**Neighbourhood Renewal and Self-Managed Action Learning:
The philosophy of the ALtogether programme**

Tom Bourner

Introduction

This paper is about the philosophy that underpins the ALtogether programme. To be more precise, it is about the philosophies that underpin its various main components.

The purpose of the paper is to help those who will become responsible for facilitating the programme and fine-tuning it in the future do so successfully. It contains material that will help them understand why the component parts of the programme take the forms they do and why particular processes have been chosen rather than others. This understanding will help when decisions have to be made in the delivery of the programme.

The main aim of the paper is to make *explicit* the philosophy of the programme as a whole and each of its main parts. It also aims to make explicit some of the values and beliefs that underpin the programme. This is important as it is unlikely that people who do not share these values and beliefs will be able to facilitate the programme successfully. Support for this assertion is provided below. The paper therefore has implications for *who* should facilitate the programme as well as *how* to facilitate it.

Philosophy of Neighbourhood Renewal

The philosophy of neighbourhood renewal expressed in the ALtogether programme is based on that of 'The Learning Curve' a government report published in 2002. According to The Learning Curve 'top-down' approaches to neighbourhood renewal have failed:

> "Previous approaches where policy makers decided what was best for neighbourhoods and professionals put them into practice have not worked." (p. 7)

The archetypal model of the earlier approach was one whereby policy-makers took decisions on the advice of experts and then professional practitioners in the field were tasked to implement them. Key features of this model are 'hierarchy', 'social engineering' and 'privileging the knowledge of professional experts over that of those with local/contextual knowledge and experience'. The Learning Curve proposed an alternative approach whereby change in the designated neighbourhoods could be initiated at any level including that of front line workers (community workers, teachers, police officers, etc) and the residents themselves. According to The Learning Curve, the key to the success of this approach is in ensuring that all groups have the knowledge and skills needed for involvement in neighbourhood renewal.

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What sort of knowledge and skills?

Distributed at points throughout the Learning Curve are a number of case studies of successful projects to illustrate the sort of initiatives that the new approach is intended to foster.

Case 1:   Establishing a dedicated childcare centre on an estate in a disadvantaged neighbourhood.

Case 2:   Setting up a residents' consultancy where residents offer advice and consultancy services to organisations.

Case 3:   Developing a scheme to deter youngsters from stealing cars and joy-riding, the *Banger Racing Scheme*. The project lets youngsters work on vehicles and race them in competitions.

Case 4:   Helping a local school extend its involvement in community projects outside school teaching hours.

Case 5:   Setting up a youth club in a local community hall.

Case 6:   Developing a support facility for community representatives.

Case 7:   Producing and distributing a directory of all the agencies involved in community safety and crime prevention in a disadvantaged neighbourhood, highlighting each agency's interest in community safety and what each can contribute.

Case 8:   Setting up a local Fire Services Young Persons Development Programme focused on the disadvantaged neighbourhoods of a City, as part of the National Fire Services Youth Training Programme.

Case 9:   Developing a scheme to accredit knowledge and skills gained by work aimed at contributing to neighbourhood renewal, so that it counts towards a formal qualification.

Case 10: Piloting a local version of a national Neighbourhood Apprenticeship Scheme to improve crime reduction and drug education

Case 11: Setting up a centre to train social housing tenants so that they are equipped to take greater control of their housing - whether it be owning it, managing it or in some other way(s).

Case 12: Initiating a mentoring scheme whereby community mentors can work with people to help set up, run and manage regeneration projects.

In developing the ALtogether programme we asked the question, 'What sort of knowledge and skills would support a broad range of projects of which this is an illustrative sample?'

In seeking an answer to this question we took the following considerations as premises:

1. Each person already has a portfolio of skills and knowledge (much of it tacit) and that portfolio is likely to be significantly different from that of each other person who might wish to be involved in neighbourhood renewal.

2. Each neighbourhood renewal project is likely to require a range of skills and knowledge that differs from other projects that involve other people, other partnerships and other contexts.

3. For the goal of neighbourhood renewal, providing people with knowledge and skills that does not lead to action is ultimately a waste of resources. Conveying knowledge and skills for *understanding* alone is not enough.

