

CHALLENGES TO LARGE SCALE CHANGE: REPLY TO PENNYPACKER

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We appreciate Pennypacker's (2004) thoughts on the application of our conceptual framework to issues of great significance to society, such as globalization, free market economies, and government. He reflected on implications of undertaking large-scale change endeavors; and he suggested steps toward sharing our cultural change perspective with leaders, colleagues from other disciplines and the general public.

We purposely limited our analysis and examples to organizations so we can begin to understand cultures by examining less complex cultural units than a society, a city, a country, let alone an economic system. It is harder to appreciate underlying principles and orderly relations when analyzing such complexity. Nonetheless, Pennypacker's thought provoking commentary stimulated us to think beyond the boundaries of a single organization. We welcome this opportunity to consider some complexities of large scale systems.

In changing a community—formed by numbers of cultural entities—it would help to understand the relations between its parts, as well as their evolution over time. Let's, for instance, consider a city as an object of study. A city is a large center of population that has a government body which administers city affairs. A city is formed by many organizations and individuals functioning within its geographical limits. Most, though not all, of the city's cultural entities interconnect. Some entities generate aggregate products (goods or services) and other entities serve as their receiving systems. A city receives inputs from external cultural entities and the products of its organizations and individuals respond to external demand. There are functional relations among most of a city's parts. Here is an example of interconnections between cultural entities of a city: A bakery produces bread that retailers buy; consumers buy bread that retailers sell; a marketing firm advertises the bread; a distributor sells bread to restaurants.

The configurations of interconnections of the city's cultural entities are dynamic and constantly changing. Table 4 (see Reply to Hobbs, p. 122 this issue) suggests that some types of relations involve recurrences, and some one-time occurrences. Each organization in the city is subject to selection through similar mechanisms of cultural evolution, adding tremendous complexity to the analysis of the city as a cultural entity.

Integrated, city-wide change would require the understanding of the interconnections between the city's cultural entities; it would also necessitate the appreciation of cultural lineages of at least its core component organizations. Without consideration of the landscape of interdependencies, significant change might be difficult or impossible to accomplish.

Another equally important step in changing large cultural systems is to study the contingencies that control the relevant decision-making behavior of the leaders of the critical entities. Unfortunately, many organizations are led by individuals who not only fail to comprehend the larger system where their organizations operate, but whose

decision-making behavior is under the control of operant contingencies that generate decisions counterproductive to the well-being of the community as a whole. Managing integrated, large scale change requires cultural engineers who appreciate the ecological interdependencies and the evolutionary lineages of critical sets of interlocking behavioral contingencies; who analyze the contingencies that control leaders' decision making; and who are able to implement new metacontingencies. Understanding is necessary, though not sufficient, to generate change in the landscape of complex cultural interactions.

We thank Pennypacker for his inspirational commentary and suggestions, and hope that our reaction stimulates further thoughts on how to bring about change to foster the well-being of societies and their members.

REFERENCE

Pennypacker, H. S. (2004). Complexity and selection: A template for nation-building? *Behavior and Social Issues*, 13, 134-137.