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Achieving Carbon Reduction
Learning from stories of vision, chance and determination

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Abstract

A rationale for exploring examples of where carbon reduction has occurred is presented as being potentially valuable and complementary to streams of research that focus on the many barriers there are to decarbonising our society. Research being carried out on this basis as part of the Carbon Vision, Lowcarbonworks program is described. The value of a narrative-based approach is discussed as a way to get past some of the challenges that can be implicit in using purely analytical or conventional case analysis where the mess of human encounter, serendipity and emotion can simply disappear from the account. Drawing on an action research methodology called Learning History, research centred in Local Government in the UK is exploring ways to evoke accounts that are at once highly individual yet also serve the purpose of celebrating, amplifying and inspiring others to undertake actions in their own locale. A short illustrative example of the approach using an excerpt from one of the 5 Learning Histories featured in the research is offered. It is the story of how an innovative piece of low carbon policy, the Merton Rule, came into being. One of the key moments of the story relates to the adventures of a cat called Randolph. Implications of the approach are briefly considered.

Keywords

Local Government
Innovation
Carbon Reduction
Learning History
Narrative
Story
Serendipity
Action Research
The Merton Rule
Best Practice
Randolph
Collaborative Inquiry
Organisational Change

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1. Introduction: Placing this Research

A 'big issue'

At the start of the millennium the UK government set a target of a 60% cut in carbon emissions on 1990 levels by the year 2050. It seemed an ambitious target at the time. As scientific reports have become ever starker (ACIA 2005; IPCC 2007), there have been recent calls to increase this target to between 80-90% in order to avoid a temperature increase of 2°C or above (Bows, Mander et al. 2006).Whatever the exact figures, the message is unequivocal: a rapid decarbonisation of our society needs to be a central part of the next great transformation.

However decarbonisation is not occurring in step with the increased awareness and understanding of the problem. Technologies that can reduce carbon are available, yet they are not being as widely used as they could be. In 2006 the Lowcarbonworks project was set up to better understand this anomaly and, through action research, in some way to address it. The project rested on the assumption that the barriers to carbon reduction are rarely technological; rather they are sociological, organisational and psychological.

Action research is well placed both ideologically and practically to engage with these kinds of problems. It is an orientation of research that concentrates on issues of practical significance within a wider aspiration to contribute to both the wellbeing of humankind and "*the wider ecology of the planet of which we are an intrinsic part"* (Reason and Bradbury 2008(1)). However action research that grapples directly with problems such as climate change is less prevalent in the literature than one might expect[1]. The emphasis has been more on the development of new processes, practices and knowledge that challenge and re-vision the world as we know it today. However with growing concerns about the state of our world, the action research community has recently challenged itself to engage more directly with the '*big issues of our time*' of which climate change is one (Reason and Bradbury 2008(2)). The Lowcarbonworks project was set up in part as a response to that challenge.

This paper describes the evolution of a stream of research within Lowcarbonworks called the Learning History project. This project is looking particularly at how action research and more mainstream research methods and theories of organisational change and innovation might come together to (a) help understand the anomalous lack of carbon reduction in the face of technological solutions being available and (b) help address this by introducing a learning process that brings action research ideas – for instance about participation and narrative - together with ideas from qualitative research. As a piece of action research this work represents a bridge between research disciplines that has been underexplored. There has traditionally been an understandable reluctance in action research to draw on mainstream research whilst simultaneously seeking to critique, question and distinguish itself from it[2]. However it has been pointed out that in the generation of practical change, action research now needs to develop "*platforms of co-*

[1] See for example the Handbook of Action Research 2nd edition (Reason and Bradbury 2008)
[2] The relationship between action research and mainstream research is discussed on page 4 of (Reason and Bradbury 2008)(1)

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operation" with other research disciplines (Gustavsen quoted in Reason and Bradbury 2008(2), p697). In this project one such platform is developed.

