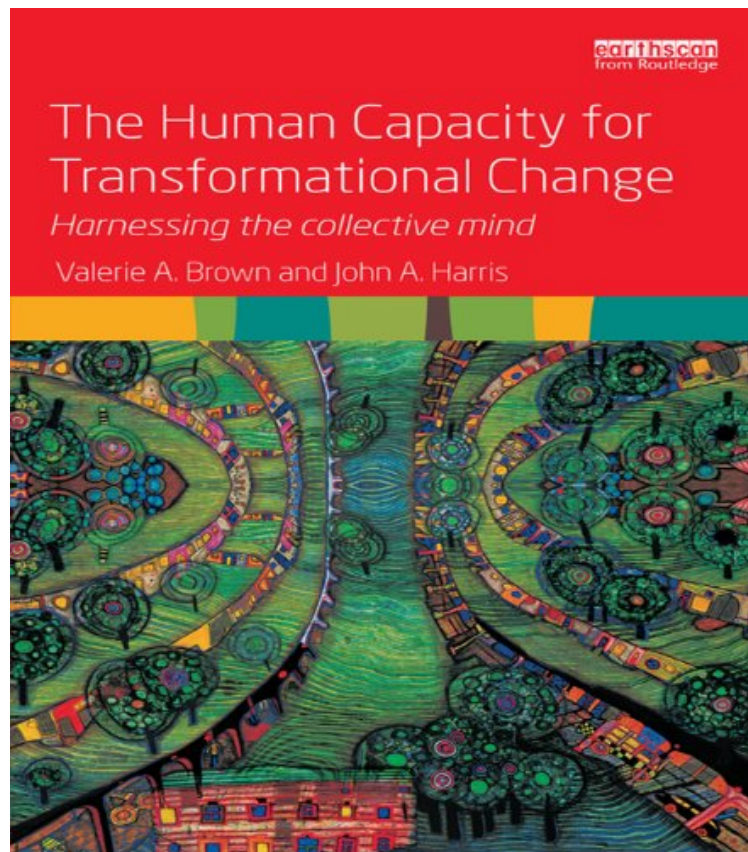


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The Human Capacity for Transformational Change: Harnessing the collective mind

Valerie A. Brown, John A. Harris
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Valerie A. Brown, John A. Harris : The Human Capacity for Transformational Change: Harnessing the collective mind before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Human Capacity for Transformational Change: Harnessing the collective mind:

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. The Human Capacity for Transformational Change - fabulous!By jack russellThe Human Capacity for Transformational Change: Harnessing the collective mindValerie A Brown and John A Harris, Routledge, 2014A reviewThis is a vitally important book for social scientists and all concerned with being open to new ways of addressing complex issues within our communities. It examines our capacity, as individuals and together, to bring about transformational change ndash; not any change, mind you, but the kind that is required to deal with truly lsquo;wickedrsquo; problems ndash; the kind that, by definition, have no solution. In modelling transformational change, Brown and Harris suggest that we need to be encouraged to see how small changes can lead to large, unpredictable effects across a whole system (including human and natural systems). They also propose that we need to recognise that, through transformational change, the future is not going to be the same as the past. This seems to me to be a critical realisation, because we might desire our brand of change to be controlled, supportive (of our actions), predictable and we should acknowledge that notion is absurd. On reading this book, one

sense I have is that envisioning the scope of some transformational change may require a long lens. In social terms, for example, we could consider how transformational change has wrought the role and contribution of people with a disability now compared with their invisibility in society only a few years ago. But what is transformational change and why a collective mind? Chapter 13 of the book provides a useful summary of the context in which to consider these concepts. Brown and Harris propose that transformational change occurs all around us, not only in relation to urgent issues or concerns but also about the matters which we shape and are shaping us every day, by our everyday interventions and responses (or lack of them). The rate of transformational change, they argue, renders projections or predictions about the future likely to be 'extremely unreliable'. We can observe this in some fields of social science – social planning for example, where the rate of change within communities and across cities challenges the skill of practitioners seeking to maintain a focus on responding appropriately to immediate social needs. Add to this that old ways of solving problems have not served us well. We tend to be locked into 'silos' of knowledge or specialisation which limit not only our perspectives but also our creativity. In the social planning example, the values (of justice, fairness and inclusion) and views of these practitioners are often trumped by economic or political imperatives. By contrast to siloed activity, the collective mind embraces not only the fields of knowledge we need to access externally for effective decision-making but also our own knowledge bases at a personal/introspective level. The authors propose that searching for 'positive and practical ideas on moving towards an unknown future'... means accepting the reality of the dynamic connections between parts and wholes, stable and chaotic systems, individuals and groups and creative and rational thinking. The authors argue that a continually changing world can best be understood through examining seven types of evidence which support transformational change through the application of the collective mind. These are (woefully truncated):