These considerations led to the conclusion that it is very unlikely that a common syllabus of knowledge and skills would equip all these different people to take on all these different projects in their different contexts. And they led to the decision not to attempt to provide a common syllabus of skills and knowledge for all the participants, which, however successfully delivered, we could not guarantee would be used in practice. Instead, we decided to start from the other end, i.e. with the action itself. To join the ALtogether programme each participant would need to have a neighbourhood renewal project, i.e. an idea for how they could help to change one or more of the designated neighbourhoods for the better. This would be the focus of their studies on the programme which would help them to learn whatever they needed to learn to achieve that outcome.

To summarise: instead of learning a pre-specified set of skills and knowledge the participants learn whatever they need to learn to help effect positive change in the designated neighbourhoods.

In adopting this approach we recognise that:

(i) some of the knowledge and skills they require might be different from that required by other participants;

(ii) some of the knowledge and skills may be tacit, i.e. they may be unable to articulate explicitly the new knowledge and skills they have acquired;

(iii) some of the knowledge may be self-knowledge. As agents of change for neighbourhood renewal the participants use themselves to bring about the improvement they wish to see. The more they understand themselves as their instruments of change the more effectively they can use those instruments.

Philosophy of 'involvement in neighbourhood renewal'

The Learning Curve is about developing the skills and knowledge for involvement in neighbourhood renewal. 'Involvement' can take many forms ranging from passive interest to active participation in neighbourhood renewal. The ALtogether programme is focused on those who wish to locate themselves in the active region of this scale. It interprets 'involvement' as action to bring about change for the better in the designated neighbourhoods.

The programme is not intended for people who want to acquire skills and knowledge of neighbourhood renewal for its own sake or to prove themselves by passing an assessment in the 'subject' of neighbourhood renewal. Nor is it suitable for people who want to learn the theory of neighbourhood renewal with a view to possible *subsequent* application in practice.

The programme is intended for those who want to actively contribute to neighbourhood renewal and wish to learn whatever they need to learn to do so. Such people are likely to fall into one of two categories:

1. They want to contribute to some existing project aimed at making a real difference.

2. They want to initiate and lead a new project.

Our conception of 'involvement' in neighbourhood renewal is in terms of 'projects' as this enables us to apply the tools of project planning and management to the issues the participants bring to the programme. It means that the programme must be sufficiently versatile to allow participants to acquire the knowledge and skills to plan a neighbourhood renewal project and manage it and lead it. The appendix provides an elaboration of this project-based approach to change for neighbourhood renewal.

Philosophy of learning

The programme aims to help participants learn whatever they need to learn to undertake a project that contributes to neighbourhood renewal. For one participant the most important learning might be about the concept of neighbourhood renewal, for another it might be about current conditions in their own neighbourhood and for another it might be about learning how they come across when they are responding to resistance to their plans. In other words, it is difficult to specify in advance what will be the most significant learning for any individual participant or in which domain of learning it will be located. We admit we do not know which domain will turn out to be most significant to a particular participant in enabling them to undertake a neighbourhood renewal project

For this reason, the programme adopts a philosophy of learning that does not seek to limit learning to specific areas or even to place a definition around it. Instead, we *partition* learning (undefined) into planned learning and unplanned learning. This distinction is crucial to the programme's philosophy of learning.

Planned learning is goal-directed learning. Learning outcomes are specified in advance, actions are taken to achieve those outcomes and success or otherwise can be assessed at the end of the programme against the learning outcomes specified at the outset.

By contrast, *unplanned* learning is all that learning which is not planned and includes emergent learning, reflective learning and experiential learning. The knowledge and skills acquired by unplanned learning is often tacit and goes unrecognised until it is needed in practice. Such knowledge is a significant ingredient in knowing-how; it is part of the 'know-how' of an effective practitioner.

The programme makes the distinction between planned learning and unplanned learning because each involves different processes and has a different relationship with practice. Planned learning in this context starts with learning outcomes and ends with application of the knowledge and skills to practice. Unplanned learning starts with practice and is the process in which knowledge and skills are crystallised from the practice.

Philosophy of teaching

The programme interprets the term 'teaching' to mean 'helping people to learn'. Its philosophy of teaching follows from its philosophy of learning. It seeks to help participants learn whatever they need to learn for their involvement in neighbourhood renewal. It recognises that some of their learning will be unplanned learning and some will be planned learned.

