

# HOW CHANGE HAPPENS

## Part 2: describing the energy and flow of change

### Change - rational, linear, closed system

A rational, linear, closed change system is characterised by control, limiting the conditions to ensure the predictability of actions and reactions, for example cause and effect; known inputs producing known outcomes. This point of view is the fundamental base running through all aspects of Western life, including our understanding about how change happens. Power in a rational, linear system is viewed as source of control or for defence.

In a closed system boundaries are edges defining separateness and may mark barriers for defence.

This view of change can lead to frustration, 'effort-full' working, violence to ourselves (and potentially to others) and can lead to burnout, and missing openings and opportunities.

### Change - organic, open system

Change, from an organic, open systems point of view, can be predictable and unpredictable, chaotic. It comes from a basic understanding that conditions are always shifting in ways we can perceive and ways we can't. Because of our knowledge that every action has a reaction and everything is inter-relational, we can cultivate conditions conducive to certain outcomes, make 'openings' and 'invitations' but not always control how, or when, they will bear fruit. Power in an open system is viewed in all its complexity, power with (a group's collective power), power over (control, persuasion) and power within (our inner courage and strength from which change originates).

In an open system, boundaries are viewed as meeting places and opportunities for exchange.

This view of change can be empowering and lead to longer-term and sustained activism.

*n.b. Joanna Macy has resources about change in an open and organic system. See 'the work that reconnects', 'living systems' and 'the great turning' on her website.*

[www.joannamacy.net](http://www.joannamacy.net)

### Change – comes from the margins

- No matter how homogeneous a group, institution or society, a close observation reveals that some characteristics are marginalised. The mainstream's preferences often are the dominant way of doing things, setting the tone about expected and acceptable behaviour, and way of organising ourselves.
- The mainstream, or dominant culture, is not about numbers. Mainstream is not synonymous with 'majority'. Mainstream is about who has their interests or values esteemed or held up as the 'norm'.
- Change usually originates in the margins, and is helped along by strategic and influential allies from the mainstream. .

## **Change – comes from head, heart and hand actions**

Change comes about when a critical mass of the population is involved in head, heart and hand actions. Everyone's contributions are unique, important and part of making change happen. None of us can do everything, but all of us can do something. And change requires broad based diverse alliances to push new ideas/behaviours/attitudes/policies into the mainstream, so all the more important just to do whatever it is you do.

These descriptions are not intended to be taken as mutually exclusive hard and fast categories. Expect to find overlap and shades of grey when discussing these categories with others. We offer them as a helpful framework for understanding how different types of change and who typically is involved.

**Head** - actions (tools, tactics, methods) that are creative and come from outside the boxing thinking. These actions are about building alternative institutions in favour of humanity and counter to oppression and domination. For example, unarmed civilian accompaniment in places of armed conflict, alternative economies like time banks, local currencies, rehabilitating military land to its natural state, a community garden on squatted land.

**Hands** - actions that respond to an immediate need to interrupt violence, domination and oppression and attend to immediate needs. Think of it as 'activist triage', or putting plasters on The System so we can keep chugging along, doing less damage than before. These are actions like women's refuges from abuse, soup kitchens for people forced homeless, writing letters urging reform in legislation.

**Heart** - actions that do deep transformational work to contribute to shifts in universal consciousness. Heart actions help people grow their awareness and wisdom; and aims to get people to open up and connect with one another. While facts are important, feelings are more important in helping people make changes in behaviour, attitudes, values and beliefs and heart work is about building empathy and connection between people and using that as a basis to shape our actions. Heart actions exposes abuses of power and strives to enable people to touch their own power.

*And the people doing these actions can be described as ...*

**Helpers/good citizens** - people who do the 'right thing' sign a petition, make a donation, recycle, take public transport if possible. They are 'good citizens', trying to help out and do their part.

**Advocates/activists** – the people who circulate the petitions, organising the events, they belong to groups and actively work with others to change things. To be successful they must convince and convert more 'good citizens' to their campaigns

**Rebels** - the people who are ready to put their bodies in the way, they have a sense of urgency that we need to do more, often these folks are on the cutting edge of change, showing the rest of us where we need to go, or go back to. A variety of people are required to support rebels' actions to make them successful.

**Change agents** – the people who are the networkers and communicators making it all happen on different levels. These are the people linking the grassroots, communities, small organisations to the formal structures, and powers that be, sometimes comes in the form of advocacy, reform or statutory changes

*nb. The idea of change as head, heart and hands action is blend of concepts from Joanna Macy's 'The Great Turning' and Bill Moyers 'Movement Action Plan'.*