

Guidance

Title:

Context – a critical issue

Keywords: spatial planning; climate change; adaptation; national; local; local authority; international; regional; change; change programme; effective change; change initiatives; partnership; communication; communication technique; strategy; champion; champions; context; constraints to progress; mapping contextual constraints; contextual constraints; technical issues; Ken Wilber; contextual factors; individual subjective factors; collective subjective factors; individual objective factors; collective objective factors; PESTLE; Contextual Change Model; 4As; 3As for change; 4 A's; Action and reflection; action & reflection

Audience:

Organisations of any size operating at local, regional, national or international levels, including: Spatial Planners, Politicians, Technical Experts, Community Groups, Policy Developers, Decision-Makers, NGOs, Public Bodies, Private Companies, and many more. Any organisation or partnership intending to develop meaningful actions on climate change.

Messages in the ESPACE strategy to which the guidance applies:

1.	2.	3.X	4.	5.X	6.X	7.X
8.X	9.	10.	11.	12.	13.	14.

Sentences linking the guidance to relevant strategy messages:

3. The “*Context: A Critical Issue*” guidance is designed to give practitioners an insight into how to recognise and address constraints when developing actions on climate change.

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6. The “*Context: A Critical Issue*” guidance is designed to give practitioners an insight into how to recognise and address constraints when developing actions on climate change.

7. The “*Context: A Critical Issue*” guidance is designed to give practitioners an insight into how to recognise and address constraints when developing actions on climate change.

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<p>Photo/diagram/map:</p>	<p>Overview: Context invariably plays a key role in change programmes, usually in the form of constraints to progress. It is important to learn to identify and deal with these constraints, particularly the types that occur repeatedly. In this way, one can significantly increase the likelihood of effective change taking place and reduce the risk of a great deal of time, effort, goodwill and money being wasted. This guidance provides a valuable insight into how this learning can be achieved.</p>
<p>Description:</p> <p>INTRODUCTION</p> <p>If the issue of context is not addressed, change of any kind is highly unlikely. If it is addressed inappropriately, the best intentions may lead to a worsening of the current situation.</p> <p>Many change initiatives in numerous fields of endeavour have stumbled or been written off entirely as the result of a number of simply stated – though not necessarily simply solved – misunderstandings. Some examples are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Change initiatives invariably involve people and they very rarely behave predictably or consistently: <i>‘we’ve changed the law – why aren’t people behaving differently?’</i> • It is not enough to address technical issues in isolation: <i>‘there are state-of-the-art recycling facilities in every town – why are so few people using them?’</i> • Communities, organisations, planets and people are complex systems and do not often respond well to simplistic change approaches: <i>‘Well, we’ve fixed the rodent problem but we’ve poisoned all the cats in the neighbourhood!’</i> <p>Context invariably plays a key role in change programmes, usually in the form of constraints to progress. It is important to learn to identify and deal with these constraints, particularly the types that occur repeatedly. In this way, one can significantly increase the likelihood of effective change taking place and reduce the risk of a great deal of time, effort, goodwill and money being wasted.</p> <p>MAPPING CONTEXTUAL CONSTRAINTS</p> <p>Alexander Ballard Limited recommended, in its work on the ESPACE project, the use of a simple 2x2 matrix, developed by them from work undertaken by American author Ken Wilber, to map the contextual factors which play a part in addressing climate change issues.</p>	

<p>1. Individual subjective factors</p> <p>Limiting personal values, worldview, assumptions</p>	<p>2. Individual objective factors</p> <p>Limitations of one's skills, knowledge, contacts</p>
<p>3. Collective subjective factors</p> <p>Organisational cultures, shared norms, national and regional characteristics</p>	<p>4. Collective objective factors</p> <p>Political, economic, social, technological, legal and environmental limitations</p>

Quadrant 1: Individual subjective factors

We all carry, consciously or otherwise, assumptions, belief systems and values which can prevent us from perceiving or acting upon climate change challenges. Many of us believe that we are just 'not clever enough' or 'not well-connected' or 'too busy' to do anything worthwhile about the problem. Almost everyone feels powerless in the face of the immensity of climate change which tends to lock them into inertia. Others may simply not have personal values which extend to caring for those in other parts of the world or for future generations.

