

# The Core Briefing: Helping People Understand the Big Picture Via Diagrams

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This paper describes the “Core Briefing” – a way of drawing a diagram on one page that shows the connection between ecology, our current mode of industrial production, economics and personal psychology – with reference to the two core values, partnership/respect relating and domination/control relating that will make or break Australia as a viable society. The Core Briefing was developed as a way of communicating with people who do not have the time, inclination, or possibly the intellectual capacity to read and absorb books on the different dimensions of sustainability. It helps people break out of their mental silos and begin to develop a much more comprehensive understanding of how everything is together. It also provides a way to highlight constructive points of change that can make us viable in the long run.

## Helping people understand the big picture via diagrams

**A**rguably we must change our entire system if we are to actually become ecologically sustainable and socially healthy. But people tend to think in silos, and only a few people can read and integrate the books necessary to get a big picture understanding of the multiple levels of change we need to make to become sustainable.

So we have a major challenge: how to communicate a systems perspective to people who are not accustomed to big picture thinking?

The approach I am presenting here is to draw diagrams. I am going to show a process I have developed for drawing a diagram that shows how the environment, industry, economics and our personal psychology work as an integrated system. We get the main elements on one page!

I call this the Core Briefing. It illuminates the dynamics the unsustainable society we have today. Many of the elements of the diagram are known to people. What is new is seeing how they all fit together, and identifying leverage points for positive change.

Drawing the diagram step by step, rather than presenting the whole thing in one go, gives people the opportunity to think, argue, probe deeper and otherwise engage with the ideas. The Core Briefing has been used with Leadership Forums for the Project to Make Wellbeing a National Priority, WEA discussion groups and with individuals. Some people have been quite moved by it.

In this paper the key ideas have been presented as succinct assertions which may seem dogmatic. A fuller account is given in my book *Evolving a World That Works*, available as a free download on the Futures Foundation web site. Look under the Project to Make Wellbeing a National Priority.

My hope is that many people will use these diagrams in their own way to

foster discussions that will accelerate our shift to an environmentally sustainable and socially healthy society.

### Ecology and our industrial system

We start with basic industrial ecology. The process of obtaining raw materials through mining, industrial agriculture and cutting down forests produces environmental degradation.



Figure 1

The raw materials are processed in factories, which produce their own environmental damage through chemical toxins, acid rain and the greenhouse gasses that accelerate climate change.

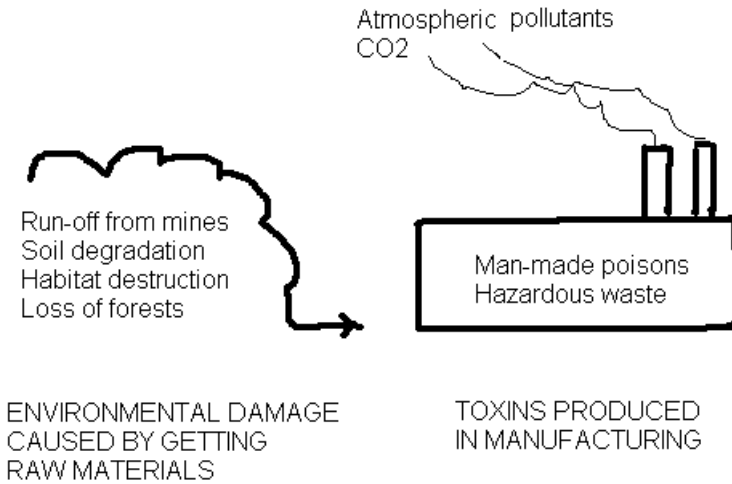


Figure 2

All of these are involved in the production of the ordinary things that we use.

