

SYSTEM INNOVATION
INITIATIVE

The Power to Shift a System



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THE ROCKWOOL
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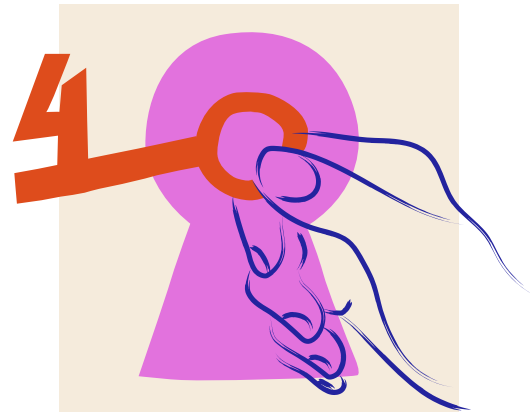
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Introduction

In *Building Better Systems (2020)*, we introduced four keys to unlock system innovation: purpose and power, relationships and resource flows.

These four keys make up a set. Systems are often hard to change because power, relationships, and resource flows are locked together in a reinforcing pattern to serve the system's current purpose. Those with power in the system use it to shape the purpose which serves their interest and view of the world. Systems start to change fundamentally when this pattern is disrupted and opened up. A new configuration can emerge, which serves a new purpose, but only if there are new patterns of relationships, a new flow of resources and a new distribution of power.



In this article series we delve deeper into these four keys and provide practical advice on how they can be put to use.

This article focuses on the role that power plays in determining what happens in systems, and how system innovators can mobilise power to create new systems.

Purpose is the master key for unlocking system change: what a system is for, the outcomes it seeks to create. However, it is almost impossible to shift the purpose of a system unless there is also a shift in who has the **power** to determine that purpose, how resources flow, whose needs take priority and what is counted as a good outcome. Shifts in purpose and power go hand in hand. This article focuses on how to shift power within and around a system.

Within systems, power works in complex ways. This presents both challenges and opportunities for those embarking on system innovation. Power takes hard and soft forms: it can be embedded in culture and observable in explicit instructions; it can work for good and for bad, for public benefit and private gain. Innovators who aim to shift systems inevitably develop solutions that challenge the distribution of power within a system. That is why these innovations can provoke such opposition: they often threaten vested interests.

This article explores how we can think and act on power in systems to bring about a system shift. It is based on four critical distinctions about how power works. These four perspectives on power should help system innovators see where power lies and how it can be redirected, and where power can be mobilised in the name of creating better, different systems:

The Powerful and the Powerless

Will you start your strategy for change by working with already powerful insiders, to redirect their existing power to bring about change? Or will you attempt to mobilise outsiders and outliers?

“Power over” and “Power With”

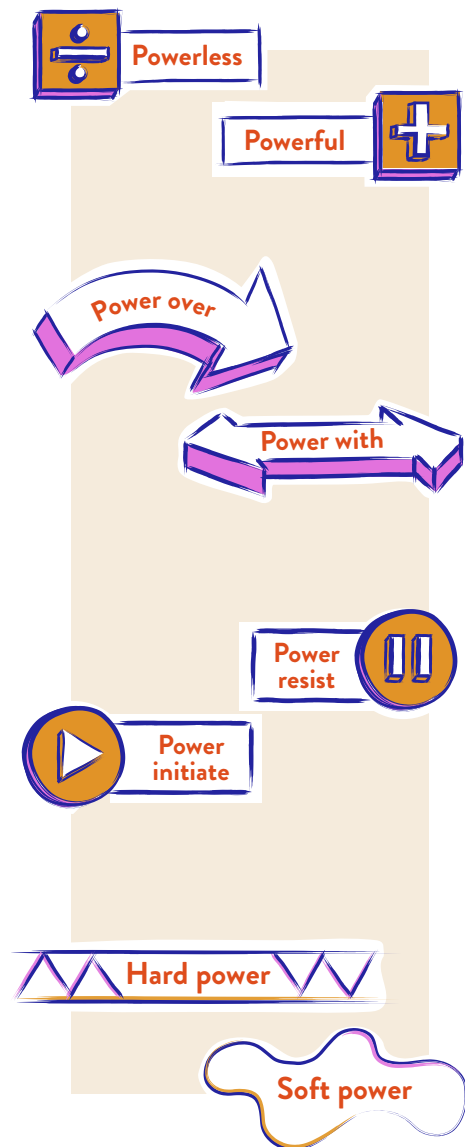
“Power over” is associated with hierarchies and institutions. “Power with” is associated with social movements. Which combinations of power will your strategy for change engage?

Resistance and Initiative

The negative power to resist change is very different from the positive power to initiate change, yet often system innovation succeeds when they are connected, when opposition to a current system generates propositions to change it.

Hard and Soft

Power comes in hard and soft forms, in rules and norms, resources and values, the explicit and the tacit. How can your strategy for change mobilise all forms of power?

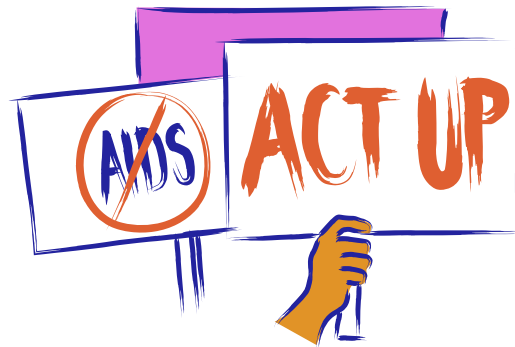


These four different dimensions of power are at play in success stories of system change. Take the story of the HIV epidemic, where a social movement of gay men forced an entire public and private system for funding pharmaceutical research to tackle the problem.

Silence = Death

In October, 1988, a fleet of charter buses rolled into the sleepy, suburban town of Rockville Maryland, carrying the core of one of the most unlikely, riotous and effective innovation movements of the late 20th century. Inside were 1,200 members of ACT UP, a movement of mainly gay men who had made it their mission to press the government, the medical profession and the pharmaceutical industry to find an effective treatment for the AIDS epidemic, which in a few years had already claimed the lives of more than 50,000 Americans. They were in Rockville to lay siege to the headquarters of the Food and Drug Administration, located in an 18-storey glass tower in an otherwise residential neighbourhood.

