

# Seven Hills of Change

## Introduction

Imagine that different ways of looking at change problems are like the hills in the city of Edinburgh from where you can see things more clearly, get your bearings and decide which way to head. In this article we suggest **Seven Hills of Change\*** but acknowledge there are many other ways of gaining a better perspective in change situations.

## The Seven Hills

- The Hill of the Magic Wand – from where you can see the perfect answer
- The Hill of the Fairies and Goblins – from where you can see who has fairy wings and who has pointy tails
- The Hill of the Total Reality Vortex – from where you can see how everything works and why it is the way it is
- The Hill of the Wind – from where you can see where your energy comes from and where it goes
- The Hill of the Bonfires – from where you can destroy all that has gone before
- The Hill of the Paradox – from where you can always see the other side
- The Hill of your Own Two Feet – from where you can see your own shadow

## The Hill of the Magic Wand

From the lofty peak of this hill you can achieve that vision that you need to make any positive change happen. If you do not have a sense of where you are going, then any direction will do.

One of the reasons person centred planning focuses so resolutely on “dreams” is in order to create a compelling and attractive vision of a different and positive future in order to give energy, enthusiasm and commitment to those trying to effect changes alongside an individual. The same theory applies to any change situation however. We all know of situations where people spend a lot of energy complaining about how things are – without putting a similar investment of energy into imagining how things could be better. These situations can become exhausting and seldom come to a positive conclusion.

All sorts of things can help create a compelling vision – getting a diverse but committed team together to work on it – using graphics and pictures to bring it to life – but without it, positive change will only happen by accident.

### **The Hill of the Fairies and Goblins**

The most important aspect of this vantage point is in knowing who is with you and who is against you. Who are your allies and foes? Who are the people you need to get on your “team” or your side and who do you need to get round or avoid? There are dangers in investing one or two people with superhero or super villain powers because they may not be the main or only problems or solutions in your change problem.

Think through the following questions as a way of looking at these issues. Often it will help to work through these questions in a small group (2 or 3).

#### **Guide to Fairy Spotting**

- Who are the fairies?
- How do you know they are on your side?
- When was the last time they did something which showed they were a good fairy?
- How long have they been around?
- How long have they been on your side?
- What have you ever done for them?
- Where would you disagree about the future?
- How do they know you need them around?

#### **Guide to Goblin Spotting**

- Who are the goblins?
- How do you know they are against you?
- How do they know you think that?
- When was the last time they put a spoke in your wheels?
- Were they always against you?
- What have you ever done to harm them?
- Where would you agree about the future?
- What attracts you to them (is it like a part of you?)
- What scares you about them?

One of the points of this exercise is to reflect on whether every fairy and goblin is who they seem. Are some goblins masquerading in fairy wings? Are some goblins really what they seem or can they be won over if

approached differently or in a new context? Sometimes your fairies will be thin on the ground so the exercise of checking out exactly who your allies are can reap very positive rewards. A series of questions might help with this reflection:

- What leads you to think what you think?
- How have you/could you check your assumptions?
- What are the benefits of investing in this relationship?
- What is the pain or cost involved of investing in this relationship?
- Is it worth it?
- What might you do more of?
- What might you do less of?

### **The Hill of the Total Reality Vortex**

The great benefit of being on this hill is the ability to see the Big Picture. The idea is to take a step back from the day-to-day manifestations of the change problem you are in and try to see where it fits in with wider issues and systems which influence it. This might be helpful for those “can't see the woods for the trees” kinds of difficulties or where there is a real feeling of “stuckness” in the situation.

The danger of this hill is of being simply overwhelmed by the scale of the problem which can reinforce feelings of helplessness and inertia.

It is worth thinking about questions like these and to try and map out where you sit in the wider picture:

- Where are you in the Big Picture?
- What system(s) are influencing what is happening?
- Are there conflicting systems at play and can this help the problem you are struggling with?
- What can you influence and have power over?
- Where your influence is limited what steps could you take to connect to those who can have influence?

### **The Hill of the Wind**

From this hill you can begin to see what activities give you energy and which drain energy from you. A danger which can be apparent on this hill is to continue to pour lots of energy into bad or unproductive places so a good idea is to take stock of where your energy levels are now.

### **Mapping your energy flows\*\***

The starting point is to map out your energy flows NOW. You can do this in relation to your whole life or in relation to your work only. Take a sheet of flipchart paper and two different coloured pens. Allocate one colour to those things which give you energy and the other to those which drain you of energy. Of course, some activities may do both! Placing yourself at the centre draw lines going into you (giving energy) and away from you (draining energy). The thickness of the lines should denote the amount of energy going out or coming into you.

Having undertaken this exercise it can be helpful to then consider the following questions yourself or with one or two colleagues:

- Is this working for you at the moment?
- If this is working how could you conserve this balance?
- Is this getting better, worse or staying the same?
- How could the energy be redirected around you to bring out the best in you?
- What would you have to do for this to happen?
- What would other people have to do?
- What would the costs of changing things be?

