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Inner Dimension

Methods to address the inner dimension.

A transition towards sustainable development is an answer to the current crises. However, it is not enough to only change the general social conditions of nations and societies in order to contribute to a transition towards sustainable development. As a starting point, it requires a change of the so called "inner dimension" of individuals and societies, which comprises amongst others values, emotions, belief systems or needs. Click here if you want to find out more about the inner dimension and its relations to sustainable development.

In general …
Often, the Brundtland definition of Sustainable Development (1987)

"Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. It contains within it two key concepts: the concept of 'needs', in particular the essential needs of the world's poor, to which overriding priority should be given; and the idea of limitations imposed by the state of technology and social organization on the environment's ability to meet present and future needs." (UN WCED 1987)

is misunderstood as many people presume that sustainable development is all about changing structures and general conditions on the superior political and societal level. But it is not recognized that it is simply not enough to change general political or societal conditions in order to realize sustainable development. Sustainable development can only be achieved if change happens at various levels: on the societal level as well as on the individual level, in the outer dimension as well as in the inner dimension. Wilber (1995) puts those 4 dimensions in a four-quadrant model (see graphic below) which allows for reflecting on the use of different perspectives in research and to take a more complete look with regard to transition to sustainable development.
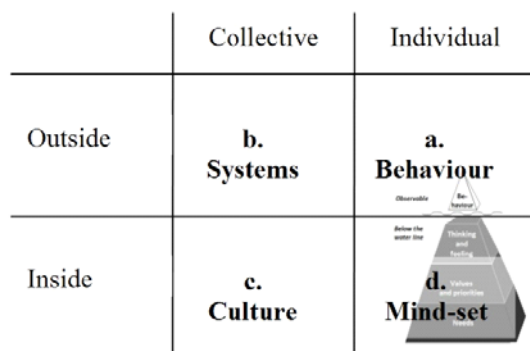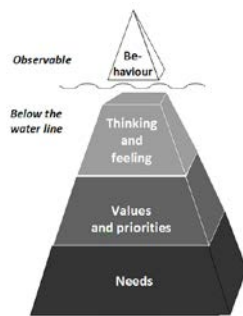

Figure 1: Four complementary perspectives on individuals (Rauschmayer et al. 2010, p.126)

Thus, both outer conditions such as infrastructure, institutions, habits as well as our individual needs, values and emotions, etc. influence our behaviour, our lifestyles and decisions. We subsume those aforementioned factors as "inner dimension". Thus, sustainable development starts at the values,

attitudes and needs of every single person. The transformation of those "inner factors" is the motivational key for any change.

Individual behaviour is affected by those "inner factors", by our feelings, values and attitudes. In other words we can say that individual behaviour is just the top of an iceberg (see figure). The internal roots of this behaviour are constituted by conscious and unconscious factors of the internal world (feelings, habits, values, needs, etc). The deeper layers are more difficult to reach from the outside, by policy makers, scientists or others. Thinking and feeling can easier be influenced than values and priorities which usually evolve in a cultural process. As displayed in the figure, the deepest roots which influence our individual behaviour are our individual needs.

Needs and strategies

"Needs" are defined as the fundamental dimensions of human flourishing and development and as reasons for action that require no further explanation or justification. Max-Neef (1991) defines a list of 10 fundamental human needs such as subsistence, protection, affection, understanding, participation, idleness, creation, identity, freedom, and transcendence. Which needs are most important to ourselves is depending on the specific influencing factors such as culture, values and belief systems or the social environment in which we grew up and learned. Needs are neither good nor bad, neither sustainable nor unsustainable, they are neutral.

There is a broad range of possibilities with which we can meet our individual needs. Those possibilities are defined as "strategies". In this sense, strategies are denoted as instrumental means to meet needs. The need for freedom for example can be satisfied by buying a motorcycle and cruising around (strategy 1) or by going on a hike with friends (strategy 2). This example shows that strategies can actually be sustainable or unsustainable as they can largely differ in their specific use of resources (such as land, water, energy, material): while strategy 1 involves high consumption of resources, strategy 2 is far more sustainable. The choice of the strategies we apply in order to satisfy our individual needs depends on our habits and on several inner and outer conditions of our daily lives (such as belief systems, culture, capabilities, etc.). Thus, every single person can choose his/her strategies to fulfil his/her personal needs – and is thus responsible for contributing to a more sustainable or unsustainable world.

Conflicts and Tensions

The challenge is now to find strategies that help meeting personal needs without compromising the same or other needs (of the specific person himself/herself, of other people or of other generations)

at the same time. Tensions or conflicts might initially be recognized by a feeling of unease when choosing a strategy or/and when applying a strategy.

