

# Skillful Engagement with Wicked Issues A Framework for Analysing the Meaning-making Structures of Societal Change Agents

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**Abstract:** The argument underlying this article is that innovative and skillful change strategies are needed in order to handle a range of complex and difficult societal issues. For many of these so-called wicked issues, conventional institutions and policies have performed rather poorly. It can be reasonably argued that societal change agents play a crucial role in catalysing developmental processes regarding our societies' problem-solving strategies and organizational forms. The purpose of this article is to contribute to a deeper understanding of the different ways societal change agents engage wicked issues by developing a conceptual framework for analysing the meaning-making patterns of change agents. The framework integrates relevant concepts and models from the field of adult development with a specific focus on the role of awareness in five domains: task complexity, context, stakeholders, self, and perspectives. The framework is expected to be useful in analysing and explaining the variability in how societal change agents construct visions, goals, strategies, and courses of action, as well as in analysing patterns of effectiveness and success in initiatives that engage complex societal issues. Knowledge gained from such studies can (presumably) be used for designing more effective forms of scaffolding individual competence development as well as collective problem-solving and strategy development processes.

**Keywords:** Context awareness, perspective awareness, scaffolding, self-awareness, societal change agents, societal entrepreneurship, stakeholder awareness, task complexity awareness, wicked issues.

## PART I: PRELIMINARIES

### Introduction

How can we, the community of human beings, become more skillful in engaging complex societal issues? Many of the tasks a society needs to manage can, with reasonable success, be dealt with in the conventional way: delegating them to an organization with appropriate instructions, resources, competences, and structures. However, some issues are complex in ways that make such a strategy ineffectual, yet they are critically important in terms of the wellbeing and suffering of people and of the biosphere in general. The American planning researchers Rittel

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and Webber (1973) called such issues "wicked problems" and made a preliminary analysis of why they have proved so resistant to resolution. Examples of wicked issues abound: long-term unemployment, marginalization of disadvantaged groups, climate change, crime, drug abuse, lifestyle-generated health issues, terrorism, armed conflicts, etc. Drawing on their conceptualization and those of others (see e.g., Chapman, Edwards, & Hampson, 2009), typical properties of "wicked issues" can be described in the following points:

- **Complex causality.** Social, economic, technical, environmental, psychological, cultural, legal, etc. factors are involved. Conditions interact in complex ways.
- **Many stakeholders.** The issues cannot be delegated to one actor. Cooperation among numerous different stakeholders is necessary for achieving significant results.
- **Deep-rooted disagreements** on (a) how to describe the issue and (b) what ought to be done.
- **Chronic:** The issues cannot be solved once and for all, they will continue to exist to some extent whatever we do. Therefore there are difficulties in agreeing on standards for successful outcomes.
- **Require systemic adaptation:** Because societal structures and processes are contributing to the emergence of the issues, isolated measures and quick fixes are ineffectual. Changes in how the societal systems operate are needed.

This brief summary shows reasons why these issues are truly complex. In order to handle such issues in constructive ways, we need capacities for perceiving, understanding, and managing complexity (Chapman et al., 2009; Inglis & Steele, 2005; Ross, 2006a). Capacities to manage complex societal issues do not necessarily reside in individuals. Skillfully designed methods and organizations and/or networks of people working together in constructive ways may allow us to create capacities that reside in collectives rather than in individuals with exceptional talents. However, in order to design methods, facilitate problem-solving processes, build organizations, and create and sustain networks that have these capacities, we need individuals who have considerable "awareness resources" at their disposal.

This article aims at contributing to a keener understanding of the role different aspects of *awareness* has for the effectiveness of people who want to make a significant positive change regarding wicked issues.<sup>2</sup> I will call such people *societal change agents*. The treatment of the topic here is adapted to the study of individuals, but many of the aspects covered will be relevant to groups and organizations as well.

Societal change agents are people who through their own initiative (rather than being told what to do by an employer) engage complex societal issues with an aspiration to contribute to systemic change on some scale level: in local communities, regions, countries, the global society. One type of societal change agents has recently attracted considerable attention: the *societal entrepreneur* (see for example Gawell, Johannisson, & Lundqvist, 2009). Societal entrepreneurs are here defined as people who (a) are committed to initiate *innovative* activities aiming at serving the good of the society (on some scale level: local communities, regions, countries, global society); (b) do it by organizing activities in new ways (rather than operating with existing

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<sup>2</sup> I gratefully acknowledge many helpful suggestions made by a number of perceptive reviewers.

organizations); and (c) seek changes that involve influencing how *other* actors and/or institutions operate (rather than just, like many *social* entrepreneurs, starting up a non-profit organization offering needed social services). Societal entrepreneurs are aiming to be agents of societal development, intent upon creating solutions to problems in the society or realize visions which serve societal needs. From a normative point of view, it can be argued that societal change agency is a critically important phenomenon, in particular in relation to "wicked issues." To the extent that the world at large as well as particular communities need to adapt and develop in order to serve the good of humanity, skillful agency of positive societal change is a topic that deserves careful study.

How can we better understand skillful change agency in relation to wicked issues? Is it possible to identify competences that significantly contribute to effectiveness in such societal change initiatives? Can we develop skillful ways to support the development of required skills? These are large questions that can be expected to sustain a field of research for a considerable time.

The specific purpose of this article is to develop an analytical framework for describing variations in the meaning-making patterns of societal change agents, in particular through considering the role of awareness.<sup>3,4</sup> One application of such a framework is analyses of the relationships between patterns of awareness on the one hand and constructions of visions, goals, and action strategies on the other hand. The phrase "meaning-making patterns" is used here in an open-ended, rather than strictly defined way, more or less synonymous with related concepts like consciousness structures, cognitive structures, action-logics, mindsets, frames of reference, perspectives, etc. All these words refer to the more durable, recognizable patterns in how a person (or a collective) constructs meaning. The reason I prefer "meaning-making patterns" to, for example, cognitive structures, is simply that this formulation so clearly points to the active construction of meaning going on in the mind.

## What is to be Explained?

The framework presented below is intended to be useful in unpacking and explaining three phenomena:

- a) The variability and complexity of the sets of visions and goals societal change agents strive to attain.
- b) The variability in the strategies and actions employed by societal change agents in order to achieve their objectives.
- c) The roles of various aspects of awareness in explaining successful outcomes in societal change initiatives regarding complex issues.

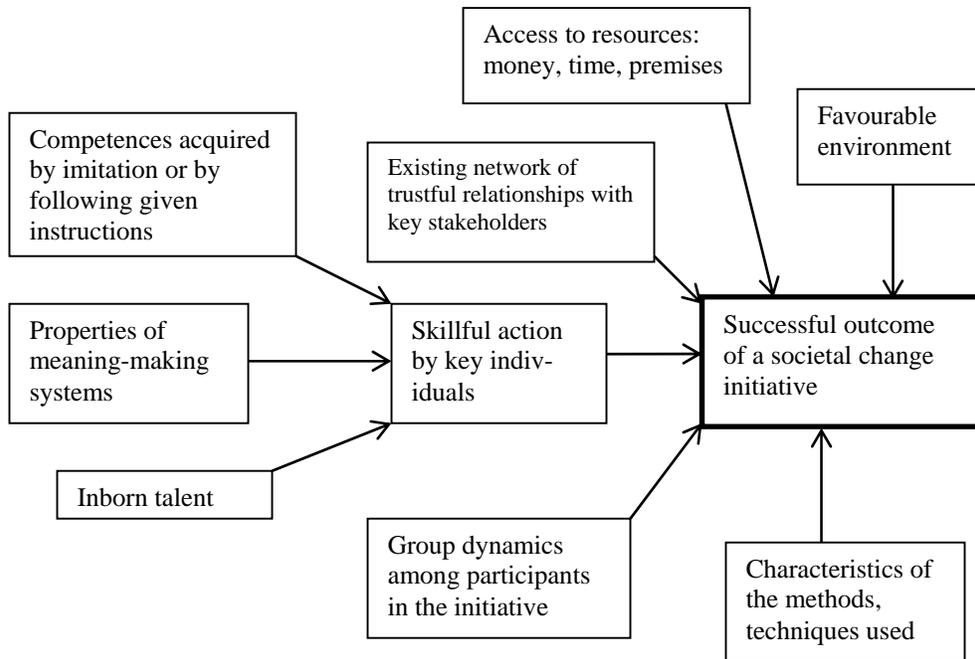
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<sup>3</sup> The article is part of a three-year research project on transformations of meaning-making among societal change agents. The overall aim of the research project is to develop insight into how the development of capacity for constructively handling ill-structured, complex societal issues can be supported. The author of this article is the project leader.

<sup>4</sup> Barrett C. Brown (2011) explores a very similar thematic in his recent doctoral dissertation, but uses a quite different investigation strategy. His work became available when this article was almost finished and I choose not to explore the interesting implications of following different routes to develop knowledge about societal change agency from an adult development perspective here.

These three aspects of societal change agency are, of course, interdependent.

Figure 1 shows some alternative explanations to successful outcomes of societal change initiatives. In the figure, skillful action is depicted as one of six possible contributing factors to successful outcomes. Furthermore, skillful action is a phenomenon that may in itself have different contributing explanations. Here only three alternatives are named: acquired skills, properties of meaning-making systems, and inborn talent. Other perspectives are possible. Of course these different sources of causation can interact with each other as well, which is not depicted in the figure in order to avoid cluttering.<sup>5</sup>



**Figure 1. Some explanations of successful outcomes of societal change initiatives**

I will focus only on one of the factors that can be expected to play a role in explaining successful societal change agency, namely the properties of individuals' meaning-making systems. I am, of course, well aware that successful change agency can have other explanations than exceptional skills on the part of key individuals, as shown in Figure 1.

<sup>5</sup> One of the reviewers of the article manuscript cautioned against using unidirectional arrows since it presents a linear, oversimplified view of something that is actually very complex and nonlinear. I will trust the reader to recognize that several of the elements condition each other in far more complex ways than the model indicates.

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## **Character of the Framework**

### **A Pragmatic Rather than Theoretical Framework**

Since the framework presented below may look like a general theoretical model of adult development, in particular since it refers heavily to a number of established models in the field, I think it is necessary to make a few comments on the intended character of the framework. The purpose of the framework is to facilitate the description and explanation of the different forms of societal change agency found in empirical data. We need a framework that is opened in terms of possibly discovering unexpected patterns of reasoning and acting. The framework is not intended to be a theoretical model that represents how people's consciousness is actually structured, but rather to be a pragmatically useful way of identifying relevant patterns in the cases we study. This favouring of practical usefulness rather than theoretical completeness and stringency has a number of consequences, as will become evident in the course of the exposition.

The task defined for this text is to integrate relevant concepts and models from adult development theory into a comprehensive analytical framework specifically adapted to the study of societal change agents. I want to provide an in-depth treatment of the topic, which means that the bulk of the article is a quite thorough exploration of selected elements of existing theoretical models and concepts. Having constructed such a comprehensive framework allows for detailed analyses of, for examples, interviews. However, it is also possible to make use of selected parts of the framework to make more focussed and less complex analyses of aspects of the thematic. Constructing an appropriate analytical framework is, in the context of our ongoing research, a phase of a process. Here, the focus will be the development of the analytical framework and no empirical analyses of examples will be offered at this stage.

### **Focus on Durable Patterns Rather than on the Ephemeral Nature of Attention**

A crucial assumption underlying the framework is that there are (relatively) durable patterns to how a person's awareness operates. This assumption is central to ego development frameworks in general, such as Jane Loevinger's (1976) and Robert Kegan's (1982, 1994). The assumption certainly allows for situational variations in levels and organization of awareness, due to, for example, situational stress or how interested the individual is in the particular issue at hand. But the assumption of durable patterns focusses on that which is recognizable as recurring forms, rather than that which is situationally dependent. In ego development theory, adult development is described in terms of distinctive qualitative shifts in the very structure of meaning-making, shifts that might be described in the form of developmental stages. Most individuals advance in ego development stages until early adulthood and then stabilize in one of the conventional ego stages (Loevinger, 1976; Cohn, 1998). A minority shifts into postconventional stages. In one representative sample of the adult American population, less than 7 % were assessed at the three stages beyond the first postconventional stage, the Individualist. (Cook-Greuter, 2004). There are few longitudinal studies of development throughout adulthood (Helson & Roberts, 1994; Morros, 2001), but the fact that few adults reach the latest ego stages indicate that most people have access to a limited range of meaning-making structures over extended periods of their lives.