In Section 2, the notion of 'change' for technology-based carbon reduction is explored in the light of some of the relevant organisational literature. On this basis, a rationale for developing new ways of learning and communicating about innovative carbon reduction is developed. In Section 3, the Learning History process is introduced as one such new and complementary way of spreading learning. At the heart of the paper lies an illustrative story drawn from one of the Learning Histories created by the research. This story is told in Section 4, partly using the form of a Learning History. It tells how an innovative piece of low carbon policy known as the Merton Rule came into being. Section 5 concludes with some wrap-up comments on the value of this research together with some reflections.

Section 2: 'change' and The Next Great Transformation

The three questions of change.

How might the next great transformation to a decarbonised society come about? The question can be answered tritely with the response – "stop what we are doing" and "do something else". Though simplistic, many discussions of change, including, as we'll see later theoretical ones, do build on this simple "stop-start" model that implies a problem needing to be solved. Consider discussions one might hear about climate change and energy. We need to "stop" using fossil-fuel based energy sources and "start" using low and zero carbon alternatives.

However as soon as the problem is posed, and, as a society we start to respond, it could be argued that the transformation has actually started. The question becomes not about how will this transformation be made to happen, but rather how do we ride the one that is already underway. Where will it go? And within that, decisions about change become three-pronged: what to stop, what to start and what to continue.

The latter question of "what should we continue doing" is more reflective and appreciative. Against the backdrop of an apparently slowly responding society, in some places, great strides have been made. Take renewable energy supply. Wind power now meets 20% of Denmark's energy needs and across Europe, in 2006, the installed capacity of wind power increased by 23% to an all-time high[3]. Newer technologies are gaining ground too. At the time of writing, October 2007, preparations are underway for the launch of the world's first wave farm off the coast of Portugal. And there's also progress in how energy is being used. In the Netherlands, an estimate of 50% of its electricity now comes from combined heat and power. By harnessing the heat produced as a by-product of power generation, the amount of usable energy that is available from the process can effectively be doubled and there are quite a few examples of where this has been

[3] Source: The Guardian, October 1st 2007, "Portugal gambles on 'sea snakes' providing an energy boost

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successfully done: e.g. Rotterdam in the Netherlands, Avidor in Denmark and closer to home, Southampton and Woking, in the UK.

Projects such as these are valuable resources in marking our way into the future. They represent a way forward, something we want to continue doing, what some have called "a bubble of the future in the present."[4]The research described in this paper has been looking particularly at these 'bubbles of the future' and questioning how these might in some way inform the changes that we are trying to make.

The logic or the vision of change?

Overall there are increasing numbers of projects that demonstrate capability in reducing carbon and yet the spread of this capability to other places seems slow. Though well known and mostly well documented, cases of successful carbon reduction have often been difficult to recreate elsewhere. Why is this?

Much of organisational development theory has been built on the *"surprisingly durable"* Lewinian notion of change as a process of "unfreeze-change-freeze" akin to the "stop-start" process I described earlier (Weick and Quinn 1999). Such a view suggests that thorny problems of change can be addressed in quite a logical, stepwise way and literature and practice alike have reflected that view over the years. Change programs can be 'rolled out'. People need to simply be told to change. Once given the information, they will rationally process it and act accordingly. Others have pointed out that there is a fallacy in the belief that change can be made to happen in this way (Beer, Eisenstat et al. 1990). Humans have bounded rationality (Simon 1957). They make decisions not based on all the information available but rather on patterns of past experience (Klein 1998). Individuals, social and organisational groups are locked-in by entrained patterns of thought (Snowden 2006), organisationally derived routines of behaviour (Staw, Sandelands et al. 1981; Miller 1994; Feldman 2003; Gilbert 2005) and fixed constructions of reality that culminate in a robust framework that guides society and is held quite firmly in place by social, political and technological norms. Some call this a regime (Kemp, Schot et al. 1998) and such a perspective goes some way to explaining the maintenance of our world as we know it – ordered and familiar – held together by collective common practice. The word 'regime' conveys the size of the challenge when it comes to tackling climate change. The forgoing analysis suggests that the lack of organisational and societal change toward decarbonisation, frustrating though it may be, could be viewed more realistically as the norm rather than as the anomaly.

