# Chapter 12

# On the Edge of Change

## Chapter Overview

This chapter shows that when people cooperatively work with others, they become empowered to create the life changes that they wish to see. Understanding how people adopt new ideas, such as living sustainably, is not usually an all-or-nothing condition. It generally starts with some innovative people who instigate the idea followed by trendsetters who establish the ideas for the rest of the population to slowly adopt at their own pace as they find them appealing and motivating. Once people are motivated, it is critical that they meet up with others and begin debating the pros and cons of such ideas for constructive dialogues. Only after talking about their visions for a new life can they set about to realize them.

Throughout this text, you have seen how sustainable living is really based on ways that used to be natural to the human species. People cannot go backwards, and they shouldn’t want to. Moving forward will take the ways that work and make them function for modern systems. Undoubtedly people have to live within the limits of the ecological systems that they currently take for granted. As thinking about sustainable technology improves, so will many of the current environmental problems. This will entail a new look at how people use resources. An industrial ecological system working on an ecological economic framework that mimics the natural one is the path to maintaining a vibrant standard of living that still provides the comfort and luxuries that make life pleasant.

Focusing on quality of life issues promotes the next level of change to give people what they really want from their lives. These issues are physical comfort, good interpersonal relations, interesting cultural activities, good health, good nutrition, satisfying jobs, and purpose in life. Happiness and health will naturally come from changing how people live. Once everyone begins the full transition to sustainability, industrial systems will no longer produce harmful artificial chemicals and the relocalized way of living will provide healthier food and resources that are sustainable and in harmony with the planet. People are hardwired to be empathic and altruistic and can now reach a level of human development that encompasses humanity as a single species. The planet can be a community partner, thus enacting what Aldo Leopold long ago envisioned as his Land Ethic (Leopold 1949), because it is in people’s benefit to do so. Prosperity and wealth are a part of the new system since well-being will be the criteria used to measure success. Achieving sustainability and regenerative community is about making choices.

There is no one right way to live sustainably. Each community must decide for themselves using the core principles such as those described in this book to make those decisions. You make those kinds of choices all the time, only now it’s about working together

* for the common good.
* as engaged citizens.
* for the well-being of all.
* with empathy.
* to be happy.
* as mindful consumers.
* as mindful producers.

## Vocabulary Terms

adoption sequence theory

conditional corporate charters

converged electronic media

Cultural Creatives

cultural critics

grassroots movements

groundswell

groupthink

homogeneous

ideological

new environmental paradigm

reframing

## Terms With Definitions

**adoption sequence theory—**Anything that is adopted, such as an idea or a piece of technology, goes through a period of selection with different motivations to adopt or reject.

**conditional corporate charters—**Legal documentation of a corporation’s objectives and formal structure of operations, which have specific restrictions for what is acceptable or not.

**converged electronic media—**The large number of different kinds of electronic communications channels.

**Cultural Creatives—**A large segment of Western society that espouses a different kind of culture and way of living.

**cultural critics—**Used here to describe a need to critically review the assumptions of the cultures in which we live.

**grassroots movements—**A collection of people who come from within a community or common base as opposed to being top-down.

**groundswell—**A deep and often sudden gathering of public opinion.

**groupthink—**When a group makes faulty decisions because of peer pressure to conform to a specific idea or practice.

**homogeneous—**Of uniform composition with little variation.

**ideological—**Following a hard set of ideals that often pertain to ethical expectations.

**new environmental paradigm—** A new worldview in which people are pro environmental, as opposed to the business-as-usual paradigm.

**reframing—**Analyzing something, reaching a new conclusion, and then understanding it in a new light.

## Extended Learning Activities

1. Analyze the progression of a product or an idea from its inception to its broad cultural acceptance and describe the different stages of the adoption sequence theory that this idea or product went through. What adopter category do you identify with this idea or product and why do you think you fell into that category? Describe any unique events that were occurring during this time that might have caused the idea or product to be readily and quickly accepted or that might have created obstacles or challenges for the idea or product to become mainstream.
2. Analyze a public electronic forum to determine how effective it is in solving a problem. Pick a topic that relates to the ideas presented in the textbook. Are people with polarizing points of view actually listening to each other or is the forum just creating more arguments? Become a part of the dialogue and see if you can create some constructive discussion. Describe your experience.

## Research and Response Questions

1. Research a governmental or nongovernmental organization that is trying to empower its citizens to make sustainable changes. Describe what the organization is doing to empower the citizens and what barriers or obstacles they might encounter. Are the citizens receptive to the suggestions? Explain your conclusion.
2. Research the Johannesburg Summit and how it was or was not effective in instilling change in the environment.

## Web Links

[Center for Rural Empowerment and the Environment](http://www.conservationforpeople.org/)

[Eartheasy: Solutions for Sustainable Living](http://eartheasy.com/)

[Environmental Law Institute](http://www.eli.org/)

[Sierra Club](http://www.sierraclub.org/)

[United Nations: Johannesburg Summit 2002](http://www.johannesburgsummit.org/)

[World YWCA](http://www.worldywca.org/)