## How the Framework Evolved

### Theoretical Habitat

I have invested considerable time and effort since the mid-1980's in reading, reflecting on, and processing literature on adult development and consciousness development. This endeavour includes surveying large volumes of academic theory-building and empirical research on adult development, but also literature stemming from several of the world's major wisdom traditions, such as Buddhist and Vedic discourse. One of my goals in this work has been to develop a conceptual framework useful for analysing those differences in structures of meaning-making that contribute to explaining what happens in social conflicts, societal phenomena (such as crime, poverty, or environmental problems), political processes, organizational development, and related areas. In earlier research, I have experimented with different varieties of analytical frameworks for studying the developmental variability in geopolitical reasoning (Jordan, 1998), and meaning-making in workplace conflicts (Jordan & Lundin, 2002), defence and security politics (Jordan, 2001b; 2003) and organizational change initiatives (Jordan, 2006a).<sup>6</sup> In one study (Jordan & Lundin, 2002), I developed a complex model for describing and analysing individual differences in patterns of awareness, called the conflict awareness mandala. The model is a graphic representation of a typology covering twenty different themes and four levels of depth, in all 80 variables. In hindsight, I find the model far too complicated to be useful for other purposes than a theoretical understanding of the nature of awareness. I was very satisfied when I discovered that Bill Joiner and Stephen Josephs (2007) had developed very similar ideas about how to structure a practical model of different forms of awareness, but had arrived at a far more pedagogical framework than I had. The framework presented below owes very much, in particular in terms of the pedagogical structure, to Joiner's and Josephs' model in their book *Leadership Agility* (Joiner & Josephs, 2007). Joiner and Josephs have integrated models and insights from a wide spectrum of adult development literature into a framework designed to be useful for understanding and working with leadership development. The form of their framework is adapted to the kind of purpose and audience they wanted it to serve: professionals interested in coaching and organizational consulting rather than academic researchers. The outcome is a very pedagogical model, accessible to interested lay persons. One drawback of their writing strategy is that the packaging of the model obscures some significant theoretical contributions made in the book. In order to serve academic purposes well, Joiner's and Josephs's model needs some modifications. For this, and for a number of other reasons, the framework I present below differs from their model. The somewhat different approach I have taken in structuring an analytical framework has some costs in relation to Joiner's and Joseph's framework, but also, I think, some benefits. I will not detail the differences and explain the reasoning for them here, but rather focus on presenting and illustrating a specific adaptation.

Over time, I have borrowed concepts, models, and discourses from many different researchers and traditions and integrated them into my own evolving analytical framework. This article is a travel report of a certain part of this journey, where the learning I have been through so far is applied to the specific task of studying societal change agency.

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<sup>6</sup> See also the interview with Thomas Jordan made by Russ Volckmann (2005) in *Integral Review* <http://integral-review.org/documents/Good,%20Clever,%20and%20Wise%201,%202005.pdf> .

## Empirical Grounding

As hinted at above, the framework has evolved over quite a long time, not only through theoretical studies but also in "dialogue" with empirical data. In four different research projects between 1999 and 2006, I and colleagues interviewed more than 130 persons with the aim of studying various aspects of their meaning-making on workplace conflicts (Jordan & Lundin, 2002), security policies (Jordan, 2001b, 2003) and organizational change agency (Jordan, 2006a). Different vintages of analytical frameworks drawing on adult development theory were used to analyze the data. After 2006 I and colleagues have carried out a number of comprehensive case studies of individuals and teams who have developed intriguing strategies for working with change related to wicked issues. Cases we studied involved crime prevention work in Gothenburg (Jordan, 2006b), integration of immigrant youth in a Gothenburg suburb (Andersson & Jordan, 2007), honour-related violence (Emanuelsson, 2011), development of a comprehensive strategy for dealing with the controversial issue of graffiti (Sander & Jordan, 2009), development of strategies for enabling suburban youth to make radio and TV programmes in Public Service channels (Sander & Jordan, 2011) and other issues. There is consequently a considerable amount of empirical data that has served as a sounding board for the gradual development of an analytical framework adapted to the specific needs of understanding societal change agency. However, in its present form, the framework has yet to be thoroughly field-tested.

## Overview of the Framework

The framework outlined here is constructed by combining three ideas:

1. The idea that the meaning-making system of a societal change agent can be described meaningfully in terms of three aspects: *awareness*, *identifications*, and *action competences*.
2. The idea that a societal change agent can turn his or her attention, to varying degrees, in four basic directions, towards *the task*, *the context*, *the stakeholders*, and *the self*. When the turning of attention in one of these directions becomes a habit, we can speak of a particular form of awareness.
3. The idea that a societal change agent might to varying degrees "go *meta*," i.e., make his or her own and other people's *perspectives* into objects of awareness.

Conceptual frameworks are, almost always, reductionistic. They need to be, because we can keep track of only a limited number of mental representations at once. The artificial sorting of a messy reality using simplified concepts is useful, but is also always problematic in various ways. This caveat is particularly relevant when dealing with very complex and variable phenomena, such as the meaning-making systems of individuals. The distinction between awareness, identifications, and action competences made here *is* artificial in the sense that processes that are actually intimately interwoven are separated into categories. These categories are not here defined in ways that keep them neatly, logically separate from each other. I do believe, however, that the distinctions are meaningful and practical to work with, if used mindfully of the shortcomings of conceptual simplifications.

## Awareness, Identifications, and Action Competences

### Awareness

I will explain the meaning given to the category *awareness* in this framework by using a couple of closely related words. Awareness is here mostly used in the sense of awareness *of*, i.e., directing attention towards something and consciously *noticing* characteristics of the object of attention. However, the purpose of the conceptual framework discussed here is to serve for describing *durable patterns* of meaning-making, rather than single instances of perception in a certain moment. What is of interest is therefore what we might describe as *habits* in the individual's employment of his or her awareness. A slightly different angle is to think of the individual in terms of him or her having *expectations* about what might be worth looking for. A more academic way of expressing these expectations is to talk about *ontological assumptions* or *preunderstanding* (German: Vorverständnis). Examples of different types of ontological assumptions will be offered in later sections. Of course, most people look at the world through lenses of ontological assumptions without being aware of having such lenses. Becoming aware of and articulating ontological assumptions is a quite sophisticated cognitive task.

There is an intended connotation in the use of "awareness" as a key concept. A lack of awareness is not necessarily a result of a lack of *capacity* for processing information. Sometimes, weak awareness is simply a result of not having noticed or realized that turning attention towards a particular aspect can be useful. For example, an individual involved in a difficult conflict may be asked: "Why do you think she got so angry when you made your suggestion?" The asking of the question directs the individual's attention towards possible explanations of the reaction of the other person. The individual may simply have failed to reflect on this before, but when turning attention towards the question, it may be easy to come up with a plausible explanation. When individuals with weak awareness actually turn their attention towards a particular object, they may have no difficulties in apprehending what is to be apprehended, nor to process the information and make conclusions. Lack of capacity is a different matter. It signifies an inability to process information in a certain way (e.g., keeping track of many different aspects at once; actually understanding a causal principle and using it to deduce possible consequences; or seeing multiple causal connections which together form a system). Even if someone else points out the relevant circumstances and explains the causal connection, the mental processing capacity is not sufficient for accomplishing the task, at least not without a lot of support (scaffolding).

A lot of the research on development of social and psychological cognition (e.g., Gremmler-Fuhr, 2006; Jordan & Lundin, 2002; Krebs & van Hesteren, 1994; Selman, 1980) analyzes shifts in how, for example, persons and relationships are constructed. This is interesting and relevant, but I have often found that the crucial issue is not how something is constructed when the individual actually talks about it, but rather the failure to at all consider the matter. This non-reflection can be total, i.e., a complete disregard of something that might be highly relevant, or it can be partial, i.e., vague and unelaborated (Jordan & Lundin, 2002). This approach to the study of meaning-making means that noticing the absences of certain types of awareness can be central to understanding the character of a person's way of making sense of, say, a societal issue. The failure of an individual to notice that there are complex reasons for a particular problem can actually be a powerful explanation of the opinions and actions of that person.

## Five Domains of Awareness in Social Settings

Figure 2 gives an overview of the five domains of awareness used in this framework for identifying salient properties of meaning-making structures among societal entrepreneurs. The simplest explanation of the model is to see awareness as a result of turning one's attention in different directions in order to allow more or less differentiated gestalts to form in one's field of vision. The formation of these gestalts makes mental work possible. One can deepen the perception of the object of attention, noticing finer details, differences, and similarities. One can start to reflect on possible causes of the present state of things, as well as hypothetically explore alternative future consequences. One can also start exploring possibilities for action: how to work with the present situation in productive ways.

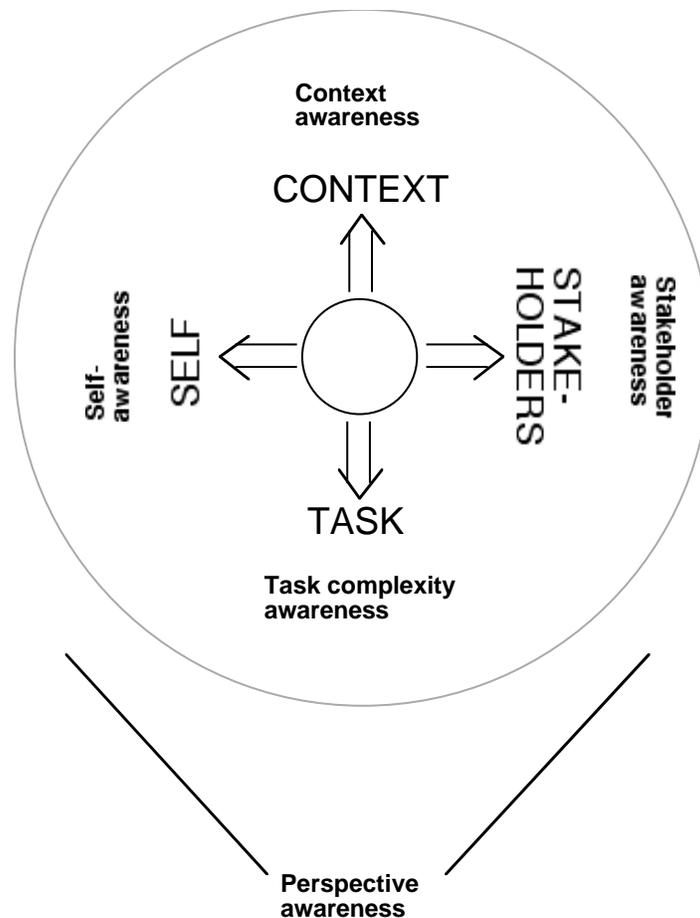
When attention focuses on a certain *task*, the properties of this task become the object of attention. A task can be a work task, a specific problem or dilemma one is presented with, a vision one wants to realize, etc. I call this *task complexity awareness* because a key aspect of dealing with a task is to unpack the complexity relevant to the understanding of and dealing with the task.

In the opposite direction, attention can be directed towards the wider *context* of the task. This context has properties and these properties may condition the possibilities of managing the task successfully. People have different degrees of *context awareness*, i.e., they are more or less prone to turn attention toward the conditions of the wider environment of the present task.

In most cases related to societal change agents' interests, task completion cannot be reached by autonomous action, but there are usually different *stakeholders* the change agents need to interact with for various reasons. Stakeholders may, for example, control resources needed for achieving one's objectives, they may react and act in various ways that influence task completion, or they may have power to block certain things from happening. *Stakeholder awareness* is the result of turning one's attention toward relevant stakeholders in order to understand who they are, what their interests are, and how best to relate to them.

The fourth direction of the model is the *self*. *Self-awareness* means turning attention towards the processes going on inside oneself, in order to notice what kinds of thoughts, feelings, and desires are tumbling through one's own self.

In addition to the four attention directions of the base model, a fifth awareness category has been added, *perspective awareness*. This category seems necessary in order to name a very significant aspect of meaning-making: taking the *patterns* of meaning-making of oneself and others as objects of attention.



**Figure 2. Five types of awareness**

Adapted from Joiner & Josephs, 2007 and Jordan & Lundin, 2002.

## Identifications

While *awareness* focuses what a person notices and fails to notice, *identifications* focusses what a person feels committed to: what feels important (desires, goals, visions, values, etc.) and what is felt to be "I" and "We."<sup>7</sup> This includes what, in Robert Kegan's (1982, 1994) languaging, is *subject* to a person and therefore forms the core of the identity. The category *awareness* is used for asking questions about what a person is aware of, which does not necessarily tell us anything about a person's motivation, such as visions, engagement, commitments, etc. There are strong interrelationships between awareness and identifications, since the gestalts formed in awareness can be highly significant for how goals, visions and commitments are constructed. This theme will be further explored in later sections.

<sup>7</sup> Joiner and Josephs (2007) build their framework around the conceptual pair of *awareness* and *intent*. In the present framework, what Joiner and Josephs refer to as *intent* is included in the category *identifications*, but the latter category also comprises constructions of self.

