



32. Why is Change So Difficult?

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Future Sense is a podcast edited from the radio show of the same name, broadcast on BayFM in Byron Bay, Australia, at www.bayfm.org. Hosted by Nyck Jeanes and well-known international futurist, Steve McDonald, Future Sense provides a fresh, deep analysis of global trends and emerging technologies. How can we identify the layers of growth personally, socially and globally? What are the signs missed; the truths being denied? Political science, history, politics, psychology, ancient civilisations, alien contact, the new psychedelic revolution, cryptocurrency and other disruptive and distributed technologies, and much more.

This is Future Sense.

Nyck: On the show today, we are going to talk around a particular topic, and that is the idea of cognitive dissonance with regard to many of the issues arising in the world and our response to them.

Steve: Yes, we're going to look at the process of change itself. It's something that people don't talk about a lot. Everyone talks about wanting to change, but very few people understand how change actually works, so we're going to split the show into two parts today and the first part will be looking at why change is so difficult. Why is it that we can campaign for years and years and years and people just don't listen or they don't want to change for some reason? And why is it so difficult to change ourselves at the same time?

Then, in the second half of the show, we're going to look at the six conditions required for successful change and try and get a deeper understanding of how change actually works and the things that we need to look for—the cues that can tell us that change is ready to happen, or maybe it's not ready to happen.

Nyck: Yes, and there are many examples that we can find in the world, local and international and all sorts of spheres, where there are so many problems and so many challenges arising, so we'll look at them as examples of why perhaps we're not changing as fast as we should.

And what's your perspective, too? We really like to hear from you as much as we can. You can do so by texting in on 0437 341119. It comes up directly on our screen here.

Nyck: You are tuned to *Future Sense* now with myself, Nyck Jeanes, and Steve McDonald. Good morning to you again. How you doing out there? As I said, you can text in, and you already have texted in. We'll just quickly cover those; thanks for that. Today we're going to be talking about resistance, and Steve will start to reveal all that in a moment, but with regard to that: "Two ways to greet the day on such a beautiful day. First is good moaning and second is good morning. Many ways also view those two ways." Yes, indeed.

Also, we were talking about the queen very briefly. Thanks to Melody whose sister won a medal from the Queen for her services to conservation and environment, and you say: "One is not averse to her lovely majesty in that situation." Fair enough, too.

Okay, let's take a tour through cognitive dissonance.

Steve: Let's do that. We often talk about global paradigm shifts and of course, Her Majesty the Queen is a remnant of a former paradigm.

Nyck: A remnant!

Steve: And an interesting reminder that these old paradigms don't go away—they're nested inside each other—so often when radical transformational change happens in our world, a new layer emerges and a new way of being human emerges but the old ones just kind of sit back and remain around for a long time. It's challenging in many, many ways because when these layers and layers and layers accumulate, we're faced with a more complex world and a world that has many, many different sets of values, different sets of motivations, different ways of viewing reality. It challenges us as it becomes more complex to get on and understand and coexist with all of these different viewpoints.

Nyck: And first up, with that of course, there are so many people, I think, who, when change is necessary—when we are compelled or impelled to do something about something, like the obvious one, climate instability, for example—assume that everybody's kind of on the same page everywhere in the world about this.

Steve: That's right. It's a very common thing, it's a common human trait to just assume that everyone's like me and then be puzzled as to why we can't all agree. But one good thing about the change process is that the same patterns and principles apply at all scales. It doesn't matter which of these layers of consciousness or layers of complexity we're talking about, the same change principles apply, so for us as people, from personal change all the way through to societal change or change within the whole of humanity, the same patterns of change are active and the same principles apply. They can also be extended, of course, outside of humanity to any complex system.

