

Being A Cultural Co-Evolver

Frameworks, Skillsets & Strategies
for Embodied Action

Dr Robert Gilman – August 16, 2021

Cultural Co-Evolver:

A cultural change agent who understands culture as a complex adaptive system

The concept grows out of my 40+ years immersed in cultural change work, culminating in the Bright Future Network and Bright Future Now

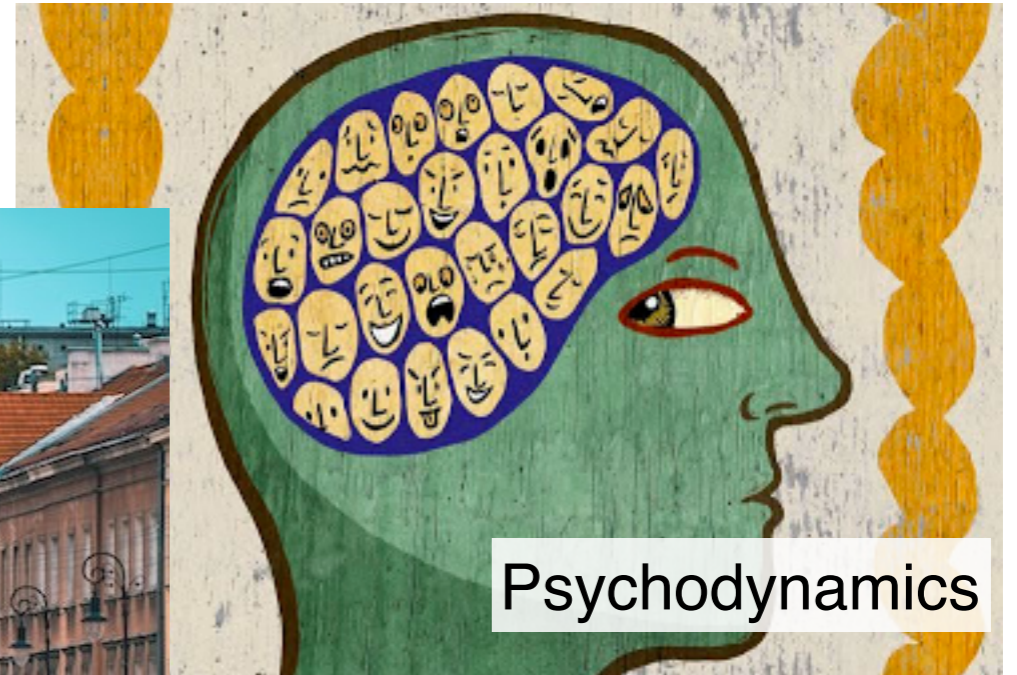
Complex Adaptive Systems



Ant Colonies



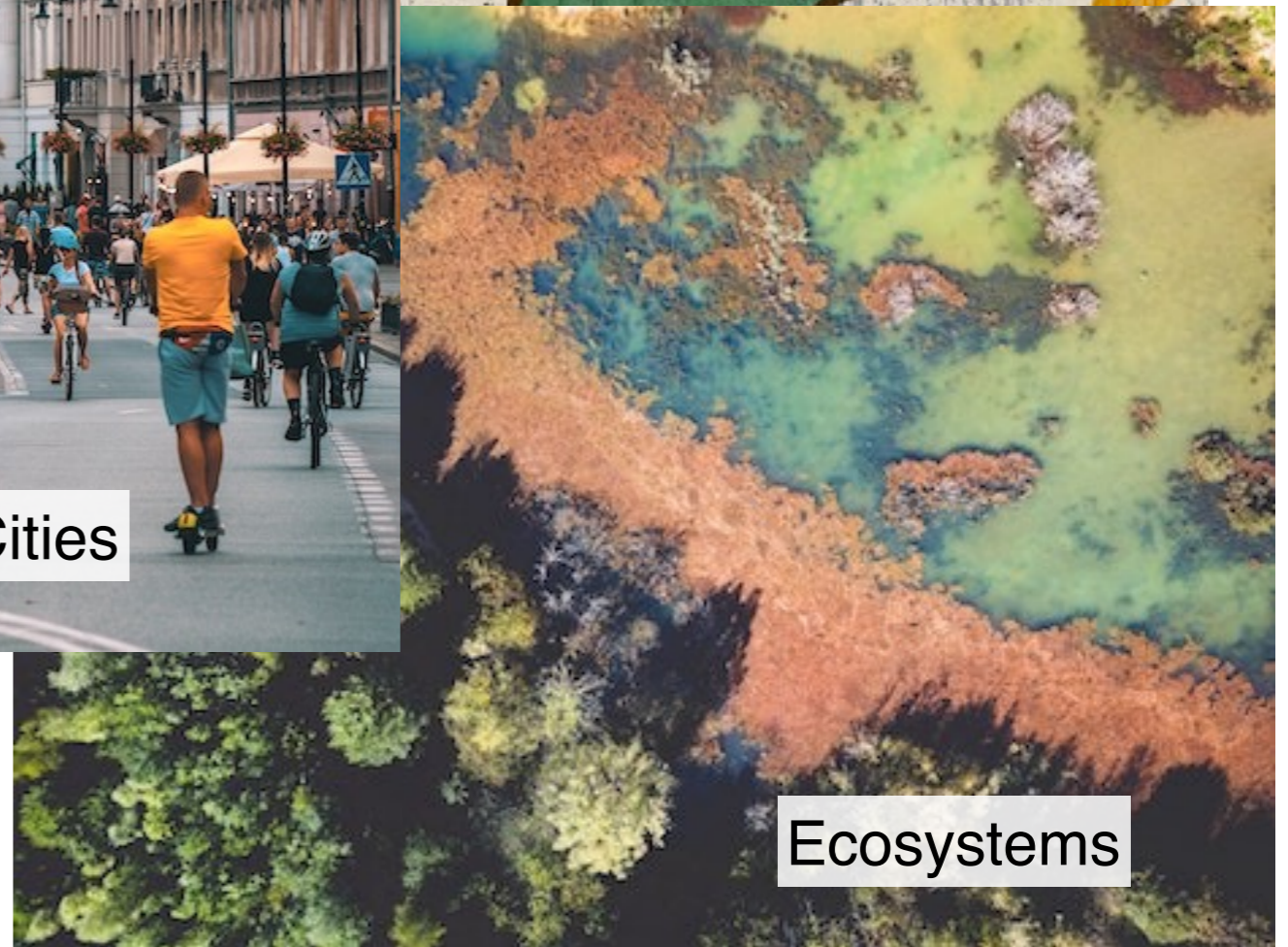
Cities



Psychodynamics

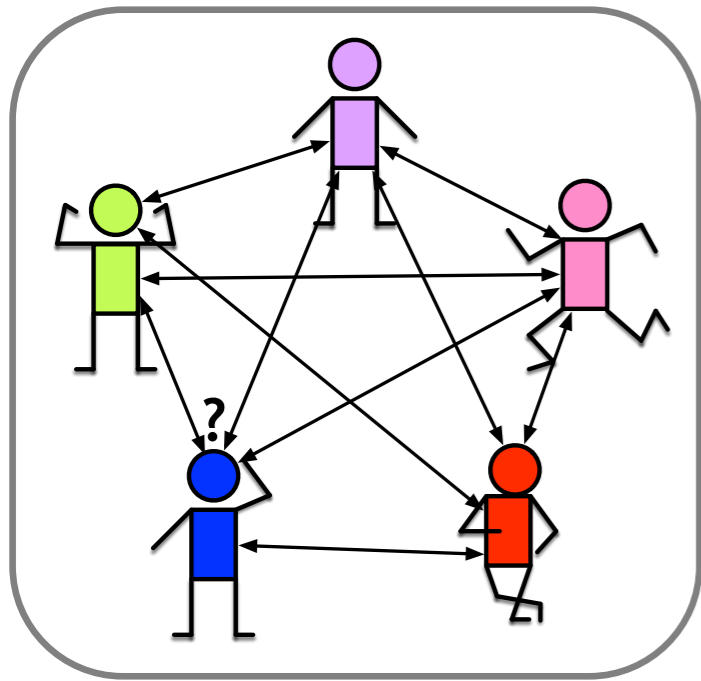


