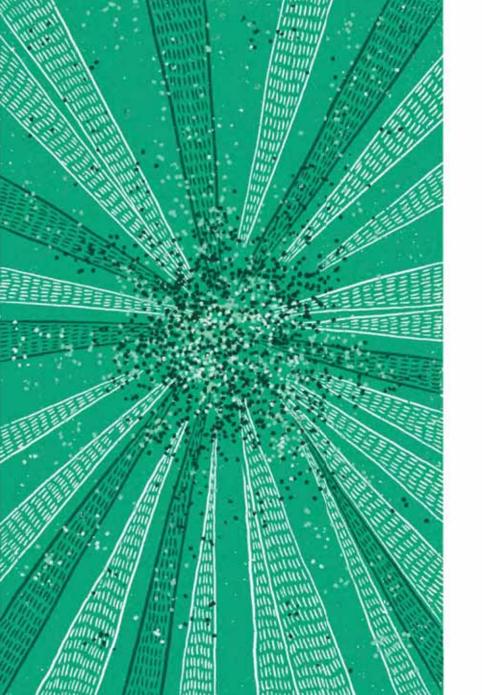
SUSTAIN | VERB

Support by giving help, strength, or encouragement.

THINK SUSTAIN 1



— CARL SAGAN



Introduction

A time-lapse video of dandelions transforming from one seed to many seeds is mesmerising. One dandelion seed germinates to be a plant, blooms into a yellow flower, then the flower closes and erupts into thousands of fluffy white seeds. Each new seed then germinates to be a plant. While one dandelion flower has a clear beginning and end, every dandelion creates many more dandelions. This cycle of life continues inperpetuity. It has been so for more than 30 million years.

While thinking about sustaining change, what can we learn from the life of dandelions? Can we think what to do beyond sustaining the limited impact of a specific change? Can we design change to be like the fluffy seeds that germinate across space and time by using the resources of the system? Can we strengthen the ability and agency of people to become the seeds of change? Can we learn if and how our ability to make and absorb change is improving? We need to think about sustaining change in many more ways than we do today.

Think Sustain is designed as an opportunity to, well, think. It is a curation of ideas and prompts to provoke reimagination. Itdoes not provide

answers, nor could it. We may want to pick it up while designing for sustainable change, or while navigating difficult uncertainties, or just to imagine possibilities.

Please keep some writing material at hand to capture musings or make a doodle or draw a mind-map.

Before we begin the journey, let us visualise a few other scenarios where this book could be useful. A healthy debate ontrade-offs? A workshop to rethink strategy? Conversation starters? A collective reading session? A team game or a collage-making experience? We get infinite possibilities when we combine thinking with reimagination.

I believe that in the midst of the uncertainties unfolding around us, we need to pause for a moment, reimagine how to build upon the improvements we are catalysing, explore alternatives, and raise the aspiration to sustain change that inspires more and rapid change towards building a better society.

— Sanjay Purohit, Chief Curator, Societal Thinking



When progress is visible, the spark that sustains, slow and steady, replaces the anxiety to do everything, all at once.

To recover 5 million hectares of forest every year, we have to restore and sustain ecological and economic balance over decades. Can we build such momentum through active community engagement, enabled by agile policy alignment?



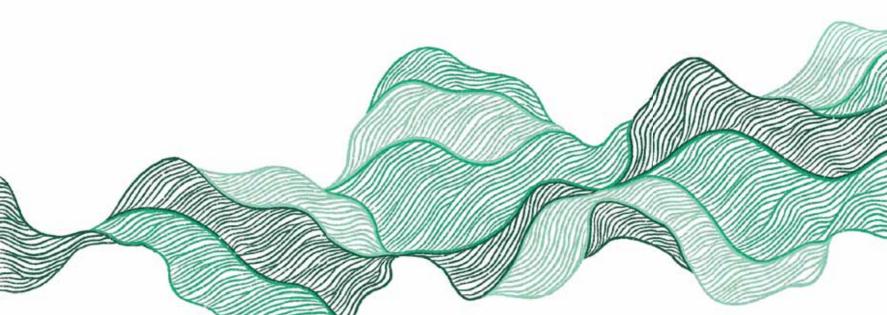
We humans are incredibly shortsighted compared to plants; while we come and go from this life with astonishing frequency, plants can live for hundreds, sometimes thousands of years, and this difference in time scale has probably in part led to our inability to protect and understand them in a collective sense.

— ELLA FRANCES SANDERS

Be clear about the vision and scale aspirations, and why they are important. Unwavering goals ensure that every twist and every turn is navigated with grace. At scale, the resources required are not only more but different from those needed to run a pilot. Align a resource ecosystem while on the drawing board, rather than think about it later. Otherwise we may commit too much too soon and have to work with too little too late.

Movements are built by many thousands of individuals. But sometimes they start with just one.

- JOHN DOERR



Technology companies that prioritise the public interest are essential for a more just future, but they need investments at their earliest stages to thrive.

- LYEL RESNER & WILNEIDA NEGRON

Sustaining change with speed and at scale banks on the endurance of leadership. Leadership cannot show signs of fatigue or stress. The next generation is like the last runner in a very long relay race. The race to end extreme poverty has been a marathon, with the starter gun fired in 1800. This next generation has the unique opportunity to complete the job: to pick up the baton, cross the line, and raise its hands in triumph. The project must be completed. And we should have a big party when we are done.

— HANS ROSLING

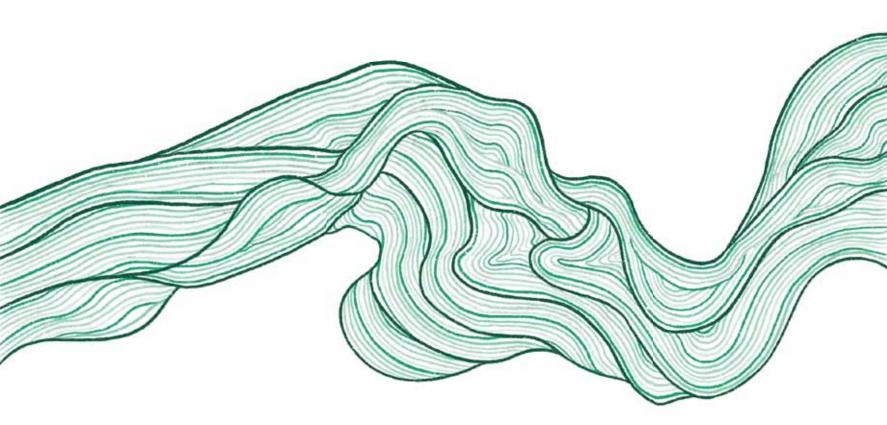


Sometimes it is wise to slow down in order to speed up.

