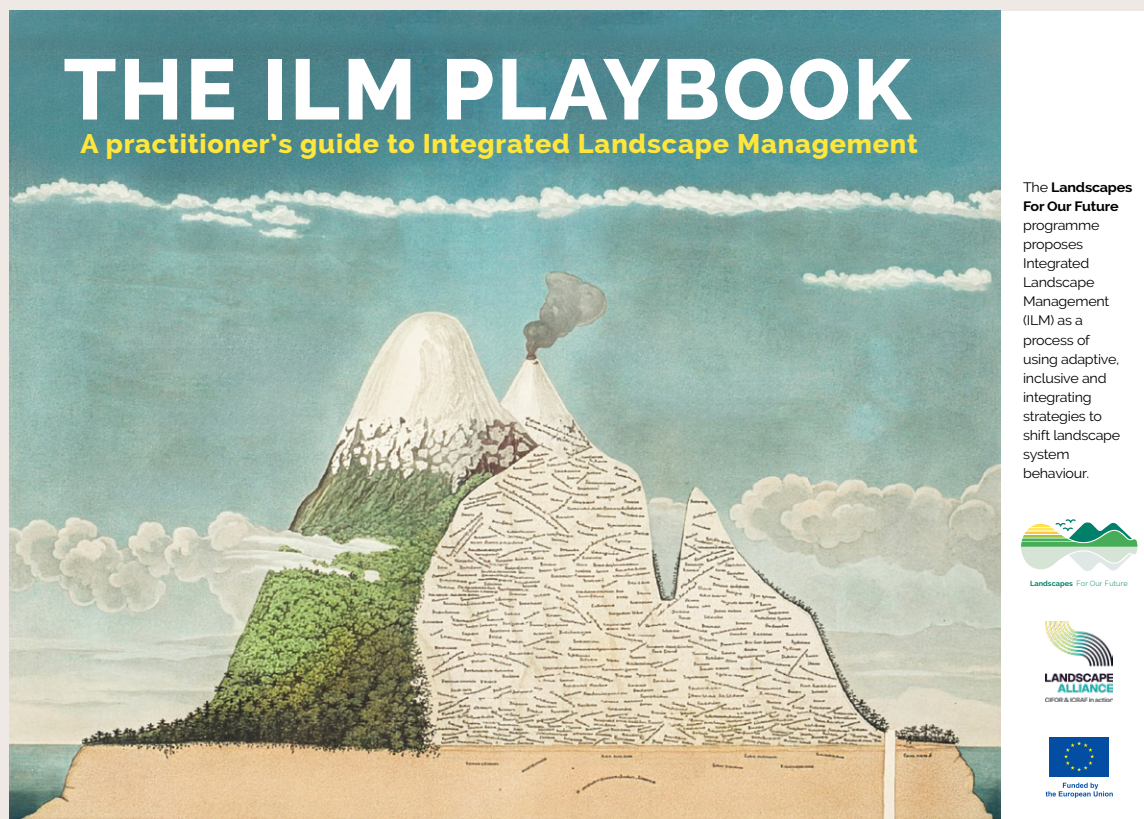


Extract from The ILM Playbook

The ILM Playbook is a practitioner curriculum developed through the EU-funded Landscapes For Our Future programme. Its **interactive web edition** provides a quick, non-linear route through the concepts and tools, while the **full-length PDF** provides the conceptual foundations, evidence and methodological depth behind them.

The concepts, methods and practical guidance were developed through the Central Component's work with project teams, partners and practitioners across the programme, and through the experience and learning generated in participating landscapes.



