

# Steps to Refining The Meaning Of Progressive

**And why it doesn't include Elon Musk**

Progressive is a concept actuated in many different arenas of human culture. Politically progressive, techno-scientifically progressive, spiritually progressive and so on.

A whole raft of trends and 'cutting edge' models of changing thoughts and behaviours labelled progressive is continually being put forward; mainly by commentators and pundits putting 2+2 together and coming up with anything other than 4.

Their ideas and concepts are diffused through media forms – newspapers, magazines, broadcast and streaming platforms, podcasts, blogs – as well as through face-to-face discussions between ideologically defined individuals and groups.

“New ideas”, “new behaviours”, “new ways of connecting with the world”, “connecting humanity with the universe” – phrases that create clicks and provide frames and headlines for media platforms from print to the web; and are now embedded in the training and output of generative AI.

Defining 'progressive' is something that needs to be examined before making judgements about what is and what isn't progressive – and why it often seems confusing – because one man's progressive is another man's 'not' progressive.

**THAT'S ONE SMALL STEP FOR MAN, ONE GIANT LEAP FOR MANKIND.**

Can progressive simultaneously mean a) a small step; and b) a giant step?

Or does being one exclude being the other?

Perhaps it is a category error – true in one dimension, but false in another – that leads to confusion in defining progressive.

This has been at the core of thinking about CDSM methodologies when attempting values-based insights into possible futures for clients. The process of defining progress and ‘progressives’ is quite simple - yet complex enough to identify threads of thought and behaviour presented by commentators and pundits and tug at them.

The base methodology is basic scenario building.

In this instance the classic Three Worlds Scenario [3WS] was used by Chris MacNulty when she joined Taylor Nelson and began using data from the Taylor Nelson Monitor to build values-based 3WS models to help clients to ‘get a view’ of where they wanted to be in future. To do this she acknowledged and used multiple, complex and dynamic parameters – VUCA (volatility, uncertainty, complexity, ambiguity) environments - and defined it almost two decades before it was first used by the US Navy.

I was a novice to values research when I was first involved with the development and application of the 3WS in 1985. My first engagement with it was in the Home of the Future project managed by Taylor Nelson. It involved 12 different corporations that needed a view of the future at both macro and micro levels – national and international forces (politics, economics, social, technological, environmental, and legal [PESTEL]) - and the impact they would have on their specific products and service in relation to creating ‘great homes’. The clients’ businesses ranged from housebuilding, heating and ventilating, bathroom and toilet ware to food processing, architecture, electrical and more.

Each had their own definition of ‘cutting edge’, or progressive – and they all had different meanings. Mostly they were based on what already existed (a small step) while others were defined by ‘what doesn’t exist yet’ (a giant leap).

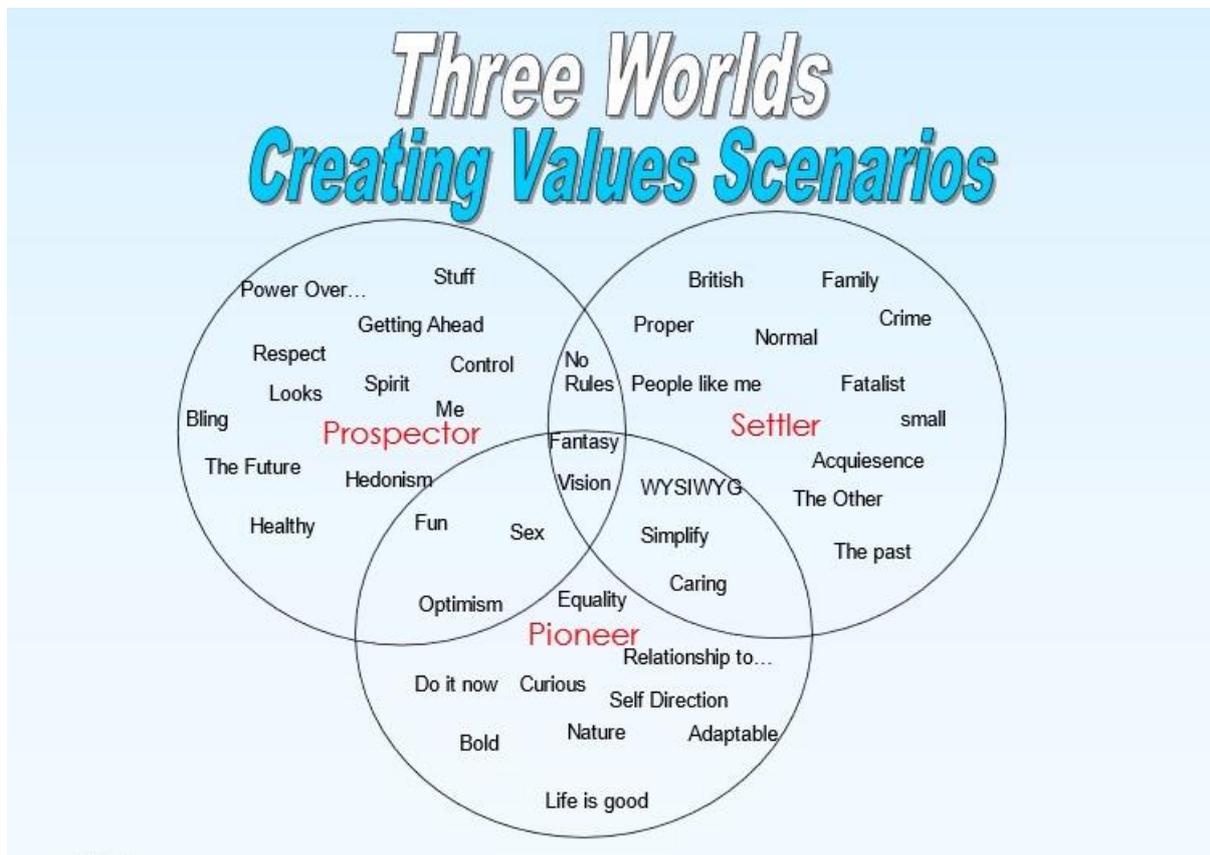
The project ran for a year and included a series of six two-day workshops clarifying ideas, behaviours, concepts and products to suit the various corporations – all built on the simple 3WS.