### **The Hill of the Bonfires**

Sometimes things can seem so bad that the only way people can envisage change is to sweep away all that is old and start afresh. When seen from the Hill of the Bonfires, this might be the way to address an intractable change problem. Some situations seem so hopeless that to expend energy in trying to “stick plasters on gaping wounds” does not appear to be the right way to go.

However, the danger on this hill, is that in every fire you risk losing some things you valued in the conflagration. If you think that a change situation would be worth sweeping out the old and heralding a completely new and shiny approach to the problem, take some time to consider if anything worth keeping will be lost.

- If you throw out all the old ways of doing things – what might be lost?
- Would you regret this?
- On balance do you gain more than you lose from the bonfire?
- Is there anyway of starting afresh but holding on to the things that made sense in the old way of doing things?

## The Hill of the Paradox

On this hill you have the advantage of seeing more clearly the other point of view. In your change situation it may be of great value to understand why some people who oppose the change you want to make believe what they do.

Some questions you could consider or discuss with a few colleagues:

- What is the other side of the argument?
- Are their hidden nightmares around for others it would be good to hear?
- What if you stopped pushing for change and/or did nothing?
- What would count as doing the opposite of nothing?
- What impact might your conduct have which might in effect be the opposite of your intentions?

Seeing the other point of view may suggest fresh strategies for approaching the change problem and for working on the fairies/goblins ratio!

## The Hill of Your Own Two Feet

This hill attempts to bring together some of the elements and perspectives from the others to give us a clear sense of where we should start from.

- **We have clarified our vision for how things can be better**
- **We have spotted the fairies and goblins and developed our ideas about how to work with them better**
- **We have worked out a better sense for where we fit in the environment we are working in**
- **We have worked out where our energy was coming from and how best to conserve and use it effectively**
- **We have destroyed those things we don't need or were in the way and rescued the bits we needed from the bonfire**
- **We have seen the problem from the other side**
- **NOW where are we and what will we do in this situation**

On your own or coached by one or two colleagues you could answer the following questions before coming up with 2 or 3 immediate **First Steps** you can take to begin to move forward on your change problem. A way of doing this creatively would be to use posters and graphics to aid your thought processes or to have the exercise facilitated for your team. \*\*\*

- **What have I authority over?**
- **What have I influence over?**
- **What's my reputation?**
- **What am I good at?**
- **What brings out the best in me?**
- **What am I going to let go, neglect or desert – and what will it cost?**
- **What am I going to pay more attention to – and how?**
- **What are two or three first steps?**

\* These ideas were originally delivered on a Scottish Human Services course called "Creating Change" delivered in 1999. The concept of the Seven Hills is theirs, although they can take no responsibility for this attempt to write up the material which must rest with me (Steve Cousin)