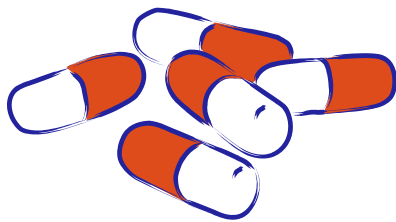
The night before, one of the march's convenors had urged the group to harness their love of one another to mobilise for change. They revelled in an intoxicating blend of truth and force that Gandhi called satyagraha. "Seize control! Seize control!", they shouted. "ACT UP! Fight back! Fight AIDS."



The protest the following day was a pivotal moment in the campaign to develop effective treatments for AIDS. The full panoply of ACT UP's imaginative activism was on display, as David France recounts in his epic history of the movement, *How to Survive a Plague* (2017). One group dressed up as laid-to-rest corpses and, on signal, fell dead in the middle of the road to stop traffic, complete with their own pop-up headstones. A group called The Delta Queens hoisted an effigy of Ronald Regan up a flagpole on the FDA grounds. A group going under the name PISD (People with Immune System Disorders) set up a lemonade stand to hawk dextran sulphate, a supposedly beneficial drug that was available elsewhere in the world but kept from Americans by the FDA. France recalled: "Despite the anger there was a joyous, country fair-like tenor to the day's affair, unlike anything that historians of grassroots movements had seen before."

That protest was critical in showing that ACT UP had the power to take on the establishment. By that stage, ACT UP, with little concerted effort and no ongoing campaign organisation, had become a national movement, almost entirely by word of mouth in an era before the Internet. Nobody knew how many cities had an ACT UP group, nor how many people they could mobilise. The FDA demonstration was the first time their potential power became visible.

ACT UP is a case study in how a movement can change not just an industry and government policy but an entire system. It mobilised community-based researchers and put pressure on government agencies. Activists who were actors and bond dealers became experts in lipids and CD4 counts. They invented an entirely new way to do drug trials so that they were completed more quickly and fairly, in order that fewer people were left in a control group taking a useless placebo that would condemn them



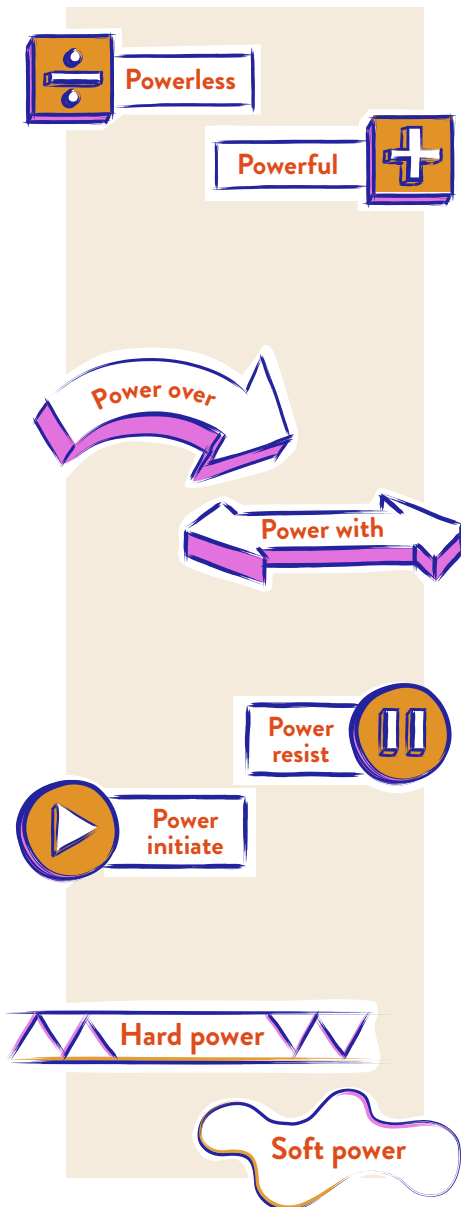
to almost certain death. It is difficult to capture the culture and atmosphere bred by ACT UP at its Monday night meetings in New York. They were often raucous, they could last until 11pm, and they sometimes descended into dramatic arguments. However, more often than not, these meetings involved lengthy exegeses on the benefits of specific drugs and hospital programmes.

ACT UP's brilliant campaigns helped to unlock the funding that gave momentum to an often disputatious scientific community, which, until then, had made slow headway in preventing HIV from disabling the human immune system. The critical step in finding a solution came when the scientific community began to include people from the gay community. These remarkable people taught themselves how to become experts in analysing the data from drug trials, working out how the trials could be made more effective, and the combinations of treatments that would be required.

When the HIV epidemic first hit, public and private health systems were slow to respond and when they did, they ended up going down blind alleys. Pressure from ACT UP pushed the issue up the political agenda, and reframed it as a public health challenge (rather than as a "gay plague"). Then they pressed for solutions: effective antiretroviral drugs that were made available in record time and at affordable prices. In this way, the epidemic in the developed world was also brought under control. By France's calculation, they saved the lives of about 8 million people, by forcing the health system to find better solutions more quickly.



ACT UP redirected the public health system’s response to HIV by deploying all four dimensions of power.



- The movement started with the powerless, with gay men helping one another understand the epidemic and beginning to search for solutions. That solution emerged when the powerless managed to engage the powerful: in the government, the FDA, the research community and the pharma companies, forcing them to work differently.

- The movement generated enormous “power with”, creating a widening coalition of supporters which then influenced those with “power over” research budgets and drug approval systems, to push research in new directions.

- ACT UP started as an act of resistance, to highlight the plight of gay men dying from the disease. It made its biggest impact by combining opposition and proposition: new ways to test and develop more effective antiretroviral treatments. ACT UP was an “anti-movement” against a failing system and a “pro-movement” for a better alternative.

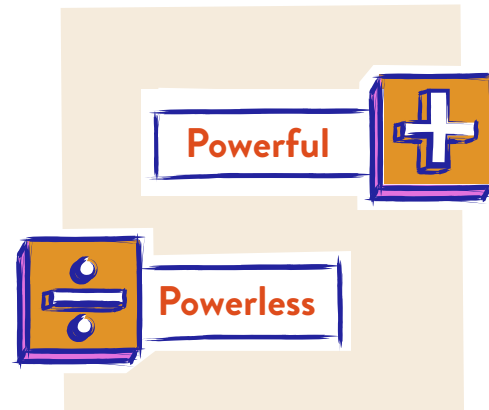
- The movement engaged with both hard and soft power. Its scientific committee engaged with the data of drug trials and created the first comprehensive map of all public and private funding flowing into HIV research. Yet it was also brilliant at working on soft power, shifting the way the epidemic was framed and publicly understood, from a “gay plague” to a public health emergency.

