

*Becalmed In The Mainstream: How Psychological Colonization Has Put The Brakes On Environmental Action ECOS: A Review of Conservation 25 (2) 2004 pp 2 - 12*

## **Becalmed In The Mainstream: How Psychological Colonization Has Put The Brakes On Environmental Action<sup>1</sup>**

(with minor revisions by CR Jan 2005 and Alex Thomas Feb 2005)

Chris Rose

### **Introduction**

In its formative years the environment movement was the preserve of fringe pioneers, people who saw a problem and took action themselves. For decades it remained a minority cause, even as campaigns and events gradually converted the issue from one confined to nature conservation to how industry works, global pollutants, inter-generational equity, banking, health, almost every aspect of society.

Gradually the case was made, and in the mid 1980s, environmentalism became fashionable if risqué, backed by designers, rock stars, and the glitterati. Acid rain, ozone depletion and global warming took it across a threshold. By 1990 long term activists in environment groups were being joined by new recruits who saw environmental NGOs as a career path. Environment groups adopted standard management practices, grew rapidly in size, and worried about 'credibility'.

The Green Consumer emerged and environmentalism was adopted by business. 'Mainstream' figures like Mrs Thatcher declared themselves "friends of the earth". The world's biggest ever conference was organised for mainstream figures to come together on the green platform.

After Rio many people felt, in the words of a banner hoisted above Nelson's Column "words failed us". The political mainstream had colonized the agenda but very little action was forthcoming.

The tabloid media began to lose interest, while others joined criticism of mainstream NGOs from younger activists particularly, for having 'become corporate'. While established NGOs flew back from Rio, roads protestors were gathering at Twyford Down.

As a director of Greenpeace charged with organisational change I led internal debates on developing a new strategy for the organisation while the press carried pictures of protests of the (non Greenpeace) M11 campaign, down the road in Leyton. Some of those on the rooftops were Greenpeace staff. Meanwhile Greenpeace itself was under fire for being out-dated (committed to using direct

action), and for having gone soft (working with some businesses on solutions), and for having disappeared from the news.

Environment started dropping down the news agenda even before Rio. Pundits declared that ‘nobody cares’ any more. Yet lifestyle indicators – such as shopping and recycling activity – showed increasing ‘green-ness’ and have continued to do so. After the massive Brent Spar campaign in 1995, ‘sceptics’ who had pronounced the environmental movement finished, were silenced. Yet New Labour then conducted a smooth retreat from its 1997 high-water mark of commitment to public transport, to a reconstituted roads programme, unworried by any significant opposition. On every issue, from GM to climate, a multitude of environmental goods, products and services are now flowering, while ‘environment’ in general has become a yawn issue for the press.

The environmental movement has consolidated but shows many signs of being becalmed, not breaking through.

Why is this? The most convincing explanation I’ve seen, published here for the first time, stems from a national psychological tracking study based on values and needs, conducted by Pat Dade’s research company, Cultural Dynamics ([www.cultdyn.co.uk](http://www.cultdyn.co.uk)).

In essence, the cause has been ‘normalised’ and progressively colonized by less activist, more conservative elements in society. The Brent Spar was a spectacular instance of breaking a norm (don’t litter, recycle), punished by consumer citizens. The rejection of GM foods was a bit more complicated.

Its fall from newsworthiness, excitement and fashion has nothing to do with people’s care and concern about the environment, or their willingness to pay, rather the reverse.

Back in the 1960s and 1970s the environmental crisis was usually too fringe to be newsworthy. Then, for a while, to believe in the environmental crisis was newsworthy in itself, and the rapidly shifting politics of who was on which side excited media comment. Now its long transit into the mainstream is complete. This however is not simply a question of changing opinions. ‘Environment’ is now colonized by groups with very different needs and motivations. What worked in its formative days, or even in the early 1990s, will not work now. Until campaigners and politicians adapt their motivational strategies accordingly, environmental action will remain thoroughly bogged down.

