

DESIGN THINKING – CULTURAL ECOLOGIES – BETTER TEAMS



There's a great recent post on Tim Brown's Design Thinking blog from Tim and Jane Fulton Suri – [\[Link\]](#)

They present four tips, inspired by biology, to create better teams:

- 1. Design a Fertile Habitat
- 2. Create Simple Rules
- 3. Be Productive
- 4. Expect Collaboration

I think Tim and Jane are again raising the question –

Just what is the human in human-centered design?

OK – we are a biological species. But people also share culture. This makes us a co-evolutionary story of the interaction of biology and culture – a melange of instincts, genetics, psychology, learned behaviors, ethics and values, institutions and agencies, communities, historical forces and accidents.

So is this call to look to biology for tips about teamwork an *analogy*, where we consider that people are *like* biological communities?

I think it's more interesting than this.

Ben Cullen [Link] taught me how to look beyond the familiar contrast between culture and nature to find basic processes shared by both in what can be called *cultural ecologies* – the hybrid mixtures of humans and non-humans, things and other species, architectures and environments that are the heart of our everyday, and indeed our historical *human* experiences.

Put to one side the radical distinction between culture and nature

Design a fertile habitat – yes, we benefit from diverse cultural ecologies. Rich habitats are those that harbor great diversity both in genetic and cultural DNA (to use a fascinating metaphor this time – though we might consider Richard Dawkins's cultural *memes*).

Collaboration is quite normal – instead of relying on management experts, politicians, and power brokers to tell us how to be organized and creative (or not), we might realize that it is actually quite human to work together creatively, and requires only simple rules, not complex business/political expertise held by a minority. (I think this is a key message of Tom and David Kelley's new book *Creative confidence: unleashing the creative potential in us all* – [Link])

Work is what makes us human – the unceasing effort to express ourselves in the world with others.

Working *with* the world – we should realize that **the constraints on our making presented by the real world are critical to our creativity**

And I would add to Tim and Jane's list – *family matters* – offer loyalty to group/community/team as if they were family, involving tolerance, care, shared aspiration.



Cultural ecologies. Wild nature in the English Scottish borders? This is Chew Green – site of the Roman camp at the very edge of empire, and here looking as remote and uninviting as can be. Antiquarians called it *Ad Fines* – at the ends of the earth. But this isn't raw nature beyond the bounds of the civilized world. The rolling moorlands are the result of millennia of human inhabitation. Here was a major Roman outpost on the main road north, Dere Street. Here was a medieval village, Gemelspeth, where were held the border courts. Remote from centers of power maybe, but not remote to the many communities who have worked this land, making it their own.