

WHAT SKILLS AND MINDSETS ARE ESSENTIAL FOR EMPOWERING INNOVATION FOR ECOLOGICAL TRANSFORMATION?

Cécile Renouard

Co-founder and President of the Campus de la Transition; Research Director of the Companies and Development (CODEV) programme at ESSEC Institute for Research and Education on Negotiation (IRENE)



Campus de la Transition, 2019, credit HLeclerc.

Born in 1968, Cécile Renouard is a graduate of ESSEC Business School, has a doctorate in political philosophy (EHESS) and a canonical licence in theology. She is at the origin, with Gaël Giraud and other researchers, of the Relational Capacity Index (RCI).

She is a member of the scientific council of the Foundation for Nature and Mankind, a member of Michelin's external stakeholder committee and co-chair of the EDF Group's stakeholder committee.

Ecological transformation goes beyond technical skills or new technologies; it demands new mindsets and ways of thinking. This article outlines the Campus de la Transition framework of the “Six Portes”, or Six Gates into understanding and acting on ecological transformation. We also discuss how organisations and companies might adopt systems thinking and other mindsets and approaches for innovation that tackles contemporary global problems at scale.

The phrase “ecological transformation” implies or invites a *systemic* (‘ecological’) *approach* to contemporary global problems. At the Campus de la Transition, which you and your colleagues created in 2018, how do you train students and professionals to think and act systemically to tackle global issues? How do you encourage systems thinking for *just* innovation that is not only technological but develops strategy consistent with systemic responsibility?

Cécile Renouard: If we want to meet today’s climate, environmental, energy and social challenges, we need to think about new economic models, new ways of producing and consuming, and how to manage existing resources or relate to the long-term at a global scale.

With this thought in mind, we set up the Campus de la Transition in June 2018, located in Forges, near Montereau, 80 km from Paris (an area which is itself in a transition process). The aim was to create a community in an eco-place, to be able to experiment and see what it means to reduce the carbon and ecological footprint.

The Campus de la Transition is an academic and research laboratory introducing new programmes, projects and pedagogical practices. It provides training for students as well as professionals, in partnership with a number of universities and institutions. We wrote the *Great Transition handbook* [English version]. It is organised in 6 chapters, considered as six ‘gates’ through which we should enter to fully understand the climate

and biodiversity crisis. The Six Gates are meta-skills or meta-competencies which offer people the keys and analytical tools to understand the problem, no matter where they start out.

- We decided to use the Greek etymology of the words "ecology" and "economy".
- The Greek root "eco", in "**Oikos**" or household, means our common home, house, and hope. This is about the science of climate change and planetary boundaries, and building a common understanding that we have only one planet.
- Then, we focused on the other parts of the words "economy" and "ecology". The word "**Nomos**" [law and metrics], refers to the rules of the game -- the laws, metrics, political institutions and economic models. For instance, the concept of gross domestic product leaves out non-monetary value.
- The other root "**Logos**" is about narratives and how we inspire the moral imagination to understand what is going on and help people look at the future in a constructive way. We need to go beyond technical knowledge and thinking.
- The **Ethos** or ethics gate is about discernment and decision-making at a personal and collective level. What is a good life for ourselves and for others?
- **Praxis** or practice came naturally because if we think differently, we also have to act. The main skill here is about collective action, reflecting on the role of different actors and different scales.
- Finally, **Dunamis** or **Dynamis** is related to how we reconnect to ourselves, to others, to nature, God, and spirituality in the broad sense. People are cautious when talking about religion in the public sphere, but Dunamis is really about integrating eco-spirituality or eco-psychology and the psychosocial skills that we have to promote if we want to change the way we look at the world, our day to day activities within it, and how our institutions are built.

How might innovation for ecological transformation look different, when those pursuing it have absorbed the mindsets you talk about?

C.R.: When we talk about innovation, very often people think in terms of technical innovation. At the Campus de la Transition we have public funding from ADEME, the French government agency on energy and ecological transition, to study low-carbon technologies - and these are not necessarily high-tech. In fact, part of this work is discerning where high-tech is useful for the ecological transformation and where it is contradictory.

