Individual and Collective Change in Knowledge, Culture and Society

Rodney Clarken

VOLUME 5
Individual and Collective Change in Knowledge, Culture and Society

Rodney Clarken, Northern Michigan University, United States of America

Abstract: Humanity collectively and individually goes through parallel changes that interact with one another. Recent thinkers and researchers in evolutionary and developmental theory in broad areas of human development have identified patterns that demonstrate many similarities (Neumann, 1955; Piaget, 1977; Habermas, 1979; Assimov, 1984; Wilber, 1995). For collective humanity these change processes may have taken centuries or millennia to pass through, whereas an individual may go through an analogous stage in a matter of days, months or years. Change may go in apparently random or unpredictable patterns, but an order exists. The changes in knowledge, culture and society have increasingly been studied and the advances in our understanding are being made daily. Some of the findings of the most influential thinkers in these fields will be briefly presented and their findings compared for similarities and commonalities that might increase our understanding. The following is a list of the areas and thinkers we will explore: worldviews (Graves), cognitive (Piaget), moral (Kohlberg, Gilligan), ego (Levinger), needs (Maslow), socio-emotional (Erikson), self-sense (Cook-Greuter), faith (Fowler), cultural (Beck & Cowan), social/cultural/economic worldviews (Wilber), technocratic (Lanski), sociocultural (Gelles), religious systems (Beilah), epochs (Habermas) and others (see Table 1). Implications of this research on how we might help facilitate change individually and collectively will be presented.

Keywords: Change, Individual and Collective, Development, Culture

CHANGE AND DEVELOPMENT are universal principles that can be seen as part of the natural order. The developmental process can be seen as stages of increasing autonomy, differentiation and integration, resulting in more complex, higher order wholes, identities, articulations and unities in diversities. We can see these patterns in knowledge, culture and society.

Every created thing exists as an individual, a whole made up of sub parts, and in turn as part of a greater collective of parts creating a more inclusive whole. Changing one affects the other. Neither stands independent of the other. Effective change will consider both the whole and it parts, as well as the greater collective of which that whole is a part.

Every cell (individual, part) affects and is affected by the body (collective, whole) of which it is a part, and, in turn, is affected and affects its component parts. As physical cells divide (multiplying), specialize (differentiating) and combine into body parts (integrating), so do knowledge (ideas), cultural (values) and societal cells (institutions), forming greater unity in diversity (integrity) and capacity (autonomy) as the combine in more complex networks and units.

The identity of the every created is in a constant state of change, as is knowledge, culture and society. They are always active, though more or less so at different times. Certain changes and developments identify different stages, but the process is continuous. Unlike the individual body which normally experiences a gradual deterioration in physical health and capacity finally resulting in death, the collective capacity of knowledge, culture and society continue to grow and develop.

Knowledge, culture and society all exist in potential, something like the body does in our DNA. All require interactions with and within environments to actualize those potentials. Given the proper environment, the body capacities unfold or come into existence naturally. With proper diet, exercise and physical care, the body develops naturally to its full capacity and powers. The skills and functions of the body can be consciously used by the mind and soul.

Individually and collectively we go through subjective and objective developmental changes that can be studied in terms of knowledge, culture and society. Knowledge as used in this paper is primarily an individual subjective attribute that has objective correlates, e.g., changes in the brain and neurological system. Culture represents human collective subjective attributes, e.g., beliefs and customs, and society represents human collective objective attributes, e.g., institutions and social structures. Each influences the other: individual (part) and collective (whole), subjective (internal-spiritual) and objective (external-physical).

A comparison of these patterns will be presented using a simplified four-stage model that considers various aspects of individual, collective, subjective and objective transformation in terms of categories of knowledge, culture and society. The four stages of development and transformation considered are
those of infancy, childhood, adolescence and adulthood. This model is considered simplified in that most of the theories discussed in this paper have more elaborate and refined stages. These four stages are general categories in individual development that will be considered analogous stages to collective development. Also the changes in subjective and objective reality have a mutual influence on one another. Because of the preliminary nature of these theories, this four-stage model allows greater ease to make comparisons that are not exact correlations, but may be useful for further study and understanding.

Until recently, individual, collective, subjective and objective development in knowledge, culture and society have not appeared to be systematic, but an order and pattern are beginning to be uncovered by modern day evolutionary and developmental theorists. Leading thinkers (Neumann, 1955; Piaget, 1977; Habermas, 1979; Asimov, 1984) have identified patterns that demonstrate development structures. Wilber (1995) has done an admirable job of bringing much of this research together to identify unifying patterns and propose some universal principles. For humanity these evolutionary processes may take centuries to pass through, whereas an individual may go through an analogous stage in a matter of months or years.