And like all infinite games, in the game of life, the goal is not to win, it is to perpetuate the game.

- SIMON SINEK

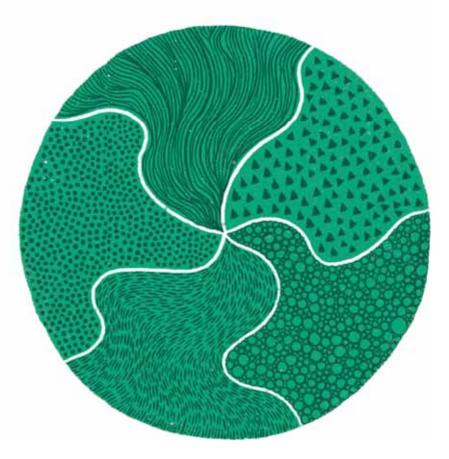
Resilience is the ability to make sustained progress towards goals while navigating uncertainty and setbacks due to failures.



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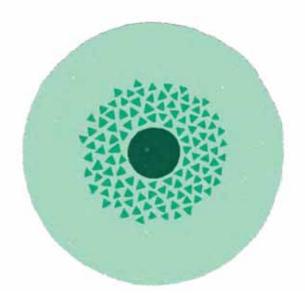
Solutions that serve a few lose relevance over time. Change persists when we shift to a better state, together. A model school can demonstrate what 'good' looks like and raise aspirations. Can we unpack 'good' into many simple actions that help 10 million teachers sustain small changes across all schools?



It is natural to gravitate towards a steady state even if it is undesirable and non-performing. A single bird cannot fly away free from the net in which it is trapped. It takes a flock to lift the prevalent equilibrium.

Nothing is so painful to the human mind as a great and sudden change. The sun might shine, or the clouds might lour: but nothing could appear to me as it had done the day before.

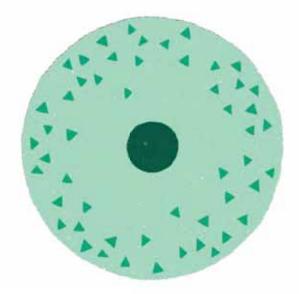
- MARY SHELLEY



If a movement can mobilise 3.5% of the population to participate, there are likely much larger proportions of the population that sympathise with and support the movement.

- ERICA CHENOWETH

The challenge is to create an intense desire for a new state of being. It may be easier if the new place is close to where one is, rather than a distant possibility that seems hard to achieve.



Exercising our agency may be constrained by how resources and power are distributed in the current environment. New forms of agency are unlocked when everyone undergoes change.

Only when all the critical agencies in the system have coordinated their services to meet the total needs of an individual will the homeless person be prepared to move into independent living and housing.

— V. KASTURI RANGAN & TRICIA GREGG

Social-ecological systems can exist in more than one kind of stable state. If a system changes too much it crosses a threshold and begins behaving in a different way, with different feedbacks between its component parts and a different structure. It is said to have undergone a "regime shift".

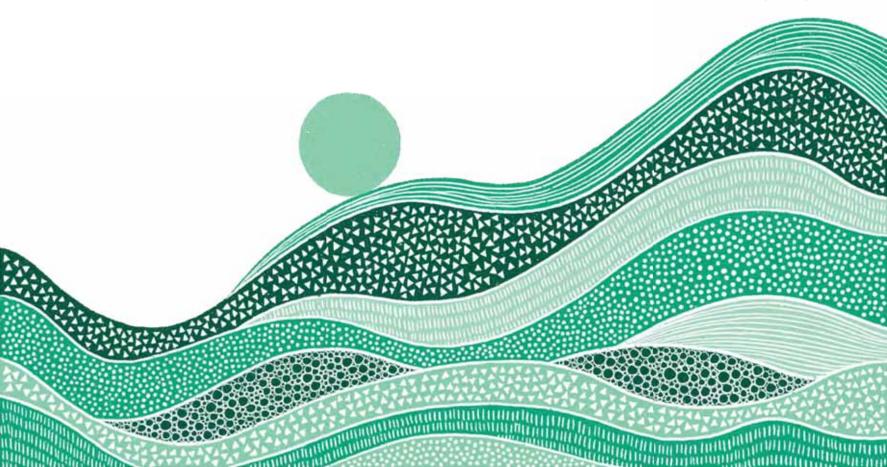
— BRIAN WALKER & DAVID SALT

We always operate within a paradigm. Each paradigm comes with its own patterns and routines. Changing the paradigm changes these for everyone. It moves us to a new equilibrium.



It must happen to us all...We pack up what we've learned so far and leave the familiar behind. No fun, that shearing separation, but somewhere within, we must dimly know that saying goodbye to safety brings the only security we'll ever know.

- RICHARD BACH



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Why is it important to sustain change?

Why is it important to sustain change?



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Over time, what is 'important' shifts. Change sustains when it can keep pace with frequent unexpected resets.

Sustaining quality healthcare for a billion people is a balancing act between crisis response and laying the foundation for longer-term wellbeing. Can shared and open data about both help us sustain this in parallel?



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Formula One winners are great at anticipating turns on a race track. They know when to brake and when to speed. In a large network, priorities are bound to shift. We must anticipate the turns.

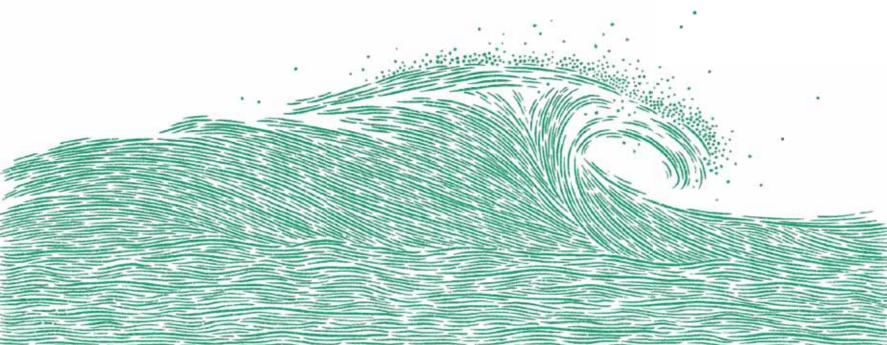
For me, a landscape does not exist in its own right, since its appearance changes at every moment, but the surrounding atmosphere brings it to life, the air and the light which vary continually. For me, it's only the surrounding atmosphere that gives subjects their true value.

