

## The Normal is Over

### Summary of lecture by Otto van Veen, The Netherlands, MSc Psychology November 28 , 2018 Lodz

I suffer from a specific, serious disease. And most probably I am not the only one in this lecture room today or in the world. This disease is chronic and almost incurable. Its name is PROCRASTINATION!

In popular language: the '**postponement**' disease. The tendency to postpone or even avoid important duties until the last moment. A phenomenon well known by students when they must prepare for exams. We can distinguish procrastination from normal delay or task aversion because procrastination manifests itself when it is about important events despite its negative consequences. Therefore, I added the adjective 'serious'.

The problem is that procrastination is widespread. Many other humans, decision makers, professionals, politicians, who are **responsible for our Quality of Life**, suffer heavily as well. Think about Katowice where about 20.000 participants from 200 countries will gather for the COP24 Climate Conference at the time I am writing this paper. Even though they rationally are convinced of the necessity to come to action to improve the **Quality of Life** by fighting the Carbon Footprint, they mainly talk, talk and talk instead of taking responsibility through concrete actions and a fair division of effort and spending between states, industries and citizens.

Will participants be able to overcome their procrastination behavior since the first report of the Club of Rome report in 1972? I am crossing my fingers and hope that activist young people might take over and come to concrete action. Let's make a clear statement here today in December 2018 as well: The *Normal* is Over

### We need more Imagination

I am here to challenge students and practitioners from the world of Design & Art to step out of their comfort zone and to inspire Ecologists, Scientists, Politicians, Economists with their *imagination*, new ideas and concepts in order to challenge them to break with the dominant economical tradition at the expense of our quality of life. What we need in the whole process of future development is Imagination, Creativity and Fun. You are the experts in that field. Up until now citizens and consumers are mainly supplied with bad news and horror scenarios by Ecologists, Scientists, Politicians and Friedman ( 'free market') Economists. Back to the disease. I will take you on a short journey through my reflections and leave it to you to draw your conclusions.

### What is the problem?

Procrastination, why is it so hard to cure? Are we aware of the symptoms that cause this disease? Is it self-interest or egoism? I think that one of the real causes is a 'virus' which is deeply embedded in our belief system. From the moment we are born we are immersed in a continuing stream of information about do's and don'ts reframed in patterns of beliefs and habits. Mainly by education. We are either individually or collectively *programmed* on how to behave in certain circumstances, in such a way that showing this behavior happens more or less automatically. Without thinking. We just act as we do, and we feel comfortable with it based on our internal guidelines and values.

The name of this 'virus' is **PARADIGM**. From the Greek word "Paradeima" which means pattern, model, example. This concept was launched **Joel Barker**, author of 'The Future Edge' (1992)

He is wondering about how it can happen that sometimes important events in our life space are invisible for us. WE JUST DON't SEE them. And even when we see them, we don't understand them. It is as if our perception and understanding are filtered, blocked or narrowed by tunnel vision. We don't see warning signals or other events that can affect our lives. We behave like sleepwalkers. My hope for today is that we are with a lot of 'doctors' in this aula who can cure the victims of Procrastination. Let us first try to discover how the Paradigm virus presents itself under the microscope:

- |               |                       |
|---------------|-----------------------|
| ⊙ Theories    | ⊙ Patterns            |
| ⊙ Models      | ⊙ Mind-sets           |
| ⊙ Methods     | ⊙ Values              |
| ⊙ Principles  | ⊙ Frames of reference |
| ⊙ Standards   | ⊙ Traditions          |
| ⊙ Protocol    | ⊙ Customs             |
| ⊙ Routines    | ⊙ Rituals             |
| ⊙ Assumptions | ⊙ Heroes              |
| ⊙ Conventions | ⊙ Worldviews          |
| ⊙ Language    | ⊙ Dogma's             |

What do they have in common? Which characteristics do they share? Do you see how they influence your life? Paradigms are deeply embedded in our mental and emotional system. We obtain them by our education, the country culture where we live, our professional world, religion, family, friends and enemies and the way we deal with social media. They are a kind of guidelines that show how we should behave in certain circumstances. About reward and punishment, about belonging to a group or being excluded. Once a paradigm has been settled it is not easy to change.

