

## What We're Learning – Transformative Change in Japan

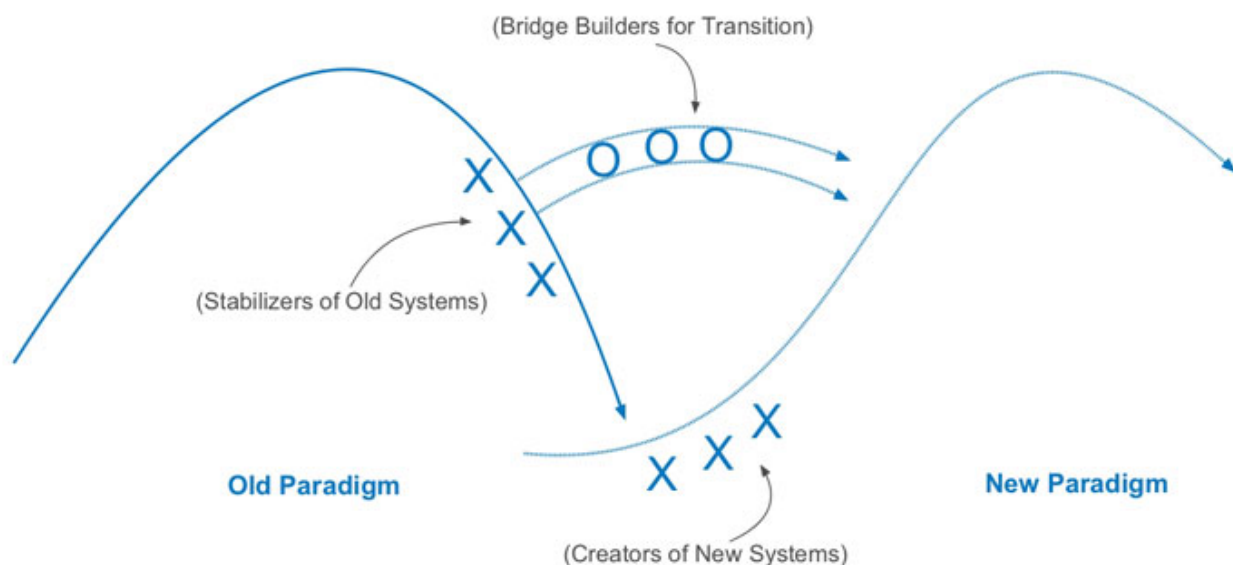
It has been almost two years since the triple disasters of March 11<sup>th</sup> in NE Japan. The emergency phase is mostly complete. The big questions are about what comes next. Throughout the region there's a sense of creating a new future, together. But how?

I've been working these last two years with a wide web of people who are asking this question. They are from the region and from outside the region. They are men and women. They are from every generation. They come from many different sectors. From these diverse perspectives, a new region and a new Japan will be created.

This paper shares a few ideas that have been emerging from this work. Most likely they will be expanded on in a book that weaves together stories and ideas about how change happens.

### What Work Is Needed Now?

This is a time when an old age is dying, even as it gasps and struggles for breath, and a new age is being born. In times like this three different kinds of work must be attended to.

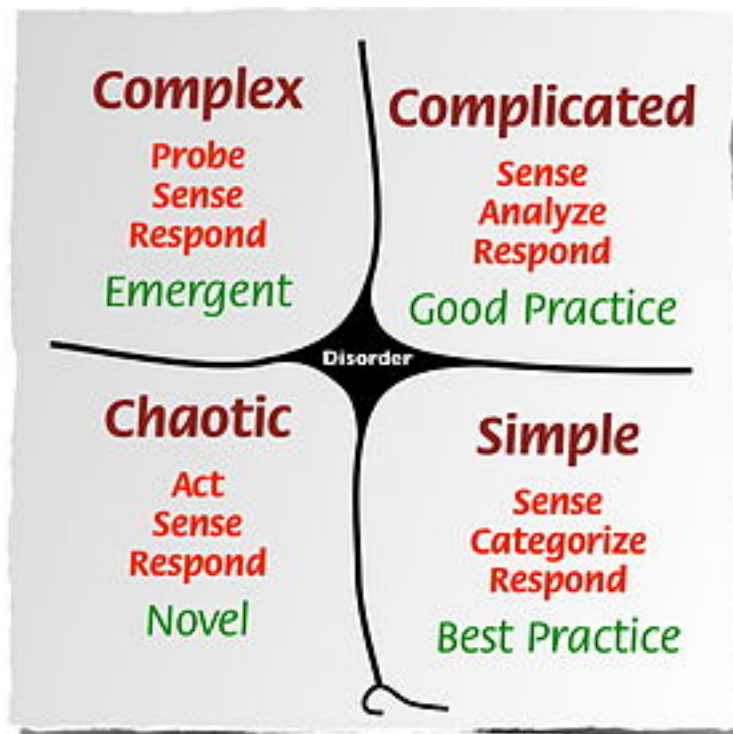


- **Stabilizing the old system**, keeping alive those things that will be important even in a new age and letting die those things that no longer serve us well. Sometimes we speak of this work as “hospicing the old,” because things do need to die – and they need to die well. There are many examples of this in Japan, ranging from nuclear reactors to a medical and education system that are increasingly problematic.
- **Creating new systems**, as people turn away from trying to make old systems work. People start to construct alternatives. Most often, their early prototypes do not work. If they have the vision, courage and support to continue working, they learn and new systems emerge. In Japan one example of this work are the closed systems of hydroponics and aquaponics that are being conceived of for production of food in Fukushima.
- **Building bridges** that allow others to cross over from the old system into the new. This work of making it possible for more and more people to embrace new alternatives is essential if systems transformation is going to be possible.