After the buy-out of Applied Futures from Taylor Nelson it was used with Eurotunnel car transport to define and refine passenger needs and the implications on rolling stock. This followed the inability of UK and French decision makers to agree on the manufacturing parameters.

After the de-merger of Applied Futures into separate companies in the US and the UK (Applied Futures Ltd in the US and Synergy Brand Values in the UK ), the US operation concentrated on the US military and ran many projects looking to the future with various branches of the US Defense Department. The UK operation concentrated on commercial organizations and NGOs.

When Synergy Brand Values was rather chaotically split up, Les Higgins and I founded Cultural Dynamics Strategy & Marketing Ltd. (CDSM) and continued to use the methodology with a range of government departments, NGOs and commercial, national and international, organizations.

Let's look a few maps and charts to see how it works to define progressive in an inclusive manner – allowing for complexity resulting from ambiguity.



This is a simple example –used in ‘Heaven and Hell’ scenario sessions that uses the macro model of Maslow and fills the individual Maslow Groups with relevant attributes and concepts.

This basic 3WS model will remain the same whatever the project, but the specific contents can change with circumstance, though the changes at this level are likely to be minimal.

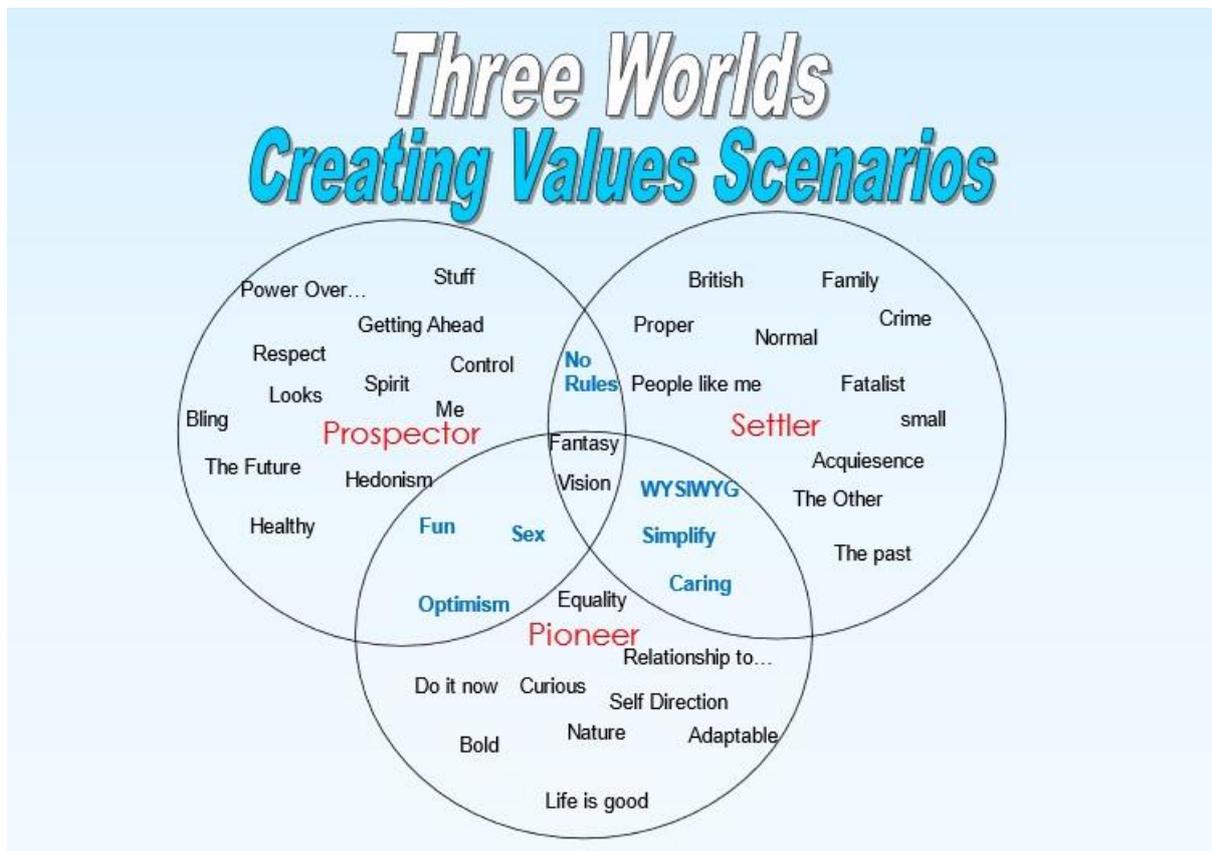
A specific project will often be conducted using only one or two of the PESTEL elements – but at other times the entire PESTEL will be explored.

Just looking at this highlights that “progressive” can mean different things to different values sets. When other elements are added to human values it becomes clear that attempting to make a one-size-fits-all definition will be difficult – no matter what pundits might say.

But...

By understanding the dynamics of interactions between the Maslow Groups it is possible to find areas of overlap between one set of beliefs and another, and define the areas of innovative or progressive ideas and behaviours.

Overlap between any two shown in **Blue**



In the Settler/Prospector overlap progressive means looking and judging the future where all rules of thought and behaviour are ‘up for grabs’ even to the extent of jettisoning them all and looking for new ways to define the future and the meaning of “progressive”.

