Topic: Human Culture – how the "DNA" of civilisation defeats efforts to achieve sustainability and long term corporate survival.

Speaker – Will Sutherland, author of "The Councillor's Handbook" and joint author of "The New Complete Book of Self Sufficiency" published by Dorling and Kindersly

All human action and decisions take place within a powerful cultural framework made up from institutions, habit and law/regulation.   The familiarity of these constraints often makes them invisible.   As a result social and behavioural scientists have promoted disciplines such as economics, political science and psychology as a means of explaining how people behave.   The speaker will argue that both at National and Corporate levels this ignorance of cultural realities leads to many unwanted and potentially life threatening consequences.   The solution lies in the new and (as yet) undeveloped science of "cultural engineering".

Will Sutherland has had a life long interest in the processes which lead to the collapse of human civilisations.   After studying Mathematics and Law at Cambridge University he spent 10 years in the Whitehall Civil service before moving on to become a Senior Consultant with Ernst and Young.   In 1992 he played a key role in the creation of the "Alternative Treaties" written by over 175 worldwide NGOs after the first Earth Summit and now posted on the United Nations website.   After this he left the business world and moved to Ireland where he grew most of his own food and began to teach the skills of "self-sufficiency".   He has talked and written widely on the institutional processes which effectively create a cultural prison preventing the achievement of sustainable corporate and national objectives.

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Talk
Introduction

Some of my earliest memories are of fascination about how the world works.

More than 60 years ago (!)I lay in my bed and looked at pictures of flowers, animals, planets and galaxies. How did they get to be this wonderful way and what magical rules made the whole thing tick?

I worked and studied and did my best – finally ending up trying to get my mind around the strange and highly abstract world of theoretical physics at Cambridge.   By this time I had a wider perspective on the world and after 2 years of immersion in bizarre mathematical inventions, I realised that the answer to one question would simply lead to even more complex questions. So I decided to turn my attention to the more tangible mystery of why humans in the mass had never succeeded in managing their civilisations without war and disaster.   How was it that supposedly intelligent rational individuals were invariably unable to create civilisations that were sustainable?

Why did people, and civilisations, do and (fail to do) what they did?

I began by studying history and law then continued into management and economics.   I continued by working on a PhD researching the then controversial question of how institutional constraints were often more important than economics in predicting how people would behave.   From there I was drawn irresistibly into the challenge of managing government. A hands on practical laboratory – if you like – for understanding how government worked.

As a senior civil servant in Whitehall I wrestled with the constant desire of ambitious politicians to win short term popularity at the expense of longer term public good.   Issues of environment and sustainability were cosmetic to say the least!   After 10 years I gave up in disgust at the constant massive waste of public money which is an unavoidable consequence of our present populist democracy.

My next adventure was to explore the opportunities offered by "alternative" politics.   In the late 70s the ecology party and the green party were just emerging.   It did not take long to discover that they too were dominated by people with massive egos, a penchant for liking the sound of their own voices and a bad tendency to stab their friends in the back as soon as opportunity offered.

Leaving that hot bed of intrigue, I plunged into the rapidly developing movement known as "civil society" - the NGO movement.   I published my own magazine – Ideas for Tomorrow Today – which attempted to summarize the emergence of new institutions and new political ideas.   This culminated in my trip to the first Earth Summit in Rio in 1992.   My work in the following year was to co-ordinate, edit and finally publish the Alternative Treaties which had been produced by working with input from175 NGOs from all over the planet.   These are seminal documents – now on the UN official website!

My conclusions from all this were that any change towards a more life enhancing world had to start from the bottom up and not from the top down. In 1993 I left London life and moved to Ireland to work with John Seymour on promoting "self-sufficiency".   With 3.5 acres we grew most of our own food – veg, fruit, meat – milking our cow every day as we learned to sing, dance and play music. We built our own houses. We gave speeches, ran courses and wrote articles, poems and books. We educated our own children at home.