ACT UP was critical in bringing about a systemic response to the AIDS crisis because it deployed all four aspects of power to shift a system that was initially obdurate and resistant to change.

Let’s look at those four dimensions of power in more detail and see how they can be deployed to shift a system.

The Powerful and the Powerless

One starting point for system innovators is to find out where power lies in a system, who has power, and then to redirect that power to serve a different purpose. An example is the way that critics of profit-maximising, free market capitalism have urged mainstream investors to take up new measures of environmental, social and governance factors in deciding where to invest. The idea is that capitalism can change from within if existing funds adopt new, more holistic measures to evaluate their investments: the already powerful can redirect their power. This is a realist view of where power lies, with elites and in hierarchies. Getting elites to shift their priorities can bring about system wide change. Systems change when those with power within them see that it is in their interests to do so.



However, elites can be deeply entrenched in the systems in which they hold power, slow to change and inaccessible. As a result, system innovators often have no option but to start their work with people who are outside those circles of power, people who feel relatively powerless. Being powerless, they lack the means to achieve what is most important to them. There are three different groups who might be experiencing a different kind of powerlessness which could spark system change.

The first are people who feel the current system is neglecting them. Systems do things for people but they can also do things to people who have little choice and voice in the matter. Systems that run on rules and standards, to ensure consistency and fairness, can seem faceless and unfeeling. People in receipt of services from public systems can feel they have little say in what happens to them. People who see the system with all its faults from the ground up, through their lived experience, provide a vital vantage point in the search for alternatives. That is one reason why some system change efforts start with ethnographic studies of the lives of people that systems neglect.

People working in systems can also feel powerless. The rules and procedures which systems run on are designed for efficiency and fairness, yet that can leave staff feeling they have limited discretion to take the initiative to adapt what they do to different user needs and contexts. Working within highly rule-bound systems can be frustrating because people do not feel fully trusted to use their judgement to do the job in the way they see fit. Systems are complex beasts, with many interconnected components. Someone working in one department of a complex institution like a hospital may find their scope for action confined to their departmental silo.

Finally, there are people who are outside or on the margins of a system, who might see it in a completely different way. Veganism emerged in the west in the 1940s as an alternative to animal-based diets. Vegans have been a small minority of the population until quite recently. But this marginal and powerless position gave them the opportunity to see the entire food system from a different point of view. One power of the powerless is that, from their marginalised vantage point, they can sometimes see opportunities to create radically different systems.

That matters now because systems work within societies which are becoming more unequal. People have been made more aware of these structural inequalities by social movements such as #metoo and Black Lives Matter. Shifting power within systems involves giving voice to those marginalised in society at large and so also in these mainstream systems. System innovation will be in a constant interplay with social movements tackling inequalities in power in society as a whole.

A power shift can start when the powerful decide to change direction, as in the ESG case, but it can also start with the powerless who come together to exert power to shift the system. Like in the case of ACT UP, it will depend on insiders and outsiders finding a common interest. That is one reason we think one of the most critical roles in system innovation is the “insider-outsider”: someone who can bring new ideas into a system from the outside, translating them into a language and form that the system can digest. The most effective strategies are likely to engage both insiders and outsiders, the powerful and the powerless. As Adam Kahane (2017), the veteran facilitator of large scale social change programmes argues, it may even require people to collaborate with people who they have seen as their opponents.

One example of a group working in this way is The Systems Sanctuary, a Canadian system change agency, which works with a network of groups promoting change in systems dominated by traditional forms of hierarchical, male power. Systems, especially systems of care, often depend on the paid and unpaid labour of women in order to function. Yet those women rarely get a voice in setting the agenda, nor in making decisions. The Systems Sanctuary argues that womens’ campaigns and feminist groups, often starting in the margins of systems, “seek to shift power from traditional hierarchical structures of dominance, to new ways to think about collaboration to share power and resources.” Groups like The Systems Sanctuary are trying to create new centres of power to become dynamos for system change.

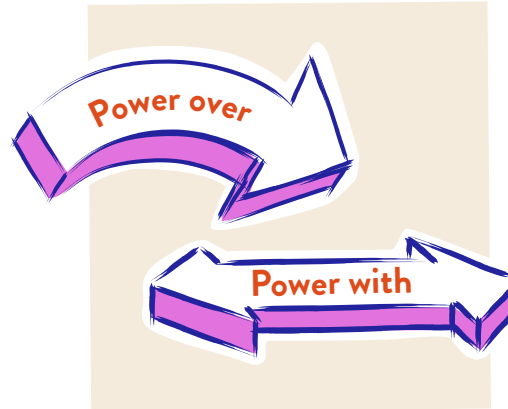
How do you think about your role in system change: does it start from the inside, with the efforts to change the powerful? Does it start with the relatively powerless, the people with the strongest incentives and freedom to imagine alternatives? Or does it have to employ both strategies in combination?

If you plan to start on the inside, working with elites, how will you move to the outside, to work with communities and movements? If you plan to start on the outside, with people who see the possibilities of radical change, how do you find allies inside the system who can help translate that ambition into practical reality?

“Power Over and “Power With”

Power is relational: invariably we think of it as “who has “power over” whom and what?”

Power is often associated with someone’s position in a hierarchy, their ability to make critical decisions, allocate resources, and decide on priorities for others. A has “power over” B, when A can make decisions which shape B’s life and constrain their choices. That power might come in the form of a direct instruction, a rule to govern behaviour, or subtle influence so that B adopts A’s priorities. Often “power over” does not need to be explicitly invoked to be effective; it’s just a taken-for-granted feature of a hierarchical organisation.



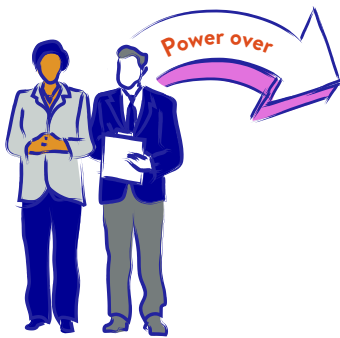
Systems require a certain order and priority, rules and standards, which produce repeated patterns and processes. People who have the power to set these frameworks have “power over” the system, those working in it and those who depend upon it. Systems differ greatly in how “power over” is constituted, legitimated and distributed. It could be on the basis of knowledge and expertise (for example, in scientific, medical and technical systems); political authority (in public and democratic systems); command over money and resources (in market-based systems: social norms and structures, for example, in systems of caste and class, race and gender); or brute power of coercion and threat of violence.

