

10 Common 'Mistakes' to Avoid, & 'Needs' to Meet, When Seeking to Create a Better World – Prof Stuart B Hill – 2008 (updated Dec 2012)

Because of the holistic nature of the approach being advocated, all of the areas below overlap & are highly interactive & interrelated. This was written in response to the Commonwealth Government's announcement of the **Australia 2020** Summit in Canberra, ACT (19-20 April, 2008: <http://www.australia2020.gov.au/>); downloadable as a PowerPoint presentation from: www.stuartbhill.com

1. **Getting the usual 'experts' (mostly older males) together to talk & plan**

- always leads to tinkering with existing (flawed) plans – ['rearranging the deckchairs on the Titanic']
- excludes most, including those affected by such plans & their fresh ideas

Need

- involve mostly 'different' people, including (if possible) those most affected
- start by focusing not on plans, but on values, beliefs, worldviews & paradigms
 - then feelings & passions
 - then, emergent from these, hopes, dreams, visions, imaginings, & creative thoughts
 - only then can 'design/redesign-based plans' be enabled to emerge (these proactively enable systems [structures & processes] to meet long-term to short-term, & broad to specific, goals, & to make systems as 'problem-proof' as possible)
 - then critically analyse, integrate, & flesh these out, etc
 - detail participatory opportunities, responsibilities, time lines, resource & support needs, means for monitoring outcomes (feedback), tracking progress, & for ongoing redesigning & fine tuning

2. **Emphasising enemy-oriented, problem-solving approaches** (back-end, reactive/responsive, curative)

- these tend to focus on symptom management & neglect the need to address the underlying maldesign & mismanagement roots of all problems [trying to make systems work that can never work!]
- they typically over-focus on measuring problems (a main strategy for postponing action - by those who benefit from the *status quo*),
- & they usually focus on efficiency & substitution strategies, eg, improved application of pesticide & on finding less disruptive (but still purchased) substitutes, such as biological controls & genetically modified organisms
same story in other areas: medicine, energy, etc

Need

- redesign existing systems (& design new systems) to make them as problem-proof as possible
- & to enable effective change from flawed/defective systems to significantly more improved ones

3. **Getting stuck in activities 'pathologically' designed to postpone (feared) change**

- particularly measuring problems ('monitoring our extinction')
- endless over-collection of data (often 'justified' by arguments for 'evidence-based [vs. responsible] approaches')
- hearings, committee meetings, report-writing, etc [appointment to such committees may be strategy to limit one's influence]
- most such preoccupations have NO follow-through, & usually only lead to more of the same

Need

- postponing pathologies must be recognised, exposed, contradicted & addressed; by taking responsible, timely, appropriate, collaborative action
- access to relevant data is needed to make responsible decisions; however, adequate data are often already available from other places, in other languages etc
- globally, billions of dollars are wasted annually unnecessarily repeating studies in new locations or with mischievous intentions (often related to perceived threats to existing commercial & power advantages)

4. **Trying to solve problems within the disciplines or areas responsible for creating them;** or with multidisciplinary teams of selected experts/authorities from favoured disciplines, with others excluded

Need

- genuine transdisciplinary, trans-competency & multi-experience teams, able to access disciplinary & specialised knowledge as needed
- include competencies relating to holistic approaches to design, sustainability, wellbeing, meaning & effective change processes

5. **Patriarchal** (them doing things to/for us, & us doing things to/for them) & **'driven' do-good approaches** are rarely exactly what is needed

- these are generally not embraced by those being 'helped', or are not sustained after the helpers leave
- also, they invariably have diverse negative unexpected consequences

Need:

- inclusion of those most affected by proposed 'improvements'; as primary collaborators in all change processes; & from beginning to end

- enables ownership, relevance, achievability, ongoing improvement & openness to unforeseen/surprise benefits
6. **Planning ‘Olympic/mega-scale’, heroic initiatives** (from hearings to projects; talk to action) **with no follow-through or provision for ongoing support** (this needs to be more than just funding)
- these invariably only reach the analysis, planning & preliminary stages; & then are abandoned
 - most have unforeseen numerous long-term & widespread harmful side-effects (personal, social, ecological, etc)
- Need**
- diverse, mutually supportive, doable initiatives that have long-term commitment & support
 - consideration of opportunities for ongoing improvement & learning our ways forward collaboratively towards improved futures
7. **Over-focus on knowledge & data, & neglect of wisdom & experience** (most ‘wisdom’ cannot be supported by data; it involves working with the ‘unknown’ – most of what is – not just the limited ‘known’ – often in ways that rely on intuition, ‘right brain’ & gut feelings, etc)
- Need**
- to be much better at recognising, valuing & involving the wisest & most experienced in our society, & not so obsessed with ‘cleverness’ (whereas wisdom enables us to work with the ‘unknown’ & ‘know’, cleverness is limited to working with the miniscule ‘known’)
8. **Over-focus on ‘productivity’, profit & quick dramatic results**
- predictably leads to burn-out, only short-term, limited benefits, & often unexpected disbenefits (additional problems that are often initially unrecognised)
- Need:**
- much more focus on ‘maintenance’ activities [sustainable ‘productivity’ is a by-product of this]
 - caring for one another (& other species & the environment)
 - celebration – helps validate & spread good ideas & initiatives
 - venting feelings, & access to support for ‘healing’ our (often denied) psychological wounding, etc
 - prioritise time & resources for these activities
 - sustained productivity is emergent from the effective maintenance of whole systems
9. **Homogenisation tendencies**
- these tend to result in construction of currently favoured ‘norms’ (for people, structures, processes, etc)
 - failure to consider diversity & ‘alternatives’
 - creation of in-groups & out-groups
 - also, inclusion, exclusion & blaming
 - failure to benefit from the creativity that resides at the margins & in the borderlands of society
- Need**
- openness to appreciation of the value of heterogeneity & ‘functional’ diversity within all systems, with its opportunities for synergy, mutualism...
 - lateral & paradoxical thinking & acting
 - extension beyond the usual competencies
 - relevance to core needs & possibilities (plus, ‘Testing Questions’ & ‘Integrator Indicators’ for these)
 - a sense of inclusion, ownership, & a sense of place, etc
10. **Neglect of the arts**, or only token involvement
- over-focus on economic (not human) growth, the sciences, technologies, business, politics, the professions, the media, & the other major powerful institutions within our society
 - as a result, the arts are poorly supported, regarded as a luxury or optional extra, an afterthought, or even irrelevant
- Need**
- recognition of the arts, in its broadest sense (including humour), as being an essential part of both the foundation & means for implementation of all efforts to achieve genuine & sustainable improvement

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My latest books are *Ecological Pioneers: A Social History of Australian Ecological Thought and Action* (with Dr Martin Mulligan; Cambridge UP, 2001), *Learning for Sustainable Living: Psychology of Ecological Transformation* (with Dr Werner Sattmann-Frese; Lulu, 2008) and *Social Ecology: Applying Ecological Understanding to our Lives and our Planet* (with Dr David Wright and Dr Catherine Camden-Pratt; Hawthorn, 2011).