## Action Competences

*Action competences* focuses attention on the competences a person can actually make use of when working with tasks, solving problems, and trying to realize visions. Action competences can be processes going on within one's mind, e.g., skills in developing creative solutions to tricky problems or techniques for managing one's own emotional reactions. Other action competences really involve outward behaviour, e.g., communicative skills in creating trustful relationships with other people.

## Five Domains of Awareness, Identifications and Action Competences

Table 1 gives a schematical overview of the framework generated by combining the five domains of awareness with the distinction between awareness, identifications and action competences.

**Table 1. Schematical overview of the analytical framework**

	Awareness	Identifications	Action competences
<b>Task</b>	Task complexity awareness	Construction of and commitment to worthy tasks	Competence in managing task complexity
<b>Context</b>	Context awareness	Scope of caring	Competence in locating the "room of manoeuvre"
<b>Stakeholders</b>	Stakeholder awareness	Goals relating to stakeholders	Social action competences: building relationships, influencing people
<b>Self</b>	Self-awareness	Ego needs, self-transformation goals	Strategies for managing interior processes and structures
<b>Perspectives</b>	Perspective awareness	Embeddedness in- disembedding from perspectives; Goals relating to transforming perspectives	Skills in using contrasting perspectives for insight and problem-solving

In Part II of the article, each of these five types of awareness will be presented in a comprehensive way, also referring to relevant models, theories, and concepts developed by researchers in the adult development field. After the completion of this discourse-building, Part III will deal with the more practical work of putting the framework to use in analyses.

## Choices in the Design of an Analytical Framework

When studying very complex phenomena, in this case meaning-making in the context of societal change agency, choices must be made, for example between designing a framework for a high level of theoretical stringency or for versatility in encompassing a wide variety of different aspects. It is seldom possible to optimize an analytical framework towards all desirable qualities. The framework outlined here sacrifices theoretical stringency for flexibility and openness. I believe that the choice to operate with five different awareness categories is useful for identifying significant patterns of meaning-making in real-life contexts. The division of awareness into five

different categories *is*, however, artificial. For example, the aspects described in the category *task complexity awareness* are integral parts of aspects of the other categories as well. Some would argue that stakeholders are a salient part of the context. However, when studying the particulars of people's meaning-making, it makes good sense to treat awareness of significant other persons separately from awareness of the conditions of the wider environment. Furthermore, perspective awareness *is*, it could be argued, a particular case of systemic complexity awareness applied to awareness of self and of stakeholders. Consequently, the framework is designed to serve the function of facilitating the identification of different aspects of meaning-making among societal change agents, rather than offering a consistent theory of how awareness is structured.

## Multidimensional Frameworks

Readers familiar with the "integral studies" field, or with adult development research in general, know that many of us grapple with how to deal with the topic of "lines of development." Is it sensible to conceptualize adult development in terms of several distinct, if somehow also interdependent, lines of development? Or is the self, as is sometimes assumed in ego development theory, a "structured whole," a system that develops and transforms *as* a system in recognizable stages. Or does it make more sense to try to find the common underlying variable (e.g., levels of complexity) that can explain patterns of development in different domains?

Ken Wilber has been a pioneer in pointing to the existence of multiple "lines of development" and in starting to consider how these different dimensions of consciousness development are interrelated (e.g., Wilber, 1995, 1997, 1999, 2006).<sup>8</sup> However, Wilber's contribution has mainly been to point out the general patterns and issues in consciousness development. Fashioning the details of an analytical framework out of his often penetrating insights has been left to others. People inspired by Wilber's way of conceptualizing different dimensions of development have started to develop frameworks outlining the "lines of development" they consider relevant to their own field of inquiry or practice. Most such efforts concern the field of psychotherapy (e.g., Esbjörn-Hargens, 2010; Forman, 2010; Ingersoll & Zeitler, 2010; Marquis, 2008) and are conceived in terms of choosing lines of development and then defining stages in each line. One of the most ambitious efforts along these lines (although with a weak or no relation to Wilber's framework) is the *Manual for Faith Development Research* (Fowler, Streib, & Keller, 2004). This manual describes seven different aspects of development with coding criteria for six developmental stages for each aspect.<sup>9</sup> The framework is, of course, designed to allow a differentiated analysis of meaning-making in the realm of (religious) faith. Many of the aspects are, sometimes with some adaptation, relevant also to other areas of meaning-making.

The approach taken in this article is, however, different. Rather than operating with quasi-independent lines of development, the framework is constructed from the notion of varying degrees of awareness, put to work with different objects of attention. Rather than defining stages, this framework is opened, in order to be flexible in relation to the actual patterns presented by the cases we study.

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<sup>8</sup> See also Jordan, 2000.

<sup>9</sup> The seven aspects are: Form of logic, Social perspective taking, Form of moral judgment, Bounds of social awareness, Locus of authority, Form of world coherence, and Symbolic function.

Readers interested in different ways to handle the multidimensionality of adult development might want to study the work of Otto Laske (2006, 2009). Laske has made a very ambitious effort to integrate theoretical constructs of, among others, Kegan, Jaques, Basseches, and King & Kitchener into a comprehensive multidimensional framework. His specific application is developmental coaching, but the theoretical project is probably the most ambitious effort thus far to differentiate and integrate cognitive, socio-emotional, and epistemological dimensions of adult development into a sophisticated theoretical framework. In our context, however, Laske's theoretical framework and methods are too complicated and time-consuming to be practicable.

## PART II: FIVE DOMAINS OF AWARENESS

### Introductory Notes

In the following sections, the discourse defining each of the five types of awareness is elaborated using the same basic pattern. First, an explanation of the meaning given to the respective type of awareness is offered. Secondly, a discourse for relevant distinctions is developed, drawing on a number of models and frameworks from the adult development field. The distinctions offered in these subsections constitute patterns to look for in, for example, interviews made with societal change agents. Thirdly, some observations on how variations in the forms of awareness in each of the domains relate to possible patterns of identifications are offered. Lastly, some comments are made on how each domain of awareness also forms the basis of useful action competences in the field of societal change agency.<sup>10</sup>

The first section, on task complexity awareness, is considerably more comprehensive than the following four. The reason for this is that awareness of complexity is a fundamental aspect of awareness in all domains and is therefore given extra care.<sup>11</sup> So while theoretical models describing various aspects of meaning-making relating to complexity are presented in the section on task complexity awareness, the other sections build on these models as well.

### Task Complexity Awareness

*Task complexity awareness* describes to what extent a person notices, expects, and can handle the complexity of a task. I discern three aspects of complexity awareness.

1. The noticing of and interest in *compoundedness* and *variability*. This aspect concerns the extent to which a person actively notices a spectrum of varying conditions, circumstances and characteristics that might possibly be of significance for the interpretation of the situation when taking on a task. The gestalts constructed of a task, a situation, or an event can be more or less elaborated in terms of compoundedness, nuances, and attention to

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<sup>10</sup> A lot of plain assertions are made in the following. This form is used for convenience and fluency and should not be read as truth claims, but rather as plausible assumptions (often based, however, on a considerable body of knowledge).

<sup>11</sup> But, as I hope will be apparent in the following, there are also aspects of the various types of awareness that cannot be accounted for in a satisfying way by assimilating them into a pure model of hierarchical complexity. See for example the section on self-awareness below.

potentially significant details.

2. The noticing of and interest in underlying *causal connections* at various levels of complexity. This aspect concerns to what extent different elements are seen as connected to each other through causal relationships that might offer meaningful explanations of events and allow reasoning about possible future consequences of present conditions. Causation of social and psychological phenomena can often be conceived of as nested in layers of increasing complexity, of which an individual may be more or less aware.
3. The noticing of and construction of mental representations of *abstract properties*. This aspect concerns the acquisition of a conceptual repertoire for reasoning in terms of qualities that are far removed from concrete, tangible actions and objects. Concepts at high levels of abstraction can, for example, be words for qualities that are common to many different-looking occurrences (e.g., "authenticity"), or be formulations that describe properties of complex systems (e.g., "a vicious circle of depopulation").

When taking on a task, a person may have more or less complexity awareness at his or her disposal. Complexity awareness can also be more or less consolidated. The first step of complexity awareness is the *noticing* of different aspects of complexity. Sometimes there are circumstances that, so to speak, call for attention by being obnoxious hindrances or obviously relevant explanations. A person might become aware of some of the complexity of the issue when prompted in this way, but still be relatively oblivious of the uses of actively exploring complexity without being prompted. A further step in the consolidation of complexity awareness is therefore having the *expectation* that things may be complex, i.e., being aware of the possibility that there might be significant circumstances, causal relationships, potential consequences, and systemic characteristics that might explain occurrences and that might be useful to consider when deciding on a course of action. Above, I also referred to such expectations as *ontological assumptions* or *preunderstanding*, i.e., general, mostly unreflected, assumptions about the nature of reality. An ontological assumption about the ever-present complexity of most issues means that an individual without prompting expects and looks for significant circumstances and underlying causes.

The expectation of complexity and the habit of reflecting on complexity usually leads to the accumulation of a *repertoire of concepts, ideas, thought forms* (Basseches's "schemata," see below) and *generic questions* about what to expect and look for, such as a set of ideas about what circumstances to look for, what explanations might be relevant, what properties of systems might play a role. Having a vocabulary of meaningful words for naming properties of complex relations can be seen as an important support for complexity awareness.

A keen complexity awareness can lead to the development of actual *action competences* in dealing with complexity. Action competences include being able to construct and operate with mental representations of complex interrelationships between a number of conditions, causes, and system properties, so that more effective strategies, courses of action, and solutions can be developed by taking the complexity of the issue into account.

As has been alluded to before, the *absence* of complexity awareness is as significant as the presence of the same. If a person does not notice complexity, this will have profound

consequences for how he or she makes sense of the issue at hand and consequently also for how he or she handles it.

## Potentially Helpful Conceptualizations in the Adult Development Literature

The issue of complexity in mental processing has attracted a lot of attention among researchers in the adult development field.<sup>12</sup> The models and concepts of hierarchical complexity developed by researchers in the adult development field (e.g., Kurt Fischer and Michael Commons) cannot be properly understood without a good grasp of the entire discourse the models and concepts refer to. I will here only point to some conceptualizations that may be useful for recognizing patterns in the meaning-making of societal change agents. For a fuller understanding of hierarchical complexity theory, the reader is referred to the core texts (see footnote).<sup>13</sup>

Researchers writing about hierarchical complexity have tried to find appropriate names for various properties of reasoning structures and abstraction levels. Often, several different names have been used to cover the same phenomenon.<sup>14</sup> It is hard to find (and agree on) names that are descriptive of the properties one wants to have a name for, without them having misleading connotations. Each author has his or her reasons for preferring some names to others. I will add to the confusion by picking the names from different models that I find most appropriate.

### Models of Hierarchical Complexity

There is a considerable literature on two closely related theoretical models for describing hierarchical complexity. One is Kurt Fischer's skill theory (Fischer, 1980; Fischer & Bidell, 2006), which has been developed further in various ways by Theo Dawson and her colleagues (the Lectical Assessment System, LAS, e.g., Dawson & Gabrielian, 2003; Dawson & Wilson, 2004).<sup>15</sup> The other model is the Model of Hierarchical Complexity (MHC), developed by Michael Commons and his colleagues (see e.g., Commons, 2008; Commons & Richards, 1984, 2002; and

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<sup>12</sup> The first aspect of complexity awareness mentioned above, concerning compoundedness and variability, is an important theme in Jane Loevinger's descriptions of the stages of ego development (e.g., the ego development scoring manual, Hy & Loevinger, 1996). However, Loevinger did not go far beyond inductively derived stage descriptions in theorizing about increasing complexity as an important aspect of ego development.

<sup>13</sup> Fischer, 1980; Fischer & Bidell, 2006; Dawson-Tunik et al. 2005; Commons, 2008; Commons & Richards, 1984, 2002; Commons et al., 1998. Elliott Jaques offers an alternative framework, less stringently defined, but with striking similarities to Fischer's and Commons' model (Jaques, 1998; Jaques & Cason, 1994).

<sup>14</sup> Not seldom the same author uses different names for the same phenomenon in different texts. Elliott Jaques, for example, used *declarative* and *assertive* to describe the same form of mental processing, and Theo Dawson has experimented with a variety of names for both structures of reasoning and orders of abstraction, finally deciding on just using numbers.

<sup>15</sup> Many of Kurt Fischer's articles, book chapters and other texts are available (as of August 2010) at this website:

[http://www.gse.harvard.edu/faculty\\_research/profiles/profile.shtml?vperson\\_id=335](http://www.gse.harvard.edu/faculty_research/profiles/profile.shtml?vperson_id=335)

Texts by Theo Dawson and her colleagues are available (as of August 2010) at this website (see under "About us"): <http://devtestservice.org/>

Commons, Trudeau, Stein, Richards, & Kraus, 1998).<sup>16</sup> Both models describe a hierarchy of increasing complexity.

