

RESEARCH BRIEF

Reflection is an important precursor to thinking differently which can make planning processes in climate change adaptation projects more collaborative.

WHAT WAS DONE, AND WHAT WAS NOVEL?

When considering how climate change issues should be tackled, an academic response would say that planning needs to be more systematic, holistic and collaborative.

Rather than generating more theories about social change, this research looked at what practical steps might be taken by people in positions of influence to start doing things differently. To find this out, stakeholders participated in a process called Transformative Scenario Planning.

Activities aimed to help diverse groups of people come together to avoid working in silos, and to leave the workshop not only with concrete plans, but with an appreciation for the realities of working in non-linear ways.

KEY FINDINGS

This paper reports on work that aims to instigate systemic thinking and form new collaborations using planning workshops. Coined by a person from the water industry in Namibia, the phrase 'mind stretcher' encapsulates what stuck with stakeholders after the workshop. The most popular activities were those that challenged people to reflect on why they think the way that they do.

Introspection was important for people to identify the things they did that were preventing, rather than enabling, them to achieve the future they want. Reflection also exposed routine ways of thinking about leadership and, although it was difficult, the ways individuals needed to be prepared to resist dominant trends to avoid doing the same thing while expecting different results.

KEY IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICY, PRACTICE AND RESEARCH

Climate change narratives are dominated by phrases such as 'urgent' and 'action.' While this pressure can be productive, people in leadership positions across scales need to be permitted to pause in order to think about what unites people. What is the shared long-term vision, and how can we work with people who we do not like or agree with in order to achieve this vision?

This research demonstrated how taking time away from daily routines allows workshop participants to identify and question social norms and habits which work to preserve vulnerabilities, and inhibit effective adaptation.

Identifying what we can and cannot change is an important first step. But something that we can all do is stop assuming that change rests solely on the shoulders of experts and politicians. The implication is that reflection is an important precursor to thinking differently, and this can make planning processes more collaborative in climate change adaptation projects.