It suggests too that a logical, linear view of change may not be sufficient when it comes to communicating about and replicating the acclaimed change initiatives that do occur. A typical logical explanation of how a successful carbon-reduction project came about may gloss over or omit altogether the particularities. Each individual case will include a different set of highs and lows, twists and turns and chancy moments. When taken into

[4] This term I owe to practitioners at International Futures Forum who use a framework they call "three horizon thinking" to describe the different mindsets that can co-exist in a climate of transformation. It assumes we are in a time when first horizon thinking is prevailing but that we need to move to a third-horizon mindset. Third-horizon thinking manifesting in the present they argue leads to a 'bubble of the future in the present'

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account these particularities imply change happens in a complex, non-linear and somewhat unplanned way. It might be called a 'visionary' as opposed to a 'logical' view of change where change is less controlled but not random. It is steered according to the individual's vision in combination with unfolding events as opposed to executed as a series of logically connected steps in accordance with a set plan.

The Learning History research project had two starting assumptions: first that places where change initiatives for carbon reduction have broken through the organisational barriers to be successful are the anomaly and worthy of study; and second that the visionary, human story of change has a relevance on a par with more logical, factual accounts. In other words there is rich informative ground to be covered by visiting and indeed revelling in the messy, individual terrain from which these successes have sprung.

Examples of 'Bubbles in the future' in Local Government

The research commenced by trying to find examples of where significant carbon reduction had been achieved – directly or indirectly. A wide-ranging set of possible examples were gathered. Two examples in particular were frequently cited as breaking the mould. These were Woking Local Authority where, by 2004, carbon emissions had been slashed by up to 77%[5] on 1990 levels. The second example was the Beddington Zero Energy Development (BedZED) in Surrey – a housing development that had been heralded as the UK's first carbon-neutral eco-community.

Looking more closely at the iconic examples of Woking, the research started to probe the influence and impact of what had happened there. In so doing, other examples started to emerge that painted a picture of innovative happenings dispersed sparsely across local government in the UK. Five of these examples were ultimately featured in the research. Just down the road from Woking, in the London borough of Merton, a groundbreaking piece of policy had gone through that would strongly favour renewable technology. Whilst in the northern town of Huddersfield, a street previously described as 'death row'[6] had been replaced by sawtooth-roofed, timberclad, solar panelled eco-houses. In the formerly coal-dependent, metropolitan borough of Barnsley, biomass from local woodwaste was supplying increasing amounts of heat to council offices and housing. The initiative was putting them on track to meet the government 2050 targets of 60% carbon reduction by 2010. In Nottingham, a declaration to tackle climate change had been created and over half the Local Authorities in the country had joined in to voluntarily sign it. And finally in Southampton, a district energy scheme was estimated to be saving some 11,000 tonnes of CO_2 annually for commercial and public sector clients.

Such examples are well known to other Local Authorities and yet a common response tends to be 'that could never happen here'. This is not a throwaway response. In each case, there were highly specific conditions that enabled something innovative to happen. Yet we have argued earlier that the particularities of the context and the individuals involved are important. To push these specifics aside limits the potential of the case to

[5] On the council's own estate.

[6] so called by locals because of a number of violent crimes that had taken place there.

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inform and inspire us. Recent government-commissioned research into the UK government's Beacon scheme for the transfer of knowledge and learning within Local Government would appear to concur. In a systematic and extensive review of the literature on organisational learning and knowledge, researchers at Warwick University highlighted the importance of context to the learning process:

> *"The embedded and contextualized nature of much knowledge requires a consideration of how learning is shared without being de-contextualised and losing significance"(Rashman, Withers et al. 2008)*

They noted too the need for participation in the learning process recommending consideration of "*forums for interaction, where practitioners can engage with each other and develop learning relationships (idem)"*.

