

3. MINDSET & THINKING

"I somehow think we've got to get out of this agricultural silo, which says the people don't understand farmers and farming, we're different. But that mindset is simply going to have to change. You've got to bring 1st class minds, you know, world class thinking if agriculture is going to prosper..." Jim Williams, CEO AgAnalyst Ltd

Mindset defines an individual's attitudes, assumptions and beliefs. Mindset shapes how they make sense of the world, their place in it and the situations, contexts, opportunities and challenges around them. Mindset influences behaviour, decision-making and willingness to respond to the situations we find ourselves in. Thinking is the series of active cognitive processes, used either by individuals or groups, that help us to make sense of the world. We use lots of verbs to describe thinking in this way – considering, analysing, evaluating, problematising, solving, imagining, reimagining and so on. Thinking can be constrained or free, structured or creative, deductive or intuitive, logical or emotional etc. Thinking is affected by the mindset but is different to the mindset. Both inform decision-making. Seth Godin, in his book 'Tribes'⁴⁹ states:

***"A crowd is a tribe without a leader. A crowd is a tribe without communication....
Crowds are interesting... but tribes are longer lasting and more effective."***

Steve Jobs (Apple), Bill Gates (Microsoft), Jeff Bezos (Amazon) created tribes. The rise of social media platforms creates, grows and reinforces tribes. In the agricultural context, the organic movement, the biodynamic movement, or the regenerative movement have all created tribes. Tribes use storytelling to create a culture, develop stories driving a sense of belonging,⁵⁰ and creating a zone of exclusion for those not in the tribe (Table 4). In seeking to drive change in the UK agricultural sector, recognising those intricacies of the 'zone of belonging' and the 'zone of exclusion' is critical (Figure 7), as well making positive choices to create collective zones of inclusion.

Tribes....

- Create and come together around symbols, rituals, rhythms and rote.
- Create leverage.
- Develop myths and stories over time and use storytelling to create a culture.
- Develop and maintain a sense of belonging for those in the tribe.
- Maintain a strong sense of identification, individualism within the tribe and interdependence.
- Remember, mentor, connect in a way teams do not.

But tribes also...

- Create boundaries between themselves and other groups.
- Develop and maintain a zone of exclusion for those not in the tribe.
- Renounce heretics if they are perceived as a danger.

Table 4. Characteristics of a 'tribe' (Adapted from Godin 2008; Robyn 2000)

Land-based communities are embedded in the land for generations. They know each other, are often related to each other and they form 'tribes.' These tribes have a strong sense of belonging. For them land is a place, not a space.⁵¹ Tribes create social identity. Tribes can be vibrant. But tribes can lose forward direction, lose vibrancy, get stuck and arbitrarily reject new thinking. Tribes can listen to other members of the tribe more than the voices from outside, creating an 'echo' chamber.⁵² Tribes occur not just in agriculture but also in government, the civil service, the food supply chain, food service and consumers. Tribes are everywhere.

