Keynote: “Strategies to make the socio-ecological transformation a success: Lessons from theory and practice”

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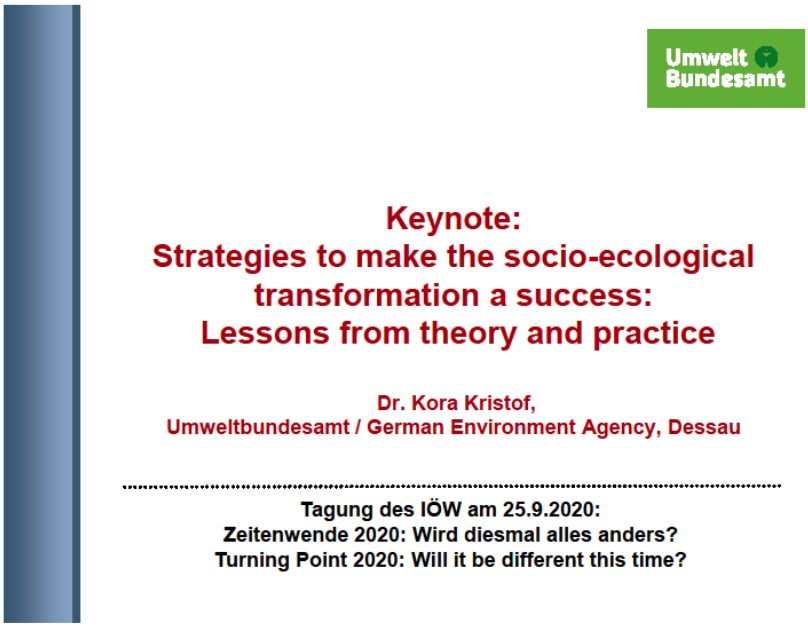


Challenges

Good morning from my side, too.

I would like to start with thanks to Thomas Korbun, Mrs. Palzkill, and Uli Petschow for inviting me for this keynote.

I was asked for a ten or fifteen minute input to complete the other two keynotes. Uli Petschow put the one million dollar question to me: How does transformation succeed?

Johan Schot clarified that the second "Deep Transition" has to go in the direction of sustainability. To achieve this, many changes must interact. So, we are facing major challenges in the economic sectors and in the areas of need.

Florian Kern presented the tension between "sustainability transitions" and the post-growth debate for various fields of action. In doing so, he pointed out the necessity of a

phase-out of the growth paradigm with its supposed promise of prosperity. And he pointed out the necessary system changes.

Briefly summarized: Wherever we look, we see large and complex needs for change.

Moreover, having good ideas for change is not enough. They do not automatically become accepted.

This raises the central question: How can the necessary changes succeed?

What is needed is, firstly, knowledge of the success factors and patterns of success and secondly, their consistent use.

It is clear that in a complex world, changes cannot be planned in detail. But what can be identified are important success factors and patterns of successful change. So two tasks arise:

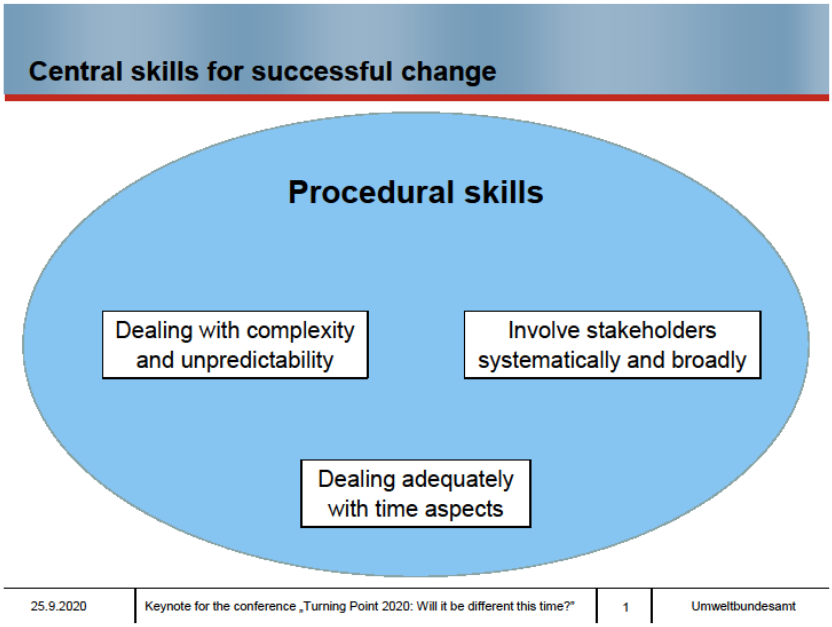
- On the one hand, to look ex post at what has worked or not and why,
- on the other hand, to identify ex ante success factors and success patterns and to use them consistently.

