

“The biggest paradigm shifts happening right now are ironically the increasing awareness of the existence of paradigms...”

In his Book *‘The Structure of Scientific Revolution’*, Thomas Kuhn wrote that advancement was not evolutionary but rather a *“series of peaceful interludes punctuated by intellectually violent revolutions”* when *“one conceptual worldview is replaced by another”*.

These *‘paradigm shifts’*- a term Kuhn created - are best thought of as a transformation driven by agents of change. Examples of change agents through history include the invention of mechanical automation, electrical technology and more recently the digital revolution. The next paradigm shift, known as the Fourth Industrial Revolution, will probably be the advance of ‘Smart’ technology which will unleash the potential of individuals and communities.

Paradigms are useful filters for problem solving and decision making within a particular system. They represent the existing worldview. But as Kuhn observed, clinging to the wrong paradigm means you can miss the blindingly obvious. If you believed the Sun orbited the Earth, then you would assume the Sun really was ‘setting’. Systems theorist, Buckminster Fuller, replaced ‘sunrise’ and ‘sunset’ with the terms ‘sunlight’ and ‘sunclipse’ to counter this Ptolemaic bias.

Paradigms can make fools of us all, influencing seemingly intelligent people into making disastrous decisions. Look at the world stage and you see the results of faulty thinking. Wars, environmental degradation, recession, austerity and inequality are all examples of people working with ineffective paradigms.

When we’re in the wrong groove we’re slow to realise it. We become comfortably uncomfortable in our comfort zones because we fear the discomfort and uncertainty of exploring the new paradigm. We’ll stay in the same groove until there is enough pain to shift us. There are usually five steps to human transformation:

- 1. We become disillusioned with the present reality**
- 2. We have an insight into a better world**
- 3. We experience enough motivation (pain) to get us shifting**
- 4. We develop a pathway towards the new improved reality**
- 5. We experience enough motivation (pleasure) to want to continue along the new path.**

The problem with this process is that we ultimately experience a lot of unnecessary pain before we make a shift. The main reason for not '*shifting*' effectively is because the people who are winning in the present system fear losing in the new system. They begin to fall under the spell of the 7 delusions, (See diagram).

The 7 Delusions

**Certainty
Permanence
Authority
Counter-Dependence
Entitlement
Ownership
Institutions**

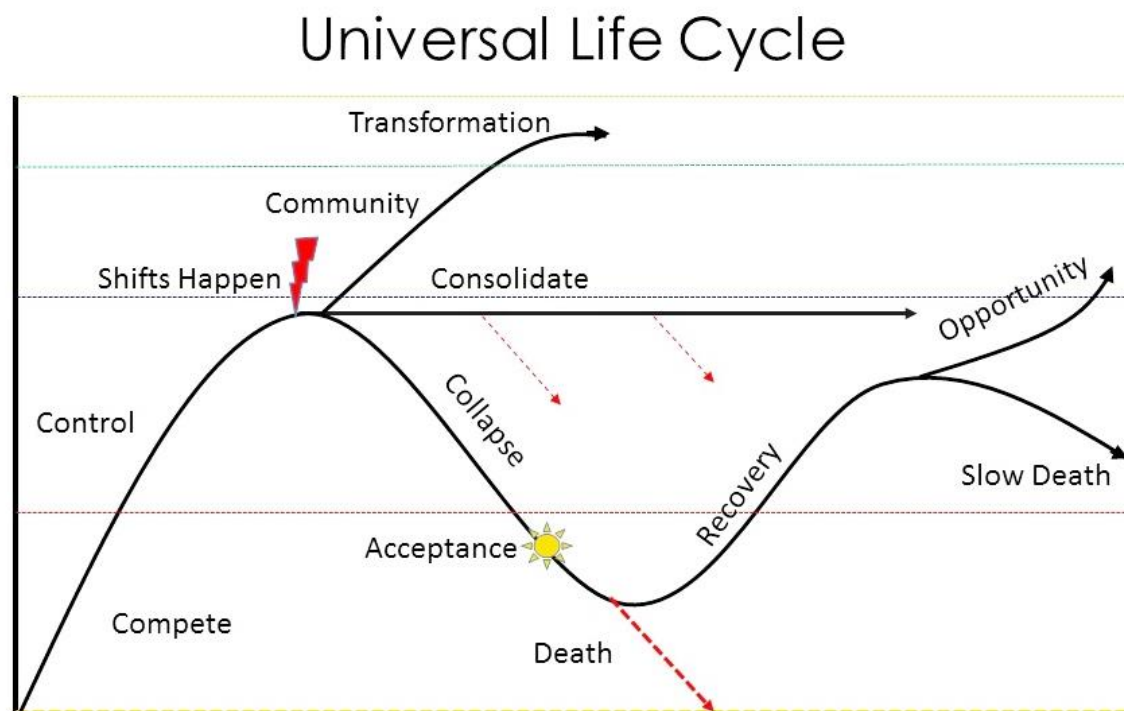
Paradigm winners in the dominant system believe that they are imbued with some superhuman qualities. That when it applies to them, things will remain the same. They feel blessed with authority and control and entitled to have more. They also believe they are an island which allows them to succeed without worrying about the fallout to the rest of humankind and the planet.

