



WHAT PLANET ARE YOU ON?

MINDSETS AND WORLD VIEWS

When campaigning on climate change, we environmentalists believe our message should be heard by all. After all, the problem will affect everyone. We get the seriousness of the situation, so why shouldn't you? And then, only the usual suspects turn up to our workshops, the same faithful journalists cover our press releases, and the tabloid newspapers continue to avoid us like the plague. As for the politicians, are they all thick?

We forget that you can't treat people as a homogeneous group. Not everyone is like us. Sadly, there is no one size that fits all.

At a very basic level, we need to understand that very often, people who are struggling, whether under financial, physical or emotional pressure, often just don't have time or energy left over to help save the world. They won't be turning up to our demonstrations, or writing to their local TD's. Even if they know they have every reason to be concerned, they may not have the oomph to take a stand. And who can blame them? The stresses of looking after young children, of caring for elderly or disabled relatives or dealing with ill health, or unemployment can be immense. We therefore cannot presume that parents of young children will be more concerned about climate change because they are worried about their children's future. Nor can we take for granted that people who were recently flooded will be out waving Climate Chaos banners, or that farmers with sodden crops will sign our petition.

On a deeper psychological level, people may not respond to our message because they see the world in a different way. They may have a different mindset or be motivated in distinct ways. They may have an alternative view on life.

HIERARCHY OF NEEDS

In 1943, US psychologist, Abraham Maslow, published a paper called *A Theory of Human Motivation*, which mapped out a pyramid of human needs. At the bottom of this hierarchy are the basic requirements, and as people move upwards their needs become increasingly psychological and social. Maslow was



particularly interested in the top level of self-actualization, which he saw as a process of growing and achieving individual potential. He also believed that these needs resemble instincts and play a major role in motivating behaviour.

The theory suggests that our most basic requirements must be met before we can aspire to attaining the secondary or higher level needs. So, if you live in poverty, your main aim is to get food, shelter, and the necessities for life, and to feel safe and secure – and you may not have much time left over to worry about climate change. Once these basic needs are met, people are more motivated to acquire “outer-directed” social needs, such as love, belongingness and esteem and self respect, both for themselves and others. Maslow proposed that people then look for “inner-directed”, growth related, self actualisation needs, which lead to an emphasis on morality, creativity, spontaneity, problem solving, and a lack of prejudice. This theory may explain why environmental and social justice issues are of more concern to the middle classes.

MOTIVATIONAL GROUPS

The authors of *Positive Energy*¹ refer to a well established segmentation model, which, drawing on Maslow’s theory, identifies three broad motivational groups covering the general population. Each group has its own emotional needs and very different attitudes towards risk.

1 Pioneers - the inner-directed or pioneers of change are strongly motivated by ethical concerns and stimulated by new ideas and ways of doing things. They seek meaning in life and new truths and look ahead to new horizons. They like change, discovery and the unknown, and are not worried about status. They often become activists (that’s us) and their action mode is DIY. Pioneers make up 35% of the UK population. This group is expected to grow over the next forty years as people satisfy their outer directed needs.

2 Prospectors - the outer directed status seekers who place a high value on success and wealth. They scale things up, become managers and follow fashion. They like earning and spending money and see the world as a big opportunity. They tend to be ambitious and position and power are important to them. In the past 25 years, this has been the largest and the fastest-growing group, most strongly represented by middle-income women and teenagers. Prospectors make up 44% of the UK population.

3 Settlers - the security and sustenance driven people, who are more concerned with their home-base, tradition and belonging. They tend to look backwards, to yesteryear (which was better) and dislike change, or anything new or different, as this threatens their identity and their sense of belonging, security and safety. Financial security is of high importance, and money is spent cautiously. They don’t like challenging authority, and are open to messages from people in authority. Settlers make up 21% of the British population.

¹ S Retallack, T Lawrence & M Lockwood (2007) *Positive Energy*; p. 142

ALTERNATIVE PERCEPTIONS OF REALITY

In the first chapter of *Clumsy Solutions for a Complex World*,² the authors, Marco Verweij & Michael Thompson, ask a number of questions: If we continue to accumulate greenhouse gases, will catastrophic consequences occur?; Does climate change put the future of the world at risk?; Can only a radical reallocation of global wealth and power rescue us?; Or should people chill out as technological progress will see us through in the end?

They argue that people understand a phenomenon like global warming, and indeed almost any major social and political problem, in different ways which are derived from alternative perceptions of reality. These alternative ways of understanding the world justify, represent, and emerge from different approaches to organising social relations. Therefore, successful solutions to pressing social ills must be creative, flexible and above all “clumsy”.

Using the framework of cultural theory of risk proposed by Mary Douglas and Aaron Wildavsky,³ the authors claim that there are four primary ways of organising, perceiving, and justifying social relations, or, more simply put, “ways of life” - *egalitarianism, hierarchy, individualism, and fatalism*.

These different forms of association tend to produce alternative ways of perceiving nature and human nature, which then determine the policy prescriptions that follow. They also reflect the different views people have on the relationship between the individual and society, and they offer a rich insight into how, and why, people perceive risks in different ways.

