

# Part 1. How the Environmental Movement Can Find Its Way Again

*"Every real problem can and will be solved,  
entirely by accurate observation and close, searching thought."*  
Ernst Mach, 1838 to 1916<sup>3</sup>

**T**HIS IS A BOOK FOR EVERYONE WHO IS AWARE OF THE EXTREME URGENCY of the sustainability problem and is perplexed by society's inability to solve it. Accordingly, there is little need to dwell on the severity of the problem, so the book spends little time on that. Instead, it presents an entirely new problem solving path and the results of five years of following that path. The key findings of this work are:

**1. The process does not fit the problem** – The environmental movement has lost its way because it is using a problem solving process that does not fit the problem. This process can be called Classic Activism.

The environmental movement includes grassroots activists, scholars, businesspeople, activist think tanks, national environmental agency employees, and international organizations like the United Nations Environmental Programme. Classic Activism is the process all of these have been using to solve the sustainability problem. It is the same process that worked so well for other movements, such as women's suffrage and civil rights. But when you put it under the magnifying glass, Classic Activism suffers from a fatal flaw: it is incapable of solving the difficult problems the environmental movement now faces, like climate change. This is because it is an ad hoc, common sense, event oriented process, as opposed to a formal, analytical, structure oriented process. As a result environmental classic activists have never been able to see how to correctly approach solving the sustainability problem.

**2. Pushing on low leverage points** – Because the process does not fit the problem the movement is "pushing" on low leverage points. This dooms even brilliant and heroic effort to failure.

Due to decades of reliance on a one-size-fits-all process that worked well on the easy problems they tackled first, environmentalists have become habituated to pushing on low leverage points. Exactly what these are is explained at length in the book. *Analytical Activism* builds a well documented case that the movement is pushing on low leverage points and that this approach is doomed to eternal failure.

**3. Need to push on high leverage points instead**

– It follows that if the movement could find the right high leverage points and push there instead, it could solve the problem.

**4. Need to change to a process that fits the problem**

– The only way to find those high leverage points is to do what all of science did in the 17<sup>th</sup> century: switch to a process that fits the problem. For science this was the Scientific Method.

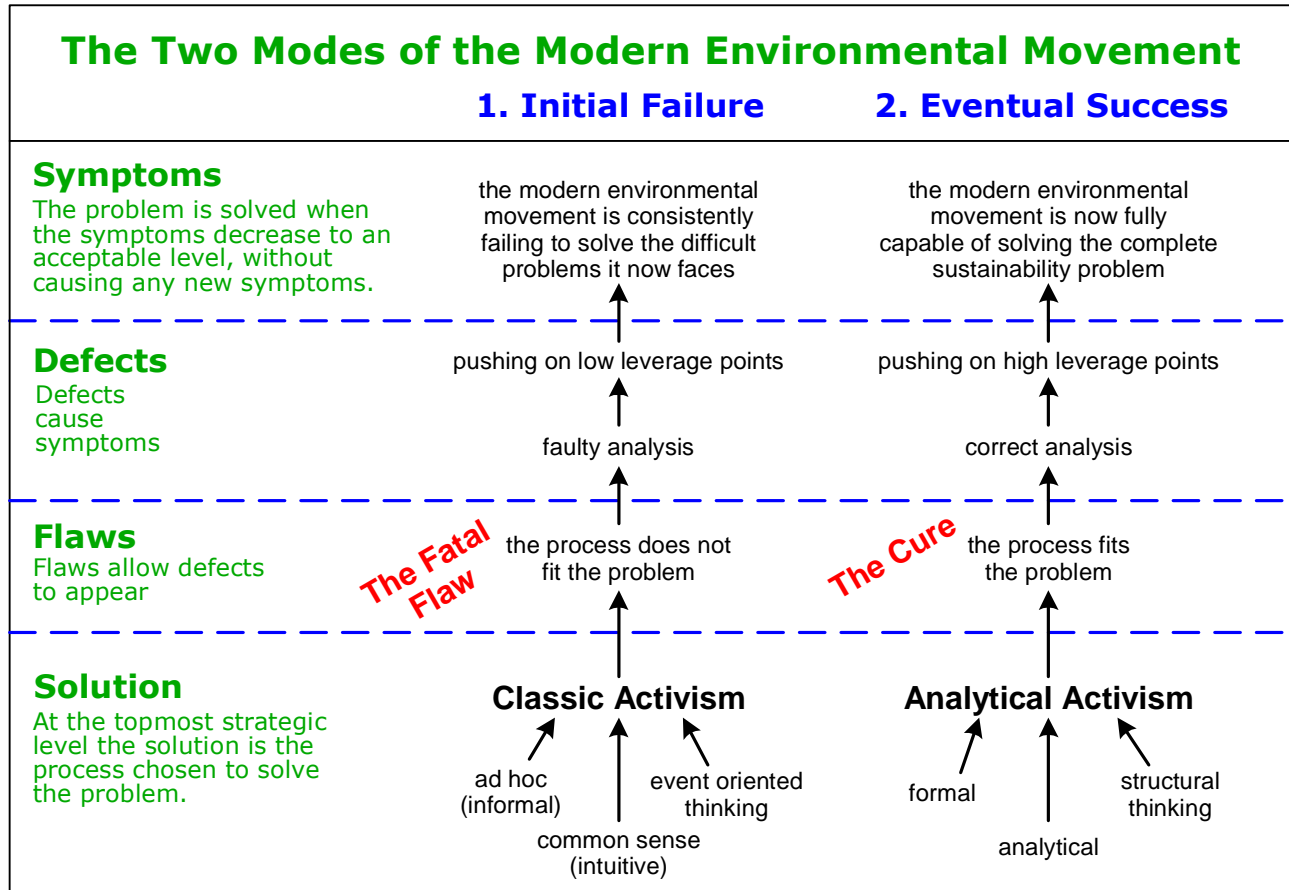
If use of the wrong process has caused the movement to be unable to solve the problem, then it follows that use of the right process would change everything. It would allow environmentalists to fulfill their dream: to make the crucial difference in changing the course of human history from unsustainable to sustainable. The importance of the right process is a message this book will drive home again and again, starting with an analogy to the United States urban decay problem of the 1960s in chapter one.

