



Embedding Radical Innovations

Mainstreaming Water Sensitive Cities through Institutional Change

The Problem

Realisation of the Water Sensitive City vision relies on radically new innovations or technical approaches becoming widely accepted and adopted across industry as standard practice. But how does this happen? What factors influence this process?

This project explores how radical innovations (ie: fit-for-purpose supply or decentralised water treatment) go from being a novel or fringe idea to fully implemented across a sector and embedded as 'business as usual'. By examining this process of institutionalisation, we are seeking to offer practical guidance to government and industry on how to deliberately influence and steer the institutionalisation process to embed water sensitive innovations.

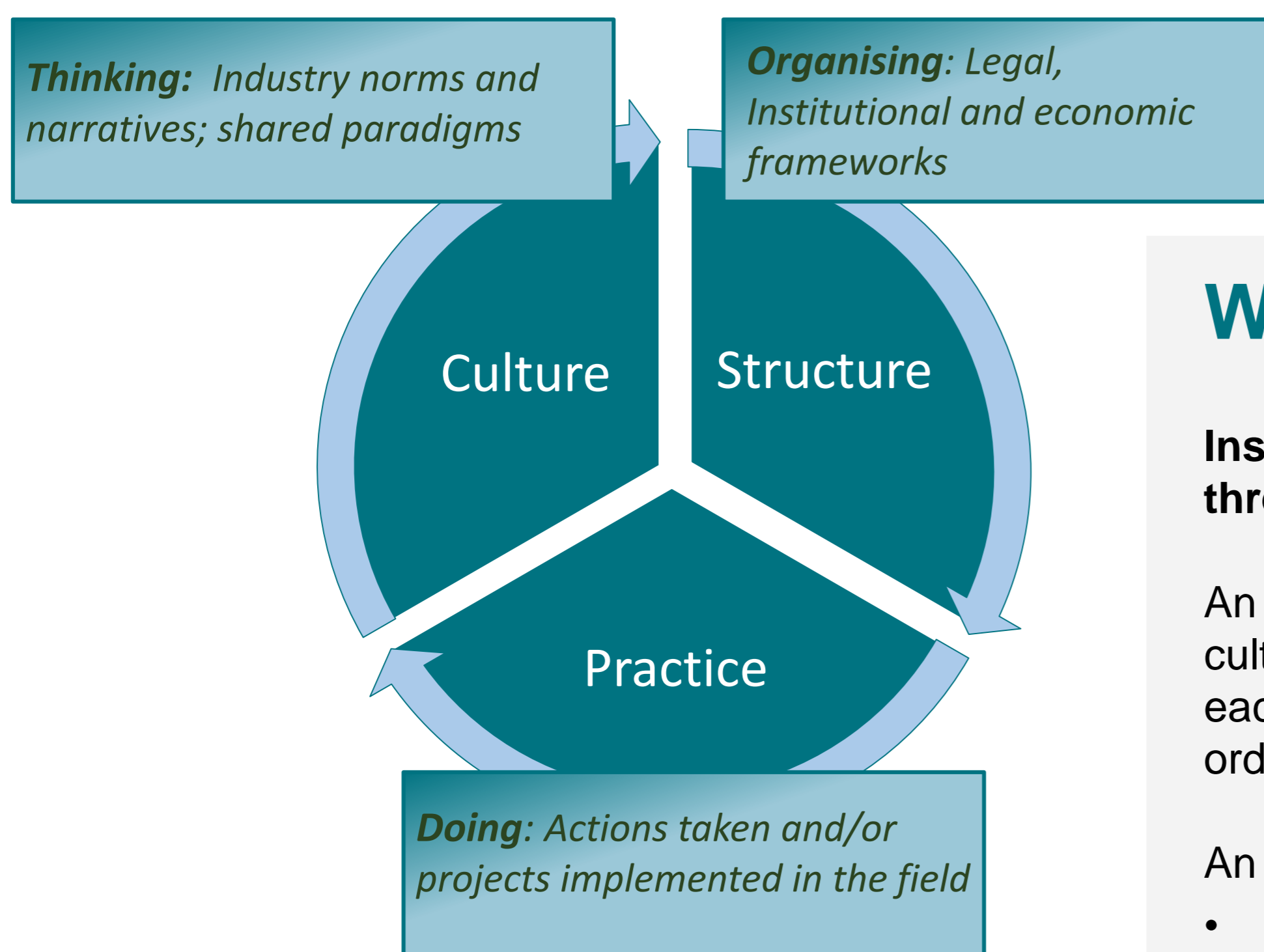


Figure 1: Domains of institutional change

When is a Practice Institutionalised?

Institutionalisation of a radical innovation requires change across three dimensions; culture, structure and practice.

An institutionalised innovation is one that is embedded in the dominant cultures, structures and practices of an industry (Fig 1). The change in each dimension needs to be complementary and mutually reinforcing in order to fully embed the innovation.

An innovation is taken to be institutionalised when:

- it is widely used within a sector; and
- has a foundation enabling it to persist.

The Results So Far

There is no single 'path to institutionalisation'. The institutionalisation process can unfold in a number of ways, giving government and industry leaders a choice of strategies when seeking to embed a radical innovation.

Culture-driven pattern: Focus is on establishing a strong narrative about the value of the new practice and capturing hearts and minds around a common vision. Uses informal methods of persuasion to build critical mass across a multi-stakeholder network.

Structure-driven pattern: Relies on deliberate and proactive engagement with regulatory and economic frameworks to grow a community of practice by incentivising or mandating the practice beyond the early adopters.

Practice-driven pattern: Focus is on demonstrating the value of the innovation, first through pilot projects and then widespread implementation of the new technology or approach, prior to the creation of a strong narrative or enabling regulatory framework.