From here some interesting questions arise and it is around these that this research is organised:

Important Questions

- **How can we learn from places where there has been significant Carbon Reduction?**
- **What are the key lessons to be learned from the experience of those involved?**
- **Does achieving carbon reduction require a new way of working or learning?**
- **How relevant are moments of chance and opportunity in achieving change?**
- **Are there new ways to join-up such successes and increase their impact?**

3. The Learning History approach

Introducing Learning History.

Learning History is an action research practice that fitted well to these questions as well as to Rashman et al's earlier recommendations on learning. It is a relatively new action research approach that has been developed to deepen the learning from innovative groups and to support the diffusion of learning to other groups and organisations (Roth and Bradbury 2008). Roth and Kleiner at MIT's Society for Organizational Learning coined the term "Learning History" and pioneered the approach to explore how the learning from a highly performing team within a large automobile-manufacturing organisation might be assessed and used in the training of other teams (Roth and Kleiner, 1998). It was further developed by Hilary Bradbury in her doctoral work at the Swedish environmental NGO[7], the Natural Step (Bradbury 2001). Other researchers have worked on Learning Histories in a number of different educational and organisational settings, predominantly with a view to increasing the performance and learning of the team and/or organisation

[7] Non-governmental organisation

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involved. For this research it offered an exciting new avenue. Its specific potential for learning about carbon reduction had not been explored; it had not been used much in the UK[8] and not at all in the Public Sector.

Crucially, as the name suggests, a Learning History is a story-based approach. By including the messiness of human endeavour, the potential for learning from others' experiences and contexts is retained. Thus the logic of 'visionary' change with all the complexity of chance, swerving intentions and particularity can be explored through the accounts. Roth and Kleiner suggested that the potential for learning in any situation is increased if one has access to the '*thinking, experimentation and arguments of those who have encountered the same situation*' (Roth and Kleiner 1998). They proposed Learning History as a way of getting beyond distilled best practice guides that imply change as a linear sequence of carefully executed cause and effect.

By adopting this approach, the examples of carbon reduction could be examined in a new way that would have value for participants and that would get away from the dehumanised focus of the more commonly used factual studies. It was adopted too in full awareness of some of the trappings of various narrative approaches. Such trappings include sanitized "Janet & John" accounts (Snowden 2001) where protagonists behave in idealised ways akin to the characters in primary school readers. Another is the trap of the heroic victory narrative where a myth arises around one person in the account thus excluding the possibility for any non-hero to do anything similar. A third challenge is what Snowden has called retrospective coherence (Snowden 2004) where looked at from the perspective of now, all actions seem to be have mindfully taken in the service of achieving 'now'. When this happens, chance, luck and serendipity are not acknowledged and everything reverts to the logical view of change as a sequence of well-planned and controllable steps.

The Process of creating a Learning History.

The Learning History starts with reflective interview(s) with those close to the case being studied. Interview data is both analysed thematically and used to shape a written narrative of what happened. The voices of the participants are included in the history as direct quotes. This keeps the narrative close to the original experience and brings it to life for the reader. In the history the researcher reflects and comments on the narrative, and, using standard qualitative techniques, notes themes and makes links to theory. It is then a 'jointly told tale' (Van Maanen 1998) between the insider(s) (protagonist) and the outsider researcher(s) (Bartunek and Louise 1996).

As with other forms of action research, knowledge based on rational argument and analysis is not privileged over other kinds of presentational knowing such as art, poetry, or story[9]. The thematic analysis that makes up part of a Learning History is therefore offered rather than advocated – unlike other forms of qualitative research. It takes its

[8] One UK-based example was a Learning History of the collaborative relationship between Shell (UK and Nigeria) and the NGO Living Earth (Shah 2001)

[9] This refers to the idea of 'many ways of knowing' or 'the extended epistemology' that underpins action research. For a more discussion of this see (Heron and Reason 1997)

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place alongside photos, story, comments and reflections. The result is an accessible, engaging account that works on multiple levels. According to the reader's interests, situation and indeed preferred mode of working he/she can pick on the elements of the account that may be relevant to her/him whilst ignoring others.