— CLAUDE MONET

Perhaps a crux of success or failure as a society is to know which core values to hold on to, and which ones to discard and replace with new values, when times change.

— JARED DIAMOND

We must always ask, 'Does this propel us towards our vision? If not, can we ignore it?' New ideas are exciting but may derail our efforts to sustain change at scale. Some may cause mission drift, others may shift scope.



Those on a quest to induce sustainable change at scale must not get attached to one specific solution. They can serve the ecosystem better by staying focused on distributing the agency to solve.

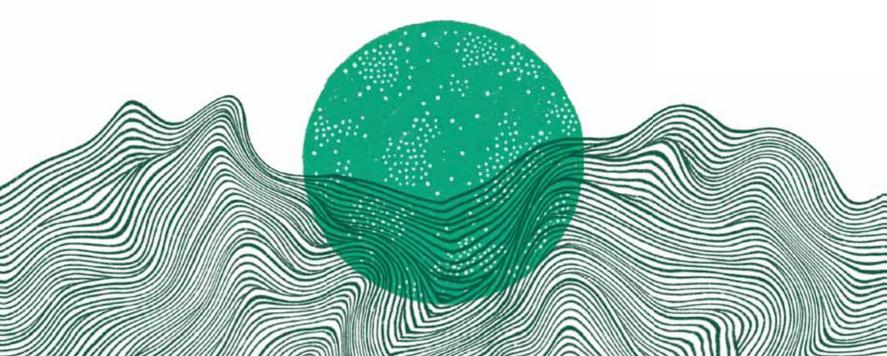
Today, technology has lowered the barrier for others to share their opinion about what we should be focusing on. It is not just information overload; it is opinion overload.

- GREG McKEOWN

What makes it possible for cooperation to emerge is the fact that the players might meet again.

ROBERT AXELROD

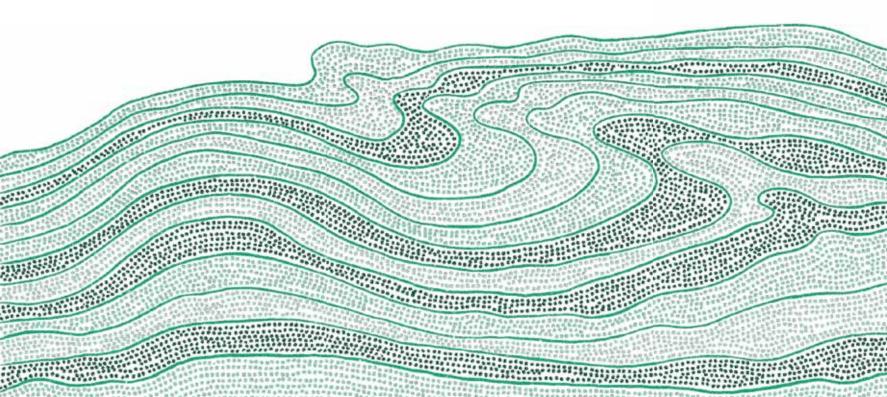
The challenge is to retain our vision through the twilight zone, the space between the dark night of despair and the bright morning of hope.



The best way to predict the future is to create it.

— PETER DRUCKER

Leaders across government, markets and civil society will change over time, that is a certainty. Simple and fundamental change, that is ideology-agnostic, stands a reasonable chance to survive such transitions.

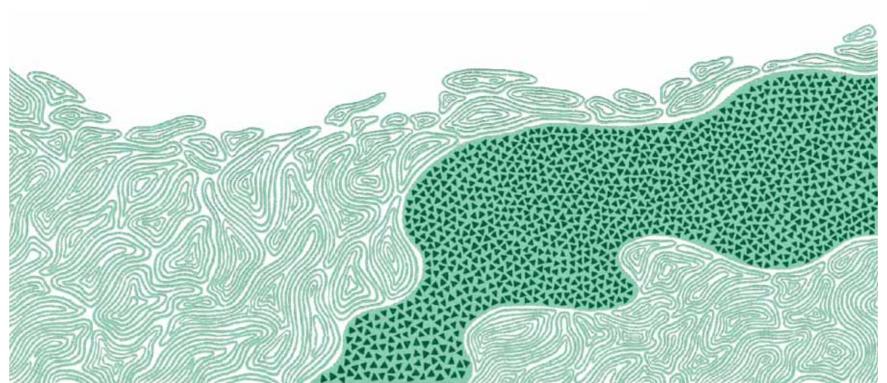


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Almost 50% of daily actions are old habits. Change has the potential to sustain if it forges new habits.

Tolerating gender-based violence around us is the same as being party to its perpetuation. Can all citizens be prompted to practise new rituals that assure the safety of neighbours and change the prevalent culture?



It is so easy to overestimate the importance of one defining moment and underestimate the value of making small improvements on a daily basis.

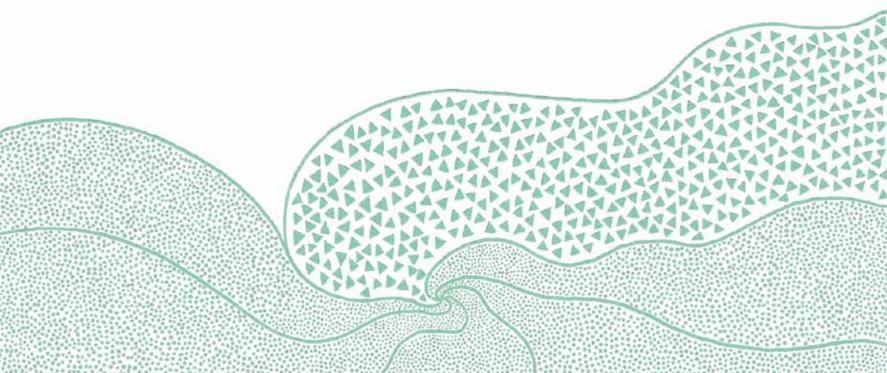
— JAMES CLEAR

More often than not, we focus on defining where people should spend their time. It may be more effective to identify where they are spending their time today and nudge that activity in the desired direction.

When there is a choice between changing old habits and forming new ones, we should choose the latter. New habits may take time to settle in, but they do take root. Old habits, on the other hand, are hard to change.

Change is about noticing what's no longer working and stepping out of the familiar, imprisoning patterns.

- EDITH EVA EGER



When you are designing a new habit, you are really designing for consistency. And for that result, you'll find that simplicity is the key. Simplicity changes behavior.