### **How We Got Becalmed**

Major corporations<sup>2</sup> regularly use a powerful population-wide communications planning system based not on economic abstractions (such as ABC1) or consumer data (such as acorn groups) but on motivation itself. Known as Value Modes Mapping, it is maps the population according to the psychological model ‘hierarchy of needs’ developed by a student of Jung, Abraham Maslow<sup>3</sup>. It also

maps dozens of attributes, including environment, and can reveal their relative change and position for each group.

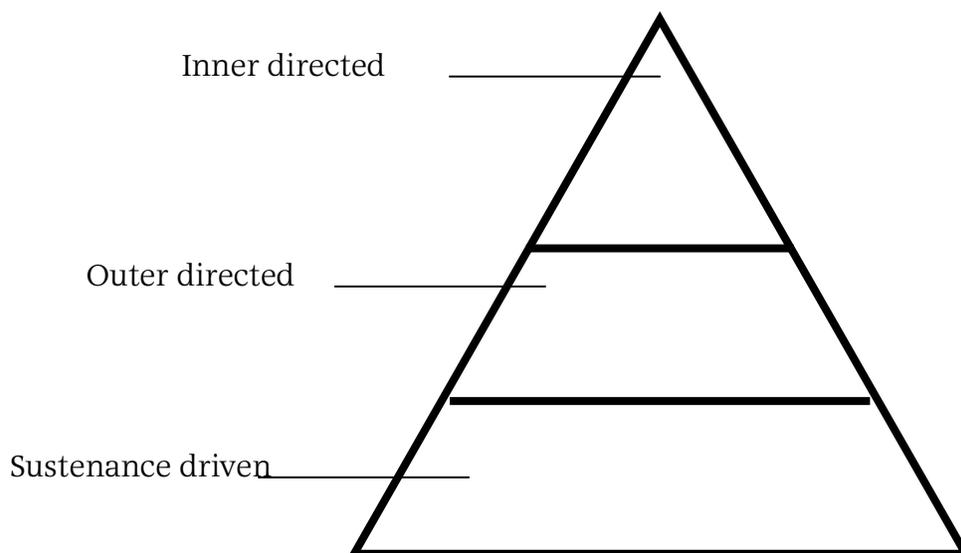
Famous in the 1950s as the father of humanist psychology, Maslow recognized three main states – defined by needs – which humans fall into: security or sustenance-driven; esteem-driven or outer-directed; and inner-directed. Cultural Dynamics calls them Settlers, Prospectors, and Pioneers.

In the sustenance- or security-driven state, which is naturally where we all start, we need things like food, warmth, security, belonging and sex – the basics of individual, family and social life. Once these needs are met, some people go on to explore further needs, such as esteem for ourselves and the esteem of others. Here we want to succeed and be seen to succeed, to be recognized for, in some ways, being better than some others. These people are usually called ‘outer directed’.

For some, even this is not enough. One day there seems to be more to life than just the trappings of success and achievement. People become ‘inner directed’, looking for and finding new and deeper meaning and value in things beyond their safety, security or status-giving properties.

Using Dade’s terminology, Pioneers started the environment movement, prospectors organised it, and settlers joined in once it was safe to do so (once it was ‘normal’).

Maslow’s ‘heirarchy of needs



Once people cross the boundary between esteem-driven (outer directed) and inner-directed they cannot go back. People who are esteem-driven can ‘go back’ to being security driven if their personal circumstances and/or environment

mean they can no longer pursue esteem, and they feel the need to make themselves safe, belong etc. This appears to have happened on a large scale in the US<sup>4</sup> in recent decades. Interestingly, organisations tend to behave the other way round – starting out ‘inner directed’ and ending up security-driven.

At present, approximately 30% of the UK population are settlers. Once this would have been the majority group, and it is still shrinking. The other two are approximately equal in size, with the inner-directed group showing long term growth.

The existence of these groups has significant implications for communication in campaigns. Driven as they are by different needs, people behave differently, think differently, and are motivated differently. See the table below.