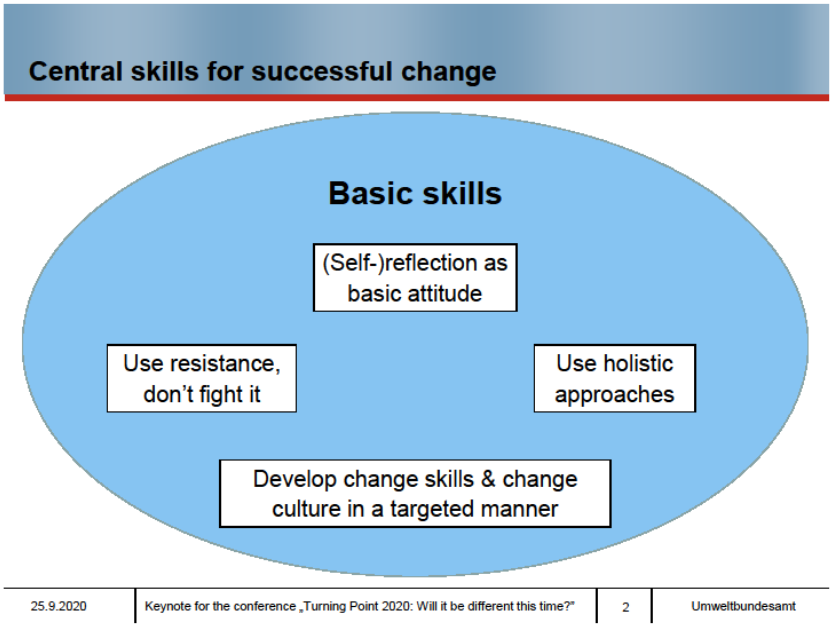
What are the most important success factors? Four illustrations give a short overview.

Core skills

I would like to start with the central skills, which are important success factors:

- The procedural skills ensure a successful handling of actors, time and complexity.
- The basic skills aim at the basic attitude towards change and resistances that arise in the process.





Let us take a brief look at the most frequently unused skills.

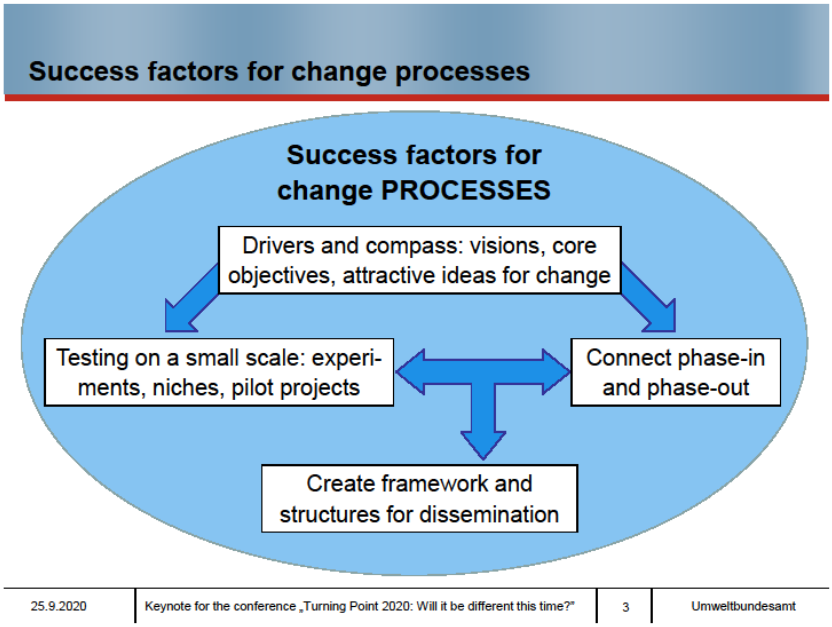
- First of all, this is the reflexive and self-reflexive attitude of the change actors which is necessary for successful change processes. It is important to constantly reflect on the change and the change process with the necessary distance in order to be able to continuously adapt along the central success factors.
- The challenge of 'loving resistance' is also difficult for many change agents. It is promising to deal actively and positively with resistances and conflicts of interest instead of seeing them as annoyance.
  What someone perceives as resistance is a question of perspective: Is the behavior of the change actors themselves not also resistant?
  It is important not to see the representatives of resistance automatically as 'evil opponents', but to accept their legitimate criticism and recognize their different interests.
  Resistance is always a good indicator of the potential for improvement of the change idea, the proposed solutions or the change process. If you understand resistance, you can also use it in a solution-oriented way. Residual resistances can be weakened, for example, by compensating for disadvantages or sharing advantages.

