

John Croft's 'Four stages that any project will go through'

by Naresh Giangrande of Transition Training

In Transition Town Totnes, we have found these four stages an extremely helpful tool and where possible incorporate them into our work. Early in 2007, John Croft, co-ordinator of the Gaia Foundation of Western Australia, visited Totnes, where he shared the following insights with us. He developed what he calls the 'Dragon Dreaming' method by examining hundreds of projects around the world, environmental, social justice, or community projects. He noticed that there are four stages of successful projects. He defines these stages as:

- dreaming or visioning
- planning
- doing
- celebrating and evaluating

He also noticed that 90% of projects failed to get beyond the first stage – dreaming. Of the 10% that did, another 90% failed to get beyond the second stage – planning. This means 1% of projects actually get off the ground and do what they set out to. In an effort to increase this low success rate he developed the Dragon Dreaming approach. His message is that each of these four steps is essential if your project is going to succeed. Leave out any one step and the project will invariably fail.

Let's take a closer look at these four in turn:

1. Dreaming

Each project is an encounter between the originator (any project, Croft argues, begins life as

and between theory and practice. If you look at the project as a flow of energy, at the beginning the main flow will be from the 'dreamer' to the environment and the community around the dreamer. There will be very little coming back. In terms of theory and practice the project will also be almost all theory, as the practice has yet to be created. As the project progresses the environment around it responds. This is how you know you have a 'runner', a viable project. For instance, if you were developing a product and you had identified your target consumers and they indicated they would be queuing up to purchase your product, you would know you had a winner; the environment had responded appropriately. On the other hand, if there was a tepid response, then you would have to go back to the drawing-board. Maybe you misread your target audience; maybe the price was too high.

Either way there has to be a balance between the originator with his or her idea and the environment where the project is being launched at this stage before you go on to the next. Likewise the theory gradually takes on more material manifestations and moves from being merely a twinkle in the inventor's eye to something real and tangible. The sorts of questions asked at this stage are:

- What would happen if.....?
- What would this sort of project look like?
- What do you think, does this sound like a good idea?

- Don't you think that if people had access to it would be great?

The Dreaming Stage is the essential first stage, but in order to progress, it is vital to move into the next stage, the Planning Stage.

2. Planning

This is the stage in a project where an idea is worked up, where research and investigation take place. This is where 'the rubber really starts to meet the road'. The sorts of questions that need to be addressed in this phase of the project are:

- How do we make this happen?
- Who's going to design it?
- How many people in the team?
- What skills are we missing, or do we have?
- How might we finance it?

It is the beginning of an idea leaving the conceptual stage and engaging in the outside world. Are there already similar ideas out there? What can we learn from other successful models? What do we need in order for our idea to take practical form in the world?

3. Doing

This is where the idea is implemented. Something real and tangible is put in place. What was dreamed and planned becomes a reality. All the planning can now (if your dreaming and planning stages have been successfully completed) be put into practice. You have committed to something and are now seeing how this behaves in practice. The visioning and planning sessions in Stages 1 and 2 may raise questions which you do your best to answer, but the only real test is to actually do it. In Stage 3 you have signed your contracts, employed your workers, and installed the phone lines and your

baby has come to life. The theory is now practice, and with time and familiarity it becomes so second nature that you forget that it was only a theory not so long ago. This is the time of birth.

4. Celebration and Evaluation

The final stage is celebration and evaluation. This celebrates the success of the project and looks at the failures and difficulties before starting the cycle again. The next phase of the project (if there is one) is then dreamed, planned, executed, and celebrated. This process can go on and on as each phase of a project is brought into being. It is a fractal process: each stage also contains the other three parts of the process.

- Has the project reached your expectations?
- Has it matched targets you set, or your funders set you?
- Can it be, or should it be, done more or again?
- Has it reached all its target client group?
- Which phases of the project went well?
- Which phases were difficult?
- Was everyone properly recompensed?
- Was the project fun to work on?
- Was it hard work, adequately resourced, or did it rely on one person's unsustainable hard work and commitment?
- Did the people who worked on it grow personally, acquire new skills, or gain personal satisfaction from all their hard work?

When you have answered these questions and finished your honest evaluation, then the next phase can happen. Indeed, it will happen better and with more creativity as you now have had the experience. You can be more daring and take

Appendix 3: Energy Descent Action Plan

on something bigger; if that's what you want. It can go on and on in a spiralling cycle of success.

And now you can celebrate! You have done it. It is important on a group level and on a personal level to celebrate and integrate the new

confidence and skills and awareness you have. One of the tasks will be to find an appropriate way to celebrate! If that sounds like a chore then you know which part of the project is weak!

Find out more at www.gaia.iinet.net.au.