Cultural theory assumes that the four organisational principles are constantly interacting – forever merging, splitting and recombining – in unpredictable ways, at every level of social organisation. This can result in an endlessly changing, infinitely varied, and complex social world.

- 1 Egalitarianism** - nature is seen as fragile and intricately interconnected, and man is essentially caring (until corrupted by coercive hierarchical institutions); we must all tread lightly on the earth; equal distribution is important; voluntary simplicity is the only solution to our environmental problems and the precautionary principle must be enforced; group oriented; people are equal, joined together through voluntary associations and few governing rules; the climate system is in a precarious and delicate state of balance and the slightest disturbance by humans can trigger a collapse; risks are frightening and may spiral out of control.

- 2 Hierarchy** - the world is controllable and nature is tolerant, if treated with care within limits; man is malleable, deeply flawed but redeemable by firm, long-lasting and trustworthy institutions; group oriented; fair distribution is ensured through a strong social structure of rank, role and need, governed by rules; the climate system is to a certain degree uncontrollable, but can be resilient if suitably managed by certified experts; greater knowledge is required to manage the risks.

- 3 Individualism** - nature is benign and resilient, able to recover from exploitation; man is essentially self-seeking and unconnected; trial and error (unfettered markets) is the way to go; outcomes are a personal responsibility; not group oriented although co-operation is valued if it is seen to be in one’s best interests; little emphasis on conventions or rules; any risks introduced by climate change are viewed as manageable and despite the impact of humans, the earth’s climate will re-establish itself at a tolerable level.

² (Eds.) Marco Verweij & Micheal Thompson (2006) *Clumsy Solutions for a Complex World*

³ Mary Douglas & Aaron Wildavsky (1982); *Risk and Culture*

4 Fatalism - nature is a lottery; man is fickle and untrustworthy; fairness is not to be found in this life; there is no possibility of effecting change for the better; outcomes are a function of chance; not group-oriented; see themselves as isolated individuals within a stratified and rule-bound society; climate change is seen as fundamentally unpredictable, influenced by a multiplicity of factors, of which humans are but one; climate has always presented risks to humanity and will continue to do so in the future, so why bother?