Markets



Ecosystems

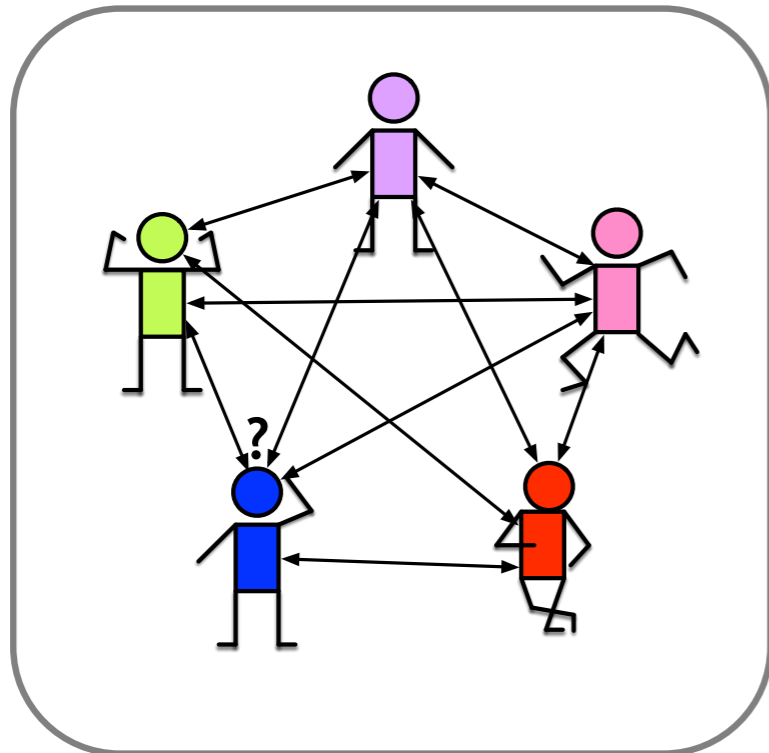
Complex Adaptive Systems



- Many agents/players/nodes
- Interdependent but with some autonomy
- Open systems, dependent on context
- Shaped by their history
- Self-organized through mutual adaptation

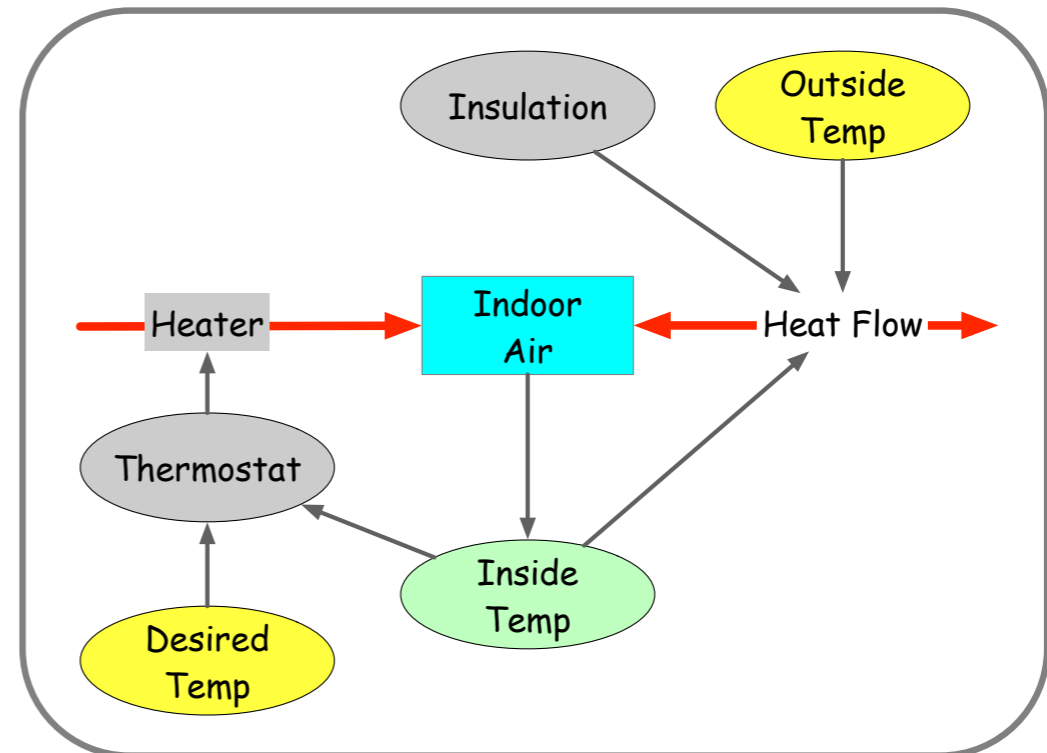
Complex Adaptive Systems

Complex Adaptive



≠

Mechanical



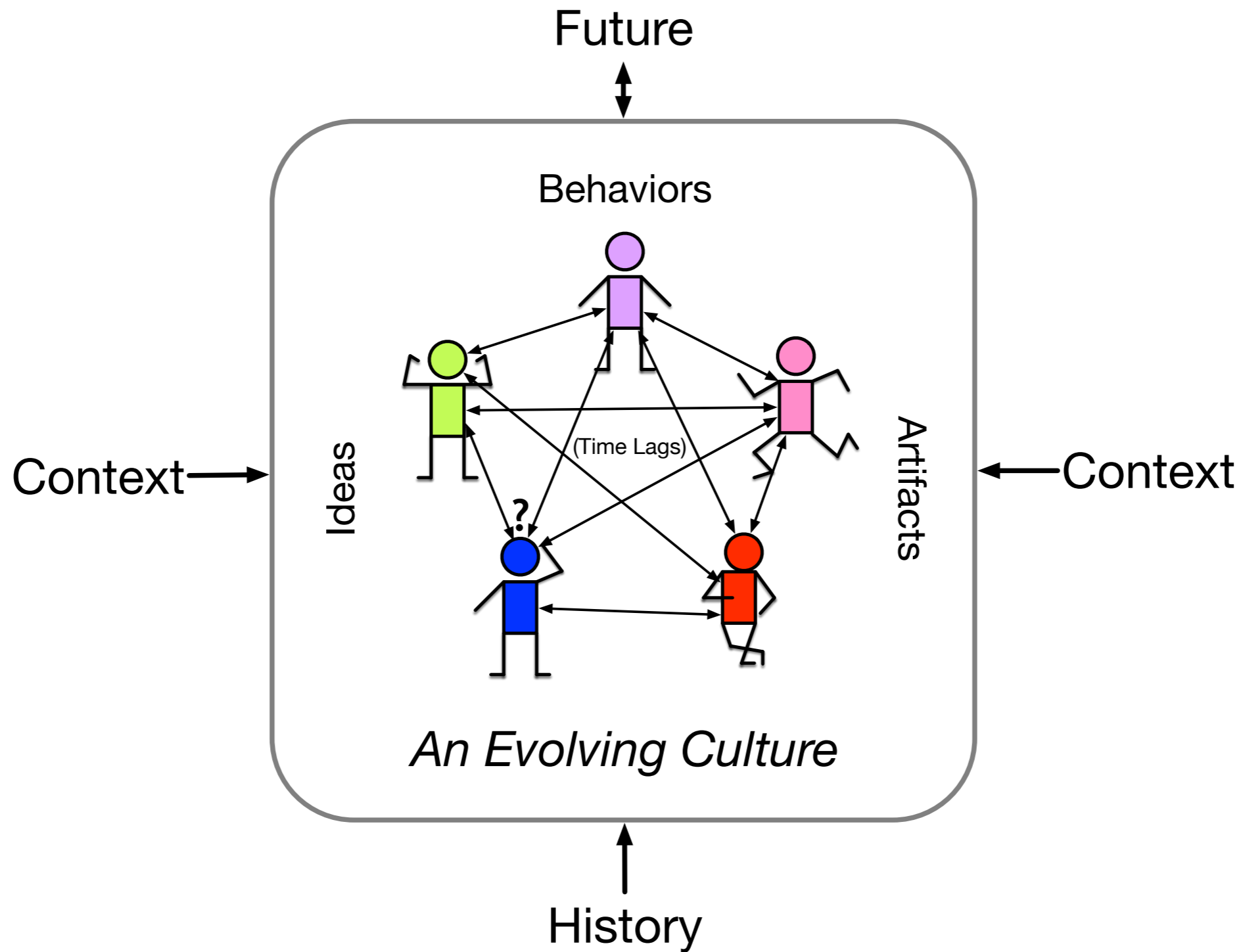
- Many similar nodes
- Unpredictable outcomes
- Self-modifying structure
- Distributed internal control
- Evolve via iteration

