Levels of Thinking /
Models of Change*

By Jim Rough

*Adapted from Chapter 8 of

Society's Breakthrough! Releasing Essential Wisdom and Virtue in All the People

Society's Breakthrough! describes three social innovations:

1) **Dynamic Facilitation**—a new way to facilitate meetings where people face difficult-to-solve issues, think creatively about them, and reach consensus through breakthroughs.. (www.ToBE.net)

2) **The Wisdom Council**—a new way that cities, counties, government agencies, corporations, non-profit organizations, states, and other large systems of people can resolve issues and become democratically managed. (www.WiseDemocracy.org)

3) **The Citizens Amendment** — a proposal for how a national Wisdom Council can create a wise and responsible "We the People" in the United States, and solve many of society's most intractable issues. (www.SocietysBreakthrough.com)

The Citizens Amendment is outlined below …

Each year twenty-four registered voters will be randomly selected in a lottery to form a Citizens Wisdom Council. This Wisdom Council will be a symbol of the people of the United States. It will meet for one week to choose issues, talk about them, and determine consensus statements. To ensure creative conversation and unanimous conclusions, the meetings are aided by a facilitator. At the end of the week, the Wisdom Council will present the statements to the nation in a new ceremony, from "We the People" to the people. The Citizens Wisdom Council will then disband permanently and the next year a new Wisdom Council will be randomly selected.

Levels of Thinking / Models of Change

By Jim Rough

Adapted from Chapter 8 of the book **Society's Breakthrough! Releasing Essential Wisdom and Virtue in All the People** (www.SocietysBreakthrough.com)

> *We can not solve our problems with the same level of thinking that created them.*
> Albert Einstein

When people first asked me, "What value would the Citizens Amendment bring?" I often found myself talking past them instead of with them. They had a particular image in mind of how change should happen that was different than the perspective I was assuming. In this chapter I'll briefly describe five different perspectives on change. This sets the stage for the rest of the book, where we take up each one, like putting on different pairs of glasses, and examine how the Amendment would affect scoiety.

I'd like to start this exploration by distinguishing between two opposite approaches to change: *managing* and *facilitating*. To manage change is to assume that you are dealing with dead matter rather than living beings. It requires the skills of control and planning to tame chaos and build something that works. To facilitate change is to assume that you are dealing with living systems that grow and change by themselves. You do what is needed to evoke and enhance this natural self-organizing process.

You don't "build" a garden, for instance, by shaping objects to look like leaves, flowers, and stems, glue and paint them, and deposit them in the dirt. There is managing to do in a garden, but, ultimately, you must facilitate the natural growth of the plants.

The five perspectives on change are different blends of these two opposites, managing and facilitating. The Amendment shifts us to an organizational system, which is facilitative. Certainly, there is some managing involved, but democracy, trust, and the spirit of community are fundamentally self-organizing phenomena. They are living processes that flow bottom up, not top down. They aren't about government; they are about people.

Self-organizing Change

When we approach any task as though it can be managed and controlled, we are operating from an eighteenth century version of common sense, exemplified by Newton's Laws of Physics. These say that an object at rest, or at a constant momentum, will remain so unless some outside force is applied. Nothing changes unless something or someone *makes* it change. Adopting this perspective helps us gain control over bad situations and helps us build complex machines.

But we now know through modern sciences like quantum mechanics, biology, and cosmology, that there are no "objects" in the natural universe, that every "thing" is self-organizing. From the Big Bang forward, the cosmos has been growing in complexity through self-organizing change. From quantum mechanics and $E=mc^2$, we know that the smallest bits of matter aren't dead, but have potential for spontaneous, uncaused change. So the idea of managed change is a human invention, inconsistent with nature, which can be applied only occasionally.

The eighteenth century design of our system, however, emphasizes managing change. It encourages us to use the methods of control, even for living systems like meetings, the environment, and our children, rather than supporting their capacity for self-organization. This is true, even though in our hearts we know that what is most meaningful in life—like falling in love, giving birth, being creative, and building community—are necessarily self-organizing, and can't be managed. As biologist Elisabet Sahtauris said, "The fact is that you can't turn living things into machinery. You can try to force them to behave like machinery but they will not be machinery. That is exactly why our economists can't predict anymore and our politics is falling apart. We don't understand them as unhealthy living systems. We're trying to fix them like machines. It's very different to cure a person than to fix a machine." (*Insight and Outlook*, with Scott London)