How can the programme help participants with their unplanned learning? It can create a context that will nurture it and it can provide the participants with tools to *capture* unplanned learning. Much of the ALtogether programme is about creating

an environment to support the emergence of unplanned learning. For example, the requirement that each participant should work on a neighbourhood renewal project is intended to do just that. As another example, the ALtogether programme creates conditions for the participants to receive abundant feedback in a supported environment as recent research[1] indicates this to be conducive to success in practitioner learning.

An example of the sort of tools that enable participants to capture the unplanned learning is the skill of 'active reflection'. Reflection is not normally viewed as either 'active' or a 'skill'. Developing the skill of active reflection enables the participant to take charge of the reflection process and do it in ways that increase reflective learning. It develops their capacity to become effective reflective practitioners throughout their involvement with neighbourhood renewal.

How can the ALtogether programme help participants with their *planned* learning? It helps them set learning outcomes, it helps them identify activities to achieve those learning outcomes and it helps them assess their success in meeting their learning outcomes. This is what it does at 'ground level'. In addition, the programme also works at two 'meta-levels'. First, it teaches the *process* of planned learning as a content-free practice. Participants are presented with the elements and structure of a 'learning agreement' which they can re-use after the end of the ALtogether programme. Second, the kind of thinking required for achieving planned learning is the same sort of thinking as that required for achieving any other sort of plans. It is 'goal-directed' thinking or, in other words, 'strategic thinking'. The programme teaches a question-based approach to strategic thinking. This is a transferable skill that can be applied to the achievement of the goals of a neighbourhood renewal project, to broader work-based goals or to life goals more generally.

In addition to helping participants directly with their planned learning and their unplanned learning the programme also offers a range of skills that help participants to learn how to learn. This includes skills such as listening skills, questioning skills and feedback skills (... getting as well as giving).

Overall, the philosophy of teaching on the programme is one of eclecticism in response to the implications of its learning philosophy. It is a blended approach where the ingredients in the blend depend on the particular learning outcome in focus. There are didactic elements (e.g. in developing specific skills), there are facilitative elements (e.g. in the approach used for most of the workshop activities) and there are self-managed elements (e.g. in the approach used with the action learning sets).

Having said that, there are two approaches to 'teaching' that dominate the blend: action learning and self-managed learning. Action learning is a particular proven approach to experiential learning and self-managed learning is an approach to planned learning which gives as much control as possible to the learners themselves.

Why the emphasis on action learning and self-managed learning?

Whilst the programme is eclectic in terms of learning and teaching at its heart are action learning and self-managed learning.

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[1] See Tamkin, 2000.

Action learning is an approach whereby participants try to bring about change and learn from their attempts to do so. An action learning programme sets up structures and processes to facilitate such learning. The 3 main reasons we placed action learning at the centre of the ALtogether programme are:

1. It does not limit the areas in which learning can take place i.e. it is domain-free in terms of the *content* of the learning. The learning can be about the participants' current projects, neighbourhood renewal in general, about a participant's own strengths and weaknesses as a change agent or as a learner. This is appropriate if we wish participants to learn *whatever* they need to learn for their involvement in neighbourhood renewal.

2. It is a *proven* approach to capturing emergent learning. It is an approach with a history of successful usage (some of which has been recorded by the International Foundation for Action Learning).   It is an evidence-based approach that has been tested by research (some of which has been published in the journal Action Learning Research and Practice). It has certainly been more closely researched than the 'lecture' and the 'seminar' of traditional higher education, which are often uncritically adopted by education programmes. Most importantly for the ALtogether programme, it is an approach recommended by The Learning Curve report following a study of what does and doesn't work in neighbourhood renewal.

3. Action learning expresses some core values of the ALtogether programme and The Learning Curve, including the following:

    (i) *Equality*. All the people in an action learning set have an equal entitlement to the time and attention of the group regardless of rank or position. Action learning is a questioning approach where the ideas and actions of all the members of an action learning set are equally open to scrutiny. In these ways action learning is democratic and non-hierarchical.