Unconsciously and automatically they offer comfort and certainty. Paradigms are not good or bad. They are normal, they are a corner stone of our comfort zone. Without Paradigms we could not live our daily lives in a normal way. Imagine that you would have to think all day on how to act. The proof of the power of a certain paradigm happens when you either feel not comfortable in certain circumstances (places, people, discussions) or are 'impressed' by the paradigms that are held by other people. They play a major role in our communication with others and a major source of mutual misunderstandings or conflicts.

Both last remarks are strongly related to the discussion of behavioral change within the frame of the climate debate between ecologists, politicians, scientists, business people, economists and bankers.

If paradigms are learned during our lives, we also should be able to 'unlearn' them. If we can unlearn smoking or other addictions, we can also alter our paradigms. Can we unlearn our cultural programming after living in a different culture? We all know the difficulties of changing daily habits

and comfortable beliefs (even if they are wrong). The deeper paradigms are embedded in our behavioral patterns, the more difficult they will be to review, change or replace.

Let us look at the characteristics of Paradigms according to Joel Barker who describes a paradigm as a set of (mostly unwritten) rules or regulations that:

- ⦿ define the **boundaries** in our behavioral space, or ‘playing field, the game we are in, (What)
- ⦿ tell us **how to behave** inside these boundaries: the rules of the game (How)
- ⦿ do not come by nature, but by ‘nurture’
- ⦿ are necessary, common, useful and normal
- ⦿ can cause other options/paradigms of others to be invisible

In the ‘Hammer-Nail’ problems are defined within the knowledge paradigm of the specialist. ‘As long you only know to handle a hammer, you define every problem as a nail’. For example 2 or 3 different physiotherapists who all claim to have the best treatments for the pain in your back. Or consultancy firms who, whatever your problem may be, always claim that they can solve it, regardless of their specialism. Beware of consultancy firms!

Once you are familiar with how to operate in a certain environment, like the university, it will be a paradigm change when you become an employee in a banking office. The organizational cultures are different. Cultures are ‘jungles’ of paradigms. It may even happen that you feel so comfortable in your existing paradigm, that you are not aware that you suffer from *paradigm paralysis* that has turned into so called ‘learned helplessness’. Look on You Tube: “Stuck on an Elevator”

### The Comfort Paradox

We know now from what kind of disease we suffer (Procrastination) and by which ‘virus’ it is caused (Paradigms). Can we cure this disease which is known as ‘incurable’? Paradigms offer us a lot of comfort. So, why change? Or how? On the other hand, there are moments in our lives that we can’t continue in the same way as we did. We have to break through the vicious circle of the Comfort **Paradox**, the ‘normal’.

### The Comfort Paradox



**If I keep looking as I always did ,  
I keep thinking how I always thought  
and keep believing what I always believed  
so , I will continue to do what I always did  
and therefore, what happens to me  
will remain the same as always happens to me**

What does that say? It says that we must change our point of view, deliberately or voluntary, in freedom or under pressure, as soon as we want to change our beliefs and consequent acting. We must become aware of our paradigms and *worldviews* and their meaning and influence on our behavior. Generally, we feel resistance when we 'must' instead of 'want'. We must check the balance between win and lose. Because to prohibit something leaves a negative taste in our mouth. Choosing by free will is more likely to change our behavior and leads to a win : a more positive and rewarding result. "I must stop smoking "is saying goodbye to a guilty pleasure and the risk of serious health problems, whilst the promise of a healthier life sounds more pleasant. But when we *don't see* the better alternative, we will defend the old choice. In the discussion about CO2 reduction we do not experience any *future* benefit because it doesn't match yet with the costs and efforts we must make *today*. Satisfaction on the long term is quite different from satisfaction on the short term. Psychological research has shown that we most people prefer the direct reward even when the future reward is bigger. Some people say 'I prefer what I have, because I don't know what I will get' The message from Paris 2015 and Katowice 2018 is that we must prevent a decrease/diminishment in our quality by scarfying a comfortable life with a CO2 emissions. This is hard to imagine in reality.