Just one recent example of this was the EU referendum. The people winning in the EU paradigm, the elites in bureaucracy, academia and business, didn't count on the people who we're not doing so well since the recession; upsetting the apple cart. To protect what they've achieved, paradigm winners build complicated, hierarchical institutions making them formidable opponents to shift. Today however, practically every

institution is undergoing a shift. Everything is in flux. That means pain and uncertainty because whenever there is a paradigm shift everything goes back to a level playing field and that's scary. We're all at ground zero again.

The Universal Life Cycle

Spotting paradigm shifts early on is difficult to do. The people best placed to notice shifts are those on the coal face or those on the outside or edges of the system such as mavericks and entrepreneurs. Moreover; people moving jobs or to a completely new field are unencumbered with the paradigm reinforcing programming of working within the mature system.



When I show clients the Universal Life Cycle (see diagram above) they intuitively know their current position which brings clarity. It helps them form an action plan as well as realising who has the right skills and strengths needed for the next move.

Every human system moves through this life cycle and these life cycle paradigms become more recognisable once we're aware of their existence. Experts will notice a paradigm and create theories aligned with what is working in that particular paradigm. Of course the theories are situation dependent on our position on the life cycle. Take politics. Any political theory is only effective in certain situations. The point is we're not supposed to cling to one theory over the other, we have to adapt as we evolve.

Our present political system is like rowing down the river of life with only one paddle. You'll go in circles. When we swap hands, i.e. have an election and change parties, we feel like we're making progress. But we're actually just passing through the centre line and will eventually go in circles in the opposite direction.

Here are the universal life cycle stages and the paradigms I think reflect the stage:

Compete Stage: The '*against all odds*' paradigm.

Every new idea has to compete for its place in the Universe. This is the time of the entrepreneur and innovator. Like a baby, the project has a very *co-dependent* relationship with the world and needs a constant supply of resources such as money, clients and hours of hard work. This is the paradigm entrepreneurs thrive in. As legendary investor John Doerr observed;

"...entrepreneurs do more than anyone thinks possible with less than anyone thinks possible."

New ideas must prove themselves worthwhile and trying to skip this stage by attracting funding, doesn't always ensure long term success. According to the Wall Street Journal, 70% of venture backed projects fail. It's a roller coaster ride at this stage but once entrepreneurs have achieved a foothold they move onto the next stage.

Control Stage: The '*Good to great*' paradigm.

Once an idea has achieved some measure of success, processes and rules are introduced to cope with continued growth. The '*Good to great*' paradigm is a *counter-dependent* stage that relies less on people and more on measurement and discipline to keep on the growth path. This is where we take the *humanness* out of the equation and add more certainty. Everything becomes *widgetized*. This is when a business will be making good money and paradoxically when leaders should begin to look for the next paradigm shift. It will have already begun to germinate into existence.

Consolidation Stage: The '*Bigger is better*' paradigm.

The human ego is scared of not getting what it wants and when it's got it; losing it. Leaders often avoid looking for the next paradigm shift and head towards what seems like the safer option; consolidation. The consolidation or *bigger is better* paradigm, is an over played psychological strength. That of creating more certainty with more processes, rules and barriers to entry for new players. We'll often see the emergence of imposing buildings, hierarchies, more layers of management, more rules and gate keepers.

As the system attempts to secure more control, there'll be take-overs. However; one mediocre system acquiring another mediocre system will not make for a better bigger system. They'll be more extraction of resources from within the system, so we often see institutional '*bending*' of the rules as the system attempts to feed its addiction for perpetual growth and power; think Enron and Volkswagen. They then enter the:

Collapse Stage: The '*Shifts Happen!*' paradigm.