    (ii) *Responsibility*. Each action learning participant takes on responsibility for a project and within the action learning set retains personal responsibility for the outcomes (... or absence of outcomes) of the project. The link between responsibility, action and outcomes is exposed in the action learning process. Those who are inclined to stand back, blame and judge, find themselves responsible for actually bringing about change and they usually discover that a more constructive and proactive approach produces more positive outcomes.

    (iii) *Initiative*. Making progress with a project can be viewed as identifying obstacles to progress and dealing with them. Much of the time of an action learning set meeting is taken up looking *at* obstacles and looking *for* obstacles - often triggered by questions such as 'What's getting in the way?' or 'What might go wrong?'. Action learning gives people practice in trying to spot problems and opportunities and then taking the best action they can find to address them. In that sense it helps people to develop initiative.

On the ALtogether programme the action learning is complemented by self-managed learning. This is an approach to planned learning whereby participants decide on their intended learning outcomes, the steps they will take to achieve those outcomes

and what constitutes evidence of a successful outcome. The 3 main reasons for using self-managed learning in this programme are:

1. Self-managed learning recognises that for involvement in neighbourhood renewal different people will need to learn different things because different projects require different knowledge and skills and because people differ in the knowledge and skills they already possess and in their strengths and weaknesses as change agents and as learners. The use of self-managed learning allowed us to offer the development of 'bespoke' knowledge and skills rather than the 'one-size-fits-all' curriculum of a common syllabus for all participants.

2. In addition to the participant-specified learning outcomes we also want participants to be able to plan and manage their own learning. This follows from our belief that any new neighbourhood projects that participants take on after completing the ALtogether programme are likely to require additional learning i.e. much learning for neighbourhood renewal is necessarily project-specific. An enhanced ability to plan and manage their own learning would prepare participants to acquire the knowledge and skills needed for subsequent projects.

3. Some of the core values of self-managed learning are similar to those of action learning:

    (i) *Equality*. In traditional education the teachers control the syllabus, the methods of teaching and learning and the assessment. Self-managed learning erodes the hierarchy implied in that control by supporting the participants in choosing their own learning outcomes, methods and evidence for self-assessment.

    (ii) *Responsibility*. The other side of the 'control' coin is responsibility. In self-managed learning the participants have more responsibility for their own learning - they become responsible for their intended learning outcomes, the steps they will take to reach those outcomes and the deciding what constitutes evidence of success.

    (iii) *Initiative*. Self-managed learning is an approach that encourages participants to take charge of their own learning. If participants are to turn their learning choices into reality they have to take the initiative in deciding what actions they will take and then taking those actions. Developing a positive attitude towards using initiative can also serve the participants well in tackling neighbourhood renewal projects.

Self-Managed Action Learning as an innovation in 'professional' practice

The ALtogether programme is an innovation in 'professional' practice. To be more precise, it embodies three innovations in practitioner development:

- Prior to the start of the first action learning set meeting it develops skills for effective participation in an action learning set, i.e. for getting the most out of action learning.

- It integrates action learning and self-managed learning within a single process.

- It develops the participants' capacities to manage their own set meetings.

The programme starts with a Foundation workshop which underpins the whole of the rest of the programme. Most importantly, it underpins the action learning sets. It has long been apparent that some people struggle with action learning whereas others are 'naturals'. After studying this issue we concluded that the difference that makes the difference is the incidence of skills for effective set participation. These skills include listening skills, questioning skills, skills for active reflection and feedback skills. Participants who are well-endowed with these skills tend to get much more out of action learning than those who are less endowed. Happily, it is possible to develop these skills and that is one of the aims of the Foundation workshop.

Second, the ALtogether programme integrates self-managed learning and action learning in a single process. It would appear that self-managed learning and action learning inhabit different domains of learning; self-managed learning is based on 'planned learning' whereas action learning is orientated towards emergent learning. What they have in common, however, is the use of learning sets (Cunningham, 1994, Revans, 1998).   The ALtogether programme makes the most of this commonality by using the same learning sets to support participants in making progress with their learning agreements and also to capture the lessons of their experience with their neighbourhood renewal projects.