Patterns of change in knowledge, culture and society will be considered in the following areas using a four stage model of infancy, childhood, adolescence and adulthood for comparison: knowledge (cognitive, moral, ego, needs, emotional), culture (worldviews, cultural, faith) and society (technical, economic, social, religious). Implications of this research on how we might help facilitate human development individually and collectively will be presented.

Individual and collective change is a gradual, predictable and necessary process. Individual possess the potentiality for knowledge from the beginning, but only when the physiological, culture and social conditions come into play do these potentialities manifest themselves. By understanding the interactive quality of development, we can better appreciate and evaluate the various contributions of knowledge, culture and society to present conditions and make adjustments based on this knowledge to facilitate progress. We can work with our past and build on it in the present, developing with us those qualities that will further our advancement and changing those characteristics that are no longer useful or appropriate.

**Knowledge**

Knowledge and the intellect are what distinguish humans from the rest of creation. It is the faculty of knowledge that creates culture and society and is in turn influenced by them. This noble endowment enables people to learn and develop civilization. Knowledge is the primary tool needed for change. The better the knowledge, the better the potential benefit of the change it produces. Ignorance is the primary limitation to progress and well being. The most fundamental aspect of progress is to change ignorance into knowledge. This knowledge and its acquisition should be guided by ethics and morals if it is to be of benefit.

Subjective knowledge alone will produce no results unless it is applied to the realities and problems facing the individual and society. These objective results and manifestations can be signs of subjective knowledge. Knowledge must be combined with resolve and action before any fruit can be seen. Individuals must strive to obtain knowledge, cultures should encourage and value it and societies should supply the means and means for its attainment.

Knowledge is generally initially attained through our senses. Later our cultures pass on traditional knowledge that is generally accepted by the greater community. As we develop our reasoning faculties, we have access to yet another way of knowing that can transcend both our senses and traditions. We also have an intuitive sense that might be called inspiration that seems to be independent of our senses, traditions and reason, though may be influenced by them. Each of these ways of knowing has its limitations and can not be generally considered reliable. However, as much as we can find knowledge that accords with more of these ways of knowing, the more we can trust it.

Consciousness grows to differentiate self from non-self and then to differentiate from and integrate with all the various non-selves it encounters. The first sense of self is identified with its body. As awareness of our body increases, we are able to begin to exercise and develop some control over it. We can gasp things, make sounds and move. Gradually consciousness discriminates feelings and mind as being separate from the body, and begins to shift some of its identity to them. With this we can begin controlling some of our body discharges and functions that previously were beyond control and consciousness.

We develop our body, feeling and mind in interactions with expanding conceptions of knowledge, culture and society. We differentiate and integrate our ways of being, feeling and knowing within cultural and social contexts. Our expanding consciousness becomes increasingly aware of an expanding world and our focus gradually shifts from the self to a larger collective such as the family and community. We come in contact with wider groups of others in our culture and society, differentiating, selecting and integrating their views and ways using capacities
and criteria developed at earlier stages. Our sense of knowledge and self is expanded, altered and influenced by these forces. Eventually our minds will adapt and incorporate all those forces into our knowledge. As we mature, our knowledge should expand until we can see ourselves in context with all these outside cultural and social influences and begin to be able to reflect and act upon them. If we do so, we move from a predominately ethnocentric thinking to a more individually defined and chosen view (see Table 1). All of these changes in knowledge affect culture and society as well as are affected by them.

Individual knowledge has many aspects or qualities that can be examined to determine patterns of evolutionary development analogous in both individual and collective development. At the lowest levels of development the human shows signs of development starting with instincts, moving to sensations and then perceptions. Mental development progresses from body centric to egocentric, ethnocentric, and world-centric orientations. Potentially higher levels should be forthcoming in the future. The world is currently at the stage of moving from predominately ethnocentric to a world-centric outlook, which will eventually lead to more transcendent and universal world views.

Culture
This age is being characterized as the information age. It is an age of knowledge. Knowledge is power and that power can create or destroy depending on the uses to which it is put. Culture often determines the uses and values of knowledge and society can create ways and means to either encourage or limit knowledge. Any culture that does not promote and value knowledge is a culture in decline. Cultures everywhere are being challenged by the waves of new knowledge that threaten their views and beliefs. They struggle to find the balance between change and homeostasis, trying to adapt to changing conditions.

Education happens within a culture and individual knowledge can not help but to be influenced by the culture within which it is found. Most prejudices and superstitions are passed onto individuals through their culture. Generally the influence of culture on the individual knowledge is greater than the influence of individual knowledge on culture. If however, a culture is not open to the progressive thoughts available to it and does not engender high mindedness, it will suffer decline. We see many cultures in the world today struggling with new ideas and clinging to traditions that are no longer suited for the present age. The society progresses as knowledge influences culture.