We felt sad and sorry for the millions of wage slaves trapped in by debt and an incurable addiction to buying "stuff".   We searched for ways of spreading the good news that much fun and good times can be had without spending money.   It is, of course, a necessary condition that we have a comfortable living Earth on which to have all these good times.   How to achieve this remains our constant challenge today. This is why I am interested in culture and institutions since these are the dominant factors determining how humans in the mass will behave.   (Economics is just one of these institutions.)

The title of my talk uses the common term "sustainability".   It is, of course, wishful thinking to imagine we can have "sustainable development"! Life on Earth will always be "sustainable" with, or without, humans.   The question is simply what kind and quality of life it will be – and, just as important, how we will get from here to there.

What is culture?

Culture is often called the DNA of civilisation because culture is what carries forward patterns of behaviour from one generation to the next.   But there are some paradoxes. Culture is often (usually) invisible to those contained within it.   We often find the behaviour of other cultures incomprehensible without realising that they may have exactly the same feelings about the way we behave.

The cultures that we live and work in today have been "selected" by evolutionary pressures. They are in reality the true human "life forms" on Earth.   In this sense an extra-terrestrial visitor would see only a few life forms on Earth – the Christians, the Consumers, the Muslims, the Buddhists, the Hindus - for example.   As individuals we depend on being part of one of these cultures for our survival.   The long term survival of corporations is equally affected by the viability and relevance of their internal cultures.

Given this dynamic there is no doubt that nature and evolution WILL

eventually select a culture that can co-exist with a sustainable Earth. (Corporations in their current profit seeking form will probably not be a part of such a culture.)   Unfortunately natural selection (survival of the fittest) is NOT a comfortable process – as the dinosaurs discovered.   There is some re-assurance in this – Earth herself will transcend everything we do to her!   But as a grandparent with 10 grandchildren I still hope to make some contribution which will make the adjustment less painful and the future more pleasurable.

The Significance of Culture.

All human organisations involving large numbers of people depend on culture to work effectively – this applies to the nuclear family at one end of the scale to the huge global corporation or nation state at the other.
Culture is built from value systems (fuzzy), memes (ideas and behaviours) and institutions (more or less complex structures of rules which persist from generation to generation).   If you are interested in changing the way people (in the mass) behave then you have to change their culture – there is no other effective way.   Many different academic specialities have been created to study different aspects of culture – law, history, anthropology, psychology, sociology and economics to name a few.   Rather surprisingly there is (as yet) no speciality of cultural engineering.   Despite this, we see governments, protestors, security services, advertising agencies, revolutionaries, corporate leaders and religious fanatics trying every trick to change cultures in ways that suit their cause.   Some tricks are better than others as we shall discover!

Ridiculous Examples
Here are some simple examples which show how humans behave in seemingly ridiculous ways because it is so difficult for us to escape from institutional constraints.

A. The querty typewriter keyboard was invented with the major objective of making it as difficult as possible to type quickly.   This was necessary to avoid jamming the mechanically operated keys.   Despite all the advances in word processing, computer power and every brilliant attempt at a faster keyboard, we are still using querty!

B. English spelling!   There is no consistency whatever in english spelling – for example the sound"a" can be spelled 11 different ways!   Spelling is an institution which has evolved over hundreds of years – logic has not been involved!

C. The long trousers,ties and suits which are worn by men are very strange and impractical clothing.   Jackets are cut in a shape that allows easy riding of a horse. Trousers became popular after the french revolution in 1789 when they were used to indicate solidarity with the working class and

dislike of the aristocracy (who wore breeches).   The clothes people wear are still an important part of corporate culture.   We do behave differently depending on the clothes we are wearing.   For some reason the corporate world has always expected the really bright IT people to dress in an unconventional way!

D. Money incentives are the conventional way of encouraging desired behaviours despite the fact that there is a mountain of evidence showing that such incentives can seriously reduce creative thinking.   The candle experiment and Dan Pink's TED talk for example.