To the Settlers this is negatively triggering! Abiding by and defending the rules against the 'anarchy and chaos' of free thinking is an anathema to be explored with trepidation and some fear.

Moral courage is called for and many organized groups, formal and informal, stumble when confronted with the option. The Church (Catholic and Protestant alike) and government departments like the Treasury and Central Banks the world over are examples. Small steps within an established morality, ways of knowing right and wrong, can be perceived as cutting away at the foundations of moralistic thoughts and behaviours – the 'slippery slope' argument.

Progressive change is wrought when the no rules approach is adopted and applied. New thoughts can create existential crisis in this mindset.

There is another downside as well - that the 'new rules' are just another set of 'small steps'. If the scenario participants return from exploration of the unknown and bring back 'new reasons', including conspiracy theories, that just explain the 'old rules' in a new way they will fail to envisage the future, just reframe the present. Different, but not different.

In the Settler/Pioneer overlap area progressive is more about relaxation of rules rather the confrontational either/or 'no rules' mindset in the Settler/Prospector overlap. What you see is what you get (WYSIWYG) means that ego battles over which version of progressive is 'right' are unlikely to occur. Every idea is a good idea until found not to be as good as once thought – today's progressive thought or behaviour is just grist for the mainstream tomorrow. Everything always changes, so no problem.

Progressive in this area is about more caring for others, up to including humankind itself. The Settler will likely see this as a moralist calling - an acknowledgement of old rules in today's chaotic world. The Pioneers will have an ethical approach to caring – knowing that they are just human, subject human foibles, and see progressiveness as being open to new ideas and experiences in areas of thought and behaviour they had not previously believed possible. "Being a better person" is a definition of progressive in this instance – with the basic orientation leading to 'better' PESTEL outcomes. This is best summed up by the Muslim thinker and writer Majid Narwazz.