Developed by

Landscapes For Our Future Central Component, Landscape Alliance

Lead writing and synthesis

Kim Geheb

Conceptual development, review and editorial contributions

Khalil Walji, Mieke Bourne and Dominique le Roux (Landscape Alliance); Marcela GalvisHernandez (FAO Colombia); Camila Alvarenga, Lucimara Marcelino, José Luís Monteiro and Rogério Rosa (Oikos)

Design and production

Dominique le Roux and Elinore de Lisle

With contributions from

Landscapes For Our Future project teams and partners across 36 countries

Explore the full interactive ILM Playbook or access the complete reading edition at:
landscapesfuture.org/ilm-playbook

OUR THEORY OF CHANGE

Key take-aways

- The TOC is not “if X then Y” but *release, observe, adjust* – the only causal logic complexity permits, and the basis for everything operational that follows in the Playbook.
- System heading is the composite of *strands* – the trajectories of practices through time – and shifting system heading therefore means shifting the headings of multiple strands by reshaping the interactions between them.
- Practices and their regulatory context are mutually constitutive: foments must work both the *interaction space* (where strands meet and regulate each other) and the *MMC bundle* of the practice itself – regulatory space without practice-level foments yields an empty opening; practice-level foments without regulatory space yields effort that snaps back.
- Foments generate ripples, which are inherently dependent on the intervention’s continued presence; durable change requires escalation to *cascades*, and the foments designed for ripple are typically not the same as those designed for cascade.
- Sensing is the precondition: identifying the major strands, their weight, and the interaction spaces where their regulatory effects converge – without a strand map you cannot identify op-points, design foments or recognize the ripples your intervention generates.
- The intervention team is itself a strand entering the system; a fit-for-purpose, embedded, polymathic team – and ideally a mosaic of distributed teams – is the principal driver of change for the intervention’s duration.
- Integration and ILM are *emergent outcomes* of this process, not methodologies imposed from outside: the shift from one-way regulatory dominance ($A \rightarrow B$) to bi- and multi-directional regulatory exchange ($A \ll B \ll C$) is the minimum condition for a landscape system to adapt, and is what makes ILM resilient rather than brittle.

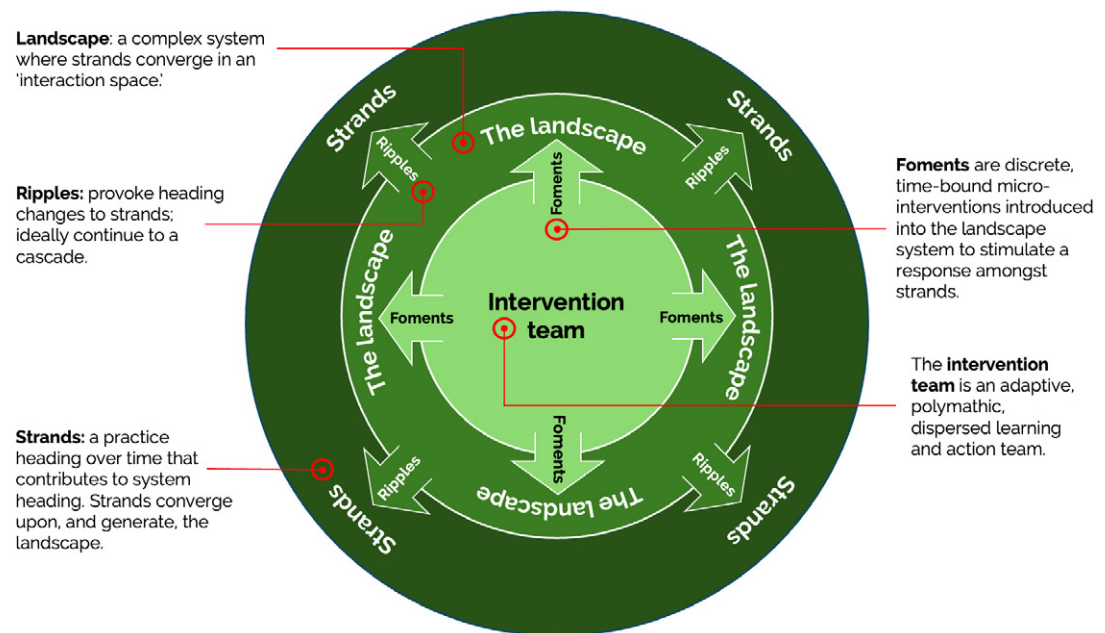
Introduction

In the Systems and Complexity section, we introduced the theoretical foundations: what complex systems are, how they behave, and why they resist conventional intervention. This section builds on that foundation to present the Playbook's Theory of Change (TOC) – our theory of how change happens in landscape systems, and how an intervention can work *with* that theory rather than against it.

