The Ecology of Systems Thinking

Gerald’s Jan 27, 2017 mention of Daniel Wahl’s post

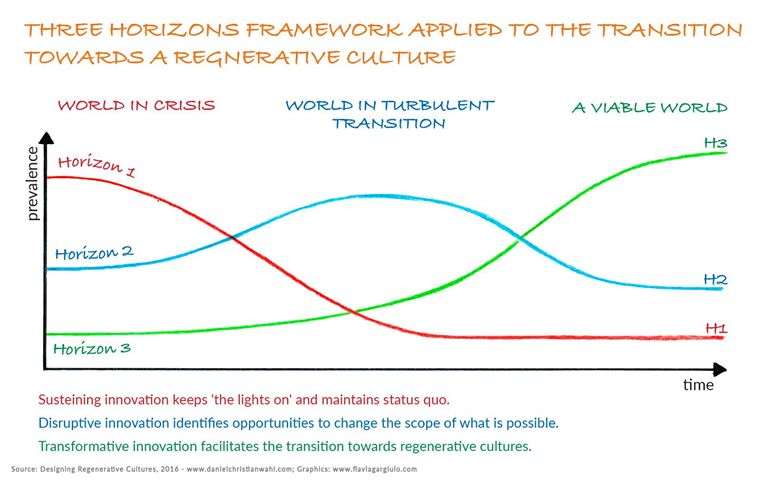
3 Horizon Thinking

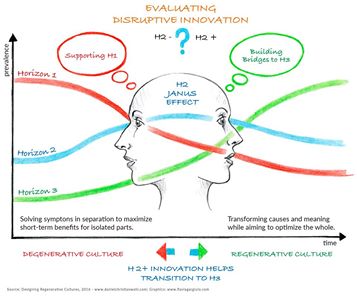
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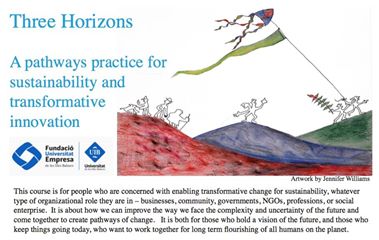
## [Gerald Midgley](https://www.facebook.com/gerald.midgley)

shared [Daniel Christian Wahl](https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=100014615418677)'s [post](https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fbid=157985034698676&id=100014615418677).

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[Daniel Christian Wahl](https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=100014615418677) added [3 new photos](https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fbid=157985034698676&id=100014615418677).

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3 Horizon Thinking is a key skill for people in leadership positions or any committed change agent who wants to facilitate transformative innovation towards a more regenerative future. In February [Bill Sharpe](https://www.facebook.com/bill.sharpe.982) and I are offering a three day course. I hope to see many of you there.   
<http://smart.uib.eu/digitalAssets/409/409916_3h-flyier.pdf>

I could do with a little help from my friends to get the word out about this amazing opportunity to learn from Bill. He is one of the co-originators of this agile futures and strategy methodology that will help you to develop future consciousness and facilitate multi-stakeholder conversations for transformational change.

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... and, it is not a bad excuse to visit beautiful Mallorca during the almond blossom! https://www.facebook.com/images/emoji.php/v7/fb0/1.5/16/1f609.png;-)

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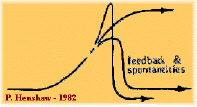
## [Daniel Christian Wahl](https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=100014615418677&fref=ufi) Thank you Gerald

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I'd be interested in learning more, but can't go to Majorca, and need a simple introduction to help me orient the specialized terms. Like what 'horizons' does it refer to. I've read a little but am not quite getting it, despite my having studied transformation from a another kind of '3 Horizons' kind of systems ecology view for decades. Is there a simple introduction for scientists?

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In general if someone really understands something, they can explain it very well. I am just picking up this systems by osmosis, I do not understand it yet and am not trying to understand it, except for exposing myself to it, ... If I ever figure it out though, I will try to help.