- Mostly unique nodes
- Predictable outcomes
- Fixed structure
- Controlled from outside
- Change via intervention

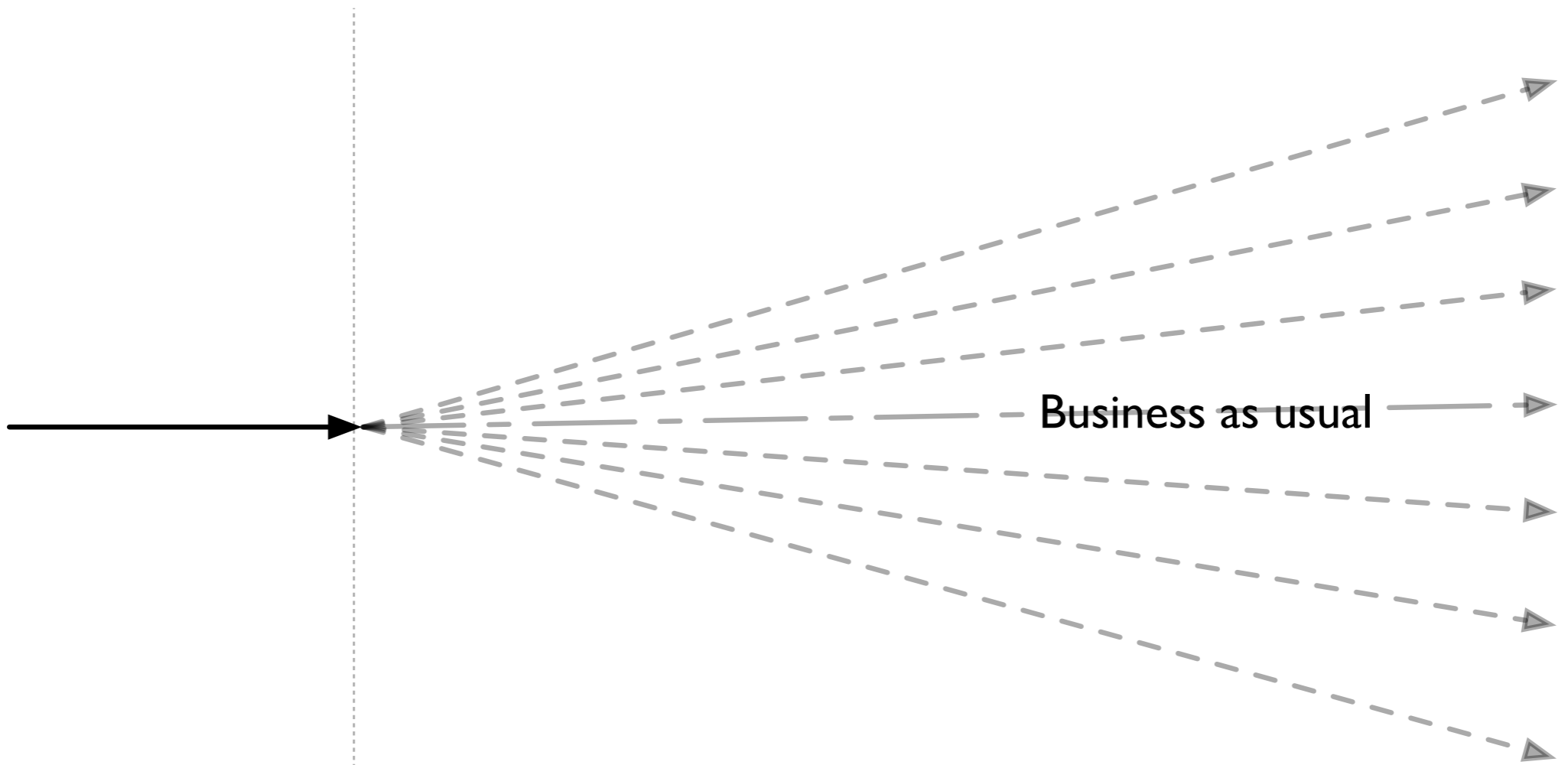
Guidelines for Co-Evolvers - I

- Understand the system around you
- Have a clear sense of direction, a compass; don't fixate on outcomes
- Focus on qualities, not specifications
- Prototype and iterate

