

# Organizational Sustainability *for Lake Leaders*

Steve Thomas

# Sustainability

## Big Questions First!

Does Sustainability even matter? Can't we live in a state of constant change?

# Sustainability

## The Big Questions

If Sustainability does matter, we must answer:

- \* What does Sustainability look like?
- \* How do Sustainable things behave?
- \* What aspects make something Sustainable?

# Sustainability

## The Big Questions

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Unfortunately, in complicated settings the answers are not instinctive, and cannot be “figured out.”

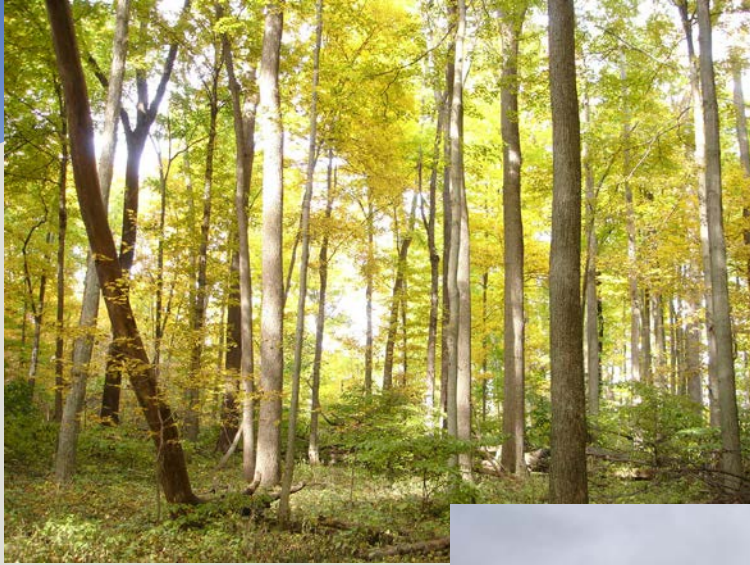




# What about Nature?

Nature is full of sustainable groupings and systems.