More often than not, different patterns of “power over” are vying with one another within a system. There is rarely a single hierarchy. There are usually competing hierarchies, each with a different claim to power. In health systems, for example, medical hierarchies can often be at odds with managerial hierarchies. The first focuses on the quality of medical care, the other is concerned with efficient use of resources. These tensions between fractious hierarchies can be a potent source of frustration, but they also offer levers for change.

It is tempting to conclude that “power over” is the “old power” of hierarchies which is being outmoded in an ever more networked world. Yet “power over” is constantly taking new forms, responding to new demands and opportunities. Hierarchies are constantly reshaping and renewing themselves.

One aspect of this is the rising attraction of more authoritarian and technocratic forms of government. All over the world voters have stopped turning out in elections. A late 2020 report by the Centre for the Future of Democracy at Cambridge University (Foa, Klassen, Slade, Rand & Collins, 2020), drawing on hundreds of studies conducted over the previous twenty-five years, found that faith in democracy had been declining virtually everywhere since the late 1990s. In the US, a large proportion of younger voters say they would prefer it if the army ran the country. Democracy flourished after the fall of the Berlin Wall but quite soon went into recession as people became increasingly frustrated with growing inequality and detached elites who did too little for the average voter. That seems to have persuaded more people that this is grounds for adopting a more decisive, authoritarian approach to governance.

Technocratic power – another form of “power over” – is also becoming more pervasive and sophisticated. The populist wave that swept through US and European politics in the period after the financial crash of 2008 was associated with an attack on elites and



“experts” in favour of popular common sense. Yet as that wave recedes, there is more demand for technocratic knowledge to tackle complex challenges such as the Covid pandemic and climate change. Technocratic power has grown enormously through the pervasive, and invasive, spread of digital platforms, such as Facebook and Amazon, with algorithms which reach deep into our lives. These platforms increasingly provide the frameworks and systems for our daily lives, embodying the double edge nature of power. They both enable us to be more creative, connected and productive, providing us with greater

choice, and at the same time delve deeper into our lives. What some people claim is a new “surveillance capitalism” (Zuboff, 2019) is a new insidious form of “power over”. No discussion about power in our lives can now ignore the influence of the big technology companies.

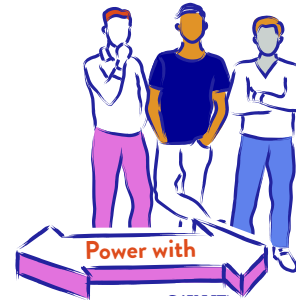
However, there is a very different way to think about power in relational terms: it can flow laterally between people when they come together for a common cause. This is what the political philosopher Hannah Arendt (1972) called the power of concertion. “Power over” is associated with the old power of hierarchies; “power with” is associated with the new power of movements.

The power to act in concert is central to all systems because systems involve coordination and cooperation among many different, related participants and ingredients. An orchestra depends on the power of concertion as a conductor guides the players through a piece. Teams of all kinds, from sport to science and business, depend on concertion which requires intelligent mutual cooperation.

Systems provide different settings in which “power with” can work through networks, communities and movements. They might be communities of users, professionals, front-line staff, or leaders. Power shifts within a system when new communities

form, representing new centres of “power-with”. Sometimes those communities are like pressure groups, putting pressure on those in power within the system to use resources in different ways. At other times these communities create capabilities among their members to achieve things on their own terms and in new ways. This can be seen in the long story of the rise of the independent living movement among adults with learning disabilities, working inside and outside systems of care to drive them to change and create alternatives.

Social movements are the prime example of how the power of concertion can shift systems: mobilising discontent and spreading new values; spreading new practices and norms of behaviour among consumers; creating communities of knowledge to spread new ideas within systems; movements of workers pressing for better conditions of work. We live at a time when movements are proliferating, from Climate Emergency protests to Black Lives Matter, often using the power of digital platforms.



The critical questions for these movements are: how to go from opposition against a system to proposition to *transform* a system; how to mobilise the new power of movements but to parlay that into power within institutions and hierarchies.

The ACT UP story shows that system innovation involves both “power over” and “power with”; hierarchies and movements, insiders and outsiders, initially in conflict but gradually working in tandem. System innovators need to be adept at playing both sides of this power shift. Systems rarely change without external pressure from campaigns and movements and yet that is seldom enough on its own to shift an embedded system. Change has to also come from within, as those in power within a system shift their priorities. Equally, it’s also clear that old and new power can be reinforcing: authoritarian populist political leaders are often adept at creating mass movements to support them. Old power and new power are not alternatives but often complements.

Power to Resist and Power to Initiate

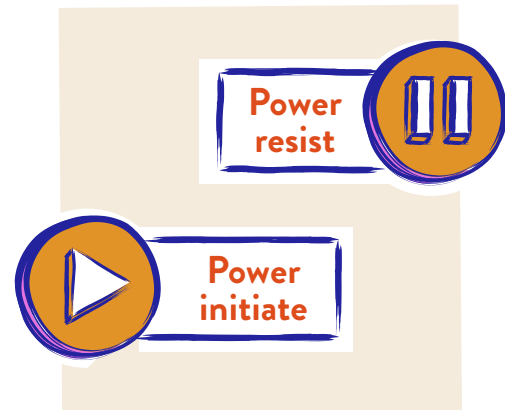
Power matters because it is required to achieve things, to get things done, to bring about an outcome. At its most basic, power is active, it creates, makes, moves: it is “power to”.

Modern systems mobilise this “power to” in a systematic way to operate at scale and serve the many rather than the few. Modern life is made possible by systems which make us efficient and productive, by bringing us water and light, heat and food, energy and transport, provisions and services of all kinds. Without modern systems, a lot of time-consuming labour would be required to provide these basic services. Modern, mass systems allow that labour to be put to more productive uses while also delivering services to people, creating a society of citizens and consumers, workers and householders. If people are excluded from these basic systems which sustain modern life, it is a cause for concern. The most fundamental power of systems is the “power to” achieve things and make things possible on society’s behalf.

The other side of power, however, is that once established it can become entrenched and defensive. It becomes the negative power to say “no” rather than the positive power to say “yes”.

In the multi-level perspective model of system change, developed by Frank Geels (2006), the power of the system to both mobilise resources and to resist change is embedded in the middle level - the regime of institutions, rules, organisations and technologies. The negative power in this regime is exemplified in Geel’s case study of how the US airline industry eventually shifted from propeller planes to jet engines. The technical advantages of jet aeroplanes were already well known, but the industry was held back from shifting to this new technology by a “cartel of fear”. No airline wanted to be the first to break ranks and take the risks involved in adopting a new technology. Eventually Pan Am made the leap and the Boeing 707 changed the industry forever.