Learning History in this research: Institutional and Participative

There are a number of ways in which this research is developing Learning History further as a practice. First whereas previously it has been charting the learning relating to a single initiative or team within one or at most two organisations, here Learning History is being applied at the institutional level. The featured Histories (described in Section 2) are drawn from 5 different UK Local Government organisations. Rather than garner multiple perspectives on one organisationally centred story, a set of individual Histories across several organisations is being created. Each individual History is based on just one or two perspectives close to the case. There is no pretence of 'truth' or attempt to arrive at one agreed definitional account with these partial Histories. There is instead a presumption that a story well told stands on its own merits and has the potential for learning. The 5 individual learning histories together represent many perspectives and say something overall about how carbon reduction comes about in the wider institutional setting of Local Authorities. This is the central storyline of learning this research is seeking to chart.

In this research the learning for third parties across the field of endeavour (in this case carbon reduction in Local Government) is particularly being emphasized and being sought through participative processes. This distinguishes the approach here from other incarnations of Learning History where the learning of participants directly or closely involved with the organisation in question has been the primary concern. This emphasis relates to the earlier question about 'joining up' successes and increasing their impact. In 1:1 and small group settings, participants who want to make changes in their organisations are actively reading the Histories and exploring the relevance of these to their own situations. The 5 examples of carbon reduction in Local Authorities that previously stood alone in separate organisational contexts are now being linked by the research. At a forthcoming workshop individuals featured in the Learning Histories will come together with interested third parties who are connected in some way to the central inter-organisational storyline. Together they will work with the Learning Histories, and by sharing their own stories and experience they will explore jointly how carbon reduction in Local Authorities might be achieved. It is important then to understand that the Learning History is as much a process as it is an 'output'. The Learning History document is designed to be a vehicle for an ongoing collaborative process that hopes to create new enabling links, be they relational, cognitive or otherwise in a field that needs to respond as quickly as it can to the challenge of climate change.

Section 4: An Illustration of a Learning History

An illustration: The Merton Rule

So what does a Learning History actually look like? In the remainder of this article, by taking the Merton Rule as an example– I illustrate the approach. The significance of the

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Merton Rule as an innovation for carbon reduction is first explained. This is the official account that is known in the public domain. Then the personal narrative in the Learning History that covers the early years is summarised. This highly abbreviated version follows events as the policy moved from an idea to something more concrete. It sets the scene then for a key excerpt from the Learning History itself.

The excerpt is intended to show the form and feel of a Learning History. Its appearance in this paper, despite all this lead-in may appear disjointed and is somewhat against the ethos of the History process. The particular extract I have include does touch on one of the questions relating to how 'visionary change' mentioned in section 2 namely: *what is the role that chance plays when trying to innovate for carbon reduction and how do we work with it*? The story of the Merton case is about how a group of determined individuals effected quite a major change in the system. The story involved moments of synchronicity and one such moment is highlighted in the excerpt. Without the rest of the narrative however this theme is being 'shown' here rather than being proposed as a source of learning.

Learning History developed at Merton.

The learning history of Merton is the first created by this research. It was developed based on one key interview with principle environment officer for Merton, Adrian Hewitt, together with secondary interviews with two others peripherally involved. Perspectives from 3rd parties impacted or directly involved are now being invited in response to the history. As cautioned earlier, the narrative presented in the Learning History is based on one or two perspectives of actors close to the case. There is no claim that it represents 'the truth' of the case, rather it is one person's truth from which it is believed there is much value to be had. The scene-setting and subsequent extract below is presented on that basis.