# Sustainable Nature

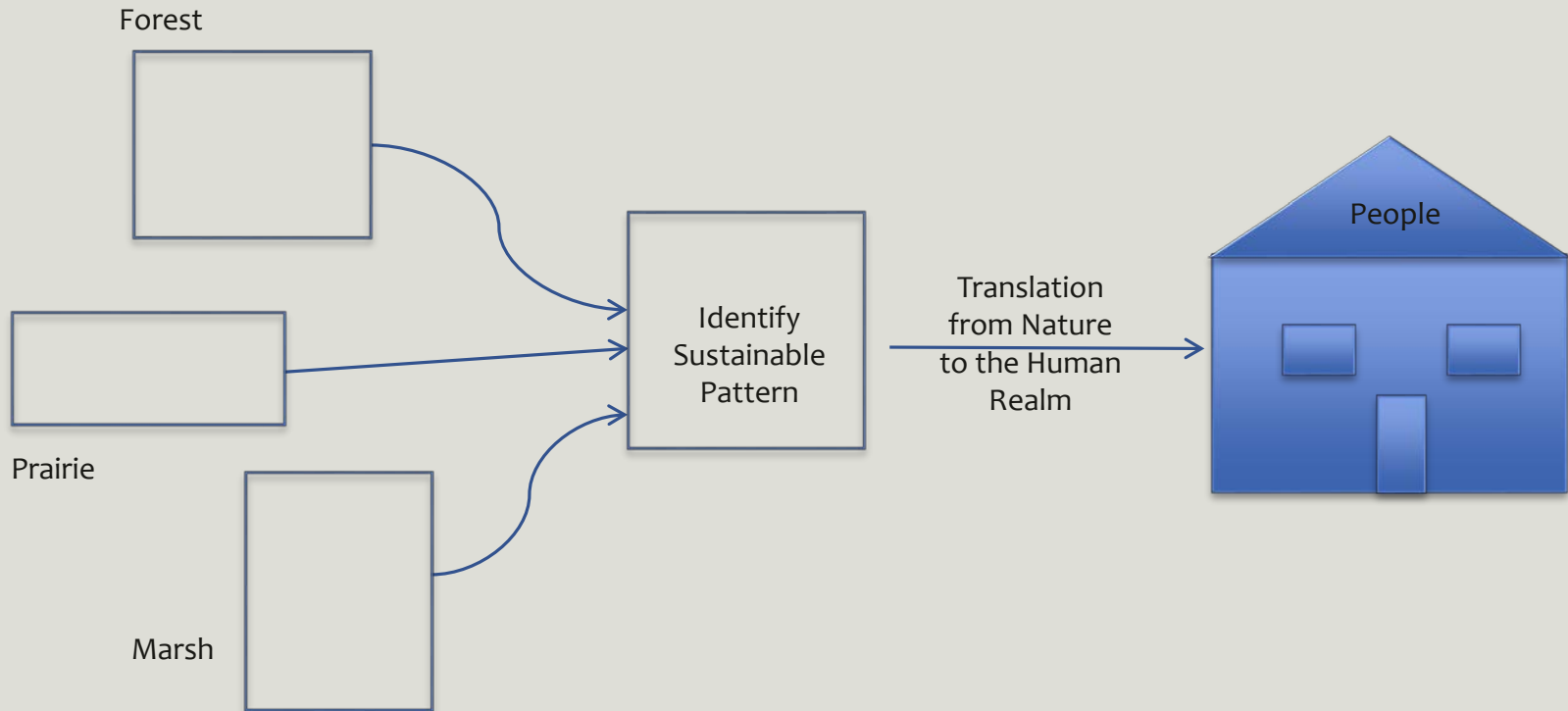


Ecosystems, Natural  
Communities, Species  
Groups, etc.



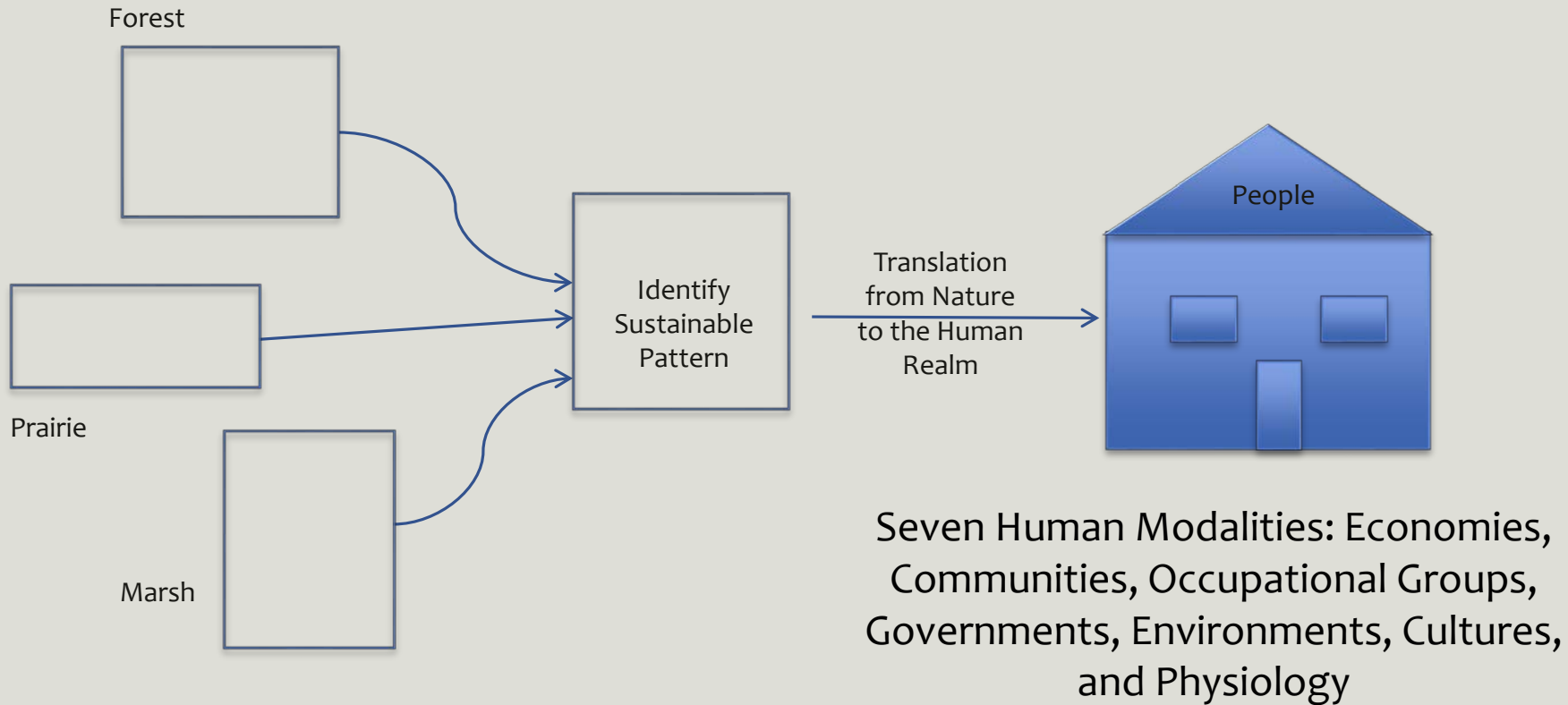
# Interpreting Nature's Sustainability for Human Purposes