Example for a typical tension from a father and ecological economist:

'I want to bring my children safely to school. It is raining outside, we are late. They could go there by public transport. There is the car, today I have got time, because I am not working. What shall I – as a person who wants to live a sustainable lifestyle and be a role model for my kids – do?'

On a theoretical level we distinguish intra-individual intra-societal, and intergenerational conflicts:

- Intra-individual tension: A given strategy or set of strategies that is prescribed or recommended by sustainable development, can be in conflict with other values. The sustainable strategies help or inhibit the individual to realize certain needs and no synergetic strategy is found.

  Example: A couple has to decide where to settle. Both were always dreaming of a single family home on the countryside, close to woods and in the middle of nowhere. But they aim to pursue a sustainable lifestyle and thus decide to move in a row house in the suburbs as this saves lots of energy and resources (e.g. infrastructure, mobility, etc.) and contributes strongly to their CO_2 reduction. This strategy to move in a row house however is in conflict with other values, for example:

  Freedom: It gives them a sense of freedom not being surrounded by other buildings as in the row house but having great view of the landscape.

  Identity: Building an individual single family home and planning and designing the house gives sense of identity as this very same house would probably not have been built in any other place and would have had a very personal touch.

  Creation: The woman calls herself a "garden-person". Designing and taking care of the garden in the single family home would have given her pleasure and satisfaction.

  Transcendence: It would have been easier for them to live their spirituality and get in touch with their beliefs when being in close contact with nature - another benefit of the single family home.

  As can be seen, the decision to move into a row house leads to intra-individual tensions.

- Intra-societal tension: The needs of any individual or societal group wanting to pursue sustainable strategies in our societies are affected by needs of other individuals or groups or affect needs of other individuals or groups, who might choose unsustainable strategies. This tension points to the interdependency of individual behaviour with societal culture and the systemic embedding of behaviour.

  Example: Continuing with the example mentioned above, there are tensions between those people who wish to use CO_2 extensive housing strategies and those who build houses in the greenfield. In this context, culture, as the expression of socially shared values, plays a major role as the wish for a privately owned home in the open countryside - which is badly compatible with a sustainable style of living - is still a common aim in many westernized societies.

- Intergenerational tension: This tension arises if certain societal strategies support caring for next generations, but inhibit current needs and vice versa. *Example: Restricting the impact on climate change is one of the currently most prominent strategies for intergenerational justice and, herewith, for protection. Even though we do not know who will live, how these persons will live, what values they will have and what strategies they will favour for meeting their needs, it is obvious that climate change will not contribute to increase the possibilities of choosing the set of strategies of future generations at large.*

  If a person living in Alaska for instance decides to resign flights in order to protect the environment for next generations this strategy can get in conflict with the need for participation (as this person may not be able to attend a conference in Japan) or, with the need for freedom (as this person may not be able to enjoy white sandy beaches in Thailand).

Dealing with tensions requires going beyond the tensions to the beliefs and values lying underneath and addressing them.

Methods

There is a wide range of methods available which provide access to the aforementioned happenings below the waterline (see pyramid above), which specifically address values, needs and emotions, and which aim to contribute to a more sustainable world such as Dialogue, Dyade, Dynamic Facilitation, Future conference, Future workshop, Mediation, THANCS, Wisdom Council or Nonviolent Communication.

Sources

Max-Neef, M. A., Elizade, A. and Hopenhayn, M. (1991). Development and human needs. In: Max-Neef (1991). Human Scale Development: Conception, Application and Further Reflections, The Apex Press: New York. pp.13-54.

Omann, I., Rauschmayer, F. (2011). THANCS – a process to address tensions that emerge in/with a transition towards sustainable development. Paper presented at the 9th Biennial Conference of the European Society for Ecological Economics (ESEE): "Advancing Sustainability in a Time of Crisis". June 14th – 17th 2011. Istanbul, Turkey.

Rauschmayer, F., Omann, I., Frühmann, J. (eds.) (2010). Sustainable Development: Capabilities, needs, and well-being. Routledge.

UN WCED, United Nations World Commission on Environment and Development (1987): *Our Common Future.* Available at the URL below: http://www.un-documents.net/wced-ocf.htm (accessed 11 January 2012)

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Methods

Nonviolent Communication (NVC)

Nonviolent Communication as a method stands for clear, empathic communication and aims to find a way for all present to get what really matters to them without the use of guilt, humiliation, shame, blame, coercion, or threats. The primary purpose of NVC is to connect with other people in a way that enables giving to take place: compassionate giving.

Suitable

NVC is a useful process for communicating what is important to oneself in a way that others can easily understand empathically. One can also use it to better understand what is important to others, and make discover common needs behind opposing strategies in a conflict situation. It consists of four steps: observations, feelings, needs, requests.