**NO IDEA SHOULD BE ABOVE SCRUTINY,  
NO PERSON SHOULD BE BENEATH DIGNITY.**

In the search for meaning, the ultimate goal is to have explored many paths, to discover the 'simple truths' which are often not defined by powerful people but represent the experiences of pathways taken - the road less travelled - by billions of 'common' people. Progressive is about more caring within simple guidelines. Hippocrates is alleged to have put it this way, "Above all do no harm" - to others, their lives and their thoughts.

Now ask yourself – does this describe someone like Elon Musk?

From an idealistic, yet practical view of progressive we turn to the last dichotomous overlap – between Pioneers and Prospectors.

Fun and Sex combine into a hedonistic mixture that helps frame their view of progressive as that which gives them more pleasure in life. This is more themselves than PESTEL. In fact, they can get more pleasure from life when PESTEL is not infringing on their ability to experience new and different thoughts and behaviours.

They present their concepts and behaviours as groundbreaking and extreme, but necessary, for themselves and society.

To many of today's pundits this may sound like 1930s freethinkers and their rethinking of monogamy, or the 1960s hippies raised on the optimistic science fiction of the 1940s and 50s - of space travel and everlasting life outside the Earth.

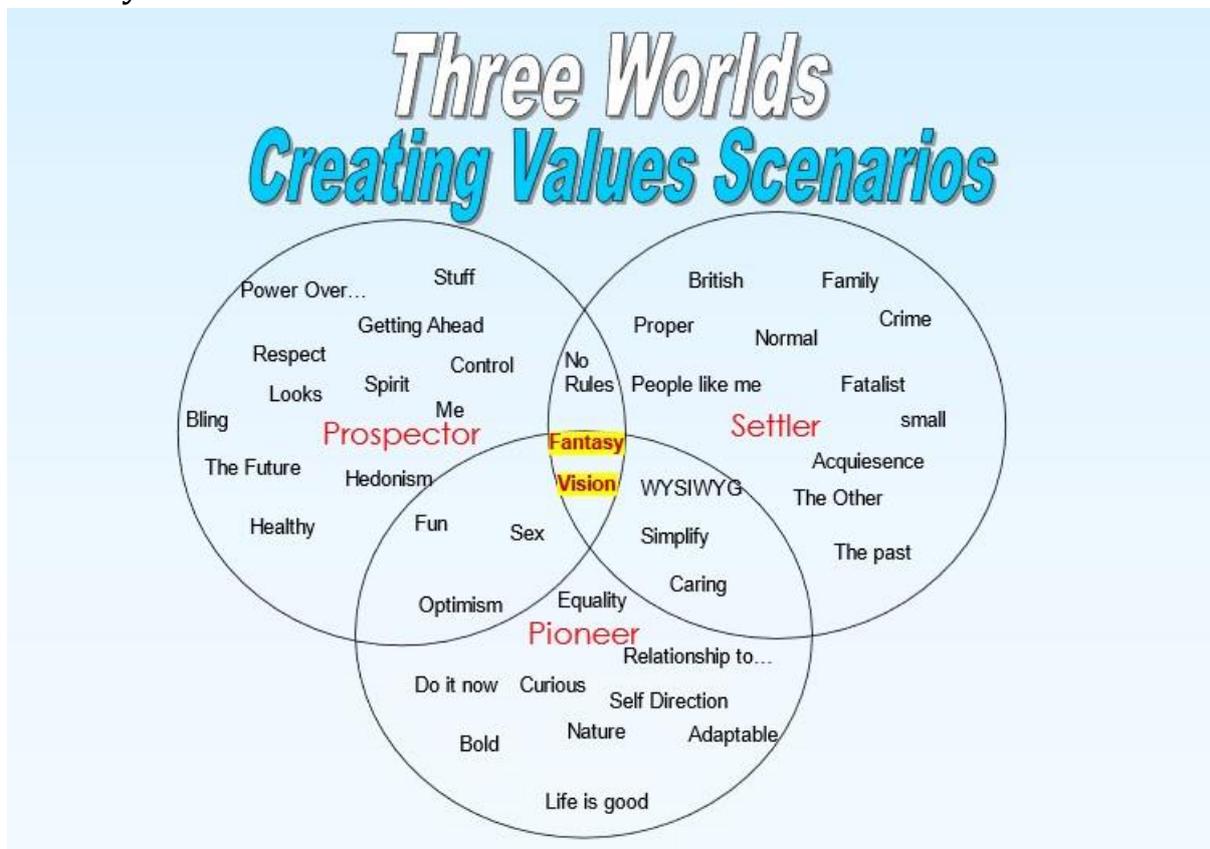
But for millions of media consumers looking for new ideas it could also refer to many Silicon Valley multi-millionaires and billionaires who are framing their ideas as progressive, when in fact the ideas are old and the behaviours timeless.