E. Major Scientific discoveries
These are almost invariably made by people who have been educated and working in a different subject area from that in which they make the discovery.   Those who are brought up in a particular discipline/culture simply cannot see "outside the box".
AT&T could not see that digital package switching would take over from analogue signals
Plate tectonics was not discovered by geologists
Einstein came at physics from a completely different angle – he took Maxwell's equations and their consequences as being "TRUE" then examined the new reality they represented.
IBM did not see that software would be a highly profitable industry
Edison could not see that alternating current would be better than direct

What makes Culture and what are institutions?
Institutions, values and memes are specific patterns of behaviour and ideas which have been selected by historical evolution and together comprise a culture.   Through human upbringing, education and peer group pressure these patterns can persist (like DNA) from generation to generation *even though they may no longer be fit for purpose.*

Values
Cultural values have been analysed across 6 dimensions in the work of Geert Hofstede (of IBM) who was primarily interested in international comparisons.   These dimensions are:
Individualism-collectivism
Uncertainty avoidance
Power distance
Masculinity-femininity
Long term orientation
Indulgence versus self-restraint

Memes

Memes are relatively simple ideas or behaviours which are carried out by individuals and passed on through time by upbringing, education and peer group contagion. The concept was developed by Dawkins in 1976. He saw *memes* as the cultural equivalent of *genes.*

In the modern digital world of the internet, memes have become a new way to spread cultural messages. Pictures/icons and words spread rapidly in a peer to peer chain reaction – particularly with mobile phones. This has been a spontaneous "invention" of the "crowd" and we don't yet know what power or function it may ultimately give rise to. The website "Reddit" will keep you up to date with trends. The new power of the "crowd" is still evolving in peer to peer communication and "wiki" type phenomena.

Institutions

Institutions are more complex sets of rules and behaviours which are required for the viable operation of communities – they may be implicit (often invisible) or explicit (depending on codified rules and laws). My focus in this talk is on the way in which *institutions* create subtle but powerful constraints on how human organisations behave. Such constraints can only be removed by *cultural engineering* and this is a discipline which has been little studied or understood. (Hence the collapse of all previous civilisations and many apparently successful corporations.)

Seven Major Institutions preventing "sustainability"

Let's look at 7 major institutions which dominate our present global culture and prevent "sustainability" :

1. The concept of "I"

Many of the ways we think and behave are contained in the institution of language. (Language being the system of rules and understanding ascribed to words made from small physical marks on paper.) The western world places a huge emphasis on individuality and this concept is contained in the word "I". While it is legitimate for an individual to have feelings as in "I am happy", it is misleading and completely incorrect to say "I can do what I like". In practice "I" cannot do anything without the support of my community (who grow my food, make my clothes, protect my safety etc.) or the existence of an Earth life support system which provides clean air, water and soil.

Answer - In the culture which is to come I believe everyone will carry with them a "natural companion" (a small plant, animal or tree) as a continual reminder that the natural world is just as much an integral part of our living being as our fingernails or teeth. It is the Earth and not "we" who are "alive". There are some who believe we should not use the word "I" except in its proper context – otherwise we should say "the me part of us" or "the me part of Earth"!

2. Romanised Christianity

Moses was the first man to see the power of having a single God outside the Earth.   Before this pagan gods had been strongly attached to animals and places – humans could not just use them as they pleased.   And like other cult leaders since, Moses was the only one who had a direct line to God.   Later on JC took up these concepts, made wise speeches, practised civil disobedience, made miracles and finally became a martyr.

JC was in effect a very gifted cultural engineer.   The Romans could do nothing to stop his ideas – indeed they added to their power by creating more martyrs.   On the principle that if you can't beat them, join them, the Romans finally adopted JC's religion.   But, in doing so, they made several VERY IMPORTANT changes - original sin and the fear of hell, Earth and animals put here for our use, strong hierarchies of authority (Pope) and conformity, no females allowed into hierarchy (Eve and "evil').   Roman christianity became the "glue" which kept the Roman empire together – and indirectly led to the life threatening exploitation of Earth and strongly centralised leadership structures which we still see everywhere around us today.