Third, most of the set meetings on the ALtogether programme are managed and facilitated by the set members themselves. The first 2 set meetings are fully facilitated by external set advisors and the same external set advisors attend the last part of the next 2 set meetings to conduct set process reviews. After that, the set members themselves are fully responsible for ensuring that the set meetings take place and achieve the objectives of a set meeting.

We believe that it is within the spirit of The Learning Curve for participants to manage their own set meetings. We also believe it is important for the programme to support them in so doing. For this reason we have embodied a range of devices for supporting set self-management within the programme:

Support for the SMAL sets is provided by the programme in a variety of ways:
- Training is given at the Foundation Workshop in the skills of effective set participation and effective set management.
- The first two set meetings are managed by people with experience of SMAL. This ensures that sets start well and model good practice.
- A Set Process Adviser attends the last hour of the next two self-managed set meetings to hold a review of the day - this process monitors the health of the Action Learning process and helps the participants discover how to distil the learning from the set meetings.
- An innovative structure for the set meeting formalises the process of reflecting and then identifying actions. This prevents sets becoming either 'talking-shops' with no action, or so 'task-focused' that there is no learning.
- SMAL meetings are managed by set members, on a rotating basis. This means that at every set meeting a different set member has responsibility for ensuring the set meeting 'works', that is, it takes place and achieves its purpose.
- A session of intervention by an external set advisor is available on request by a set if it encounters process problems that it is unable to resolve without help.

- A workshop is held about half-way through the programme; part of this workshop, 'Taking Stock', aims to review set development and enhance the skills of set self-management.

Conclusions

In designing the ALtogether programme we have tried to be true to the vision of The Learning Curve: a vision where those involved in neighbourhood renewal have the knowledge and skills they need.

There is a strong chain of logic from the vision expressed in The Learning Curve to the structure and processes employed in the Altogether programme. That logic can be summarised in a sequence of questions and responses:

Question:
  What is the ALtogether programme's philosophy of neighbourhood renewal?
Response:
  It is the philosophy of The Learning Curve: neighbourhood renewal through change in the designated neighbourhoods initiated at any level ... including front line workers and residents.

Question:
  What is the main aim of the ALtogether programme?
Response:
  To help participants acquire whatever knowledge and skills they need for involvement in neighbourhood renewal.

Question:
  What sort of 'involvement' in neighbourhood renewal does the programme envisage?
Response:
  Active involvement, i.e. involvement that helps to bring about change for the better in the designated neighbourhood, particularly by planning, managing and/or leading projects to bring about such change.

Question:
  What knowledge and skills are needed by people who are actively involved in neighbourhood renewal?
Response:
  Any learning that helps them to contribute to positive change in the designated neighbourhoods.

Question:
  How can people involved in neighbourhood renewal acquire the knowledge and skills they need?
Response:
  Through planned and unplanned learning; the programme needs to be flexible enough to provide for both forms of learning.

Question:
  How can the programme provide for the teaching of such a wide range of possible learning outcomes?
Response:

The programme's interpretation of the term 'teaching' is 'helping people to learn'. It does this by adopting an eclectic approach to blending different methods but with action learning and self-managed learning as major ingredients in the blend.

The ALtogether programme in an innovation in professional practice. Transfer of practice is not the same as transfer of knowledge. Intellectual assent is not enough. This is an important issue since the purpose of this paper is to help other people (particularly past participants) take on responsibility for the ALtogether programme in practice - and that includes fine-tuning its design in the light of emergent issues and future developments.

The transfer of complex practice requires not only intellectual assent but also assent to the underpinning values and beliefs. An innovation in professional practice is only likely to be transferable to other practitioners who share similar values and beliefs within that area of professional practice (see Bourner, France and O'Hara, 2000). The reason for this conclusion is that the transfer of practice invariably involves teething problems associated with the transition and it is impossible to foresee all the possible contingencies.

Consequently, it will be necessary for the new practitioners to find their own solutions to the problems. Unless they share the values and beliefs that underpin the innovation in the practice they are likely to take decisions that can undermine the essence of the innovation itself. If the new practitioners do share the key values and beliefs as those that underpin the innovation they are likely to come up with solutions that are congruent with the innovation.