- B. J. FOGG

Change sustains when new routines become commonplace. It is the mundane that lasts and scales, and not the exciting or the thrilling.

It is not shortage of time that should worry us, but the tendency for the majority of time to be spent in low-quality ways.

- RICHARD KOCH

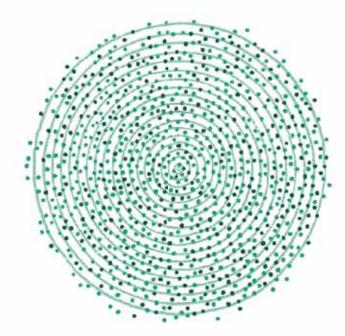
To induce new habits, we may need to invest in new spaces to nurture them. A clean and well-managed community centre may prompt members of the community to meet and solve problems together.

Culture does not make people. People make culture.

— CHIMAMANDA NGOZI ADICHIE

A new habit thrives in a new narrative.

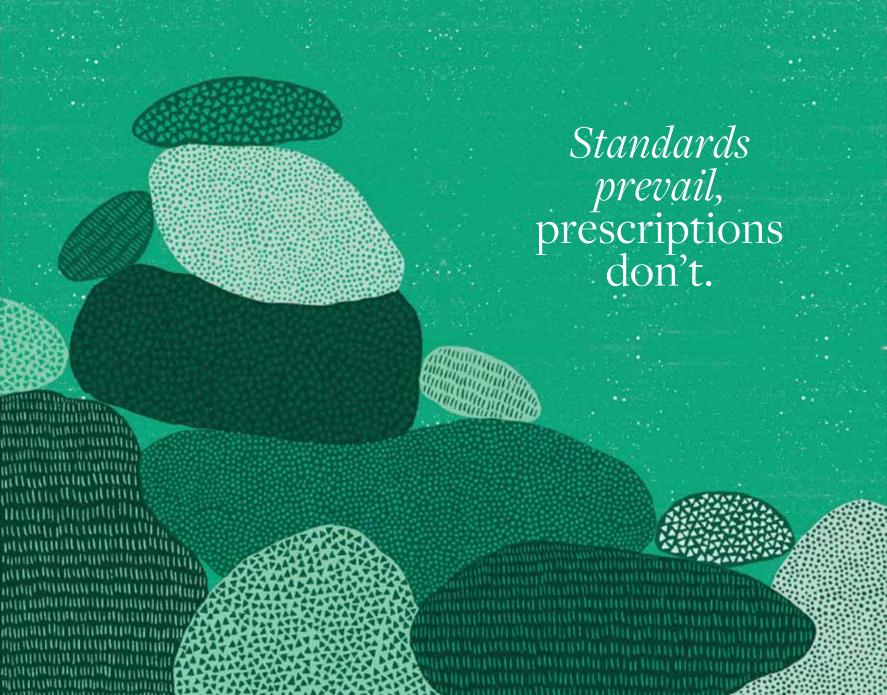




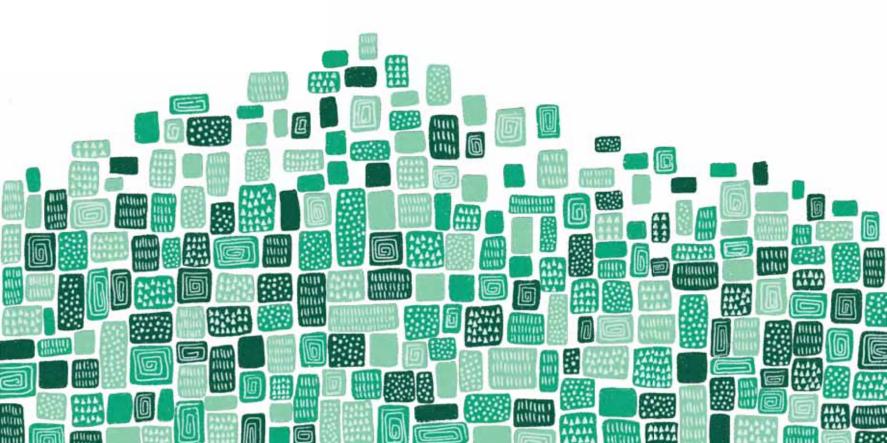
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What simple actions will ensure that change sustains?

What simple actions will ensure that change sustains?



Any one solution cannot suit every context. Standards set expectations that help people find relevant solutions. Competency, aspirations and access must align to create sustainable job opportunities for 3 million youth. Can we define common standards to build trust in people's credentials and enable such matches?



Where there is no standard, there can be no improvement. For these reasons, standards are the basis for both maintenance and improvement.

— MASAAKI IMAI

It is believed that standardisation enables scale. However, standardisation cannot match the diversity of social contexts. For scale, we must worry about what standards need to be defined and by whom. Standards set thresholds: acceptable limits that enable diverse innovations.

Jazz works because the process is designed around small patterns, minimal structures that allow freedom to embellish — a system that balances between the extremes of too much autonomy and too much consensus.

- FRANK BARRETT

Shared standards build trust. They clarify what to expect when we interact and how to improvise when the interaction fails.



I don't propose. I'm old fashioned. I'm not one of these young guys who think they are so smart that they can prescribe what humanity ought to do. Humanity never learns any lessons. Prescriptions don't matter. We already know exactly what to do. We just don't do it.

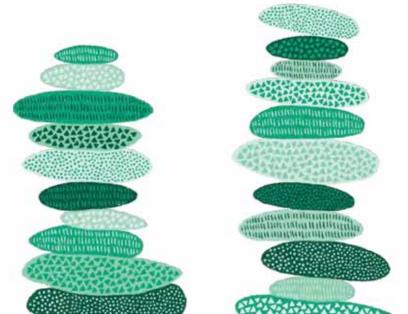
- VACLAV SMIL

Being open is a commitment. The philosophy of openness, in practice, manifests as financial, technical and legal openness. It is the foundation on which open ecosystems are built.

We can either standardise a solution and let people struggle with diversity, or set standards and let a wide ecosystem develop diverse solutions. But just setting standards may not be adequate. We must develop ways to inspire people to innovate using these standards.

The basic principle I would like to see communicated to people is the idea that every form of authority and domination and hierarchy has to prove that it's justified — it has no prior justification. For instance, when you stop your five year old kid from trying to cross the street, that's an authoritarian situation: it's got to be justified.