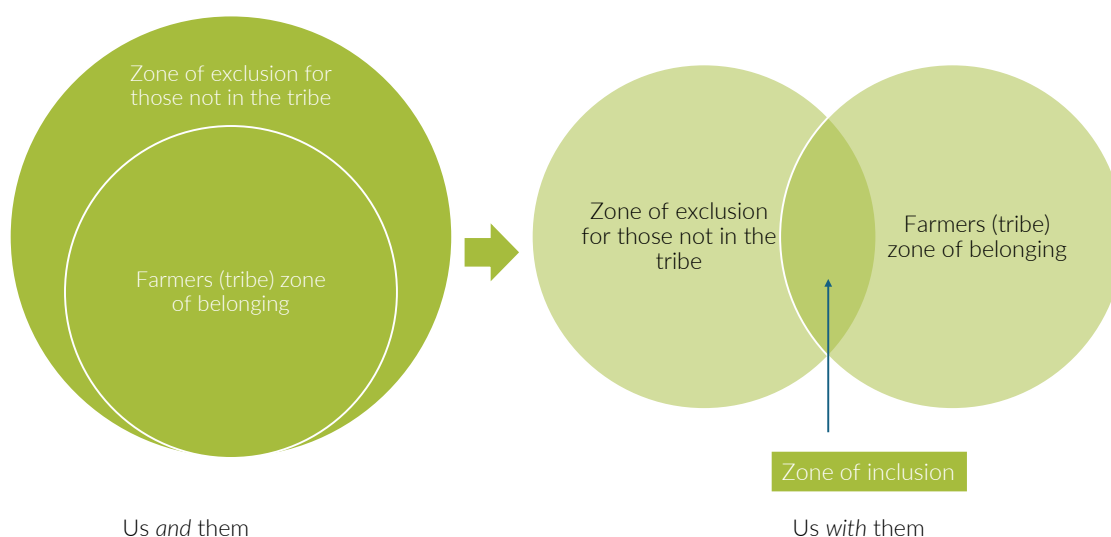


Figure 7. Tribes, their zones of belonging, exclusion and inclusion.

Family farming businesses are highly socially leveraged, with a legacy of responsibility to and duty towards previous generations who have spent their lives working the land and a legacy of thinking which can create a drag on change. The mindset of the 'agricultural tribe' and the need now for this to evolve came up often in the discussions around whether farming is a lifestyle, a business, a profession and whether this drives inclusion or exclusion of new talent and new thinking. Another discussion suggested that there needed to be a mindset shift to bring into the sector people who have got a view of the world outside of agriculture, people who understand the environment, people who understand technology, people who understand geopolitical relationships. One respondent stated that current mindset in government too creates inertia and that there needed to be more trust from government that farmers could and would deliver. Thus, in terms of social identity individuals may find themselves interacting with a series of tribes with different mindsets, thinking and variability in their perceptions of the other tribes.

Creating trust between these groups, reducing barriers to engagement and promoting better collaborative working and innovation is essential. A social zone of inclusion is the social space that is created where individuals feel recognised and valued (becoming), feel they are legitimate members of the group (belonging); feel they are able to participate fully in the activities of the group (access); feel that they have a voice (agency) and that any differences are recognised and accepted (trust). As one discussion addressed, these zones of inclusion need inter-tribal thinking shifting from "us and them" to "us with them" (see Figure 7). The UK agricultural sector also contains sub-tribes often driven by social identity and also self-identity (see Section 4). Mindset, as has been previously stated, informs thinking and three mindsets emerged from the discussions given the current place that UK agriculture finds itself in. These were: the doomloop mindset, the drawbridge mindset and the growth opportunity-driven mindset (Table 5).

The doomloop mindset is characterised by focusing on short-term rather than long-term strategy, making decisions based on fear and lack of trust in others, shaped by mechanisms of accountability and regulatory controls and systems. The doomloop mindset is based on the belief that UK agriculture is doomed e.g. the farm asset value is too high to be internationally competitive, government policy limits opportunities for the future for agricultural businesses in the UK, everyone in the farming community is too risk averse, too old, too stuck in their ways, too stubborn to embrace change.

The drawbridge mindset is seeking to avoid, block-out or insulate an individual or a business from the challenges and concerns around you. The drawbridge mindset prevents businesses from being able to grasp opportunities. Raising the drawbridge leads to an organisational focus on the operational rather than the strategic running of the business, disengaging from changes and trends and the opportunities that can arise and to having a fixed or adverse approach to risk. In one conversation it was summarised as the mindset that arose from planning for one sort of regime when another was now in place. This required different plans and greater agility especially when there was policy change.

The opportunity-driven mindset is one triggered by confidence and curiosity, on the lookout for opportunities and being open to risk taking. One discussion led to a great example of this:

"I was judging a Farmer of the Year competition and this guy who won was just amazing. He was constantly seeing opportunities and grabbing them and, you know, taking his farm forward. And I said to his wife, does his antennae ever stop buzzing? And she said, no. But he was a guy that even if he was at a social function, he'd talk to someone about something, spark a thought there and off he goes. But he just had that ability to constantly be basically trawling the environment, seeing what was out there, thinking about what could be useful. And that is a skill that does have to be developed. If you've lived in a protectionist society, you haven't had to do that, because there was no point. You know, all you were doing was filling in the forms for Brussels or whatever, but now you're saying, actually.... now, maybe there is a real opportunity." Nicola Shadbolt

Thinking	Opportunity Driven	Drawbridge	Doomloop
Triggered by	Confidence, curiosity	Concern	Fear, negativity
Reaction	Adaptive	Avoidant, block-out, insulate	Defensive, resist, isolate
Outcome	Opportunity	Disengagement	Decline
Risk appetite	Open to risk taking	Fixed, risk averse	Negative, risk averse