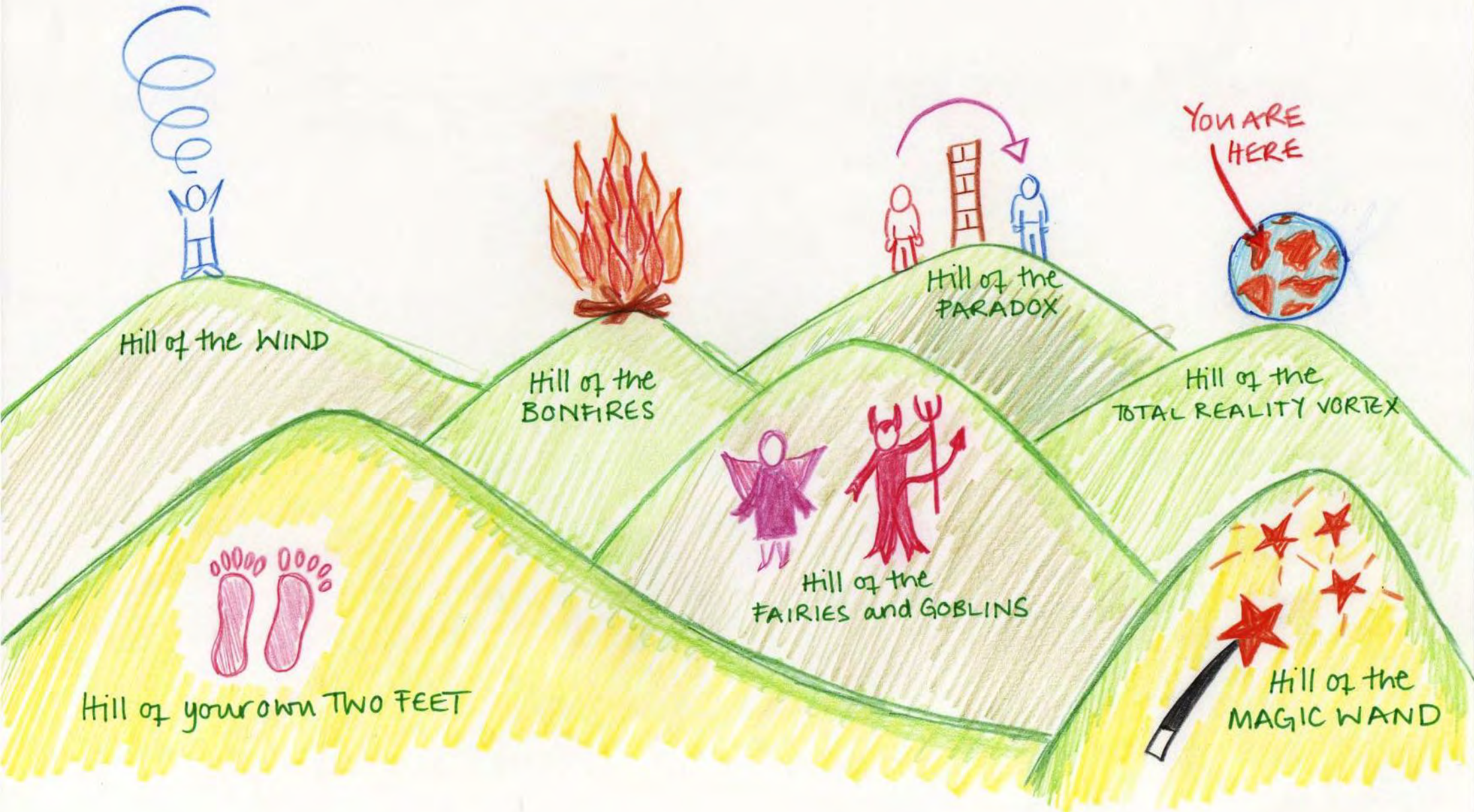
\*\*See graphic #1

\*\*\*See graphic #2

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# THE SEVEN HILLS OF CHANGE

developed from an original SHS idea





**People, Plans and Practicalities**  
 achieving change through person centred planning

This book by Pete Ritchie, Helen Sanderson, Jackie Kilbane and Martin Routledge is a practical guide for would be implementers of person centred planning who want to travel the road between making plans and changing lives.

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# **THE HILL OF THE FAIRIES AND GOBLINS**

...from where you can see who has fairy wings and who has pointy tails...

## **GUIDE TO FAIRY SPOTTING**

- Who are they?
- How do you know they are on your side?
- When was the last time they did something which showed they were a good fairy?
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- How long have they been on your side?
- What have you ever done for them?
- Where would you disagree about the future?
- How do they know you need them around?

## **GUIDE TO GOBLIN SPOTTING**

- Who are they?
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- How do they know you think that?
- When was the last time they put a spoke in your wheel?
- Were they always against you?
- What have you ever done to harm them?
- Where would you agree about the future?
- What attracts you to them (is it like a part of you?)
- What scares you about them?

# **THE HILL OF THE WIND**

...from where you can see where your energy comes from and where it goes...

- **IS THIS WORKING FOR YOU?**
- **IF THIS IS WORKING, HOW DO YOU CONSERVE IT?**
- **IS THIS GETTING BETTER, WORSE, OR STAYING THE SAME?**
- **HOW COULD THE ENERGY BE REDIRECTED AROUND YOU TO BRING OUT THE BEST IN YOU?**
- **WHAT WOULD YOU HAVE TO DO FOR THIS TO HAPPEN?**
- **WHAT WOULD OTHER PEOPLE HAVE TO DO?**
- **WHAT WOULD THE COST OF CHANGING THINGS BE?**

Scottish Human Services (1998)

## **WORKING ON THE BIG PICTURE**

### **Aim**

This exercise will enable a staff team or group to explore the wider context for their work. This can be a helpful preparatory exercise when looking at development opportunities or team planning sessions i.e. using SWOT analysis etc.

### **Method**

One of facilitators outlines different ways of looking at change. For example, the Seven Hills of Change (see relevant article) can be used and then attention drawn to the Hill of the Total Reality Vortex. This is the hill which enables you to see the “big picture” and where you and your service sit in it.

One of the facilitators then gives an example of a situation in their work and what the different factors influencing it are:

Example - EDG and citizenship.

This grew out of ideas which young people expressed during person centred planning we were doing. We then connected up with both EYSIP and the Edinburgh Youth Council who were interested and promoting active citizenship. We then noticed that the Curriculum for Excellence promoted through schools by the Scottish executive included citizenship as one of its 4 main pillars and that the 21<sup>st</sup> century Social Work Review was committed to nurturing “citizen leadership”. An election for the parliament and local councils was also in the offing which was an opportunity to organise a hustings and invite politicians to meet with people with learning difficulties.

The group is then divided into smaller groups (3-5). They are asked to spend 15-20 minutes considering the following questions:

- What is happening here?
- What is happening locally? (council, NHS etc)
- What is happening nationally? (Scotland and the rest of the UK)
- What is happening in wider society? (rest of the world)
- Anything else influencing your work?

After the discussion you ask each group to draw a poster of what the “big picture” is like and make sure that they place themselves or their service/group in the picture somewhere. This should take about 15 minutes.

Ask each group to share the pictures they have drawn and say 1 or 2 things about it to the bigger group.

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