Here are three different ways to think about how to break the grip of a “cartel of fear” which keeps a system in place, even when it is far from effective: narrative, design and coalitions.



NARRATIVES:

Negative power depends on what the economist Albert Hirschman (1991) called a “rhetoric of reaction”, which creates a narrative for why radical change should be avoided with three themes: jeopardy (we risk losing ground, a bird in the hand is worth two in the bush); futility (attempts at change usually prove pointless); and perverse effects (nothing quite turns out as intended and promoters of change are bound to underestimate the unforeseeable negative consequences of change). These three themes mobilised together create a powerful case for inaction. According to William Gamson and David Meyer (1996), specialists in political and social movements, the mobilisation of people around a sense of opportunity requires a rhetoric of change involving urgency, agency and possibility. Change is needed now, the situation is critical, change is an imperative; people can take action that will have an impact; the world can be a different place, better outcomes can be achieved without threatening what we already have. Effective social movements use these narratives of change not just against resistance, but to open up what the philosopher Charles Tilly (1967) calls a new “structure of opportunity” to act on their claims. System change depends on a compelling narrative of opportunity.

DESIGN:

A second approach is for those promoting change to find ways to insinuate innovation into a system without exciting opposition. The technical term for this is skeuomorphic design and a good example is the way that Thomas Edison made his first electric light system (Hardagon & Douglas, 2001). Edison was an upstart competing against a very well entrenched gas lighting system. Consumers were used to the gentle warm light that gas lamps gave off. They knew how to use them. The New York city system for awarding gas lighting contracts favoured large centralised systems. When Edison brought his revolutionary electric light to market he made it look and feel as much like a gas light as possible. He deliberately dimmed the bulb. He even explored whether the electric wiring could be run through gas pipes. He adopted a centralised generation system because that meant his new electric light company would look to the regulators very like the gas companies they were used to. Edison succeeded in inserting a radical, disruptive innovation into an incumbent system because he made it look familiar and unthreatening. That reduced the opposition he faced.

COALITIONS:

Another way to think about how change comes about in systems is that it is all about shifting coalitions. The current system is kept in place by a coalition of interests, especially among producers, funders and perhaps regulators. The advocates of a new system need to build a stronger, broader coalition to bring about change, which in time breaks up the old coalition. That is achieved by persuading members of the old coalition that it is in their best interests to switch sides. An example might be the way that vegans and vegetarians have built a widening coalition in support of plant-based diets, taking it from a marginal taste in the West to become close to mainstream, especially among younger people. That coalition now includes companies from within the mainstream food sector who have normalised what was once regarded as a niche pastime. One sign that veganism and vegetarianism has shifted the mainstream food

industry by creating a larger, aspirational coalition of supporters is the rise of Oatly, the alternative, oat-based milk maker, and the recent move by the French government to insist that all restaurants provide a vegetarian option on their menu. We call coalitions that manage to create a new system “breakthrough coalitions”. Karyn McCluskey brought down knife crime in Glasgow by creating a breakthrough coalition which included the police, social services, schools, churches, mothers, young people and community groups (McCluskey, 2019). One way of thinking about systems is to imagine three different coalitions vying for control. One might be a breakthrough coalition which wants to transform the system around a new sense of purpose; a second might be a managerial coalition which wants to improve the system as it is by reducing waste; a third might be a coalition of restoration which wants to return the system to an earlier, more traditional and simpler state. Systems change when the balance of power between these coalitions also shifts.

Resistance is part and parcel of system change. One measure of whether an innovation effort is starting to have a real impact on a system is whether it provokes opposition because those in power feel threatened by it. Radical change is rarely smooth and seamless. Indeed, resistance and negative power can in some cases feed the positive power to initiate change. Doug McAdam (2009) says, “Power relations define the functioning of any ongoing system; [...] the ability to disrupt these relationships is exactly the sort of leverage which can be used to alter the functioning of the system [...] therefore any system contains within itself the possibility of a power strong enough to alter it.” In the upheaval of system change, resources and people can be freed up to play new roles. Often new systems incorporate ingredients from older systems which are redeployed, as well as introducing new elements. Social movements such as veganism mobilise the power of opposition – against animal cruelty and climate change – but marry it to a new proposition – the possibilities of a virtuous, clean, aspirational, animal-free diet. Therefore, resistance and initiative, opposition and proposition, can work in a cycle, one generating the momentum for the other.

“Power relations define the functioning of any ongoing system; [...] the ability to disrupt these relationships is exactly the sort of leverage which can be used to alter the functioning of the system [...] therefore any system contains within itself the possibility of a power strong enough to alter it.”

Doug McAdam

Soft Power, Hard Power

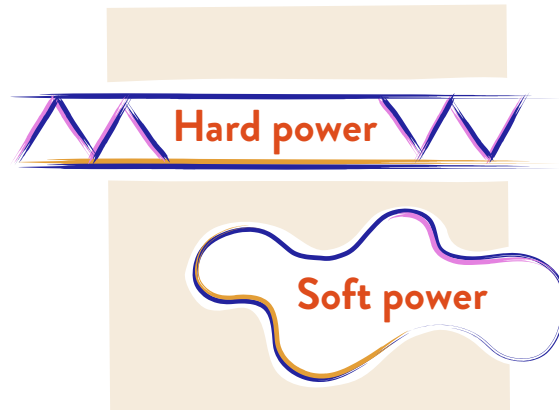
The final perspective on power is to explore where hard and soft power is at work in systems, in order to entrench and to subvert them. Successful system innovation will involve deploying hard and soft power in tandem. One without the other will not be enough. Finding a way to combine the two is critical.

Hard power is explicit, visible and tangible; encoded in rules and protocols, procedures and policies; backed by the hard edge of enforcement and regulation; made real by tangible rewards and punishments. Hard power enforces standards of quality which define what good outcomes are, against which the system's performance is evaluated and resources are allocated. These rules and policies determine who is entitled to what, and how rights and responsibilities, duties and obligations are distributed.

This kind of hard power engineers the "regime" which sits in the middle level of a system: the institutions and their operating frameworks which shape inputs into outputs. The length of the school day and term; the organisation of classes and year groups; the curriculum they study and the exams they sit. All of these are tangible aspects of the hard power of education to shape the way our children learn, backed by the compulsory nature of primary and secondary education. In most societies, children have to go to school, by law.

