Working Slowly in Working Together

Life is filled with things to do, with temporalities, to-do-lists, pressures, rhythms. It can feel like there is a need to work quickly, to produce more, to act instead of reflecting. The onflow of life feels faster, busier, more fractious, enmeshed. Yet, to hurry, to be busy, does not mean to work or to live better (with ourselves, nor with one another). Drawing from, and inspired by, literature and practices of slowing, our approach within Collective Leadership attends to more careful and deliberative ways of working. There are times in responding to crises that we all need to act urgently and rapidly. But this cannot be done without reflecting and thinking about what is needed, by whom, and by what is already there. We are interested in questions of what we can learn by temporarily standing still (but not stopping), and by listening more deeply, rather than rushing to action. This piece offers an invitation to think more slowly.

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A manifesto for going slower

(Inspired by, and drawing from, the [Slow Science Manifesto](#))

We are collective leadership. We take time to be attentive, and to listen deeply.

Don't get us wrong, we do say yes to the changing systems that we work in. We understand the intractable problems that civil and public services face. The need to be accountable, to demonstrate outputs to timescales. To respond rapidly to priorities against a backdrop of uncertainty. To deal with crisis' in the urgent manners that they need to be dealt with. We are in this game too.

However, we maintain that there is more to how we all work than just this. We all need time to think, to talk together, and to understand where we are all coming from. We need time to misunderstand, to un-learn, and to reflect, especially when we are in dialogue with those coming from different perspectives. We need to hold a space which allows us to all do this.

We do not want for public services to continue to work with fractures and frictions across shared issues- distanced through systems, but deeply united in their goals. We need time to become more connected, without continually quantifying progress for the sake of progress. We need space to work iteratively, accounting for the knowledge, perspectives and understandings people have, without worrying about how this fits into predetermined categories. This does not mean to work less, but to work more deliberatively and carefully.

We believe that time is to pursue dialogue, to discuss, and to think with each other, and within ourselves. We maintain that to make a change and to work productively, efficiently, effectively in new ways will profit greatly from this. We need to recall and revalorise knowledge and conversations that are 'slow'. To propagate care. To be attentive and attuned, to establish dialogues with different individuals and organisations. To work better together, and to more deeply affect change. We cannot continuously talk about what change and progress is, without first meeting people where they are.

We all need time.

Going slower in times like these

What is 'Slow Research'?

The concept of 'slow research' is borrowed from the slow food movement. Slow food is about pausing before eating, understanding the connection and value of food, and about recognising shared needs between producers and consumers. Slow research applies these similar principles to the ways we work. It centres upon deliberate ethnographic pauses, through which the researcher listens and engages, enabling a deeper, more enduring understanding of the processes and backgrounds they are investigating (see Slow Research Lab, undated).

Slow research is therefore concerned with connection, rather than inferring a slower *way* of working, that works less hard. As Judith Van Den Boom (undated) phrases it in an interview conversation with the Slow Research Lab;

> *"slow is not about quiet or different pace, but explosive- a mentality and awareness of how you're doing things. A pulse. A dialogue with inside as well as outside".*

It is more thoughtful, more deliberative. In the contexts that many of us may find ourselves working in, there is a risk that working quickly and being busy becomes valorised and accordingly valued as suitable and normalised. Slow research requires reflection upon why we do things, and how we obtain a deeper understanding through building connections and listening, instead of on producing marketable knowledge (Berg & Seeber 2016). It might feel, as Berg and Seeber continue, like a practice of resistance in the systems we work in. It does not need to be about conflict between this and that, but instead, it can be about proliferating senses of listening and of deliberative care within different perspectives.

Much of the thinking around slow research draws upon Isabelle Stengers (2018) thinking on slow science. Stengers critiques how science demands efficiency rather than care, framing not as either correct or incorrect, but as a plurality of ways of seeing things. Slow science approaches see work as being deeply intertwined with wider social milieu- science must not race ahead in isolation, Stengers argues, but become more attuned to this milieu. Society benefits from science, but it also shapes it. One can draw parallels between this, and between public and civil services- all are intimately intertwined with multiple 'publics', and the need to be attentive and attuned to their needs, as well as those of other organisations.

Slow research is not about starting again then, but about using local specificities, and ensuring that things that work well are protected and kept in place. It requires thinking carefully about what we do, and why. In addition to this, Scheel's (2020) think piece around working in times of COVID-19 also argues that if we work too quickly, focusing upon outputs and appearing busy, science risks becoming inefficient, and making critical mistakes and errors. Working faster might risk lowering the quality, as well as the communication.

"Slow research is not opposed to thinking about futures, but it might systematically resist enabling projected futures to govern what we are able to see and learn from those who are potential beneficiaries". Slow Research Lab 2016

We are inspired by *The Slow Research Lab*

The Slow Research Lab is a collective of researchers and practitioners which builds upon Goethe's 'conscious process participation'. It is a protected (non-material) space in which to "open and deepen, extend and enfold, break and unlearn, reformulate and re-root, imagine and evolve" the potentialities between practitioners. Some practitioners are scientists, social scientists, artists, some a combination, some identifying differently. It focuses upon co-creating these spaces (connections) where new investigations are possible, where people bring their stories and skills to the emerging collective. At slowLab, six core research topics frame ways of working; slow identity, slow agency, slow governance, slow economy, slow ecology & slow pedagogy[1].

Through working creatively and collectively, the Slow Research Lab is centred around the sense that there are ample important opportunities for reflection if we are present and aware of things around us. Scientific inquiry is one approach to getting there, but there are others, and it is about recognising these 'others' and what we might learn from these too, by working together and by standing still.

"We need to know that we don't know, to un-learn in order to learn; and to re-learn with others; in the disruptive process of re-imagining, taking into account the pedagogical process is crucial". (Pomarico in Strauss & Pais 2016, p.208)

"We need to embolden ourselves, overcome our own disillusion and scepticism, create spaces not only to contest, but also to take care and hope, to realise a new topography of the possible" (Pomarico IBID, p.213).

"We may never be able to fathom the depths of the sea, but we can be willing to embrace the unknowable, to go with its flow, and in so doing find ourselves transported to an expanded realm of being in and of the fabric of (co-)existence"

(Strauss, 2018 p.2)

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[1] To read more about these topics, see http://files.cargocollective.com/653799/CRISP-4---Well-well-well...---P24-27---Carolyn-Strauss-Ana-Paula-Pais---Take-it-Slow.pdf (please note, this link will take you to an external site).

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