A part of our reexamination and reevaluation of our individual and collective pasts is to look at the attitudes and assumptions that have guided our thinking and actions. These are often called worldviews or paradigms. They are hard to change. We do not let go of them easily. We either need to be presented with a worldview that is superior to ours and that works noticeably better than ours, or we need to have a failure of our worldview, usually in the form of a major life-threatening or life-changing crisis, similar to the social-emotional crises individuals go through (Erikson, 1950, 1959). Those who do so successfully are able to advance to a higher level of functioning, and those who do not are forced to stay at a less developed level. It seems challenges and crises are the normal route to growth. We do not discard something until it becomes very clear it does not and will no longer work for us. And sometimes we need overwhelming evidence.

Society
Universal education is a basic human right as the acquisition of knowledge is the primary means for the advancement of individuals and societies. Governments and other societal institutions should see that the necessary infrastructure exists so that it citizens can receive an education adequate to their individual and collective needs and aspirations.

It is the society that produces the learning materials and sources of knowledge. It supports and makes available the technology, discoveries, research, laws, inventions, arts, reforms and regulations necessary for knowledge to be wisely used and propagated. It is the individual's duty to acquire knowledge, and the society's duty to provide the institutions for doing so.

Historically social developments have roughly progressed from family units, clans, tribes, feudal state, city state, nation state to the now emerging world state. Humanity has passed through social developments connected with hunting and gathering, horticultural, agricultural, industrial ages which have led to the present information and emerging globalization age. In the same way that biological genetic endowments have been passed on and future evolution has built upon them, so has the emotional, cultural, mental and other developments connected with the human mind (see Table 1). Each higher stage allowed for greater individual and collective expression of and opportunities for development of capacities.

We have also seen an evolutionary development in the areas of spirituality and religion. Religions have evolved, building on preceding religions and introducing necessary adaptations according to the spiritual demands of each successive age. These religious teachings have covered spiritual matters, but
also addressed social, cultural and physical matters as well. The influence of these religions on human development in all areas has been well established. Their evolutionary relationships are less accepted and understood, partly because of the ethnocentric mentality of their adherents and the nature of the physical, mental and spiritual development of the times these religions were revealed. The paternalistic and mythological aspects of religion that were appropriate for a less developed humanity, need to be replaced by standards and approaches more suited to the current age. Each age has different needs and requirements which religion must address if it is to be relevant and useful.

One of the problems with institutionalized religion has been its clinging to superstitions and rejecting or trying to suppress knowledge that does not accord with its conceptions. This is especially unfortunate as the founders of these same religions have been the most powerful and progressive influences on the advances of knowledge, culture and society throughout history. True religion serves as the well spring for knowledge, culture and society. Devoid of religion, no true happiness or well being can be found individually or collectively. The corruption of religion is the surest sign of the downfall and collapse of a society and civilization. Numerous examples of this principle can be found throughout history.

**Conclusion**

In summary, the key and leading individual and collective change needed in knowledge, culture and society is the realization of the oneness of humanity. This single concept captures the changes that are taking place and need to take place for humanity to advance, both individually and as a culture and society. Individually this change will largely be subjective: the seeing of all peoples as part of one whole family, the human race. Collectively the change will occur in culture and society. Examples of this change in culture are everywhere apparent as we increasingly move towards a world culture with common information, values, and ways of thinking, feeling and acting. In society, the move towards global institutions, corporations, standards, technology and communications are clear signs of this developing trend.

The breakdown of the barriers among nations, religions, classes, and other limited collectives that have kept people apart for centuries are indicators of this great movement towards oneness and unity. The release of energies that will greatly enhance all aspects of life is beyond current conceptions and imagination. The oneness of humankind will entail the elimination of prejudice of all kinds; the realization of the oneness of religion, a world government supported by worldwide institutions to administer its affairs; a uniform system of standards, laws, regulations and commerce and a universal auxiliary language.

The new level of wholeness to which the world is being rapidly propelled is that of global unity, one social organism representing the rich diversity of humankind. The nations which one represented the largest social whole, now become parts in a larger whole that increases the capacity of both the parts and the whole. Consultation will be a guiding principle in bringing about and nurturing that wholeness so that the richness of its individual parts will not be lost in its unification with the whole.

**References**


Broughton, J. et al. (eds.) (1959). *The cognitive developmental psychology of James Mark Baldwin*.