### Comforting lies and inconvenient truths

The first step to paradigm change is to open our eyes, not by learning to look, but by learning to SEE. We are so familiar with our daily habits and routines that we hardly can say 'Yes' to other ideas. It is so much easier to say 'No' to a new idea. After all, by the Evolution we are lazy creatures, who prefer to live with as little energy consumption as possible. Our brain is constructed in such a way that it first filters inconvenient information in the primary visual cortex at the backside of our brain before it is sent to the frontal lobe where our thinking skills are located. Information that does not match our routines or paradigms will initially be rejected. Thinking consumes energy, so we try to postpone thinking for as long as we feel physically and mentally comfortable. Resistance to change or to accept another truth therefore is not only emotional but also physical. The outcome here is that we are more attracted by **Comforting lies than Unpleasant truths.**



We all know both famous films produced by Davis Guggenheim and presented by Al Gore: An Inconvenient Truth part 1 (2006) and part 2 (2017). They are still relevant and current. If you want to learn something about 'paradigms in action' find a moment to see both films and the 10 years 'gap' between them. Global Warming is the central topic.

### The Paradigm Shift moment

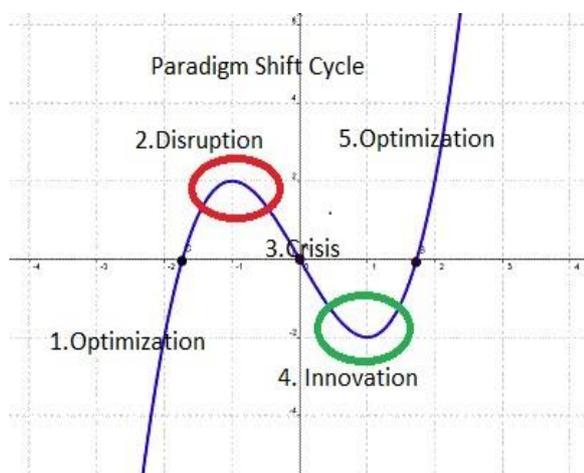
A real paradigm shift can be caused by a dramatic change in your cultural or professional environment. The birth of the first child, a divorce or the death of beloved person. Facing a serious disease or a severe accident. What these shifts have in common is their disruptive character: disturbance, disordering, disarranging, upsetting, confusion etc. Disruption prevents human beings,

organizations, communities or processes or events from continuing 'as usual' or as expected. Moments like that cause a break with the traditional way things have been going.

Look at our topic for today in Lodz: Eco Make: *in search of the Responsible Human*. We are in the midst of the discussion about global warming. While I am writing, Katowice is the central spot in the world where thousands of Politicians, Ecologists, Scientists, Economists, Business and Financial specialists (6 different Worldviews!) are staring in the deep abyss of Procrastination. Will they be able to jump over it and finally collectively start to act, instead of continuing to talk? Will they take responsibility for the Quality of Life (QOL) for the future generations or is it the Quantity of Money (QOM) that will dominate the decision-making process? How to bridge the gap between long term benefits and short-term costs. Will they be able to create a smooth transition to a CO2 free world by incremental changes, or do we need a disruptive event that speeds up the decision making in a more chaotic way? Should we wait for a so-called Black Swan? (Nassim Taleb, 2008)

Maybe it will be helpful if we use the Optimization-Innovation cycle of change. On the one hand the **Optimization** paradigm says that we move forward step-by-step by Repair & Improvement of the existing situation. This approach matches best the mindset of the Adaptors and Procrastinators. The **Innovation** paradigm says that we first need a disruption and crisis followed by Redesign & Innovation. This approach fits more in the mindset of Innovators and artists.

