

BABY STEPS...  
TO GIANT LEAPS.

An exploration of culture,  
innovation and sustainability  
from Vermillion Institute.



A young child, likely a toddler, stands on a sandy beach looking out at the ocean. The child is wearing a bright pink bucket hat and a blue dress with white trim. The child's hands are clasped behind their back. The ocean is visible in the background with gentle waves washing onto the shore. The sky is clear and blue.

We all care about ensuring that future generations have a high quality of life, and yet many people aren't sure what to do.

Because people have fundamentally believed that we must do *something* to increase sustainability, society has taken steps to improve for the past 20 years.

Unfortunately, they have only been *baby steps*.

Experts say that people take greater, *more confident* steps when they feel competent to do so safely. A lack of confidence is why society has never shifted from first gear — and why we still have *so far* to go.

Confident people feel greater motivation to make commitments and to stick to them.



It has been suggested that for sustainable development and alternative energy to gain momentum, it will require a strategy similar to the Apollo program.

Vermillion believes that's right.

But it's important to consider that a giant leap such as landing on the moon really happens as a series of confidence-building achievements.

**Sustainability is no different.**

A photograph of an astronaut in a white spacesuit with an American flag patch on the shoulder, standing on the dark, cratered surface of the moon. The astronaut's helmet visor reflects the lunar landscape. The background shows the vast, desolate terrain of the moon under a dark sky.

This presentation illustrates a series of *cultural shifts* that must accompany the *technological shifts* needed for the world to finally shift from first gear to second, second to third, and then third to fourth gear, resulting in a *giant* sustainability leap.

Vermillion believes the time will come when the world's *know how* has exploded and when culture-appropriate solutions are working as well in Miami as they are in Mumbai.

**Get ready for the ride.**



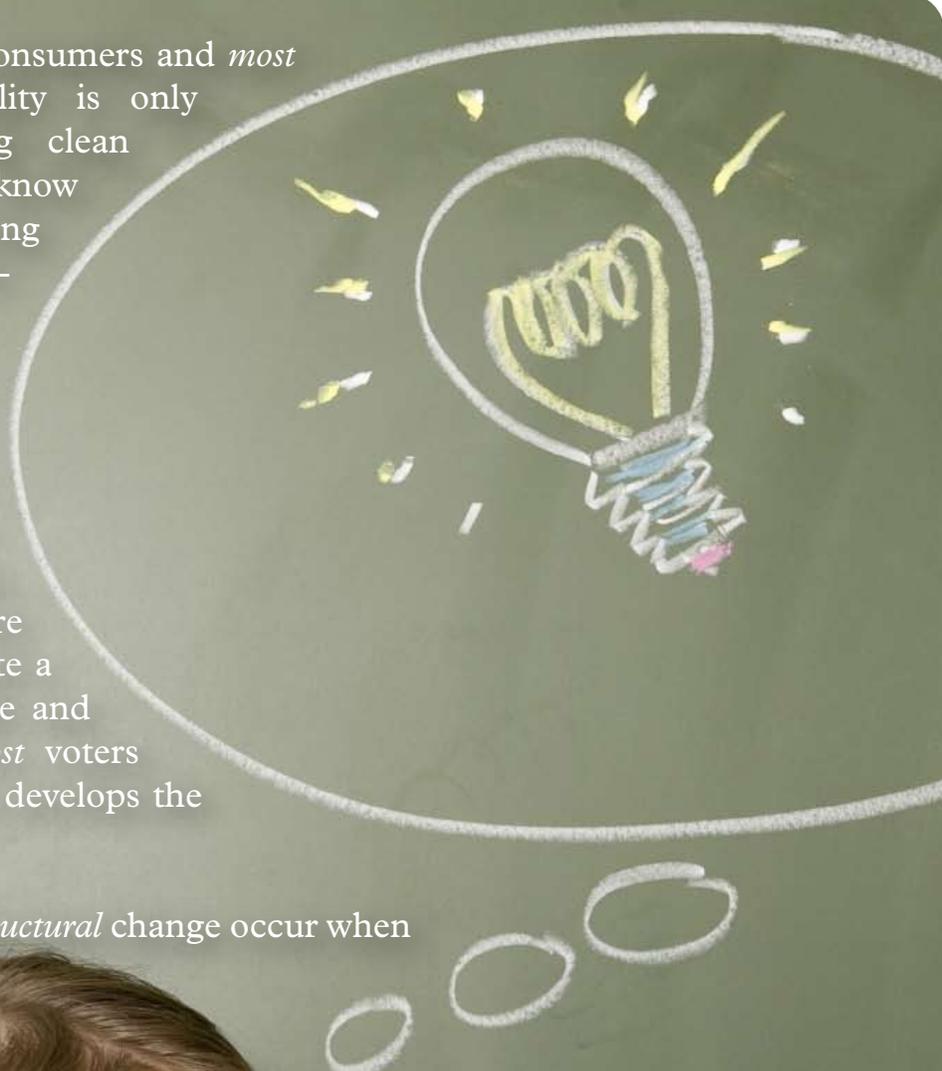
**First Gear** is when *most* consumers and *most* companies think sustainability is only about recycling and using clean energy. *Most* of them don't know that sustainability means caring for people, planet and prosperity.