So what are we going to do is we're going to discuss some of the challenges posed by these things and also tease out some distinctions so we can start to understand change a little bit better. Whether we're just thinking about how we change ourselves (or how we don't change in some cases), or whether we're interested in being an agent of change within society or even wider within the global sphere, the more we can understand these processes and patterns, the better we can actually work in tune with the change process. Then, of course, it becomes easier if we're in flow with those natural things. That can mean sometimes knowing when to surrender to the larger flow of change, whether to be in stillness and just be an observer, and when to be active and move in tune with the flow itself.

Nyck: That choice, if you will, between action and stillness or nonaction, and discerning when that is appropriate, is a really fine ability to cultivate, isn't it? It's not something that a lot of people, I would suggest—I'm generalising here, terribly—actually have a lot of facility with. We not really taught that, are we?

Steve: No, this is the interesting thing. We're not taught about it at all. There are lots of things we're not taught, actually.

Nyck: The history of indigenous people in Australia, for example—there's one.

Steve: Yes, and perhaps these are things that do need to change, but you're quite right, Nyck. Some might call this a process of being conscious of the actual change dynamic rather than being tossed around by it—surfing the wave rather than being smashed by the wave if you want to take a swim or a surf in the ocean analogy—moving with the flow rather than fighting the flow. Of course, trying to force change when the timing isn't right or when perhaps you're not moving in the direction of the flow of change, can be a tremendous consumer of time and energy, so the more we can move in flow with the natural processes, the better.

We'll start to talk in a minute about some examples from current affairs, and see some really obvious cases where people must be pushing against the flow because after years and years and years of trying to change things, things haven't changed very much at all.

Of course, the process of adaptation has to stay in step with changes within our life conditions and if that doesn't happen, then as organisms we become extinct, and history shows us that. If organisms are unable to change or they don't adapt quickly enough to changes within their environment, then they become extinct, so we need to pay attention to this natural change process—not force it, but work with it.

Nyck: Yes. Now cognitive dissonance itself, for those who don't know, just a quick sketch about what that actually means. It refers to "a situation involving conflicting attitudes, beliefs or behaviours. This produces a feeling of mental discomfort, leading to an alteration in one of the attitudes, beliefs or behaviours to reduce the discomfort and restore balance" (<https://www.simplypsychology.org/cognitive-dissonance.html>). A simple example of this is when people smoke, which is a behaviour, and they know that smoking causes cancer, which is cognition. They are in a state of cognitive dissonance and they may justify smoking continually because they feel like, well, I only live once, I might as well enjoy myself while I'm here, damn the consequences. That satisfies or releases some of that tension that they're feeling between what they know and their addictive behaviour, if you will.

"Cognitive dissonance was first investigated by Leon Festinger, arising out of a participant observation study of a cult", which is kind of relevant, "which believed that the earth was going to be destroyed by a flood, and what happened to its members—particularly the really committed ones who had given up their homes and jobs to work for the cult—when the flood did not happen? While fringe members were more inclined to recognise that they had made fools of themselves and put it down to experience, committed members were more likely to reinterpret the evidence to show that they were right all along." That's really the key here, isn't it? You either change behaviour or you can reinterpret evidence to prove that you're right, and I guess we're seeing a lot of examples of this around the world.

Steve: That's right, and of course, a lot of these things come back to being present; to being here, now rather than being lost in any kind of fantasy. How many teachers over the years have been really emphasising 'just being here, now'?

Nyck: Yes, well, it's been a long time since I think we've really faced how not in the moment we actually are, and as you speak, I'm thinking of myself in this context because it's very easy on a personal level to think that you're present with things, but to really be living in either a past version or in a sort of false future or a projected future which actually doesn't have the weight of science and trust, if you will, behind it. It's a big thing. We've already been talking about staying in the present, but it's a really easy thing to say.

Steve: It is a big thing, and of course, we can sometimes get caught in bubbles and so if we isolate ourselves or we move in a circle of friends that are somewhat isolated from the wider reality, then it's very easy to stray into those constructed worlds. Sooner or later, of course, you bump into the wider reality and you experience that dissonance that you're talking about.

