

Guidance

Title:

The 4th 'A' - Action and reflection – the key that unlocks learning

Keywords: spatial plan, politician; technical expert; community groups; meaningful action; climate change; national; local; local authority; international; regional; change; change programme; change issues; meaningful change; change initiatives; partnership; champion; champions; champions for change; barriers; cultural barriers; external barriers; contextual factors; passion; awareness; agency; association; 3As for Change; context; action and reflection; action; reflection; learning; learning process; cycles; learning level; organisations; change management; organisational change; 4As; 4th A; support change; support action; encourage action; encourage change; stimulate change; stimulate action; local authorities; action research

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

Sentences linking the guidance to relevant strategy messages:

1. The *Action & Reflection* document provides guidance on how to ensure that robust policy frameworks are created and that valuable learning processes are adopted in order to maintain long-term robustness.
3. The *Action & Reflection* guidance forms an important component of the “change management processes” expressed in this recommendation. Well-managed cycles of Action & Reflection not only create desired change, they also stimulate a learning process which tends to improve the efficacy of a change programme over time.
4. The *Action & Reflection* guidance provides organisations focussing internally as well as externally in partnership with others, with an approach that not only creates desired change, but also stimulates a learning process which improves the efficacy of change programmes over time.
5. The *Action & reflection* guidance describes an approach to reviewing existing actions (including for example: plans, policies, directives, regulations, legislation, codes of practice and guidance related to spatial plans) that stimulates a learning process which improves the efficacy of change programmes over time.

6. The *Action & reflection* guidance describes an approach to ensuring that learning processes which improve the efficacy of change programmes over time are identified in actions (including for example research and research dissemination).

13. The *Action & Reflection* guidance illustrates an approach that could be used by politicians to ensure that they are pro-active through policy making that keeps up with shifting trends and that builds upon identified learning processes.

14. The *Action & Reflection* guidance is designed to illustrate and guide you through the invaluable benefits for regularly reviewing and revising actions in order to stimulate a learning process which improves the efficacy of change programmes over time.

Photo/diagram/map:

Overview:

In order for significant change to begin, clearly action needs to be taken. However, if all efforts are focused on action alone, change processes rarely, if ever, improve. Well-managed, cycles of action and reflection not only create desired change, they also stimulate a learning process which tends to improve the efficacy of a change programme over time. This guidance explains how “action & reflection” processes can be used to progress through distinct levels of learning.

Description:

INTRODUCTION

Without action, nothing changes; without reflection change stagnates.

In order for significant change to begin, clearly action needs to be taken. If all efforts, however, are focused on action alone, change processes rarely, if ever, improve. When well-managed, cycles of action and reflection not only create desired change, they also stimulate a learning process which tends to improve the efficacy of a change programme over time.

There are several distinct levels of learning; cycles of action and reflection can help all participants to progress through these levels, ‘learning more and learning better’. In this way they become more effective change agents, while contributing to real action as they go.

LEARNING LEVEL 1

This level is concerned with efficiency and is characterised by the question: ‘*How do I do things better?*’ It is in this area of learning that participants tend to develop their tactical behaviours, usually in response to advice. Much of the ‘hard work’ of climate change adaptation is actually done by people at Learning Level 1. They may begin to recycle office paper, take the train to work or buy a bicycle for commuting. They may also develop or

improve the skills they need to work on the issue in other ways.

LEARNING LEVEL 2

Learning Level 2 is about effectiveness: *'How can I do better things?'* Here people begin to make inquiries as to the most successful strategies they might adopt. At this stage individuals are 'framing' their role in a new way. By this means, they are beginning to explore ways in which their own position, skills and relationship sets might be put to use in uniquely productive ways.

LEARNING LEVEL 3

As individuals evolve to the third learning level, they begin asking *'What am I being efficient or effective for?'* At this stage they are exploring their purpose, certainly in a climate change adaptation programme, often in life as a whole. Many people have by now acquired the passion and agency levels that are capable of inspiring a 'climate champion' (see Guidance Document: *Champions for Change*). People at this level can become extremely powerful agents of change and will often consider significant career moves to increase their effectiveness.

WAS GOOD ENOUGH FOR EINSTEIN...