Answer – New spirituality based on magic of life versus entropy (modern physics) – "God/the life force" immanent in everything, dispersed weak hierarchies of authority (local autonomy and diversity).   The old celtic christianity offers a useful model.

3. So-called democratic government
Democratically elected populist governments began with the english parliament which was effectively elected by a club of the very rich after the king was beheaded in the seventeenth century.   At the outset of "democracy" people needed to own at least 2000 acres to vote.

Today with universal suffrage the system simply gives "power' to those that most want it despite the fact that these people need have no training or experience which qualifies them to govern.   The situation is further compounded by the fact that those who vote have little understanding of the complex policy issues involved in modern government.   Even more bizarre is the fact that voters cannot vote for "none of the above".   And anyway the idea that good decisions can be made on the basis of a 4 or 5 year turnaround is plainly stupid.

Answer -   Civilisations like the Incas and the Chinese (and to some extent the French) only give "power" to those with sufficient training, education and experience to use it wisely.   One could imagine an enlightened world where a "citizenship test" is required to obtain the franchise.   Or we could revert to the Greek method of choosing "leaders" by random choice (by lot) and then requiring them to answer to the demos with "ostracism" as a punitive sanction for bad performance!

4. Debt based fiat currency

Debt based fiat currency was invented with the creation of the Bank of England in 1694.   This was a brilliant institutional invention which allowed the english to build the biggest navy in the world *without having to raise taxes excessively.*   No longer was currency limited to gold and silver but workers could be paid with pieces of paper (promises!).   The new Bank could create money which government and businesses needed "out of thin air".

The entire world economy is now driven by the need to pay interest on all this debt based money (51 trillion $ and rising at $100,000 per second). However much faster we work and mine, paying this interest is going to get more and more difficult on a finite planet.   Price inflation is inevitable as more money has to be constantly created to pay the interest.   Debt based money and sustainability are not compatible.

Answer – Promote and adopt the use of non-debt based digital currencies like bitcoin and litecoin.   These are analagous to a more user friendly version of currency backed by gold.   Integrity of the currency is protected not by banks but by large peer to peer networks.   No interest is payable and the currencies are "deflationary" which discourages profligate spending and encourages saving.   A vibrant non-pecuniary economy would be a necessary feature of a world using digital currencies.

NOTE – Such digital currencies would eliminate the banking sector in its current form.   It would greatly reduce the power of the nation state – to collect taxes and influence the economy.   It would require corporations to raise finance directly from the public rather than use the "undemocratic" financial power of loans raised with banks.

5. Economics and the free market

Ever since Adam Smith wrote about the invisible hand of the market the commercial world has been wedded to the ideal of the free market.   The strong, ruthless and lucky get rich – and that is OK (we say) because they actually help the poor by driving economic growth onward and upward.

In the modern world of globalisation the dominant ethos is western consumerism. This is effectively underpinned by the romanised version of christianity. Success is measured primarily by money. Goods and resources are distributed almost exclusively by the price mechanism. Our relationship to the Earth (its plants and animals) is based on the precept that these "goodies" have been put there for our use.   "God" is somewhere out there keeping an eye on things (if he/she exists at all).   Humans expect to use the Earth as if it were some giant machine.   If business were governed by the ethos of buddhism, celtic christianity or hinduism then things might be very different.

Answer - The shortcomings of the price mechanism on a finite world where life depends on huge uncontrolled commons (air and water) are well known. Price does not give effective signals to use resources wisely.   Professor Manuel Castells has published a book (The Aftermath) describing his research into just how quickly and effectively the people in Spain have

created almost 100 new non-economic ways of doing business.   Before the advent of the money economy in the 17th century virtually all exchange was carried out without money – based on the power of social obligation, community responsibility and family duty.   When inflationary debt based money is abolished in favour of deflationary digital currency the velocity of circulation will be greatly reduced.   This will be a powerful incentive encouraging non-economic trading and "own work".