- NOAM CHOMSKY



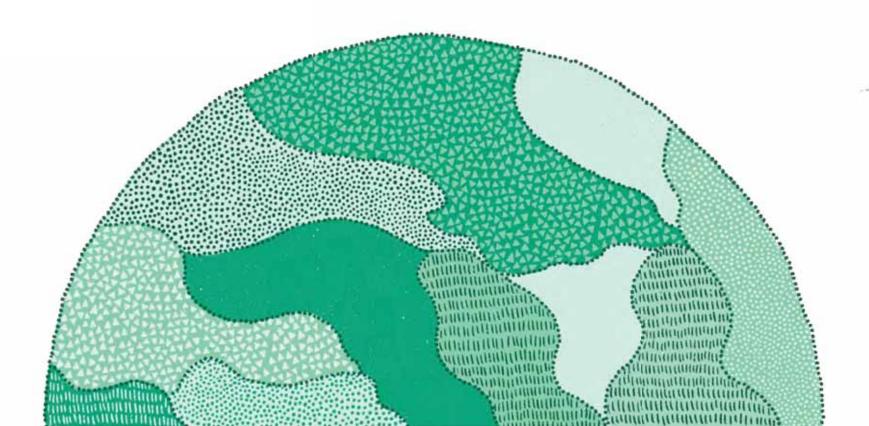




Standardisation leads to rigidity, and rigidity causes things to break.

- BILL JAMES

Co-creation can bring together a solution that neither of us have before. We will be able to create it because we believe in and hold ourselves accountable to a shared standard.



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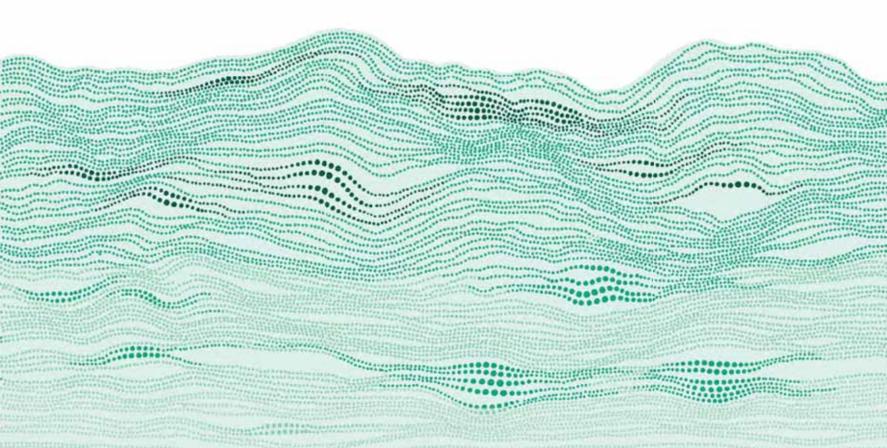
What are some conditions critical to sustaining change?

What are some conditions critical to sustaining change?

What can't be seen, can't be sustained.

Visibility into adoption reduces with scale. New ways to observe progress and identify hurdles help stay the course.

It is hard to sense gradual change across an education system spread over 30 provinces and 500 districts. Can we enable 3 million teachers to share the small changes they observe around them on a daily basis?



What man sees depends both upon what he looks at and also upon what his previous visual-conception experience has taught him to see.

- THOMAS KUHN

Our design challenge is to make simple changes as observable as slight shifts, subtle movements and early wins. If we can make the green shoots visible and nurture them, they will bloom into lush pastures.

Every system emits data. We are limited by our ability to capture and process it in time. Imagine the world before thermometers. We had limited ability to make sense of body temperature data, though the body was emitting that data all the time.

The one thing that I have learned from all these projects is that the key to transformative change is to make the system see itself. That's why deep data matters. It matters to the future of our institutions, our societies, and our planet.

— OTTO SCHARMER & KATRIN KAEUFER

Sense. Make sense. Learn. Act. Repeat.

Good data on performance is important for scale.

— PATRICK DAVIS & BETH BAFFORD

We can level the playing field by ensuring every individual has agency and control over their data assets.

Data is always an abstraction of reality based on underlying assumptions as to how to categorise the unstructured phenomena of the real world.

— CLAYTON CHRISTENSEN

Our comforting conviction that the world makes sense rests on a secure foundation: our almost unlimited ability to ignore our ignorance.

- DANIEL KAHNEMAN

Helping millions of people sustain change is more than just governing it with data and analytics. We must improve sentience: our ability to perceive and feel the changes at an emotional level.



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With 75% of produce tended to by smallholding farmers who own ~0.25 ha of land, soil health data is hard to get. Can each farmer publish and access local data daily so that micro-changes can be observed and acted upon?



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Measure and evaluate. Then measure and evaluate again. The most successful systems change campaigns create consistent and ongoing data assessments, and rely upon those findings to guide strategy and ensure accountability.

— JEFFREY WALKER

It is better to use simple data and act quickly than to collect comprehensive data and let it languish.

Sensors that amplify minute feedback and enable action are critical to improve quality. We have to pause and listen to every actor engaged in solving a complex challenge.

Instead of quantifying worthless output measures, or wringing hands because impact can't be measured in short time frames, donors can measure the strength, relative position, and resilience of coalitions and agents of change they are helping.

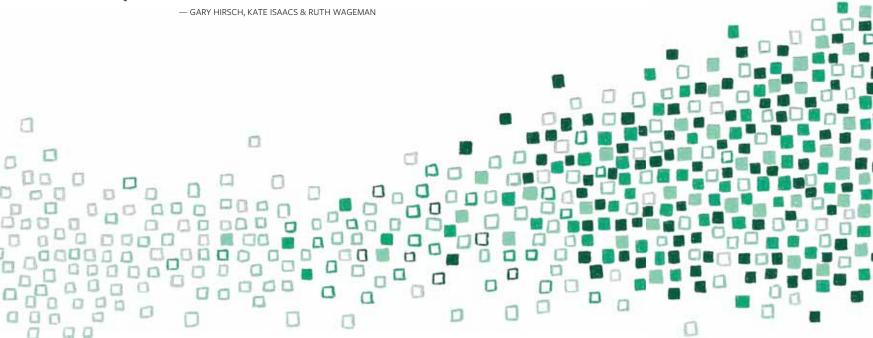
RACHEL KLEINFELD



Being able to see and understand data about ourselves restores our agency. Being able to influence decision-making for our wellbeing using this data is empowering.

