

GLOBAL COOPERATION DAY INTERVIEW, OCTOBER 4 2014:

ALLAN SAVORY with Adam Greenwell

Allan's Prefatory Comment -

From families managing their households to saving farmers, pastoralists, rhino, pandas, addressing desertification and climate change to national and international policies - all boil down to making decisions, taking actions, designing development projects etc. All are management.

Most policies are today driven by people trained as experts in many fields - all silos of knowledge and jargon. Even large teams of experts in many fields pulled together in integrated scientific teams, as they are for instance by governments, are still engaged in reductionist management. It is reductionist management and policy development because the context for all objectives of management and policy is always reduced to "need, desire, profit, problem being addressed" etc". or in case of policy invariably the context for policy objectives is "problem addressed". Such context for management is too simplistic for the real world and thus we see conflicts, treating symptoms and all too often unintended consequences. Management at any level simply cannot avoid social/cultural, economic and environmental complexity. Therefore management needs to be holistic meaning objectives/goals/missions/visions need a relevant holistic context. Period.

Allan, thank you so much for joining us. Let's begin with a link- from Occam's Razor to Occam's Grazer, the documentary you inspired.

Occam's Razor is both Franciscan and Scientific: Franciscan origins go back to the scholar, and friar, William of Ockham, over 600 years ago. In the scientific process- the fewer assumptions that are made, the better.

Your famous quote: " Desertification is a fancy word for land that is turning to desert", seems to have been honed by Occam's Razor! What's the connection between the principles of Occam's Razor and holistic management, that seemed to meet the practical needs of farmers in Occam's Grazer?

I did not know about Ockham's Razor over the years of striving for management that would be consistently successful, but have read about it since. As I understand it, Ockham's Razor is an ancient way of reasoning to try to understand phenomena in nature (aim of science) that would, in my view, assist reasoning greatly. I say this because over many years of teaching professional people how to develop policies holistically the greatest problem and blockage I have found is the human tendency to delve into infinite details too soon. Because of this I built into my training a step that makes it difficult to delve into detail prematurely, but rather forces reasoning at the simple big picture principle first. This increased the quality of work greatly. Unknowingly I was I gather using Ockham's Razor philosophy.

The similarity with Ockham's Razor would probably end there because while that is a

way of reasoning, managing holistically is nothing but management to address the social/cultural, economic and environmental complexity that is inescapable in any management action. In addition the key to, and driving force behind, the remarkably consistent success of holistic management is the new concept of all actions being in a holistic context. This idea of a holistic context, tying our lives and cultures to our life-supporting environment, had to be developed in a vacuum not knowing what it was we were seeking and finding no guidance in any branch of science, philosophy or religion.

2) There are personal stories of struggling farmers in Occam's Grazer, who were helped by your methods of Holistic Management: On the other side of the coin, George Monbiot from The Guardian recently challenged your claims on the basis of little scientific evidence. Then the award-winning author Hunter Lovins took issue with Monbiot. She said, "I can attest from personal experience that Savory's approach works", then cited academic and commercial support for you around the world.

Yes, using the holistic framework in any management situation from household to governance and international policies will and does help people greatly. When training some 2,000 US scientists and others as I did over two years in the early 1980's they came from all USDA land management agencies, land grant universities, World Bank, USAID and more. I had them bring and use their own policies to analyse with the holistic framework. All policies were found to be addressing symptoms and likely to fail leading to unintended consequences. One group on training produced an agreed statement "We now recognize unsound resource management is universal in the US". And although urged to find any logical or scientific flaws in the holistic framework none did. Monbiot did not do any research as had he done so he would have learned that when managing holistically we apply currently known science consistently. The critics he cited have never studied or worked with any holistic management situation. They were criticizing various rotational and other grazing systems that we knew were flawed sixty years ago and that bear no relationship to holistic management.

Within public life and the media, do you detect professional jealousy; a lack of practical, hands-on experience; both; or more of one than the other?

All of the above. Sixty years ago I was warned by a wise Rhodesian farmer that I was up against the biggest vested interest in the world. As my work has never been opposed by any corporation yet, and people invariably make more money managing holistically I could not understand his statement and asked to be enlightened. He informed me I was up against professional egos. Time proved him right over many years of ridicule and opposition and none yet from any business interest. Even the training of USDA personnel mentioned, that was planned to lead to establishing a USDA training centre, was halted by academics with political influence having all further training banned during the second Reagan Administration. Only now are we gaining traction once with USDA supporting limited training for farmers.

I do not believe anyone opposing or ridiculing such new scientific insights is being evil or bad because this is simply how humanity has always responded to new

insights outside the prevailing beliefs of society. We see this from Galileo to many others – Harrison (longitude), Ignaz Semilweiss (bacteria) etc. and I cannot find a single example in history where any mainstream scientists, institutions or organization has accepted new insights ahead of a significant level of shift in public perception. Individuals (including within organizations) change, as has happened with holistic management, and when enough change organizations and institutions change. Hundreds of scientists working in organizations opposing my work helped me develop it but in their individual roles.

Your work also reminds us of the Dust Bowl period of the Great Depression, droughts, dust storms, machinery, farming methods, economics, all affecting people's lives on a broad scale. There was no one simple answer... a famous politician once said at the time he learnt more about economics during a dust storm on the farm than he ever learnt at college.