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[Hannah](https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=100014302393560&hc_location=ufi), It's a pattern for sure, that even well constructed whole new ways of thinking produce total confusion for some time. There are also frequently hidden ways to let you in on the "big secret", though, so it does sometimes pay off to look for them.

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To me, the obvious, is there as well, that people are off in a world all their own, this is not a secret, but most people know this. I am working on concepts of how to empower the subconscious mind to work on the solutions - to share with people the possibilities of the powers in solution orientated articulation. This provides hope, and anyone can start, no complicated theories, no need to be rich, start tomorrow or right now, on a system designed to help change the world for the better.

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[Ecology and Society: Three horizons: a pathways practice for transformation](http://l.facebook.com/l.php?u=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.ecologyandsociety.org%2Fvol21%2Fiss2%2Fart47%2F&h=ATPb6qDGkhp99aCjZAaXNkrSFDRvrb5hDcXb43_v9i_WrtpWZQVw_xV96uLrSbbCOboZPqF_Wiqv7ySOJQ5IelYcLtqPCJjmSLpfR5RzNGDx9bthacaUTefHasXpFPuTLCCx4Ok&enc=AZNwFcLwVGVZgV8gLBks1vOfei1Z5QiWLS4iKf6d1OqtCfOKMuT3occXEiLMLPmTDFr8TogrMT96y8OOnk3woV5n9zjABGtxOujv1CL99m2HC8Kgm2yHDkXDzYNNVlk-5UmToAK9mTE74zwbPRZjBndenaTBRbkVic6CiIUOqs3z5A&s=1)

Sharpe, B., A. Hodgson, G. Leicester, A. Lyon, and I. Fazey. 2016. Three horizons: a pathways practice for transformation. Ecology and Society 21(2):47.[http://dx.doi.org/10.5751/ES-08388-210247](http://l.facebook.com/l.php?u=http%3A%2F%2Fdx.doi.org%2F10.5751%2FES-08388-210247&h=ATN3UmWfL7Kd3UDUGdMjnvR9p_Cgn-Xb5mQiynbGLTwZ-6ANDb0lebAP9eprF4EJXY5ireB6Ple2DbUN6xekMO3l4CpIVe6hsC5dNrS89OIdiBboQ7dQXfVEq8SYL7MqpcUQPk0&enc=AZN21iHQBeExv7myjH5Uui_TSGHJ_oE3d8XRbi5r5W74teZZxeTzmp9IaPZ4OieKexeQn4-sHRR3u6tmEuQq1-9_v9u5dgYwxoBi2qlwBWTXgauVq_SrqJKgRPxuTNywixCbvalGpC4eC1IPoNjb4MOhkgE79kmUywMutdWIDincdg&s=1)

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... and here is another [http://www.internationalfuturesforum.com/three-horizons](http://l.facebook.com/l.php?u=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.internationalfuturesforum.com%2Fthree-horizons&h=ATOPNgx66Cw8NSWjCpOtobCK_GxHxBwh8Yf-E8P0mETJYqmNlxw60eWQE3O_7V6uV3UcB8qSdnaW3euKy6ummmWOcf29cUyq7dz35EVkw5YfA-oRhFqd2zh3FNCY9y1aKG2nTBQ)

[Three Horizons | International Futures Forum](http://l.facebook.com/l.php?u=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.internationalfuturesforum.com%2Fthree-horizons&h=ATMT27AyxavmTMq8ADlMSrBCWNB1m848LngM-yA34cMJQHmsPJEXKQLE0jWngIvj8O21vuJXUYXcarFtYK10CSyM4U-OQZNiiH8qfhWGsguXEahQA629HmcCzGGrkkRZg3aAL0w&enc=AZMfWYlundhrG8mM-x69Z2LJL2Uqm9sJmTXWk0Ru5-ShW9rkd97f4mVI4-7aiF3So1d4GEihUE1iUdd6Rv7snIcwJMY-t4dtBwqTU71TRPTNmlb8fwcuW4A5dHYO6uzSlCCQUwHYgXrWh5cXCGLnVUtl3DrWwzBKf02SWchJFMBIDg&s=1)