It follows that in order to assist with this transfer of practice, it is important to be explicit about the values and beliefs that underpin the ALtogether programme. Since there are many such values and beliefs with varying degrees of influence on the programme it is probably most helpful to identify what seem to be the 5 most important values and the 5 most important beliefs.

The issue of underpinning values has been partly addressed above, where 3 values were highlighted: *equality* (rather than hierarchy), *responsibility* (rather than unresponsiveness and unaccountability) and *initiative* (rather than passivity). Two other underpinning values are:

> *Reflection*. Action learning values reflection as a key process for turning experience into learning. Therefore, it is not well-suited to those who are reluctant to reflect on their own experience.

> *Inclusiveness*. This is reflected in the 'vertical slice' concept that is a significant part of the ALtogether programme. The action learning sets are made up of a mix of people at different 'levels' of involvement in neighbourhood renewal. The programme is not well-suited to people who see leadership and strategy-formation in hierarchical terms, as properties of those who occupy high positions. Clearly the value of 'inclusiveness' resonates with the 'equality' value addressed above.

Underpinning beliefs include:

1. *Action is a key source of learning*. There is much that can be learned from action that cannot be learned from textbooks (... and vice versa). In the end, all significant knowledge and skills for neighbourhood renewal must be tested in action.

2. *Improvement in professional practice can depend on the acquisition of self-knowledge*. For example, an element of some professional practice that many people find difficult is 'cold-calling' - this obstacle is unlikely to be successfully tackled by reference to a manual or textbook.

3. *Mistakes are a valuable source of learning.* The role of the ALtogether course, as a programme of learning, is not to stop people making (non-fatal) mistakes but to support them in handling the consequences and to help them distil the learning from mistakes.

4. *Developing the ability to talk knowledgeably about achieving something does not imply development of the ability to actually do that something*. In the words of the founder of action learning (and Olympic competitor), Reg Revans: "... there is an observable difference between consulting past reports of the Olympic Games to decide that one may need to clear two metres forty to win the next high jump, on the one hand, and, on the other, actually sailing over that height before the crowd in the stadium" (Revans, 1998). On a more prosaic level, one can acquire a lot of knowledge about education without becoming an effective teacher.

5. *Those who are unable to change themselves are unlikely to be able to bring about much change in the world around them.* This is known as the 'principle of insufficient mandate'. Again in Revans's own words: "Those who are to change significantly that which they freshly encounter must be changed by the changing of it."

There is enough evidence now that the ALtogether programme can work. This raises the question, 'who can work the ALtogether programme?' I think that the answer is people who share those values and beliefs. Those who share the values and beliefs and who have 'done' the programme as participants are likely to be at a particular advantage as they will be familiar with how the values and beliefs are expressed within the structures and processes of the programme.

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Appendix

A project-based approach to change for neighbourhood renewal

Involvement in neighbourhood renewal can be conceptualised in terms of 'projects'. This appendix gives the reasons for adopting this approach and some of its implications.

The Learning Curve report expressed the aspiration that everyone involved in neighbourhood renewal will have the knowledge and skills that they need. The ALtogether programme interprets 'involvement in neighbourhood renewal' as action to bring about *change* for the better in the designated neighbourhoods.

Change can be partitioned into planned change (i.e. goal-directed change) and unplanned change (i.e. emergent change). Whilst it *is* possible to foster emergent change (e.g. by developing the conditions that support such change) the focus of the ALtogether programme is on *goal-directed* change. The overall goal is neighbourhood renewal and the ALtogether programme is designed to support changes that contribute to neighbourhood renewal. It does this by helping participants acquire the knowledge and skills for such change. And as a significant by-product it can also contribute directly to the success of the change initiatives that the participants bring to the programme.

Goal-directed change that contributes to Neighbourhood renewal can be described in terms of 'projects'. The ALtogether programme takes a project-based approach to neighbourhood renewal for three reasons:
1. The Learning Curve used successful *projects* as case studies to illustrate the sort of initiatives that have actually worked in neighbourhood renewal.
2. It allows us to use well-tested tools of project planning and management.
3. Projects are a rich source of emergent learning. They generate the experience for experiential learning. They therefore provide good vehicles for action learning to help people capture the learning that is emergent and experiential.

Everyone starting the programme must have an idea for how they can help to bring about change for the better in one or more of the designated neighbourhoods. This is their 'neighbourhood renewal project'.