## Tactical Application

Here is a rule of thumb ready-reckoner for how value-modes mapping and insights may help in constructing campaign propositions and running campaigns. If an audience is mixed, the rule of thumb is to make sure you put the offer, argument or call to action in three different ways. A 'message' will be rejected if it's put in the wrong way, not just if it's something an audience disagrees with as an objective.

<b>SEGMENT of population</b>	<b>Dominant motivation</b>	<b>Action mode</b>	<b>Desire</b>	<b>Why they save dolphins in Seatown</b>	<b>I want a brand to ...</b>
Inner directed PIONEERS	Exploration	Do it yourself	Better questions	I feel I could be one myself – and for their own worth	Bring new possibilities
Outer directed PROSPECTORS	Status and esteem of others	Organise	Answers	Good for the town's image and economy (and my house price)	Make me look good
Security driven SETTLERS	Being safe and belonging	"Someone should do something about it"	Safeguard against external threat	So long as the dolphins keep coming back, Seatown will be Seatown	Make me secure

<b>SEGMENT of population</b>	<b>I like to meet</b>	<b>I connect through</b>	<b>I like to be associated with</b>	<b>I most respond to threats to</b>	<b>I</b>
Inner directed PIONEERS	New challenging and intriguing people	My own networks	Good causes that put my values into practice	Visions and causes	Am me
Outer directed PROSPECTORS	Desirable and important people	Big brands, systems and organisations	Success	What I've worked for	Am successful
Security driven SETTLERS	People like me and people I know	Club and family	tradition	My way of life	Know my place

The main dangers for campaign propositions arising from this include:

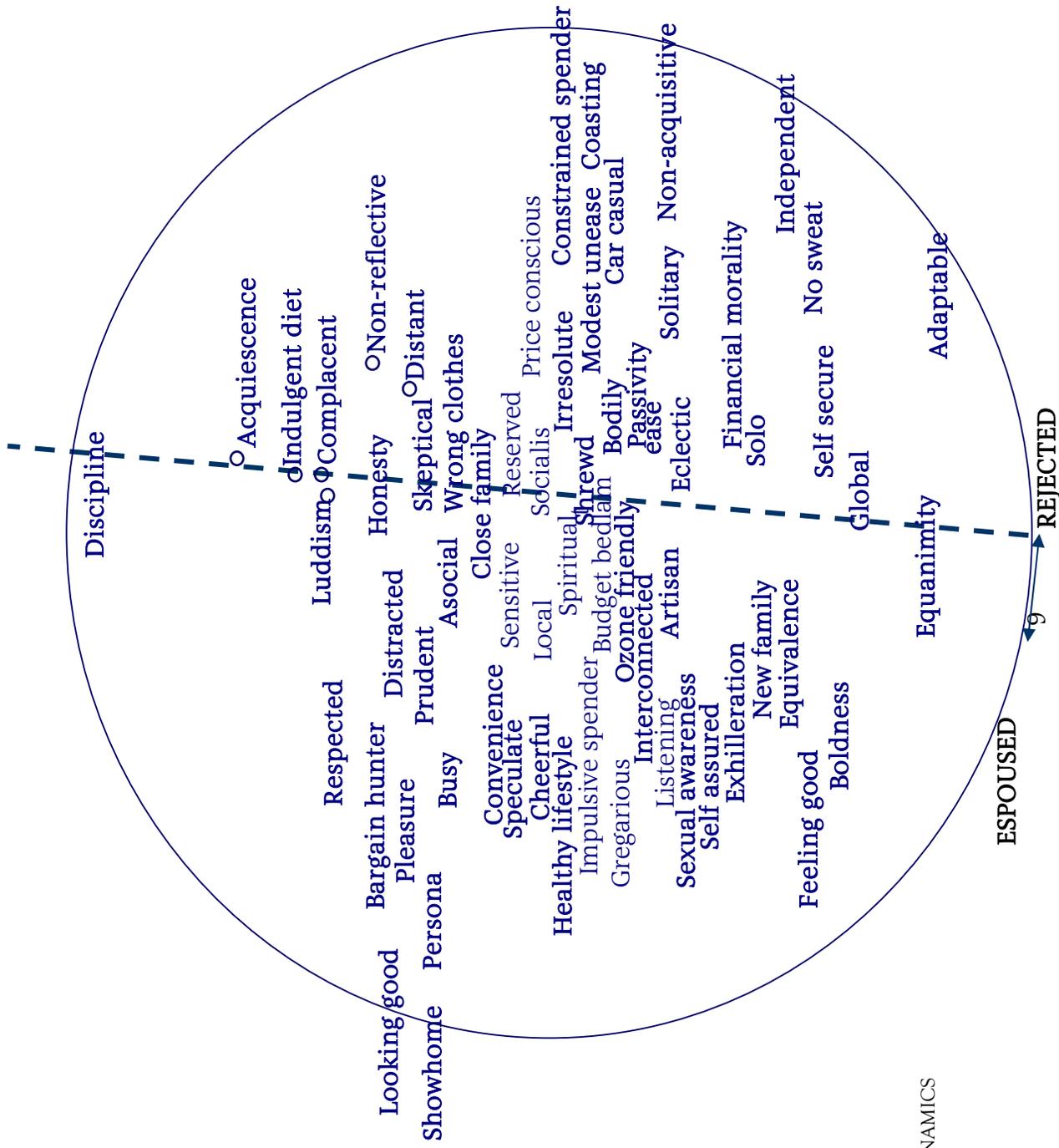
- Producing campaign propositions which make no sense in one or more important modes
- Assuming a values mode or motivation based on wealth or occupation or social class
- Projecting your own way of thinking onto others
- Accidentally threatening people rather than offering them what they want
- Projecting arguments rather than meeting needs

