

Collective Thinking, Collective Learning and Collective Inquiry

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Valerie A. Brown, AO, PhD

1. Q. What is Collective Thinking? A. Learning from difference

Knowledge cultures as a nested system (Brown 2001)

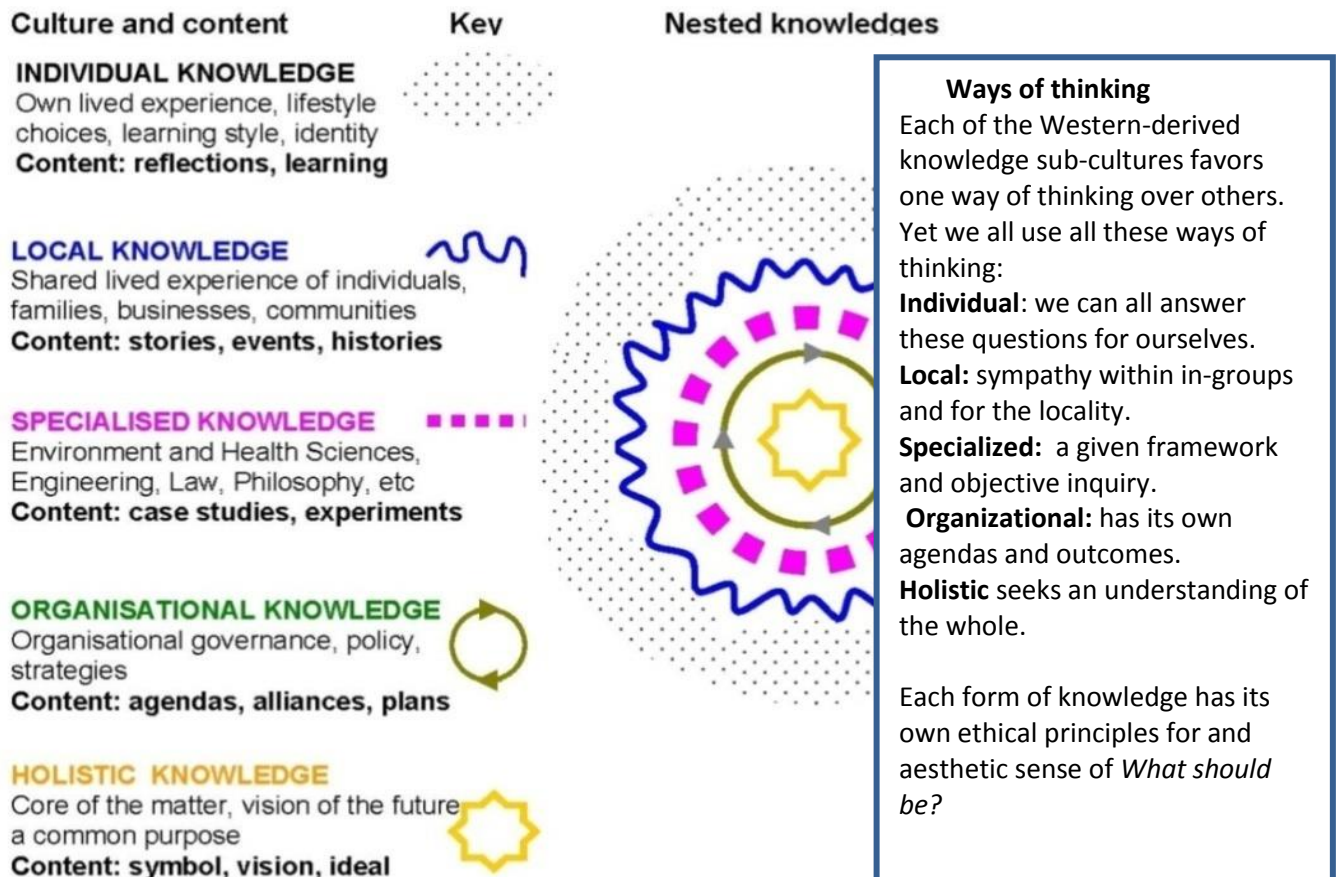


Figure 1, Western knowledge sub-cultures

Transformational change from the present to a just and sustainable world is a complex problem that calls for changes in the society that produced it. Transformation has multiple participants with multiple ways of knowing and no one answer.

In times of transformation, collective thinking brings together people from different knowledge sub-cultures that make up a society; welcomes their differences; and forges connections between them. Try replacing 'but' and 'or' with 'and', both in thinking and in action. Working with people from individual *and* local *and* specialized *and* organizational *and* holistic knowledges brings the full range of understanding to a project and so everyone is able to learn from each other. Reference: Brown VA et al 2013 Tackling Wicked Problems