## Sustainable Natural Systems



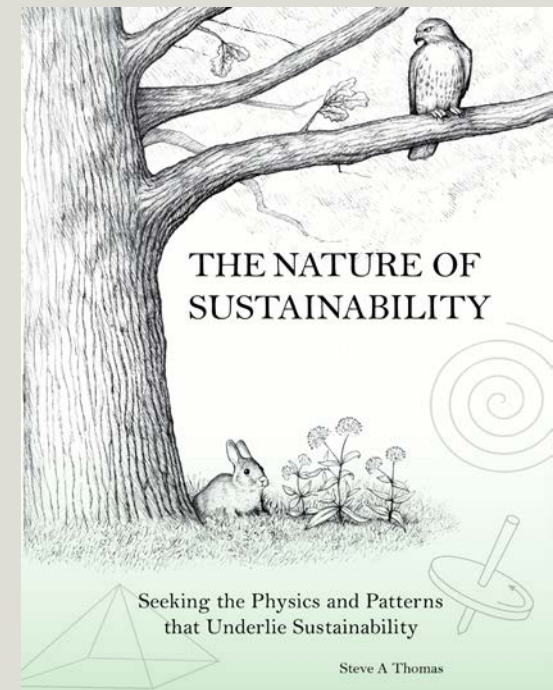
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# This Model Is Detailed in *The Nature of Sustainability*

Theory, discussion, and examples  
pertaining to forty-four  
Sustainability Patterns



# Organizational Sustainability

- I. Forming an organization
- II. Operating an organization
- III. Larger forces at work
- IV. Management and innovation

# I. Forming an Organization

## 1. Value in Nature



# I. Forming an Organization

## 1. Value: implications for human organizations

- Think critically. Every group and organization needs to not only be valuable, it needs to be *more* valuable than alternative groupings, *including no grouping at all!* (Pattern 21 in book)