The so called Back-to-Zero situation which can be the start of a new paradigm and optimization process:



- 1) Optimization:** incremental change, step by step, doing things *better*, Repair & Improve
- 2) Disruption:** foreseen but unexpected event that cause an irreversible situation. The Normal is Over.
- 3) Crisis:** back to zero, collapse of familiar values, despair, but activation the search for new ideas
- 4) Eureka moment:** first seeds of a new paradigm, breakthrough to new beliefs, doing things *differently*, Redesign and Invent, Innovation
- 5) Optimization of the new paradigm,** step by step, doing better & better with the new paradigm.

### The Role of Designers and Artists

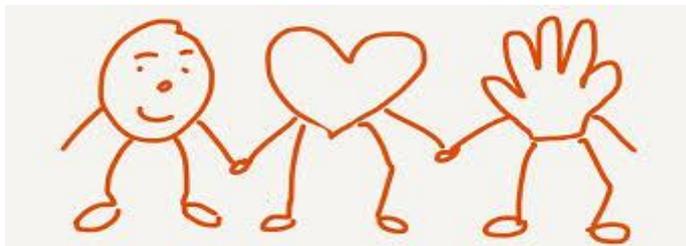
Up until now we have seen that people from very different backgrounds, imprisoned in a huge variety of paradigms, suffer from the Procrastination disease. Then there is the 'man-in-the-street' who tries to form his judgment in the jungle of TV and social media information which are repeating only one dominant message about the climate change : the normal is over (warnings) , but sorry guys, although we know the solutions, we will not take actions because it costs too much money unless you have to pay for it. So, what? Talk, talk, talk. As long as old paradigms stay dominant (comfortable lies) over the new ones (inconvenient truths) it will be very difficult to break the vicious circle.

Why are all experts unable to turn the negative picture of Earth 's future into a positive one? If all the message is to warn and scare us, it will be hard to seduce society to change its behavior. It is easier to change based on a positive motivation (we win if we play the new game) than from a negative one (we will lose if we continue the actual game). Nevertheless, the negative motivation dominates. Why? Because the same people who spread the daily bad news are unable to turn their message into a positive image of the future. They lack *imagination, creativity and humor*. They are unable to touch the right emotional button in the hearts of citizens and communities.

Therefore, I think designers and artists can make the difference. They can open our eyes to ideas that are invisible because we ourselves are caught too much by our structured ways of living. They have the courage to bring forward new visions in an unusual way. They could be the eye-openers the society needs so much. I am not only talking about the design of 'things' but also of society.

A warning: **be aware of your own paradigms**. You are the first ones who should learn to look beyond your own comfort zone and how it feels 'out there'. Immerse yourself in the world of the others and try to accomplish your task as innovators by integrating Eco Make as your new paradigm. Whatever you do, in education, product design, services, or in the discussion with clients and colleagues, try to make clear your contribution to the future Quality of Life. Especially when you are still a student. You must *cooperate with other disciplines* . You can learn so much and add so much value because changing ecological paradigms in society is a collective process.

Try to seduce engineers, marketeers and financial guys. You are in the middle of the battlefield between Quality of Life (QOL) and Quantity of Money (QOM). Start with envisioning and anticipating what is invisible now or appearing at the horizon.



**With your personal toolkit :**

Heart, Head, Hands, in that order. All change starts with the *heart*, with the emotion. To hit the emotion of people is the first step to success

Remember the rules:

- ⦿ When a paradigm changes, everyone goes back to zero
- ⦿ A Paradigm shift is a change to a new Game and a new set of Rules

**And work with the Joel Barker's paradigm shift question:**

What do I believe is impossible **today**, but, if it could be done, would create fundamental change in society?

And who else **outside** my field, might be interested in my unsolved questions?

**Just do it, no Procrastination anymore, destroy the obsolete Paradigms.** Fight against this Virus.