Our TOC does not promise that if you do X, then Y will follow. It argues, instead, that if you sense the system well, identify where it has give, and release carefully designed provocations into those openings, the system will respond – and that response, however imperfect and partial, can be steered towards a shift in heading. The causal pathway is not *if this, then that*. It is **release, observe, adjust**. This approach is the only strategy that complexity permits.

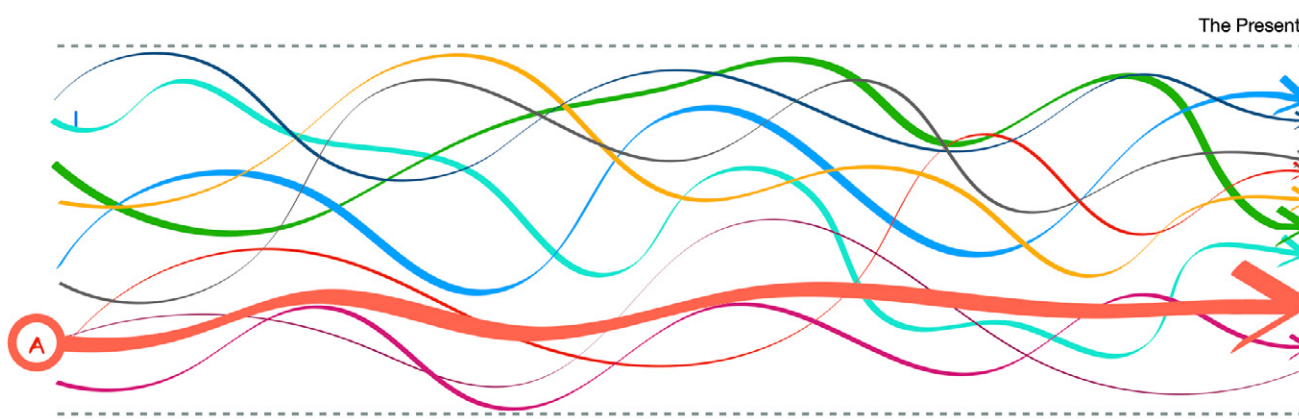
Each concept introduced here is elaborated in its own section elsewhere in the Playbook. This section assembles them into a single narrative so that the reader can see how they fit together before encountering them in operational detail. The graphic below summarizes the TOC's constituent parts – each of which we introduce in this section.

In summary, you want to change system heading towards something that is more integrated. This is expressed as your alt-heading – the alternative heading you are working towards. As we reveal below, heading comprises strands – the heading of individual practices through time. If a shift in system heading is to occur, then strand headings must too. To achieve this, your intervention will generate ripples, which perturb interactions in the landscape. If these are to be sustained after the end of your intervention and to have broader systemic relevance, they need to be escalated to a cascade. In turn, we stimulate or provoke these perturbations using foments – each designed for a different type of interaction. Newly designed foments are released to maintain positive ripple momentum and/or to escalate ripple to cascade. At the heart of this is the intervention team, with the requisite skills and capabilities needed to be fit-for-purpose.



Strands

We describe strands in our Practices section. These are the course a practice takes through time. Strands matter because each strand in a system contributes to a system's heading to lesser (a 'light strand') or greater (a 'heavy strand') degrees. In the first graphic below, Actor A is a heavy strand. Perhaps Actor A is an influential politician, or a large open-cast mining company. The weight of Actor A's strand in the system means that it plays a disproportionate role in defining the system's heading at that moment. There are many other actors in the system, each with their own strand, and these each influence system behaviour – but to a much lesser degree than Actor A.



