Transformative capacity

Resource Sheet 6 (RS 6)

What is transformation?

Transformation (sometimes called radical adaptation) is a deep, systemic type of change. Major structural shifts including changes to form and beliefs (hence 'trans-form') occur during transformational change leading to changes in feedback loops, function and identity. Where transformation takes place slowly through a series of incremental steps it is often called a transition. Examples include a shift to mining of prime agricultural land or from dryland farming to large scale irrigation developments.

In this study we are interested in a transition towards sustainable resource use. Contributions to this transition can be at a number of levels including personal transformations, paradigm shifts, governance transformations and practice innovations. No till farming is an example of a transition to sustainable land management through its fundamental shift from traditional high disturbance soil cultivation practices to growing crops and pastures without ploughing.

Active & forced transformation

There are two types of transformation. *Forced transformations* are those imposed from outside such as decisions by government to restructure the dairy industry and reduce water license entitlements. *Active transformations* are those intentionally instigated from within in response to shocks or perceived crisis situations such as regional community responses to the closure of BHP in Wollongong and Newcastle or regional

agricultural transitions from traditional unprofitable orchard crops to vineyards and wine production, such as is the case in Orange, NSW.

Transformative capacity

Transformative capacity is defined as a special form of adaptive capacity that, when required, enables a community to intentionally instigate transformative action and/or to navigate their way through an active or forced transformation. This usually happens when the when the existing system or any of its component parts are out of fit with the environment in which it sits.

Key components

Component 1: Access to the services that flow from capital stocks which are the resources for memory, rebuilding and renewal.

Component 2: Governance structures/institutions that support participatory knowledge exchange processes among stakeholders particularly about shared ideals, deepening insight into current, historic and potential future situations, opening up the possibilities for innovations which are the embryos of new futures, and nurturing these innovations in safe arenas to provide opportunities for up-scaling and diffusion.

Component 3: Emergent or entrepreneurial leadership that can:

- read signals of change, engage with community concerns and recognise windows

of opportunity for change; reframe problems as opportunities and activate stimulants of transformative action
- articulate the scale/urgency of concerns and foster alliances in ways that address 'the state of denial'
- break technical, political and managerial patterns of the past and mobilise creative thinking
- access and mobilise capital stocks and services to nurture innovations.

Component 4: Stimulants of transformative action including:
- deep reflection; which stimulates triple loop learning
- innovation networking; which explores alternative system trajectories and links across institutional levels to scale up change
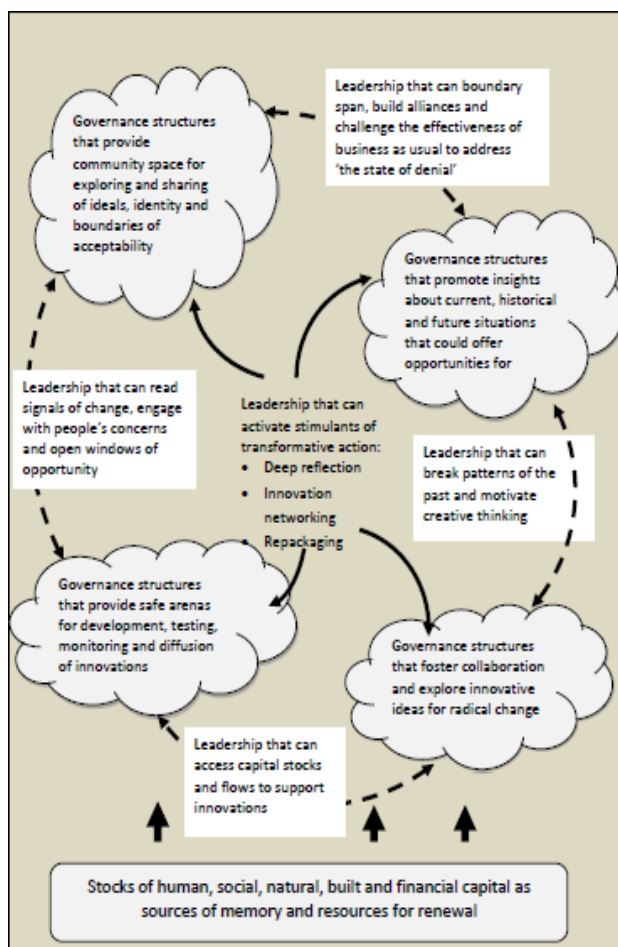
- Reframing/repackaging of knowledge in novel ways which opens up opportunities
- tipping point incentives; which are targeted temporally and spatially to assist in crossing critical thresholds.

Cape York experience

Cape York NRM is actively building transformative capacity through its *planning by doing* approach and project governance so the people of Cape York can transform the way NRM is conducted in the region. Each project reflects opportunities to work on priority issues of concern to communities, fosters collective learning, is designed to enhance knowledge generation and sharing, build local leadership capacity and strengthen and bridge networks. Examples include:

- new locally driven collaborative governance arrangements, knowledge sharing and real time monitoring around integrated turtle/predator relationships on the west coast
- community groups to mentor new Indigenous ranger groups to build leadership/project management and delivery capacities while working together on key issues of concern
- establishment of a champions network across Cape York to build local leadership capacity
- building the capacity of graziers, Indigenous landholders and conservation managers to share understandings of how the system works and to work together on shared problems.

Further information

Partnership Study Resource Material:
www.ausresilience.com.au/research/transformation

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