These models have the advantage of being stringently defined, which make them valuable in research endeavours that aim for high degrees of stringency in measurement and analysis. However, using these frameworks requires a thorough understanding of a quite complex theoretical discourse and considerable training to acquire reliable scoring skills. The actual scoring of interview transcripts is also a time-consuming procedure. Scoring yields stage scores. These can be useful for comparative purposes, for measuring change over time, and for additional insights in interpreting qualitative data. The advantages of stage scoring consequently come at considerable costs in terms of the time that has to be invested in training, scoring, and interpretation of the results. However, I believe that the distinctions made in the hierarchical complexity frameworks can be useful also in less meticulous, more qualitatively oriented analyses of discourse. In the following two sections, I will present two sets of conceptualizations that I deem potentially useful for recognizing structural properties of the meaning-making of societal change agents. The first is Elliott Jaques's description of four forms of mental processing, the other is the five MHC stages relevant to the vast majority of adult forms of reasoning. Both models are hierarchical, i.e., the forms/stages that come later build upon successful completion of the previous form/stage.

#### Four Forms of Reasoning about Tasks

Kurt Fischer and Elliott Jaques both noticed that there are some basic forms of thinking that can be recognized in a wide variety of contexts. They developed quite, but not entirely, similar conceptualizations for describing those forms. Fischer's discourse is more stringently grounded in clear definitions (Fischer, 1980; Fischer & Bidell, 2006), while Jaques's typology is probably more accessible to those who are not intimately familiar with Piagetian discourse. Jaques describes four basic "forms of mental processing" that can be recognized when an individual talks about how to handle a particular task.<sup>17</sup>

**Declarative Processing:** a person argues his or her position by bringing forward a number of separate reasons for it. The reasons are separate in the sense that each is brought forward individually, on its own, and no connection is made with any of the other reasons; for example, "Here's one reason for my idea, here's another, I could give you others as well." This method of processing has a disjunctive, declarative quality.

**Cumulative Processing:** a person argues his or her position by bringing together a number of different ideas, none of which is sufficient to make the case, but taken together, they do; for example, a detective might argue, "If you take this first point (clue), and put it together with these three other items we have observed, then it becomes clear that such-and-such has occurred." This method of processing has a pulled-together, conjunctive quality.

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<sup>16</sup> Articles, papers, dissertations and other texts by Michael Commons and his colleagues are available at: <http://www.dareassociation.org/>

<sup>17</sup> Jaques and Fischer both constructed models where a sequence of basic *forms* of mental processing repeated itself on several orders of increasing abstraction, thereby defining a relatively large number of stages.

**Serial Processing:** a person argues his or her position by constructing a line of thought made up of a sequence of reasons, each one of which leads on to the next, thus creating a chain of linked reasons; for example, "I would do A because it would lead to B, and B will lead on to C, and C would lead on to where we want to get." This method of processing has a conditional quality in the sense that each reason in the series sets the conditions that lead to the next reason.

**Parallel Processing:** a person argues his or her position by examining a number of other possible positions as well, each arrived at by means of serial processing. The several lines of thought are held in parallel and can be linked to each other. It becomes possible to take useful points from less favored positions to bolster up a favored one. This method of processing has a double conditional quality, in the sense that the various scenarios are not only linked with each other, but they can condition each other as well. (Jaques, 1998, p. 22)

*Declarative* forms of reasoning mean that the speaker makes assertions and states opinions, but does not justify assertions by offering explanations of the underlying causal principles. If asked for justifications, the individual often responds by adding new assertions, rather than pointing to how things fit together. In *cumulative* processing, the individual notices that there are different circumstances that need to be taken into consideration to make a good judgment. There is consequently an independent processing of a number of situation-specific factors that leads to a conclusion about how to handle an issue. In *serial* processing, attention is turned towards causal relationships. An understanding of the principles of (linear) causation involved invites hypothetical reasoning: deducing possible consequences of alternative courses of action as a method for choosing an appropriate problem-solving strategy. In the light of other theoretical frameworks, Jaques's conception of *parallel* processing seems a bit idiosyncratic. Fischer, Dawson and Commons speak of *multivariate* or *systems* reasoning as the natural next level of complexity after serial/linear reasoning. The essential quality of more complex forms of reasoning is that several interacting elements are kept in mind simultaneously, not only in unidirectional series of cause-and-effect relationships, but as having mutually conditioning complex relationships to each other.

For our purposes, it is relevant to look for the structure of reasoning when societal change agents are grappling with ill-structured issues. I will, however, make a mixed selection regarding the terminology. *Declarative* reasoning means that ideas are asserted without a consideration of underlying causative processes. People reasoning in a declarative way may provide what they consider to be explanations, but these explanations are only assertions about fixed properties, not explanations of causal principles. The notion of *cumulative* reasoning could assist us in noticing when respondents make elaborated comments about a variety of specific circumstances that need to be weighed in when handling issues, but do not in a deeper way consider causal processes. Characteristic of *linear* reasoning is when people as centers of their strategy-making have ideas about significant cause-and-effect chains, but keep their focus on single unidirectional chains. A person who considers multiple relations that are seen to hang together in systematic ways uses *systemic* reasoning (see also the explanation of the *metasystematical* stage in next section).

## The Model of Hierarchical Complexity

The Model of Hierarchical Complexity (MHC) is a mathematics-based general theory of levels of task complexity.<sup>18</sup> It accounts for a series of levels of increasing complexity of tasks (and in particular stages of task performance). Each new level is defined in terms of coordination of tasks of the preceding level. An important characteristic of the model is that it is content-free. Hereby, the model allows a stringent classification of a single aspect: the level of complexity of a task. This property of the model makes it possible to make measurements of, for example, the complexity level of a person's effort to solve a problem through reasoning. The model can also be used for comparing different models that describe stages of development in a particular field (e.g., moral reasoning, reflective judgement, ego development). For our purposes, the MHC can be useful as an approach to discerning the complexity of reasoning about a particular problem or vision that engages a societal change agent. The MHC comprises 15 stages, but only five of them are relevant in relation to the patterns of thinking about tasks one generally encounters among adults.

The following is a brief presentation of the relevant MHC stages as they can be recognized in discourse about social issues.<sup>19</sup>

### *Concrete (Stage 8)*

At the concrete stage, thinking and talk is narratives about concrete, specific things, people, acts, events and places. The concrete stage is, when found in adults' thinking and talk, perhaps best understood in terms of what is absent. Experience is not processed into generalizations, where the concrete events would be seen as specific instances of classes of things, people, acts, etc. (abstract stage). Nor would more complex mental representations be used, such as conceptualizations of abstract causal relations (formal stage). Thus, talk is dominated by narratives about the specific (often what is concretely experienced in daily life). For example, a group of people who are concerned about problems in their neighbourhood and start talking about them can go on talking for a very long time about one specific incident after another. At the concrete stage, they do not summarize the different specific incidents into thematic categories. However, at the next, abstract stage, they could formulate their concerns in general terms, like for example: "—We ought to do something about misbehaving youth in our neighbourhood."

### *Abstract (Stage 9)*

Thinking at the abstract stage is characterized by the use of categories that are abstracted from specific things, people, acts and events. The construction of abstractions makes it possible to talk about concrete things, people, acts, and events *in general*, i.e., to form categories and generalize about them. Abstractions are categories for something that can vary, i.e., take on different forms and properties within the broader characteristics described by the category (Fischer, 1980, p.

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<sup>18</sup> I gratefully acknowledge constructive comments and suggestions by Sara N. Ross on this section. I haven't always followed her advice, though, so any misrepresentation remaining is my own sole responsibility.

<sup>19</sup> The stage descriptions here are compiled and adapted from a number of different articles and documents about MHC, including unpublished course material generously shared by Sara N. Ross.

481ff). Since cognition confined to the abstract stage and below does not make use of generalized conceptions of cause-and-effect relationships, conversation about problems at this stage is dominated by plain assertions and value judgments (opinions). There is no effort to justify propositions by offering arguments about underlying causes and principles. If explanations are provided, they are simply other assertions. Referring to Jaques' terminology, the abstract stage makes use of declarative mental processing: there is no real coordination of conditions, circumstances or causal relationships – each assertion, opinion and belief stands for itself.

### *Formal (Stage 10)*

Reasoning at the formal stage makes use of mental representations of generalized *relations* between or among abstract categories, i.e., conceptions about how different abstractions are causally or otherwise connected to each other. In Jaques' terminology, the formal stage is characterised by serial mental processing of abstractions. A common way of describing the essence of formal reasoning is that "if-then" statements are formulated by putting two or more abstractions into logical relationship. The mental representations of abstracted relations allow for hypothetical reasoning. A person using formal reasoning can, in his or her mind, make experiments. Assuming a certain action, consequences can be deduced by referring to an idea about the causal relations involved. When issues are processed at the formal stage, people ask for evidence and explanations and critically scrutinize whether a statement is consistent with other accepted facts or logical arguments.

The limitation of formal reasoning is the linear character of the arguments. Attention is focused on one variable that stands in some type of linear relationship to one or more other variables. The relationship is thought of as unidirectional: one thing causes another. One can look for causes of events, or consider possible consequences of a certain condition. However, in formal reasoning there is an absence of conceptions of co-dependent causation involving multiple variables.

### *Systematic (Stage 11)*

In reasoning at the systematic stage, multiple formal conceptions are coordinated into mental representations of complex relationships, forming systems.<sup>20</sup> In a system, elements can condition each other in complex ways that are not reducible to linear causal relationships. In formal stage reasoning, only one unidirectional causal relationship at a time is considered, whereas in systematic reasoning a system of multiple formal relationships is considered simultaneously. Characteristic of systematic reasoning are such factors as consideration of the function of a single element in a larger system, feedback loops and interacting conditions and causal factors. People who use systematic stage reasoning about an issue usually need more comprehensive statements in order to do justice to their conception of what they perceive as relevant conditions, causes and consequences.

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<sup>20</sup> Jaques' *parallel* mental processing describes one form of systematic reasoning about abstractions. However, I believe that Fischer's terms *multivariate* or *systems* reasoning better capture the spectrum of forms of systematic reasoning.

*Metasystematic (Stage 12)*

At the metasystematic stage, mental representations of whole systems *as* systems are constructed, allowing the subject to describe systems as integral wholes, compare systems to other systems and reflect on how different systems are related to each other. Taking systems as wholes as objects of attention allows for understanding of the properties of systems, i.e., properties that are not reducible to the properties of relations between the elements of the system but exist or arise as a consequence of the structure and the interaction patterns of the system as a whole. A common outcome of metasystematic thinking is that systems, strategies and complex processes are named with designations that describe their key properties. Another is that metasystematic thinkers often look for high-level principles that are valid across different systems. Examples of this would be "transcendent" values that are valid beyond the concrete beliefs in different religions or ideologies, or principles that describe similarities and differences between different types of complex social systems.

Metasystematic reasoning can lead to the construction of "metasystems," i.e., conceptualizations that coordinate two or more systems. One important form of metasystematic reasoning is when a person reflects on the properties of *perspectives* as complex systems of ideas. This enables the further metasystematic consideration of how the contrast and tension between different interpretive lenses can be used for gaining further insight into complex issues. Metasystematic reasoning in relation to perspectives is further discussed in the section on perspective awareness below.

The distinctions made in the MHC as summarized above may be useful for recognizing patterns of reasoning among societal change agents.<sup>21</sup> As is pointed out repeatedly in this article, it is usually instructive not only to look for the structure of what is actually said by respondents, but also to look for what is absent in their discourse about their work. In particular, it can be elucidating to look for the following forms of reasoning:

1. Formulations of principles of cause-and-effect relationships that are actively used to interpret an issue and to develop ideas about appropriate courses of actions to prevent or solve a complex problem or achieve an end that requires that a whole chain of cause-and-effect relations is set in motion.
2. Formulations of systemic properties, i.e., descriptions of the properties of various types of social systems (including organizational structures) and the consequences of these properties, as well as how such conceptualizations may influence the formulation of goals, visions and values.
3. Formulations of values at high levels of abstraction, what could be called "existential concerns," i.e., values and concerns that are of a more or less universal human character. Typical formulations include "ensure that human dignity is respected," "create conditions for creative processes," "make it possible for people to have rich lives," "reduce suffering," and "enable developmental transformation of people."

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<sup>21</sup> See also the "Scale of Public Interactions," developed by Sara N. Ross and Jan Inglis (Inglis, 2007). The scale draws on MHC and describes five types of group communication about societal concerns.

If these three forms of more abstract reasoning are conspicuously *absent*, this certainly has consequences for goals and strategies in societal change agency.