International Futures Forum

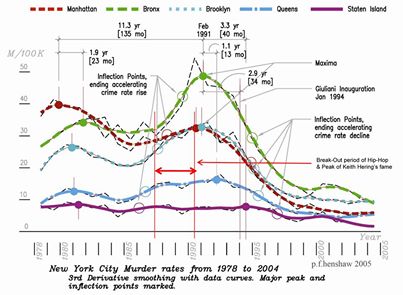
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[Daniel](https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=100014615418677&hc_location=ufi) Thanks for the added links. I prefer natural language terms. Is it not about the generations of thought and experience that each have their history and current consciousness, but seem to never catch up with each other? In a steady state world the progression of the overlapping generations would create a tapestry like what you show, though your paper in Ecology and Society is still hard to understand, thought I'll keep trying occasionally.   
  
The biggest omission to me is the role of non-linear cultural change, how new paradigms erupt with great bursts of innovation and thrive for a while before fading away over a long period. That does not follow sin wave curves. I think if you studied actual generational successions you'd find a dominance of more eventful kinds of change.  
  
The image is of the collapse of the crack culture in NYC that peaked in 1990

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Good that there is space and a need for multiple perspectivas and approaches. Good luck on your preferred path. To me what matters is faciltating on the ground action and transformative innovation towards regenerative cultures everywhere. Academic debate about terminology has its place but is not a major attractor for me. Thank you for the feedback. ... the 3 Horizons are not a model of culture change as such, they invite us to explore the relationship between three distinct ways of seeing and working with the future potential of the present moment ... they acknowledge non-linear change (the inherent unpredictability of complex dynamic systems) and thus the limits of accurate prediction of future events based on past events ... they are more about anticipation as a practice rather than forecasting ... I invite you to read Bill Sharpe´s book which is a lucid explanation of the model, or take the time to watch this webinar, so we avoid talking past each other or misunderstand each others framing: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xSyD1mFKjAE](https://l.facebook.com/l.php?u=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.youtube.com%2Fwatch%3Fv%3DxSyD1mFKjAE&h=ATMkFlMbZfSsNT_M-Mf9AoxZSdaSgDflZPs2oHeSwTaANrNiD0YbaaYauJI8c7NaXaUcsLTKFhsgfGrfZLE0dBJd-BEGxH437TvPW0K7u4tL0fm0WCOHqtxCbHTfwWTII99CURY)

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[ALIA Webinar - Bill Sharpe - Three Horizons](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xSyD1mFKjAE)

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Here is another short video of Andrew Lyons explaining the model and its application: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zaokNL2mmBQ](https://l.facebook.com/l.php?u=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.youtube.com%2Fwatch%3Fv%3DzaokNL2mmBQ&h=ATOgmgneRV0r9VZjnisaDtlUCPdsPavmq-8gKuTuZgTfmZKQ9Cn7sfVBTc3Olw_I9XP6i-loSgDJFaGnAtjpkXEGnNL4sSW5i34T4d47rPnA2NNbTCuy_ZUxVePCtQsZDPPAP7s)

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[Andrew Lyon's Introduction to The 3…](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zaokNL2mmBQ)

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[Gerald Midgley](https://www.facebook.com/gerald.midgley?hc_location=ufi) is it fair to say the forum is in the tradition of Futures studies  
  
from wikipedia:  
"(also called futurology) is the study of postulating possible, probable, and preferable futures and the worldviews and myths that underlie them. There is a debate as to whether this discipline is an art or science. In general, it can be considered as a branch of the social sciences and parallel to the field of history. History studies the past, futures studies considers the future. Futures studies (colloquially called "futures" by many of the field's practitioners) seeks to understand what is likely to continue and what could plausibly change."  
  
I ask because I find the importance of history as a context to make decisions today is sometimes underappreciated.