Quadrant 2: Individual objective factors

Quadrant 2 barriers are external phenomena which can be tested empirically, unlike beliefs and mindsets. One may not, for instance, have the skills required to assess the vulnerability of a new building to climate impacts. In such cases, we must either acquire these skills or find someone who has them. If we struggle to achieve the latter, then we may need to acquire appropriate networking skills or learn other communications techniques.

Quadrant 3: Collective subjective factors

Even those whose personal beliefs and capabilities are entirely capable of contributing to valuable change may find that they are constrained by something bigger: the broadly shared norms or culture of their organisation. Or there may be a wider-scale challenge: their community, national or religious beliefs may discourage or preclude certain behaviours.

For example: a house builder wished to create a development of over fifty eco-homes in the UK. His company was advised by construction industry professionals that his insistence on local timber would require that they submit much higher costings to the bank, thus jeopardising the entire project. The reason given was that the professionals had never encountered such a request before and 'unknowns' automatically triggered a cost-loading response. The project was finally financed by the bank when the developer located a local family firm who could supply green oak at very competitive rates.

4. Quadrant 4: Collective objective factors

Quadrant 4 constraints usually come from the six commonly-acknowledged areas of

corporate strategy known collectively as ‘PESTLE’: political, economic, social, technological, legal and environmental barriers to change.

An eco-hotel in the UK, wishing to fit double-glazed windows and solar and wind power systems, came up against not only planning constraints but also listed buildings legislation (the hotel is based in an eighteenth-century building, listed as of architectural significance). Here, different departments of the local authority found themselves at odds with each other.

In another sector, a group of Benelux farmers worked together to create a system of dams (‘stuwen’) to save up to 4 million m³ of water per annum. Then they discovered that the local planning regulations forbade the system. They next worked successfully with local legislators to change the relevant laws. This precedent now informs local legislation and future generations too will benefit. In this way spatial planning has had a significant positive impact on climate change adaptation.

WORKING WITH THE CONTEXTUAL CHANGE MODEL

We have looked briefly at some examples of contextual barriers in specific areas. It is vital, however, to understand that *all four boxes of the contextual change model must be considered simultaneously*. Often an alteration in one of the four boxes can trigger changes in any or all of the others. It is therefore essential that likely consequences be explored before making change in any area.

Occasionally, for example, a well-intentioned movement in one box may actually *worsen* the overall position. For example, developing a small, specialist group within an organisation so that they become experts on climate change, may not help the organisation as a whole to move forward in understanding and action. If the rest of the organisation feels relatively disempowered, for example, or even alienated, by their colleagues’ expertise, they may be less willing to play a part in the overall collaborative movement towards excellence.

On the other hand there are often opportunities to make changes in one area that have great payoffs in other areas. For instance, research shows that most people think they can do nothing meaningful about climate change. Spatial planning processes, on the other hand, potentially offer important opportunities to make communities resilient to climate change and to reduce reliance on carbon-based energy. These are surely meaningful actions – the payoffs are not just in the objective world (lower carbon emissions, more resilient developments) but also show people that there can be *agency* – the chance to act in a meaningful way.

Timing is an extremely important matter in this context. Opportunities to contribute to profound change often open up only briefly (it may be an application for planning consent, for instance).

There is no point in recognising the opportunities six months too late, however! It typically takes around a year to get climate champions (see ESPACE Guidance Document: *Champions for Change*) to the point where they understand

- a) that they *can* effect real change and
- b) *how* to spot an opportunity.

If an opportunity arises and no-one spots it or believes they can use it, nothing changes. If the climate champions have been identified and trained to spot and exploit the opportunity *in*



<p><i>time</i> they are ideally placed to contribute to significant change.</p>	
<p>Author: David Ballard & Rob Weston of Alexander Ballard Limited and Doogie Black of Hampshire County Council</p>	<p>Warm Hearts and Cool Heads: The Leadership Potential for Climate Change Champions (Volumes 1 & 2) By Alexander Ballard Ltd in partnership with HCC Volume 1 Volume 2</p> <p>How can local authorities stimulate & support behavioural change in response to climate change? (Volumes 1 & 2) By Alexander Ballard Ltd in partnership with HCC Volume 1 Volume 2</p>