### **Attributes And Value Modes/ Maps**

Dade's company surveys over 5000 people each year and asks them a large number of questions, from which they can produce 'maps' of attributes. These range from attitudes like WYSIWG (what you see is what you get) or passivity, to activities like 'budget bedlam' or postures like 'wrong clothes', or 'healthy lifestyle'. One of these is 'ozone friendly' (aka environmentalism or environmental sensitivity). The groups can be mapped across these attributes. The simplest three level breakdown is shown below.



# OUTER





'Ozone friendly' is a strong attribute for all three groups. Critically, it has moved from the fringe, in one group's area (inner directed), to the centre, overlapping with all three groups. But there are now important differences in what it is associated with, or what it 'means'. Any cross-group discussion can, therefore, quickly lead to disagreement. So 'environment', while normalised as a value, doesn't necessarily lead to environmental action.

### **Developing A Log Jam Of Violent Agreement**

A change in the attitude of these groups towards 'environment' has profound consequences. Pat Dade identifies three major stages in what 'the environment' has meant over this period:

#### *Late 1960's to Early 1980's-Environmental Concern (stage1)*

- *Pioneer issue. Very minority in uptake, but growing every year, not a fad but a trend in society.*
- *Typified as younger in age profile*
- *More educated than their age cohort and society in general*
- *Aware of unsatisfactory immediate consequences of economic growth on some localities and regions.*
- *Aware of probable global long term damage.*
- *Favoured Solution- taking personal responsibility for not further harming the environment.*
- *Secondary Solution-discover and practice methods of sustainability changing their own behaviour to enhance the environment.*

#### *Early 80's to Early 90's- Environmental Action (stage 2)*

- *Led by Pioneers and attracting Prospectors, becoming more mainstream, "mainstream alternative".*
- *Still younger and more educated than society as a whole.*
- *Explosive growth in the awareness of worldwide inter-relationships that seemed to be creating problems, e.g. aerosols and ozone layer depletion or fossil fuel usage and global warming.*
- *Favoured Solution- Join together in groups that would highlight the problem.*
- *Secondary Solution- Take indirect or direct action against the despoilers of the environment.*

#### *Early 90's to date-Ozone Friendly (stage 3)*

- *All groups, Pioneer, Prospector and Settler agree on the need to protect the environment from further damage. Accepted as a mainstream concern.*
- *All ages agree (the 20 year olds of 1970 are now the 50 year olds of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century!).*