- Introspective: Based on who I am; how my journey has shaped my thinking; acknowledging one's engagement-
- Physical: Ensuring measurement and analysis are grounded in human experience, imaginative, responsive and practical-
- Social: Based on the lived experience of members of the community, how they work toward inclusion, collaboration, mutuality-
- Ethical: Addressed to the relationships between living things; the pursuit of conditions for a collective society-
- Aesthetic: Valuing the capacity for transcendence, 'for being lifted out of the ordinary, everyday world'
- Sympathetic: Grounded in responsibility, trust, shared commitment-
- Reflective: Building in a stage of review which respects the paradoxes influencing our interpretation of reality (interconnections of parts and wholes; stable and chaotic living systems; individual and collective learning and different paths of human thought).

For social scientists, whose work can sometimes struggle for legitimacy alongside 'straightforward' physical or economic measures, these are a gift, because all seven types of evidence are considered essential for developing policy and decision-making. The book eloquently explores questions around these types of evidence and interweaved through the discussion are examples in science, art, literature and philosophy which focus upon ways of escaping from the opposites to relationship-building; bringing together parts and the whole; embracing complexity; understanding different traditions; expanding empiricism; accepting (and working with, rather than against) dynamism. The book provides detailed and fascinating life story examples of great thinkers who employed both introspective and broader thought processes to be described as collective thinkers. Chapter 2, on Charles Darwin, is a personal favourite. It describes the confluence of his introspective, physical, social, ethical, aesthetic and sympathetic thought over a lifetime of diverse (in some ways, unprecedented) experience and environments and in the company of loving family and devoted colleagues and collaborators. The book also includes chapters devoted to fellow 'sorcerers', James Lovelock (Gaian theory) and Norbert Wiener (cybernetics) and visionaries who interpreted and extended their thinking. The work of Christopher Alexander, who developed and gave expression to pattern language, is of particular relevance to social scientists owing to the belief that everyone who lives had influenced their environment and that there are elements contributing to good design (and a good life), including a collective understanding of communication – in the words of the authors: 'A pattern language allows all the interests involved in any transformational change to discover the relationships between their answers to the reflective question (in times of transformational change, how shall we live?)' As social scientists we already practice some of the elements of collective thinking (for example inclusion, collaboration, trust-building, etc). This book invites us to further those skills, to bring together our mutual learnings, to change the ways we acquire knowledge and make decisions (including by bringing other collective thinkers to the process). In this endeavour, we could also learn from a 'companion' volume to this book, which includes a wealth of tools to assist practitioners in collective learning and collaborative action. It is *Collective Learning for Transformational Change: A guide to collaborative action*, Valerie A Brown and Judith A Lambert, Routledge, 2013. *The Human Capacity for Transformational Change* is a book which encourages an essentially positive view of our futures, collective and individual. It is important for those seeking to explore ideas for better ways of approaching transformational change in their lives, practice or communities. The book invites the opportunity to dip into key chapters at will. I would encourage readers to first read Chapter 13 for excitement about the possibilities and then return to Chapter 2 for a beautifully researched and articulated insight into the Darwinian (and others) mind. Jackie Ohlin July 2014 of 0 people found the following review helpful. *Harnessing the Collective mind_ hope for the future* By Wendy Rainbird

