

Global Transition Initiative – taking shape

Peter Merry, interviewed by Helen Titchen-Beeth, 22nd March 2009

The Global Transition Initiative has emerged out of the conversations convened by Jim Garrison to prepare for the State of the World Forum in November 2009. It became clear early on that the State of the World Forum conference could not just be a traditional conference - with talking heads, sages on the stages – and couldn't just be about awareness-raising any more, because we all know that there is something seriously wrong with the state of the planet and there are enough conferences around to go to. We didn't feel energised by the idea of just another classic conference which was just another talking shop, and we didn't think anybody else would either. Really, these days, the energy across the board is about how we – we being global humanity - organise ourselves to take the action that we need to take at this stage.

So we started talking more about a longer process. When I first met Jim in Amsterdam, at the end of our conversation, he said “There's one thing I really need to tell you, and that is that this is a 10 year commitment”. Well, fine! Whatever it takes to get us through this! Since then, we have started talking about a process to support the transition which we're in, which we're calling the Global Transition Initiative, punctuated by global annual events which are called the State of the World Forum. The first one will be in Washington this year in November. The second one will be in Brazil, next year. The third one might well be in The Hague in 2011, and the fourth one in Singapore in 2012. That's as far as we've got at the moment.

What we are seeing is the meshworking approach, scaled up to the global level. How do we set up a global meshwork to support the greening of our economies over the coming 10 years, which can rapidly increase the speed with which we develop and implement solutions to the big challenges we're facing? Particularly in the last days, news has been coming through from the scientific community studying climate change, saying how bad it's getting. Professor John Beddington, chief scientific adviser to the UK government, has reported to the sustainable development conference, predicting what he calls a 'perfect storm of problems by 2030', like food shortages, scarce water, insufficient energy, creating public unrest, cross-border conflicts and mass migration.

All the mainstream scientists now basically all agree that it's all going much faster, and it's systemic, all these issues are inter-related and we really need to act. Unfortunately, we're not quite getting the same urgency back from the politicians at the moment. It's a tough one, of course... it requires you to take a really long-term perspective. So somebody's got to do it, and we might as well just start, even if there are other people also trying to do things, because we think that meshworking technology and the integral perspective on these things are critical pieces that can really enable us to have an effective impact.

What are the core functions of the global transition initiative? There seem to be key functions that must be covered if we are to manage the complexity of pulling off a global transition in the face of upheaval generated by systems failures and severe climate disruption.

Content

Clearly we need to educate ourselves on the content of what is going on around climate and the interrelated issues. We need to educating ourselves about the solutions that are already out there and that are emerging.

We also need to learn to address these issues climate change, food shortages from an integral perspective. How do we create as integral a picture as possible of the issues, so that the solutions we develop are as integral as possible as well. This means not only tackling the technologies and the systemic and structural piece, but just also the cultural piece, the individual mindset and behaviour. Just to make sure we really are covering all four of those quadrants and that we're really thinking about the implications of the different value systems and how they play out in different societies and different contexts. To make sure we don't fall into the trap of a one-size-fits-all solution.

Building capacity to collaborate

We also need to focus on the 'How'. How do we generate the collaboration and surface the insights that we need to emerge? At the heart of this question is really building capacity in what we would call the 'Art of Hosting conversations that matter' - the skills to hold space for the insights to emerge out of the collective consciousness. And also to create and hold the space that will enable effective collaboration between individuals and organisations beyond their individual and organisational egos. There is a need for training in how to design and run effective processes.

Integral coaching

There is also a need to have integral coaching capacity available to support leaders and individuals who are taking initiatives - to help them acting from as integral a consciousness as they have available to them. We need people across the planet who can provide integral coaching to these individuals.

Peer-to-peer mentoring

One of the beauties of the Gaiasoft technology that we will be using to support this process is that you can compare progress across different issues and locations. So you could see that a certain country, organisation, region or city is a little further down the line on a certain element of sustainability than somebody else somewhere else. So if, for example, the performance spreadsheet shows me a comparison of where my city is in relation to other cities, I can identify which cities are just a step or two ahead of me, so I can call them up and find out what they did to get from where I am to where they are. In this way we are beginning to develop a peer-to-peer mentoring relationship. This kind of peer learning requires specific capacities and competencies, too, so there is also need for a support function around helping people to be good p2p mentors.

Integral organisational consultants

The transition needs to happen effectively and it needs to happen fast. As we start organising ourselves at different levels – because it's going to require organisation to make this happen, be it at city level, state level, national level, or global level – we need to have as effective an organisational structure and processes as possible. So we need people who are versed in cutting edge organisational practices like Holacracy. We need people who have really explored the cutting edge of what it means to set up and run an organisation integrally. We need people who are familiar with chaordic design principles. So we need integral organisational consultants available across the planet to support initiatives in their start-up phase and to advise them on how to run their organisation and help them embed that capacity internally as well.

Roles for the new world

To sum up, we need people playing a number of different roles across the planet. Those roles, which perform the functions I have just described, are:

- Sustainability content experts on the issues
- Integral sustainability experts who can help the content experts see the piece which they have and see the piece they don't have, so that the integral sustainability experts can help connect up the different content dots that need connecting.
- Experts hosts and facilitators who can support people to develop the skills they need to design and facilitate the processes, the people collaboration and organisational collaboration.
- Integral coaches to support individual leaders and initiative takers to hold their own inner space to be effective in what they're doing.
- A team of people who can support peer-to-peer mentoring.
- Integral organisational consultants

These six roles need to be distributed across the planet, for people to call on to support their action whenever they need it.

Global events as training grounds

What would these global events do? State of the World Forum would essentially exist to build that capacity. At the global scale, we would aim to have people coming to the event from as many countries as possible who could potentially be lead people in their own countries. They would come to learn – to get a sample of each of these six roles, so they have an overview of the whole picture, so that by the time they leave, they understand:

- the essential content issues
- what it means to take an integral approach
- the importance of the art of hosting
- the importance of the individual coaching support in this
- the peer-to-peer potential and that that needs support
- the need for good and effective organisational structures in this.

Then you could have specific parallel deepening tracks or streams that people could follow during the conference – almost a training process. Really a capacity-

building event. We would also have to create the processes that keep those interweaving with each other as we go through.

The exciting thing is that we know that a lot of these people already exist, it's just a question of connecting them up and organising ourselves to really focus on building that capacity and that competency at many levels. And making explicit that offering. That whole. Making people see how that fits together and how those different roles contribute to the global transition initiative.

Supporting all of this is obviously the human contact, so alongside the annual global events, you would be having regional and local events which are similar, communicating the content issues, building the competency and capacity around these different roles. These different levels could potentially organise themselves with a double linking across from global to regional to national.

And then of course, we have the technology to support all of this now, with the Gaiasoft technology, where we can be tracking progress across any set of indicators, under a group of pillars, across the planet on many different scales. So we could zoom right down to the neighbourhood region or right up to a Europe region, or even global. And we can find who else there is, either in my direct region, who's working on what I need to be working on – who's my local expert? Or we can zoom right out to the global level: who is the most recognised person on the planet in this area, and can I access them for some insights? So what level do I need to go to to get the level of expertise that I need? Does it need to be language specific, or can it be in a different language?

And where are the best practices? Anywhere on the planet, or maybe specifically in my region, around this issue. And those we can find as well.