- *Levels of education still have an element of discrimination but not nearly to the same extent of 30 years ago. Dozens of TV channels and 30 years of news and documentaries have created much of the increased awareness of the world as a set of worldwide inter-relationships.*
- *Favoured Solution- no longer a clear answer, as different Values Modes are often “violently agreeing” with each other*
- *Secondary Solution- The Settlers introduces a new dynamic into the mix of personal and group responsibility. This is to make governments, rather than individuals or corporations, responsible for the protection of the environment.*

Because these groups have very different action-modes, as environmental awareness of the problems has increased, the scope for disagreement on the necessary solutions has increased. Dade says “in the 1960’s/1970’s it was a Pioneer-only answer. Simple: personal responsibility. By the 1980’s/Early 1990’s there was a pioneer answer *and* prospector answer. Both simple: prospector answer was about *group* responsibility. But from the 1990’s to date we have a Pioneer, Prospector and Settler answers. The settler answer is about making government responsible. All are still individually simple but the result is a logjam over how to move forward – what Pat Dade calls ‘violent agreement’.

In the 1970s – 80s increased environmental awareness led to more activism. In the 1980s – 1990s it also caused growth in NGOs. In the 1990s- 2000s it also causes calls for “someone” (else) to “do something”. Dade comments that Governments then work together with existing NGOS, or form new ones and “this dramatically increases the time-to-effect.”

Initial colonization by pioneers meant environmentalists were mostly activist. Then they became activist plus esteem driven (organisers, credibility seekers). Now there are lots of settler environmentalists who want no change. So the activist proportion has declined, and overall, activism has been smothered, first by managerialism, then by pure caution. ‘Environmental revolution’ has given way to a movement which revolves gently in circles.

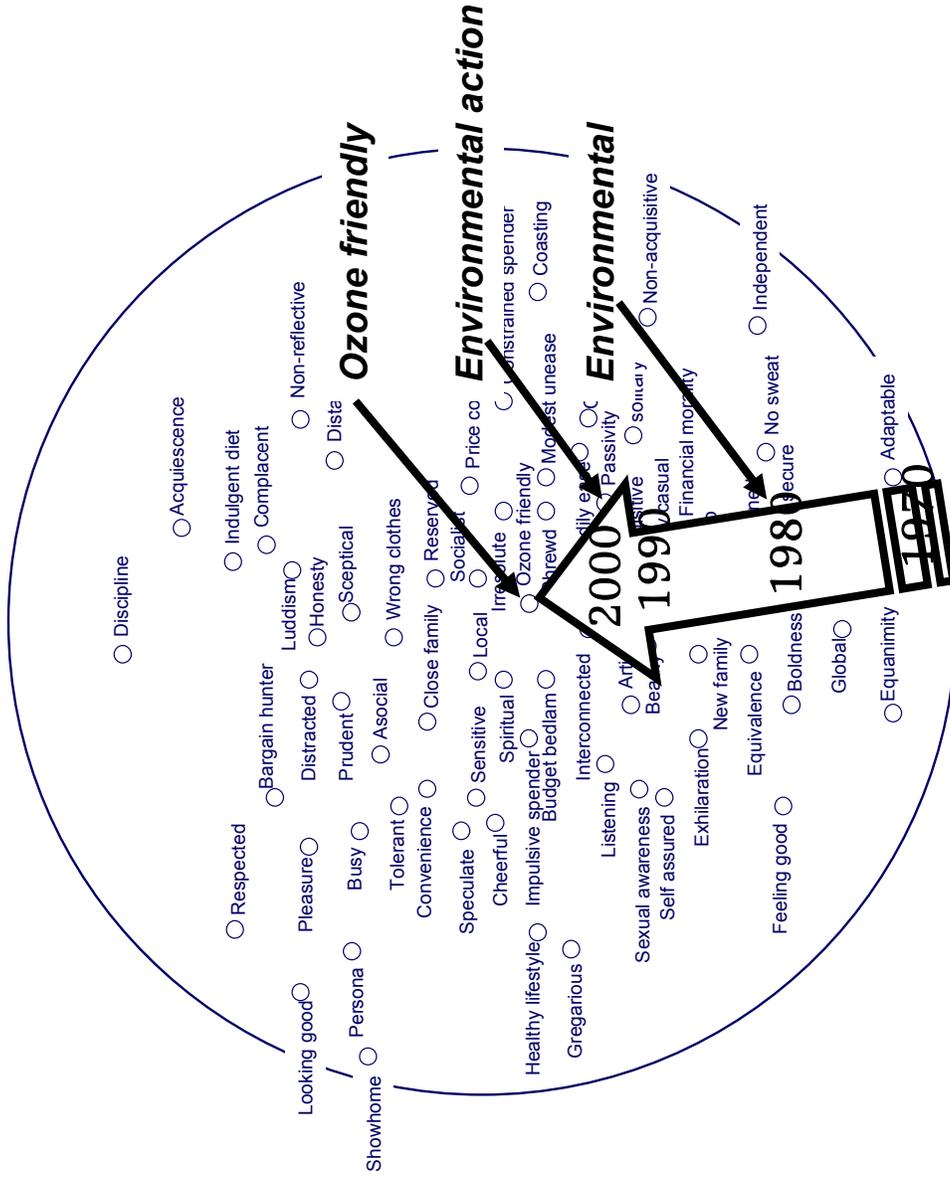
This process has been widely misread. Journalists see lack of newsworthiness as lack of interest or concern. Adherents to the ‘issue attention cycle’, which supposes that issues have a natural life-cycle of: attention by a few, event, alarmed discovery, let’s do something, costs of significant action realised, general loss of attention. As can be seen from the colonization process detected by Dade, this is not what has happened with the environment. Instead there has been a change in the environmentally aware population.