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acknowledging the fundamental unpredictability and uncontrollability of complex dynamic systems, means we have to get comfortable with uncertainty and not knowing ... no matter how much past date we crunch with ever more complex algorithms and big data, forecasting and scenario planning will only get us so far (and uncertainty remains) ... so the art and science of working creatively with uncertain futures is about humbly aiming to facilitate positive emergence ... we can get better at this as we learn to imitate nature's inherent patterns by which life creates condition conducive to life.

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Good answer.

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Most of my predictions are based on the predictable laws of cause and effect, when applied to profiling. What will people do, based on their profile. Such things a ethics, the lack of ethics, the culture, etc, are used to calculate the probabilities of a regenerative culture. In general the pain of doing stupid things, and the rewards of following logic and reason determine the major catalysts in change. This is also how I would determine the estimated progress of the human race.

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The best future studies are informed by the unpredictability of complexity. The technique is imagining different scenarios and trying to assign probabilities to each. As the situation unfolds events affect the likelihood of one versus another. The problem in most futurist work I've seen is trying to predict timing. It's similar to stock market investing. One can make pretty reasonable judgments about the general trends. Making bets on timing is a dangerous game.

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[Daniel](https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=100014615418677&hc_location=ufi) you've inspired me to try something new for a change. Stay tuned.

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ntrigued ...

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I have been wondering about the value of stability in transition. I think there is an assumption which I have held and others around me, that collapse leads to a rebuild of the world which we want. Is this warranted?

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concepts of economic theory, are not observing the reality of the populations - there is needless death - people in America dying in droves, but they are not statistically important to the people who keep statistics - concepts of stability in transition, or collapse, as far as the stats go, or where the concern is, there is a lot of work to do to actually be able to articulate the horrors that are out there - nor the lack of concern - nor the intentional ignoring and culling of people who fall on hard times.

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collapse leads to a rebuild of the world which we want" is warranted.   
  
When Tainter writes about the collapse of the Roman Empire he says (wikipedia )  
  
"It is often assumed that the collapse of the western Roman Empire was a catastrophe for everyone involved. Tainter points out that it can be seen as a very rational preference of individuals at the time, many of whom were actually better off. Archeological evidence from human bones indicates that average nutrition actually improved after the collapse in many parts of the former Roman Empire. Average individuals may have benefited because they no longer had to invest in the burdensome complexity of empire. Tainter notes that in the west, local populations in many cases greeted the barbarians as liberators."

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real collapse means indescribable suffering for many and loss of bio-cultural diversity ... not a scenario to contemplate light heartedly ... and, yes, disturbance and partial collapse (as in the break down of outdated rigid structures that no longer serve) are part of the adaptive cycle and opportunities for re-design and systemic transformation

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I have heard some people say that there is no guarantee, that the system falls to the side we want it to fall to. I can imagine that collapse to different degrees supports different distributions of power in rebuild, over different time horizons. I'm interested if anyone has case studies, ecological or social, meta-analysis, that might help me wrestle with this.

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[The Collapse of Complex Societies (New Studies in Archaeology)](https://l.facebook.com/l.php?u=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.amazon.com%2FCollapse-Complex-Societies-Studies-Archaeology%2Fdp%2F052138673X&h=ATMrCPZW0fjT8qGgqGcEY2AYf1prIwwZ6kLyIK8s6OvFeXn4754XpS6MT9mPzEyrIDZRrTBC8i9PbHtHW-EzCwGcdr1i0I2AauatrPu_UNMRQQO-zrJE3sGoiJo0fST3btSWW_U&enc=AZMgeRDcj7Fjrm5kHSrsWkJtcnwJVCcmUuBeHCGfr-20xdM-8zxAx8Z_8OrMx7g7MBAfn0Tgp0GZ5vdiDNPfWXIxrWWVooG1umCC3AJMfeH6AG7gJVPu8_A1kathtumQvpx1YNBEd0uuu3Zobm3PomL4Dc0T6waAZjm88anJB_gS8g&s=1)

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 ... yes, excellent book ... would love to read it a second time and more slowly

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In my opinion it is a must read if the field of study is complexity.