There are times when it is appropriate to manage change, but we cannot get so absorbed in this approach that we lose track of the way nature really works. If we do, we will face resistance and breakdowns. This is what happens when children rebel as teenagers, and what happened when the colonists of North America rebelled against Great Britain in 1776.
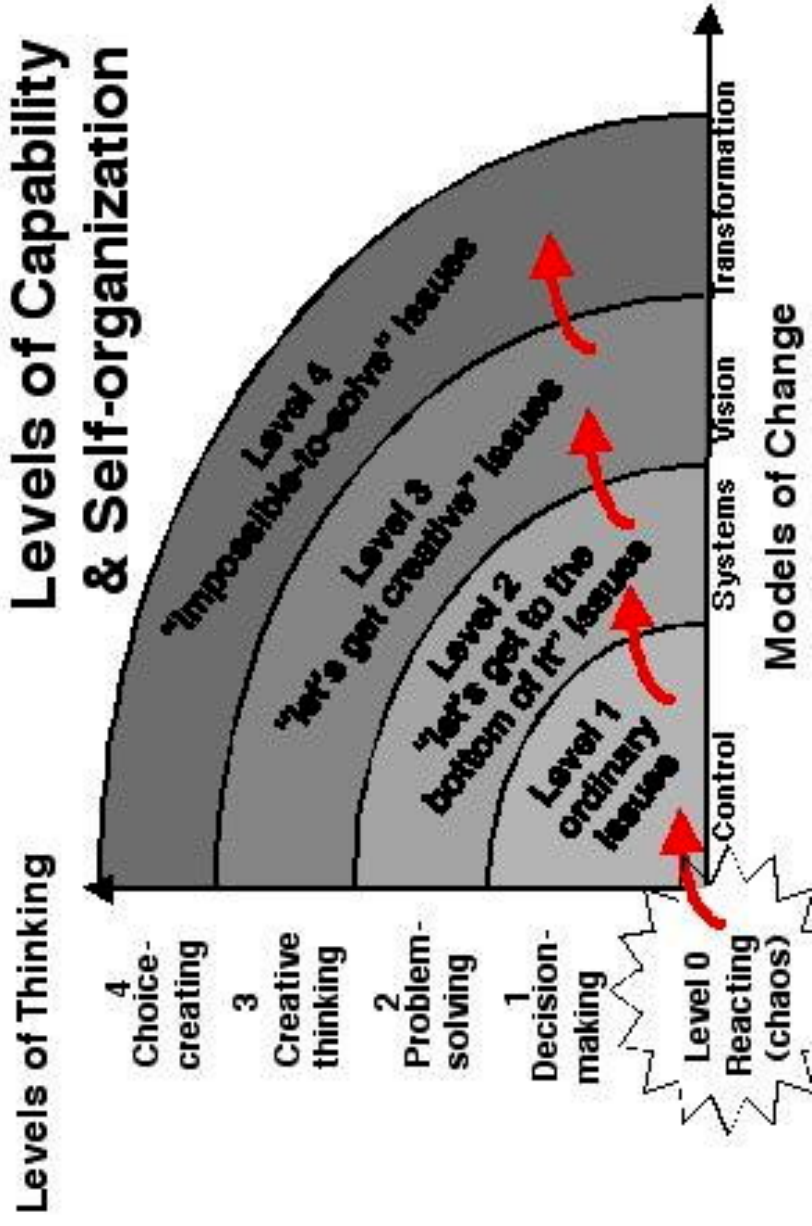
In organizations and as a society, we must shift from trying to control change to facilitating it. The prospect of making this shift offers great hope for us in addressing and solving all of today's big issues, like the threat of global warming, the loss of soils, water, and the ozone layer, the corporate takeover of democracy, etc. With it, we stop working so hard at jobs we "have to" do, stop aiming so much at money and "the bottom line", and begin following our natural instincts to help others and to help society.

Levels of Self-organizing Change

Self-organizing change is at the heart of democracy. It is the idea that ordinary people can responsibly manage themselves, both individually and as a society. Of course, the Founders made a giant shift in this direction with the advent of the U.S. Constitution. It was put in place with the consent of the governed; it established free elections; and it assured individual freedoms. But without a legitimate, ongoing We the People, it morphed into a mechanistic system which is, ultimately, control-oriented. There is no king to exert arbitrary authority from the top, but he has been replaced by a constitutional mechanism, which exerts top-down control. Now, we must take another step forward on the path to increased self-organization and greater democracy.

Shifting a system to become more self-organizing is not just a matter of letting go. That would bring chaos. But so will adhering to the methods of control. Better is to keep the mechanisms of control in place while we facilitate more self-organization. Then, as people become empowered, they can use their new power to responsibly take charge.

Chart #8 illustrates the natural progression of empowerment, steps we all go through at times. Five levels are depicted, each of which, except for the first, has a viewpoint of how change happens and an associated style of thinking.