Innovation is also about social and psychosocial innovation. We have to acknowledge and integrate our feelings about the ecological transition, about the disasters that are already happening all over the world. We have to look at our day-to-day lives and try to express what a meaningful or fruitful life is. We see that it's about quality relations with ourselves, with others and with the Earth, and we can try to innovate in order to foster this kind of fruitful life where relations matter. In fact, social innovation should and must come first before technological innovation can follow.

What does the Six Gates approach to ecological transition mean for business? How can business and business leaders effectively adopt these perspectives?

C.R.: Over the course of my fieldwork into multinational companies, including very large companies such as Total, Lafarge, Unilever, Danone and Michelin, I studied how these companies relate to territorial development, and from these studies we built a Relational Capacity Index to measure the capability of economic actors to interact with and be part of social, economic and political networks. It was very interesting to look at their contribution to territorial development, and to try to raise with them the ethical and political issues related to sustainable development and what we would call ecological transformation today. For many companies, there was a gap between what they currently do and what should be transformed in their business models to respect planetary boundaries.

For top executives and CEOs of multinational companies to take leadership on this, they need to be convinced that changes are necessary. That's why I think the Six Gates approach can be very fruitful, because it can help leaders reflect from a narrative perspective to design the kind of society they would like to live in within 20 or 30 years, and help them design the role of their company in achieving these goals. Of course, it means they have to advocate for new regulations and new metrics, so it can help them reflect on political responsibility at a national and international level. They have to promote changes





Campus de la Transition, aerial view 2022, credit Lucas Gosset.

in regulations and in the rules of the game. For example, if we don't change the accounting standards to integrate ecological and social issues, if we don't change taxation, if we don't reflect on the distribution of wages along value chains, we won't be able to achieve the goals set out in global agreements like the Paris Agreement.

In my fieldwork, we also found that pure corporate philanthropy does not work. What does work, however, is developing capabilities among populations to *be* and *do*. This means promoting bottom-up participation, empowering people and increasing their awareness so they want to create change themselves.

Companies have an impact on the relations of the people amongst themselves. When a company's impact on its environment and community is analysed, many companies fail to shore up social relations with local communities. So it is crucial for companies to create social relations and lasting social cohesion with the communities in which they are located. This will require a mindset change and a long, hard look at how a company can help local development – not only in the short-term but also over the long-term.

Innovation is also about social and psychosocial innovation. We have to acknowledge and integrate our feelings about the ecological transition, about the disasters that are already happening all over the world

You've talked about how leaders' mindsets need to change, and how the Six Gates approach can help. What about employees, and what kind of changes can they make for ecological transformation when mindsets shift?

C.R.: What I find very interesting, at least from my observations in France, many employees - especially younger ones - are really willing to try and change things from within, whether that is through conversations or pressure on top executives to change management practices and day-to-day operations. And they're also willing to leave if they feel the company is not up to the challenge. So to retain talent, companies have to really implement actions for ecological transformation, from management and strategy all the way to ground-level. Some top executives I've spoken with do see the need for change.

What all this means is that there is room for employees to act. There are movements like Les Collectifs in France that enable employees to combine efforts to change from within. Employees can also build connections to other organisations such as NGOs, civil society movements and local authorities to act from different starting points but in a convergent way.

How is the Six Gates approach already driving innovation? Are there examples of organisations following these principles to pursue change?

C.R.: Since 2020, the CY Cergy Paris University has asked the Campus de la Transition to accompany them on their ecological transition. We started with the Engineering

The Six Gates are meta-skills or meta-competencies which offer people the keys and analytical tools to understand the problem, no matter where they start out

school, to integrate an ethical perspective on technical innovation for engineering students, and now are working across the whole university. Together with Cergy professors, we've designed a module that will be compulsory for all new students, integrating the Six Gates approach.

The Campus is a young institution so it's too early to say our pedagogy has been concretely helpful, but we've received many confirmations that it helps people think differently.

It is crucial to promote 'just' innovation which is not only technical, but that companies ensure that their innovations develop a strategy which is consistent with systemic responsibility. The Six Gates approach can help leaders, managers and employees think systemically and creatively about just innovation.

