

Out of the shadows:
Why don't senior decision makers
take decisive action
on climate change???

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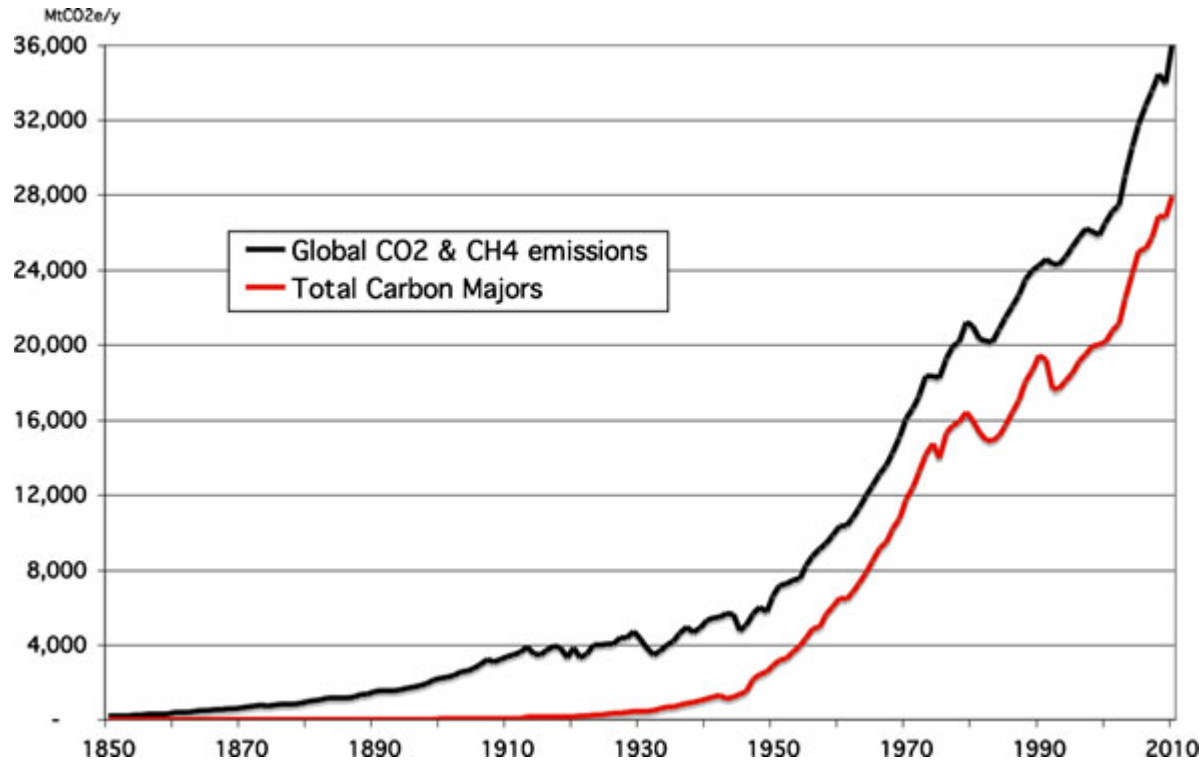
*Between the idea
And the reality
Between the motion
And the act
Falls the Shadow*

*Between the conception
And the creation
Between the emotion
And the response
Falls the Shadow*

T.S. Eliot, The Hollow Men

The need to study SDMs

1. Influential – organisations, individuals



Heede (2014) Climatic Change, 122:229–241

2. Poorly understood – faceless political economy, individuals = citizens, resistant

Many issues, perspectives

- Scales (agency-structure tension)
 - Micro: individual, interpersonal factors
 - Meso: organisations, institutions factors
 - Macro: enviro, socio-political, economic contextual factors
- Issues
 - Power – economic, political, cultural
 - Discourses – knowledge, ideas, norms, values
 - Huge array of disciplines and fields to cover
 - Lack of (critical) empirical work on SDMs themselves
 - Variety – within and between groups, and individuals, and over time – skimmed over in our study

Individual and interpersonal factors

- Awareness and understanding of CC
- Disciplinary background and perspective
- Political worldviews, values and affiliations
- Gender and risk perceptions
- Lifestyle and location

Awareness and understanding of CC

- Selective filtering of evidence
 - Cognitive
 - Organisational
- Difficulty understanding complexity and systems effects

Disciplinary background and perspectives

- Narrowness of business/law/econ backgrounds
- Misunderstanding of science
- Peer effect: narcissism and materialism
- Problems with neoclassical economics, law and accounting
 - Econ. reductionist, positivist, discounting, equilibrium
 - Law (US) non-interventionist, uncertainty about C
 - Accounting: enviro accounting marginal, uncertainty about C
- Silos