Sequence of events

NVC consists of four steps: (1) observations, (2) feelings, (3) needs, and (4) requests.

- **State the observations you would like to talk about:** Without introducing any judgment or evaluation we observe what is actually happening. Thus, we state what the others are saying or doing independently of whether it is enriching or not enriching our life.

- **State the feeling that the observation is triggering in you:** In a second step we state how we feel when observing the action in step (1): are we hurt, scared, joyful, amused, irritated, etc.? Naming the emotion, without moral judgment, enables us to connect in a spirit of mutual respect and cooperation.

- **State the need that is the cause of that feeling:** Third, we state what needs of ours are connected to the feelings we have identified. Declaring the underlying need without morally judging it, gives clarity about what is alive in us in that moment and facilitates mutual understanding.

- **Make a concrete request for action to meet the need just identified:** The fourth step is to clearly and specifically ask what we want right now in order to enrich our lives, rather than hinting or stating only what we don't want. For instance: "David, I see your toys strewn all over the living room (1). I feel irritated (2) because I would need more order in this room that we share in common (3). Would you be willing to put your toys in the box? (4)" or "Nancy, I realise that you are increasingly using your car (1). I feel disappointed (2) because I want to care for the environment and the next generations (3) and need to be understood by you as well (3). Would you be willing to use the public transport to get to your work? (4) "

Participants

This method is suitable for two persons, small groups or small groups within a large group.

Point to note

It can be a challenging task to clearly differentiate between the four abovementioned steps, especially to distinguish between feelings and needs.

Level of participation: joint decision

Time required overall: depending on intensity and group size between 0,5h and 8h (Workshop)

Number of participants: from 2 to 50 persons (large group), however in large groups, subgroups of 2-7 people should be formed.

Links

http://www.wikihow.com/Practice-Nonviolent-Communication (accessed 11 January 2012)

http://www.ayahuasca-wasi.com/english/articles/NVC.pdf (accessed 11 January 2012)

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nonviolent_Communication (accessed 11 January 2012)

http://www.nonviolentcommunication.com/index.htm (accessed 11 January 2012)

Center for Nonviolent Communication: http://www.cnvc.org/ (accessed 11 January 2012)

NVC Training Academy: http://nvctraining.com/ (accessed 11 January 2012)

Dyade

Dyads (Greek: duality) are a special form of in-depth interviews: Two participants have a meeting, where they ask each other a set of question, formulated by a moderator. This constellation allows for a distinct intensity of interpersonal relationship and interaction. The interviewees are challenged to change their perspectives during the interview and critically evaluate their own views. Through that, mutual expectations and discrepancies of internal and external perception can be discovered.

Suitable

Dyads have similar benefits as in-depth interviews as they provide the possibility to identify and explore needs, attitudes or resistances against certain values. Moreover the method is suitable to shed light on various perspectives and to reproduce social opinion-forming processes on the micro level. Therefore they are especially useful for questions with a socio-interactive relevance that cannot be examined in group discussions.

Sequence of events

Based on a specific topic a set of questions is formulated which should then be discussed in the Dyads. The facilitator has to develop coherent questions which are beneficial for the process and which open the potential. The formulation of the questions is the crucial point of a Dyade. Following a presentation or a discussion on a certain controversial or touching issue, the questions could for instance be formulated such as:

- What are your new understandings?

- Out of this: What are the new critical issues?

- Out of this: In which areas are you still acting in ways which are not appropriate?

- How would you solve those problems?

- Which concrete initiatives would make sense?

- Tell me one concrete next step!

- What kind of support do you need in order to get there?

After the presentation of the questions, the facilitator has to (1) explain the process in order to ensure a smooth and self-perpetuating flow of pair discussions and to (2) organise the building of pairs and to (3) keep the time frame.

General process structure: Two people interview one another by posing the same set of questions in 2 to 4 consecutive rounds. The aim of this interview technique is to listen to new perspectives and taking them into account for the personal examination of the specific topic and thus gaining new insights and a deeper preoccupation with individual values, beliefs and needs.

If useful for the topic discussed, a short plenary session can be held at the end of the very end of the Dyade.

Participants

This method is best suitable for small and medium sized groups.

Point to note

It is essential, that the interviewer is a good listener without judging or giving advices. Also, openness and honesty of the interviewee are required.

Level of participation: joint decision

Time required overall: 1,5h (4-6 questions)

Number of participants: pairs are formed within a group from 2 to many persons (from small to large groups)

THANCS

Pursuing a sustainable lifestyle and high quality of life at the same time might lead to tensions due to needs or values conflicts. The term THANCS stands for "**Th**riving for **A**wareness for **N**on-**C**onflicting **S**trategies" and can be described as an option to deal with those tensions which emerge in sustainable lifestyles. THANCS is a tool that allows going beyond the waterline (see introduction) down to the level of needs.