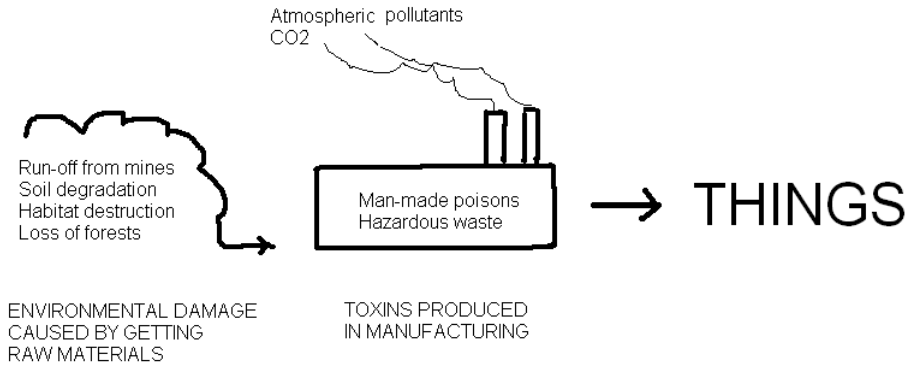


Figure 3

The more things we produce and consume, the more environmental damage is produced – vastly more than most of us imagine. In the following diagram, as the red arrow on the right representing increasing consumption goes up, the red arrow on the left representing environmental deterioration goes up even more.

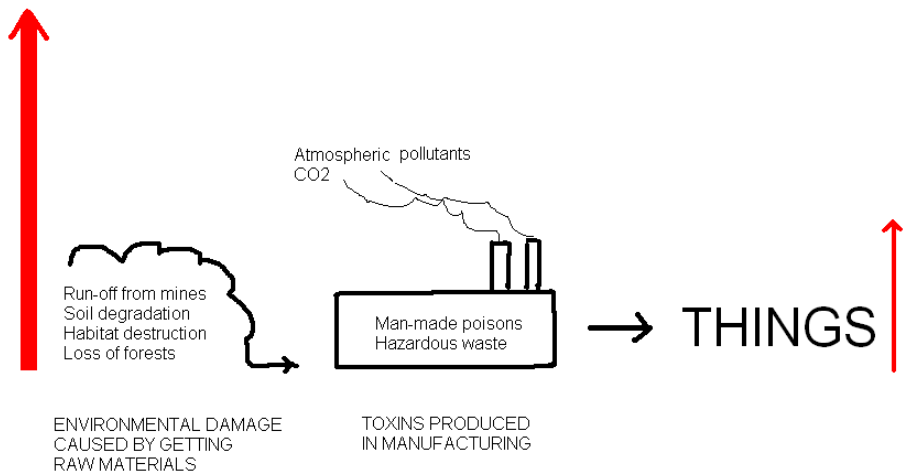


Figure 4

It is clear that if we are to become environmentally sustainable, we must reduce the cumulative environmental impact of the process of making and consuming things. By how much, we may ask.

If we cut trees from a forest plot, and we cut them faster than they regrow, gradually the forest will get smaller and smaller until it is gone. This is an example of *cumulative* damage. It adds up over time. If we intend to be ecologically sustainable, our goal must be to *reduce our cumulative rate of environmental degradation in each key area* (water, biological diversity, fish stocks...) to... **zero**. Zero! This rigorous

demand comes from the nature of reality itself. If the overall trend is of increasing deterioration, we end up producing a desert.

The technical hope is to reduce environmental degradation through improved design. A great deal can be done in this direction. Lovins and Hawken's *Natural Capitalism* (1999) shows that in every area from agriculture to architecture to manufacturing we can reduce energy use and material throughput 90 percent or more. This is exciting stuff, and more of us should know about it. It is a crucial key to our future sustainability.

But improved design may not be sufficient by itself. Sometimes improved design means that things are produced more cheaply, making it easier for people to buy more of them. And as affluence increases, many people tend to buy more things. Currently this is incompatible with becoming environmentally sustainable.

So let us ask a question: what factors tend to increase consumption?

The first answer most people give is *advertising*. And they are right.