Central process elements

In addition to the central change skills, promising patterns for change processes can be identified.

- This involves inspiring visions and narratives, which are often the 'source of energy' for change processes. These should be combined with related core goals and viable initial proposals for solutions as well as the framework conditions for dissemination.

In addition to establishing the new (phase-in), it is always a matter of replacing the existing (phase-out or exnovation).



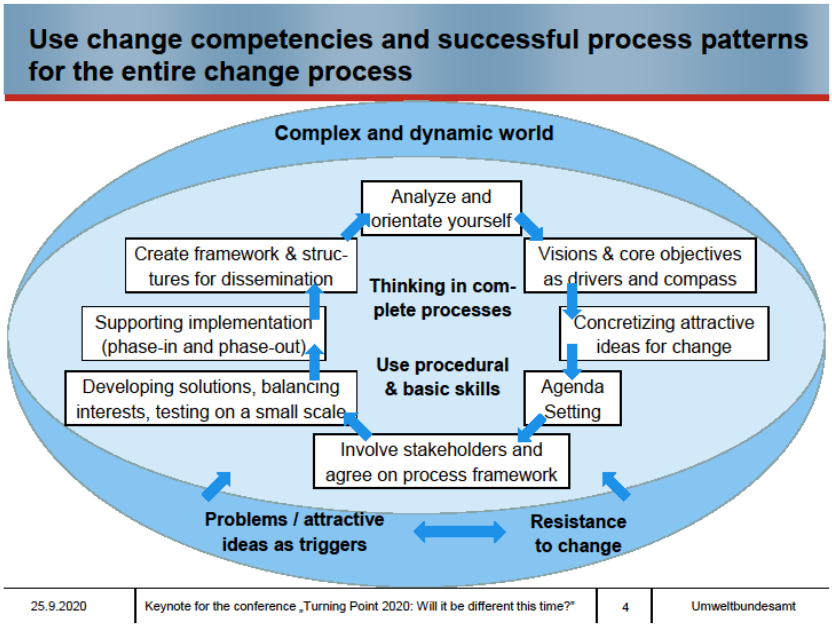
- Among the success patterns of change processes, small-scale testing is often insufficiently appreciated, because one would rather have large solutions immediately. The typical complexity of fundamental changes, however, speaks in favor of testing on a small scale, such as niche developments, pilot projects or real-life laboratories. This makes it possible to develop different solutions, learn from problems that arise, reduce risks and avoid resistance. In addition, the new and its advantages become concrete.

Entire process and consistently using success factors

Now I come to the last slide, which combines the central skills and successful patterns with a look at the entire course of the change.

The analysis creates orientation and is the basis for the visions, the core objectives and the first ideas for implementation. Agenda setting makes it possible to set up a change process, to involve stakeholders and to reach an agreement on the process. Solutions are sought together with all stakeholders and developed step by step. It is also important to think about the concrete implementation of the new and its dissemination as well as the replacement of the old. Since there can be no optimal and permanently valid solutions in a complex and dynamic world, the process of change is never completed.

It is very challenging to think in terms of overall processes and to continuously keep an eye on all central success factors. The core skills as well as the successful patterns of change processes should be used consistently throughout the entire change process.



Building up skills

Success in change processes requires that the change agents have the central change skills and know the central success factors and patterns.

For changes towards sustainability, people often rely on the implicit models in their own heads. In other areas of our lives we are more professional: we take sports courses or go to music lessons.

We should also become more professional in change processes, making targeted use of the knowledge gained and building up the necessary skills - in schools, universities and in professional training.

The first teaching programs on the success factors from transformation research have already been developed (for example in our project "Transformation wagen" or by Smart CSO). This kind of training opportunities should be actively used.

I would be pleased if you could follow this path a little. Then, the answer to the conference question "Will it be different this time?" would more likely be "yes".

Thank you for your attention.

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