System innovation has to change the hard power infrastructure of: policies and laws; budgets and resource flows; standards and quality; data and evaluation; regulation and inspection; management structures and systems for performance review.

Soft power, by contrast, is tacit and implicit, embedded in culture, values, norms and assumptions, which guide our habits of thought and action, and which direct our imaginations to what is counted as possible and preferable. It is conveyed in conventions and told in narratives which encourage us to behave in certain ways, defining the good student, the compliant patient and the deserving poor. This is the power we internalise into our own way of thinking as we become a part of the systems that we work for and which serve us, behaving in a way that the system expects and rewards.



In education, soft power is embedded in what we count as a good education, measured by tests for individual academic and cognitive knowledge. Once this idea of what counts as a “good education” is accepted, much of the hard wiring of the regime and its institutions will follow.

Soft power is like the “water we swim in”, the habits of thought and taken-for-granted beliefs which influence how we think and talk. The political theorist Steven Lukes (2005) developed a widely used typology of power at three levels. The first is the observable, direct “power over”, in which someone powerful can force someone else to do what they want: a master directs a slave. The second tier is menu setting: the power to set the menu of choices available to someone. The third is soft power: setting our culture and values, the language and concepts we have available to see the world and imagine alternatives. Soft power is embedded in the assumptions we make about the causes and justifications for inequality, which keep social problems in place because they are seen as part of the accepted order of things. Soft power is the ability to get others to buy into the values which keep you in power.

As soft power is so diffuse and intangible it can be difficult to challenge directly. Its power rests in rarely having to make itself apparent. As a result, it can play a huge role in keeping dominant systems in place even while the super structure of rules and regulations might change.

System innovation cannot just change the hard power of institutions, it must also change the wider environment of values and expectations in which institutions operate. To do so system innovators must reshape the dominant narratives and norms of the system, not just its policies and rules. Institutions such as schools, hospitals and job centres do not just shape behaviour through their rules, but by constituting the interpretations, actions and roles available to people as patients, students and job seekers. They tell us how to behave and how to present ourselves to the system to get things done, so we are system ready.

Soft power involves influence and persuasion, often through peer example and emulation, rather than instruction and enforcement. This is the terrain of social movements which bring about mass behavioural change in pursuit of new aspirations, values and lifestyles. All significant innovation has a powerful cultural component as people rapidly adopt new behaviours and orientations (a new sense of themselves) which would have appeared alien to them only a short time before.

A prime example of the way that soft and hard power can work together is the way people with disabilities have created new vehicles to allow them to live independently. The veteran Canadian disability rights activist, Al Etmanski (2020), has worked for most of his life to reshape the hard power of services for disabled people. He pushed to shut down specialist residential facilities, created a Registered Disability Saving Plan which has mobilised billions of Canadian dollars for long-term support, and lobbied for far-reaching changes to the Canadian legal framework so support relationships (rather than just individuals) could be granted legal status. Yet, Etmanski says, all these reforms

to the formal structures of the system mean little if the underlying mental model which determines how a person with disability is seen does not change. If disabled people are still treated as if they are dependent, incapable and cannot be trusted to make good decisions about their lives, then the system will carry on regardless of changes to its hard power structures. It will be the same wine in new bottles.

Soft power change often involves reframing an issue in a way which creates a “resonance” between a new narrative of change and existing values and therefore power structures. It’s this resonance between old and new that creates the power to change. A good example of that resonance at work is the push for marriage equality in the United States.

In the ten years up to 2004, marriage equality – gay marriage as it was then known – was a losing issue. Republicans and conservatives routinely attacked same-sex marriage as an anathema to American values which would undermine the sacred institution of marriage. It was presented as if it was an alien contamination. Thirty states adopted constitutional amendments against same sex marriage. Eighteen times US voters were asked to vote on the issue between 1994 and 2004; on every occasion they rejected it. Polls at the time showed that an average of only 33% of voters supported it. At the 2004 presidential election, it was widely suggested that opposition to gay marriage was a critical factor in George W. Bush’s winning re-election (Woodly, 2015). Gay marriage was a marginal issue which became a losing issue whenever it gained too much attention.

Yet ten years later the position had been completely reversed. By 2014, marriage equality was widely accepted and practiced, written into law and applauded by elites, even many conservatives. It was increasingly accepted as a common sense part of a normal society.

How did those campaigning for same-sex marriage pull off this remarkable shift?

The campaign had already created a vital legal and social vehicle in the form of the “civil union”, adopted in Vermont in April, 2000 (Woodly, 2015). One sign of impending system change is the emergence of hybrids, which are a blend of the old and the new (the hybrid car which runs on electricity and petrol is a case in point). The civil union was an innovation in the hard power of the machinery of marriage law, a hybrid status parallel and equivalent to marriage. However, the innovation of the civil union was not taken up until there was a shift in the soft power which enabled it.

To do that, gay marriage was reframed as “marriage equality”. The way an issue is framed is one of the most important aspects of soft power. Frames are constructions of the issue; they spell out the essence of the problem; suggest how it should be thought about, and may go so far as to recommend what if anything should be done. The campaign for marriage equality created a frame which turned an issue for a particular group into one for the mainstream.

What was seen as an attack on the institution of marriage was turned into an endorsement of it. The fact that gay people wanted to get married was a show of support for and extension of a traditional institution. The campaign also mobilised traditional American values of privacy (people should be free to love and live with whoever they wanted) and fairness (it was unfair for these private freedoms to be denied to people who happened to be gay). By mobilising traditional ideas of love and privacy, fairness and marriage, the campaign created a resonance: the new idea resonated with older values and commitments. That resonance won marriage equality wider acceptance. By 2014, conservatives were going out of their way to show they were not opposed to gay people marrying.