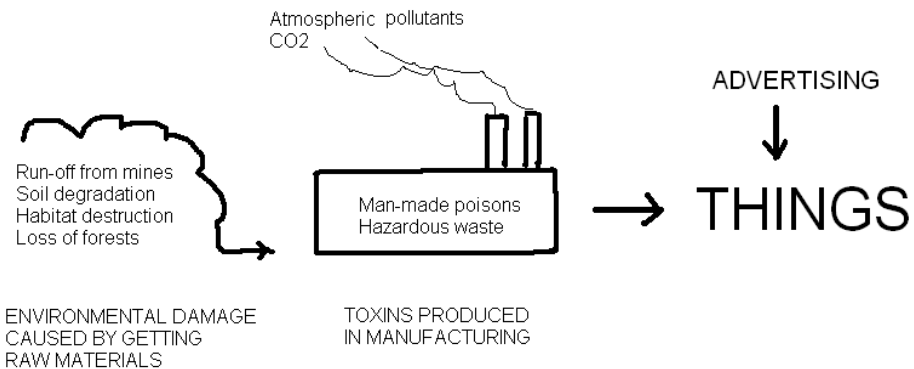


Figure 5

But advertising *per se* does not compel us to buy things. There are psychological drivers that affect our desire to purchase things. Here I will give one account of these dynamics. It is necessarily incomplete. My purpose is to bring a discussion of psychological dynamics into our considerations of sustainability.

Many people lack a feeling of inner wellbeing, and instead have a zone of pain inside. It is sometimes experienced as an empty hole inside. This comes from the experience in childhood that their parents for whatever reasons (often reasons beyond their control) did not give adequate nurturing (Grille 2005, Slater 1980).

If this zone of pain were to be directly experienced it would be extremely painful. People avoid it by compulsively distracting themselves, taking drugs, or by stuffing themselves with things. Thus some stuff themselves with chocolates and others indulge in 'retail therapy'.

Desire for status also drives excess consumption. There is healthy status and dysfunctional status. Healthy status is earned; it arises because of one's contribution to the community based on competence and caring. Pathological status is based on a profound need to feel good about oneself by appearing to be superior, or at least not inferior. This finds expression as conspicuous consumption and keeping up with the Jones.

So *retail therapy* and *striving for economic status* are two ways of avoiding the zone of pain inside. They drive excess consumption beyond our real needs or genuine enjoyment. We will add them to our map.

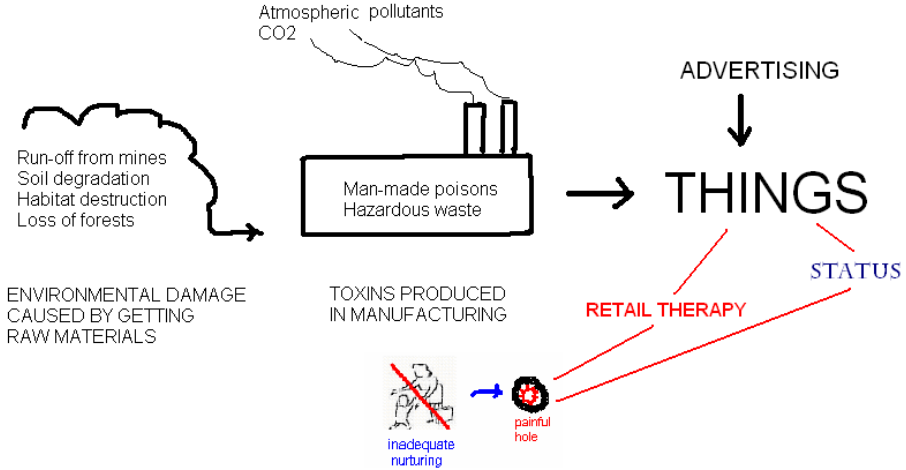


Figure 6

As you know, our economic system is oriented around *increasing shareholder value*. The vast majority of shares are not owned by ordinary people, but by a relatively small number of extremely wealthy people (Wolff, 2000). So we may say that our economic system is set up to help the wealthy get wealthier. They are assisted in this through government policies that they themselves have influenced – policies that emphasize increasing the Gross National Product. And while most businesses advertise, the most extravagant advertising is done by transnational corporations. So we may add a nexus of shareholders, TNOs and the WTO to our diagram.