We can already see a spectrum of human organisations in which "success" and "status" are measured/valued in very different ways.   At the smallest scale (in the family or group of friends) status is not measured by how much money people have.   It is measured by how much they contribute physically, spiritually and emotionally to the group – how friendly, loving and supportive other find them.   The most "successful" will have a wide and numerous web of support from the other members of their community.   And it is a natural part of the human condition to want to be in emotional credit with other members of the community.   In the countryside it is always a big plus if you are able to help a neighbour in distress – this builds up your social and emotional credit so you know you too will receive all the help you need when things go wrong.

6. Corporations treated as immortal individuals with limited liability

The modern corporation combined with the invention of debt based money (Banking) to create the industrial revolution which is the basis for the globalised world economy we live in today.   The corporation as a legal entity is immortal (lives for ever) and has tax advantages which enable it to accumulate huge wealth and power.   It has limited liability which means it can take risks which might bankrupt an individual.   It must generate "profit" for its owners and this tends to encourage expansion.   It can operate in many different nations often playing one off against another, and has sufficient resources to lobby and influence governments.

These characteristics create dangers for the sovereignty of nation states and the unsustainable exploitation/pollution/destruction of natural resources.

Answer – Follow the pattern set in the early history of the United States whose settlers were determined to limit the influence of large corporations (particularly English ones!).

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- Corporate charters (licenses to exist) were granted for a
limited time

    ●Corporations could engage only in activities necessary to
    fulfill their chartered purpose.
    ●Corporations could not own stock in other corporations
    ●Corporations were often terminated if they caused public harm.
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●Owners and managers were responsible for criminal acts committed on the job.
●Corporations could not make any political or charitable contributions nor spend money to influence law-making.

7. Consumerism

Consumerism is the addictive process through which people buy more and more stuff in the hope of making themselves happy even though they know that this is ultimately unsustainable and life threatening.   Consumerism is driven by human greed whose effects are hugely magnified by advertising and peer group pressure.   Consumerism creates "affluenza" which has been defined as:

"a painful, contagious, socially transmitted condition of overload, debt, anxiety and waste resulting from the dogged pursuit of more".

Answer – Develop a new institution in the form of "consumers anonymous" to be inspired by the internet networking game of "Metanoia".......   Peer groups work together to support each other in practical ways of rediscovering the many non-material pleasures in life.

Zeitgeist

The life threatening consequences of some of these institutions have been well described by the extremely articulate young american percussionist Peter Joseph in his Zeitgeist videos.   (Watched on Youtube by more than 20 million people.)   Unfortunately PJ does not offer any simple workable solutions – other than something he calls "resource based economics" which seems to be something like a "good housekeeping guide" for planet Earth.
In fact the solution (and sustainability!) can only be achieved by "cultural engineering".

CULTURAL ENGINEERING
So what is "cultural engineering" ?
The *first requirement* of the cultural engineer is to identify the institutions which influence critical aspects of behaviour in any human community whether it be a family, business, nation or civilisation.   The paradox here is that some of the most important cultural institutions may be effectively invisible simply because they are so intimately woven into day to day behaviour.   We have learned to take them as "givens" as part of our reality - democracy, paper money, the corporate form, private property and so on.

The *second requirement* is to look at the origins of each institution and assess whether the pattern of behaviours it creates is still 'fit for purpose".

Once we identify those outdated institutions which are getting in the way of the organisation's objectives (i.e. life threatening in the case of planet Earth) then we look for creative ways to change them.   This is what I am calling "cultural engineering".

Changing Institutions – changing culture
There are 2 dimensions to cultural engineering – we can call them "soft" and "hard".