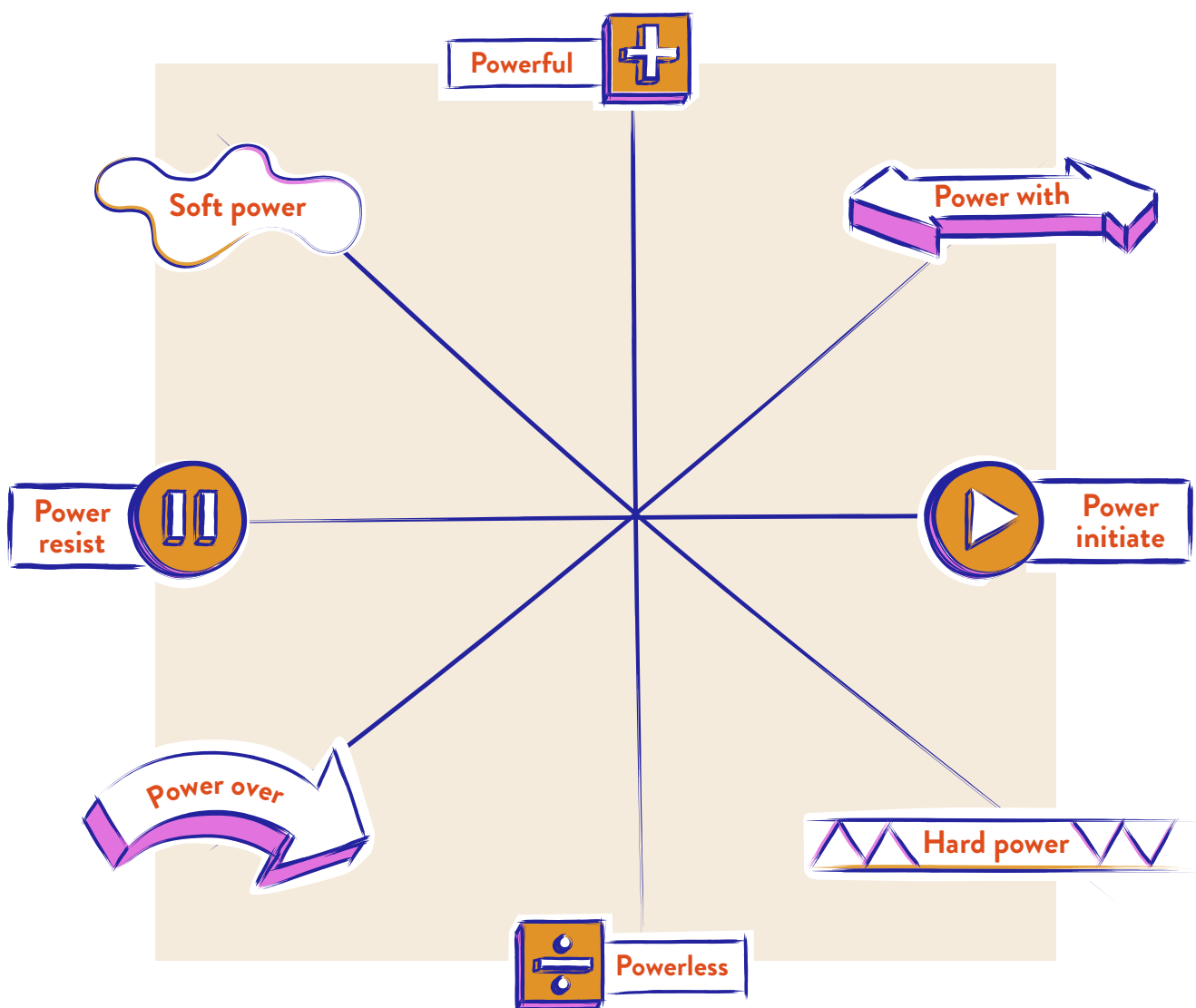
Deva R. Woodly (2015) concludes *The Politics of Common Sense*, her detailed study of the success of the marriage equality campaign this way: "The ability to present new claims as credible depends on whether the connections between the old ideas and new purposes is likely to resonate with the values and understandings that are taken for granted in the general public [...] the trick to advancing a new issue is the union of old values with a new prescription using a linking concept." Marriage equality won over mainstream power by linking privacy and fairness to love and marriage. As Woodly has it, this campaign created a new common sense.

“ The ability to present new claims as credible depends on whether the connections between the old ideas and new purposes is likely to resonate with the values and understandings that are taken for granted in the general public [...] the trick to advancing a new issue is the union of old values with a new prescription using a linking concept.”

Deva R. Woodly

Conclusion

These perspectives on power create a circle of power with four spokes across it: the powerful and the powerless; old “power over” and new “power with”; soft power and hard power; negative power to resist and positive power to initiate.



System innovators need to work with every aspect of this wheel to generate change. That will involve tensions and conflict between different aspects and holders of power within the system.

System innovators will need to be both consummate insiders and authentic outsiders, to work with the powerful to change direction and the powerless to mobilise their ideas and voice. System innovators will work with old power to modernise and redirect it, to reshape how hierarchies work to achieve different outcomes. Hierarchies are too powerful and pervasive to be ignored. All systems have elements of hierarchy. How can hierarchies be redesigned and redirected? Yet system innovators will also be alert to where new power movements might form. What common causes might provide the starting point for these movements? Where does the leadership and support for these movements come from?

What are the most important components of hard power; rules, laws, protocols, procedures, budgets? Which need changing? That kind of change will require expertise and technical knowledge that is respected by those within the system. System innovators will be adept at finding allies within the system who can reshape hard power structures.

Strategies for soft power change will rely on finding new voices and narratives, which inform new social practices and forms of behaviour that make change meaningful. Where can you create and spread these new behaviours at all levels of a system? Who might be the bearers of these new practices and meanings and how can they create the resonance of old and new, traditional and radical, that is needed for soft power?

All the elements of this wheel of power, the powerful and the powerless, "power over" and "power with", resistance and initiation, hard and soft, need to be in play at the same time. System innovation involves finding the right combinations of strategies to shift a system, breaking up concentrations of old power which stall change and opening up opportunities for new power to shape the system, often in favour of those who have felt less powerful within it.

Case: Veganism

Use the model of the four dimensions of power to analyse the following case study of the rise of veganism to pinpoint where different forms of power are in play.

Donald Watson probably never saw himself as a revolutionary. He was a woodwork teacher in a British secondary school. But in 1944, as an exhausted Britain moved into the final stages of the Second World War, Watson came up with an idea that may yet change the world in fundamental ways, and according to some, could even save it. Rejecting names such as “dairy barn”, “vitan”, and “benevore”, Watson created a new entirely plant-based diet and lifestyle, which we now know as “vegan” (The Vegan Society, n.d.).

As a young boy growing up in Yorkshire, Watson had worked on his uncle’s farm and was horrified by the slaughter of the friendly pigs he had got to know. He became a vegetarian on New Year’s day in 1924 at the age of 14, convinced that modern life was built on an exploitation of animals that was comparable in its immorality to human slavery. Sixteen years later, he decided the logical extension of his commitment to animal rights was to do without dairy products as well as meat.