The Significance of the Merton Rule

In October 2003, the London Borough of Merton won approval to include in its Unitary Development Plan[10] a groundbreaking piece of policy stipulating that all major new housing and commercial developments[11] must have provision to generate at least 10% of their projected CO_2[12] emissions from on-site renewable energy sources. The policy, which subsequently became known as "The Merton Rule", immediately started to make itself felt not only in Merton, but in Local Authorities up and down the country, many of whom started to look at adopting Merton-type rules of their own.

This gathering momentum received a further boost when, in June 2006, a ministerial statement was issued stating that Local Authorities would now be *expected* to include

[10] The unitary development plan, known as the UDP sets out the land use plan for a local authority. Updated every 10 years, it goes through a 2 year cycle of consultation before being approved by the Ministry of Planning. Once approved, the Local Authority gets its planning delivery grant.

[11] Major for Housing developments is more than 10 buildings or exceeding 0.5 HA. For other developments > 1 Hectare. For exact definition see http://www.themertonrule.org/what-is-the-merton-rule

[12] The original wording stated that 10% of projected '*energy*'. This however has now been changed to Carbon as this recognizes the additional carbon costs of grid versus local generation.

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such a statement in their UDP. By the end of 2006, approximately 130 of the country's 420 local authorities are actively progressing such a rule. Should all Local Authorities adopt it, the boost to investment in renewable energy is estimated to be in the region of £1.5bn[13].

Setting the Scene: Synopsis of Merton Learning History 2000 - 2003

In early 2000, keen to reduce carbon in some way and aware of successes in the neighbouring Borough of Woking, a couple of policy officers at Merton put quite a radical statement about renewable energy in their draft UDP. The statement they included was the early form of the Merton Rule. They knew it was an ambitious statement. Their bosses did too and some were resistant to it - but there was not much to lose – so it was allowed to go through. After all the subsequent period of consultation would surely weed it out.

Inevitably, during the two-year consultation, objections were raised. The Chartered Institute of Professional Developers was planning a new building in the area and saw the statement as a threat. Central Government also objected. The statement they argued was out of scope. It was a matter for building regulations not for planning.

When the plan went for approval at the end of the consultation period, in what was perceived as a significant stroke of luck, the inspector assigned to the case was not of the institution but somewhat outside it. A young, recently appointed New Zealander swept the objections aside and said the statement was perfectly in line with the Government 2050 target of 60% reduction in CO_2. And so in 2002, to the delight of the team at Merton, the UDP was returned with the statement more or less approved subject to some minor adjustments. The UDP would now go through a further year of consultation at the end of which, in October 2003, it would be sent to the Ministry for Planning and Housing[14] for final approval.

Excited by this success, the group at Merton commenced an active campaign to broaden the scope of this piece of policy. In their local pub they met and discussed a draft wording that could be used more widely in other UDPs. With Merton's cycle 2 years ahead of most other Boroughs, the timing was just right. They contacted their opposite numbers in boroughs around London and got *'this buzz going'*[15]. The extent of support for the idea surprised them. Many Local Authorities were keen to sign up and, in addition, a key alliance started to form with a commercial supplier of solar equipment - solarcentury and the Green Alliance – an environmental lobbying NGO[16]. They started to speak at conferences around the country, proselytizing this policy and reassuring other Local Authorities that they too could do this.

[13] Estimate from interview data.

[14] Located at the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) at the time.
[15] A direct quote from the interview.
[16] Non-governmental organisation

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This campaigning was done in the shadow of strong messages from central office that the Merton's UDP would not be approved. At these same conferences key civil servants from the Housing and Planning Ministry were stressing that such a policy was illegal and belonged instead within building regulations. The debate was out in the open and until Merton's UDP got final approval from these self-same civil servants it would remain so.

This sets the scene then for the following excerpt of the Learning History which describes Adrian Hewitt's take on events in that final month before the approval deadline in October 2003.

Note that direct quotes are italicised; research reflections are in thought bubbles and some names have been changed.

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Excerpt from the Learning History of the Merton 10% Rule.