## Dialectical Reasoning

Different conceptual frameworks for describing and analysing more complex forms of meaning-making emphasize different features. The MHC and LAS focus the development of skills in cognitively keeping track of coordinations on increasingly complex levels. This means that they describe a *control* aspect of levels of cognitive complexity. The later stages in the MHC are characterized by a capacity to construct mental representations that keep track of and actively coordinate very complex interrelationships: systems of relations; systems of systems, and systems of systems of systems. Michael Basseches (1984), in his seminal work on dialectical thinking, made a dedicated effort to describe how more sophisticated forms of reasoning reflect a dialectical view of reality.<sup>22</sup> He found 24 dialectical schemata, "movements of thought," characteristic of a dialectical outlook. Basseches's framework, in contrast to the MHC, focuses the recognition of *limits to control* that he finds is characteristic of more sophisticated forms of meaning-making. A summary of the typical traits of a dialectical worldview is offered in the manual for coding dialectical thinking that is a part of Michael Bopp's doctoral dissertation:

A dialectical world-outlook can be understood as a view of the nature of existence and/or knowledge which emphasizes their instability, their wholeness, and their composition by internal relationships. In ontological terms, instability pertains to the view that existence is not seen as composed of fixed, unchanging elements (monads), but rather as consisting of ongoing processes of becoming in which old forms give way to new, emergent forms. Likewise, from an epistemological point of view, knowledge is not seen as the accumulation of fixed, unchanging facts or ideas, but rather as active processes of conceptually organizing and reorganizing phenomena.

Ontological wholeness is asserted in a tendency toward viewing existence as a unitary whole in the process of differentiating itself. This contrasts with the view that separates existence into monadic elements which are taken to exist as individuals, independently of each other. Epistemological wholeness is asserted in a tendency toward focusing on the structure and functioning of knowledge (or the conceptual system) as a whole, rather than dividing knowledge into facts or ideas which are viewed as mutually independent.

The idea of composition by internal relationships ties together the focus on change over time with the focus on wholeness or organization. Composition by internal relationships refers to a "dialectical" process by which a whole changes or evolves over time through the changing relationships of its parts. These relationships are seen as "internal relations," meaning that the relations of the parts within the whole make the parts what they are [...]. Within the dialectical world-outlook, this process of composition by internal relationships can be taken to describe the development of either existence or knowledge. (Bopp & Basseches, 1984, pp. 453-454, emphasis in original)

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<sup>22</sup> Recently, Otto Laske (2009) has taken up Basseches framework and used it as one of several components in his multidimensional framework. Laske also developed a comprehensive and very useful scoring manual for dialectical thinking, based on Basseches work (see last part of Laske, 2009).

Bopp and Basseches thus point to three distinctive, but intimately related, features of dialectical reasoning. I prefer a somewhat different terminology for the same qualities. Expressed in other terms, higher levels of complexity awareness typically result in a set of ontological assumptions regarding three aspects of reality.

*Processes:* Things change. Everything has a past, a present and a future, i.e., is embedded in processes of change. In a dialectical worldview, there is an *expectation* that there are different long- and short-term change processes going on that might have to be considered in order to make good judgments about how to deal with a specific concern or task.

*Systems:* Issues are embedded in larger contexts that have systemic properties. A systemic awareness means that the *relationship* between the specific issue and the system it is embedded in is a distinct gestalt in awareness. The properties, structures, and change patterns of the larger context may have significant consequences for understanding and managing specific tasks.

*Relationships:* Relationships have their own properties, which cannot be reduced to properties of the parties/elements. Sometimes relationships are constitutive of a phenomenon, i.e., a thing is what it is only through its relationship to something else. The properties of relationships can be described. These properties can be causes, i.e., they can be significant explanations to what happens and what doesn't happen. The properties of relationships can change over time, not least as a result of intentional efforts to transform the properties of relationships by one or several of the parties.

To these three basic components of a dialectical worldview, I would like to add a fourth.

*Perspectives:* How one makes sense of an issue is inextricably dependent on the properties of the perspective(s) the sense-making is embedded in. Insight into the nature of one's own and others' perspectives is therefore an integral concern in any endeavour. This fourth component of dialectical thinking is clearly articulated in Basseches framework, but is there treated as part of the system/context dimension. I think it deserves being emphasized as a very significant part of dialectical thinking on its own. I will return to this topic in more detail in the section on perspective awareness below.

Before the shift into a dialectical worldview, people tend to see issues in more or less separate ways. Issues are dealt with without considering how they are embedded in a larger (dynamic) context, how they stand in relationship to other issues and levels, and how they have a different meaning when viewed with the lenses of different perspectives. The range of causal relationships considered is usually limited.

With strongly developed complexity awareness, grounded in a dialectical worldview, people generally develop a repertoire of concepts and more complex formulas for naming and describing characteristics of (a) processes of change (e.g., gentrification, individuation, conflict escalation, phases of group development); (b) properties of systems and structures (e.g., machine bureaucracy, learning organization, culture of honour); (c) properties of relationships (e.g., trustful, dynamic, patron-client relationship); and (d) properties of perspectives (e.g., idiographic vs. nomothetic sciences, dialectical worldview, dualistic mindset, postconventional morality).

## Task Complexity Awareness as a Basis for Identifications

The level of complexity awareness in relation to tasks is central to what a person feels is important to attend to. Figure 3 illustrates this in a simplified way. The figure points to the possible differences in the complexity level of constructions of tasks. For one person, the task to deal with is a very concrete problem or vision. Attention is focussed on how to eliminate a problem or on how to realize an idea about something that could be. The strategy this person pursues may be seen by another person as attending to symptoms, while the significant causes that create a problem are left unattended. The second person would want to do something about the underlying causal processes that generate the troubling problem, or to initiate causal processes that lead to the realization of a desired outcome.

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If attention is directed only towards

**the concrete, visible problem,**

it is likely that measures taken will deal with the immediate visible problem.

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If attention is directed towards

**the underlying causes creating the problem,**

it is likely that measures taken will also deal with the underlying causes of the problem.

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If attention is directed towards

**the properties of the system in which the problem arises,**

it is likely that measures taken will also aim at influencing systemic properties.

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If attention is directed towards

**the different perspectives that might contribute to understand the complexity of the problem,**

it is likely that measures taken will also aim at influencing the stakeholders' ways of interpreting the problem.

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### Figure 3. Relations between awareness of complexity and type of problem-solving strategy

Adapted from Jordan & Andersson (2010)

Bill Joiner and Stephen Josephs (see Table 2) offer a different perspective on how identifications, in the sense of what is felt to be important, transform character in the course of adult development.

Joiner's and Josephs's formulations give an example of how aspirations are coloured and transformed by more complex, dialectical, and abstract conceptions. From a focus on achieving concrete results, the individual's attention is shifted towards engaging in fluid processes in a way that serves existential values (*cf.* Basseches's description of dialectical thinking).

### Table 2. Constructions of what is desirable in five stages of development

Stage	Intent
Expert	To improve and accomplish things
Achiever	To achieve desired outcomes in a way consistent with self-chosen values
Catalyst	To create contexts and facilitate processes that are experienced as meaningful and satisfying and that enable the sustained achievement of desired outcomes
Co-Creator	To tap into an evolving sense of life purpose and actualize it in your everyday life through deep collaboration with others

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Stage	Intent
Synergist	To engage with life in all its fullness and to be of benefit to others as well as yourself

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Note: From Joiner & Josephs, 2007, pp. 213-214.

## Action Competences Related to Complexity Awareness

When studying the meaning-making of societal change agents, it is important not only to look for signs of awareness of complexity, but to try to find out to what extent the individual demonstrates competence in *working* with complexity in creative and independent ways. Bill Torbert's concept *action inquiry* is highly relevant for describing action competences relating to complexity (Torbert & Associates, 2004). Action inquiry means actively inquiring into the complexity of issues, continually learning more, reevaluating one's own assumptions, and experimenting with different strategies in order to deal skillfully with significant tasks.

## Context Awareness

*Context awareness* relates to the *scope* of awareness in terms of how much of the wider context a person actively notices and considers. Each task, each initiative is embedded in layers of context, such as a work group, an organizational unit, organizational structures and cultures, a society with certain characteristics, a global system. Noticing the properties and processes of change in the broader environment might be of crucial importance for carrying out one's own tasks. Changing conditions in the wider context might influence the possibilities, opportunities, and impediments for the specific tasks one is engaged in. What oneself and one's colleagues do might have consequences for the larger system and might therefore elicit reactions and changed conditions. Context awareness entails a capacity to shift focus between micro and macro levels and relate them to each other.<sup>23</sup>

The simplest forms of context awareness are to notice properties of the wider context that are of apparent significance to one's own doings. For example, a societal change agent could notice that since an election is coming up, it might be wise to postpone lobbying for a proposal until after the election as everyone's attention is focussed on the election process. A more consolidated context awareness means that there is a generalized expectation that all issues are embedded in larger contexts and that it is important to keep an eye on what is going on in this larger context, because such conditions and patterns of change may need to be taken into consideration when managing one's own tasks. One of Michael Basseches's dialectical schemata is a good description of context awareness consolidated into the ontological assumptions of a person. The schema is called *Location of an element or phenomenon within the whole(s) of which it is a part*. Basseches writes:

Schema 9 (which also can be described as the "schema for contextualization") may be applied to any objects of thought (e.g., concrete things, events, classes of things and events, ideas, theories, etc.). The schema involves placing these phenomena in the contexts of

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<sup>23</sup> Ken Wilber's (1995) discourse on holons is one way of pointing to the ever-present embeddedness of everything in larger wholes.

larger wholes, which may be referred to as *systems, structures, contexts, processes, sets of connections, wholes, forms, etc.*

Schema 9 is a reflection of the assumption that individual elements are organized, or can be organized into larger wholes. Its application can be seen as turning the thinker's attention to these larger wholes....

Schema 9 describes a process of contextualization, and can be related to any verbal expression which indicates that the subject is viewing something within the context of a larger whole. (Basseches, 1984, pp. 107-108, emphasis in the original)

Consequently, a person with a strongly developed context awareness regularly turns attention towards the wider context's patterns of change and structural conditions. The formulation of goals and strategies is continually adapted to what seems possible, what has a good fit with trends in the environment, and what needs to be done in order to skillfully handle the way the context sets conditions for the successful attainment of goals. For the person with a strong context awareness, the wider context is a distinct gestalt in the field of vision. There is an awareness of the complexity of the processes going on and the conditions set by the structural properties of the system(s) one is embedded in. This gestalt is continually updated and perhaps sometimes reevaluated.

A person with a weak context awareness does not actively look for the properties and trends of the wider context. The context is simply not given consideration. Consequently, this person has only vague conceptions of what the structural conditions and change trends of the context could imply for his or her own concerns. Goals and strategies are formulated without being informed by and adapted to the specific conditions of the context. A person with a weak context awareness may be attracted to the formulation of a utopian vision of how things ought to be ordered *because* he or she is unaware of the intricacies of existing inert structures, unpredictable processes, and complex relationships. The person with a strong context awareness is generally more sceptical about being too specific in the formulation of desired outcomes, since there is a deep-rooted awareness of the complexity of the situation. There are too many processes and conditions one cannot control, therefore goals and strategies have to be continually adapted as events unfold.

## **Context Awareness as a Basis for Identifications**

"Context" can be conceived as a nested hierarchy of increasing scope, where what is considered to be task and what is context is always relative to each other. For a person who is strongly focussed on her own immediate work tasks, the team she belongs to is, for her, the immediate context that she might be more or less aware of. For a person who sees as her task to manage a team, the rest of the organization can be considered to be the context, while for the leader of the organization, its efficient operation may be seen as the primary task, and the relevant context is the (changing) environment the organization operates in.

Increasing context awareness often means a reconstruction of tasks, so that what was before considered to be context in relation to a task with a more narrow scope, becomes a focus of

attention in its own right and goals relating to influencing the way the larger context operates gain in importance.

In terms of analysing societal change agency, a distinct, elaborated and systemic gestalt of societal conditions, structures, and patterns of long-term change often leads to the formulation of concerns derived from an image of what is going on in the society. It is not enough to successfully solve an intriguing problem or build a successful operation. One also needs to feel that what one engages in stands in the service of the evolving needs of the society.<sup>24</sup>

## Action Competences Related to Context Awareness

A strong context awareness imprints itself on action competences by skillful adaptations of strategies to the conditions and patterns of change in the wider context. One example of such action competences is a continual scanning of what is going on in the environment in order to catch upcoming opportunities presented by new, often unforeseen, developments. Another example is the continual adaptation of strategies to restrictions and opportunities presented by the context. The term "room of manoeuvre" points to an awareness of the need to look for openings determined by conditions in the context.