He lived an ascetic life, carefully crafted from simple ingredients: wood working, organic farming, cycling, walking, and amateur photography. There was no smoking, drinking or other toxins. Critics scoffed that he would never survive on his meagre diet. He died in 2005 at the age of 95.

In November 1944, Watson and his wife, Dorothy, together with four friends, took the first step to turn their lifestyle into what would eventually become a movement: they founded the Vegan Society in the British midland town of Leicester. Vegan stood for the beginning and end of ‘vegetarian’ because veganism carried vegetarianism through to its logical conclusion.

How things have changed. In the second decade of the twenty-first century, veganism has enjoyed the kind of exponential growth normally confined to tech start-ups. Among young people, veganism is an increasingly mainstream choice. In both Denmark and France, canteens and restaurants have been instructed to increase the availability of vegetarian food.

The kind of transition that veganism is going through – from an obscure and outlandish cult to a new way to live that is followed by millions of people around the world – is changing social norms and markets as well as industries and public policy.

How did veganism become such a powerful force reshaping the world food industry?

Veganism started deep in the margins. Even six decades after it was created, it was a cult of punks and hippies who were widely regarded as esoteric and even extreme. Their commitment kept the movement going in the social undergrowth even when it had little traction in wider society. Movements often start with visionary prophets in the wilderness, like Donald Watson and his friends, people who are prepared to be dismissed as irrelevant oddballs who turn out to be well ahead of their time. For decades, veganism languished on the fringes among people who were not looking for a larger following: the whole point of the movement was to remain counter-cultural, the province of outsiders and outcasts.

Veganism generated its power by reaching out beyond the faithful to the unconverted and outright sceptical. By doing so, it created a new and more powerful coalition.

New forms of communication and community building played a critical role. Watson and his friends started spreading the word using newsletters printed on a mimeograph machine. Veganism took off with online documentaries, like *Cowspiracy* and *Earthlings*, which showed in graphic and distressing detail exactly what it takes for animals to become the meat on our plates. Those documentaries were a delivery system for facts that quickened the pulse and infused people with outrage and passion. Made available by online streaming services, word spread fast through peer recommendation. Watching them became a rite of passage for young people.

These documentaries provided a “moving frame” for the issues that veganism is concerned with: modern farming is exploiting animals and killing them cruelly while contributing to climate change and environmental destruction. The documentaries and the commentary that surrounded them were a “moving frame”: they explained what was going on and why it was wrong; made people feel deeply emotional and outraged at the injustice involved and showed who was responsible, the industrialised food industry. They told people what they could do to make a difference: to right the wrong, become a vegan.

To create “power with”, people need places where they can gather. The Vegan Society created by Watson and his friends did that on a small scale. The Internet and social media have provided multiple new gathering places in forums and blogs and Instagram and Twitter accounts, where vegans learn from one another how to adopt the lifestyle.

One powerful congregation is the international community that follows *Deliciously Ella*, the Internet sensation Ella Woodward who is one of the leading advocates of clean eating. *Deliciously Ella* takes many of the ingredients of Watson’s diet and way of life and makes them attractive and aspirational to 21st century consumers. She embodies the lifestyle as a personal guru to her many thousands of online followers.

That paved the way for the movement to go from the negative power of opposition to the positive power of initiative. Veganism started as an anti-movement, against animal exploitation. Giving up meat was a virtuous sacrifice. It has become an aspirational movement for a better way to live. As the coalition supporting veganism expanded, it became part of a wider set of “flexitarian” approaches to food in which many people

are sometimes vegans, mainly vegetarian and occasionally fish and meat eaters. That flexible approach would be an anathema to many deeply committed vegans but it has expanded dramatically the potential constituency.

Donald Watson's asceticism has been reborn as ethical, minimalist simplicity. As Keegan Kuhn, one of the producers of *Cowspiracy* put it: "Whereas before, veganism may have been viewed like you were giving up something, now it's been reframed as what you gain, now it's been reframed as what you gain: you gain health, you gain a greater sense of living in bounds with your values, you gain all the environmental benefits" (Hancox, 2016).

As it moved from opposition to proposition, veganism also moved from the outside to the inside of the food system. For years governments had been urging people to eat more healthily, with a diet based on four portions of fruit and vegetables a day. That meant that veganism was not such a big step from the conventional wisdom about healthy eating. Meanwhile, the mainstream food industry started to sense a new market was opening up among younger consumers. From about 2010, they started to make space on their shelves for almond milk, soya sausages and beetroot burgers. The regime dominating the food industry was changing: insiders were increasingly working in tandem with outsiders.

Veganism has made the crossing from the margins to the mainstream by going from an oppositional movement for those angry at environmental degradation and animal cruelty, to becoming a lifestyle movement for healthy, environmentally-conscious consumers. It moved out of the places where the faithful congregate, into supermarkets, kitchens and restaurants, into the mainstream food system. The dominant regime started to change from without and within at the same time.

It remains to be seen what new food systems will emerge. "Clean meat" offers the prospect of eating meat without that having to involve killing animals. Richard Branson is one of the investors in a synthetic meat business, Memphis Meats, which will use synthetic biology to grow meat from animal cells. No animal will be killed to make this meat. This will be just one part of a vegan-inspired meat and dairy substitutes industry, which is projected to be worth \$40 billion by 2020 (Hancox, 2016). Large food companies like Kraft, Nestle, Unilever and Walmart are investing in developing more plant-based lines. Analysts Springmann et. al. (2016) at the Oxford Martin Institute's Future of Food Programme estimate that if the world went on a vegan inspired diet, the savings in terms of health care and environmental costs would be close to \$2 trillion a year. Yet for many this kind of hyper-industrialised food system will be a corruption of the original ideals of veganism, a compromise with the very corporate interests so many of its early adherents were against.

Reviewing this story, what different kinds of power were involved? Veganism deployed soft power to shift in values but that then reshaped the hard systems of production; "power with" generated by a social movement forced change in "power over" in hierarchies and institutions; the outsider power of the movement combined with the insider power of those within the mainstream industry who saw an opportunity to innovate; power to resist turned into the power to initiate.

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This initiative of the ROCKWOOL Foundation's Intervention Unit connects knowledge and practice on system innovation to leaders, innovators and entrepreneurs who want to have more systemic impact and meet big, shared societal challenges in new ways. The initiative works with system innovation experts and practitioners internationally and in Denmark to turn systems theory into systems change in action.

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