**Diagram: *Movement of The Environment From Fringe To Central (Normed) Concern***

1970s – fringe, elite; late 1980s accepted (“I am a friend of the Earth” - Mrs Thatcher), massive growth in groups, fashionable; 1990s-2000s normal (unfashionable again and not news).

# Values Mode Space

- Eclectics
- Seekers
- Players
- Optimists
- Rationals
- Protectors



A Cultural Values Model

## What This Now Means For Environmental Campaigns

- cross-society, broad-issue campaigns about ‘environment’ or (worse) even vaguer all-encompassing or plastic concepts like sustainability, cannot now be honed into campaigns that force change. They are literally motherhood and apple pie and can never be forged into a sword to split the opposition with, or even a pen to write clearly with
- Making or pointing to lots of connections as in “everything is connected to everything else” is a very inner-directed idea which will repel rather than motivate other groups

For energy, ‘environmental’ campaigns could take these steps:

- for inner directed pioneers - move to the leading edge - push the envelope in terms of making final aims into objectives to be achieved in the short term (more activist but lose some other support) – make the future happen now
- for esteem driven prospectors – create brands/ propositions which are clever, fashionable, high-impact, low-risk ways to be ‘green’ and good, typically by lifestyle and purchasing (naming and shaming is also very prospector)
- for security driven settlers - defend deep security or belonging values and traditions. But be warned, settler NIMBYism can turn nasty – (nationalism and xenophobia are examples as well as the Countryside Marches – defending a ‘way of life’ and conflict based on religious and ethnic divides)
- for everyone - focus on departures from the norm (eco-police/ defence of communities/icons)

## Other Implications

### Getting Agreement To Campaign Within Organisations

Campaigning is high risk: more venture capital than repeat business, socially intrusive and controversial. Meat and drink to pioneer types but uncomfortable for prospectors and maybe unintelligible to settlers. Some people should possibly be asked not to campaign.