Cultural Evolution



Cultural Evolution



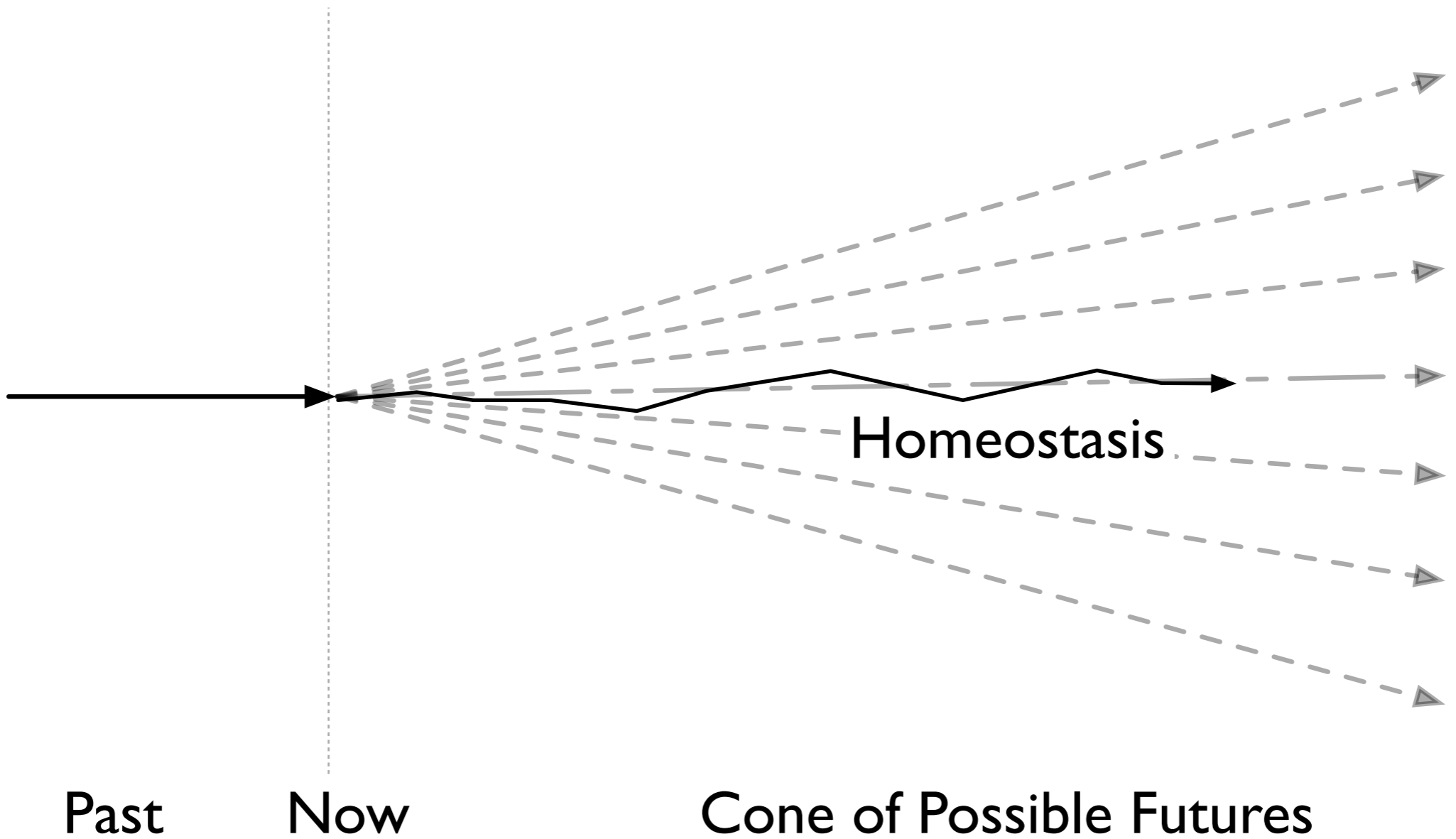
Past

Now

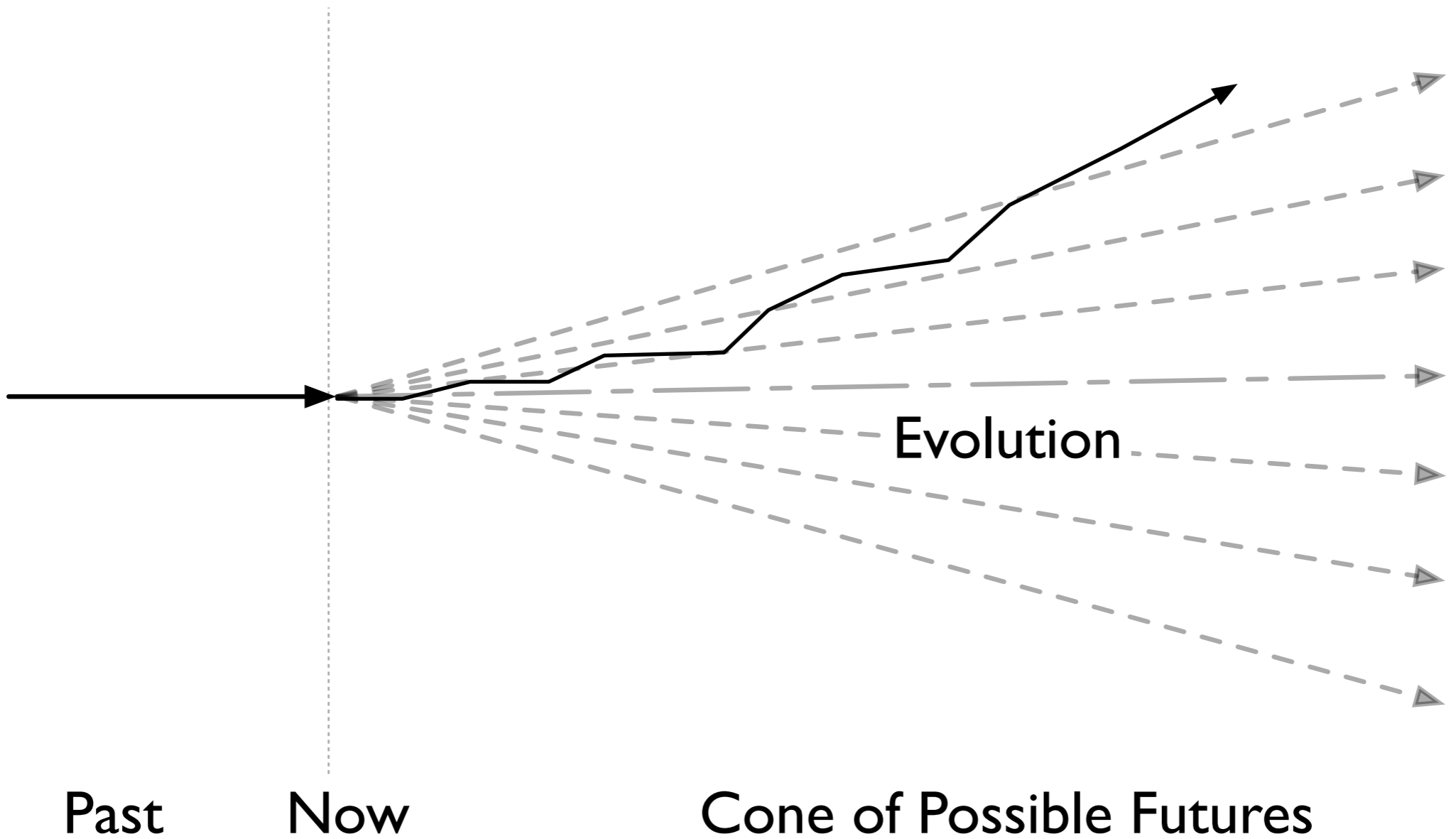
Cone of Possible Futures
“Adjacent Possibles”

Business as usual

Cultural Evolution



Cultural Evolution



Cultural Evolution

Two Strategies

Tear it down first
Build it back later

VS.

Innovate first
Let the old ways
become obsolete

Cultural Evolution

“You never change things by fighting the existing reality. To change something, build a new model that makes the existing model obsolete.” -R. Buckminster Fuller

Cultural Evolution

Innovate

Implement

Communicate

Equation Of Change

Innovate,
Implement,
Communicate



$$\left[\begin{array}{c} \text{Perceived} \\ \text{value of} \\ \text{the new} \end{array} \right] - \left[\begin{array}{c} \text{Perceived} \\ \text{value of} \\ \text{the old} \end{array} \right] > \left[\begin{array}{c} \text{Perceived} \\ \text{cost of the} \\ \text{change} \end{array} \right]$$