Scene 1: October 2003: Synchronicity



Figure 1: Randolph (photo courtesy of Adrian Hewitt)

When: October 2003
Who: Adrian and colleagues – London Borough of Merton
Mr A. Plan et al – Planning officers, Central Planning Office
M.P - Minister for Housing & Planning
Randolph – Adrian's cat
Jim – erstwhile Labour Party colleague of Adrian

In October 2003 the UDP went to the ministry of housing and planning for final approval. The deadline for approval was the end of the month. If they heard nothing by then, then it would have been approved. However there was a growing sense that key civil servants there would not approve it. With all the debate and argument that had gone on in the previous year, Adrian could envisage them gleefully putting the line through their policy. And yet, politically this did not ring true with the Labour party's current line on environmental building. Adrian needed to speak to the minister for planning directly to put the case to him. However he did not have a link to him that might give him such an opportunity.



This passage was a lovely example of how Adrian was working with chance, intention and his informal networks. There was a sense of his knowing the capacity of his network – a bit like testing frozen ice.

"Now- the chaos theory again - this is where it gets spooky".....

In mid-October, Adrian's cat got in a fight and needed to be taken to the vet. There he ran into an old colleague and friend of his from his Labour party days. When he asked Jim how he might get a message to the MP for Planning, Jim replied "*why I'm having dinner with M.P. and the wife on Saturday night – I'll pass him your message".*

Synchronicity: "A meaningful coincidence of two or more events, where something other than the probability of chance is involved"
– Karl Jung.

On Monday the 20th of October, there was an e-mail from Jim. The minister would speak to Adrian on Friday afternoon at 5:30pm.

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Scene 2: 24th Oct, 2003 A key phonecall

When: 24th October 2003
Who:
Adrian – London Borough Merton
M.P. - Minister for Planning

THEME: A key moment of agency. Recognised by protagonist. Account implies a letting go of intention in this moment. This appears to have keep him steady.

In the phonecall with Adrian, M.P laid his cards on the table regarding the issue. He had already spoken with John Prescott and Gordon Brown about it and whilst there was a concern for how it might effect development, he had a sense that the carbon reduction issue was going to win through. However he needed a month or so to sort this out. When Adrian pointed out that they didn't have a month, they had 5 days, the conversation took on a more urgent tone.

And I said to M.P "If your senior civil servants pull our emergency cord and we come to a juddering halt you got a trainwreck on your hands and this is going to be embarrassing - lots of these boroughs are radical LibDem boroughs who are going to scream that you talk big about Environmental building but you don't walk the walk"

In unpicking his account it seems that Adrian managed to speak very frankly to M.P. There is a strong sense too in his account of them working *together* with this issue whilst keeping the formal power balance in tact. Adrian seemed to speak to M.P's own tacit knowledge of the political consequences of the policy not going through, whilst somehow maintaining M.P's own sense of power and position. Indeed at one point he seems to have invited M.P's to re-instate his authority, by alluding gently to the civil-servant-minister relationship. In a key exchange described as follows by Adrian, M.P rose to this challenge by re-asserting his position of authority as follows:

And M.P. says*: 'Look - I'm the minister of State for Planning Agent – what do I do?'*
So I say '… *get up from your metaphorical desk, go down the corridor, kick open this guy's door and instruct him to allow us have our policy'*
And then M.P said: *'consider it done'*

RR

Over and again there is a levelling of power in the way Adrian and his colleagues work. Whilst they acknowledge formal positions they work in a robust egalitarian kind of way that appears to have been quite central in getting things to happen.

End of Excerpt.

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The ongoing story of the Merton Rule

The Merton rule went on to be passed and adopted by many other Local Authorities. As the policy starts to take effect the field of construction, development and planning is responding by getting to grips with how renewable energy can be included in new developments. A whole area of new practice is emerging as a result and in addition the market for renewable energy equipment such as solar photovoltaics and wind turbines has been stimulated.