We're living at a time where there seems to be a very large change approaching on a global scale, and this was something that Clare Graves wrote about in his research. I'm quoting Clare Graves here. He called it "the most difficult, but at the same time the most exciting transition the human race has faced to date. It is not merely a transition to a new level of existence, but the start of a new movement in the symphony of human history.

Nyck: That's beautiful.

Steve: Yes, that was something he extracted from the data in his very extensive field research, not something that he dreamt up at all. It was very much based on hard data. It's a very, very challenging thing. I became aware of this stuff well over a decade ago now, probably in the early 2000s, and I guess when I first read that, I had some understanding of what he was talking about, but again, until we start facing this dissonance, it doesn't necessarily become real. It's only probably been in the last maybe five years or so that there's been such turmoil in the world, showing up like a growing snowball of change, and I've seen the larger population start to wake up and take notice and say, hey, what's going on here? You see the rising fear that comes with that and the clutching at trying to understand what's going on and putting it down to this or that or something else, trying to make sense of it, and that's a process that is just going to build and build and build right up until some tipping point, which, to the best of my knowledge, I'm guessing at this stage it looks like being maybe in the period 2028 to 2032, where global change will reach a peak for various reasons and there'll be some major, major shifts going on. Later in the 2030s we're going to be living in a very, very different world, I think.

Nyck: And, of course, that five years you mentioned there—that observation that in the last five years there's been a feeling that's been rising in humanity—I think is fairly accurate, and also corresponds fairly well to the rise, for example, of fake news and the rise of social media and the impact of all of that on our understanding, our trusting, our safety, our security, our certainty around what is true. What is true; what is false? It's very difficult to actually ascertain that now. There is so much information out there, it's overwhelm in this era, which we talk about a lot on this show. So to actually figure out how to locate yourself in a way that doesn't create this incredible dissonance to a degree where you can't function anymore, you just drop back in a way that you just don't do anything; you just stay where you are because it's too hard to change. Clearly

it's getting more and more difficult to actually know which step to take, in which direction, for many people.

Steve: That's right, and there are many, many different responses depending on where people are at themselves and what they feel inclined to do. I guess you could summarise it as the old freeze-fight-or-flight instinct that we all have. You either freeze and just don't know what to do or you decide that you're going to fight against it in some way, or you're going to try and escape it in some way.

One of the things we can do to help us make sense of what's going on is to look back in history to the last paradigm shift that we went through. I think it's fair to say that what Clare Graves wrote is probably quite accurate and that we're facing an unprecedented change that's coming, perhaps in the next 10 or 15 years, but we can certainly learn by looking back to previous paradigm shifts to get an understanding of the kind of things that go on around paradigm shifts and the signposts that can help us understand how far away the shift might be. One of the things that went on during this transition between the Agricultural era, which we were in through the Middle Ages there, and then the emergence of the Scientific-Industrial era ...

Nyck: European Renaissance.

Steve: Was the European Renaissance, exactly, and that happened right before those two revolutions, the Scientific and Industrial Revolutions. A renaissance, of course, is a revisiting of something that had been previously, and so there was a big regressive values search back there. We descended from what was, I guess, a relatively stable way of living in the Agricultural era where the society was quite structured—there were kings and queens and they ruled over their land, their empires, and everybody was born into a particular place in society and they really had no choice but to live their life within that strata of society that they were born into.

Nyck: And that's the way it was. They were probably quite happy, generally, to do that in fact, for a long time.

Steve: Well, I think they just had no choice and they just accepted that it was the way it was. If we go back another paradigm prior to that, we go into what was a martial, individually-oriented paradigm where the world was wracked with conflict and violence. You can see that during the period in the Middle Ages, there was a regression back into that violence—the Middle Ages were a very, very violent time—and so from the Agricultural mindset, we regressed back into this martial, conflict-based, egocentric

mindset, which gave rise to a hell of a lot of conflict. That was the slingshot effect of that time.