## Stakeholder Awareness

*Stakeholder awareness* concerns the extent to which an individual notices the presence and roles of people, organizations, associations, groups, or other types of actors that might in various ways have a role to play in the initiative the societal change agent engages in. There are three major aspects of stakeholder awareness, as it is conceptualized here: (a) awareness of the existence of relevant stakeholders; (b) constructing more or less differentiated images of the properties of stakeholders, and (c) awareness of properties of *relationships* between oneself and different stakeholders, as well as relationships among different stakeholders.

Persons with a strong stakeholder awareness have something like an "always on" function scanning the environment for significant stakeholders to keep track on. This scanning produces an internal "map" of different types of actors, including images of their respective properties. This map can then be "consulted" in later situations, when various issues come up, in order to identify, for example, people who might contribute ideas or resources, actors who might have objections that ought to be considered, or someone who ought to be informed in advance about a particular course of action. People with a strong stakeholder awareness are attentive to information that might allow them to understand how different stakeholders think, feel, and act. The resulting interpretations are used for adapting one's own style of communication, conversational strategies and actions to fit the particulars of each stakeholder. A strong stakeholder awareness usually means that goals relating to building good relations with specific stakeholders are prominent parts of the societal change agent's strategy.

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<sup>24</sup> The transformation of the scope of concerns in the course of ego development is beautifully described in Joiner & Josephs, 2007.

Persons with a weak stakeholder awareness simply don't have an internal "map" of stakeholders and the "scanning" for significant stakeholders doesn't get going spontaneously. Images of stakeholders, if at all formed, are undifferentiated and unreflected. People with weak stakeholder awareness act without much prior consideration of stakeholders that might contribute to or stand in the way of initiatives.

It should be noted that an individual can have a strong and differentiated awareness in relation to some groups of people who are at the center of one's conception of significant issues, but devote much less attention to other stakeholders. A person might, for example, want to do something about the situation of unemployed youth in the neighbourhood, who are at risk of developing a criminal lifestyle. This person can have a very differentiated understanding of how young people think and feel about themselves and their situation and may have developed a strong sense of commitment and care in relation to this particular group. But it is also possible that this capacity for role-taking is not put to work in relation to many other actors that might be important to understand and relate constructively with, such as the police, local politicians, administrators in the municipality, shop-owners, etc. In such a case, the awareness demonstrated in relation to the youth is rather a consequence of complexity awareness in relation to the chosen task, rather than stakeholder awareness proper.

### **Models in the Adult Development Literature that May be Useful**

Jordan analysed the structural forms of images of the counterpart in a large number of narratives about workplace conflicts and concluded that the ways the respondents described others could be assigned to three basic categories (Jordan & Lundin, 2002). In the research report, the three categories are called *fixed traits*, *linear psychological causality*, and *complex psychological causality*.<sup>25</sup> Briefly explained, the category *fixed traits* comprises those descriptions of other people that are limited to the enumeration of characterizing adjectives and descriptions of typical behaviour. No efforts are made to understand *why* people behave in certain ways. The category *linear psychological causality* covered the counterpart images that included some ideas about why the other person acted in a particular way, or had a certain attitude. The images of the counterpart classified in the category *complex psychological causality* described the other person in systemic terms, where behavior and attitude was interpreted as an integral consequence of interrelated factors like personality structure, personal biography, life situation, educational background, enculturation, etc. In the terminology in the section on complexity awareness, I would call the first category a declarative image of the other, the second category a linear image, and the third category a systemic image.

Table 3 shows another example of how descriptions of people can be more or less complex in the meaning-making system of an individual. The table describes how increasing stakeholder awareness can lead to qualitatively different, and more complex, constructions of people. From our point of view, this kind of conceptualization is useful in pointing to the *character* of the changes in the complexity of mental representations related to increasing stakeholder awareness.

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<sup>25</sup> These categories correspond closely to the abstract, formal and systematic levels in the Model of Hierarchical Complexity.

<sup>26</sup> Actually categorizing those mental representations into a finite number of stages is, for our purposes, not necessary.

**Table 3. A model of development of how people are described**

Moral stage	Description of people
Stage 1	People conceived of as particular persons who do particular things.
Stage 2	People classified into groups according to actions they perform.
Stage 2/3	People understood in terms of a few inner states that are closely tied to behavior.
Stage 3	People understood in terms of fixed personality characteristics, sentiments, roles, or motives.
Stage 4	People seen as complex systems of qualities that vary with circumstances.
Stage 5	People seen as complex systems of qualities and processes in interaction with other complex systems.

Note: Extracted from Table 1 in Dawson and Gabrielian, 2003, pp. 166-167.

### Stakeholder Awareness as a Basis for Identifications

A strong stakeholder awareness imprints itself on goal construction by the realization that understanding stakeholders, establishing productive relationships to them, and influencing their views are crucial enabling goals. In order to achieve significant progress regarding visions and problem solutions, it is often necessary to invest a lot of time and creativity in managing the relationships with a network of stakeholders. Stakeholders have different meaning-making systems, including narratives, attitudes, conceptions of causal relations, and levels of awareness. They have their respective knowledge constellations with some areas where they have expert knowledge and other areas where they are ignorant. They also have their own patterns of behaviours that may be more or less conducive to the ends of the societal change agent. All this can be apprehended, interpreted, and influenced.

Strong stakeholder awareness, in particular understanding of the background causes of stakeholders' views and actions, generally reduces the tendency to get stuck in antagonistic conceptions and opens up for empathy even towards stakeholders who oppose own initiatives.

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<sup>26</sup> There are other theoretical frameworks in the adult development literature that are at least partly relevant to the stakeholder awareness domain. Robert Selman (1980) did some pathbreaking research on the development of how children and adolescents construct relationships. Some of this work is relevant for identifying adults' reasoning about relationships, but more work is needed in order to have a good conceptualization of developmental differences in typical adult meaning-making. Martina Gremmler-Fuhr's doctoral dissertation (Gremmler-Fuhr, 2006) offers a comprehensive typology of different kinds of properties of relationships and discusses these in a developmental perspective. Considerable work would be needed to adapt the typology to the purposes of this study, though. Outside the adult development literature, the discourse around emotional intelligence offers useful concepts, but generally disregard the developmental preconditions and patterns.

## Action Competences Related to Stakeholder Awareness

Often, the most apparent consequence of a weak stakeholder awareness is simply the ignoring of possibilities for contacting and establishing productive relationships with potentially significant stakeholders. There are individuals, officials, and organizations that might play an important role in a process to realize a societal change agent initiative, but they remain invisible to the person, at least until they actively block the way forward.

People with a weak stakeholder awareness have little to work with when deciding how to behave in relation to significant stakeholders. They have no clear conception of what the mental world of the other looks like and therefore do not reflect on how their own ways of talking and behaving might be adapted to fit with how the other person thinks and feels. Influencing others' attitudes and decisions becomes a matter of persuading, cajoling, or even threatening, i.e., unidirectional modes of influence.<sup>27</sup>

A strong stakeholder awareness generates a lot of information that can be used for adapting behaviour in interactions with stakeholders. Persons with a strong stakeholder awareness often develop skills in creating mutual trust, in formulating ideas and visions that make sense to other stakeholders because they are aligned with their own interests and ideas, and in inviting stakeholders to genuine dialogues (Joiner & Josephs, 2007).

## Self-Awareness

The concept of self-awareness refers here to awareness of the processes going on inside a person. Focus is on the extent to which a person is in conscious contact with cognitive, affective, volitional processes, and sensomotorical reflexes. The concept stresses the process-character of being aware of what is going on in the mind and body, rather than on having constructed a self-image that tells a story about what character traits one has. Self-awareness in this sense is something that an individual can have at his or her disposal to very different degrees. Every human being thinks, feels, wants, and has behavioural reflexes all the time while awake. Indeed, it is usually really hard work when starting a meditation practice to learn to calm down these more or less self-propelling processes in order to reach at least a modest measure of stillness. However, self-awareness means actually *noticing* the nature of the internal processes, i.e., taking them as objects of attention. It is not always the case that someone who is annoyed consciously notices his or her own annoyance. It is even less common that someone who starts to dislike a new colleague at work really notices that a process has started in his own mind in such a distinct way that he can ask the question: what do I do with my own feeling of dislike for my new colleague? Many (perhaps most) people are, with Robert Kegan's words, *subject* to their likes and dislikes and act them out without having made the active choice of going along with the feeling.

Self-awareness is an important category of awareness because a strongly developed self-awareness opens the possibility for actively taking care of one's own reactions and for developing strategies to work on transforming one's own habitual patterns of thinking, feeling, wanting, and

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<sup>27</sup> Joiner & Josephs (2007) explore the developmental aspects of "power styles" from unidirectional to more dialectical strategies for influencing others and aligning intentions.

behaving. A person with a weak self-awareness will not reflect on the nature of the thoughts, emotions, desires, and impulses generated by the organism (i.e., the self) and will therefore not be in a position to handle these processes intentionally. Strong self-awareness means that the notion of self-awareness becomes a part of the ontological assumptions, which in simpler words mean that the individual knows that there are spontaneous cognitive, emotional, and volitional processes going on all the time and that these processes can influence one's actions in desirable and undesirable ways. When something important is at stake, one knows that it can be useful to keep an eye on these processes and to sometimes intervene to change their course.

Of course, the noticing and interpretation of self processes can be more or less elaborated, more or less complex in the senses discussed in the section on complexity awareness. Internal feeling states can be noticed and quickly labelled without further reflection on why the feeling arose or what consequences it could possibly have in the future course of events. At the other end of the complexity spectrum, an individual can see thoughts, feelings, and desires in the wider context of his or her own complex system of meaning-making with a past, a present, and a future. Such a well-developed self-awareness opens possibilities for developing comprehensive and sustained strategies for self-transformation.

## **Models and Concepts in the Adult Development Literature that Might be Useful**

Self-awareness has been an important subject in several of the world's wisdom traditions, in particular, perhaps, in Buddhism and the Vedic tradition. However, the theoretical conceptualization of the development of self-awareness seems to be poorly developed in the adult development literature.<sup>28</sup> The founder of psychosynthesis, Roberto Assagioli, is an exception. He was an early Western pioneer in exploring self-awareness as a capacity to witness internal processes without being absorbed by them (Assagioli, 1965).

I conceptualize self-awareness by the combination of two types of distinctions (Jordan, 2001a): six ego processes and four phases. Self-awareness is framed in terms of awareness of six ego processes.

1. Perceiving: Organizing impressions and images of lifeworld experiences.
2. Emotions, feelings and moods.
3. Thought patterns and interpretations.
4. Opinions, likes and dislikes.
5. Motivation, desires, wishes and intentions.
6. Behavioural patterns and habitual reactions.

Each of these six ego processes can be taken as objects of awareness. I describe the development of self-awareness in relation to the six ego processes in four phases (Jordan, 2001a). In the first phase, the individual is subject to the ego processes, which means that they are not conscious gestalts in awareness. People think and feel, but do not consciously notice and attend to

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<sup>28</sup> A lot of relevant perspectives have been developed in relation to notions like emotional intelligence and mindfulness, but the conceptualization of the *developmental* aspects is generally weak in these discourses.

the processes of thinking and feeling. The second phase is when the individual notices what is going on in his or her own interior. The third phase constitutes a deepening of self-awareness by not only noticing that processes are going on, but also evaluating the contents of the processes: What do I think about my having these kinds of thinking patterns? In the fourth phase, the individual starts to develop strategies for actively influencing the ego processes, e.g., having a technique for transforming one's own recurring moods or dysfunctional interpretations.

Joiner and Josephs (2007, pp. 213-214) describe the development of self-awareness in terms of an increasing capacity to *sustain* the attending to internal processes. According to their stage framework, self-awareness proper starts to develop at the first postconventional ego development stage, the *Catalyst* in their terminology. Before this stage, a person's reactions, thinking and feeling are not consciously noticed as they happen. At best, the individual starts to reflect on past occurrences in terms of what was going on in one's own mind and how those processes influenced the course of events. At the *Catalyst* stage, however, the individual develops "[t]he ability to step back 'in the moment' and attend directly but very briefly to a current assumption, feeling, or behavior that would otherwise escape your attention... In the next stage, *Co-Creator*, there is "[a] slightly more sustained attention to the flow of your ongoing experience, giving you a more robust capacity for processing painful feelings and for understanding whole frames of reference that may differ from your own." The *Synergist* stage is described as having a "[s]ustained, expanded present-centered attention to your physical presence, including your five senses, thought processes, intuitions, and emotional responses." According to Joiner and Josephs, self-awareness only very gradually becomes an integral, ever-present aspect of how one's consciousness operates.