[Joseph Tainter - Wikipedia](https://l.facebook.com/l.php?u=https%3A%2F%2Fen.wikipedia.org%2Fwiki%2FJoseph_Tainter%23Social_complexity&h=ATM1_F8-S0iFliYZEdnG3yrcH8BB9tvwgARTBp-f9CcCkpJXaiQ9dLxfhsSkzQGTcGoA0WSCcRmbTgYReBVfSVi5hwu2DHle7t6R7Ya2wOrlRrzVaC-lr8HvilX36rqd-8wMjL8&enc=AZPEA_zK5_BM6BPYVvsR5xvuz1re1Z9rq0S49Pap50adxA2lKOD4t2FFT8ZDUH62ZCY-CSS8XkTSoPsluzcBKhThsLWLSXFydfII_PkhvUWFp3Y-7ppztUyqEXPJ2wMXVBPWREUhRpadPkQojJDs3MiM1MbecPUsty1eOhB8a8qJeg&s=1)

. His previous positions include Project Leader of Cultural Heritage Research, Rocky Mountain Forest and Range Experiment Station, Albuquerque, New Mexico and Professor of Anthropology at the

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I was reading about the 3 Horizons framework. Was it developed specifically to help organizations adapt to change [Daniel](https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=100014615418677&hc_location=ufi)?  
  
I can see how it could apply to a rational approach to changing government policy (for example). There is another level where individuals and organizations are planning activity based on the certain knowledge that other individuals of the many species and most organizations will continue to act according to existing patterns of behaviour. The breakdown of the old pattern creates opportunities for new forms of organization (new species).  
  
I am just thinking that decisions are not made at a level where a 3 Horizon approach applies to the whole system . . . only specific components that adopt the approach.

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 I would say that 3 Horizons model offers a way to have constructive conversation about the future between people who - due to their role - have very different outlooks on the future ... and enable them to develop the capacity for anticipation and transformative innovation with future consciousness (and in ways that value the contributions of different perspectives) ... to respond to your question about 'adapting to change' ... if you think of the 3 components of resilience (persistence - adaptive capacity - transformability), the model invites people to develop that capacity for a wise transformative response to the converging crises we are faced with ... incremental (adaptive) change may no longer be the appropriate response ... I hope this helps. The fastest way to get some clarity on the usefulness of this model and what it is offered for, is to watch Bill´s webinar video: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xSyD1mFKjAE](https://l.facebook.com/l.php?u=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.youtube.com%2Fwatch%3Fv%3DxSyD1mFKjAE&h=ATOzGRR1fq-EoOcdZzLm-L3SbbTuS1832mCkRvQDCDZNSGmxq9RbQ3km_6XCGcwnBJnlzaRodfqt_2bgVRkUDYMOXA1Xw00tMMBECnSq8s89IeaWyYjD5pcJWJq5_oBp0Ro9vvE)

[ALIA Webinar - Bill Sharpe - Three Horizons](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xSyD1mFKjAE)

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A pattern continuously repeating itself for thousands of years and part of the evolution of mankind? Falling of civilisations, e.g Roman Empire following chaos -alcohol, sex, etc......western civilisation- drugs, moral standards, millions murdered, cyber attacks - chaos........ Just wondering.....

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 yes, it is ... the third horizon turns into the new first horizon once you get there ... the hope is in avoiding total collapse and extreme suffering or irreversible systems degradation and to facilitate a transition from H1 to H3 through H2+ initiatives, rather than have a full collapse of H1 and a long and painful rebuild.

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I like the title "Authentic Leadership in Action". I think we are on the same page when you say, "the model invites people to develop that capacity for a wise transformative response to the converging crises we are faced with", [Daniel](https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=100014615418677&hc_location=ufi). My point is individuals, and the individuals deciding for each organization, are the ones with the power to take the 3 Horizons approach. Because organizations have constituencies it is individuals who have the greatest power to make H3 choices.  
  