*The application of the right process would break the thirty year deadlock of systemic change resistance. On the surface the deadlock is caused by environmentalists thinking long term while the opposition is thinking short term. But what is the deeper underlying cause of the deadlock? What is the root cause?*

Once problem solvers find the root causes of change resistance the disease has been correctly diagnosed. Then, like the good doctor who starts by first diagnosing the root causes of a patient's symptoms, we can begin to develop a rational treatment plan. By pushing on the right high leverage points, the patient can be brought back to health.

Part one presents the argument that all four of these points are true. It also goes one giant step further, by briefly delving into a very promising analysis and solution that illustrates what will happen once the environmental movement finds its way again.

On the next page is a visual summary of all we've said so far, and all we will say in the rest of this book.



The above diagram summarizes the entire argument of this book. (For further discussion of this diagram, please see page 258.)

Currently the modern environmental movement is in the **Initial Failure Mode**. The symptoms of Initial Failure are that the modern environmental movement is consistently failing to solve the difficult problems that it now faces. Why is this? Our analysis shows the immediate cause is pushing on low leverage points. The cause of this is a faulty analysis of the sustainability problem. These are the defects that the movement must resolve to find its way again.

How can it do this? Well, it needs to dig deeper and find the flaws allowing the defects to appear. This has been done. There appears to be a single fatal flaw: the process does not fit the problem.

Why has this flaw existed for so long? The path the environmental movement chose, without ever giving it any real consideration, was to choose Classic Activism as its central problem solving process. This simple process is characterized by an ad hoc (informal) approach, a common sense (intuitive) way of analyzing problems, and an event oriented way of thinking.

This book argues that environmentalism will sooner or later mature, and move into the **Eventual Success Mode**. The symptoms of success will come quickly, because the modern environmental movement is now fully capable of solving the complete sustainability problem. Why? Because it is now pushing on high leverage points. And why is it doing that? Because of a correct analysis, instead of a faulty one.

Going deeper, what is the cure? In retrospect, it will be breathtakingly simple: the process fits the problem. Why does it fit it now? Because environmentalism has grown up and adopted Analytical Activism (or an equivalent process) as its central problem solving process. This process is only slightly more complex than Classic Activism. It is a formal process, not an informal one. It is analytical, not intuitive. And it uses structural thinking instead of event oriented thinking, *which allows activists to “see” the real structure of the sustainability problem for the first time*.

What will happen once we can do that?