Political worldviews, values and affiliations

- Conservatism predicts scepticism
- Social networks, sources of information and \$
- Disproportionate optimism about human agency, rationality and technology
- Market responses have appeal & momentum independent of CC

Gender and risk perceptions

- Dominance of men
- Dominance of certain masculinity ideals
- White male status anxiety effect
- Emotion-free, value-free, personal-free
- Positive connotations of confidence, optimism
- Blame avoidance behaviour - inaction

Lifestyle and location

- High C, enviro insulated lifestyles
- Transnational elite – less place based
- Places generally have low exposure to climate variability and enviro degradation

Organisational and institutional factors

- Social identities, norms and networks
- Management paradigms and practices
- Organisational culture and ethics
- Organisational leadership and capacity
- Institutional complexity and inertia

Social identities, norms & networks

- Referent group and homophily – convergent identities
- Small world effect – closed networks (guarded access)
- Strategic use of multiple identities to fit context

Management paradigms and practices

- Pragmatism
- Utilitarian/consequentialist ethic
- Neoliberalism, ecological modernisation
- Formal risk management
- Near-term focus
- Perverse HR incentives

Organisational culture and ethics

- Product of narration – strategic story telling
- Managerialism – universal application of private sector ideals (efficiency, competition, bottom line)
- Preoccupation with shareholder value (near term profit)

Organisational leadership and capacity

- Decentralised agency – no easy steering mechanism for individuals
- Driving major change hard but hijacking others' change initiatives easy
- “Resource readiness” needed for change: positive feedback on inertia
- Lack of vision for transformational change

Institutional complexity and inertia

- Sunk costs – political and social as well as economic and physical. Characterises even new “experimental” arrangements (C markets)
- Increasing complexity (partly due to C policies)
- Institutional logics – unhelpful and/or conflicting
- Weak governance – voluntarism
- Strategic exploitation of above

Contextual factors

- Climatic extremes and crises
- Vested interests
- Collective action dilemmas
- Economic drivers and political culture
- Public opinion and climate imaginaries

Climatic extremes and crises

- Insulated and analytical: arms-length experience of extremes
- Normalisation of risks and crises
 - Lack of recognition
 - Undermining of capacity and sensible action
- Lack of attribution to CC
- Interpretation and representation of crises as contingent
- Maladaptive use of windows of opportunity
 - Deliberate or undeliberate
 - Excuse to short circuit democratic processes
 - Attraction to quick fixes and heroism

Vested interest and collective action dilemmas

- Fossil fuel lobby extremely powerful – pervasive and well-organised
 - “inevitable”, omnipotent, no alternatives
 - Influence over research therefore alternatives
- Prisoners’ dilemma games and intergenerational complexities

Economic drives and political culture

- Dominant strategic and tactical focus
- Investments and taxation structures
- Volatility and distraction
- Fragmented and uncertain green policies – not sticky enough

Public opinion and climate imaginaries

- Underestimation of public concern about CC among public (“no one else cares”)
 - perhaps because level of concern inferred from behaviour
- Dominant climate imaginary (in U.S.) the ‘techno-optimist’ one, then ‘fossil fuels forever’
- Strong resistance to ‘apocalypse’ imaginary
- No interest in ‘sustainable lifestyles’ imaginary

(Levy, D. L. and A. Spicer (2013). "Contested imaginaries and the cultural political economy of climate change." Organization 20(5): 659-678)

Conclusions

- SDMs intentionally and unintentionally protect and maintain the existing system in many ways
- They have the capacity to shape as well as respond to the existing system
- The factors constraining them (in their mind) are often the most local
 - immediate pressures and risks
 - persistent ideas, norms, logics, expectations
 - personal (identity) work

Conclusions

- In large part, problematic systems consist of repetitious and taken-for-granted practices
- Reveals need to examine the relationship between the distribution of risk (“bads”) and distribution of power (“goods” - economic, cultural, political). Is there an inverse ‘double exposure’ (double protection) pattern?

Conclusions

- Multifaceted response needed
 - Cross-scale, cross-sectoral
 - Focused on cultural/social as well as economic/political factors
 - Apply pressure from both the “inside track” (working with SDMs) and the “outside track” (critiquing and pressuring from outside)
 - Ongoing but varied pressures
- Possible interventions:
 - Preparatory work (build pressure)
 - Begin to question, shift and disrupt the taken-for granted practices constituting existing cultural, economic, socio-political systems
 - Generate ‘shadow networks’, ‘institutional entrepreneurs’ and social movements to cultivate linkages and alternative visions and knowledge
 - Generate or wait for openings for step change...

Conclusions

- So... Thinking reflexively and systemically as we need to do:
 - What power relations, climate imaginaries and system effects are *we* academics contributing to with our work, intentionally and unintentionally?