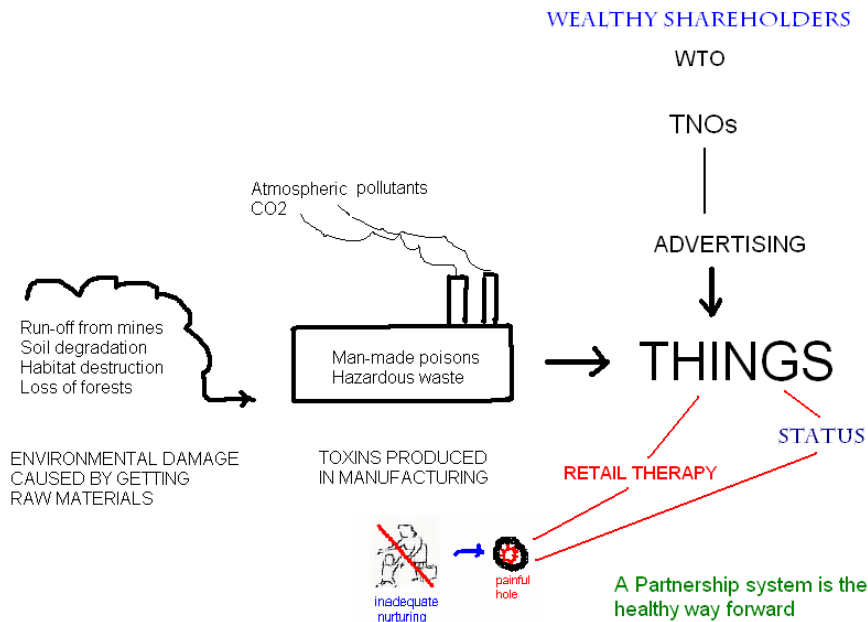


Figure 7

The behaviour of people directing the large transnationals is at times extremely aggressive, to the extent of even being closely aligned with wars such as the invasion of Iraq. The WTO and the pattern of increasing transnational corporate power can be seen as the current expression of the 5000 year old pattern of empires, where wealth is forcibly made to flow from the periphery to the centre.

There may be more to this aggression than just the desire for wealth. People who have been physically abused in childhood tend to repeat or 'act out' that abuse when they become adults (Grille 2005, deMause 2002). This acting out finds expression at many levels, including abusing one's own children or spouse, workplace bullying, and adopting policies that hurt groups of people or entire countries. Yes, our personal psychology plays out on the world stage! From this point of view, it appears that some aggressive corporate behaviour is driven by an (unconscious) desire to hurt others. So when we include these dark psychological factors our diagram looks like this:

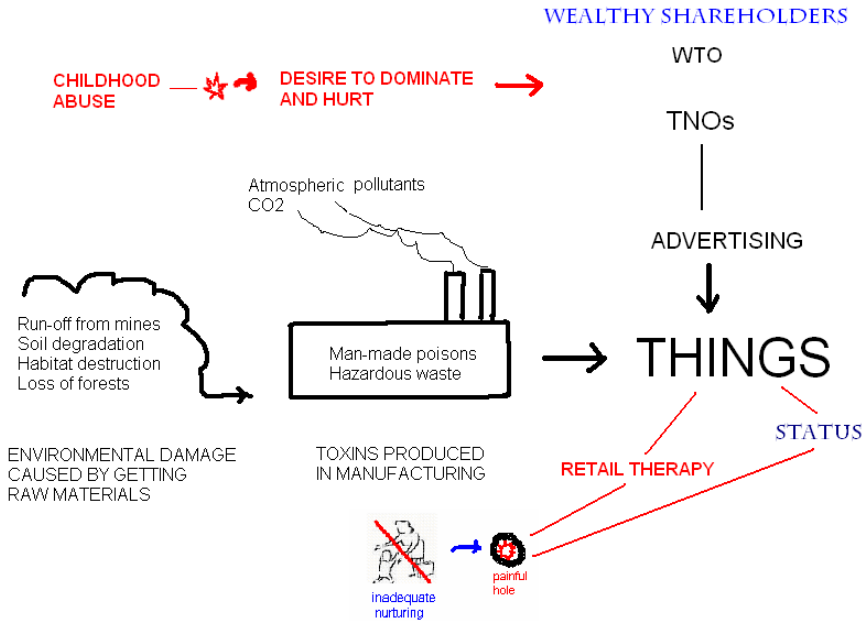


Figure 8

We have talked about inner pain and lack of felt well-being, as well as about responses to childhood abuse finding expression as large-scale corporate aggression. These psychological aspects, although they are rarely discussed, are actually key drivers of environmental deterioration in developed countries. They lead people to over-consume, on the one hand and to an attitude of *attacking* nature and society on the other. Thus to a significant extent our environmental deterioration is driven by unhappy people.

It follows that a key point of change for creating a positive future is that *people should become happier in themselves*. Ideally we should develop such an internal feeling of wellbeing that excess consumption either becomes uninteresting or is eschewed out of respect for environmental ethics. Improved parenting, personal development and also organising business, education and government to support rather than control people can all contribute to developing genuine happiness and wellbeing.

From a systems point of view, other high leverage points of change for achieving ecological sustainability include improving industrial design and reducing the amount of advertising – perhaps by not regarding advertising as a tax deductible business expense.

To complete the Core Briefing we need to consider the core values that will lead to either a positive or a dismal future

## The partnership-dominator contrast

In *The Chalice and the Blade* (1987) futurist Riane Eisler describes two quite different modes of relating to people. She calls them *partnership/respect* relating and *domination/control* relating. People who are using a partnership mode of relating take pains to understand other people, and they work collaboratively for the good of the whole. People who are using a dominator mode of relating work for their own aggrandisement (or that of their group), and characteristically use force to achieve their ends. They are quite willing to hurt other people, communities and the environment in the process. For example, think of the invasion of Iraq and of corporations who knowingly sell disease producing products and ‘externalise’ the medical and environmental costs,

Arguably it is people with dominator attitudes who shape the policies that are inducing increasing environmental and social deterioration. If so, then *the fate of the world depends upon partnership values coming to set the tone.*

The world has put an amazing amount of creative resources into building an astonishing industrial civilization. Now it is time to shift our emphasis to creating a world where *magnificent well-being* is our primary goal. And the good news is: we know a vast amount about how to actually do this. We have the technical design strategies that can vastly reduce adverse ecological impact (Lovins *et al.*, 1999). Proposals to change the economic system to better support community well-being have been put forward (Hawken, 1993). We know how to support parents in becoming more nurturing (McFarland, 2005). We have effective means of helping adults resolve their childhood hurt and become more loving (and inwardly contented) people (Feinstein *et al.*, 2005). Experiential methods of personal growth including Aikido, the Feldenkrais method of body awareness and interactive creativity training can help people become more comfortable and skilled at partnership relating – a shift that makes us less hurtful to others and which can make businesses work better (Hull and Read, 2004). There are examples of running successful institutions on partnership values (Niel, 1960; Semler, 1993). All in all these approaches can take us far towards an ideal of becoming so inwardly contented (and ecologically responsible) that excess consumption simply becomes uninteresting.