1) We do what is necessary to meet our immediate needs,  
2) We seek out incremental improvements in our situation, and  
3) Seldom do we investigate a radically different approach,  
  
Just be aware that most of the people with the power to decide believe that there is a higher authority that will undertake the H3 innovations.

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The locus of agency is with the individual, yes. And the the postulates of how "we" act depends on the state of consciousness the individuals in that we are at. Collective and colaborative action from a shared ethical basis can leverage systemic change. Luckily, I have met many people in leadership posición that do not pass the buck of transformative innovation to a higher authority.

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## [Jessie Henshaw](https://www.facebook.com/jessie.henshaw?fref=ufi)

[Daniel](https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=100014615418677&hc_location=ufi), The difference I seem to see between "3 Horizon" thinking and mine, a scientific general systems approach, seems to be your focus on cyclic evolutionary change and my focus on irreversible progressive change, seeming to talk about similar things but in ways hard to connect.   
  
One way of connecting them might be if you recognized the increasing speed of evolutionary change making it preemptively harder and harder to either keep up or reach for the next level. Does that connect at all with your thinking?

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I would agree with that.

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As in the figure I'm concerned with the ability of people to respond to approaching natural limits, and so as in the diagram, either the faster progression toward the limits or longer delay in responding would precipitate learning crises with lasting effects.

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## [Jessie Henshaw](https://www.facebook.com/jessie.henshaw?fref=ufi)

[Daniel](https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=100014615418677&hc_location=ufi), Then would you agree that the generations are getting pulled further and further apart, having to live in increasingly separated alien worlds? (assuming the 3 Horizons refers to successive generations). You seem to show them as being separated already, an I would say the trend is for them to be pulled further and further apart. The result we do seem to see is a modern society less and less aware of what went before or what will come after. Holling's "Panarchy" doesn't address that.

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From what I've read there seems to be an underappreciation of generations as the organizing concept that I think it deserves.  
  
As [Jessie Henshaw](https://www.facebook.com/jessie.henshaw?hc_location=ufi) says "the trend is for them to be pulled further and further apart. " And there is a counter trend of the generations getting closer. I speak from my experience from being a 1946 ("leading edge" ) boomer active in the `1960 change movements.   
  
The changes in culture we see today is what we saw in a nascent form then that are now mainstream. The first Earth Day was 1970. The Women's Rights movement in the 60-s and 70s. The Civil Rights movement in the late 50's and 60s.   
  
I do believe sections of the generations are being pulled apart, as you suggest. I think it's fair to say that the rise of Trumpism has it's roots in the Culture War started in the 60s. My guess is the turbulence we see today indicates the final stages of the Culture Wars.   
  
We can speculate on the reasons, but I'm not sure that is appropriate in this thread.

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[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Theory\_of\_generations](https://l.facebook.com/l.php?u=https%3A%2F%2Fen.wikipedia.org%2Fwiki%2FTheory_of_generations&h=ATM5-z4Q1ozQYlTWoeiAX9FxFU_Rxq9fs94azh4PyI5eNgaAbIyMKfDmuu-J-L0197MDqWD31UTbOjJcW2yrl_zv6VpvkX3f5qCkZYcKC8q5eR4sxwc64O5SNDDvWo-753ucOQ4)  
  
Theory of generations (or sociology of generations) is a theory posed by Karl Mannheim in his 1923 essay, "The Problem of Generations."[1] This essay has been described as "the most systematic and fully developed" and even "the seminal theoretical treatment of generations as a sociological phenomenon".[2] According to Mannheim, people are significantly influenced by the socio-historical environment (in particular, notable events that involve them actively) of their youth; giving rise, on the basis of shared experience, to social cohorts that in their turn influence events that shape future generations.[2] Mannheim's theory, however, tends to center around Western ideas and lacks a broader cultural understanding. [3]

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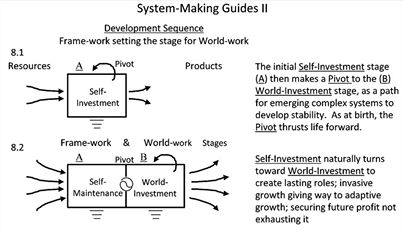
Yes, intergenerational equity is key in all this.