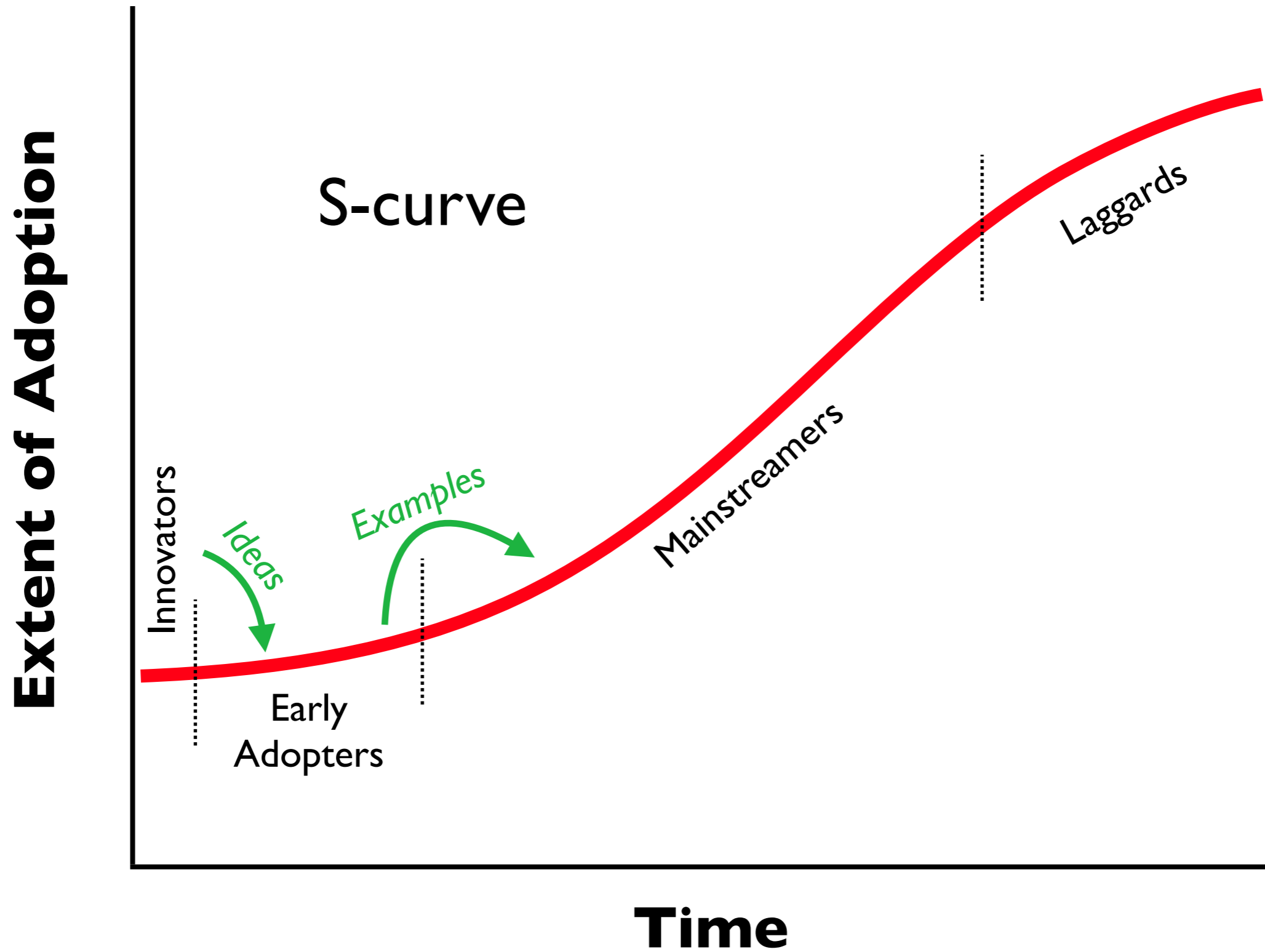


Communicate



Implement,
Communicate

Diffusion of Innovations



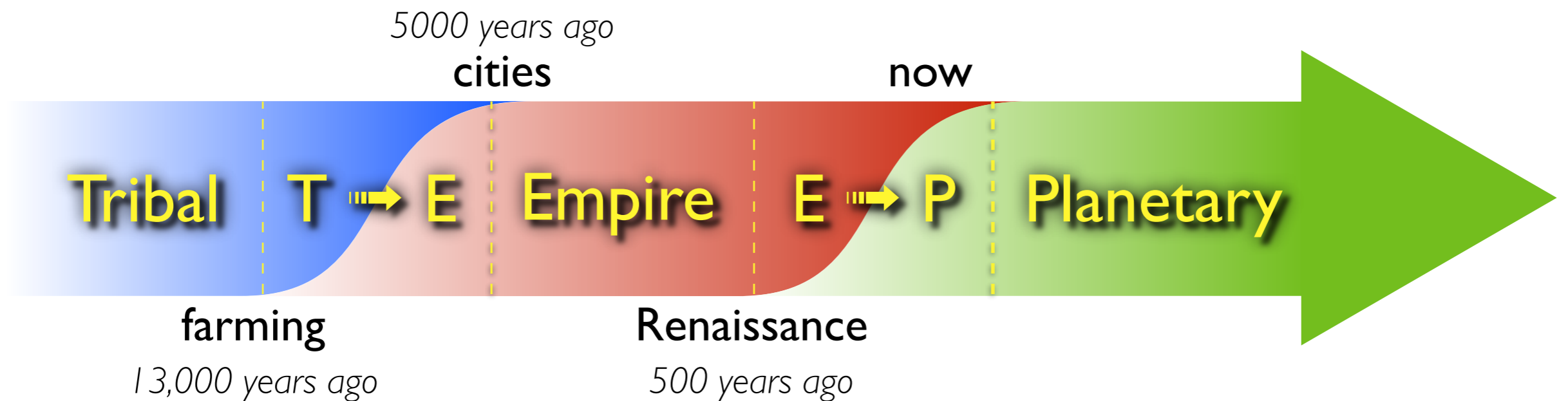
Guidelines for Co-Evolvers - 2

- Build the new; avoid power struggles with the old
- Innovate, implement, communicate
- Focus on the 1st quarter of the diffusion curve
- Help early adopters change their behavior
- Understand your context and its momentum
- Be on the lookout for your next "adjacent possible"
- Be opportunistic with synchronicities

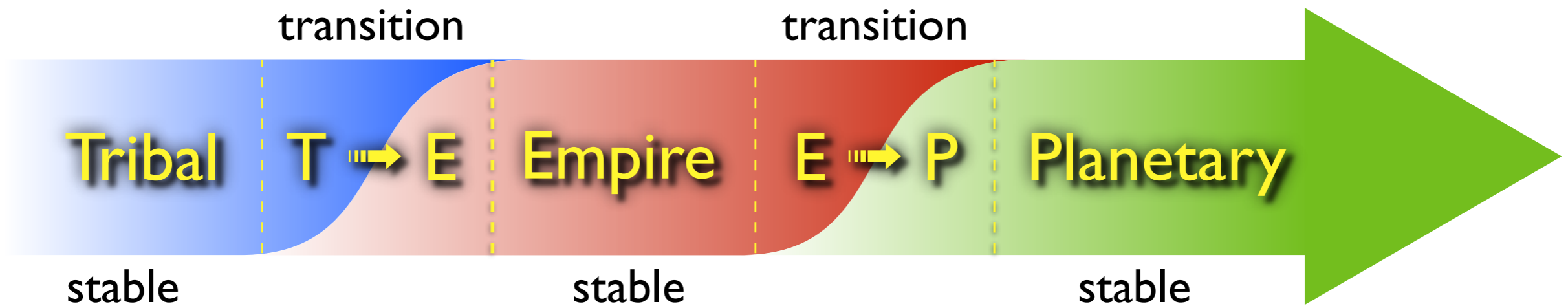
CAS view of cultural history

Tracking the changes over 40,000+ years in ...

- Livelihood
- Advanced form of communication
- Basis of social organization
- Type of leaders