*Most* don't know that there are reliable ways to compare the sustainability performance of various companies and that investment fund analysts can look at more than 90 indicators<sup>1</sup> to evaluate a company's impacts on people and planet. As things stand, *most* voters don't yet know sustainability develops the economy and creates jobs.

Think about this: How can *structural* change occur when *cultural* beliefs get in the way?

Guided by their conscience, some take steps towards sustainability and preferentially choose products and services from suppliers whom they believe hold similar values.

In first gear, organizations put "green" claims on recycled boxes - thinking that makes them leaders, but having few benchmarks to really know for sure.



<sup>1</sup> Learn more at [globalreporting.org](http://globalreporting.org)

**Second Gear** is when most people are confident that sustainability takes care of people and develops the economy so they expect to see their suppliers and employers constantly measuring and reducing adverse impacts.



At this stage there is widespread awareness in public and corporate circles about the need to report impacts on people and planet along accepted indicators.

Organizations will see validated sustainability reports as a further competitive advantage. Many will begin to use *current* year results as a reference points for the *following year's* improvements.

In second gear, to assist organizations in measuring, evaluating, and reporting performance, the market will provide a number of competing solutions.

As happened in the *dot com* boom, many solution providers will be ambitious and inexperienced, so business managers will need reliable sources for practical, industry-specific guidance.



Experts say that in times of profound turbulence, cooperation is the only way through.

**Third Gear** is when small and mid-sized organizations around the world strive to do even more...

Collaboration forums like The United Nations Global Compact and Business for Social Responsibility will see membership rolls exploding as it becomes conventional wisdom for companies and industries to pool collective efforts relating to innovation and sustainability.



As organizations begin to recognize the enormity of the challenges and the obstacles in pooling private Research and Development budgets, they will call on government to facilitate their efforts. Media campaigns will likely be initiated to build public support for market-based instruments and government incentives. There will be a need for a third-party platform to enable this kind of cooperation.

That's why Vermillion stimulates a global community of businesses, researchers, citizens and governments who share this vision as they learn and work together to achieve common goals. Issues are addressed within an innovative framework — creative ideas flow in from those that care, and reliable policies and solutions flow back out to businesses and the public.



**Fourth Gear** is when culture-appropriate solutions are working in both Singapore and Sydney. It's where directed investments and new services continually renew the middle class and keep world economics rolling.

Think about this:

- We are not going to just make a giant leap all the way from first gear to fourth gear.
- Getting there requires confidence and systems yet to be developed.



Vermillion Institute

Get involved! Be a trigger for progress in your community.  
And if you like our thinking, pick up the phone.

Vermillion is a non-partisan policy institute dedicated to advancing full-spectrum sustainability through research, multi-stakeholder engagement and modern communication design.

**We advance the vision that sustainability means caring for people, planet *and* prosperity** by delivering accurate, high-impact messages to key audiences. Our movement is fueled by people like you who are committed to accelerating innovation in sustainability.

Please join us.

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