Table 5. Types of mindsets that emerged from the discussions

Three aspects of sub-optimal mindset and thinking emerged in the discussions about UK agriculture: negative thinking, shallow thinking and vested thinking (Table 6). These reinforce the doomloop and the drawbridge mindsets and if the sector is seeking to move to being more opportunity-driven then the businesses and the mindset and thinking of the individuals who lead them need to change. The impact of these mindsets was summed up in one discussion:

"Yeah, it's just that bravery of thought, isn't it? And being able to take on vested interests and thinking.... It's a combination of madness and thick skin and brilliance. And that's the bit that needs cutting through, because British farming is so business as usual. It's outrageous and yet we're all standing and going 'Something's going to change. Something's got to give.' And there's not a bit of that thinking out there as far as I can see, really as an outsider, and I do

feel like an outsider now as I spend more time out of the UK than I do in it, but there's so much opportunity...." Richard Counsell, CEO Stable

	Mindset	Thinking
Negative	A mindset where the individual tends to focus on the negative aspects of a situation, is critical of potential opportunities, tends to anticipate negative outcomes, or engage in negative 'self-talk.	A negative mindset can lead to bounded thinking where the decision-making is based on the goldilocks principle of worse-worse-worst. Negative thinking can also lead to low aspirations in terms of goal-setting, driving a cycle of low expectations and low levels of performance i.e. 'survive not thrive'.
Shallow	A mindset where the attitudes and beliefs are based on limited and superficial perspectives and assumptions, experiences or knowledge.	A way of thinking that is superficial and does not explore issues deeply, nor underlying causes or assumptions. Shallow thinking only considers issues and makes decisions based on a limited perspective. Shallow thinking focuses on what's familiar and comfortable rather than what is more uncomfortable and challenging i.e. 'what not why'.
Vested	A mindset where in a certain situation either individuals or organisations have a strong interest in ensuring specific outcomes are delivered. This could include a strong interest in maintaining the status quo and/or resisting change.	An approach to problem-solving that is driven by vested interest. Vested interest can bias decision-making to focus on the 'me not we.'

Table 6. Sub-optimal thinking

Another described the lethargy in the sector:

"I would say that sort of mental lethargy doesn't just extend to farmers. It extends to their advisers very often, who are the second or third son or daughter of a farming family, where the 1st one has inherited the business and they want to work in the business, but not on the business, so they end up being an agronomist or they work for a machinery dealer. So again, the agricultural supply industry is a big part of the problem. It's partly a political problem and it's partly a mindset problem. They very often employ people because they come from a farm and that is the thinking we need to completely change." Jim Williams

Having effective leadership as a sector and as individuals came up in another discussion:

"I see seven leadership traits that all the leaders have, and courage and vision are the two on top. You've got to have a vision and you've got to have the courage to push it through. It's easy to be glib about the word courage, because true leaders have just got that, because they don't have to be rude or angry. But they do have courage. So I think our issue with the leadership at the moment across the nation is that you've got to make your own mind up first of all about what you think is right, and that can take ages, and it also takes a particularly intelligent brain to come up with a vision that



is going to be successful. And then you've got to stick to it, irrespective of what people say. I mean, it's the whole thing. We're in a mess." Robert Shepherd, Chair Environmental Farmers Group

The discussions not only reflected on mindset and thinking but also on identity. Whilst a specific mindset informs your thinking, social identity that is built around who you are, your values and your beliefs is also important. Tribes are about social identity. Social identity reinforces rules, behaviours and ways of acting. Social identity can create a sense of belonging, but also a sense of responsibility and duty and is reinforced by beliefs and values that farmers hold as a collective group that they need to feed the nation and are custodians of the land for the nation.

Mindset and thinking summary

- Mindset and thinking inform decision-making.
- The farming sector is a tribe amongst tribes. People identify with tribes when the tribal values align with their own. This makes it difficult to stand apart from or leave a tribe.
- Tribes can lose direction, vibrancy and arbitrarily reject new thinking. Tribes can create an 'echo' chamber.
- Drawbridge, doomloop, vested, negative and shallow mindsets stifle growth and change. Opportunity-driven mindsets focus on positive outcomes and are triggered by confidence and curiosity.