Measurable impact leads to other positive effects that enhance the ability to collaborate, such as the potential to pursue new sources of funding or build more infrastructure, which enables yet further collaboration and accomplishment. I often say that when you can measure what you are speaking about, and express it in numbers, you know something about it; but when you cannot measure it, when you cannot express it in numbers, your knowledge is of a meagre and unsatisfactory kind. If you cannot measure it, you cannot improve it.

— LORD KELVIN



Traditional metrics for tracking progress such as the number of people reached may not provide much insight as to how the innovations are working. Instead, nonprofits may want to track, validate, and optimise unit-level metrics such as the adoption rate, retention rate, success rate, and unit economics. Improving these underlying drivers will in turn lead to greater and greater impact.

- ANN MEI CHANG & LAURA LANZEROTTI

It is one thing to make data open and available, it is another to make it easy to access and use. If our intent is to inspire improvement, then both dimensions need to be addressed with the same rigour.

Mind the gap. Bias makes itself invisible.

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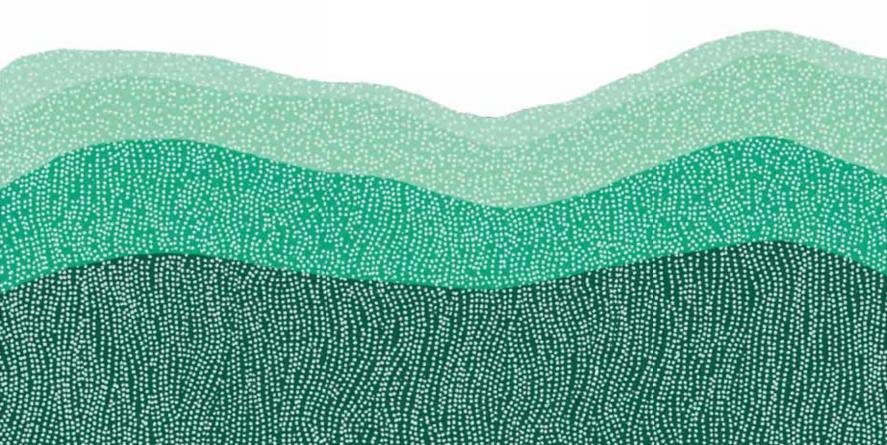
How does access to data improve the ability to sustain?

How does access to data improve the ability to sustain?



With scale, cost of innovation and coordination gets divided between the ever-expanding base of participants.

With only 4% of GDP available for healthcare, serving a population of 50 million can be challenging. Can innovations to improve the utilisation of existing infrastructure be adopted at scale?



As trust improves, the cost to sustain change reduces. As trust persists, the cost to introduce new change reduces. Invest in building trust, it is the best cost optimisation lever there is.

This is a law [of] the way that humans are. In order for anything to evolve like our semiconductor technology has evolved, it takes an enormous amount of creative effort by a large number of smart people. They have to believe that effort is going to result in a successful thing or they won't put the effort in. That belief that it's possible to do this thing is what causes the thing to happen.

CARVER MEAD

Abundance is harder for us to handle than scarcity.

- NASSIM NICHOLAS TALEB

Scarce resources are expensive. Let us seek what is abundant in the system and make it effective while making what is scarce irrelevant.

The right mix between volume and customised production can be achieved by operating a large-scale network of production, yet customising the final product (be it good or service) to the individual consumer.

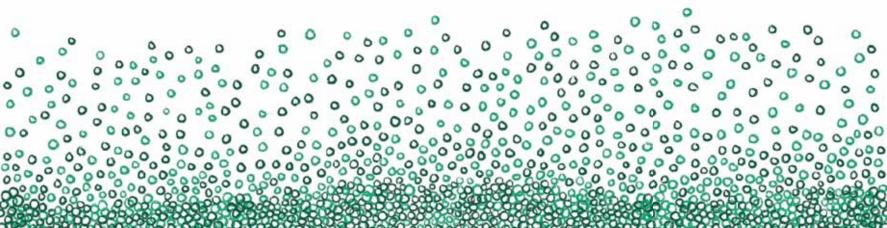
- MANUEL CASTELLS

To reduce the cost of change, monitor two parameters. How easy is it for my neighbour to help me adopt a new habit? How many people have adopted the new habit so far? To be viable at scale, both must improve.

When change is complex, we must decide who needs to deal with the complexity. Either people can struggle with it or systems and processes can be designed to handle it. Making change simple for people is more likely to sustain.

Productivity is "a measure of productive efficiency calculated as the ratio of what is produced to what is required to produce it." If the cost of producing an additional good or service is nearly zero, that would be the optimum level of productivity.

- JEREMY RIFKIN



Costs do not exist to be calculated. Costs exist to be reduced.

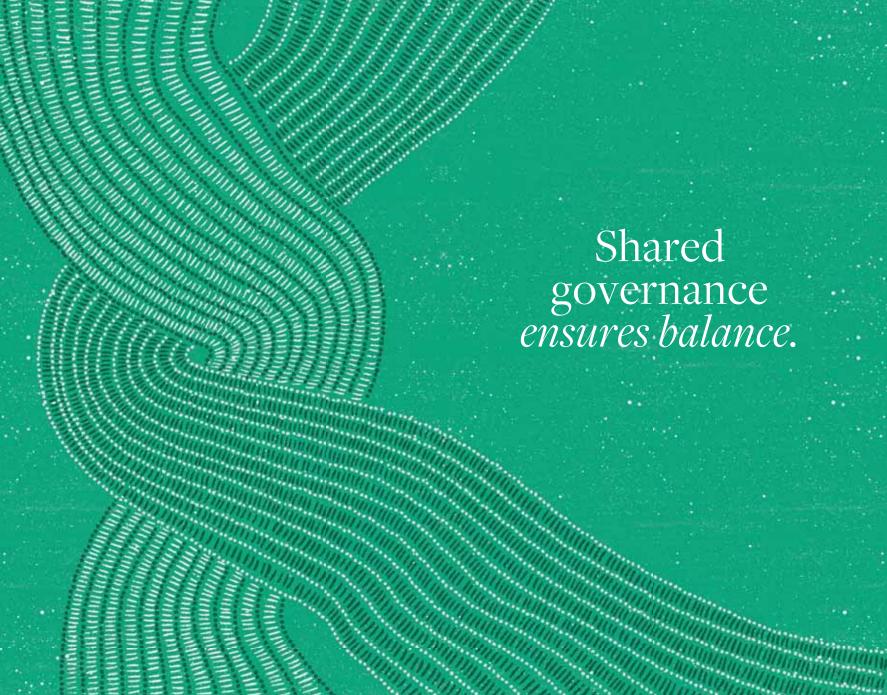
— TAIICHI OHNO

The notion of average cost is misleading. Cost to change increases with complexity. Unit cost of simple change, that anyone can practise at scale, is almost nothing.

