

Life Itself Overall SCQH

Why We Exist: Summary

Ours appears to be at a pivotal moment in history: we face a number of potentially existential crises whilst also having the potential to embark on a new era of flourishing if we can transcend them. We believe it is clear that the current dominant social paradigm embodied by the West is defunct, and a viable alternative has yet to emerge from elsewhere in the world.

We view shifting this paradigm, or more specifically the views, values and culture underpinning it, as the most important task facing those of us wishing to improve society. The severe crises we face, from climate change to inequality and the increasing decoupling of wealth and well-being shown by the global north, all stem at their root from the defectiveness of this paradigm. Without transforming it, no amount of technical or institutional advancement can secure a truly flourishing existence for all beings.

Life Itself aims to help catalyse this paradigm shift. Primarily through creating developmental spaces and communities which experiment with and incubate new forms of culture. Our Hubs are designed as spaces to nurture transformation in views, values and ways of being without detaching from the realities of everyday life. They offer opportunities to connect more deeply with the self, with the collective and with the natural world while still working and engaging with mainstream society.

At the same time, we explore how these seeds of transformation can contribute and connect to wider systemic shifts. Our work brings inner transformation out of the domain of the purely spiritual, and seeks to rigorously cement it as a pillar of social change that works for all.

SCQH (Situation, Complication, Question, Hypothesis)

Situation

This is a critical point in history: humanity faces a number of existential risks, from climate change to the threat of runaway AI, while our rapidly expanding awareness and capability offers us the potential of a major civilisational breakthrough if channelled correctly.

However, the current dominant social paradigm, characterised by materialism, individualism (at least, in the West), consumerism and techno-fetishism, is a major source of our dysfunction and cannot support the breakthrough we need. For example, even in wealthy countries it prioritizes material growth despite evidence showing a decoupling of wealth and well-being (past certain thresholds) and our materialistic values are causing ever worsening exploitation of the planet and of each other. Inequality is running rampant, and the traditional frames of sense and meaning making (such as religious faith, mainstream politics and even local communities) have broken down. As a result, there is widespread ennui and polarisation, as this void is filled by a jostling mass of adversarial ideologies.

A deep suspicion of traditional politics and political action has taken root across much of the world. Vast numbers of people feel too helpless, too cynical or too blindly faithful to 'modernisation' to participate in meaningful collective action for a better world. There are also no clear, attractive alternatives [to our current paradigm] which can easily be gestured to and mobilised around; alternative ways of living and being, where they do exist, do not resonate with most people.

A small cluster of individuals and groups have identified the need for a paradigm based on interbeing and prosociality, deeper relationships to ourselves and the planet, and well-being that runs deeper than material gratification. However, these ideas have not gained anything close to mainstream traction even within the 'social change' sector. There is a widespread neglect of the inner dimension, of being and of culture as both a lever for social change and a causal factor of our current circumstances. While practices such as mindfulness have gained popularity, this remains bound to the context of personal 'wellness' rather than deeper change.

Complication

On our current trajectory there is a significant chance of civilizational (and potentially planetary) collapse. At best, we will end up locked into an equilibrium far below our personal and collective potential. Evidence from the global north shows that our problems go far deeper than technological and institutional development, and it is clear that even significant innovations in these domains will not be enough (on their own) to secure our full civilisational potential.

A 'stuckness' pervades our societies: a deficit of imagination means we struggle to envision what alternatives might look like, especially at the ontological level. We have blindspots in the form of existing beliefs and views which limit our capacity for change, and the grip of our existing values has left the idea of a different way of life uncountenancable for many.

At the same time, those who have identified the need for transformation have yet to gather cohesively together. There is little space for shared experimentation and incubation of a new culture, and less still in the way of strategy for translating any insights gained into the broader social context. Even among those who see being and culture as vital foci in our efforts for change, there is limited thinking, research and evidence for how these might be shifted, at least not in ways that are relevant to social transformation (we can't expect everyone to become a monastic, for example). In short, even where the "what" is relatively clear, the "how" is still not.

Question

How do we bring about the shifts in being, culture and systems necessary to transform our social paradigm, and steer humanity and the planet into a flourishing future?

Alt 1 (or subquestion): Where are we in the process of transition [to a new paradigm], what hypotheses do we have as to what will facilitate this and what is most useful to prioritize?

<https://coggle.it/diagram/YYU3x3wfye5HJKNN/t/root-issue-tree-nov-2021-where-are-we-in-at-this-point>

Hypothesis (for Life Itself)

The best way to nurture this transition is rapid, iterative and rigorous experimental[1] development of conscious coliving communities and developmental spaces that are accessible and proximate to the mainstream and which support sustained personal and collective multidimensional growth as well as acting as hubs for those interested in social change to connect, collaborate and engage cohesively with broader society.

[1] including the building of an evidence base around their utility and efficacy.