Program planning strategies to foster a 'deliberate' culture of learning in environmental social movements

Program planning for practice-development

- For recognised professions, such as social work and physiotherapy, this may seem a truism, but for the environment movement it is not

Champions for sustainability

undertake work in the household, community and public policy domains and therefore have a more extensive remit than 'activists'

I define professionalism

as a sensibility and ethos where practitioners are committed to performing work—be it paid or unpaid—that recognises there is no single best-practice model and deliberately draws on critical analysis and research.

two examples of champions

- member of a group protesting against the expansion of coal mining

- member of a shared house seeking to 'educate' other household members about only purchasing clothes produced under 'fair wear' conditions—fair work and trade

What are the challenges in planning programs to improve practice?

What does it take to develop and foster more 'deliberate' approaches to those dimensions of practice that are concerned with environmental citizen-action, sustainability and social action?

I draw on the work of Franziska Trede and Celina McEwen (2015) and Henry Mintzberg and James Waters (1985)

- I draw on research that was commissioned by the NSW Department of Environment and Conservation in partnership with the Total Environment Centre, Nature Conservation Council of NSW, and the Australian Conservation Foundation.

Ad hoc and tribalistic versus deliberate and emergent strategies

- 'just do it'.

- there is practically no comparative discussion of what are the various theories about change that inform the practices of the big national environment groups, such as Australian Conservation Foundation (ACF), Wilderness Society, Greenpeace, Friends of the Earth and World Wildlife Foundation.

Deliberate and emerging

- What does it mean for an 'organisation'—a collection of people joined together to pursue some mission in common—to act deliberately? What does it mean for a strategy to emerge in an organisation, not guided by intentions'? (1985, p. 258)

Planned strategies
Top-down approach

- Centralised leadership makes formal and detailed plans. In some cases, there is little critical analysis and so these types of strategies are far removed from Trede and McEwen's perspective on what constitutes desirable deliberate practice.

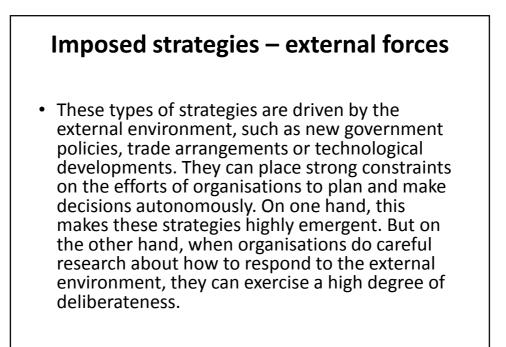# Entrepreneurial strategies – fluid, negotiable and exploratory

- They have both deliberate (because clear intentions exist) and emergent features (because the entrepreneurial vision provides only a general sense of direction, details of the vision can emerge en route). These types of strategies are closer to Trede and McEwen's vision of deliberate strategies that are desirable because they are underpinned by practice that is exploratory and committed to listening, responding and adapting.

Ideological strategies – principled but how flexible and democratic as opposed to rigid and authoritarian?

- 'Whereas the intentions of the planned and entrepreneurial strategies emanate from one centre and are accepted passively by everyone else, those of the ideological strategy are positively embraced by members of the organisation' (*Ibid*., p. 262). Ideology fires a collective vision and is characterised by such strong conviction that champions seek to 'impose their collective will on the external environment' (*Ibid*., p. 262). These can be seen to be highly deliberate in the Mintzberg and Walker framework, but are far removed from Trede and McEwen's notion of desirable deliberateness that is characterised by flexibility and democracy, as opposed to rigidity and fundamentalist authoritarianism.

Umbrella strategies – networked approaches, decentralised, action-oriented

- These types of strategies are deployed by a considerable number of environmental advocacy groups. This is where organisations with large membership give local branches or chapters a large amount of freedom to do their own detailed planning and headquarters devote energy mostly to broad strategic goal-setting. Mintzberg and Walker define this as strategies that are 'partly deliberate, partly emergent and deliberately emergent' (*Ibid*., p. 270). Trede and McEwen would welcome this mixture of strategic vision-setting, local decision making and action-oriented planning.

Imposed strategies – external forces

- These types of strategies are driven by the external environment, such as new government policies, trade arrangements or technological developments. They can place strong constraints on the efforts of organisations to plan and make decisions autonomously. On one hand, this makes these strategies highly emergent. But on the other hand, when organisations do careful research about how to respond to the external environment, they can exercise a high degree of deliberateness.

a defining feature for practitioners who are deliberate

- is that they may have received extensive training, but will exercise autonomous and creative judgment about which aspects to apply in the real world.

there is a hierarchy of social change practice models that prevail among champions for sustainability

- At the top of the hierarchy—where most money and policy attention is invested—are social change models that derive from either or both marketing and behavioural psychology and at the bottom are social change models that derive from community education and community organising.

Enabling more deliberate and emergent environmental citizen-action

- By focusing on the whole field of practice, one is necessarily taking a structural approach to developing more deliberate models of environmental citizen-action. I, therefore, propose two structural strategies that will help practice-development, not just for individual champions for sustainability, but also for the field. The first is to strengthen a movement-wide culture of learning. The second is to foster more trans-disciplinarity.

two main challenges to enable the building of a deliberate learning culture with champions for sustainability

- how to embed deliberate learning into the day-to-day work of environmental advocacy groups and champions

- deliberate practice-development strategies that are embedded in action-oriented projects

second theme that could inform the building of a deliberate learning culture

- The first way is through study-circles or workshops, where people and groups can work and learn from and with each other. The second way is through deliberate practice-development facilitators.

- The notion of workplace-culture is rarely used in a social movement, but I suggest, for my purposes it could be substituted with the notion of movement-culture. Considering movement-culture will encourage practitioners to deliberate at a movement-wide level about ways to work in new ways. What can environmental advocacy organisations do to support the development of more deliberate change-for-sustainability practice?