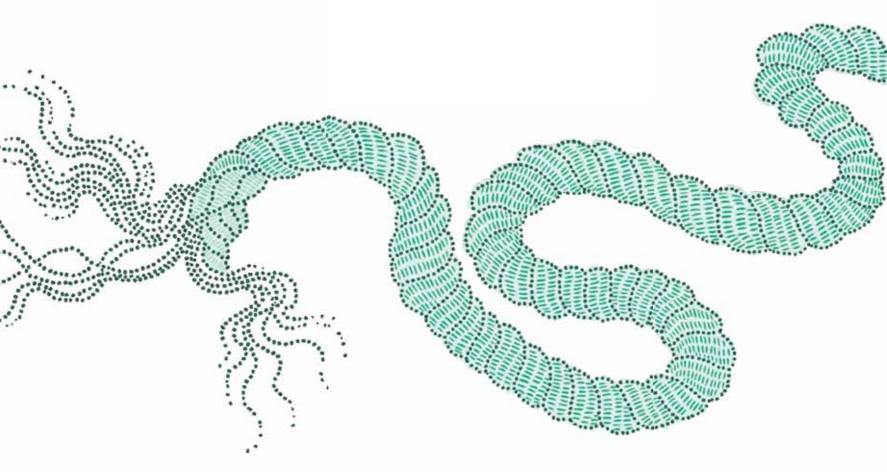
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How to reduce cost of change with scale for it to sustain?

How to reduce cost of change with scale for it to sustain?



Concentration of power is risky. Change sustains when power is shared and decisions are co-created. A third of rainforests and a tenth of species on Earth are at risk due to misaligned governance by governments, businesses and communities. Can data-driven and shared decision-making revive ecosystems? 100

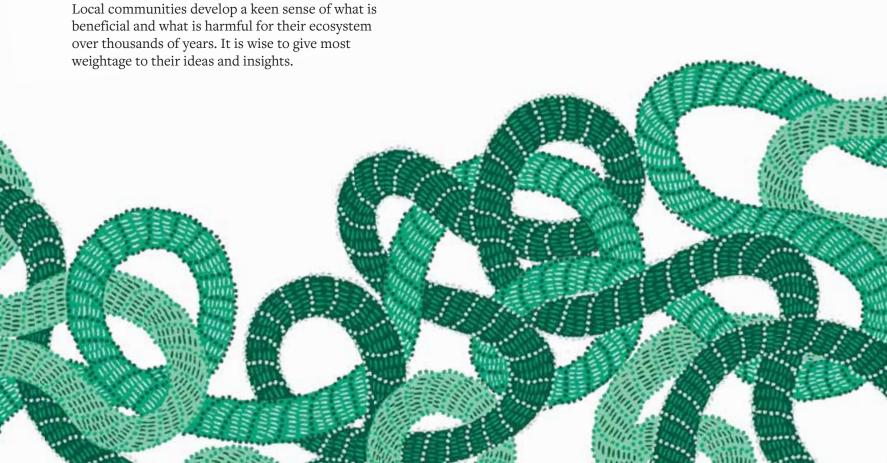


The co-creative enterprise is not about "build it and they will come". Rather, it is about "build it with them, and they're already there".

- VENKAT RAMASWAMY & FRANCIS GOUILLART

Optimism requires confidence, and confidence is built on trust. And trust, as we know, flows in both directions.

- TIM BROWN



How we allocate resources will decide which intent will translate to action and which will stay just an intent. We must decide what we want to do and allocate the resources to do it at the same time.

Effective transfer of ownership will be a springboard to national scale.

- SESSO CHRISTOPHE GBELEOU & JENNIFER SCHECHTER

The paradox is that we often treat technology platforms as black boxes that can only be theorised about, while in fact, platforms collect and store more data about their own functioning than any other entities in history.

— DANIEL BJÖRKEGREN & CHIARA FARRONATO

Disruptions due to climatic, economic or technological changes are becoming fast, frequent and fierce. Policies and regulations that kept pace with slow disruption now lag behind. If we can anticipate impact and align policies and regulations accordingly, change has a better chance of survival.

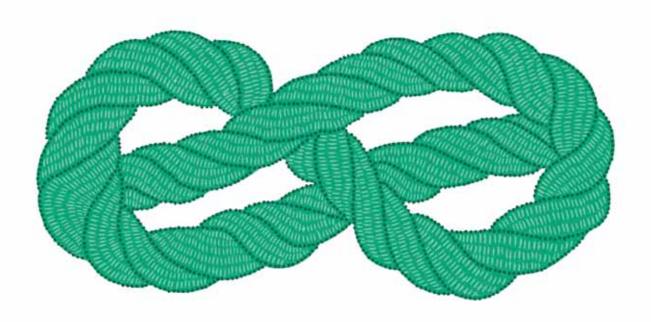
The effectiveness of shared governance is directly proportional to the openness of data, information and knowledge.

When like-minded leaders know each other, they can unite and collaborate to make something exponential possible.

- NANCY ORTBERG

With transition, new leaders assume charge over time. It is important to ensure that values — the core belief in agency, dignity and choice of the society — do not change. Establish the values with the checks and balances required to hold leaders accountable.

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How can shared governance sustain change for all actors?

How can shared governance sustain change for all actors?





Working together is better than striving alone. Not uniform, but unified actions sustain change at scale.

Everyone, without exception, has an active role in ensuring that a billion girls complete education on time. Can each of us figure out our role and play it in our immediate neighbourhood?



Create more value than you capture.

- TIM O'REILLY

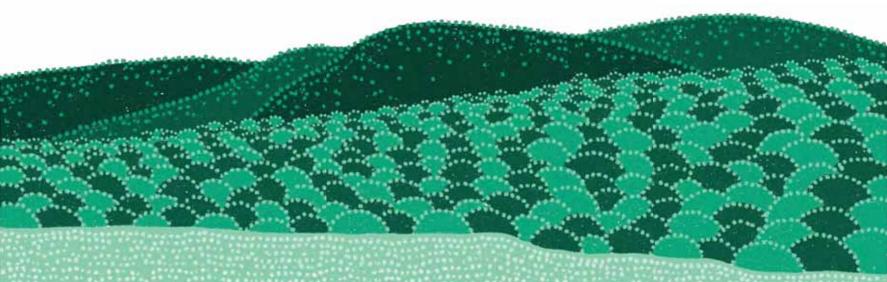
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Connect the dots across the ecosystem. For governments, it means getting the attention of the system (budgets, priorities and resources) and signalling it as salient. For markets, it is about meeting customer needs. For civil society organisations, it means ensuring that communities can improve their lives and move forward.