CAS view of cultural history



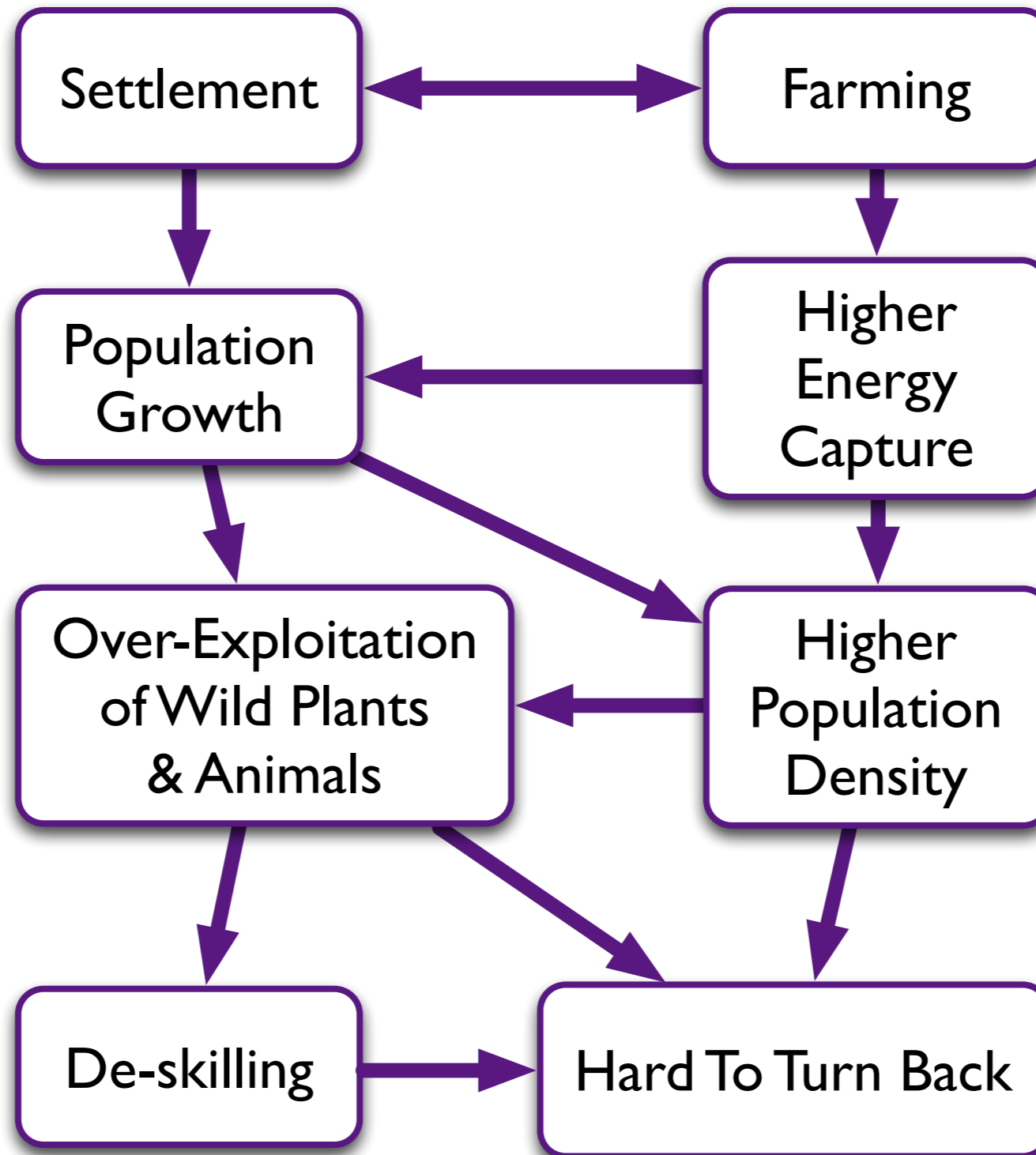
“Punctuated equilibrium”

Tribal Era

- Hunting and gathering
- Spoken language
- Kinship/egalitarian
- Elders



Irreversible Transition to Agriculture



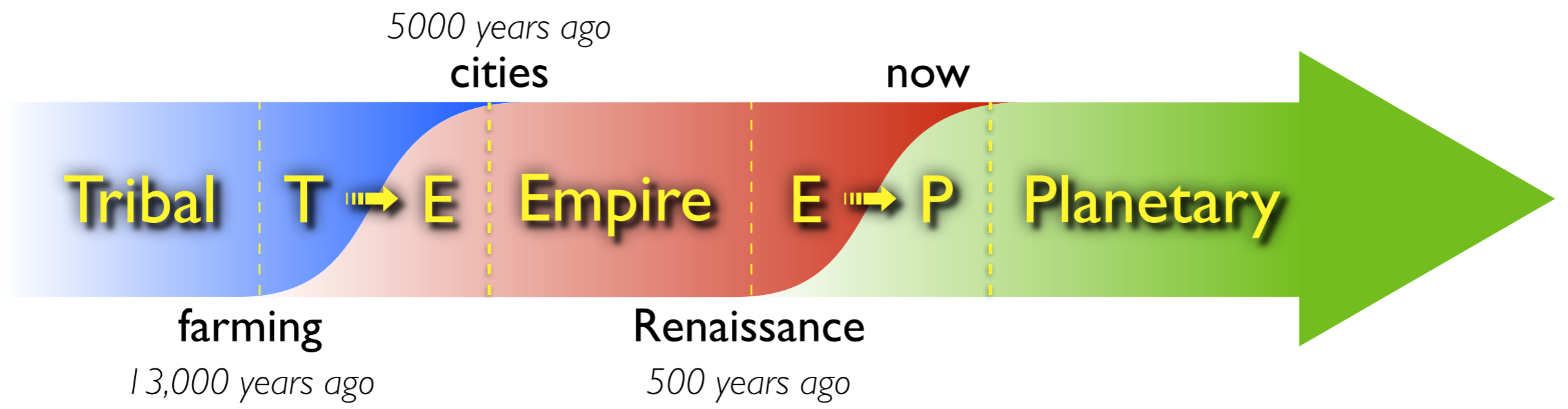
These are really different!

- Hunting and gathering
- Spoken language
- Kinship/egalitarian
- Elders

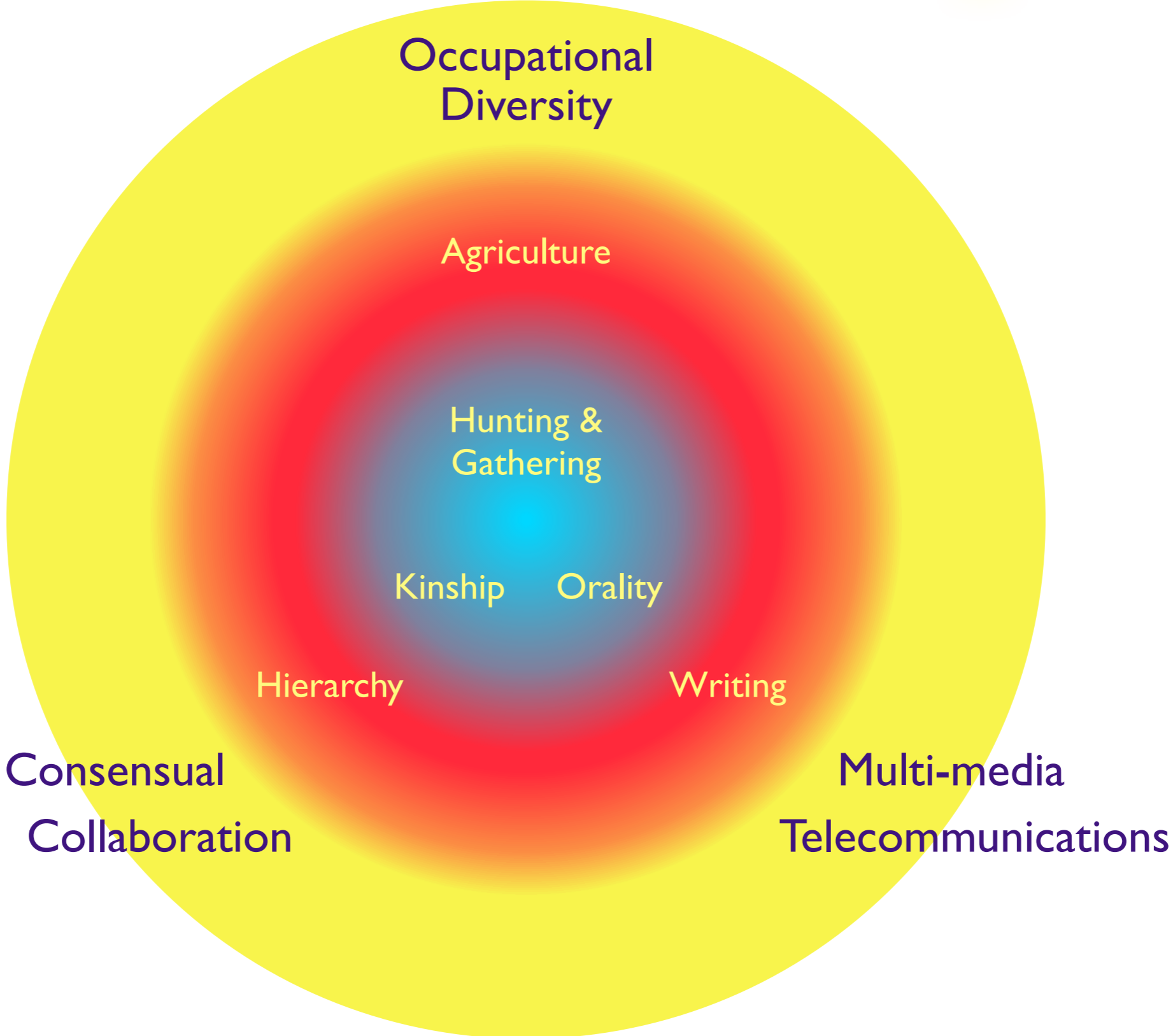
- Agriculture – 90%
- Written language – 10%
- Enforced hierarchy
- Strongmen/dominators



What about the Planetary Era?