The ALtogether programme uses their projects as the main vehicles to help them acquire the knowledge and skills they need for involvement in neighbourhood renewal. Participants plan and manage their neighbourhood renewal projects and capture the lessons that emerge from that experience. They also learn *how* better to capture the lessons of experience and they learn about project management.

Certain types of projects make better vehicles for such learning than others. Projects that involve other people make much better vehicles for action learning than projects of a purely *technical* nature. Projects that involve the participants in action make much better vehicles for action learning than ones that require only cognitive endeavour.

Technical projects are concerned with physical materials/objects and the mechanical relationships between them. Such projects typically involve a sequence comprising an initial stage where the project is prepared, planned and programmed, followed by

an implementation stage and then (sometimes) a stage of review and reflection on the outcomes and processes. This is the 'programmed approach' to project management.

It is the application of planning and management processes derived from such technical/engineering projects to the problems of social change that has been termed 'social engineering'. It has not been very successful in practice and this helps to account for the disillusionment with social engineering approaches to Neighbourhood renewal.

The presence of a *social* dimension within a project makes it difficult to programme the elements of a project or often even to *identify* all the elements of a project. When people are involved, actions often have unintended consequences, sometimes via third parties not directly involved in the action. The actions that need to be taken in each of the phases of such a project are likely to be dependent on the responses of people to actions taken in earlier phases and the range of possible responses of different individuals can be large. Moreover, projects involving social change can involve long chains of actions where the best action depends on the outcomes of previous actions.

Social change often involves the need to *influence* people, which introduces a further element of unpredictability. It is not possible to schedule that which cannot, in practice, be predicted. This leads to the conclusion that projects involving social change needs an approach to project planning and management that differs from the programmed approach to managing change.

What are the consequences of applying the programmed/technical approach to a social change project? Typically, a great deal of time will be spent on the planning stage of the project to produce a 'blue-print' for the project (i.e. a schedule in which all the activities are identified, placed in sequence, times estimated and dates attached). Even with a relatively high probability that each action will produce the desired outcome, the product of all the individual probabilities would produce a low total probability that the intended outcome will be achieved in practice.

Typically, along the way there will be unexpected outcomes in the peopled context of the project. These are likely to be seen as 'pitfalls', 'snags', 'mishaps', 'unintended consequences' and 'emergent obstacles'. At best they are likely to cause delays and increase costs and at worst can derail a project altogether.

The goal of Neighbourhood renewal is *social* change (less crime, better health, better education etc). Neighbourhood renewal projects usually involve people, participation and working in partnership. Such projects need an approach to change initiatives that differs from the approach that is appropriate to technical/engineering projects (i.e. that is different from the *programmed* approach).

The ALtogether programme does offer a different approach to managing projects. It is a *learning* approach. In this approach planning and replanning is based on feedback and learning from the outcomes of prior actions.

> *"In well-structured situations, rational planning can usefully precede action; in uncertain conditions, it is better to get into action, taking small steps and staying alert and receptive, because action generates information". (Pedler et al, p.80)*

The learning approach to project management is like the automatic pilot system of an aircraft. Every time the plane strays sufficiently off course, the automatic pilot makes a correction. In his book *Actualisations*, Stewart Emery quotes a pilot's description of

the process: "So the path from here to where we want to be starts with an error, which we correct, which becomes the next error, which we correct and that becomes the next error which we correct. So the only time we are truly on course is that moment in the zigzag when we actually cross the true path."

The automatic pilot, an inertial guidance system, enables intercontinental aircraft to get within a few hundred meters of the intended runway despite the fact that the aircraft is off-course for 90 per cent of its journey. The automatic pilot system gets the plane from take-off at A to its destination at B by successive corrections whenever the plane goes too far off-course. In other words, the inertial guidance system uses *feedback* to correct errors to stay on course. The route will be more direct the more feedback that is generated and the sooner it is available. For this reason the ALtogether programme is designed to generate abundant feedback.

Learning is an increasing function of feedback and feedback is an increasing function of action. In other words, action produces feedback and feedback is raw material for learning. That is why action-based projects provide a better basis for action learning than projects that require only *cognitive* endeavour.