Strengthening Samaaj (society) aligns Sarkaar (government) and Bazaar (market) to our collective purpose of a good society. We cannot be mere consumers of good governance; we have to co-create it.

- ROHINI NILEKANI

We have schools, textbooks and millions of teachers. Everyone is trying to improve learning outcomes. The government is involved, so is the private sector and not-for-profit organisations. Can we leverage this existing ecosystem? It seems to be much more energy efficient than doing everything all by ourselves.



Capital to sustain change comes in many avatars. It is used to fuel experiments, develop building blocks, enable ecosystems of diverse solutions, manage largescale adoption programs and support rapid innovation cycles just to name a few. The capital ecosystem must be commensurate with and as sophisticated as the impact aspirations.

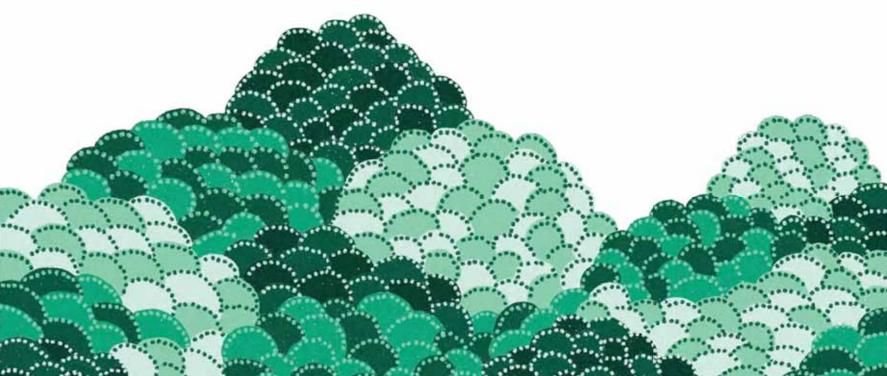
Accept scale as a shared responsibility.

— J. GREGORY DEES

One sector toiling in isolation or digging into an adversarial approach cannot achieve breakthrough scale on its own. Instead, engaging and coordinating actions across various actors from the private, nonprofit, and public sectors is critical.

KRISS DEIGLMEIER & AMANDA GRECO

Population-scale impact happens when change unlocks the agency of and creates sustained value for both individuals and institutions.



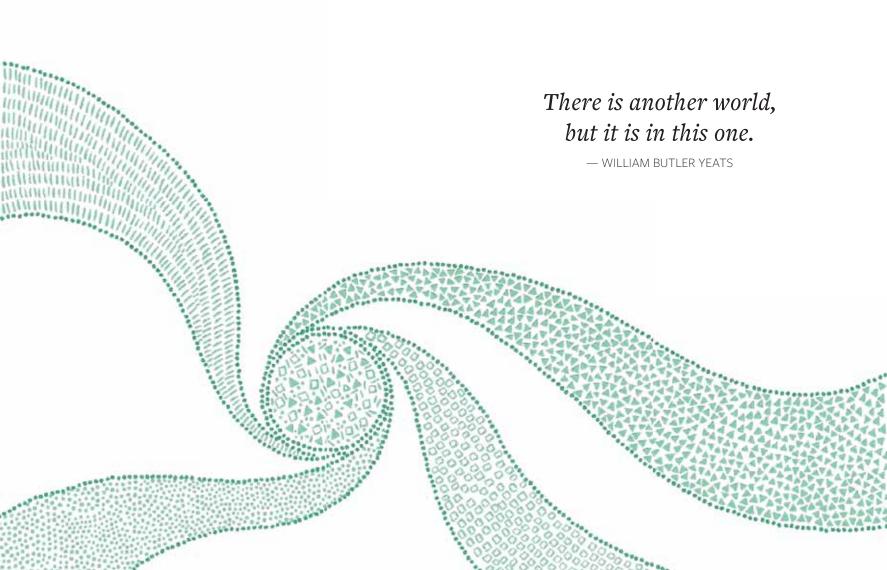
That which is not good for the swarm, neither is it good for the bee.

- MARCUS AURELIUS

Traditional instinct is to identify what is scarce, such as expert capacity or apt resources, and try to make it abundant. This often does not scale. If we can identify what is abundant, such as community members or local practices, and try to make these effective, they may sustain at scale.



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PAUSE TO REFLECT

What does it mean to sustain change?

Why is it important to sustain change?

What makes it difficult to sustain change?

What simple actions will ensure that change sustains?

What are some conditions critical to sustaining change?

How can shared visibility sustain change?

How does access to data improve the ability to sustain?

How to reduce cost of change with scale for it to sustain?

How can shared governance sustain change for all actors?

Where to begin? When to begin?

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Societal Thinking

We live in a complex world where social problems multiply. For example, more children join schools before we can remedy the learning losses of the ones graduating. At scale, our unpredictable and diverse environments make it hard to estimate the impact our solutions will have on learning levels. Meanwhile, like the virus that had upended our lives, learning problems mutate across generations before we can scale new ideas.

In dynamic situations, for impact at scale, change efforts must recognise and restore the agency of people and institutions across civil society, government and markets. To outpace problems that multiply and mutate, we must respond with an approach whose effects also multiply and evolve. Exponential problems can be countered with exponential change.

Societal Thinking is one such systemic approach to apply a set of core values and design principles to induce exponential change. It focuses on three areas: How to help key societal actors align their programmes and deliver impact? How to nurture a diverse ecosystem of change leaders who can co-create relevant solutions? How to

connect everyone with a shared digital backbone to deliver impact at scale, with speed, sustainably?

This is an invitation to think and design for exponential societal change.

www.societalthinking.org



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We hope this book nudged you to think about sustaining change!

— Anjali Hans, Naveen Varshan and Sanjay Purohit

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Where we create the opportunity to reflect on what scale means.



Where we create the opportunity to reflect on what speed means.



Where we create the opportunity to reflect on what it means to sustain.

Social problems are complex. In our efforts to deal with emerging uncertainties, we often grapple to sustain change. How do we sustain, at scale, the limited impact of a specific change? How do we strengthen the agency of people to make change? How do we institutionalise change?

Think Sustain is an opportunity to pause and reflect on how to sustain change. It is a window into the thoughts and experiences of change leaders, thinkers and funders on a journey to enable change that sustains.