2. Q. What is the Collective Learning Spiral? A. Reciprocal learning by doing

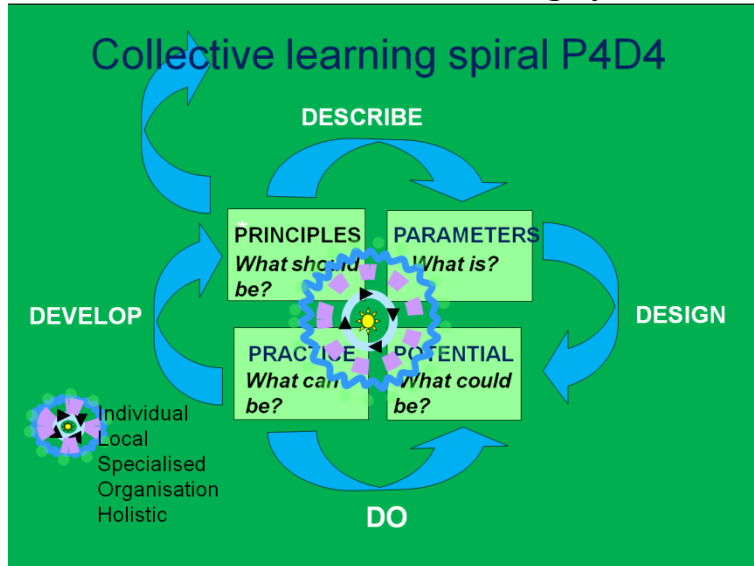


Figure 2. Collective Learning P4D4

The Local Sustainability Project teams developed the collective learning spiral P4D4 (Figure 2) over two decades and four continents in partnership with communities seeking transformational change. The aim was not to complete a jigsaw puzzle with a known result, rather a collage of the different contributions that generate a fresh start, The collective learning spiral has four learning stages, each with its own way of thinking.

Principles: IDEALS. Stage one of each learning cycle asks “What should be?” Collective thinking means respecting the differing core principles of the different knowledge cultures for the collective project (Figure 2).

Bridge: recognize the distinction between the ideal and the actual.

Parameters: FACTS. Stage two asks “What is?” Describing the parameters of the inquiry asks for evidence from each of the sub-cultures of knowledge. All parameters are treated as legitimate: observations, personal reflections, sympathies among groups, power differences, and sense of the whole.

Bridge: recognize the shift from the rational to the creative

Potential: IDEAS. Stage three asks “What could be?” Designing for the full potential for the shared project asks that your blue sky, business not-as-usual ideas are needed.

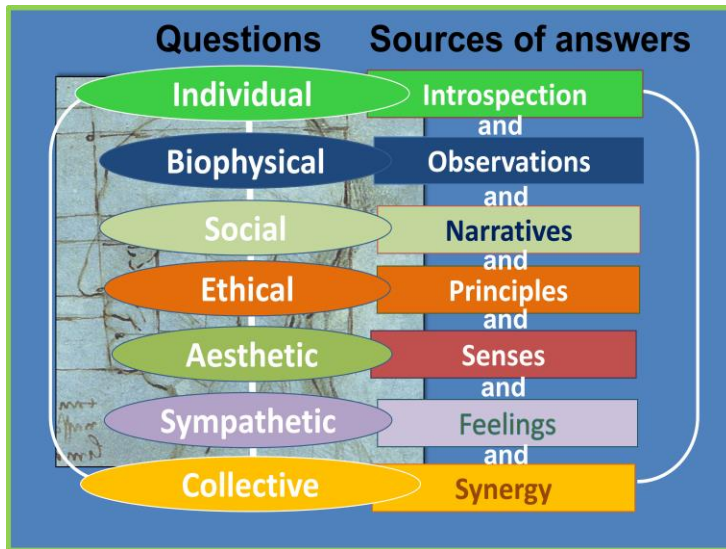
Bridge: recognize the shift from thinking to doing

Practice: ACTION. Stage four asks “What can be?” Doing the design in practice is a cooperative enterprise. The energy generated in the design process is maintained in the doing. Appreciative shared evaluation monitors the collaborative action plans.

Bridge: recognize the shift from practice to the next learning cycle is a creative leap

Reference: BrownVA and LambertJA 2010 Collective Learning for Transformational Change

3. Q. What is collective inquiry? A. Asking collective questions



An environmentally sustainable and socially just world would have:

- Individual love of life, and
- Biophysical integrity, and
- Social cohesion, and
- Ethical justice, and
- Aesthetic inspiration, and
- Sympathetic dialogue, and
- Collective conviviality

V.A. Brown

Figure 3. Ways of knowing and their sources of evidence

Drawing on all the human ways of understanding includes the thinking from all the knowledge sub-cultures. Everyone tacitly asks themselves the following questions of the issues they have chosen to address. In a collective inquiry the questions are asked explicitly by every participant. Each of the questions has its own source of evidence.

The collective suite of questions for monitoring and appreciative evaluation of a transformational change:

- Personally, what assumptions do I bring to this inquiry?
A. Personal answers to each question below.
- Physically, what observations and measurements can I make?
A. Populations, lifestyle, health status, ecosystems, climate etc.
- Socially, how are the structures of this society organized?
A. Education, governance, finance, law, science, families etc
- Ethically, what are the accepted rules about relationships?
A. Equality, reciprocity, responsibilities, allegiances etc
- Aesthetically, what gives a sense of fitting or not fitting into the study?
A. Mental and physical patterns, shapes, sounds
- Sympathetically, who are joined in communities of practice?
A. Friendship, community, specialist, organization and creative groups,
- Collectively, what insights do the previous questions bring to this inquiry?
A. Creative leap, Gestalt, collage, discovery, insight, synergy.

Reference: BrownVA and Harris JA 2014 The Human Capacity for Transformational Change