Soft cultural engineering takes its form in words, songs, art and music of all kinds, newsletters, speeches and circulars.   In all these ways difficulties are identified and ideas/aspirations raised as to how they can be solved.   Values are changed.   The ground is prepared for the eventual nitty gritty of hard cultural engineering when the rules and systems underlying new institutions are finally laid down.   We can look at various forms of "soft" cultural engineering in more detail.

Ritual, ceremony and magic (including prayer and gods) Powerful art, ritual and rhetoric can progressively change people's values and beliefs. Starhawk wrote about Magic, Sex and politics – the golf game incident – the magic of cosmology, relativity and quantum theory.   Religions and fascist dictators have used ritual and ceremony very effectively.

Experiential change – actually being exposed to different ways of doing and being. This can happen through acts of nature – climate change for example or loss of topsoil.   It can happen when Management Consultants conduct workshops and team building exercises.   Humans are remarkable quick to adapt and this has been an important evolutionary advantage.
It can happened by example. After the fall of the roman empire the early celtic christians promoted their way of life and beliefs very effectively by creating monasteries all over Europe.   Their beautiful buildings, music, gardens, and many technical advances were a powerful promotional tool for their evangelical objectives.   As yet we have not seen anything like "ecosteries" being created by the "post consumer" or environmental movements.   Cultural change can be effectively promoted through practical example.

Martyrdom
Martyrdom is probably the single most powerful tool of the soft cultural engineer.   This has been amply demonstrated throughout human history yet governments and leaders of all types seem constantly to forget this as they persecute or extravagantly punish those whose actions they dislike.   (US drone attacks in Pakistan are a perfect example of unwitting cultural engineering – hugely benefitting the islamic extremists.   Just as Rome helped the Christians by throwing them to the lions, so the US are giving

massive help to their enemies – quite bizarre but then the excitement of short term political gain cannot be ignored!)

Pearce was the classic exponent of the power of martyrdom. In the late 19th century he wrote at length about his belief that it would only be through martyrdom that the irish could rid themselves of British rule. He even founded his own school where he promoted this teaching. So he had a ready band of followers ready to stage the symbolic Easter uprising of 1916. Winston Churchill who was then Britain's Commonwealth Secretary duly ordered the leaders to be executed and Pearce's plans were completed. The popular explosion of feeling against these executions became an irresistible springboard for irish home rule.

Charismatic leadership

Actions and statements by celebrities are particularly powerful in this regard – whether the celebrities are monarchs, footballers or pop stars. Turn ups on trouser bottoms appeared after King Edward rolled up his trousers so they would not get wet at the Windsor races!

Corporations will pay big money for a new Chief Executive when they believe his (or her) charismatic leadership can boost corporate culture in beneficial ways. There are many examples of soft cultural engineering being attempted in this way through product endorsements.

Non-violent/symbolic direct action

Michael Davitt was the irishman who first pioneered the successful use of well organised non-violent action as a tool for cultural engineering. After an early life of running guns for irish rebels he came to see that violence would always be met by greater violence from the occupying power. His answer was to raise money to build up a fund which could be used to keep workers alive if they withdrew their labour from bad landowners. The englishman Colonel Boycott was his first target – forced to give up his estate because nobody would work for him. Hence the "boycott" has become a common tool of the would-be cultural engineer.

Well organised non-violent action can create huge pressure for cultural change and Gandhi showed later with his campaign to free India.

Clothing and visible signs

Many of us remember how the tiniest signals in dress gave powerful indications of group status at school (or in the army). Prefects might be allowed to wear different coloured ties or high achievers in sport or music particular badges or ties. This is highly developed in the army where medals, badges, stripes, stars and dress have created a highly sophisticated cultural and social language.

We humans are incredibly sensitive to small visible signals because of our highly developed capacity to read emotions from minute facial movements.

The formal business "suit" is an important cultural institution in corporate life.