This image of how change happens came out of many years of work by The Berkana Institute. It is the very magnitude of the Japanese disasters that makes the work on these three arenas obvious.

### How Can The Range Of Work Be Understood?

Cynefin framework (Snowden & Kurtz, 2003) offers another way of visualizing the work needed now.



What Snowden and Kurtz share with Henry Mintzberg (Mintzberg, 1994) is a clear understanding that the age of strategic planning is over. It just doesn't work anymore – it if ever did, it certainly doesn't work in these turbulent times.

The Cynefin invites us to acknowledge that situations in which we find ourselves adhere to one of four dominant conditions – simple, complicated, complex and chaotic. Japan makes it clear that in any system all four of these conditions exist simultaneously. And all four are found in each of the three kinds of work described in the Berkana model.

## What is Transformative Change Like?

All of this makes for a robust, challenging, paralyzing, exhilarating, dynamic system in Japan. So how does transformative change occur? That's what we are learning, studying and creating simultaneously in Japan. Here are a few of the pieces we are seeing:

1. **Leadership comes from many parts of the system, from people who lead with their own authenticity.** They have clear purpose. They know what they know and what they don't know. They know they must be connected with others in honest relationship. They work with their own emotions. They are willing to lead but have no need to be followed.
2. **Intention dances with surrender.** The system begins to shift because of clear intentions. Individuals and groups see what is important to them. Because of the overall dynamics, the ways in which the system will manifest itself must be surrendered time and time again. Our understanding of how to proceed is constantly shifting as new experience enters the system. We might even speak of this as prototyping at a systems level.
3. **Fields upon fields of honest relationships are essential.** People need to be able to come together in a safe and generative space. Called BA - 場, (Nonaka & Konno, 2005) this simple construct is exquisitely powerful in Japan. In these spaces when respect, curiosity and generosity are present, creativity and possibility prosper. In Japan we have been reinventing the European form called Future Centers in a way uniquely suited to Japan.
4. **It takes everyone.** Diversity is essential in the work. All the generations, men and women, people with diverse backgrounds and working in different sectors are needed to create new possibilities. We think better, more originally and more clearly when in the presence of diversity. Of course, this also means we have to develop the inner strength to hold the tension of diversity.
5. **Invitation, not promotion is critical.** It is counterproductive to work with the energy of convincing or motivating or promoting. It just does not work. People have heard it all before. Invitation is different. Those who are ready to begin, begin. They work with the

knowledge and resources they already have. As they work, when their work is made visible, it attracts the attention and then the involvement of others.

6. **Start with what you have; ask for what you need.** The title says it all. The revolution will not be funded, (INCITE, 2009), but this also is incomplete. We begin by working with the knowledge and resources we have, and we are part of a rich web of other knowledge and resources that we will need to realize our dreams. One important question is how to access resources from beyond the immediate system in ways that don't overwhelm the local system.
7. **A web of connections creates conditions for transformation.** Change happens in one local place. Transformation takes a bit more! When people working on similar problems and possibilities begin to connect with each other they are able to learn together and take their work to a whole deeper and wider scale. We started noticing and working with these phenomena at The Berkana Institute with the creation of an exchange of leadership learning centers in many parts of the world. (Wheatley & Frieze, 2008)
8. **Making pioneering work visible is essential for emergence.** Parallel to creation of a rich web of connections, innovative work must be made visible. This visibility is of two forms. When dynamic work is made visible to people beyond any system, it inspires them and invites their participation. When people doing the often hard, day to day work become, in turn, re-inspired when they discover that their work energizes others.
9. **All work is local, except when it is not.** True change happens on the ground in a local system. If nothing changes in terms of individual and local systems practices, nothing has changed. Eventually, however, systems dynamics need to be accounted for and changes at a systems level are necessary to ensure the health and vitality of local changes.
10. **In the end – and the beginning – it is all about creating new stories.** We don't live in the world; we live in our stories of the world. Change the story, change the world. Durable change will occur in Japan – or any system – as we change the stories.

## Where Are the Starting Points?

You may have noticed that one word occurs in each of the four Cynefin quadrants: **Sense**. In Japan the cultural competence for communication is listening. In cultures like the US, the communications competence is speaking. Japan, with all the dynamics of living in a collectivist culture, listening is a whole body sport. It is, in fact, sensing. Many years ago Edward Hall told a lovely story in a book that laid the groundwork for the field of intercultural communications (Hall, 1976). He talked about how when the husband arrived home from work, he would know something was not okay in the household when he noticed a branch out of alignment in a flower arrangement or that his tea was just a little cool. Deep meaning conveyed beyond words.

