

Governance

The New Science of Governance.

This document is a declaration of intent, rather than a specific plan. There is more, but it has not currently been clearly articulated. Work on Pattern Language will make this easier to author, disseminate and engage with.

Context

“The real problem of humanity is the following: we have paleolithic emotions; medieval institutions; and god-like technology.” - E.O Wilson

Humanity has entered an era where our technical competence, implemented at scale, directly impacts the biosphere, influences the decisions of hundreds of millions, and is being handed increasing agency in domains formerly inaccessible to any but human intelligences.

In this context, it is clear that existing human governance structures and systems are no longer fit for purpose - not socially, not legally, not technically.

The majority of these systems are the almost accidental products of path-dependent historical evolution, not purposeful design. Intentional examples were written looking in the rear view mirror (US constitution, UN convention on Human Rights), or designed to serve organisations with tightly defined purposes that deliberately exclude large swathes of human value (corporate bodies).

Attempts to produce new forms of governance largely proceed as modifications of existing formats, on the basis of antiquated tools, fettered by politics and business-as-usual.

Existing schools of governance are siloed, with little cross-talk. New understandings about human interaction, about networks, about neuroscience and anthropology and more are too often missed or dismissed.

The capacity of technology to empower civil and grass-roots groups with simple and effective governance tool-sets has been largely missed.

None of this will do. The risks are too large, the waste is too great, the missed opportunities heartbreaking.

The New Science of Governance

Governance must increasingly be understood as a technical discipline of wise and purposeful evidence-based design. At the same time, the practice and experience of governance must become more fully human - embracing, empowering and utilising the full gamut of human capacities.

Governance design will be trans-disciplinary, will address a wide range of patterns and modalities, will build increasing understanding of how these interact across differing contexts, scales of time, distance and scope, across human, machine and systemic qualities - all in the service of developing the social, legal and technical competencies necessary to address the challenges and opportunities that face us.

Governance will not be boring

Governance can no longer afford to be boring; technocratic, the 'groan' item on the agenda.

Without a new focus on human capacity for sense-making and decision taking at scale, all our vaunted technical and scientific achievements become tools for species self-termination.

The discipline of Governance

Governance by definition brings together disparate domains - the forces of the 'what' that is to be governed ineluctably intertwined with mechanics of the 'how', conditioned by the direction of the 'why', all set within and composed of other governance domains.