

Chapter 9

Facing the wicked problem

We need to face that we live on a spaceship that is operating outside its bounds; it is not sustainable. The most obvious measure of unsustainability these days is CO₂-content in the atmosphere. But it is too shallow thinking to believe that by cutting CO₂ emissions we will be back on track and can continue with business as usual. The planet and the human culture on it are unbalanced in many and accumulating ways.

Our predicament is what has been named a ‘wicked problem’ because of complex interdependencies and because one or a few people cannot – even with all their might and wealth – solve the problem alone. I often picture the solution as the view you get in a kaleidoscope: When the pattern changes everything in the pattern changes at the same time. Of course, in the kaleidoscope the mirrors are the key to the well-timed change in the visual patterns in the kaleidoscope, so there it is not so difficult to perform.

To make such a kaleidoscopic transformation throughout every human institution is something else. It is as if every institution stands in the way for everyone else. But of course, what we can do is change a bit, so that the rest of the pattern can change a bit, which will unlock possibilities for new movements. Step-by-step we can change everything. Of course, this can work out; it has worked out before. After all, our human landscape changes all the time.

I believe that my role as a water professional or water worker is to transform into a water steward – step by step – to take on this greater responsibility as best I can. By moving like this we can begin solving the water sustainability problem – small step

by step synchronised with the global kaleidoscopic changes. We can move, we can lead, and we can follow – everywhere, in all functions and on all scales. Everybody working with water can make a difference in their position – if only by being awake to what is happening, if staying focused on learning and understanding more profoundly, if only visionary enough to be able to act when the opportunity is there. Water heroes come in all sizes. But regardless the change requires something from us.

Everybody working with water – in every position – can make a difference by being awake to what is happening, by staying focused on learning and by understanding more profoundly. Everybody needs to be sufficiently visionary to act when the opportunity is there.

‘Water is the driving force of all nature.’

Leonardo Da Vinci

Your reflections: What does water stewardship mean to you? What is important to you? What will be your legacy?