Yes, there is no one simple answer or silver bullet. People constantly seek this in from some form of technology. We are a tool-using animal and with only two tools to manage our environment at large -technology and fire - and the concept of resting the environment to allow biodiversity to recover, seeking technological saviour is understandable. However over many years of persistent struggle with the problem of invariable environmental damage no matter what we did, apart from conservation in perennially humid environments, I came to understand that we faced a systemic problem. How else could we explain thousands of years with millions of brilliant minds, and our amazing build up of knowledge, and good intent so consistently resulting in unintended consequences and destruction? From that we were able to discover that all our problems dealing with complexity stemmed from one universal genetically inherited tool-using animal way of making conscious decisions. This genetically inherited way is incredibly successful in all areas of our lives where we make something – buildings, planes, cars, bridges, dams, computers, clothing – everything we make. All use expertise and technology and all are amazingly successful to the extent we can explore space. However none of these involve the concept of complexity although most are too complicated for my brain. From this realization we could recognize the underlying framework of every human action and with slight modifications create the holistic framework to use in it's place. The discovery was not as neat and linear as it is to describe in hindsight and we had to make many trial and error twists and turns pursuing all that worked and dropping what did not work. No different no doubt from the Wright Brothers finally learning to fly by getting the principles of flight right.

Where I am at in my understand now is that there can never be a single “solution” to anything from saving rhino, pandas, dealing with poverty, violence, drugs, desertification or climate change. However there is a profoundly simple way of enabling people to address all such problems far more successfully, without unplanned consequences, by simply using the holistic framework. I say this because every problem of our own making (as almost all are) is actually not a problem as much as it is a symptom of human decision-making. And using the holistic framework addresses that single cause.

How has your varied and interesting life in Zimbabwe shaped your thinking and view of the world - how broad issues can be seen as connected, through observation and experience?

The life I have led was fundamental to my understanding and in hindsight I realize that the holistic framework could never have been developed in any university or institution, nor in any one country. Finding, at least for me, that I could not pursue honest science under institutional pressures I very early chose to become an independent scientist supporting work and family in any way I could but determined to solve the ancient problem of essentially desertification. In those days we did not have today's buzz words biodiversity loss, desertification, climate change. I saw these as one issue and could not make sense of plant ecology, animal ecology, fire ecology – to me there could only be ecology (all life) and, fire being a tool, there could be no fire ecology any more than hammer ecology. Without biodiversity loss man-made desertification does not occur (it is a symptom) and without addressing desertification we can never address climate change. In our siloed education and structure of our institutions we could not today even hold a conference to discuss this one matter. Each is dealt with separately in research, education, organizations and conferences never to be pulled together, as we need to do, for civilization as we know it to survive.

Although my chosen course led to a hard life I was indeed fortunate to work in a country with a small population and a microcosm of almost all going wrong – desertification, disappearing wildlife, increasing poverty, social breakdown, violence, prolonged civil war, international brutal sanctions, finally independence only to be followed by thousands more deaths, worse poverty, corruption, misrule, worst inflation ever known, collapse of currency and problems still getting worse. And I was forced to farm, game ranch, ranch with cattle, twenty years of war, enter politics and lead an opposition party, consult with hundreds of ranchers over initially five countries then expanded to six continents. All the time no matter what hat I wore on a given day as farmer, soldier, politician, consultant it was the same issue to me – poor land leads to poverty, social breakdown, violence and the fall of governments and ultimately civilizations. I was fortunate to have a few great mentors and to work with some exceptional fellow scientists sharing my concerns.

And during the Dust Bowl crisis, what are your thoughts, in hindsight, on the Federal Governments approach at the time of dealing with soil erosion and buying livestock from impoverished farmers - has there been any real policy change?

No, there has been no change in how Federal (or any other government) develops policy. That one alleviated the problem by addressing the ploughing up of vast open grasslands and at least having grass re-establish over most of the bare disturbed soil. It was like using a fire engine on a fire with sixty foot high flames that are brought down to smouldering and in places a couple of feet high. Almost all of that land continues to desertify today and dust storms are once more arising. Eroding soil remains America's largest annual export through the air and down the rivers. All this good intent and effort could be easily rectified today with knowledge already available - on our farms, ranches and in our universities - because it is, as mentioned, a systemic problem. As soon as US public opinion insists that

government policies be developed holistically in a national holistic context, America will begin reversing it's serious desertification including the droughts in California and climate change. And America will save billions of dollars currently being wasted on policies that simply are exacerbating the problems. However this cannot happen till enough of the public are insisting policy be developed holistically and no longer in the present reductionist manner.

A popular talking point on YouTube and Facebook right now is the video clip of your traditional home in Zimbabwe - thatch-roofed mud huts, entirely off-grid with solar cells, LED lanterns, and solar hot water heating. Meanwhile, super-rich Montecito, Santa Barbara, home to the world's most famous, is facing a drought. After all, as you know, most of California is a desert after all. What are your thoughts for both mini-grazing livestock on wealthy estates; and designing luxury upgrades of your own home in Montecito, to express how food and water deficits affect us all?

I will sound like a gramophone record stuck in the same groove. None of California's land slides, floods, droughts, noxious weeds, disappearing species, conflicts over proposed policies will be solved when everyone is unknowingly using the same genetically embedded way of making such decisions. All will begin being far more successful just as soon as Californians demand that their government develop such policies with the holistic framework. What is happening in California is almost entirely man-made – much within their control and now increasingly due to policies and practices in all nations affecting the climate globally. However California is said to be a bell weather state and they could be leading the way out of today's mess.

Please tell us about your e-book, The Grazing Revolution, if hard copies will be available soon, and if so, where they can be purchased.

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