A backlash in August 2007 led by the House Builders Federation has raised fears that the Merton Rule could be axed.

Section 5: The Value in the Approach

So What?

What purpose does such a rendition of a particular case serve, other than entertaining us or perhaps meeting any gossipy needs one might have to know more about something or someone in particular?

The point is the story stands on its own. The response to it depends on the reader's own thoughts, experiences and indeed mood. Some have found it an inspiring example of how someone broke through a power barrier; others have commented on the importance of informal networks; others have struggled with the twists and turns of that particular story. After all one cannot conclude that to bring about change one needs to have a conversation at the vet's office.

The excerpt included from the Merton case illustrates that luck does play a role in bringing about transformation whilst cautioning that luck alone will not do all the work. Though the specific twists and turns of this human story could never be repeated, there are nonetheless messages in the overall Learning History about working with chance, maintaining determination and seeking pathways forward that are more universal.

Value for whom?

The value of this kind of research is on several levels. Firstly there is value for the original protagonists. The process affords them the reflective space, so essential to learning,[17] that fast-paced organisational settings do not normally allow. During the reflective interview, as they recount their experiences and probe and discuss their thoughts with the researcher, participants hear themselves articulate their story in a way they have found therapeutic and insightful. The interview, the Learning History itself and the follow-on engagement with the researcher serve to hold a mirror up to participants that aids their reflection and learning so that they might hone their actions in the future. The research is designed to follow up and track if there are any such benefits, whilst recognising that these may be difficult to identify.

[17] This is an action research claim. Learning for transformation lies at the heart of action research and is proposed to be achieved through successive cycles of action and then reflection, (Torbert 1991)

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Second there are more conventional research insights to be had from such accounts. The researcher renders a narrative and alongside it a bottom-up thematic analysis that is in keeping with more standard inductive methods of theory building. Viewed in this way the Merton Learning History alone does tell us something about how innovative things happen. Themes such as risk, informal networks, working with chance, niche creation, power relationships, collaborative leadership and so on arise from the data of this example alone. Some of these link to themes in the other Learning Histories as well as to diverse theories that range from organizational change theory to theories of socio-technological change through to post-feminist concepts of leadership.

As with other forms of action research, value and knowledge for participants in the field is valued as highly as academic conclusions and theory. As described in Section 3, the value to be had for third parties and for the 'big issue' of carbon reduction is a particular emphasis of this research. This research has been exploring Learning History as a way of influencing a wider field of change. So it is not only seeking ways to amplify and spread inspiration from stories of change but is also examining how such inspiration and learning might lead to action. Participative processes that convene interested parties around the Learning Histories are a key feature of the research. So the Learning Histories are been taken out to diverse audiences and in diverse settings (e.g. a seminar with energy policy academics, a conference with sustainability practitioners, an MSc with business professionals, a meeting in one Local Authority, a workshop with several Local Authorities and so on). The Learning History is then not reified as a static output of the research. It is a process as much about creating different futures as it is about charting multiple histories of the past.

Afterword

Returning then to the three questions with which we started: what to start, what to stop and what to continue as we 'ride' this transformation? It might help to stop thinking that 'here' is the only place we could have ended up. Thinking that way flattens away the story of how previous transformations have occurred and with that something is lost. As Marvin puts it:

"That we no longer remember the excitement of electric light spectacles testifies …[] to the tendency of every age to read history backward from the present. We often see it as the process by which our ancestor looked for and gradually discovered us, rather than as a succession of distinct social visions, each with its own integrity and concerns. Assuming that the story could only conclude with ourselves, we have banished from collective memory the variety of options a previous age saw spread before it in the pursuit of its fondest dreams" (Marvin 1988)

With the successes in carbon reduction that have been achieved, it is good to start acknowledging, understanding, celebrating even the complex mix of vision, chance and determination that led to them happening. A variety of options continue to spread themselves out before us. It is hard to know which way to go other than to continue seeking out glimpses of a transformed future.

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