There is a much-quoted statement, attributed to Albert Einstein: "We can't solve problems by using the same kind of thinking we used when we created them." This perfectly illustrates the benefits of action and reflection. As individuals and groups work on changing external conditions and also regularly convene to reflect – or reflect alone – on the effects produced, learning inevitably takes place. We frequently start with a *How?* question, for instance: *'How might we halve this organisation's car-based commuting miles?'* Action is then taken and results generated. It is when we then reflect on the consequences of this initial action that learning begins. Someone may have spoken with the local bus company and discovered that, subject to a minimum daily volume of passengers, the company would be willing to provide a dedicated service. Another may have established a car-share arrangement with colleagues, only to find that he was now arriving late every day. For each such action, reflective practice will provide learning opportunities.

It is by no means the case that all actions produce desirable results. However, this proves the value of the action and reflection approach. Every error of judgment or unforeseen barrier to desired change need only occur for as long as it takes to yield learning which solves that problem once and for all. Frequently it is the 'mistakes' and 'pitfalls' which provide the best learning and the greatest breakthroughs to more effective change thereafter.

THE ACTION AND REFLECTION 'ACCELERATOR'

The 'accelerator' factor in action and reflection is its ability not only to inspire change through action in ways that straightforward research cannot; it also has the inevitable effect of helping participants to become increasingly effective in their 'agency'. As people grow past simply acquiring more skills, they begin to reflect on *how* they acquire skills, on *how* their skills might better be deployed and so on. This 'meta-learning' is the means by which they move from one learning level to the next. I may, for instance, have been struggling with the advanced meteorology required to understand how changing weather may affect buildings. I might learn instead to frame my needs clearly to a group of meteorologists and building specialists at the local university and inspire them to participate in our project. In this way I have:

- Overcome the problem of my inability to understand meteorology and building science
- Added nonetheless to the level of my team's proficiency in this area

- Brought to the team new individuals who doubtless have many other useful contributions to make
- Increased the range and efficacy of my networking and advocacy skills
- Provided my group with a model of strategic intervention which others may find useful in their own roles

Among other things, the use of cycles of action and reflection provides a very incisive tool for addressing issues of 'context'. It is especially useful where 'internal contexts' are concerned and personal self-limiting beliefs or cultural barriers are hampering progress. Well facilitated learning processes not only help us to overcome external barriers but also those in our own heads (see Guidance: *Context – A Critical Issue*).

If numerous members of a group are raising their awareness and action in a similar way, the learning and external performance of each individual and of the group as a whole can accelerate very successfully. It is important to note that, in order to optimise the results achieved and the rate of learning acceleration, a suitably trained facilitator can make all the difference. Such a professional can not only help to guide structured reflection sessions and teach important listening skills, they can often help to play 'midwife' to emerging breakthroughs and even prevent (if required!) the breakdown of a group when emotions, as occasionally they will, run high.

CHANGING THE WORLD IS *NOT* IMPOSSIBLE

Action and reflection also solves other important problems. The ESPACE project not only involves a geographically and culturally diverse group, it is also working to address a huge challenge: global climate change. For many people, faced with a task of this enormity, there seems to be no way to make a significant difference. One feels overwhelmed and thus cannot even begin to take action. Using this approach, however, the issues can be addressed in bite-sized pieces; as learning grows and its influence spreads, the impacts achieved tend also to grow exponentially, as with much other systemic change.

An example of this phenomenon at work is the UK farmers' markets movement. Farmers' markets have given farmers and consumers the chance significantly to reduce their part in the emissions created through international food freight and refrigeration. The food industry is the third largest contributor to carbon emissions in Britain.

The change began when a small group in the UK city of Bath decided to explore the possibility of linking local producers to local customers. Eventually, after much trial and error, three pilot days were arranged for a farmers' market in the city. The response was overwhelming and before long Bath Farmers' Market became a weekly event. Soon the founders were featured on national television and national newspapers picked up the story from this documentary. All over the country television viewers and newspaper readers learned of this new scheme. Many began working to set up their own markets. At the time of writing there are over 500 farmers' markets throughout the UK.

Without action there is nothing to reflect upon; without reflection there is no learning how to act better

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Further information:

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- Appendices



	<p>Warm Hearts and Cool Heads: The Leadership Potential for Climate Change Champions (Volumes 1 & 2). By Alexander Ballard Ltd in partnership with HCC</p> <p>Volume 1</p> <p>Volume 2</p>
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