## Self-Awareness as a Basis for Identifications

For the societal change agent, the degree of self-awareness is not the immediate source for the formulation of goals, but may have important consequences for the *relationship* a person has to his or her goals and visions and for the more personal unconscious motivations that may play a role in formulating goals and strategies. A person with a strong self-awareness can be expected to be less likely than someone with a weak self-awareness to be driven by needs for personal status and recognition. The familiarity with the comings and goings of thoughts and feelings also generally lead to a more flexible relationship to seemingly compelling idea systems. Strong self-awareness contributes to a process orientation, less likely to construct fixed goals and vision, more likely to engage in a continuous process of finding situationally adapted ways to serve meaningful purposes. Strong self-awareness can, however, lead to the inclusion of auxiliary goals about developing better self-management skills in the overall strategy.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Barrett C. Brown (2011) found that late ego stage change agents often report experiencing themselves as serving or being part of some type of transpersonal entity. This interesting finding is probably highly compatible with the framework presented here, but it would take too much space to elaborate on the connections here.

## Action Competences Related to Self-Awareness

In the case studies we have made on value-oriented change agents (Emanuelsson, 2011; Jordan, 2006a; Sander & Jordan, 2009, 2011), it was obvious that skills in handling one's own feelings of dejection, frustration, and anger when encountering resistance or indifference are of central importance for success in change initiatives. Among the most common techniques for skillfully taking care of own reactions in a professional role are conscious venting with carefully selected persons, internal dialogues with oneself about the reasons for the resistance (i.e., using stakeholder awareness as an instrument for self-management) and taking care to have sources of mental and spiritual nourishment that are independent of the course of events in the change project.

## Perspective Awareness

The category of perspective awareness covers the propensity to notice the properties of one's own and others' perspectives *as* perspectives.<sup>30</sup> Actively and consciously noticing that people (including oneself) have durable patterns in the way they make sense of things has profound consequences for a person's meaning-making system. A strong perspective awareness means that the individual reflects on the properties of perspectives, realizes that these properties can be different and that they can develop over time, and, most importantly, that the properties of perspectives *cause* people to make sense of events in particular ways. No single way of seeing the world is absolute, but there are many different ways of making sense of one's experiences. I myself would have had a different set of values and opinions if I had grown up embedded in another culture, or if I had made other decisions in my life regarding where to live, what to study, which partner to spend my life with, what workplace to stay with, etc.. Perspective awareness means, in other words, that perspectives are regarded as *variables*.

A strong perspective awareness leads to a more flexible relationship to perspectives overall, both to one's own adopted perspective and the different perspectives of other people.

Perspective awareness is, of course, inextricably related to self-awareness. The aspect of perspective awareness that concerns awareness of the properties of one's own system of meaning-making is certainly a continuation of the forms of awareness described in the section on self-awareness. The propensity to notice the processes going on in one's own mind and body becomes perspective awareness when the individual starts to perceive one's own patterns of reasoning in a systemic way. Of course, perspective awareness is not limited to awareness of one's own perspective. Nor is it limited to awareness of both one's own perspective and the perspectives of significant stakeholders. A strongly developed perspective awareness becomes part of the individual's ontological assumptions. A person with a strong perspective awareness notices the existence of perspectives, how the meaning attributed to issues is dependent on the properties of the perspectives used for making sense of the issues. One can describe and reflect on the properties of perspectives and consider what happens when an issue is interpreted through the

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<sup>30</sup> My use of the concept "perspective awareness" has evolved from my efforts to concretize and operationalize Ken Wilber's concept "vision-logic" (see e.g., Wilber, 1995, 1997 and in particular 1999). The two concepts are not synonymous, but I want to acknowledge the original source.

filters of different perspectives. Perspectives can be compared and one can reflect on the relationships between different perspectives, e.g., how the respective properties of perspectives lead to conflict or to development of deeper insight through contrasting points of view.

A fully developed perspective awareness presupposes systemic thinking. It can actually be seen as a natural product of the deepening of systems thinking, as formulated by Jake Chapman in the following quote from a listserv post:

There seem to be at least three stages of 'systems thinking.' The first is when people start to conceptualise the world holistically, they see and are interested in the connections between things and they 'discover' feedback loops (and system dynamics, etc.). The second stage is when they realise that different people conceptualise the system differently; they wake up to pluralism and constructivism and realise that to be an effective leader they have to do more than just understand the system. The third stage is when they realise that the way that they think is conditioned by their level of self awareness and that this is true of others too. They now realise that there is a continuous interplay between understanding the inner and the outer and that they are not separate from 'the system.' (Jake Chapman, in a post to the listserv adultlevel, 29 June, 2009, quoted with permission)

Basseches, referring to the work of William Perry (1968, as cited in Basseches, 1984), offers formulations that well capture the nature of perspective awareness (even though he doesn't use that particular naming). Several of his dialectical thinking schemata are relevant, in particular schemata 11, 13, 23 and 24. The quote below is part of Basseches's explanation of Schema 11, *Assumption of contextual relativism*:

I consider each of the following ideas to be a component of Perry's notion of relativism.

1. Ideas and values are to be understood in the context of larger wholes described as "points of view, interpretations, frames of reference, value systems, and contingencies."
2. There exists a plurality of these contexts of knowledge (points of view).
3. These larger wholes are to be understood in terms of their "structural properties."
4. Such an understanding makes "analysis, comparison, and evaluation" possible.

(Basseches, 1984, pp. 110-111)

Basseches also describes, in particular when discussing Schema 23 (*Criticism of formalism based on the interdependence of form and content*) and 24 (*Multiplication of perspectives as a concreteness-preserving approach to inclusiveness*), more advanced forms of perspective awareness. I find his distinctions very useful, but the formulations require some explanation. Basseches uses a juxtaposition between "formalism" and certain forms of dialectical reasoning for clarifying the essence of the latter. The first step in the explanation is:

In order to describe Schema 23, I will define "formalism" as the effort to describe relationships and movements of particulars as governed by rules or laws which can be stated at a general or universal level, with no reference to the content of the particulars.... The assumption behind formalism is that general laws and rules (form) govern relationships and movements of particulars (content) which exist separately from the general statements themselves. (Basseches, 1984, pp. 142-143)

Basseches says (I interpret) that one way of making sense of things is to try to find universal patterns, valid over a large number of specific instances, patterns that can be described without reference to particular circumstances. These abstract explanations are seen as the real causes behind the immense variety of empirical reality. Then comes the second step in Basseches's explanation: "The schema for criticism of formalism attacks this framework by viewing form and content (universal and particular) as interdependent" (1984, p. 143).

The dialectical worldview is critical of the contraction of meaning-making that is often (at least when considering social and psychological issues) the result of relying on a single abstract discourse about causality.<sup>31</sup> One alternative to this approach is to refuse to abstract and instead consider all the concrete, unique circumstances that are relevant for a specific event. Basseches points out, however, that with a dialectical worldview, there is an alternative:

... the multiplication-of-perspectives approach relies on the process of abstraction no less than does the abstract universal approach. In generating and articulating perspectives, it begins by abstracting aspects of an interrelated whole out of that whole... However, the difference between the approaches is that, in the multiplication-of-perspectives approach, the abstractions are used consciously with an acknowledgement of their oneness, and their limits are pointed out by the juxtaposition of alternative perspectives... To multiply perspectives on the same whole, therefore, is to expose abstractions as one-sided handles on concrete reality, as opposed to universal self-subsistent realities. (Basseches, 1984, pp. 148-149)

When asked to clarify the meaning of the last sentence quoted above, Basseches writes:

My intent was to say that abstract formulations of "laws" and other generalities are often presented as descriptions of universal realities, with the expectation that they will simply be accepted as established. By generating multiple ways of describing or representing the same or overlapping set of phenomena, one reveals that each of these formulations is not a description of a reality, but is one way that one or more people have used to "grasp" some aspect of their environment in order to relate to it. How any one group grasps their environment is necessarily related to the group's place in the universe and the needs that they are trying to meet, which may not be identical, and in fact may be in conflict, with the needs of other groups. In that sense these formulations are "one-sided." (Basseches, personal email communication, July 28, .2010, quoted with permission)

## **Models and Concepts in the Adult Development Literature that Might be Useful**

King & Kitchener (1994, 2004) developed a framework that describes development of reflective judgement in terms of seven stages. Their model can be useful for tracing the development of perspective awareness back to its very beginnings. Thinking according to the first three "pre-reflective" stages assumes (without awareness of this assumption *as* an assumption) that there is absolute truth. Certain knowledge exists, even though some people may not have

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<sup>31</sup> Wilber (1995), following Jürgen Habermas, names this "monological rationality."

access to it. These are stages with no perspective awareness at all. The following "quasi-reflective" and "reflective" stages increasingly recognize that knowledge is constructed, and is therefore dependent on the specific characteristics of the interpretive process. This realization leads to the conclusion that there can be no absolutely certain knowledge. In the later stages of development of reflective judgement, it becomes natural to reflect on how properties of the methods used for gaining knowledge co-determine the outcome of the efforts. Knowledge is then not a matter of more or less correctly representing reality, but is fundamentally of a constructed nature, inherently dependent on the properties of the discourse it is formulated within. Otto Laske (2009) incorporates King's and Kitchener's model in his own framework, calling it "epistemic position." Attending to the level of awareness a person has to the process aspect of knowing can be elucidating.

## Perspective Awareness as a Basis for Identifications

Perspective awareness means that one's own and others' perspectives are distinct gestalts in awareness. This might have concrete consequences for how the individual constructs goals and visions. People with a strong perspective awareness often regard the properties of particular stakeholders' perspectives as a key factor in causing problems or blocking possible solutions to problems. Influencing the properties of those perspectives are then seen as a key enabling goal to work for. By succeeding in initiating a transformation of certain stakeholders' perspectives, it might become possible to accomplish other goals, such as realizing a vision.

The increased awareness that one's own perspective (a) has many structural properties; (b) that these properties have far-reaching consequences for the way one interprets and forms opinions and commitments; and (c) that one's perspective is an outcome of a formative process involving biographic events, cultural environment, educational history, etc., usually leads to a weakening of the exclusive identification with the perspective. One's own perspective is taken as an object of attention and is therefore no longer subject to the self (Kegan, 1994). The weakening of the embeddedness in a particular perspective also weakens the tendency to fall into a dualistic conception of *us-them* relationships. It is no longer a question of *us*, with the good perspective, prevailing over *them*, with bad perspectives. Rather, it seems more fruitful to regard all perspectives as valuable working material. People with a strong perspective awareness don't perceive people with other perspectives as opponents. They differentiate between the individual and the perspective this individual currently is identified with. Perspectives can potentially be transformed, if handled skillfully.

Two further observations can be made about strong perspective awareness as a basis for identifications:

- It is characteristic that people with a strong perspective awareness also have a strong process orientation. This can lead to the construction of goals that aim at creating propitious conditions for creative processes, for example establishing forums for explorative dialogue, developing methods that support inquiry and creativity, working with climate, values, and norms regarding openness to transformation, etc.
- Strong perspective awareness can also lead to a concern for not getting stuck in a limiting perspective. Goals may also include strategies to challenge unexamined assumptions, expose established "truths," and seek out critical voices.

## Action Competences Related to Perspective Awareness

Recognizing the existence of perspectives *as* perspectives can have profound effects on a person's attitudes towards people who think very differently. However, actually putting perspective awareness to work is far more advanced task. I would like to cite a formulation Herb Koplowitz made in two posts to the listserv "adultlevel."

I think of a transcript Glenn Mehlretter showed me early in my learning Jaques's system of a professor describing modernism, postmodernism and existentialism quite eloquently – how they related to each other, their differences and so on. This looked clearly Stratum VI to me. Glenn then pointed out that the professor was not doing any work with those descriptions. He wasn't exercising judgment about them or solving problems with them. He would not have been able to design a modern or postmodern or existential school system let alone a system that integrated two of these approaches. In fact, his work was never above Str III.

[...]

So for us, a performance that is a learned response is very different from one crafted on the spot by the interviewee. We want our interviews to capture someone's working, and we understand work to be the exercise of judgment and discretion while engaged in a task. So the issue is not what you can say about modernism but what you can do with it. The issue is how you use (unconscious and ineffable) judgment to choose and use skills (methods you can use without bringing them to consciousness) and knowledge (facts you can use without bringing them to consciousness) to solve the problem at hand. (Herb Koplowitz, in posts to the listserv adultlevel, 3 July, 2009, quoted with permission)

Brown's research (2011, p. 179) points to a number of "perspective-related practices." One is using the contrast and tension between dissimilar perspectives in order to generate a richer understanding of issues and, in particular, to develop integrative action strategies. A second practice is to facilitate more awareness about the mechanisms that generate particular properties of perspectives, so as to deconstruct the unreflected embeddedness in one perspective by taking the creation process of perspectives as objects of attention. A third practice is to facilitate a more pure witness awareness by letting go of all perspectives.