We often talk about the slingshot effect on this show in that in order to create forward momentum, if you take a slingshot as an example, you've got to pull backwards on an elastic band and create enough tension to the point where you can let it go and actually get the forward momentum that you need. The same phenomenon occurs in change processes, whether they be personal change or widespread change. We get the tension building and building and building, which of course, is what creates the dissonance that you're talking about, and then at some point there'll be a release and all of that energy that has built will be released and then that will carry us forward.

We can see this happened back during that time—during this transition between the Agricultural era to the Scientific-Industrial era—and we can also see it happening now. There is a lot of regressive values search going on now. We're regressing back to the rigid ways of thinking, very structured ways of thinking that we saw in the Agricultural era, and that's showing up as the rise of the right wing, and also it's showing up even in the left wing in politics; and look at all the regressive trends in society right now, like retro music, for example.

Nyck: I should also add to that, when you're talking about past violence and the martial period, we obviously still have this in some elements of society in some places, of course, live through that layer, that window, still. You could point to some of the fundamentalist religious activists and the murders and horrors. I was listening to a show about the battle for Mosul, for example, and the terrible, archaic, Middle-Age punishments that were meted out by ISIS and the like in that country, and many others, of course; not just that particular form of fundamentalism, it happens everywhere.

Steve: No, that's quite right, and of course, as I was saying at the start of the show, these older paradigms don't disappear. They can usually be found somewhere in the world where they're persisting, and that is tied to the complexity of life conditions. The simpler the life conditions are, then the simpler the values sets are.

I've had personal experience, having served in Somalia with the Army back in the early 1990s, of a society that had actually developed, certainly at least to Agricultural era standards and values, and maybe poking into the to the Modern world. There was evidence there, for example, where I was based in a little town called Baidoa. I think it was about 240 kilometres inland from the capital of Mogadishu in Somalia. There was an old agricultural college that was in ruin and in the town of Baidoa itself, it had no government, it had no essential services—there was no electricity, there was no garbage collection, people were defaecating in the streets, and of course, in fear of their life from bandits running loose using power and violence. It shocked me when I arrived there just to see things like, for example, the Coca-Cola factory, which was sitting there in ruin, and of course, we were all picking up the Coca-Cola lids from the factory and

taking them as souvenirs. There was an agricultural college, there was a Fiat car factory, so these things had been up and running and society had been operating on that level and yet it had descended back, regressed back, to basically a martial state.

Nyck: That's really important, isn't it? Because to some degree in many places, and not just in developing countries, we're going to see a lot more of this in these coming difficult times—this regression back and the failure of some movements forward that are often quite positive but may not quite succeed yet. They sort of push us into the new; two steps forward, one step back kind of thing. That's the way it works, isn't it?

Steve: That is the way it works. The very interesting thing is that the more we understand the process of change, the less regression is needed, and that's a really, really important point. If we understand that when we feel the earliest stages of dissonance, that is a signpost, it's a signal to us that change is needed, and then if we can look to see what change is needed and act on that in those early stages, then we don't need that boot in the backside which normally comes from the slingshot effect, and that's exactly what it is. The slingshot effect is a boot up the back saying, 'hey, wake up, you need to change, you need to act.' The more conscious we can be then the less we need that.

Nyck: Have you had your kick up your arse this morning, folks, because it's going to replace superfood smoothies shortly—the kick up the rear end to get yourself going. You ready to change?

Steve: Yes, and of course, today change happens much faster than it used to. That's largely because of our communications technology, which is much, much faster than it used to be.

Nyck: And that's important too. You mentioned the European Renaissance, which of course was like 300 years, that transition, so we don't need 300 years any more.

Steve: We don't, and it's all the more reason to wake up and be conscious of change because it's going to be on us very, very quickly.

Nyck: You're tuned to *Future Sense* here on 99.9 with Steve McDonald and Nyck Jeanes. We're talking about cognitive dissonance or dissonance with regards to change; how hard it is to change. Why is it so hard to change, and what conditions do we need in order to change?

Steve: Exactly.

