

Now, before I start to talk about how, of the innovations that you've identified, you might pick the one that you think has the most transformative impact, I want to visit this concept of agency—building the relationship between innovation and opportunity and this idea of system or institutional entrepreneurs.

Most of the people who are working in social innovation would fall in this category. As I said before, you have inventors and they're often social entrepreneurs. There're the people who come up with the idea, and may even set up an organization; but if an a social invention is going to become a social *innovation* that has this broader system impact, there's a whole another set of skills and approaches that need to be developed so that you can help to move a particular innovation into this arena of broader impact.

You can be a system entrepreneur without being a social entrepreneur at all. You, yourself, may not have invented anything, but you're very interested in that process of supporting existing inventions that are promising, because you're committed to trying to make a difference in a particular complex problem domain. On the other hand, you could be—and we do see at times

people who do—who are inventors and innovators.

Al Etmanski, who was the person who was behind the Registered Disability Savings Plan, is one such inventor who then became also a system entrepreneur. Sometimes you find the same people doing both, because in order to secure a broad impact for their particular invention, they need to learn that secondary set of skills. They may go together or they may be separate: both are extremely necessary.

As Edwin Land said, *"Every innovation has two parts, the first is the invention of the thing itself;"* That's the inventor. *"The second is the preparation of expectations so that when the invention arrives it seems both surprising and familiar, something long awaited."* How, in fact, do you take your understandings of the system and work with that to actually make an idea have this kind of broad impact?

When we go back now, again, to this concept of scale, we can see there are at least two kinds of scales, and we can even go to a third. We can talk about scaling out, where you have an invention and you're really interested in proliferating that invention to different contexts.

Plan Canada invented a circle around a disabled child that would help to keep them safe and secure: a circle of volunteers with a facilitator. This is such a popular invention that many, many communities across Canada wanted it. There was a lot of effort and work that went into scaling it out, tailoring it to particular communities while keeping the essential parts still there.

But, at some point, Al decided that he wanted to scale up, meaning he wanted actually to start having an impact on the system that had created the problem in the first place. This partly happened because he began to understand the problem differently. Instead of safe and secure, or a good life he began to see this was a problem of belonging, and that he wanted disabled people to be able to be real citizens, and that demanded defining the nature of citizenship, and to embark on very discreet initiatives like the RDSP, to try to change economics, politics, and ultimately the culture in Canada to see disability differently.

When it comes to culture, another term that we sometimes use about that is *scaling deep*, where we can argue that it, ultimately, is the perceptions and the culture, the fundamental ways of making sense in the

world that characterize our culture, that are hardest to change; but that have the biggest impact they do have to change. That, if you manage to create a shift in people's ideas about what is good and valuable, many of these other things will follow. The politics will fall in line, the economics will fall in line, because people put their money towards what they value. People vote for people who represent their values and there's a whole different set of initiatives or techniques that have developed around scaling deep.

We'll be talking in more detail about those in the future. But, here I just wanted to point out that here is agency working at multiple scales: at the level of trying to scale out an innovation, have it move to a level of the problem itself, and at the level of trying to change the broader institutional landscape. Also, while some innovations seemed to be mandated from above and some seemed to just be developing from below, neither worked well on its own. System entrepreneurs have to be able to work across multiple scales.

Here we have two examples: one is Transition Towns, which is a movement to try to create sustainable communities. It has really been very popular in England and

it's proliferated all over England. But Transition Towns have made no effort to influence the broader culture or, maybe more importantly, the broader economy. They are content to try to do this on a local level, buying local, creating trading systems that are non-monetary, etc., and they leave the rest alone. They figured it's doomed and the world economy will eventually collapse or they would have figured out how to do it.

That may be true, but then, again, it may not. It would seem that many things that scale out have a limited shelf life. They go on for a while, but because they don't challenge the broader system when the particular people or the ethos associated with it sort of dies away or becomes less popular, it simply disappears and the big institutional structures go on intact.

The Big Green Challenge is the opposite: an attempt to create change from the top. This challenge, in the same domain [as Transition Towns], came out of NESTA, the National Endowment for Science, Technology and the Arts in England. They decided to ask for innovative proposals around carbon reduction. They put up a million pounds as a reward for this. They did attract a number of interesting proposals. Not all of them were new. Some

of them were already in existence, and some were being invented. They ultimately ended up dividing the million pounds between three or four different ones so that it wasn't actually all that much money.

It was a very interesting process; but, when interviewed after the fact, the award winners said that the problem was that there was nowhere to go from here. There weren't resources to scale this up, or even to scale it out. It was just a good idea and it got some money that supported it, but what they needed were avenues to create a bigger impact and those didn't exist. We need a way to look at this in a management up-down point of view.

Again, an example of an initiative that has been trying to do this—and the jury is not in either about whether it's going to succeed or not—is about mental health in Canada. Michael Kirby was the Senator who led one of our Royal Commissions, which came out with a report called, *Out of the Shadows*, where he went across Canada asking what was happening in mental health, and what was happening to people suffering from mental health challenges.