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## [Jessie Henshaw](https://www.facebook.com/jessie.henshaw?fref=ufi)

I think a simpler way of understanding "generations" is as "the cohorts of emerging social networks", brought together by common experience, and so naturally forming as social cells. We'd also call them "silos" when concerned with the communication barriers that develop between them. My systems science is based on the identification of these or other emergent cultural cells, using their growth patterns to help draw their boundaries. To then really understand them you look for the biophysical and social relationship framework that identifies how they work and holds them together, i.e. the 'pattern language' of their design.  
  
This is why we try to understand the cellular form of natural systems and then try to identify the pattern language of their individual designs. "generations" are composed of so many sub-cultures, each of which will develop by an process of emergence, and then secure lasting roles in society to continue.

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Fascinating!

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## [M Ichael Josefowicz](https://www.facebook.com/michael.josefowicz.1?fref=ufi)

Nicely said. Makes good sense. In my work I use the notion of small world networks to point to cultural cells. Smallness does not necessarily mean a limited number of actors. The issue is more the friction involved in communication/info/energy exchange. In human systems a common culture, language, etiquette all take friction out of info exchanges.  
  
My approach is to see networks of small world networks with weak links that move signals between SWN.

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[Jessie Henshaw](https://www.facebook.com/jessie.henshaw?hc_location=ufi) Worth repeating. "My systems science is based on the identification of these or other emergent cultural cells, using their growth patterns to help draw their boundaries. To then really understand them you look for the biophysical and social relationship framework that identifies how they work and holds them together, i.e. the pattern language of their design."   
  
I'm still trying to understand how pattern language fits in. The patterns I look at are the structures that emerge as a result of cells bouncing against each other.  
  
Ping [Nora Bateson](https://www.facebook.com/norabateson?hc_location=ufi)

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The way pattern language fits in is when studying systems that work as wholes, looking for the "simplifying ideal way of balancing their internal forces", that being thought of as its essence of working organization giving it its ability to behave as a whole. My view of PL is more like systems theory than most people's. I focus on any subject that is seen as working as a whole, like looking for the holistic pattern of local shops as its "pattern language" giving the neighborhood its "living quality". I then also use PL to help me learn from nature, doing what is called "pattern mining" from naturally occurring designs.   
  
The basic step is that of identifying and organization's boundary and then studying its internal and external forces to help discover the internal way working that unifies its forces to make it an individual. For example, you can identify a home as the center of a family, and after a while realize that having access to the outside as well as being able to cut it off is essential for it to act as a family, and what that enclosure does is separate public and private, giving the family a private place where it can make all its choices for the good of the whole.   
  
So my approach to the succession of generations (Cohort Horizons?) as a succession of organized communities that behave as a whole, some defined by age group, some defined by music or politics or gender, or often just individual language and style.

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[David Braden](https://www.facebook.com/david.braden.18?fref=ufi)

## [David Braden](https://www.facebook.com/david.braden.18?fref=ufi) [Jessie](https://www.facebook.com/jessie.henshaw?hc_location=ufi)

writes "The way pattern language fits in is when studying systems that work as wholes". An H3 innovation in [Daniel](https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=100014615418677&hc_location=ufi)'s work would be a collection of individuals following a new pattern that worked as a whole in a way that addressed one to all the wicked problems. (sustainable patterns of interaction comparable to a new species within the context of the whole system).

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Excellent thread everyone! [Gerald](https://www.facebook.com/gerald.midgley?hc_location=ufi), thanks for the initial post.

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