A couple of distinctions and definitions just before we dive too deep. The first one is the difference between what is called translational change and transformational change—some people call those minor change and major change also. Translational change is when you make a change within an existing system or set of circumstances. You're not really changing the fundamental basis of whatever it is, you're just shifting things around and perhaps refining it, making it better, making it more effective, but it's still, at the end of the day, basically the same thing.

Nyck: Worst case scenario is moving the deck chairs around on the Titanic.

Steve: Well, yes, I mean, that would be a matter of making translational change when transformational change is required, right? Do you try and plug the hole or just move the chairs around so you're more comfortable as you sink, or do you actually abandon the ship and then build a completely new ship?

Nyck: What a metaphor!

Steve: Yes, exactly. At this time, depending on what we're talking about, both of those types of change can be appropriate. There are some things in our modern-day society which will survive through the big changes to come, but they'll need some sort of translational change, so they'll need some sort of refining to make them work better or more appropriately. There will be other systems which literally need to die and be reborn. They need transforming into something completely new based on different values and different principles.

The process of change can be what's called evolutionary in that it happens in small increments, or it can be revolutionary—like the slingshot, in that the tension builds and builds and builds, and then it just explodes in a volatile way and is all over us before we know what's going on. Of course, the most desirable way of change happening is in an evolutionary sense where we're conscious of what needs to change and we work slowly, bit by bit to transform something and transform it completely. It can still be transformational change, but it's just a gradual process, as opposed to a revolutionary change—and it's called revolutionary for obvious reasons because the tension builds and builds and builds and then people bust out.

Nyck: Overthrow the old.

Steve: Exactly, the old is overthrown. I think we're going to see a considerable amount of revolutionary change over the next 10 to 15 years.

Nyck: Well, as you are speaking, I'm thinking that in a way, we've probably been cultivated, even, to want revolutionary change in a sense. It's kind of part of our culture to have those sort of explosions, those sudden things that go pop—the exciting force. We like the shiny things, we like the glamour of suddenness too, so there's a bit of a trap there, I think.

Steve: That's really been the way of the Modern Scientific-Industrial era. Boom and bust has been the *modus operandi*, basically. You push things until they bust and then of course, once they bust, everything falls down and then you push them again and they boom until they bust again. That's been a repeating pattern. The reason that that way of being human and that way of living is starting to slide is because it doesn't work anymore. Things need to change and we need to move from that 'pushing things till they break' mindset to a completely different way of being human and a different way of living that is sustainable.

Nyck: And of course, this is a hard conversation, especially for those who are seriously emotionally and genuinely affected by some of the big problems and challenges we have on the planet, to actually find a way to work on a slow and steady transformation towards a known, hopefully—as much as you can know—a known goal, rather than to overthrow. We're seeing a lot of overthrowing tendencies at the moment again, and I'm not saying they're wrong, but for me personally, it's a little hard to know where to put one's energy now, and I think that's true for a lot of people. Do you go up against this and that in the streets with placards and bang, bang, bang, just as the Chinese are doing now to the citizens of Hong Kong—these protests that are going on there, for example. We will come back to that.

Steve: Yes. Martin Armstrong has forecast this year from his computer algorithm, civil unrest around the world. Of course, we've seen a lot of civil unrest in France, much of which hasn't been covered by the mainstream media.

Nyck: Yes, that's true. Yellow vests.

Steve: Martin Armstrong has predicted it in the USA, and thankfully that hasn't really showed up on any scale yet there, but of course, Hong Kong, and there are other places around the world—some radical stuff happening in Iran at the moment has, I think, already resulted in some civil unrest there.

Nyck: And we've got, I think, 4,000,000 at last count, Venezuelans who slipped over the border to Colombia, which is another place where there is serious unrest and transformation that is really desperately needed. Just a shout out to Colombians in the area, too, because apparently the Colombians have been incredibly hospitable and loving to the Venezuelans coming over, so that's a lovely change.

Steve: That's good to hear. That's wonderful.