Icons and memes
Today with the almost universal availability of the internet we have new forms of "soft" cultural engineering in the form of "memes".   These images and words now spread rapidly across the globe via smart phones, You tube, Tumblr and Reddit.   Each image carries with it a bundle of messages and values and its popularity is an indication of its relevance and power.

Just like Institutions, these memes evolve through natural selection.   In this sense we could regard a "meme" as the simplest form of Institution. *Icons* are the bread and butter of the advertising industry.   They include brands, trademarks and such things are car radiator grills!   *Icons* are small signals which carry a large cultural message – for example the swastika or ban the bomb symbol.

Songs, poems, prayers and creeds
Religions have always been expert at using these approaches to create a closely bonded culture of religious feeling and community.   When people sing or play music together they do develop strong community feelings. Various attempts have been made in the corporate world to duplicate this type of process. There are corporate mission statements, creeds, and even songs.   Some businesses make space for communal activity.   The "conscious business" movement encourages meditation.
Sometimes cultural engineering through song may be quite a subtle process yet still defy all direct practical measures to resist it.   Pop music was, for example, a huge force which promoted 'western" values inside the "iron curtain" and no amount of restrictions could stop it.

The case of Kerry Packer and his attempt to introduce of new forms of cricket also shows how huge amounts of promotional money and lobbying proved almost useless in changing the established culture of test cricket.   It was only when Packer commissioned a pop song (as a last resort) that he catalysed a landslide of public support for his new ideas.

Games and support group action
Humans are good at learning new forms of behaviour through playing games especially when this requires co-ordinating action with others.   Jane McGonegal has written extensively about this and now uses "games" to effect change in corporate behaviours.   Internet games and the huge attraction of virtual realities are creating new ways of behaving within a whole new cultural environment.

In the world of the internet we are already seeing important new institutions.   We have tweets, facebook, and tumblr.   We have memes, Youtube and digital currencies.   We have massively popular co-operative internet gaming.   Many young people (mostly young!) have at least 2

different personalities – their "real" persona and their internet "avatar". Increasingly it is more comfortable and rewarding for people to spend as much time developing their internet persona as they do their "real" face to face relationships.

Note that it has always been a part of the "Gaia" hypothesis that the Earth will continue to evolve as a viable cosmic life form through the development of a "nervous" system analogous to the human body.   In this model the Earth is like a seed as it uses up huge stores of resources (particularly fossil fuels) to transform itself from one state to another.   10,000 million individual "cells" begin to organise themselves not through the crude mechanisms of "economics" but in a more sophisticated way using the fully developed institutions of the internet.   As we reach a point where the majority of human basic needs (food, shelter and vibrant life support systems) are met then the all encompassing dynamic of money and competition will be replaced by a new set of motivating factors.   For example peer group status, service to the community, giving help to the environment, number of "friends" and so on.

False flag activities

There is a long history of intrigue and deception involving false flag actions as a powerful means of influencing public opinion and changing values.   Corporations have blamed competitors for damaging incidents initiated by themselves.   Governments have started wars by setting up stage managed incidents which place blame on the enemies they wish to attack. The Nazi party famously burned down the Reichstag and found an unemployed communist Polish worker still in the building.   They were soon voted into power.   Prior to invading Poland they dressed up prisoners as German soldiers and had them shot by the gestapo.   Photos of the incident were published and the shootings blamed on Poland.

The american CIA has a long and murky history of trying to set up false flag events to provide cover for US aggression.   Security services everywhere have a big incentive to use agent provocateurs or allow minor incidents so that they receive more legal and financial power.

Propaganda

By publishing selected elements of the truth or lies that cannot be disproved, propaganda is used by governments and corporations to cloak their less pleasant activities.   The Nazi party was the first really successful proponent of modern news media as a vehicle for propaganda.   Today the advertising industry has taken the process to much greater degrees of sophistication.   Within corporations we often see the use of corporate newsletters spreading propaganda to highlight desirable practices and so on.