In the last two years, while the rescue and emergency work has been going on, many people have been **sensing** with each other into the question of what comes next. Much of my work in this time has been hosting a variety of dialogs that have given people a chance to listen to each other. Another part of my time has been spent listening to many people individually or in small groups as they poured out their stories. It all begins with sensing.

## Tohoku Futures Network

We received support from Give2Asia to support people in Tohoku in using Future Center methodologies to catalyze collaborative action in the fall of 2012. Our current understanding of this work is that it is actually a broad network of people, communities and organizations who are using the 場 of the Future Center as a place to build relationships and trust, identify needs and opportunities, research alternatives, prototype possibilities, reflect on results, converge on solutions to be taken forward, and communicate results.

This network and what it represents is a chaotic swirl. We're resisting all are own urges to make it tidy and orderly. But for years I've been saying that the only organizational structure worse than rigid hierarchy was flat. This network cannot thrive as a chaotic swirl, but we must discover the order from inside the system rather than from without. There are so many questions.

- How to move with the speed and urgency the times demand, and yet proceed at the pace of grace?
- How do we help people develop and trust their leadership capacities at a variety of levels of system? What can be trained? What can be learned together? What requires practice and then more practice?
- How do we evolve the web of connections required for this work to reach transformative scale? There is so much going on and so many people doing so many things. How do add to the power of connection without getting lost in move overloads?
- How can this work be sustained over time? Our funding from Give2Asia is limited. How do we continue to develop capacity?

One of the things we learned with the Berkana Exchange was that in this sort of networked system, singularity of purpose was not essential, but resonance of purpose was. We are intentionally building a robust network that works separately with separately with resonant purposes, using just in time dynamics required systems that are too big to know (Weinberger, 2011). We design processes that use core values and principles to guide the process – and then we trust it. There is much to be explored here.

## Connect Beyond Tohoku

True transformation requires going beyond the boundaries of existing systems. A new Tohoku will not be born from Tohoku alone. Two level of connection are required. The first is with the rest of Japan and the second is with the rest of the world.

One promising way of connecting inside of Japan is through the broader Future Center movement in Japan. One of our partners founded FutureSessions, Inc. ([www.futuresessions.com](http://www.futuresessions.com)) to promote, support and link Future Center activity throughout Japan. An interactive website ([www.ourfutures.net](http://www.ourfutures.net)) is ready to launch this spring. We are planning our third annual FutureSessions Week throughout Japan to continue to introduce these approaches.

Beyond Japan we are beginning a pattern of connections. For the past two years I have been blogging at [www.resilientjapan.org](http://www.resilientjapan.org) and we have brought teams from Japan to the Authentic Leadership In Action Summer Institute. This is just a start. More writing and sharing is essential.

## Transformative Scenario Planning

One aspect of the current work is that we are between stories. There is no collective vision at any level of system about the future people want to create. This is most obvious in Fukushima where many are clear that the past is gone – it is just completely gone – but there is not collective clarity about what might come next. It looks as if Transformative Scenario Planning might help us move forward.

At its core, Transformative Scenario Planning is a five part process (Kahane, 2012):

- Convene a team from across the whole system
- Observe what is happening
- Construct stories about what could happen
- Discover what can and must be done
- Act to transform the system

We are using normal Future Center processes to convene a core team of people who want to explore the possibilities of Transformative Scenario Planning which may do a major regional convening in the fall, bringing together a cross section of leaders from the region to examine what transformative scenarios offer.

## Transition Towns

It's hard, in spite of one's best intentions, not to simply rebuild the past. Over the last four years there has been some inspiring work done in Japan to use Transition Town (Hopkins, 2008) as a container for moving forward. Beginning with the transition town of Fujino in 2009, there are now 23 transition towns in Japan at various levels of organization.

We are convening the leadership of the Japan Transition Town movement with the leadership of the Tohoku Futures Network to look at ways in which transition knowledge can be most successfully brought into Tohoku. It may provide common language and insights that will be valuable now.

## **Business Partnerships**

Before 3.11 the business climate in Japan was already shifting. There was increasing discontent with the false promises of globalization. Japanese companies felt ill at ease in working outside a relational field. There was growing interest in localization.

One of the challenges and opportunities right now is that there is a need for business expertise from the rest of Japan in Tohoku and there is a need to bring it in through forms of true partnership rather than outside exploitation.

We're working with KDI – Knowledge Dynamics Initiative – at Fuji Xerox, FutureSessions, Inc. and other individual business to explore this dynamic.

## **What's Next**

This is a living laboratory of grace in which the new is constantly being revealed. I believe what we are learning here is important for the rest of the world, as well as Japan. We're discovering how to foster and support the emergence of self-organized transformation. It is exciting, maddening, confusing and promising.

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