So, by understanding the change process and understanding how it works, and also the signs to look for, then we have more chance of actually working in tune with the natural flow of things. Of course, once you in flow with things, then it decreases the need for that revolutionary aspect to happen because the revolutionary change is usually a characteristic of being surprised by the need for change and then having to act quickly.

Some of the things that need to be present before change will flow are, first and foremost, the dissonance that we've already discussed. The word dissonance, I think, comes from music, really—discordance. If you can imagine standing in between two pianos and they're both playing different notes and those notes aren't harmonic, you will get that dissonance where the sound is clashing and it's not harmonic at all.

Nyck: They used to call one of those the 'flattened fifth', the 'devil's interval', because it was so dissonant that the church banned the use of that particular harmonic in music for a long time.

Steve: That's historically correct indeed. And of course, if you were the person standing between those two pianos and you were hearing this terrible sort of dissonance, the inclination is to move, right? You want to move, probably towards the note that sounds the nicest to you, and further away from the other note.

Nyck: Or you make a third note that balances the two of them. That would be my way—my intent, anyway.

Steve: Make it really loud so you can't hear the other ones, right?

Nyck: Your friends are out jamming again.

Steve: Dissonance has to be there, there has to be that discomfort. This is the evolutionary tension that we often talk about. It has to be present. When people are comfortable, they want to stay comfortable. That's just part of human nature and very understandable.

Another thing that has to be present is some kind of insight into what's next—some understanding or inclination, some instinct, intuition, as to what to do in order to escape the dissonance. Unless that insight is present, then you'll feel kind of trapped and you'll feel like you have no choice but to sit there and not enjoy the experience.

The third thing that has to be present is that any barriers to change need to either be removed or you need to be assisted—given some assistance that allows you to overcome them in some way if they're not going to be removed—a bridge over the top, for example.

Of course, all of these things are very much related to timing as well. It reminds me of that old song, there's a time for this and the time for that.

Nyck: Oh yes, that's from the Bible.

Steve: Yes, exactly. Timing is very, very important and I think that's probably one of the most difficult things for people to understand, is that sometimes the timing hasn't arrived for the change to flow yet and the tension has to build further, the dissonance has to be stronger before people are going to be inclined to change on a large scale. Certainly we're seeing a lot of that at the moment in current affairs, aren't we?

Nyck: Yes, that's right, although as you're speaking, I'm thinking of the emotional power that now is driving so many people to take action immediately—things have to change now; they have to do something about it right now—and they'll pull in some things that are not necessarily true or not researched properly in order to prove their point and to not feel the dissonance: 'I'm right about this; I know this is bad for me, we must do something now', kind of thing. This very strong emotional response that many people feel in the activist movement, for example, what do you make of that? How does that fit into this? Because, as you're indicating, it's not really the best driver, ultimately, for the most effective change ... and yet!

Steve: It's very difficult to use words like 'best', and 'good and bad' when we're talking about human nature because it's so circumstantial. It really depends on what the context is, what the life conditions are, what value system is at play and at what point in

the change process people are at. If you think of change as like a cycle, a process that we flow through that goes from stability through turbulence as things start to feel dissonant, and then descends into chaos as things are falling apart, and then in the process of falling apart, creates the space for the re-creation, the regeneration of something different.

Nyck: Or for an insight to emerge, for example, in that space.

Steve: That's WHEN the insights emerge. When things are falling apart, people are under pressure, and of course, they will often go into different mindsets, different states of consciousness, even during that time—and people seek out different states of consciousness during that time in order to gain the insights.

One of the observations Clare Graves made was that during those turbulent times of change, people often will turn to sources of altered states such as drugs, for example. The usage of drugs often goes up during times of change because people are trying to find some insight; they're trying to find a different perspective on things, and when used constructively, that can be extremely useful. But of course, it can be damaging if people don't understand why that driver is there. It can be used as a form of escapism as well as constructive.