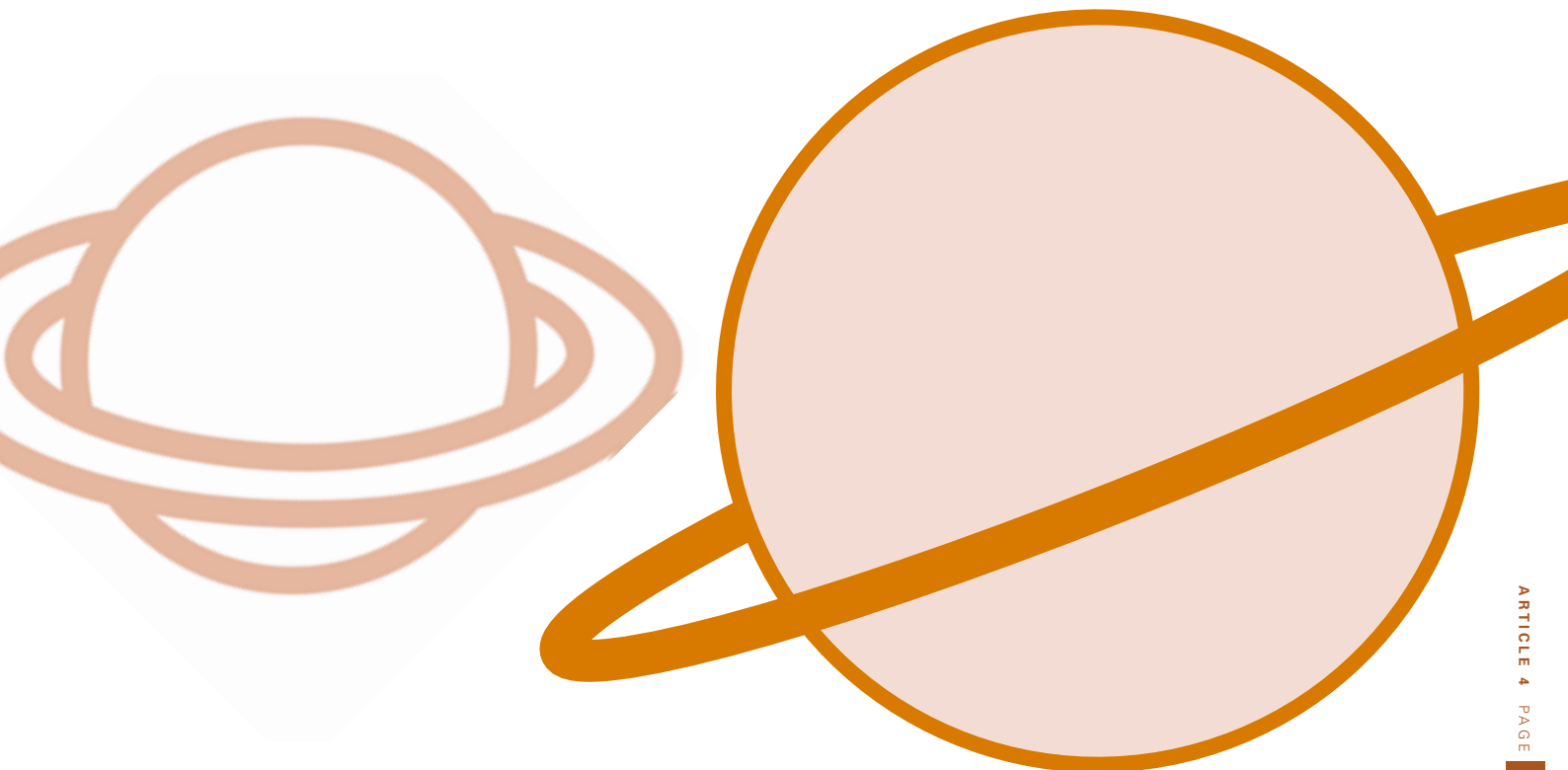
DIFFERING WORLD VIEWS

Political and social viewpoints on how society should be organised can also provide frames within which people see and respond to issues such as climate change.

Two opposing ideologies particularly evident in the United States are those presented by conservatives and liberals.

1 Conservatives - generally believe in individual freedom, tradition, moral values and a society with small government. Their political demands usually include low taxes, minimal welfare provisions and particularly in the US the right to carry guns and an aversion to free healthcare. They are most likely to vote Republican. Conservatives believe that the role of government should be to provide people the freedom necessary to pursue their own goals. They are more likely to be sceptical of climate change.

2 Liberals - generally believe in liberty, equality and a benign but active state. They support free and fair elections, civil liberties, human rights and freedom of the press and the welfare state. Liberals usually rail against corruption and the power of large corporations and wealthy social and political elites. They are most likely to vote for the Democrats. Liberals believe the role of government should be to ensure that no one is in need. They are more likely to accept climate change.



The trouble with mindsets, personality groupings and different ideologies is that issues are not seen on their merits, but rather they get filtered through each person's belief system, and appropriately tweaked along the way.

So the message is seen in different ways by different people. Not only that, the message may also be seen in a different way because the messenger is perceived to have certain beliefs or world views, or to be a certain kind of person.

In general, environmentalists fall into the liberal camp and climate sceptics are quite likely to be conservative. And it would appear that we drive many conservatives like Guardian journalist, Brendan O'Neill, mad.

*"Liberty - true liberty - requires that people see themselves as self-respecting, self-determining subjects, capable of making free choices and pursuing the "good life" as they see fit. Today, by contrast, we are warned that we are toxic, loaded, dangerous specimens, who must always restrain our instincts and aspire to austerity. This is not conducive to a culture of liberty; indeed, it represents a dangerous historic shift, from the Enlightenment era of free citizenship to a new dark age where individuals are depicted as meek in the face of more powerful, unpredictable forces: the gods of the sea, sky and ozone layer. And of the individuals who say "to hell with environmentalism" and continue living the way they want to? Apparently in the words of the Ecologist, they have a disordered "psychology"; they are victims of "self-deception and mass denial." Some greens openly admit they are on the side of illiberalism. George Monbiot describes environmentalism as "a campaign not for more freedom but for less." Environmentalism is instinctively and relentlessly illiberal, and it is doing more to inculcate people with fear, self-loathing and a religious-style sense of meekness than any piece of anti-terror ever could, If you believe in freedom, you must reject it."*⁴

Steven Milloy founder and publisher of JunkScience.com and a columnist for FoxNews.com is also incensed: *"The environmental movement has cultivated a warm and fuzzy public image, but behind the smiley-face rhetoric of "sustainability" and "conservation" lies a dark agenda. The Greens aim to regulate your behaviour, downsize your lifestyle, and invade the most intimate aspects of your personal life..... Whether they're demanding that you turn down your thermostat, stop driving your car, or engage in some other senseless act of self-denial, the Greens are envisioning a grim future for you marked by endless privation."*⁵

And our home-grown Kevin Myers says, *"I don't like the Greens at all. I see so much of the old Catholic Church in the Greens. There's a kind of wild dogmatism which makes me nervous. It does not mean you are virtuous, just because you believe in the environment. It does not raise you above mob instincts. I see the potential in the Greens for all sorts of nasty kinds of totalitarian possibilities."*⁶

Lest you still think it's possible to treat people as a homogenous group, check out Malcolm Gladwell's talk on spaghetti sauce! http://www.ted.com/talks/malcolm_gladwell_on_spaghetti_sauce.html

⁴ B O'Neill Greens are the Enemies of Liberty; *The Guardian*: 15 July 2008

⁵ S Milloy (2009) *Green Hell: How Environmentalist Plan to ruin your life and What you can do to stop them; inside flap*

⁶ P Cunningham (2008) *Ireland's Burning*; p. 68