

CREATING A VISION FOR ACTION

In developing a climate change action plan it is valuable to start with the question ‘why...?’ The following contribution has been provided by Josie McLean of The Partnership. Josie is well regarded by Local Government in SA for her work in understanding and developing the personal qualities, skills and knowledge required for sustained success in the future.

I recently heard this true story...

A government department, decided to reduce its greenhouse emissions and other waste, by moving into a new 5 star-rated office building. Shortly after the relocation, ‘management’ noticed that the building’s recycling bins were not being used as hoped. Management decided to remove the individual rubbish bins, located under staff desks – thus ensuring that staff would use the recycling bins located on each floor. Staff were outraged and some even brought in bins from home. This reaction was viewed as defiant by management and in their frustration they decided to confiscate the privately supplied bins.

The story-teller shared with me that he couldn't believe how little staff understood and cared about environmental issues and climate change. “*Two star people in a five star building*” was his conclusion...

Perhaps what this story best illustrates is how complex seemingly simple and rational solutions can be. The complexity is added not only by people and their often unpredictable responses, but also by the inevitable ‘side-effects’ of absolutely everything we choose to do – our interconnectedness.

This story can also be analysed in terms of the simple model shown below.



In search of quick and simple answers, which we all seem to have a preference for given our busy lives, many focus only on *what* to do. The management team in the story above probably had this focus.

A higher level of effectiveness can be gained by focusing attention on *how* we go about doing what we do. It is likely that if the management team above had focussed on a process that was participatory, they may not have created the very resistance they later encountered.

An even more effective approach would be to focus attention on *why* the management team was choosing this action – what was it they were really seeking to achieve? *Maybe their vision was that the 5 star building would live up to its stars both environmentally and financially, and people would work in harmony, be a model for other departments and the society they serve.* If this had been guiding management’s approach, they may not have acted in the ways they did, and they would have achieved far better, more tangible results. They would even have engaged simultaneously in all three elements of sustainability - environmental, economic and social.

As you and your Council engage with this valuable document, consider working from the place of most possibility. That place is *why* you are doing this. Ask yourselves “what is it that we really want?” Employ a creative process to engage everyone you can in this question and share your stories about it. Explore your heart-felt desires, not the outcomes you would just settle for. Idealism within a vision is the source of its inspiration – engaging idealistically is, in this context, pragmatic.

Although visions are often viewed as soft or fluffy, the example above demonstrates how a vision is a holistic representation of what you seek: it is motivating and provides energy – especially when the going is tough; it is underpinned by values to assist you make better decisions about how to do things. In complex situations, a vision will also act as a guiding light for you as you determine what to do next.

Talk about your vision often. Remember *why...?* in your leadership capacity, it is one of the best uses of your time.