What about the Planetary Era?



Occupational
Diversity

Agriculture

Hunting &
Gathering

Kinship Orality

Hierarchy

Writing

Consensual
Collaboration

Multi-media
Telecommunications

Empire-to-Planetary Transition

Reformation

Empire

Planetary

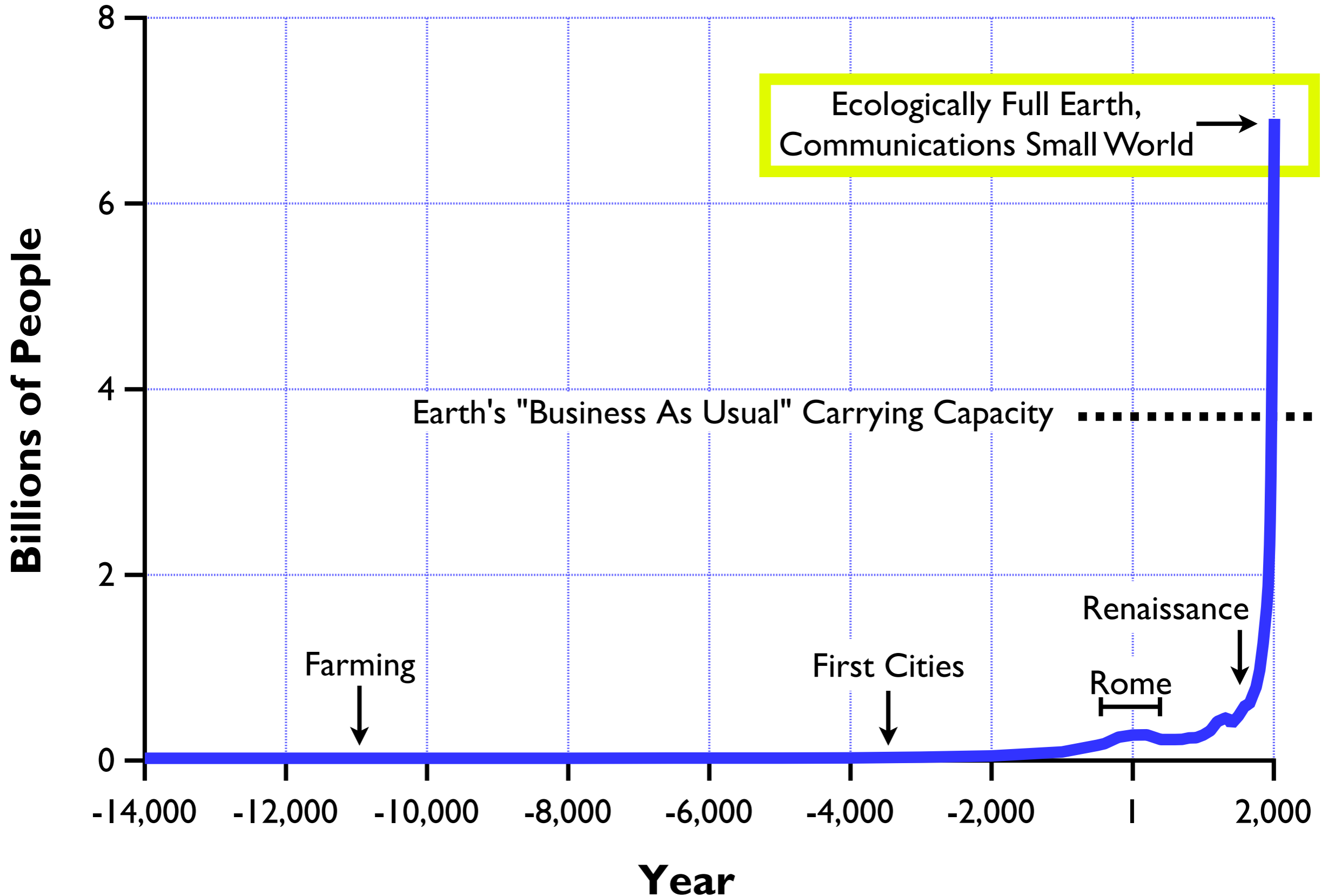
Renaissance

Enlightenment

printing press, natural sciences,
political revolutions, industrial revolution,
market economy, representative government

But modern culture has now created a world
beyond its capacity to cope

We're In A Different World



The Polycrisis

- Secularization and the Meaning Crisis
- Fragmentation and the Reality Crisis
- Atomization and the Belonging Crisis
- Globalization and the Proximity Crisis
- Stimulation and the Sobriety Crisis
- Weaponization and the Warfare Crisis

Peter N. Limberg and Conor Barnes

The Polycrisis

Biosphere Stressors

Climate change, sea-level rise, and changing weather.

Biodiversity loss at 10,000 times the normal level.

Toxification of all life, insect armageddon. Ocean acidification, dead zones, plastics, and fish and plankton depletion.

Declining and polluted fresh water sources. Depleted topsoils. Vanishing forests. COVID and future pandemics.

The Polycrisis

Society Stressors

Poverty, racism, and injustice. Unsustainable economic growth and global debt. Vulnerable financial systems, supply chains, and power grids. Population overshoot, refugee migrations, and resource competition. Uncontrolled technologies, including artificial intelligence, biotech, nanotech, robotics, and cyber threats. Dysfunctional geopolitics, failing states, and outdated institutions. War, terrorism, nuclear threats and excess military expenditures.

The Polycrisis

Technology Stressors

Electromagnetic frequency (EMF) pollution. Uncontrolled technologies: artificial intelligence (AI), biotech, nanotech & robotics. Displacement of people by robots & AI. Cyber threats. Big Data threats to democracy, privacy & human rights. Modification of human germline and bifurcation of the population.

It's overwhelming at this level

We need to go deeper

AoE/Modernist Dysfunctions:

- Clueless about psychodynamics
- Narrow modes of cognition
- Outmoded strategy for success