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Developmental Stages</th>
<th>Infancy/Early Childhood</th>
<th>Childhood</th>
<th>Adolescence</th>
<th>Adulthood</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ages: Individual Collective (estimated)</td>
<td>0-6 yrs</td>
<td>5-12</td>
<td>11-21</td>
<td>20+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Paleo to mesolithic</td>
<td>Neolithic to Bronze</td>
<td>Iron to Enlightenment</td>
<td>Global to future</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self Center / Identity</td>
<td>Physio/Bio centr</td>
<td>Ego/Role centr</td>
<td>Ethno centr</td>
<td>World centr</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perspective (Cook-Greuter)</td>
<td>none</td>
<td>1st-2nd person Preconventional</td>
<td>3rd person Conventional</td>
<td>4th and on person Postconventional</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self Sense (Cook-Greuter)</td>
<td>Presocial, symbiotic, impulsive</td>
<td>Self-protective, rule-oriented, conformist</td>
<td>Self-conscious, goal-oriented conscientious</td>
<td>Individualistic, autonomous, ego-witnessing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self stages (Loevinger)</td>
<td>Symbiotic/Impulsive</td>
<td>Protective</td>
<td>Conformist/Conscientious</td>
<td>Individualistic/Autonomous/Integrated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moral (Kohlberg)</td>
<td>Pre moral</td>
<td>Pre conventional</td>
<td>Conventional</td>
<td>Post conventional</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moral (Gilligan)</td>
<td>Pre moral</td>
<td>Selfish</td>
<td>Care</td>
<td>Universal Care</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Socio-emotional (Erikson)</td>
<td>Needs (Maslow)</td>
<td>Logical mode (Baldwin)</td>
<td>Faith (Fowler)</td>
<td>Ego Types (Graves)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------------</td>
<td>----------------</td>
<td>------------------------</td>
<td>---------------</td>
<td>-------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trust, Autonomy</td>
<td>Physiological</td>
<td>Prelogical</td>
<td>Preverbal, magical, projective</td>
<td>Autistic, magical anarchistic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Extra-logical</td>
<td>Conjointive faith/ universalizing</td>
<td>Systemic (integrated)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 2: Comparing Individual and Collective**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ontogenetic</th>
<th>Phylogenetic</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Individual</td>
<td>Collective</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agency</td>
<td>Communion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eros</td>
<td>Agape</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diversity</td>
<td>Unity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rights</td>
<td>Responsibilities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cell</td>
<td>Body</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Development</td>
<td>Evolution</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
About the Author

Dr. Rodney Clarken

Dr. Clarken has a Ph.D. in administration and supervision, an M.A. in general and experimental psychology and an M.S.T. in elementary education. He has taught and lived in China, Switzerland, Virgin Islands, Tanzania, United States and other countries. He has taught in various elementary, secondary and post secondary institutions and served as an international consultant, board member and administrator giving numerous presentations around the world. He is an editor and has published several articles on topics related to education.
THE INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF KNOWLEDGE, CULTURE AND
CHANGE MANAGEMENT

EDITORS

Mary Kalantzis, RMIT University, Australia.
Bill Cope, Common Ground, Australia.

EDITORIAL ADVISORY BOARD

Chryssi Vitsilakis-Soroniatis, University of the Aegean, Rhodes, Greece.
Eleni Karantzola, University of the Aegean, Rhodes, Greece.
Gerasimos Kouzelis, University of Athens, Greece.
Leslie Johnson, University of Greenwich, UK.
Bruce Cronin, University of Greenwich, UK.
Martyn Laycock, University of Greenwich and managingtransitions.net, UK.
Dave Snowden, Cynefin Centre for Organisational Complexity, UK.
Stavros Ioannides, Panton University, Athens, Greece.
David Lyon, Queens University, Ontario, Canada.
Krishan Kumar, University of Virginia, USA.
Claudia Schmitz, Cenndu Learning Agency, Germany.
Bill Martin, RMIT University, Melbourne, Australia.
Paul James, RMIT University, Melbourne, Australia.
Robert Brooks, Monash University, Melbourne, Australia.
Margaret Jackson, RMIT University, Melbourne, Australia.
David Hakken, University of Indiana, Bloomington, Indiana, USA.
Zainal Ariffin, Universiti Sains Malaysia, Penang, Malaysia.
David Gurteen, Gurteen Knowledge, UK.
Verna Allee, Verna Allee Associates, California, USA.
Rod Dilnutt, William Bethway and Associates, Melbourne, Australia.
Judith Ellis, Enterprise Knowledge, Melbourne, Australia.
Kirpal Singh, Singapore Management University, Singapore.

ASSOCIATE EDITORS, 2005

SCOPE AND CONCERNS

SUBMISSION GUIDELINES

INQUIRIES
Email: cg-support@commongroundpublishing.com