### Renewal

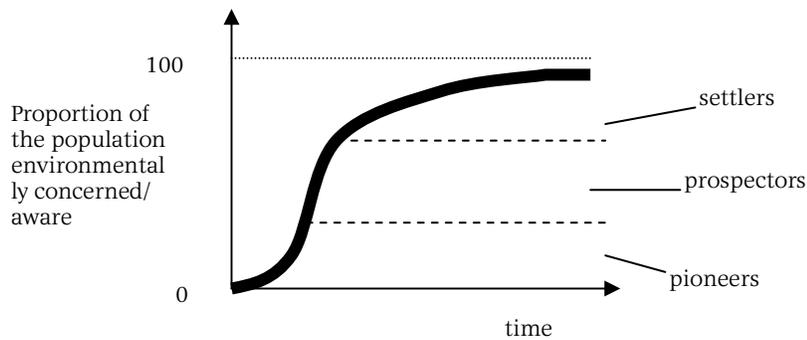
Within organisations, the founders - risk-taking pioneers – are joined by prospectors as the group succeeds, and then change-phobic settlers, when the cause becomes a norm.

One strategy to avoid this disabling campaigning capacity is renewal - led once again by pioneers, if they have the moral authority to operationalise it. Prospectors and settlers may leave. A clarion call around a formative issue is most likely to justify such a move. Alternatively break up or reformulation could

let the pioneers break away (but this will be resisted by the prospectors), or create offers, roles or mechanisms which have more central appeal to each group.

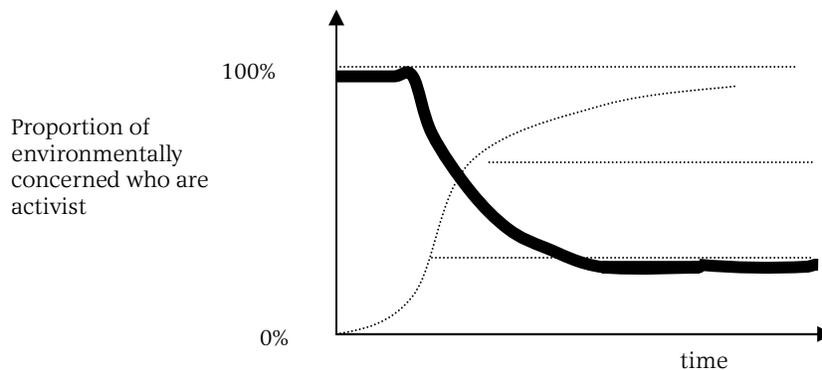
### Interpreting 'environmental concern'

The general process described by Pat Dade produces a curve something like this:



In other words it leaves a few 'browns' who for one reason or another don't care at all about the environment, or are particularly hostile to '. This is the more-or-less worldwide picture picked up in studies such as those of Environics.

However if looked at in terms of activism:



I suspect that the 'news-worthiness' of the 'movement' is broadly proportionate to the steepness of the curve at any one time.

### Contact

Later this year, the Cultural Dynamics model should become more widely available to NGO's, as a result of a hook up with strategic partner tree, in

London, who are direct marketing specialists. Contact Pat Dade of Cultural Dynamics at [pat.dade@treelondon.com](mailto:pat.dade@treelondon.com)

Chris Rose [mail@tochrisrose.idps.co.uk](mailto:mail@tochrisrose.idps.co.uk) has written a book on campaign strategy and tactics, which covers this and other 'tools', to be published by Earthscan.

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<sup>1</sup> A longer essay on this subject '**A Tool For Motivation Based Communication Strategy**' can be found at [www.campaignstrategy.org](http://www.campaignstrategy.org)

<sup>2</sup> Eg BT, Shell, Unilever, US Marines, Arsenal Football Club, BBC

<sup>3</sup> there are many resources about Abraham Maslow on the 'net. His needs hierarchy, developed in 1947, was first widely published in 1954 in *Motivation and Personality*, while his most famous book is probably *Toward A Psychology Of Being* (1968 first edition).

<sup>4</sup> This is discussed in a newsletter (January 2005) issued from the website [www.campaignstrategy.org](http://www.campaignstrategy.org) and the growing divergence between the climate of values in the US and Canada is discussed in the book *Fire and Ice: The United States, Canada and the Myth of Converging Values* Michael Adams with Amy Wagstaff and David Jamieson, pub Penguin Canada 2003.