AoE/Modernist Dysfunctions: Clueless about Psychodynamics

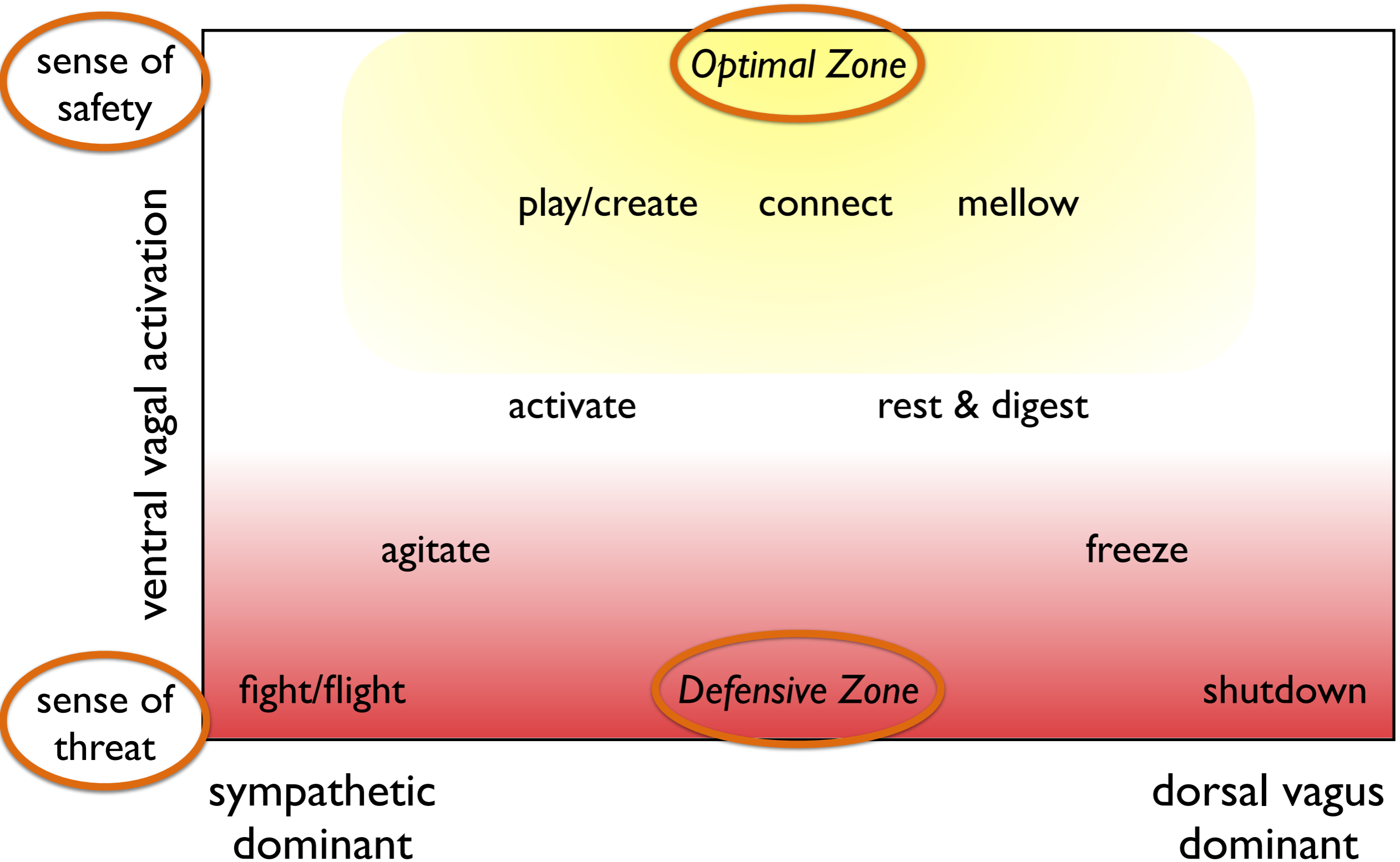
Symptoms/Examples

- Naive rationalism
- “Economic Man”
- Assume most people are psychological healthy
- Trauma is rare
- Convince via argument
- Motivate via fear
- Many similar therapies

Ways Forward

- Optimal Zone understandings and skills for everyone
- Trauma awareness and repair for everyone

Autonomic Nervous System



Optimal Zone

curious

calm

clear-headed

connected

confident

courageous

creative

compassionate

Insight:
I am most useful
when I feel safe

Guidelines for Co-Evolvers - 3

- Learn how to function from your Optimal Zone
- Focus on what you want, not what you don't want
- Motivate through future pull, not fear
- Become aware of your trauma-based defenses and work to unwind them

AoE/Modernist Dysfunctions: Narrow modes of cognition

Symptoms/Examples

- Monopoly of object perception
- Monopoly of categorical thinking
- Monopoly of linguistic thinking
- Illusion of separation
- Pursuit of timeless, context-free, universal “truth”
- Living systems seen as machines
- Individualism that isolates

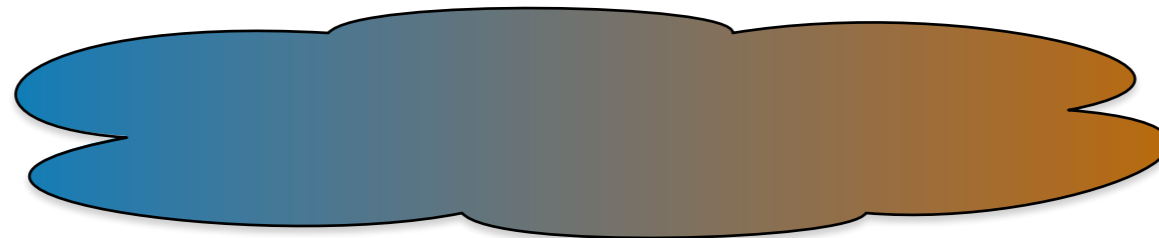
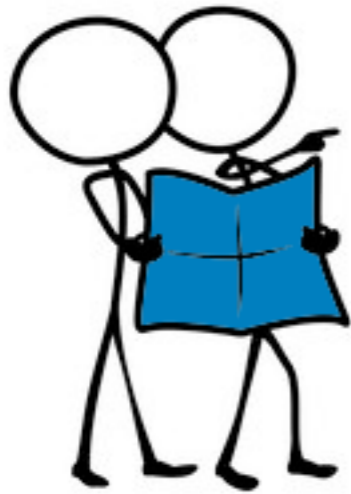
Ways Forward

- Territory perception
- Map thinking
- Visual and kinesthetic thinking
- System awareness and thinking

Territories and Maps

A humble epistemology:

- Territories are full of mystery and depth
- Maps are partial, selective and provisional
- Every symbolic representation is a “map”



Guidelines for Co-Evolvers - 4

- Learn to move between object perception and territory perception
- Learn to move between categorical thinking and system or map thinking
- Learn to move among linguistic, visual and kinesthetic thinking
- Keep learning

AoE/Modernist Dysfunctions: Outmoded strategy for success

Symptoms/Examples

- Belief in domination over self, others and nature
- Organizations as machines
- Bureaucracy as default
- Cultural problem-solving driven by policies and legislation

Ways Forward

- Embody the harmony within, with others and with nature
- Organizations as CASs
- Tree and web structures using consensual collaboration
- Cultural evolution using all the ways forward

In a highly interconnected,
rapidly changing culture

CAS-savvy harmonizers succeed
where dominators can't

Embody the 3 Harmonies

Embody the harmony	within	with others	with nature
for yourself			
in small groups			
to benefit the culture			

Guidelines for Co-Evolvers - 5

- Embody the 3 harmonies
- Use the 3 harmonies as a compass
- Build cultural patterns that embody the 3 harmonies
- See human systems as living systems (CASs)
- Build a rich toolkit; be opportunistic in how you use it
- Network

Climate Change Example

- Science and solutions have been clear for decades
- There *are* brilliant co-evolvers: e.g. Rocky Mountain Institute, Project Drawdown
- “Clueless about psychodynamics:” e.g. attempting to convince via arguments, motivating via fear, failing to understand emotional objections, activists on both sides unaware of their trauma-based motivations
- “Narrow modes of cognition:” e.g. categorical polarities like jobs vs climate, compartmentalized approach to nature
- “Outmoded strategy for success:” e.g. economic system built for self-interest, unrealistic expectations for government, accounting system that externalizes shared costs

The Meta-Strategy: Bright Future Network

Many cultural co-evolvers
building new cultural patterns
that embody the 3 harmonies,
networked in mutual support and collaboration

The Meta-Strategy: Bright Future Network

- a CAS community of good will
- with shared understandings
- with shared communications tools
- a living laboratory for building new cultural DNA
- an incubator for new projects
- in a co-created evolving culture

We'd love to have you join us!

May you find
your way forward
as an effective
cultural co-evolver

Thank you

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