Generally paradigm shifts develop over a period of time. A disruptive influence will be born at some point, go unnoticed but eventually cause the system to experience what seems like a sudden collapse. The situation is exacerbated by the human tendency for denial. In fact anybody who does bring attention

to the threat will probably be sacked, as we saw in the banking crisis. Whistle-blowers are always attacked by the system.

Effective leaders don't shoot messengers. Paradigm shifts are a facet of life. People should be encouraged to challenge and speak up. It's a good idea to have a reconnaissance team looking out for new trends. Self-managing teams, which are more agile, creative and enterprising, whilst not a new idea, are gaining increasing prominence in the organisational world because of their adaptability. After the collapse comes the:

Recovery Stage: The '*Great Turnaround*' paradigm

After a period of denial the system eventually accepts there is a problem. This begins a period of shedding all the excess that the consolidation period accumulated. A bit like dumping the excess baggage from a hot air balloon that's losing height. This is often when the bean counters use the crisis as an excuse to wrestle back control. They prioritise profits over people who are once again *widgitized*. Austerity is a classic example of this.

It takes a huge effort to stop the downward momentum towards death of the system. Everybody is in a state of high anxiety. There is an urgent need to get back to being comfortable, back to '*Business as Usual*'. Of course this is an impossibility because there is no more '*usual*'. You cannot step on the same piece of river twice because everything is in a continuous state of flux. However it's not all bad news because effective leaders look for the next stage:

Opportunity Stage: The '*Finding Diamonds in the dirt and gold in the grit*' paradigm

Once in recovery stage there is either an attempt to get back to *business as usual* or the alternative, which is to look to embrace the disruptive elements. Looking for '*diamonds in the dirt and gold in the grit*' is a more positive response. It's a pull towards a more evolved and advanced world. It's a

counter-intuitive move, but moving towards the solution as opposed to running from the problem is a higher level response.

Every systemic and chaotic collapse involves an equal amount of disruption and opportunity. You lose the old but can gain from the new, but only if you look for and embrace the new opportunities. Evolution involves looking for greater diversity, with enhanced symbiotic relationships from which emerge more complex and elegant solutions. Of course if no new lessons are learnt a system will enter the:

Slow Death Stage: The *'Lessons are repeated until they're learnt'* paradigm

Generally, in consolidated organisations, the entrepreneurs and innovators who, with passion and enthusiasm, have driven the organisation towards a more certain future are bought out, forced out or leave the system out of bureaucratic boredom.

So even after the bean counters have slashed and burned the excess, there is still nothing new to offer. Until some fundamental lessons are learnt then the same mistakes often re-surface. There has to be some transformational shift.

If we look at Marks & Spencer today, we see this phenomena. Its clothing sales have collapsed and threatened the whole ship. It's a pattern that has been repeated regularly over the decades. It has experienced many short lived recoveries only to come to the brink of collapse again. Many businesses who've been around for 100 years or more, have had to completely transform what they're doing. Think about 3M, it started off mining. The founder of Avon cosmetic products sold books originally. They evolved, becoming masters of paradigm shifting. Disruption, whilst usually perceived as a threat is actually a significant growth opportunity.

"The important thing is this: to be able to give up in any given moment all that we are for what we can become" ~ DeSeaux

Death: The *'Time to let go'* paradigm.

In order to imagine a future world it is necessary to accept reality and let go of the beliefs and behaviours of the old paradigm. Death is a part of evolution. What worked in the last paradigm will not work in the next and paradigm shifting successfully involves recognising and confronting one or more of the 7 fears. (See diagram)

The 7 Fears

Vulnerability
Letting others be right
Accepting reality
Stopping
Letting go
The Unknown
Transformation

There is a myth that people are scared of change. That's not true. People change all the time so they can stay in the same place. What we're really scared of is transformation. Often we have to let the old paradigm die in order to allow the birth of the new one.

In order to capitalise on new ideas, you need everybody on board so you can tap into the collective wisdom of the group.

This is when: *"Culture determines and limits strategy"*~ Schein

Community Stage: The *'We're all in this together'* Paradigm

Whenever you create a highly structured and consolidated system, you'll eventually see failures in its inability to adapt and evolve. The cost of certainty is that it limits the behaviours and potential of people so they can be easily managed. Everybody has become *'widgetized'*.