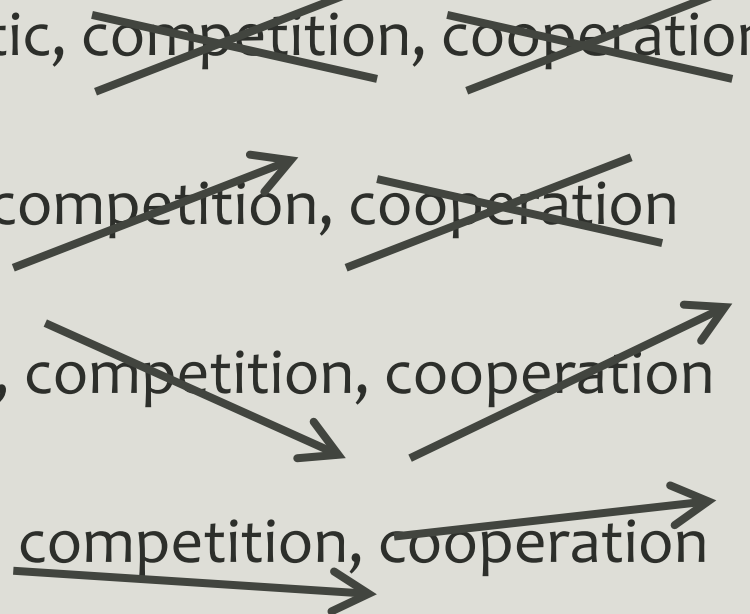
# I. Forming an Organization

## 2. Successional Stages in Nature



# I. Forming an Organization

## 2. Successional Stages in Nature

1. Stage 1: chaotic, opportunistic, ~~competition~~, ~~cooperation~~
  2. Stage 2: increasing conflict, ~~competition~~, ~~cooperation~~
  3. Stage 3: decisive, narrowing, ~~competition~~, ~~cooperation~~
  4. Stage 4: harmony, balanced, ~~competition~~, ~~cooperation~~
- 



# I. Forming an Organization

## 2. Successional Stages: implications for human organizations

- Willingly enter Stage 1, a chaotic, dreamy, brainstorming stage. Be open to all possibilities. (Pattern 13)

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- Enter Stage 2 by winding down the brainstorming and become critical. The more honest, the better. (Pattern 14)

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- Stage 3—recognize that all possibilities cannot carry forward simultaneously. Narrow down to the most optimal configuration. (Pattern 15)

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- Stage 4 proceeds only after the first three, and unfolds naturally under your good stewardship. (Pattern 16)

# I. Forming an Organization

## 3. Stage Time in Nature



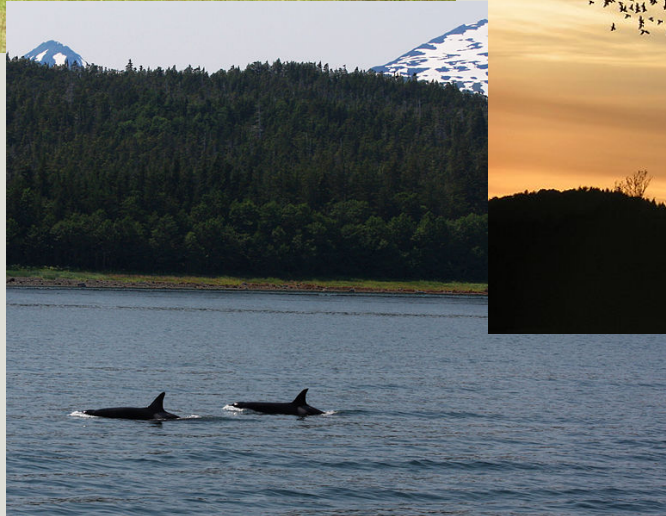
# I. Forming an Organization

## 3. Stage Time: implications for human organizations

- The relative contentment and harmony of Stage 4 lasts the longest, but that is only achieved after engaging in the chaos, critique, and losses of the first three stages.  
(Pattern 17)

# II. Operating an Organization

## 1. Decision Making in Nature



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# II. Operating an Organization