To sum up, we have two options. One is to continue on a path that is becoming increasingly dismal. The other is to get excited about building a world of magnificent wellbeing – and to invest in the intellectual, emotional and practical things necessary to actually build that world. The option of muddling along making small piecemeal environmental improvements is not an option that will lead to future well-being for young people alive today. The near future (within the lifetime of our children and grandchildren) will either be unspeakably horrible or, through a fundamental shift in social direction, surprisingly wonderful. It will either be utopia or oblivion, and creating utopia requires committing to a massive shift to partnership values and community well-being. So we complete our diagram by adding *Dominator* and *Partnership* as core values that drive the entire system in one direction or another.



This is a Dominator system

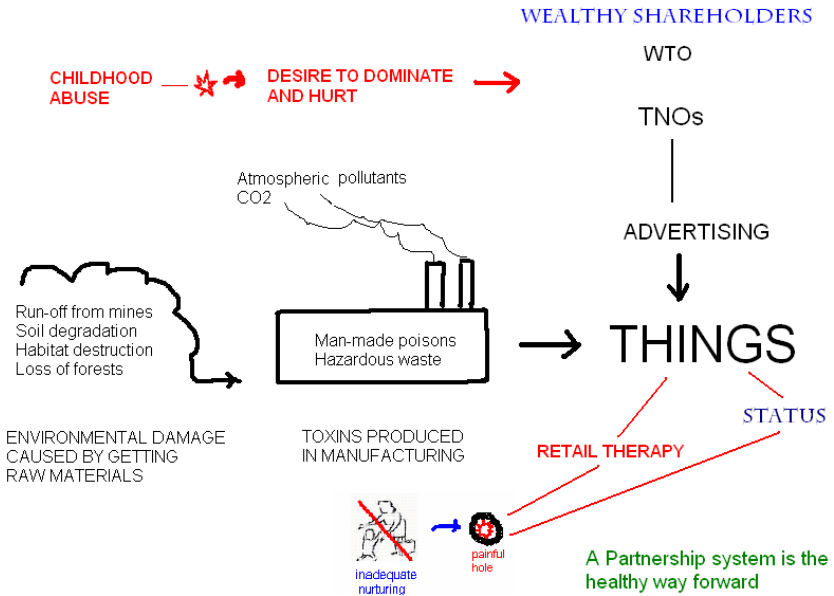


Figure 9

Our times call for an exceptional order of citizen leadership. Creating a healthy society is not just ‘up to the government’; it is up to all of us. I believe that our entire culture must wake up and make massive goodwilled changes in every sphere from child-rearing to industrial design, economics, business and personal development. And ‘everybody’ must come to understand this.

To stimulate this understanding I have set up the Project to Make Wellbeing a National Priority through the Futures Foundation ([www.futuresfoundation.org.au](http://www.futuresfoundation.org.au)). We will start thousands of discussion groups around Australia enabling people to think through what is needed in more detail, thus developing the background understanding necessary for initiating and supporting the healthy changes we need. I would be pleased if you would join us. You can contact me at [andrew.gaines@futuresfoundation.org.au](mailto:andrew.gaines@futuresfoundation.org.au).

Yours for a world that works.

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**Andrew Gaines** (BA) is Coordinator of the Project to Make Wellbeing a National Priority. The goal of the Project is to contribute to Australia’s cultural transformation to ecological sustainability and social health. The Project is sponsored by the Futures Foundation. Andrew maintains a private practice as a creativity trainer, Feldenkrais practitioner, psychotherapist and Emotional Freedom Technique practitioner in Katoomba, NSW. He is trained in the Natural Step and as a sustainability educator, and is a proponent of integrated design a la *Natural Capitalism*. He is the author of *Creativity Games* and *Evolving a World That Works*, and has published articles suggesting that a cultural shift to respectful ‘partnership relating’ is essential for achieving ecological sustainability in the *Journal of Corporate Citizenship* and the *CSIRO Sustainability Netletter*. His special contribution to sustainability discussions is powerful insights into how personal development disciplines can help us become the kinds of people who can make and enjoy a sustainable world.