Look at what the graphic shows. The strands are not parallel – they cross, diverge, and cross again. Each crossing is an **interaction**: a moment where one strand's practices encounter another's, and both are altered – even if only minutely. These interactions are not incidental; they are the micro-regulatory events through which system heading is produced. Every time a farmer sells to a trader, a community petitions a district officer, a herder crosses a farmer's land – strands interact, and each exerts regulatory force on the other. A heavy strand shifts lighter ones more than they shift it: that is what regulatory weight looks like in practice. A light strand barely dents the heavy one. But interactions between light strands can shift both, because neither dominates.

Ripples

Ripples (and cascades) are described in our Systems and Complexity section. A ripple is a disturbance that travels outward from its point of origin, dissipating as it goes. Energy diminishes with distance. A ripple may be felt, but its effect fades. Many well-intentioned interventions generate ripples: a pilot project inspires a neighbouring community, which inspires another, but each iteration is weaker than the last. Without something to sustain and amplify the signal, the ripple dies out.

An intervention's intent in a landscape is to generate ripples, which it does with foments (see below). When certain foments look promising, new ones are introduced to nudge it closer to the alt-heading and/or to maintain the momentum of change.

Many donors are preoccupied with scaling up, out and maybe deep. Ripples are a precursor to scaling out – but its effect will remain contingent on the presence of the intervention. Donors are also very preoccupied with what they call ‘sustainability’ – by which they mean that the intervention’s effect should be maintained after it ends. For this to be achieved, a cascade is necessary. The design of the foment that inspired the ripple will probably differ considerably from the design of foment for a cascade.

Our cautions around cascades – primarily unintended consequences – should be borne in mind.

The landscape

As has been described on many occasions in this Playbook, landscapes are socially produced. Their condition emerges as a consequence of what people do within them, and how practices affect each other. It is this characteristic that has led us to focus on practices and strands.

In the previous section, we described an interaction as the moment that one strand encounters another. That interaction causes a mutual change to their respective headings – even if these are tiny. This does not, however, have to be a direct encounter. Strands can influence each other despite their origins being far apart through the influence they respectively shed. In this way, strands regulate each other.

A multitude of interacting strands converge on your landscape. Hence, your landscape is an **interaction space** – because it is here that the mutually shed regulation of multiple strands yields practices that you consider concerning and deleterious to its condition. In ILM terms, your landscape is defined by the density of consequential interactions between strands. It is a highly variable space. The practices that influence it are often stable because dominant strands work to maintain lesser strands on their current trajectory.

Within any landscape, there are many interaction spaces both between local actors, as well as between local actors and far-away ones. The landscape you have selected is where the regulatory effects are *felt*, but the interaction space extends to wherever the regulatory effect *originates*. This explains why landscape interventions so often fail: they treat the landscape as if it *is* the whole interaction space, when it is only the part of it they can see.

It is the role of foment to disturb these interaction spaces in ways that shift them, and in this way, shift system heading,

Opportunity points

Op-points are conditions in the system where the regulatory exchange between strands creates potential for change. The intervention is attracted to these because, here, the ways in which different sets of practices interact create opportunity to provoke shifts in system heading. An op-point is not a fixed location; it is a condition of regulatory exchange in an interaction space – a moment where a well-designed foment can shift the ways in which interaction occurs. Op-points are not categories of thing

(leaders, boundaries, institutions). They are conditions of regulatory exchange that you detect by reading the landscape. The Op-Points section elaborates what these are and introduces six categories of regulatory exchange that represent the most productive openings:

- **Asymmetric dominance** – where a heavy strand's one-way regulatory effect is holding a lighter strand in a deleterious configuration.
- **Regulatory incoherence** – where two heavy strands' regulatory fields contradict each other, creating confused signals and openings.
- **Latent reciprocity** – where a lighter strand already has some capacity to regulate back but is not exercising it.
- **Regulatory weakening** – where a crisis or disruption temporarily reduces a heavy strand's regulatory capacity.
- **Regulatory redirection** – where the most promising move is to deflect a heavy strand's regulatory effect away from the lighter strand you are concerned with.
- **Convergent light strands** – where multiple lighter strands are approaching the point where their cumulative weight could exert meaningful regulatory force.