To overcome this, some organisations recognise the need for *'skunkworks'* or irregular units, as was the case when in WWII when the Special Air Service was formed. Its *modus operandi* was to send small teams into the African Desert to cause havoc behind enemy lines. These teams, separated from the main

system, are responsible for '*thinking outside of the box*', and working on special projects which require a high degree of autonomy to maximise potential.

Sociologist Everett Rogers defined '*skunkworks*' as an "enriched environment that is intended to help a small group of individuals design a new idea by escaping routine organizational procedures".

These smaller communities are interdependent with the main group but capable of independent thought and behaviours. They exhibit high performance, creativity and are capable of self-management. This means they can handle more complexity and adapt effectively.

Today's technology such as mobile devices with unprecedented processing power, storage capacity combined with people's access to knowledge being unlimited, means people and communities can become more agile, creative and enterprising. For leaders to be effective, they need to recognise the universal life cycle and adapt their philosophies as they evolve through it.

Primarily, successful adaptation through the life cycle is about shifting the balance of power from leader to the team, group or community. In a business, the leader evolves from entrepreneur to manager, then to coach, then visionary leader and eventually becoming a purpose focussed, inspirational leader.

Once the community has formed, they soon attract the crowd leading to the next phase:

Transformation Stage: The '*Brave New World*' Paradigm.

Once more of the potential of the community is leveraged with its ability to communicate its mission and purpose effectively, the community will attract the crowd. The crowd will then champion the community's values and ideas to a wider audience who will be inspired to contribute to the system by innovating on what has gone on before.

We often see this in open source projects. This is a transformational period when new paradigms emerge, when the young or young at heart feel hopeful for the future, but the status –quo feel threatened.

Triple 'A' human personal development

The dangers of clinging to an existing paradigm for too long, is that it becomes an overplayed strength. You really can have too much of a good thing. Effective leaders and teams learn to evolve effectively through each of the stages of the universal life cycle. They must be aware of the paradigm they are living through and understand its limitations.

Sun Tzu said,

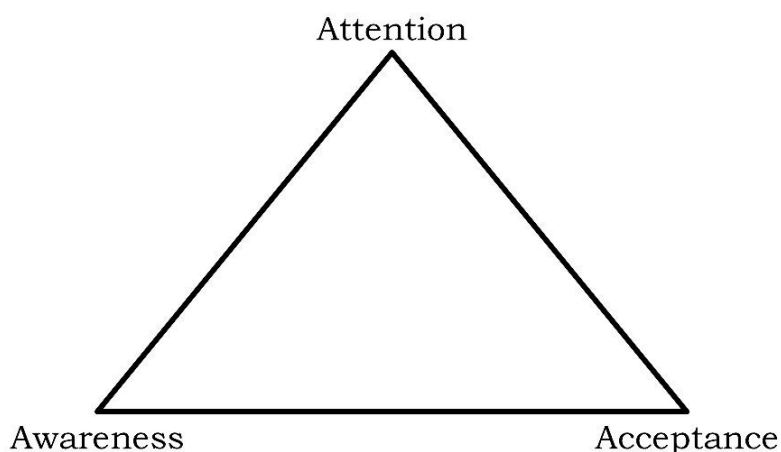
"Know yourself and know your enemy and you need not fear the result of a hundred battles".

In today's world leaders need to upgrade this philosophy to:

"Know yourself, know the paradigm you're in and you need not fear life"

To be able to paradigm shift effectively, requires the development of a universal perspective. I devised a three step process for developing universal intelligence. The first step is to pay attention to what's going on. There is a lot of talk about being mindful these days and for good reason. If we operate on instinctive behaviours and habits all the time, then we'll perpetuate the existing

paradigm. It's important to take a step back occasionally and pay attention. Much like a General in a battle, with a strategic viewpoint, one can see more of what is



happening from different perspectives.

Having begun to pay more attention and see through the illusions and listen past the noise of the present paradigm, one can experience an expanding awareness. It begins, much like with a scientist, a perpetual journey of experimentation and discovery.

But as Winston Churchill observed:

“Men occasionally stumble over the truth, but most pick themselves up and hurry off as if nothing ever happened”

The final piece is having the ability to accept the new reality and act on it with enthusiasm. This is the difference between a leader who, like a shepherd leads the flock to more of the same in the next field, and the inspirational leader who is enabling others to see they're not sheep at all. That there is a new reality and then empowering people to create their own *brave new world*.