Levels of Capability
& Self-organization

Levels of Thinking

4
Choice-creating

3
Creative thinking

2
Problem-solving

1
Decision-making

Level 0
Reacting (chaos)

Level 4
"impossible-to-solve" issues

Level 3
"let's get creative" issues

Level 2
"let's get to the bottom of it" issues

Level 1
ordinary issues

Control   Systems   Vision   Transformation

Models of Change

Four of the levels are particularly important because they represent wholly different perspectives from which to view the Citizens Amendment, to understand how it would work, and to "get" its significance. The rest of this book is organized around these viewpoints.

Level 0: Reacting (Chaos)

Level 0 is a pre-thinking stage, "reacting." There is no model of change, nor can we say that there is any real thinking, because people in this state of mind are just responding to stimuli. Change happens *to* them, not the other way around. They do the best they can, moving away from what is threatening, toward what is pleasing.

All of us know this stage of development because it happens when we are placed in a new context, when we are not feeling well, when we've received bad news, or when we just don't know what is going on. Our environment is in control of us. It is mostly from this level that the voting public currently operates, lurching from one position to another, depending on the dictates of the media and the mood of the situation.

Some young people operate from here as well. Those who have had either too little or too much structure in their lives often get stuck at Level 0 once they are independent. They lose their way, get involved in drugs or other negative influences, and just do whatever comes to them in the moment.

For these young people, a successful transition from this state to Level 1, the beginning of thinking, often comes in the form of imposed discipline. Military boot camp, for instance, can be a powerful turn-around. In the military, they are given a specific set of "right" answers—what to say, how to dress, when to get up, etc. This discipline, this clear pattern of right and wrong, can often help these people start making more conscious decisions.

Someone operating at Level 0 might ask about the Amendment, "What would it do for me today?"

Level 1 Thinking: Decision-making

The shift to Level 1 means seizing more effective control over the environment. It can begin when we start to notice patterns in what is happening, and develop routines or norms around them. Sometimes an expert will teach us the ropes, or we learn from past experience.

Level 1 thinking is "decision-making"—evaluating options and selecting them according to a particular description of goodness. A manager, for instance, uses this level of thinking when she seeks to improve her organization by evaluating the people in it, one by one according to set standards, rewarding those who are doing well, and improving or getting rid of the bad performers. It is a model of change which assumes that the organization is composed of separate individuals who can be evaluated independently.

This style of thinking is well suited to the Box structure because it assumes we can make decisions through codified procedures. It's how we structured our judicial system, for example, to apply the letter of the law rather than the spirit of the law. Such decision-making approaches can be efficient for simple decisions, but often fail to account for the real needs of people or generate real commitment to decisions.

A person using Level 1 thinking might ask about the Citizens Amendment, "Would the Amendment help us to enact better laws? And, since it doesn't have any coercive authority, how

would it help us overcome the power of special interests?" *Chapter 9 — Power and Control (Level 1)* answers these questions.

Level 2 Thinking: Problem-solving

Life is more complex than Level 1 thinking allows and, at some point, we start to notice that our attempts to gain more control actually reduce it. For instance, as we add more and more people to prisons in an attempt to increase personal security, we actually diminish it. Prisons teach criminal behaviors to nonviolent offenders, disrupt families and their earnings, build resentment among the poor people and racial minorities who disproportionately occupy the jails, undermine democracy by denying the vote to those who have served their time, generate exorbitant expenses that are borne by the general population, and do not help victims get restitution.

The transition to Level 2 thinking, "problem-solving," begins by acknowledging these unintended consequences and letting go of the idea that black and white answers will always work. It is a step away from the idea that there is one right answer and a step toward carefully considering many ideas, discussing reasons for and against each one.

Level 2 is the logical, reason-oriented mode of thinking in our system, sometimes called "deliberative democracy." It is when we rely on evaluative, critical thinking skills, along with discussion and debate, to rationally determine the "best" answers. It assumes a systems model of change, where we recognize that the apparent problem may just be a symptom of some deeper issue, and we seek to understand what is really happening.

The difference between Level 1 and Level 2 can be demonstrated by a visit to a hardware store. If you have a simple clear problem, Level 1 thinking is most appropriate. The clerk just directs you to the appropriate product on the shelf. At other times though, you may not fully understand the problem you are facing. You want a Level 2 thinker, someone who has experience with this kind of problem, to help you think it through.

The kind of question that a Level 2 thinker might ask about the Citizens Amendment is, "Would it adjust our system so that we are more deliberative, collaborative, and that we make smarter decisions?" *Chapter 10 — Reshaping the System (Level 2)* addresses this question.

Level 3 Thinking: Creative Thinking

When problems get even more complex, when issues seem impossible to solve, we may need to let go of control even more. The next "letting go" is to abandon the idea that our conscious minds can do it all and invite our unconscious minds to help. Level 3 is "creative thinking."