Foments

If op-points are *where* you intervene, foments are *what* you introduce. A foment is a discrete, time-bound micro-intervention introduced into a complex landscape system to stimulate a response. It is a provocation: it calls forth a response from the system, and the response reveals things about the system that were not visible before. Foments are *both* a diagnostic tool and an instrument with which to shift system heading.

You release a ferment (the collective noun for foments) and observe what happens. The emphasis is on what the system does, not on what you predicted or what you desire the system to do. Whatever response they generate must be treated with equanimity. If even a quarter of the response is moving towards your alt-heading, that is worth pursuing. You can use foments to:

- **Dampen** a strand's regulatory effect on the other strands you are concerned with.
- **Amplify** a strand that is already heading towards your alt-heading.
- **Redirect** a strand so that its regulatory effect no longer has a bearing on your system's heading.

The Foments section describes a palette of foment types: bilateral stakeholder engagement, relational brokering, convened spaces, info-bombs, stories, boundary objects, demonstration effects, endogenous innovators, institutional micro-shifts, and building on what is already there.

Foments target the groups of people who implement a practice. Depending on what your sensing discovers, a practice may have emerged because of a variety of other (regulatory) practices. Consequently, your intervention cannot just focus on the target practice alone. The other practices that influence it must also be targeted, with foments designed to stimulate the response you seek.

The intervention team

The importance of designing a fit-for-purpose intervention team is elaborated in the relevant section. Given everything above – the complexity of the system, the need to sense strands and their interactions, the strategic design and placement of foments, the reading of interaction spaces that may extend far beyond the landscape – consider what kind of team could actually do this work.

The intervention team – how it is designed, its skills, and the way it conducts itself – has immense centrality to the intervention. This may seem obvious, but in our experience, intervention teams typically over-focus externally rather than internally – as if any team formulation is fit for purpose. This is not the case. The team, its foments and its conduct are the primary drivers of change in the landscape for the intervention's duration.

The team inserts itself into the landscape. It has its own inherent power – just its presence changes things. The team is highly reflexive – it spends considerable effort self-critiquing its work and making sure that it is persistently sensing the landscape. The learning never stops because every time the team does something, it diagnoses and analyses the surrounding landscape system's response. This learning revolves around foments which the team designs, releases, discards and pursues, learning from every experience.

The longer a team has been present in a landscape, the better the chances of success because it has established relationships and has practised the art of sensing that landscape. This is the Playbook's argument for embedded, long-term, polymathic teams – teams that are located in the landscape, that feel it daily, and that derive income from multiple sources rather than a single donor or project cycle. A parachuted team cannot read the system well enough to design good foments, cannot maintain the relationships through which foments travel, and cannot monitor the slow signals of cascading change that unfold over years.

Intervention logic

Sensing the system

Your sensing work must identify the major strands and estimate their weight – which actors' practices contribute most to current heading, and which contribute least. But sensing must also attend to interactions: where do strands come into contact? What happens when they do? Which interactions shift headings, and which leave strands unchanged? The anchoring question for sensing is: **who is doing what, when, where, why, how – and to whom?**