When we take these few concepts within the overlap area and add Control, Getting Ahead and Power Over it is easy to see how they can take good ideas and behaviours developed by the Pioneers to optimize being a better person and see Prospectors maximize the elements of the Progressive process and turn it into their version of Progressive – "Look at how smart I am, I'm rich and that makes me even smarter, being rich makes me 'hotter', therefore I must be a progressive with progressive thoughts about how to become even richer".

This version of progressive has no room for 'caring' in the Pioneer sense.

I think I can see Elon now!

No matter how insightful these dichotomous overlaps are there is only one overlap area that cover all three Maslow groups - the segment defined by 'Fantasy' and 'Vision'.



There is often a fine line between fantasy and vision, and this is where 3WS helps clarify the difference – between small world conspiracy thinking and unattainable fantasies, and ‘giant leap’ visions that inspire new and progressive ideas and behaviours that apply to all, but for different reasons.

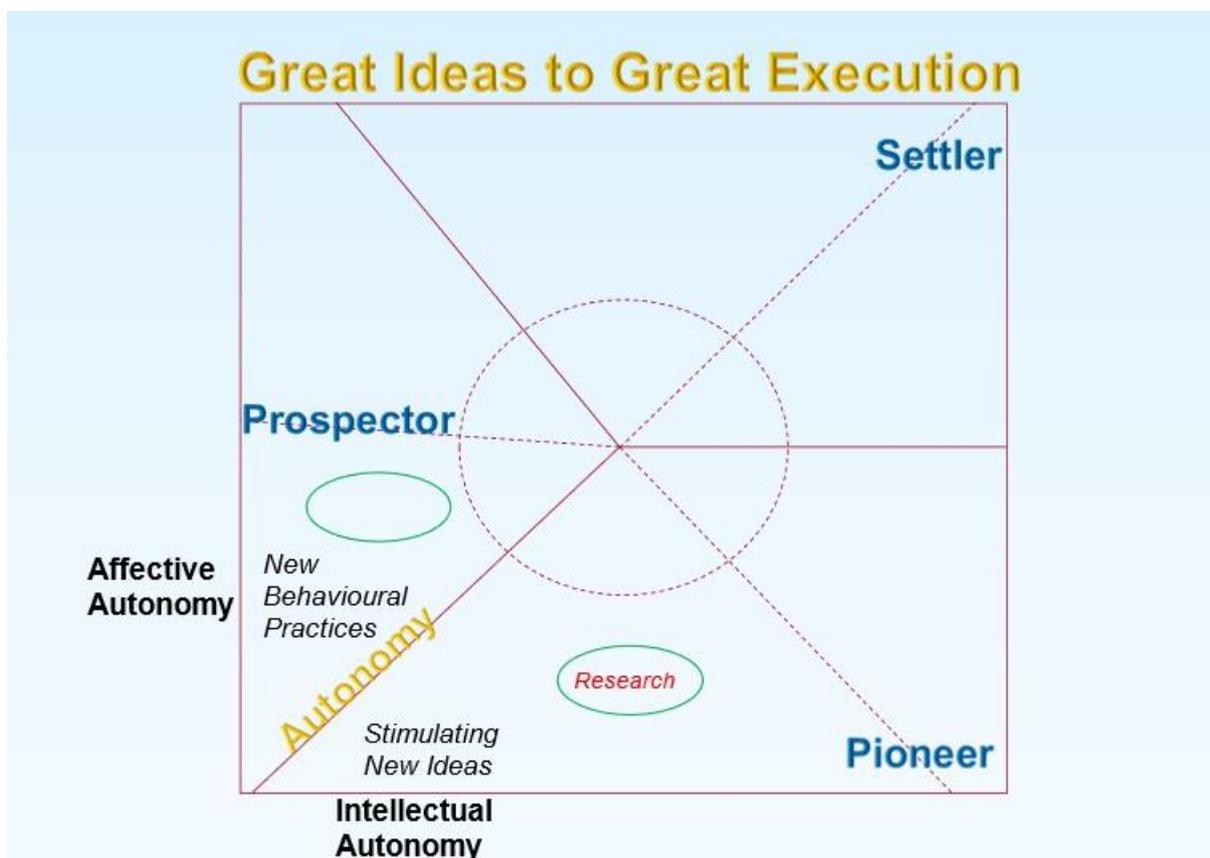
When visions are being created, they can appear to non-visionaries as fantasies. Fantasies that purport to be visions often lack any process to be attained or actuated. Visions can include things that don't yet exist – think of the vision of the American Moon mission that required new scientific discoveries and invention to occur before it could happen. But it was a vision, not a fantasy because it framed policy thinking about the process of bringing the vision to reality. And that produced the R+D projects that wouldn't have existed without the vision, and produced multiple simultaneous and serial actions that made the difference between fantasy and vision. The vision stimulated all three of the groups to forms of unified thinking and action.