We might establish and articulate a vision of what we want. Sometimes that's enough to manifest it. In other cases, brainstorming, lateral thinking, positive affirmations, and spiritual meditation can be used. Each calls forth more self-organizing change.

With brainstorming, for instance, we imagine a problem and then allow our creative minds to self-organize many ideas. We don't evaluate them, but just get out of the way and let them come. Surprisingly, after a time, we realize that many of these ideas, which at first seemed foolish, have exciting potential.

All of us open ourselves to Level 3 thinking when we dream, stand in the shower, play music, or sit quietly. In the words of Albert Einstein, " . . . the gift of fantasy has meant more to me than my talent for absorbing positive knowledge." Corporations have recognized this value and seek to foster it in employees. They often gather them together, for example, to develop a company vision,

fashion a mission statement, or formulate shared values. Just holding meetings and developing these statements, whether specific actions are taken or not, help raise the organization's level of capability for self-organizing change.

A question about the Citizens Amendment from someone thinking at Level 3 might be, "Would it help us establish a shared vision and become more creative?" *Chapter 11 — Creating Shared Vision (Level 3)* will address this.

Level 4 Thinking: Choice-creating

Level 3 also has its limits. Some issues are so impossible-seeming that a miracle is needed or, at least, a transformation. In a crisis, a person can feel powerless and emotionally overwhelmed. But these issues can be solved with another "letting go," one that evokes creativity of both head and heart, as well as logic. Level 4 is Choice-creating.

Choice-creating can happen naturally when we care deeply about a problem that seems impossible to solve. The trick is to stay both caring and creative, even to the point of letting go of who we think we are. Then we open a door to the possibility of personal transformation.

Stories about how transformation happens are the substance of our favorite myths. The story of *Star Wars*, for instance, is a modern dragon myth where a heroic figure faces and defeats the evil Darth Vader and the Death Star. Vader is all powerful at first, and can easily outfight our hero, Luke Skywalker. Luke goes through all the levels we've been talking about. First, he discovers his aunt and uncle murdered, and decides to go after the murderers. Then he starts to understand more about what he's up against, and works with others to defeat the Empire.

In time, Luke gains a vision of what he might become, a Jedi knight. He isn't very good at following his master's instructions and struggles with it, but when he eventually faces the ultimate test, one person against the Death Star, it isn't his fighting skills that save him. To reach the fourth and uppermost level, he must let go of those and "trust the force." Only then can a miracle happen, only then can he do the impossible and succeed—becoming a different person in the process. Later, he faces another crisis in fighting Darth Vader. Again, all seems lost. But when he trusts the force, Luke not only survives but a transformation begins in Darth Vader as he feels the stirring of compassion for his long-lost son. In this instance, both are transformed to father and son, and a new "Kingdom" is born.

In a more down-to-earth example, M. Scott Peck describes how this transformational process is *required* to build community. In his book*, A Different Drum: Community and Peacemaking*, he says that people in the groups he works with start out thinking of themselves as already being a community. After a while, differences are discovered and people try to fix each other, but this only makes things worse. Good feelings deteriorate and the "community" eventually faces a crisis where it may dissolve completely. Peck sees this deterioration as part of a healthy process. He warns that if an authoritarian leader were to impose order on the chaos at this stage, the chance for achieving true community would be lost.

What happens next is "emptiness," where people let go of their efforts to fix others and they accept their inability to "build" community. Paradoxically, this seeming failure makes room for transformation, for true community to self-organize.

Wise prophets throughout history have described this "letting go and trusting the force" process. Jesus described it as a paradox, "Whosoever shall seek to save his life shall lose it; and whosoever shall lose his life shall save it." (Luke: 17:33) Lao Tzu, from the fifth century, BCE said, "When I let go of what I am, I become what I might be."

This final level of self-organizing change can work for society as well as for people. It is the creation of a "wise democracy," where all of us face and solve the big issues together, using both creativity and reason. As Nietsche said, "A necessary condition for a miracle is to be at an impasse that only a miracle can resolve."

Someone thinking at this level might ask, "Will the Citizens Amendment facilitate us as a society, to address our most crucial issues creatively, collaboratively, and with wisdom?" There are three chapters on how it would do this: *Chapter 12 — "Turning On" Our System, Chapter 13 — Choosing to BE,* and *Chapter 14 — Changing Our Mythology*.

****

More about Choice-Creating can be found on the web at http://www.tobe.net/topics/choice.html

Dynamic Facilitation evokes this high-quality of thinking in people. Information about Dynamic Facilitation can be found at http://www.tobe.net/topics/facilitation.html

Additional chapters of the book may be found at http://www.SocietysBreakthrough.com