BOOK REVIEW: THE

HUMAN CAPACITY FOR TRANSFORMATIONAL CHANGE: HARNESSING THE COLLECTIVE MIND, By Valerie A Brown and John A Harris (Routledge 2014) Making full use of our minds and making a positive contribution to a world full of fundamental hope and the prospect for a better life are seen as vital determinants of a healthy society by this thoughtful and wide ranging book. This book is relevant for people working in many different fields, who understand that to achieve a more just, equitable, and ecologically sustainable future, there are many complex issues to tackle, often of a global nature, like poverty, pollution or climate change. Following their influential *Tackling Wicked Problems*; and a handbook for practitioners called *Collective Learning for Transformational Change*;, the authors have thought through and practiced tackling such complex issues. Ref: <http://www.collectivethinking.com.au> This accessibly written new book makes the point that there is a need for transformational change now and that there have been transformational changes in the way we think about the World, on which we can build. Brown and Harris conducted a search for the outstanding collective thinkers who contributed to a new understanding of how the world works: Charles Darwin (evolutionary change), James Lovelock (Gaia), and Norbert Wiener (World Wide Web). Developments in human communication and technology have been and are transformational. Our current decision-making on any of the many complex issues, is characterised by clashes of different interests, of perceiving difference as a basis for conflict, of fear, or denial of the big changes needed to address many of the World's problems. This stimulating book explores in a positive way, how we can make the decisions and changes we might need for a more humane and sustainable world. We will need to bring all of the capacity of each individual mind and many different minds into a dynamic interaction and synergy to make the necessary changes. Harnessing that capacity requires answering seven questions: introspective (what assumptions), physical, social, ethical, aesthetical, sympathetic questions, while reflecting on all these, then transformational, collective thinking can occur. Part 2 of the book explores examples of such collective thinking in practice, which are happening now: eg. inclusive language for shared understanding; different forms of active democracy; collaborative economy; the role of life-long learning. It concludes with finding a third way between the contrasting dystopian and hopeless view of complex global problems, and the utopian view that is unrealistic. The book is like a rich, treasure hunt, which is positive, stimulating and grounded. Reviewer: Wendy Rainbird, BA, Dip. Ed. Canberra.

Pressures for transformational change have become a regular feature of most fields of human endeavour. Master-thinkers and visionaries alike have reframed existing divisions as connecting relationships, bringing together as dynamic systems the supposed opposites of parts and wholes, stability and change, individuals and society, and rational and creative thinking. This reframing of opposites as interconnected wholes has led to realisation of the power of a collective mind. This book offers ways and means of creating the synergies that are crucial in influencing a desired transformational change towards a just and sustainable future. It describes how and why our current decision-making on any complex issue is marked by clashes between the different interests involved. More optimistically, the book pursues a mode of thinking that brings together government, specialised and community interests at the local, regional and personal scales in a collective transformation process. Practical examples signal the emergence of a new knowledge tradition that promises to be as powerful as the scientific enlightenment. Written in accessible language, this book will be insightful reading for anyone struggling with transformational change, especially researchers, students and professionals in the fields of administration, governance, environmental management, international development, politics, public health, public law, sociology, and community development

This refreshing, stimulating, indeed brilliant book helps move the concept of "collective mind" out of the realm of speculative philosophy and into the practical work of changing the world. We humans must think together, across our wide diversity, to deal with the great challenges before us. — Alan AtKisson, writer and international consultant, Director, AtKisson Group. This is a truly amazing - bold, audacious - intellectual enterprise that hopefully will become a mandatory text for discussion and study in the academy as well as for use in community development and planning. — Caroline Ifeka, consultant anthropologist, Nigeria and London. In *The Human Capacity for Transformational Change*, Brown and Harris have elegantly made accessible the processes that shape human existence and our collective influence on today's world. They nicely deconstruct how different ways of thinking inform the broad policy directions that serve our current global trajectory. — Colin L. Soskolne, University of Alberta Canada; Vice-President Executive Committee Society for the Advancement of Science in Africa This brilliant book leads to a vision of the world which is neither a dystopia (a prediction of gloom and disaster), nor a utopia (a model of impossible perfection). Rather, it leads to a future of a way to live that works in practice. — Wendy Rainbird, environmental educator, policy advisor, and Landcare administrator, Canberra Australia. This is an important and thought-provoking guide to navigating that complex reality and imagining, together, a world transformed. Brown and Harris draw on the best of our transcendent impulses, grounded in good science and an understanding of complex social phenomena to propel us to the next phase of human existence. — David Waltner-Toews, University of Guelph, Canada; founding president of the Network for Ecosystem Sustainability and Health. Valerie Brown and John Harris have brought together all the elements of a new conception of science, one that enables scientists to rejoin the human race. This

book should enable a new generation of scientist/citizens to assist in the transformational change that we need so badly and that is now beginning to happen. ndash;Jerome Ravetz, founder of Post-Normal Science, UKThis book is engaging and innovative and I hope it will serve to push our thinking forward at a time when radical change is needed to deal with the complexity of real world challenges ndash;Professor Roderick J. Lawrence, University of Geneva, Switzerland About the AuthorValerie A. Brown is Director of the Local Sustainability Project, Human Ecology Program, Fenner School of Environment and Society, Australian National University, Emeritus Professor of Environmental Health and author of over 12 books and 110 refereed journal papers on collective thinking and the collective mind.John A. Harris is a university academic, outdoors educator and collective action researcher with the Local Sustainability Project and Alliance for Regenerative Landscape, Agriculture and Social Health in Australia.