

On Sustainability

Cultural humility is a useful exercise in understanding your role as an agent of sustainability in a complex system. It is difficult to relinquish the illusions of power and delusions of exceptionalism that come with privilege. But it is strangely liberating to realise your true status as a single node in a cooperative network. There is honour to be found in this role, and a certain dignified agency. You won't be swallowed up by a hive mind or lose your individuality—you will retain your autonomy while simultaneously being profoundly interdependent and connected. In fact, sustainable systems cannot function without the full autonomy and unique expression of each independent part of the interdependent whole.

Sustainability agents have a few simple operating guidelines, or network protocols, or rules if you like—connect, diversify, interact and adapt.

Diversity is not about tolerating difference or treating others equally and without prejudice. The diversification principle compels you to maintain your individual difference, particularly from other agents who are similar to you. This prevents you from clustering into narcissistic flash mobs. You must also seek out and interact with a wide variety of agents who are completely dissimilar to you. Finally, you must interact with other systems beyond your own, keeping your system open and therefore sustainable.

Connectedness balances the excesses of individualism in the diversity principle. The first step in connectedness is forming pairs (like kinship pairs) with multiple other agents who also pair with others. The next step is creating or expanding networks of these connections. The final step is making sure these networks are interacting with the networks of other agents, both within your system and in others.

Interaction is the principle that provides the energy and spirit of communication to power the system. This principle facilitates the flow of living knowledge. For this, you must be transferring knowledge (and energy and resources) rather than trying to store it individually, with as many other agents as possible. If the world ever experiments with an actual free market rather than an oligopoly, this would be the perfect system to facilitate sustainable interactions. Knowledge, value and energy in truly sustainable networks of interaction are prevented from remaining static and unchanging by the final protocol.

Adaptation is the most important protocol of an agent in a sustainable system. You must allow yourself to be transformed through your interactions with other agents and the knowledge that passes through you from them. This knowledge and energy will flow through the entire system in feedback loops and you must be prepared to change so that those feedback loops are not blocked. An agent that is truly adaptive and changing is open to sudden eruptions of transformation, in which the agent may temporarily take on the role of strange attractor and facilitate chain reactions of creative events within the system.

[...] You have to keep moving, both as a strange attractor and as a sustainability agent. If you are following the four protocols of working within the pattern, little systems of vibrant complexity will spring up around you, and other strange attractors will draw you into their amazing webs. These will attract other agents, but they will also attract narcissists in droves. You need to insulate yourself against these entropic elements, but you also have a responsibility to help them.

Yunkaporta, Tyson. *Sand Talk: How Indigenous Thinking can Save the World*, Text Publishing, Melbourne Australia, 2019, Digital Edition, pp 64-66.