Suitable

- for recognizing and identifying personal needs

- for reflecting strategies in order to resolve conflicts

- for overcoming conflicts and tensions which hinder sustainable development

Sequence of events

A four step process is applied in order to deal with the tensions at hand:

- **Recognizing the tension(s):** The first step is about addressing the strategies and noticing the reduction of well-being that might emerge due to tensions with pursuing sustainable development.

- **Reflecting individually upon values, priorities, met and unmet needs underneath the tension(s):** Step 2 is about taking a deeper look into our needs and about identifying where they come from: it is about finding out the triggers for the tensions. It might be a mixture of needs and values, belief systems and convictions as well as habits. It is possible that the tension starts to dissolve, just by reassuring oneself that the behaviour is in line with one's convictions, values, and needs, or by shifting the behaviour in order to achieve coherence, or by shifting one's values, beliefs, etc. As in the first step, no law or regulation can support this inner reflection of individuals. Again, close persons, media, education, and professionals for personal development can support this step. This step is of course linked to the whole iceberg below the waterline, as it requires 'diving' exactly down there. And in concordance with the iceberg below the waterline this step addresses the often forgotten inside of the individual.

- **Communicating the reflection results to the persons affected by the tension(s), if possible:** This is the time when the person who has recognized the tension, reflected individually on it and its reasons, goes outside and talks to whomever the tension and related strategies might concern or persons who share the tension – if this person exists (not possible with future generations – here intra-individual or intra-societal communication has to replace this, see below). The decision maker talks to the affected groups, the individual to other individuals or groups.

- **Starting a process of creativity to find ways of dealing or even overcome the tension(s):** The fourth step would result in a behavioural change (top level of the Iceberg Model), ideally assisted through political changes and clarity about resulting changes through the implementation of this strategy (systems). This change results from changed values, beliefs and culture through a better individual and shared awareness of needs. That way chances increase that the transition is persistent.

Participants

This method is best suitable for small and medium sized groups, but also practicable for a single person.

Point to note

This method offers a good possibility for discussing and exploring individual needs.

Links for further reading

Omann, I., Rauschmayer, F. (2011). THANCS – a process to address tensions that emerge in/with a transition towards sustainable development. Paper presented at the 9th Biennial Conference of the

European Society for Ecological Economics (ESEE): "Advancing Sustainability in a Time of Crisis". June 14th – 17th 2011. Istanbul, Turkey.

Rauschmayer, F., Omann, I., Frühmann, J. (eds.) (2010). Sustainable Development: Capabilities, needs, and well-being. Routledge.

Level of participation: joint decision

Time required overall: about 3 hours per tension

Number of participants: from 2 to 10 persons (medium sized group)

Laddering

This method has its roots in market research with the aim to identify consumer relationships to products not only in order to understand the cognitive positioning strategies of current products but also in order to permit the development of positioning strategies for new products.

Related to sustainable development this method is applied in order to reveal underlying belief systems, dogmas and constructs. Laddering aims at gaining specific individualstatements (inner beliefs and affirmations), as they often form the basis for certain behavioural patterns and lifestyles and the identification of certain needs.

Suitable

This method is suitable to identify underlying needs and belief systems which cause certain behaviour patterns.

Sequence of events

Laddering can be done in form of an interview between the facilitator and the participant(s) of a workshop or between participants. The aim is to understand the needs, belief systems, habits or dogmas behind a certain perception or behaviour. The interviewer starts by asking, why do you like/don't like, do/don't do xyz, or why is xyz important to you. The answers can be transformed in questions again asking what lies behind the answers. By continuing to ask, the person will eventually arrive at his/her needs.

Examples for needs are: subsistence, protection, affection, understanding, participation, idleness, creation, identity, freedom, or transcendence (according to Max-Neef et al. 1991).

Participants

The method is suitable for individual work or for work in small groups.

Point to note

It is important that the interviewer is familiar with the needs approach (according to Max-neef) and ideally also with nonviolent communication. It can be used in combination with Nonviolent Communication in order to detect the needs underlying a conflict.

Links

Max-Neef, M. A., Elizade, A. and Hopenhayn, M. (1991). Development and human needs. In: Max-Neef (1991). Human Scale Development: Conception, Application and Further Reflections, The Apex Press: New York. pp.13-54.

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http://www.coaching-tools.de/tools/sci-vesco-web.htm (accessed 11 January 2012)

Level of participation: joint decision

Time required overall: about 20 minutes per person and theme

Number of participants: from 2 to 5 persons (small group)