Nyck: As you know, I was in New York at the time of 9/11, living there for a few years in New York City, and at the time of 9/11, on the morning of 9/11, I was literally a kilometre and a half away from the towers as they burned down. My kids at the time were in the Steiner School in New York, which is a great school and of course the Steiner School, being an alternative form of education, attracted a lot of what you'd say are left wing, alternative, green, sustainable kind of parents and their kids. They were pretty elite, of course, in New York City, so that also was a factor there—their life conditions were pretty good and they didn't really want to change very much—but then 9/11 happened, and while, before that, the discussions that I might have in school with other parents there, for example, would be very open, would be about a free and equal society and so on and so on, as soon as 9/11 happened, within a week or so, even the parents inside Steiner school shut down and didn't really want to talk about George W. Bush, even though they clearly hadn't voted for him. Suddenly they were sort of loosely aligned to the position with regards to invasion of Iraq and Afghanistan in that era, and I found it really curious.

It's a really good example, for me, of that cognitive dissonance. On one hand, they really believed in a free and open society; on the other hand, a bunch of supposedly Islamist terrorists destroyed the Trade Towers, a symbol of freedom and prosperity in their city, and they couldn't actually make sense of that, so instead of actually going up and looking carefully at what really happened there—why did this happen?—they kind of

aligned themselves, generally, behind the status quo, behind George Bush. I found that quite alarming at the time but I see now that it sort of relieved that dissonance that they were feeling. Of course, everybody was pretty traumatised there, too, naturally.

Steve: Yes, of course. When you're facing such dire consequences of change, and when it's so devastatingly in your face, it puts people on very, very shaky ground, and anything that starts to look like firmer ground, they'll gravitate towards, often even clashing with what their values had been prior to the change.

Nyck: Well, that's what happened. People literally closed down in my presence when I asked slightly difficult questions. I'm fairly balanced—I don't disrupt too many people too often I don't think—nevertheless, I found people closing down and just not wanting to enter a discourse that would challenge their aligned views. Literally, people were looking out of the corner of their eyes. You could see that sometimes.

Steve: This is the regression process, and that's a perfectly normal part of human nature. In extreme cases, where people are extremely shocked, you do get the regression right back to what are essentially animal instincts of fight, freeze or flight, and so what you're explaining is really an example of that; regression, also, that's not that extreme, but takes people back to simple values sets. When life is comfortable, you can explore all sorts of intricate complexities and options, but when life becomes uncomfortable, you will much more readily settle for a simple solution—you'll go back to that black or white, yes or no. It's like, okay, you're sitting on a pile of wood and it's on fire. Do you want to get off or not? Yes! It's as simple as that.

Nyck: In the United States, of course, it's very easy for many people to align to the concept of Manifest Destiny, that America actually has some God-given something that is exceptional—the concept of exceptionalism that's often talked about with America—so that is a sort of retreat back to that old value system as well.

Steve: Yes, absolutely. I used to work in a corporate change arena as a change consultant, and people in that world would literally talk about the burning platform as a change strategy. It was a little dumb in one respect, but a fairly simple principle that was bandied around in the corporate world was if you really wanted people to change, first of all, you had to build the burning platform and convince people that, okay, you're standing on a burning platform, you have to do something. Very crude, but it fits with the whole 9/11 scenario, doesn't it?

Nyck: Yes, it does. Just as you're talking there, I'm thinking of the show that we both watched, *Billions*, which is very much about those kind of strategies: you're standing on a burning platform—perform! Now!

Steve: Exactly.

Nyck: Let's look at some of the more recent local examples of this. The Australian Federal Police raids on a *News Corp* female journalist. I don't have a name in front of me.

Steve: Smethurst.

Nyck: Smethurst. Thank you very much. Arguably, perhaps a bigger thing is the raid on the *ABC* offices in the last week or so and some 9,000 documents, I think—basically taking everything out of their computers and everything gone. How do we look at this kind of thing—this invasion of privacy, this balancing between, well, national security supposedly, and private rights and personal rights and the rights of journalists?