Processes that create better tomorrows are the basis for any form of progressivism. Performing actions based on thinking that challenges

current 'realities' is progressive if it is capable of satisfying all three groups. This is the place of John Rawls and his theory of justice which loosely informed my reading of Haidt's Moral Foundation concept of Justice (and fairness) – the social basis for judging the other factors of PESTEL.

This concept of vision generation (intellectual autonomy) leading to new behaviours (affective autonomy) incorporates the models of openness and autonomy in the Schwartzian sense as measured by CDSM SIMS.

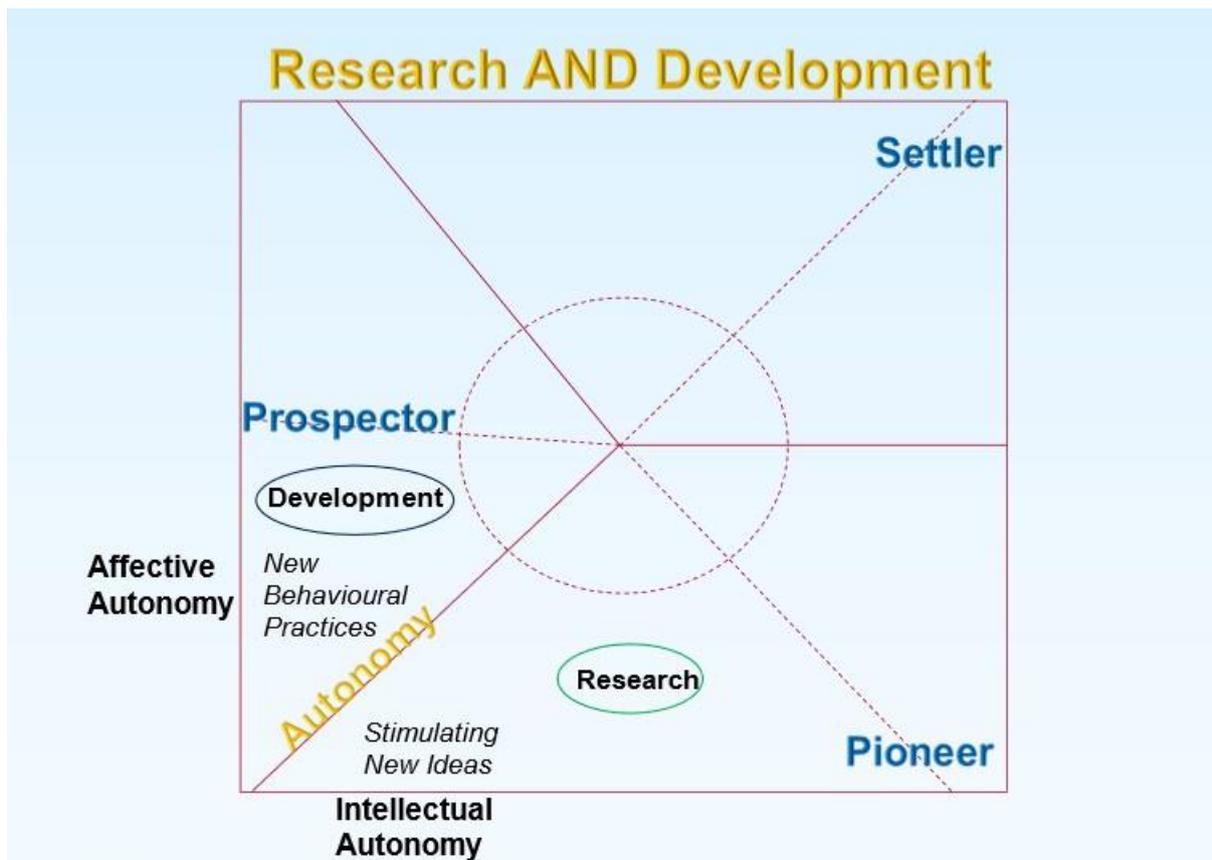
Take this Pioneer thinking into a world where Prospectors and Settlers also exist. The way a progressive vision is turned into a progressive set of thoughts and behaviours is facilitated by series of steps which turn fantasy into vision. This drives a process of creating new, potentially sustainable progressive thoughts and ideas – a paradigm shift.



