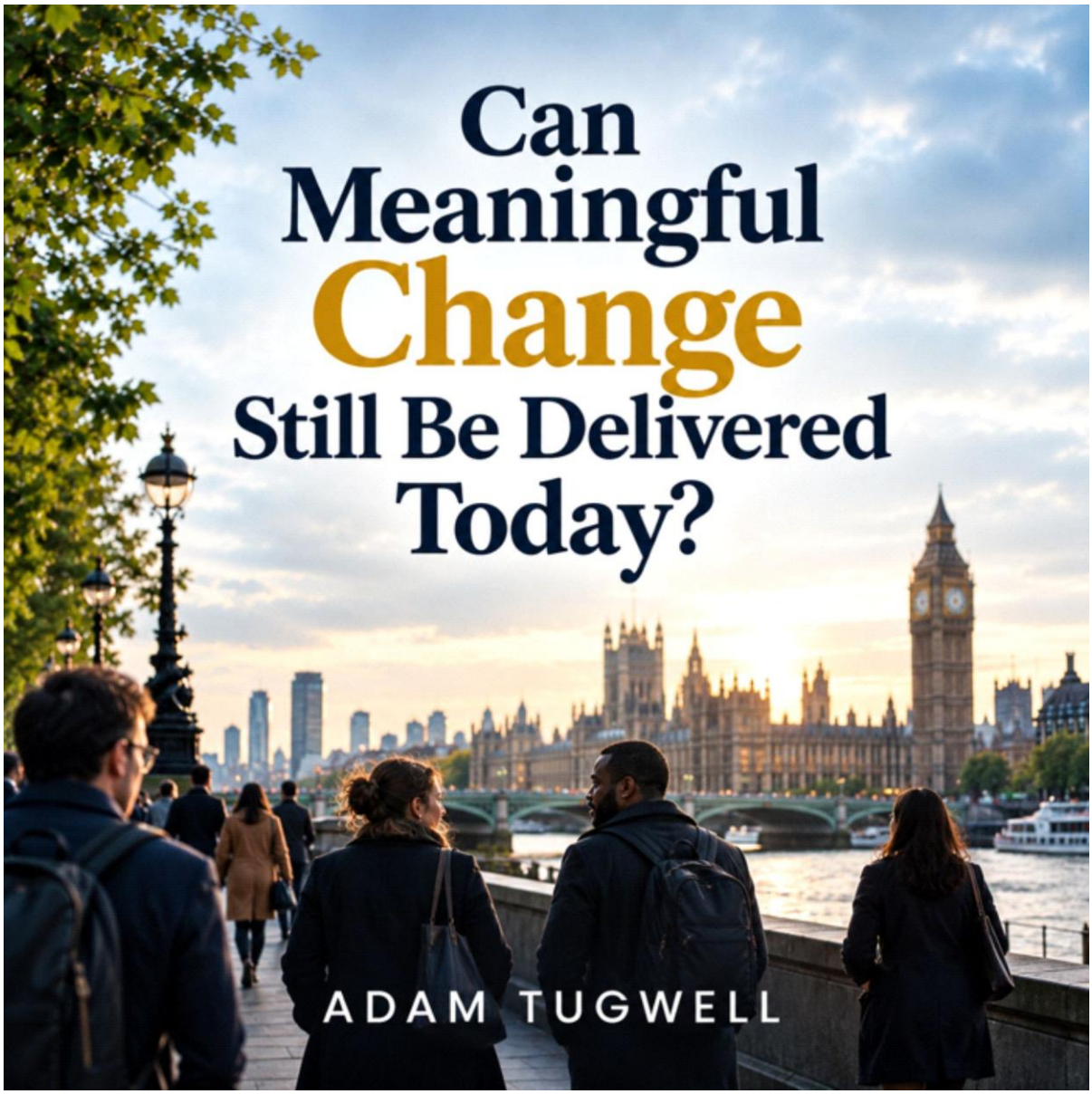
Reader's Crib Sheet

Can Meaningful Change Still Be Delivered Today?

Adam Tugwell | 1 November 2026



The Central Question

Can meaningful change still be delivered within the systems we already have today?

This book does not begin by asking what should replace existing systems.

It begins by asking whether meaningful improvements remain possible within them.

The Journey of the Inquiry

The inquiry follows a simple progression:

Looking for Meaningful Reform

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Cost Externalisation

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Human Value Externalisation

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Capability Externalisation

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The Role of Proxies

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Proxy Authority

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Proxy Sovereignty

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Judgement Displacement

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Authority and Responsibility

↓

Destination States

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Agency

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Returning to the Original Question

Core Concepts

Cost Externalisation

The transfer of consequences away from those responsible for creating them.

Key Question:

Who ultimately carries the cost?

Human Value Externalisation

The process through which important forms of human value become invisible to the systems intended to serve people.

Key Question:

What matters that is not being measured?

Capability Externalisation

The separation of genuine capability from the systems responsible for recognising or rewarding it.

Key Question:

Is capability being recognised, or merely its proxy?

Proxy

A representation used in place of direct observation of reality.

Examples:

- Targets
- Metrics
- Qualifications
- Indicators
- Reports

Key Question:

What is being represented?

Proxy Authority

The influence proxies acquire over decisions and behaviour.

Key Question:

What is actually driving decisions?

Proxy Sovereignty

The condition in which systems increasingly organise themselves around proxies rather than purpose.

Key Question:

Is the system serving its purpose, or its measures?

Judgement Displacement

The process through which human judgement becomes increasingly secondary to procedures, frameworks and representations.

Key Question:

Who is exercising judgement?

Agency

The practical ability of individuals and communities to influence outcomes affecting their lives.

Key Question:

Who has meaningful influence?

Destination States

Logical end points towards which existing incentives and behaviours tend to drive systems.

Key Question:

If current trends continue, where do they lead?

Five Questions To Ask About Any System

1. Who carries the costs?
2. What forms of value are visible and invisible?
3. What is being measured and what is being missed?
4. Where do authority and responsibility sit?
5. Who possesses meaningful agency?

What The Book Is

✓ An inquiry

✓ A framework for understanding

✓ A way of recognising recurring patterns

✓ An exploration of change, systems and agency

What The Book Is Not

✗ A manifesto

✗ A prediction

✗ An ideological argument

✗ A blueprint for a replacement system

The Question That Remains

Perhaps the deeper challenge is not accepting responsibility for others, but accepting the agency of others as equal to our own.

One-Sentence Summary

The book argues that many apparently unrelated problems may share common systemic dynamics, and that understanding those dynamics may be essential if meaningful change is to remain possible.

Further Information

To explore more of Adam Tugwell's writing, including the online edition of this post, please visit:
www.adamtugwell.blog

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