HARD CULTURAL ENGINEERING
Hard Cultural engineering takes place when the detailed rules for new

patterns of behaviour are actually codified and made concrete.   Soft cultural engineering does not of itself create new institutions although the change in values it encourages may be a necessary condition for their success.   The institutions themselves must ultimately depend on hard cultural engineering. This applies equally to working practices, tax systems, election systems, money systems, land ownership and so on.   Somebody has to get out the wet towels and use their brains, inspiration and experience to design and codify the new rules (and laws) which will form the foundation of the new institutions.

Examples of Hard Cultural Engineering needed for comfortable survival

To survive comfortably on planet Earth we now need a new non-debt based money system with greater functionality.

We need a system for legitimising and choosing leaders which is fit for purpose.

We need to build on "wiki" protocols and "crowd" wisdom to redefine "democracy".

We need to replace "economics" as the dominant institution for allocating resources.

We need to cure ourselves of addiction to consumerism.

We need to find a new spirituality which takes the up to date scientific understanding of reality as its starting point.

We need to understand the importance of diversity as nature's way of achieving stability and anti-fragility (to use Nassim Taleb's term).

We need new measurements of "success" which are not based on money or material possessions.

We can only make these changes through mechanisms of cultural engineering.   Without them all talk of "sustainability" is just wishful thinking.

THE CORPORATE DIMENSION

If we look at the "health" of a corporation in terms of its institutions rather than its physical balance sheet or intellectual property we would be need to make an inventory of "non-economic" cultural characteristics.   This is a challenge which should be undertaken by every large organisation that wishes to be sustainable.

Some possible cultural dimensions within corporations:

Court jester
Whistle blowing
Unofficial friendship circles
Peer group status
Dress rules – dress related symbols of "success"
Out of work social contacts
Number of clubs and work societies
Community activities performed voluntarily by staff

Birthday and special occasions at work
Social contact between work hierarchies
Contact between work wives
non-monetary rewards/signals of success
Type of internal newsletter – How is their content built up
Gap in the pay between the top and bottom of a company

We know that the "Conscious Business" movement has been making moves in this direction but the extent of knowledge and experience is still very limited.

One institution which was important in the long history of monarchy was the court jester.   We have lost this important institution today within the corporate and conventional business world.   The court jester was the only person licensed to tell the king the truth without being executed.   In many governments and corporations this role is badly needed as "leaders" gradually surround themselves with "yes men".   Strangely the Management Consultancy world has not yet rediscovered the institution of the Court Jester!

Some Reflections
Can corporations create protocols that will allow the wisdom of the "crowd" to express itself in some kind of wiki process?
Will governments and corporations of the future have specific functionality built in to foster and encourage the wisdom of the crowd?
How far have we gone to understand the most relevant cultural dimensions (institutions, values and memes) that should be identified in a cultural inventory of any human organisation?
Should we have "cultural engineering" departments within government and corporations?
What tools of cultural engineering do we have that can be used to change cultural institutions and memes to avoid the pain of evolutionary natural selection (which can, literally, cost the earth or the viability of a corporation)?
Can we train people to use these tools wisely or will we always be caught by the bootlace paradox?
(The bootlace paradox describes the common human situation where the individual at the centre of a behavioural problem cannot by definition cure the problem.   To do so would be like trying to pick yourself up by your own bootlaces – it cannot be done.   It is the same with the human brain and unwanted behaviours – this is the source of "addiction".   Outside help is required.   So it is virtually impossible for corporations (or nations) suffering from outdated internal cultures to change these without external help – or court jesters!)

CONCLUSIONS
We have established that cultural institutions are probably the most important

factor affecting human behaviour in the mass.   We have explored the nature of some of these institutions.   We have noted that very little academic research has been done on identifying key institutions within nations or corporations.   Even less work has been done on the important question of how they can be changed – we call this the challenge of "cultural engineering".   Some ideas have been put forward for different techniques of "soft" cultural engineering.

We have put forward suggestions describing some of the institutions that could become part of corporate inventories.