The process begins with creating space for new ideas that can begin as fantasies - by examining the status quo of acceptable thought and behaviour and questioning it through multiple facets like PESTEL and Values research. Many of these ideas and concepts will be generated in parts of CDSM Immersion workshops that stress Pioneer values. By incorporating the wisdom of Maajid Narwaaz and Hippocrates it is possible

to bake-in the values that will form the basis for progressive thoughts and behaviours.

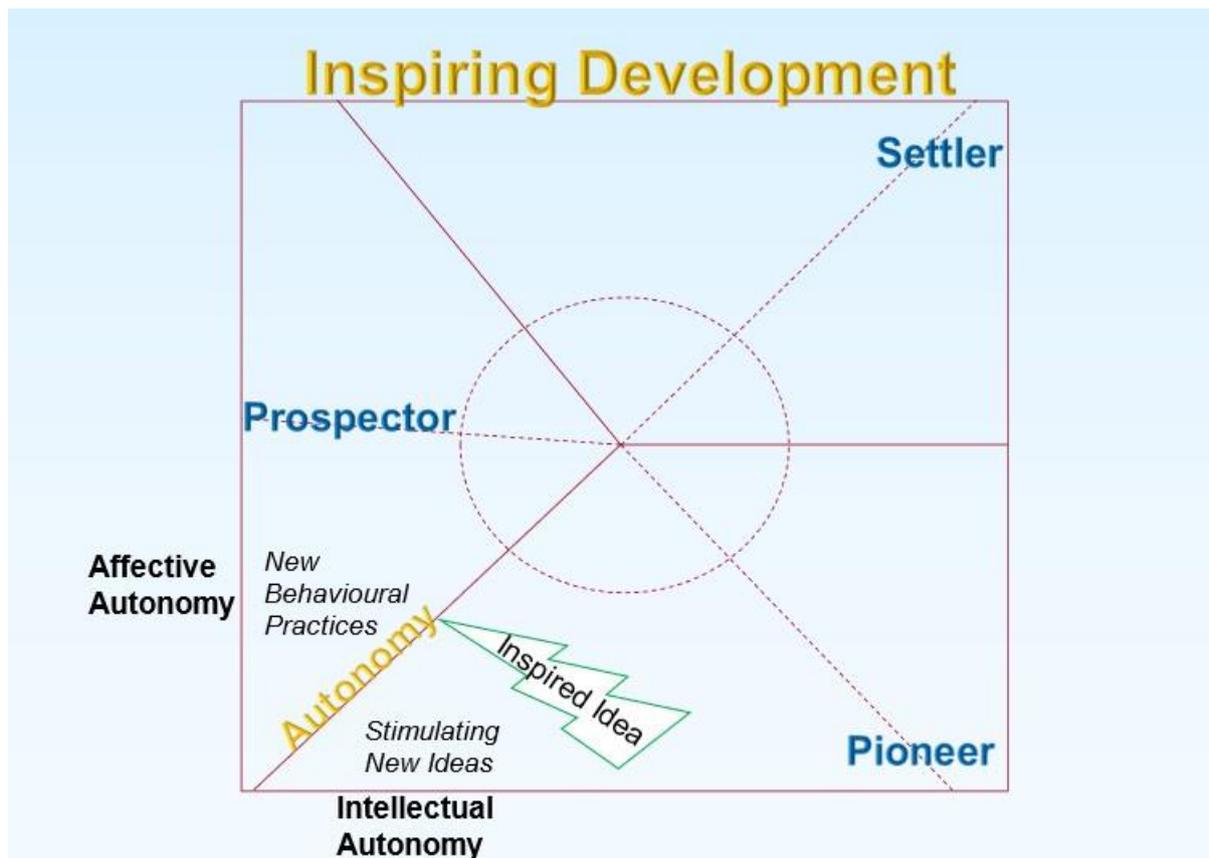
This is important because the process of creating a progressive environment – in which innovations will be created – gives fairness and justice for all (in both the Haidt and Rawls definitions) a chance to the inform policies as they move from the ‘research’ to the ‘development’ stage of creation. This process works in the context of PESTEL as well as in the understanding of cultural values changes.



While those of us to whom progressive thinking is embedded in our identities may despair at recent (last quarter of a century) political events and trends that are driven by non-progressive thinking – Trump, Putin, Erdogan, Netanyahu, Farage – the following quote from Martin Luther King Jr. holds a truth that cannot be disregarded if progressive thinking is to be confidently built into new forms of behaviour.