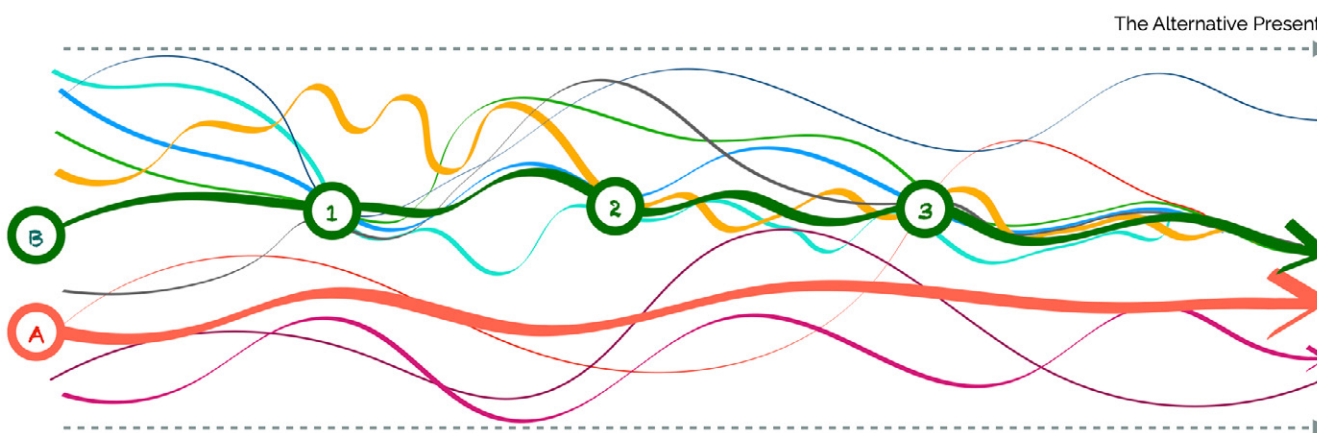
The 'and to whom' is critical. Without it, you are describing behaviour – what an individual does. With it, you are describing practice-as-regulation: the regulatory effect of one strand's practices on others. This is what distinguishes a practice from a behaviour. A behaviour can be changed by incentive or coercion. A practice can only be changed by reconfiguring the bundle of MMCs that constitutes it AND the regulatory context that produces it – the interaction space within which it sits.

The **power vista** – the map of who exerts regulatory influence over whom – is, in these terms, a strand map. It shows the weight of different strands, the direction of their regulatory effect, and the interaction spaces where their fields overlap. Reading this map is the precondition for everything that follows.

Intervention intent

The graphic below shows how this works in practice. Actor B – an intervention – enters a system where Actor A's heavy strand dominates heading. Actor B releases a series of foments designed to enable greater levels of interaction and collaboration among the lighter strands. Each juncture in the graphic is a foment – a designed interaction that brings multiple strands into contact and structures the terms of that contact.

At Juncture 1, perhaps this is a convened space – a multi-stakeholder engagement that pulls many strands into the same moment. The interaction produces small shifts in several strands' headings. By Juncture 2, some actors have strayed, but many return – their strands are beginning to converge through repeated interaction. At Juncture 3, most of the actors are on board – their strands are increasingly aligned, and they are collectively influencing system dynamics.



Two things must be stressed. First, foments rarely proceed in a clean sequence. The foment at Juncture 1 may fail and have to be discarded, and only the foment at Juncture 2 gains traction. Actor B needs to be equipped with multiple foment designs and ideas to see what takes and what does not. Actor B then learns cumulatively and introduces additional foments to reinforce the initial shift. Second, ideally, Actor B is not alone. There are several teams distributed across the landscape, each targeting those responsible for a different set of practices, with their own foments. This dispersed approach is described in the [Adaptivity](#) section.

What Actor B has done, in strand terms, is changed the trajectories of many light strands by working their interactions. Combined, all of these actors now out-influence Actor A in terms of determining system behaviour – a shift in system heading has occurred. The system has been repatterned.

All landscapes will have examples of heavy strands regulating lighter ones. It is not necessarily the case that the heavier strand will resist change to the lighter strand or to its own heading. In an ideal world, indeed, Actor A is supportive of a systemic shift and is well engaged in the intervention's deliberations. Because Actor A's strand is so influential in the system's heading, having it as a willing participant significantly increases the likelihood that a shift will happen. Your sensing must read the actual configuration, not assume the adversarial one.