It got a lot of media attention and he did get to talk to a lot of people. In the process

of doing that and going to communities across Canada. He also heard of a number of different kind of local innovations, one of them was what he called the First Response Strategy, which was in a community in Manitoba, where there was very little in the way of health infrastructure to deal with it.

They've come up with their own innovative response, which meant that, using a psychiatric nurse and a house where, when police picked up people who were suffering from psychosis, they were and they could be left there, with a bed for a few nights. Then they could be stabilized and either sent on to the hospitals or they could be sent home.

It turned out that many of them could be sent home and others could be referred to the hospital. This was a really positive initiative, because it also relieved their police of the legal duty to stay with a person while they try to work their way through the emergency rooms, which often took a very long time. It meant that instead of standing around for a 24 hours or sometimes a couple of days, a person who is suffering this kind of crisis would get immediate attention.

He felt this was quite innovative and it challenged a number of the legal frameworks in Canada for dealing with those with mental health problems; but they'd gone ahead and done it anyway, because they didn't have really any other choice. His question was, "*How could you scale that out, and at the same time scale it up, so that you could change the institutional system to allow for similar kinds of initiatives to happen?*"

They developed a group of committees that looked at the political, legal, and medical restrictions that made it hard for these kinds of response strategies to flourish. Some of them, as I already mentioned, was this mandate for the police to pick up the people who are suffering from psychosis and their tendency to try to avoid that. There are also the medical restrictions about who gets to call people psychotic and how they should be handled, if they are.

He began to work on doing the background with that, thinking like you did in your system maps: *where could you intervene here to create the more opening for these kinds of strategies?* He also developed—thinking about scaling deep—a national communication strategy, starting to tell

very different stories about people with mental health challenges, and this was very successful.

It began to change people's perceptions and there were some measurements to indicate he did it. But he also wanted to see innovations, at the same time, and he worked with some of the best community organizers in the country to say, "*How can we actually get into communities and stimulate them to think about different kinds of strategies responding to psychosis in their communities?*" But there was a problem there, which was, "*How do all these get connected up?*"

From my point of view there's a gap in the middle. It is the gap where the institutional entrepreneurs and actual networks should be. These are the people who can connect these pieces, who actually can understand what those committees are doing and where, in fact, are going to be the good opportunities for introducing an innovation in mental health, who can also see how the climate is shifting in people's perceptions, and can recognize the initiatives that are happening at the community levels that have some real promise in terms of the cracks or the openings that are happening at that higher political level.

This is a key role for agency in creating social innovation and in bringing in the new resource flows to support those innovations when they occur. Without that, you get odd patterns where you can see that an opportunity will happen at a broader level. Arab Spring is one good example of that. But, in fact, the alternatives haven't been developed and nobody's connecting those alternatives to that opportunity; and, therefore, it's a lost opportunity and nothing happens.

Another example is right now in work with Indigenous children, who for a long time have suffered much more than average Canadian children in this country. One of our real leaders in this, Cindy Blackstock, has been working very hard to challenge the government about their resources that they're allotting to the care of indigenous children in communities, and even taking the government to court, and she's shaking up the system.

On the other hand what's going on at the local level to provide alternate ways of handling children? If you're in touch with Family and Children Services of various communities, particularly ones where there's a large aboriginal contingent, you can see there is a lot of experimentation

about how could Aboriginal children be handled differently. The key thing is how are these things going to be connected? Unless someone is connecting them, opportunities can be created but lost, or inventions and good ideas can be created that have real potential but never go anywhere.

That's essentially, again, to revisit that the role of a system entrepreneur is to create those kinds of system changes. This kind of thinking really comes out of the process of innovation in large, complex organizations, where it was identified that in companies like 3M that continuously innovate or even IBM, or most of the software and computer technology companies that demand constant innovation, there is a role for a middle management person who does exactly that.

Their job is to question the strategic apex; to understand where the company is trying to go, and what it wants to accomplish; to frame and translate that to people who are working on new inventions or on solving problems on the shop-floor, recognizing the ones that seemed to have promise for the strategic directions of the company, and selling those up.

That kind of model, you can see, transfers fairly easily to the more complex social situation of where you have political, economic, cultural, and legal institutions and these kinds of problem domains—but also, the local communities attempting to respond. Ultimately, it's really about understanding the opportunity context that these higher levels of organization represent. In some cases there are very few opportunities—very few cracks in that system. The system is not open to change; there's huge resistance.

But at moments of any kind of disturbance, there are often cracks or opportunities when you *can* do something. Something like this always creates some kind of disturbance. It's one of the reasons why they're powerful vehicle for introducing change, but economic crises, even changes of government can create those kind of moments of disturbance.

System entrepreneurs can be very attuned to those. Going back to our case of Plan Canada and Al Etmanski: Al often talks about the fact that when a new government comes in at a federal or provincial level, he immediately discovers who among the MPs and Cabinet Ministers has family members with a disability. He starts to build

relationships with those people—not with any immediate intent, not with any deliberate intent in mind, but with a realization that should an opportunity occur, they might be the way, the next part of the network that can move a good idea, whose time has come, and that opportunity very rapidly into the mainstream.