**“The arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends towards justice”.**

This is an optimistic statement and must drive much of Pioneer/Prospector visions if progressive thought and behaviour are to inspire the progressive vision in Prospector minds. This is shown on the map that follows.



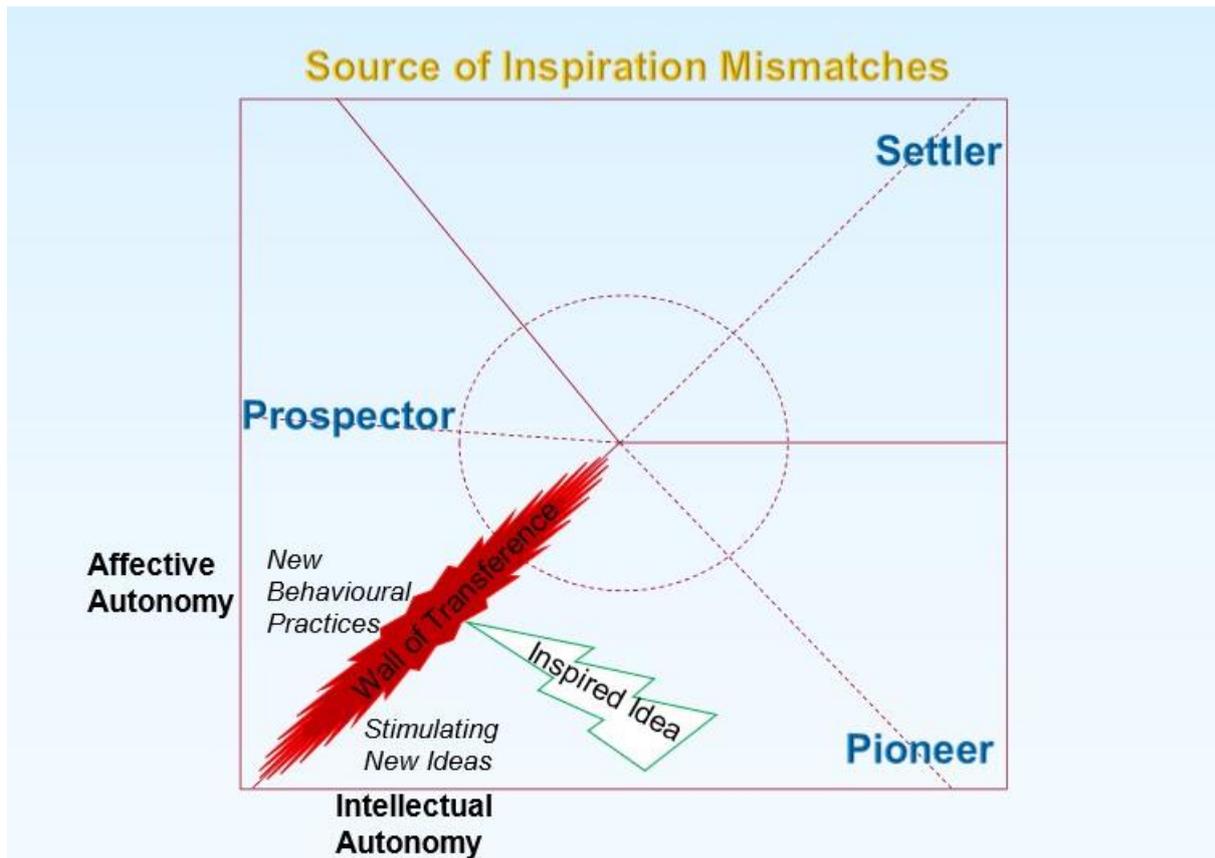
It is at this point - where progressive Pioneer ideas of intellectual autonomy conjoin with the other part of autonomy, affective autonomy.

This is where idealism meets pragmatism – not ‘why’ you do something, but ‘how’ you do something.

Inspiring ideas that appeal to all three groups are unlikely to begin with the ‘me’ oriented Prospectors – less than 40% of the population – when most of the population is ‘we’ orientated.

Progressive is defined by the values of Pioneers and becomes part of the culture when adopted by Prospectors – and only become cultural values when eventually the Settlers adopt them.

The challenge to progressive thinkers is how to make these ideas and behaviours attractive to Prospectors. Understanding the Prospectors is crucial – and then requires Pioneers to be open to new ways of transferring progressive values to people unlike themselves. This is called the Wall of Transference – a wall that must be scaled - and that is a whole other subject by itself!



*Solving this issue is the way to turn a small step for a man into a giant leap for mankind.*