Shifting strands by reshaping interaction spaces creates the conditions for practice change. It does not produce it. The lighter strand's own practices have their own internal logic – their MMC configuration (see the Practices section) – and foments must also target these directly. Regulatory space without practice-level foments yields an opening that nothing fills. Practice-level foments without regulatory space yields effort that snaps back. Both sides of the interaction space must be worked: the regulatory exchange between strands, and the practices within them.

How this yields integration and ILM

Integrated landscape management is, in the Playbook's terms, the outcome of this process – not a methodology imposed from outside, but an emergent property that the system generates when its interaction spaces are working productively. Integration is what happens when strands that were previously operating in isolation, or under one-way regulatory dominance, begin to interact bi- or multi-directionally. When the upstream irrigator and the downstream fisher are in genuine deliberative exchange about water use – not because a project convened a workshop, but because the regulatory conditions have shifted enough that both parties have voice – that is integration. When a district officer includes community livelihood data in a planning report not because the project told them to, but because the institutional micro-shift made it the sensible thing to do – that is integration.

Integration, in strand terms, is the shift from $A \rightarrow B$ (one-way regulatory dominance) towards $A \leftarrow B \leftarrow C$ (bi- or multi-directional regulatory exchange). It is the compromising sub-state described in the Integration section, and the deliberative equilibrium described in the Compromise section. It does not require that all strands agree. It requires that they regulate each other rather than one regulating all the rest. Played correctly, this extends into the collectivist state, where actors are less interested in 'power over' and more interested in 'power sharing.'

ILM is what a landscape looks like when this integration is sustained: when the multiple strands – ecological, economic, social, institutional – are in productive tension with each other rather than in one-way dominance. No single strand – whether it is agribusiness, conservation, or government authority – determines heading by itself. Instead, heading emerges from the deliberative interaction of multiple strands, each exerting regulatory force on the others, each adjusting in response to what the others do. trade-offs are not eliminated; they are deliberated and negotiated. Conflicts are not resolved; they are held in productive tension through institutional arrangements that give all parties voice.

This is not utopian. It is the minimum condition for a landscape system to adapt. A system where one strand dominates – where regulatory exchange is one-way – is brittle. It can only respond to change through the heavy strand's perspective, which is necessarily partial, and societally and environmentally problematic. A system where multiple strands interact bi- or multi-directionally is resilient – it can draw on the knowledge, diversity, perspectives, and adaptive capacity of all its actors. This is why the Playbook insists that integration is not a normative luxury but a functional requirement: it is how landscape systems survive.

The honest epistemology

This theory of change is honest about what it can and cannot promise. It can promise that foments will perturb the system. It cannot promise in which direction the perturbation will move. It can promise that sensing will reveal the system's regulatory architecture. It cannot promise that your reading will be correct. It can promise that a well-designed ferment, approaching the interaction space from multiple angles, will generate learning. It cannot promise that the learning will confirm your initial proposition.

Release, observe, adjust. This is the Playbook's epistemological commitment. It is not a failure of rigour; it is the only form of rigour that complexity permits. It acknowledges that the best possible path to system change is to ripple an emergent one. It seeks to treat the roof for the leak, rather than merely placing a bucket under it. Each cycle of release-observe-adjust deepens your read of the system, sharpens your foment design, and moves – however unevenly – towards the alt-heading. The outcome will almost certainly look nothing like what you initially proposed. But if the system's heading has shifted, the intervention has succeeded – regardless of whether it shifted through the causal chain you predicted.

The take-away here is that if the intent is to generate a shift in system heading, that challenge must be approached from a multitude of different directions, and that the likelihood of failure is high. What matters is whether, cumulatively, the ferment has nudged heading. Not whether any single foment worked as planned.

References and further reading

Shove E, Pantzar M and Watson M. 2012. *The dynamics of social practice: everyday life and how it changes*. London: SAGE Publications Ltd.