

Change Forward Draft Introduction

On May 24, 2022, an American teenager entered a Texas elementary school and murdered 19 children and two teachers, just ten days after another American teenager killed ten Sunday morning shoppers at a New York grocery store. 10-years earlier, twenty-eight people, including 20 children, were killed by a gunman at Sandy Hook Elementary School. Despite such devastating attacks on innocent lives, the United States has been unable to reach a polity solution to address this complex problem at the intersection of Constitutional rights, mental health, racism, and political funding. Similarly, bipartisan conversations have seemed to reach an impasse around other destructive and wicked problems plaguing societies around the world, from climate change, poverty, housing and COVID-19 to other public health crises exacerbating inequality and quality of life improvement. Such issues have both perpetuated and been worsened by an inability to imagine innovative ways forward that begins with civil discourse with one another. Furthermore, while we deal with these current day wicked problems, technological advances are creating future frictions and controversies that we may be unprepared to address.

When confronted with these controversial and complex “wicked” problems, which are tightly interconnected with one another, traditional approaches seem insufficient (Rittel and Webber, 1973). Something else is needed. A new way forward to create space (a third space) from which new ideas and ways of understanding can emerge. Transdisciplinarity is a hopeful and emergent means by which we might transcend our traditional silos – whether those be political, disciplinary, or other – to enter a third space designed to generate new understandings and solutions together. Transdisciplinarity is an approach to inquiry which offers the potential for reframing of problems (Pearce & Ejderyan, 2020) and integrating knowledge and experience in ways that move beyond the Aristotelian binary A or non-A (Nicolescu, 2008) that have stymied academics, business leaders, and politicians from addressing these problems together.

Transdisciplinarity consists of learning to think differently and offers the possibility of conceptualizing problems in new ways and also involves the application of innovative approaches that draw upon existing organizational and collaborative tool and applications. While a growing literature exists on transdisciplinarity, the following projects, Society 5.0 and Future Frictions, have been created out of the lens of innovative approaches designed to transcend disciplines and tribal positions. Both projects look forward into the future of society, what we anticipate is on the horizon for humanity, where technology becomes integrated and embodied deeply in our lives. Each project offers ways to sharpen our transdisciplinary skill sets and practice ways to have productive, civil conversations around controversial topics. These skills are critical, not only to start approaching the challenges of today but also to prepare ourselves for the difficult conversations we will have to have around the controversies of our future.

Stanford’s Faculty Innovation Fellowship sparked collaboration between Cleveland State University and the University of Twente as they began conversations around how to teach and prepare future leaders for a human-machine and technologically-embodied future. We are pleased to present Society 5.0 and Future Frictions in the following sections, and we invite others to embrace transdisciplinary approaches and constructive controversing in their own curricula as tools to foster innovative collaboration around the wicked problems of today and of tomorrow.

References

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skill. *Sustainability Science*, 15(3), 683–698
Rittel, H.W. J. & Webber, M.M. (1973). Dilemmas in a General Theory of Planning. *Policy Sciences*, 4:2.
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“ “constructive conflict” (Follett, 1925a) is the acknowledgment that differences among people should be cherished in their singularity as a way to integrate them into a deliberative process that creates something new and unique to the participants’ intersubjective dynamics. Integration could thus bring together viewpoints and perspectives that at first sight might seem irresolvable or irreconcilable. “ Elias and Alkadry, 2011

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