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2005-2006 Donella Meadows Leadership Fellows

Report on Workshop 3 • March 26 - 30, 2006

Hartland, Vermont

The eighteen Donella Meadows Leadership Fellows assembled during maple sugar season at Cobb Hill Co-housing for their third of four workshops. The sap was flowing despite an alarmingly odd winter; the unusual weather was an apt backdrop for a workshop that dove into both the science and emotions of climate change.

In all of our workshops we focus on Fellows learning and applying systems thinking, reflective conversation and vision to practice exercises and then to their own work. In this workshop we added a focus on climate change. Climate change offers an urgent, real example of a complex system at play, with reams of scientific data and hard to change mindsets that affect our individual and cultural behaviors.

Though we anticipated that the facts on climate change as presented by our guest speaker, John Sterman, on the first day would be disturbing, and designed a full-day exercise to build on them, they still hit hard. Very hard. Working through the many swirling emotions the data activated, over the course of the following four days, the group generated a collective sense of hope, optimism and action. It was a profound journey together through despair, urgency, reflection, vision of the world we want to see, community strength, calm, and a deep-seated sense of empowerment. Fellows left with a stated determination to use all they are learning to engage a broader audience in understanding and acting on the dynamics of climate change.



Michaelyn Bachhuber Baur, Country Director, ForestTrade de Guatemala said, *“I’m leaving feeling hopeful about how all the little ways we can effect change can add up. I can’t feel hopeless because I feel that we’re just beginning to work on this.”*

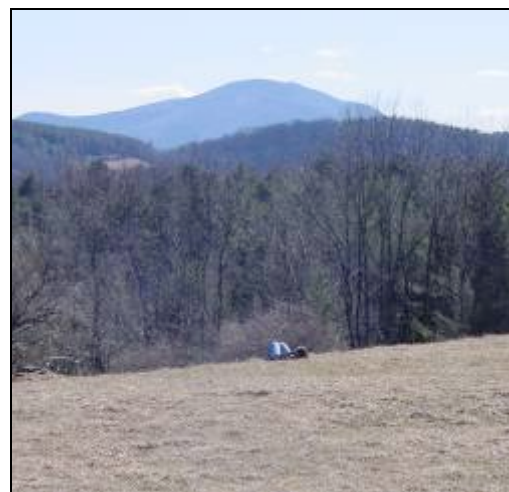


During his afternoon with us, John Sterman presented the **systems thinking** tool of stock and flow diagramming to illuminate the difficulties even highly educated scientists have estimating how CO₂ concentrations in the atmosphere will increase under various rates of emission in future scenarios. Much of John’s work analyzes how it is that well-meaning people who have excellent scientific training don’t see the need to curb greenhouse gas emissions. His combination of systems thinking, rigorous data and mental models presented a hard-hitting description of climate change. *John was a student of Donella’s and is the director of the System Dynamics Group at the MIT Sloan School of Management.*

To gather additional climate change perspectives and to practice **reflective conversation** skills, Fellows interviewed six diverse sustainability professionals – **Alan AtKisson**, author and transition director of the Earth Charter Initiative; **Dave Berdish**, manager of social responsibility at Ford Motor Company; **Hooper Brooks**, program director at the Surdna Foundation; **Michelle Layman**, sustainable mobility program at British Petroleum; **Betsy Taylor**, founder of Center for a New American Dream; and SI’s **Beth Sawin** on her program [*Our Climate Ourselves*](#). Fellows practiced inquiry and confronted different *mental models* about climate change and what strategies one might adopt. This exercise also presented Fellows with the challenge of synthesizing divergent approaches.

To help develop their own views on climate change, each Fellow created their **vision** of a world 50 years from now that had successfully addressed climate change, using everything they learned, synthesized and knew about the issue. Fellows then composed and practiced a five-minute speech, as an exercise in using data, analysis and heartfelt vision to engage someone in acting to address climate change.

Though present and looming, climate change is just one of many issues that occupy sustainability leaders. The skills Fellows applied to climate change -- using vision to guide and motivate action, using reflective conversation to balance advocacy and inquiry, identifying mental models and using systems thinking tools to illustrate the workings of a system – are equally relevant to the wide variety of other issues Fellows work on.



Fellow Valerie Langer, Second Harvest Paper Project, used the new skills she learned right after the workshop. She wrote, *“I used stock and flow analysis and a causal loop diagram in my meeting with a funder and it was fantastic. We talked about drivers of paper production and potential drivers of alternative production. We went over the production capacity of the alternatives and the impact of several scenarios on the stock of old growth forest. Eventually we dove into where the biggest leverage points were. Very fun and very effective.”*



Throughout the workshop each Fellow met with his/her coaching team of one SI staff and 3-4 other Fellows. In these sessions Fellows delve into the challenges and opportunities specific to their work, apply Fellowship tools to their work and outline learning goals and next steps. Fellows often identify the ongoing coaching as the most helpful aspect of the workshops. Terrie Lind, Planned Parenthood Mar Monte, CA, said, *“I never cease to be amazed by the positive coaching of the SI staff. Their gentle urging and probing questions are just the right technique to foster changes that individual Fellows can choose to make.”*

As the third workshop drew to a close many Fellows described an experience of settling deeply into a close network of relationships and moving along through a serious journey of learning. Mike Dupee, Corporate Social Responsibility, Green Mountain Coffee Roasters, said, *“I have a short list of experiences that have changed my life. My Fellowship experience would have qualified until I realized that it is more than life-changing - it is life-creating and rippling through me in many ways I didn't expect.”*