## 1. Decision Making in Nature



Status of Individuals

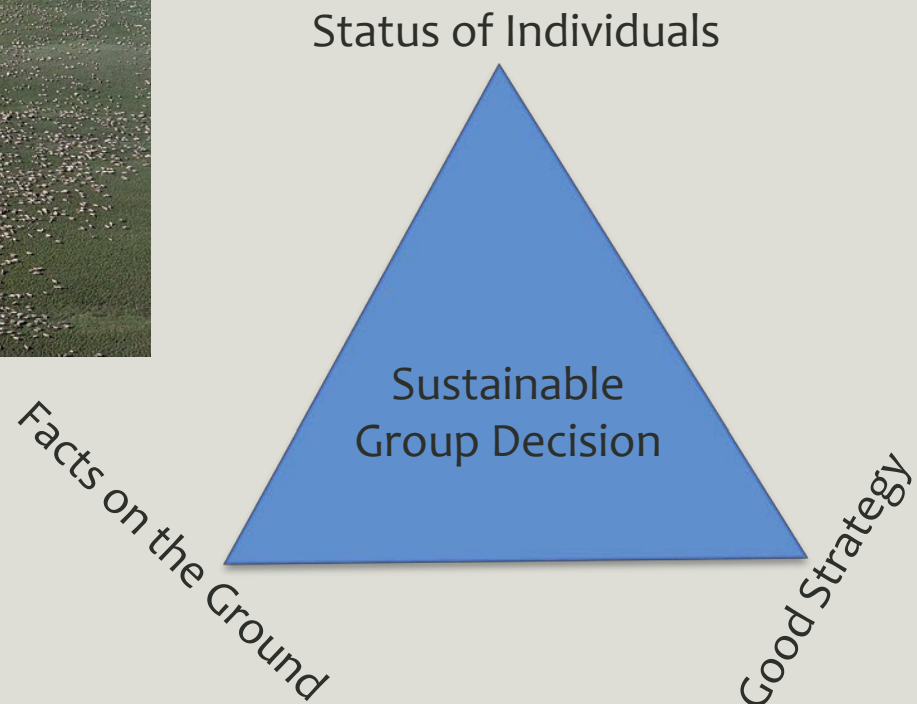
Sustainable  
Group Decision

Facts on the Ground

Good Strategy

# II. Operating an Organization

## 1. Decision Making in Nature



# II. Operating an Organization

## 1. Decision Making: implications for human organizations

- An optimal decision correctly connects the facts on the ground and the status of the the people in an organization to a desired future. Decisions which are otherwise will result in organizational demise!

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- For small organization (less than 150 individuals), this can be achieved through collective decision, or through one-to-few deciders. (Pattern 22)

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## 1. Decision Making: implications for human organizations

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- For small organization (less than 150 individuals), this can be achieved through collective decision, or through one-to-few deciders. (Pattern 22)
- For large organizations (over 150 individuals), this *requires collective decision-making*. (Pattern 23)

# II. Operating an Organization

## 2. Rates of Accomplishment in Nature



# II. Operating an Organization

## 2. Rates of Accomplishment in Nature



# II. Operating an Organization

## 2. Rates of Accomplishment: implications for human organizations

- Major changes and accomplishments within systems are usually gradual and incremental. Plans for a gradual change are more likely to succeed than plans for a rapid change. (Pattern 20)



# III. Larger Forces at Work

## 1. Expression in Nature



# III. Larger Forces at Work

## 1. Expression: implications for lake organizations

- People need things like open space, pleasing scenery, and good fishing. As people lose these qualities in their environment, many of them will fight harder to retain and restore them. (Pattern 25)

# III. Larger Forces at Work

## 2. Influence in Nature



# III. Larger Forces at Work

## 2. Influence: implications for human organizations

- Changes at a larger scale strongly affect many individuals. (Pattern 3)
- But individual don't have great impact at the larger scale, unless many behave in unison, or over long time periods. (Pattern 4)

# IV. Management and Innovation

## 1. Resilience in Nature



# IV. Management and Innovation

## 1. Resilience: implications for human organizations

- Diversity in organizational behavior, *especially potential behavior*, tends to imbue resilience. (Pattern 36)

# IV. Management and Innovation

## 2. Pattern Mimicry in Nature



# IV. Management and Innovation

## 2. Pattern Mimicry: implications for human organizations

- Be open to strategies that are apparently functional in a completely different setting. (Pattern 42)



# IV. Management and Innovation

## 3. Management Style with Nature



# IV. Management and Innovation

## 3. Management Style: implications for human organizations

- Be a macro-manager whenever possible, and avoid micro-managing. (Pattern 43)

# IV. Management and Innovation

## 4. Adaptive Management with Nature



# IV. Management and Innovation

## 4. Adaptive Management: implications for human organizations

- Engage in the unending cycle of undertaking action, observing the results, learning, adjusting expectations, undertaking more action, observing, etc. (Pattern 44)

Thank You!

# Comments, Thoughts?

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