Steve: For those people who are listening around the world, just to put a little bit more context around this, the *ABC* is one of our news agencies here in Australia—the *Australian Broadcasting Corporation*—and in fact, they are a government-created agency, but seem to enjoy an amazing level of independence, unlike in most countries, from government control.

Nyck: Yes, a bit similar to the *BBC* and a little bit like public radio in America, but not quite the same either.

Steve: Yes, but certainly there's a lot of tension between the government and the *ABC*, that's for sure. The *ABC* were the recipients of some leaked classified information, which, according to the authorities, was classified 'secret' and 'top secret', which came out of the military. It was information about the potential commission, or the possible or alleged commission, of war crimes in Afghanistan by Australian Special Forces, and so very, very sensitive information. What has happened is that the Australian Federal Police had decided to raid the *ABC* and take possession of whatever information they had as part of, they say, the investigation into the leaking of classified information from government departments.

With my background, having been in the military and having worked with government and understanding how they work, and also understanding the reason that we do

classify information, I was always taught that the reason information is classified is not necessarily to protect the information itself, but to protect the information source. For example, just say that a country was listening in to the telephone of the leader of another country and some information was gained and then that information got leaked. It's not the information that's leaked that's important, the really important thing for the government is the fact that they don't want this other country's leader knowing that they're actually listening to their telephone calls, right? So it's the source and the means by which the information was gathered is really what's being protected by these classifications, and that actually runs contrary to some of the arguments that have been put forward in this current instance.

So, there are good reasons for all these things, and these systems have developed that way for a reason, but we're in a time of change now where things aren't the way they used to be. We need to change our systems, we are changing our values—that's a process that's happening naturally because of the complexity—and some of these systems are obviously becoming far too rigid to cope with post-modern-day life, so I do understand the challenges, but in this case, what it looks like is that the government may be acting, and the agencies like the federal police may be acting at the insistence of government, to save the government's face and save embarrassment, which is really not what these laws and security classifications were constructed for.

We don't know the truth of the case. This is something that's under investigation and in question at the moment, so we're not claiming that we know the truth either way, but these are some of the dissonant topics that are floating around in public discourse. On the one hand, we as members of the public are considering the possibility that, okay, this is really important to national security so it's something that has to happen, but then again, having a free press and having the capacity to criticise government's actions openly in the media is also critical to democracy, so which of those things is more important, and which way does the balance need to fall at this moment?

Nyck: And no doubt, of course, people's personal freedoms are then threatened, too, with the possibility of excessive oversight by government and other agencies on people itself. We're seeing, for example, the city of Perth and Brisbane rolling out new facial recognition CCTV cameras.

Steve: That's a good point. These things aren't happening in isolation, they're happening at a time where society is being overrun with government-driven surveillance. Governments all around the world are putting forward these arguments that the world is a dangerous place and we're doing this to protect you, but then again, we see evidence of corporate capture of government, where governments are acting in the interests of private corporations and not in the interests of the general public. So there are many, many factors to consider here.

Nyck: Yes, the technology in Perth and on the East Coast in Brisbane was "recently rolled out on the west and east coasts with little, if any, consultation with the public that the government plans to watch" (<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2019-06-08/city-of-perth-rolls-out-new-facial-recognition-cctv-cameras/11147780>), and I think that's the thing—that dissonance between 'we need to be safe, we need to be secure, you're telling us we should be afraid of this, that and the other, and yet you're not actually consulting us about how we're going to manage that, how we're going to transform our space to deal with these issues that are real, to a degree', but fear is such a big driver that it's a bit hard to determine what people are going to really do with that.

Steve: Fear is such a common driver at the moment, largely because most people don't understand what's going on. They don't understand why the world seems to be going backwards at the moment and why things aren't comfortable like they used to be; they want to go back to being comfortable like we used to be, which is what is driving the regression back to simple values sets. With that comes simpler decision-making processes, and those simpler decision-making processes just don't meet the requirements of a very, very complex world where things are not black and white anymore.

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