People with a weak perspective awareness often feel that dialogue is a waste of time. They think it is more efficient to let the best expert make the decisions (not seldom themselves) and focus on action. Exploring different angles towards an issue and asking people with very different perspectives for their views on things is something that makes a lot of sense to those who are strongly aware of the pitfalls of monological rationality.

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## PART III: USING THE AWARENESS FRAMEWORK

### Mental Demands of Societal Change Initiatives

The framework outlined above is designed to be useful for analysing meaning-making and patterns of action in *complex* societal change initiatives. Preliminary evidence from interviews we have made with societal entrepreneurs indicate that initiatives can be very successful even if the leading individuals do not show signs of particularly strongly developed awareness in the five domains described above. In less complex endeavours, traditional entrepreneurial personality traits may carry a long way: strong achievement motivation, perseverance, inventiveness, action orientation, a tendency to quickly rebound from dejection states in the face of failed efforts and try new ideas. However, when the societal change initiatives involve influencing how *other* actors and societal institutions handle wicked issues, the difficulty of the task may require something more than the conventional entrepreneurial spirit.

I hypothesize that the following conditions are relevant as descriptors of societal change initiatives that *do* require strongly developed awareness in one or more of the five awareness types.

- The initiative aims at achieving significant changes in how established institutions operate (or such changes are necessary for realizing visions). Success is possible only if significant changes are made in policies, regulations, decision-making procedures.
- Goals of the initiative include attaining comprehensive transformations of significant stakeholders' perspectives on a complex issue.
- Accomplishment of goals is possible only through continuous active cooperation (rather than single decisions) between stakeholders with conflicting interests, roles and identities and/or profound differences in perspectives and value systems. Other specific impediments to such cooperation can be lack of interest or lack of knowledge on the part of important stakeholders.
- Success is dependent on long-term access to different types of resources controlled by other stakeholders.
- There are deep-rooted value conflicts around the issue, so that any action taken provokes strong reactions among stakeholders with power to disrupt the process.
- The initiative is perceived as a threat by powerful institutions and decision-makers.

This list is, of course, very similar to the list of properties of wicked issues in the beginning of the article. Wicked societal issues are wicked precisely because they are complex in ways that make the task of managing them very difficult. It is when facing critical wicked issues that the role of levels of awareness becomes a key factor to consider.

### Uses of the Framework

I expect the framework developed here to be useful for two broad purposes. The first one is to gain a more differentiated *understanding* of how levels of awareness influence patterns of engagement with complex societal issues. I believe that an analysis of the patterns of meaning-

making can contribute to a more detailed description of the properties of the ways people construct their narratives about societal issues, of how they identify with values, goals and visions, of the patterns of action they engage in in order to reach meaningful results, and not least how patterns of meaning-making may *explain* identification with goals and patterns of action. This more differentiated understanding of patterns might contribute to more penetrating explanations of successes and failures in societal change agency, not least through analysing the relationship between the complexity of the task people take on and the awareness capacities they put to work. Such analyses can also lead to more differentiated and grounded conceptions of the competences needed for societal change agency.

By developing deeper knowledge in the fields outlined above, the framework may also serve a second purpose, namely to assist in designing more effective types of *scaffolding* for societal change agency. Scaffolding can be methods and techniques that support people to mobilize and direct their attention to various aspects of the initiatives they are engaging, so as to develop more effective strategies. Scaffolding can also take the form of coaching formats and strategies, as well as more structured training in the form of courses and educational programmes focussed on societal change agency/societal entrepreneurship. On a more personal level, the framework might be developed into a tool for self-reflection and self-transformation, not least by more clearly articulating potentials for development of more awareness.

## **Describing and Explaining Different Patterns of Societal Change Agency**

### **Analysing Meaning-Making: What to Look for and How to Score**

When using the framework as a tool for empirical research, analysing interviews with societal change agents is a major application. From a pragmatic point of view, I find it reasonable to use a very simple and openended scale for assessing the awareness pattern demonstrated in an interview transcript. I operate with the three levels of *weak*, *moderate*, and *strong*. Table 4 offers a summary overview of the characteristics of *weak* and *strong* forms of awareness for the five different awareness categories of our framework. Classification as "moderate" is a matter of judgment in relation to the descriptions of the "weak" and "strong" level.

*Elaboration* is a key quality to look for, in particular *lack* of elaboration. The latter is a conspicuous characteristic of many interviews. We can look in the interviews for occasions when the interviewee is invited to talk about something, but simply fails to elaborate on the circumstances, causes, consequences, and systemic conditions that might be relevant. If this is a consistent pattern, we might suspect a low degree of complexity awareness.

**Table 4. Coding criteria for five types of awareness in interview transcripts**

Type	Weak	Strong
<b>Complexity awareness</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No or unelaborated reasoning about causes.</li> <li>• Explanations limited to fixed properties of persons, collectives or other entities.</li> <li>• Absence of discussion of context-specific circumstances that ought to be considered.</li> <li>• <i>Possibly</i>: voicing of undifferentiated opinions (e.g., condemnations, disparaging comments) about persons, collectives and/or phenomena.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Elaborated reasoning about complex causes and properties.</li> <li>• Issues are explored in a differentiated way, nuances and variability is noticed.</li> <li>• The conceptual repertoire includes words for systemic properties.</li> <li>• Strong presence of dialectical thought forms, emphasizing context-dependence, change processes and properties of relationships.</li> <li>• Tasks are constructed at different levels of complexity/abstraction, including goals regarding influencing systemic properties.</li> </ul>
<b>Context awareness</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Focus on concrete tasks.</li> <li>• No or very unelaborated mention of the wider context in which tasks are embedded.</li> <li>• Goals are not formulated in terms of influencing the workings of the wider context, e.g., institutions, rules, culture.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Elaborate comments about historical background of present situation and issues.</li> <li>• Elaborate comments about organizational structures, cultural norm and value systems as relevant factors for understanding present issues.</li> <li>• Explanations of the properties of the context(-s).</li> <li>• Mention of trends in the environment, change processes that condition own initiative.</li> </ul>
<b>Stakeholder awareness</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Absence of elaborated descriptions and reflections about stakeholders that might play a significant role for the initiative.</li> <li>• Few stakeholders are mentioned.</li> <li>• When stakeholders are mentioned, there is no or very unelaborated reasoning about their patterns of behaviour, concerns, motives, reactions, views, interpretations, etc.</li> <li>• If explanations of actions of a stakeholder is offered, it is limited to attribution of fixed properties.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Frequent mention of different stakeholders with elaborated comments about their concerns, thinking, interpretations, feelings, patterns of behaviour, etc.</li> <li>• Descriptions of properties of relationships between self and stakeholders and/or between different stakeholders.</li> <li>• Formulates goals regarding establishing good working relationships with stakeholders, with mention of strategies adapted to realistic images of properties of stakeholders.</li> </ul>
<b>Self-awareness</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No or few comments about the nature of own processes. When such comments are present, they are declarative (assertions without rationale) and unelaborated.</li> <li>• No or unspecified reference to own learning from experiences.</li> <li>• No reports of active strategies for dealing with own reactions, states of mind, etc.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Elaborated awareness of and reflections on the character of own processes.</li> <li>• Mention of active strategies for dealing with own reactions, feelings, etc.</li> <li>• Formulation of aspirations regarding development of self-management skills.</li> </ul>
<b>Perspective awareness</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Assertions are made without supporting arguments/evidence and without comments about the possibility of erroneous conclusions.</li> <li>• No signs of awareness of the dependence of judgments on the properties of perspectives.</li> <li>• No mention of ambitions to influence the properties of own or others' perspectives.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Elaborate descriptions of own and/or others' perspectives <i>as</i> perspectives.</li> <li>• Comparing of perspectives.</li> <li>• Explanations of the properties of perspectives by referring to biography, position, structures, enculturation, etc.</li> <li>• Using differences or even tensions between perspectives to generate insights.</li> <li>• Formulation of goals in terms of facilitating transformation of own or others' perspectives.</li> </ul>

The hard part of analysis work is to spot what is *absent* in the respondent's meaning-making, but could have made positive difference if present. The areas of the "map" that are invisible to or only vaguely apprehended by the individual are unavailable for conscious cognitive processing. These absences, if noticed by the researcher, can be as important explanations for the actions, strategies, and attitudes of a person as those patterns of reasoning that are readily recognizable in the interview transcripts. For example:

– If a societal change agent doesn't turn his or her attention towards the motivation, mindset, interpretations, and reactions of an important stakeholder, he or she will not reflect on alternative approaches to engaging the meaning-making of the stakeholder in order to influence how he or she interprets the societal change agent's ambitions.

– If a societal change agent does not turn his or her attention towards the characteristics of how the societal institutions are structured and operate (systemic awareness), it is unlikely that goals relating to influencing structures and culture in institutions will be central to the initiatives of the social change agent.

### 13.2 Typology of Fields of Action for a Societal Change Agent

Variations in degrees of awareness can obviously be assumed to result in variations in the way societal change agents construct goals. I use "goals" in a broad sense here, not only referring to ultimate outcomes desired by persons involved in a societal change initiative, but also to "enabling goals." When taking on a more complex problem or vision, it is often necessary to set up goals that are not in themselves what one wants to achieve, but conditions that need to be created in order to make a process leading in the desired direction possible. A typical such goal is to establish a personal relationship with a particular important stakeholder, for example a decision-maker in an organization. The establishment of a certain level of contact, mutual positive regard, and trust in a relationship to this stakeholder may not be an end in itself, but a necessary step that has to be completed before starting to work towards the ultimate goal.

In the preceding sections, I have discussed five different categories of awareness, including implications for the construction of concerns. In Table 5, I summarize types of goals that might be part of a societal change agent's personal strategy.

**Table 5. Inventory of different types of goals**

<b>People with strong ...</b>	<b>... are likely to formulate goals about ...</b>
<b>complexity awareness ...</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- preventing undesired outcomes by early interventions in causative processes.</li> <li>- influencing conditions that nurture early stages of causative processes leading to desired outcomes.</li> <li>- influencing outcomes by attending to causality grounded in system properties.</li> <li>- creating favourable conditions for the start and strength of opened creative processes.</li> </ul>
<b>context awareness ...</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- influencing certain properties of the context, such as policies, regulations, organizational structures.</li> <li>- exerting influence on ongoing complex processes in the context.</li> <li>- creating forums/processes for learning, problem-solving, creativity, thereby</li> </ul>

<b>People with strong ...</b>	<b>... are likely to formulate goals about ...</b>
	creating propitious conditions for development. - building capacity of organization to notice, interpret and adapt to ongoing developments in the context. - building capacity to use new opportunities created by changes in the context.
<b>stakeholder awareness ...</b>	- influencing stakeholders' focus of attention and priorities. - influencing stakeholders' narratives, interpretations of issues. - influencing the image stakeholders' have of oneself. - contributing to increased knowledge, understanding and skills regarding significant subjects. - establishing and developing qualities of relationships between self and stakeholders. - influencing the qualities of relationships among stakeholders, e.g., by setting up opportunities for stakeholders to get to know each other and build trust - engaging in processes that aim at adapting strategies and outcomes to take account of how stakeholders experience the situation.
<b>self-awareness ...</b>	- developing own social and problem-solving skills - nurturing own developmental processes - increasing capacity for real-time awareness
<b>perspective awareness ...</b>	- transformation of perspectives - developing effective strategies/methods for transforming norm and value systems. - using the contrast between perspectives to increase the creativity in strategy development. - facilitating more awareness of the processes generating different perspectives

## Conclusion: Some Hypotheses to Explore

In this article, I have outlined a discourse for supporting a differentiated interpretation of the meaning-making structures of societal change agents (and people in similar roles). Reviewing the elements of the discourse (in particular the five types of awareness and the postulated relationships between degree of awareness and identifications and action competences) and reflecting on possible implications of the distinctions made here, we can formulate a number of plausible hypotheses for research on societal change agency that might warrant empirical research, for example the following.

- Different meaning-making structures, in particular in terms of the weakness and strength of different types of awareness, lead to different types of societal change agency, both in terms of goals and in terms of strategies employed.
- Individuals with a weakly developed complexity awareness will formulate and engage in projects that are less complex than individuals with a strong complexity awareness.
- Individuals with weakly developed awareness (in the five types described by the framework) will formulate goals that are few in number, narrow in scope and lack elaboration, whereas individuals with strongly developed awareness will construct a broad range of goals and will mention strategies and tactics for dealing with aspects of task complexity, context, stakeholders, self and perspectives.
- Differences in degrees of awareness along the five types lead to systematic differences in

patterns of societal change action.

- The explanatory value of the societal change agent's degree of awareness for accomplishing successful outcomes is high when the tasks involved are complex and low when the tasks involved are less complex.

Some of these hypotheses will be explored in the context of our ongoing research project.

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