**Cape Town Drought Response Film Library**

**George Gabriel interview | 4 October 2018 | Duration: 1:35:46**

**KEY POINTS**

* A recurring theme during the Cape Town water crisis was that many people in business and civil society wanted to engage with city government to help solve the problem by supplying skills and resources that city government lacked and business and civil society were willing and able to offer, but there was resistance to this from city government and a lack of a functional interface; as a result, resources and skills that were available and offered to the city government were not used
* There was consistently a lack of follow-up by city officials after initial positive meetings
* On a worldwide basis, delivering good service is always a challenge; you need resources to do this; in a country with limited resources such as South Africa you need to be very creative in how you go about solving these problems, and it is critical that where resources are lacking in the public sector it engages with business and civil society; we are not doing this in Cape Town; in order to achieve this we need a rethink of how citizens and municipalities engage with each other, a rethink of how the different sectors of society work together; technology, data analytics and AI should come into play to assist in this
* Even after the crisis, and despite the fact that it dealt with a need as fundamental to life as the availability of water and a threat as real as climate change, there is still uncertainty that what should be done to improve the city’s resilience to climate change and drought is being done: right now, how do we know appropriate action is being taken?
* If you want to change behaviour, go to the people whose behaviour you’re trying to change and get them to engage with the problem: the communication to the people you’re trying to reach should actually come from them
* The question is how do we really embrace diversity; there is a motivation for embracing diversity that is driven by a much deeper and more profound perspective on emergency preparedness: the solutions to critical future problems may come from people currently in such disadvantaged situations that their situations will end up preventing them from presenting society with those solutions – unless we fix that
* The Cape Town water crisis highlighted four main problems in the working of the democratic process: 1) silo-based thinking with ego-based decision-making; 2) lack of meaningful engagement in modern democracy; 3) a lack of acceptance of a change in conditions, a lack of the necessary willingness and ability to confront the crisis with a sense of urgency; and 4) a lack of trust; to solve this we have to do the opposite of each

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00:00:06 How he started getting involved in 2017 in Cape Town’s response to the drought

00:02:47 Hospitality industry; FEDHASA; Waterwise Pledge

00:05:33 “The City” issue: misguided notion that the city government was going to solve the problem on its own

00:06:37 Launch of Waterwise Pledge in October 2017; two things he learnt from that experience

00:07:50 Daily measuring and monitoring led to saving of both water and money; the crisis creates the moment in time where suddenly you have to pay attention to your resources

00:08:39 “The holistic problem”: we never solve a problem completely – “we hop around from problem to problem, instead of bringing all of our intelligence and capabilities to one issue”

00:10:00 Working group to have hospitality industry ops managers share knowledge with their counterparts

00:10:44 Importance of staff training in hospitality industry; mismatch: just because people living in the township areas “live with Day Zero all the time” does not mean that they would save water in work environment outside of township areas; big difference between voluntary simplicity and forced simplicity

00:13:13 “The city woke up – there’s no doubt about it”

00:13:50 Experience with scenario planning workshop held by GreenCape in September 2017 with Clem Sunter discussing scenario options around Day Zero; first real face-to-face with bureaucracy; realisation: “there’s got to be a better way of managing these relations and the information flow and people’s attitude towards what’s going on”; the feeling he had that day: “how big a crisis is this, and how are we approaching this?”; did not have a sense that they had come up with a solution; “it’s only when you really face it as a full-on crisis that you get what I feel is so often missing … urgency, a deep sense of urgency … skin in the game … that’s what I was missing in that conversation”

00:20:35 Recurring issue: lack of follow-up by city government; more broadly, “there was this issue around how do you confront or deal with this entity called city government”

00:23:06 How to make sure local communities were prepared for “Day Zero + 20”; “the basic foundation of modern civilisation is indoor plumbing, so not having water delivered to your taps is a big deal”; “I never left any of those meetings feeling like this was under control”; what you would experience if Day Zero materialised would be the world’s largest refugee camp; massive disruption; potential outbreaks in violence; logistics

00:26:25 Suggestion to city government of online web portal to make it easier for local communities to access exactly the information they needed

00:27:25 In January 2018 mayor De Lille came out and said pretty unequivocally that Day Zero was going to happen; “that’s when things shifted”; issue of all this interest from business and civil society to get involved, but it was not 100% clear how that should work; tech could help: online portal could facilitate that; was not able to turn it into a functioning process

00:30:01 This is a city that’s complicated by the fact of walls and barbed wire and gates between people

00:30:35 Roundtable discussion with representatives from the tech community; he presented to them his thesis on how did we get into this situation and how are we going to get out of it; thesis: “silo-based bureaucracies with ego-based decision-making create … wicked problems”; “this city lives in crisis all the time”: transport, education, healthcare are all in crisis

00:32:15 “That’s the challenge of a city like Cape Town … it’s a beast in that it’s a big, massive animal with lots of heads, and four million people is no small issue”; inequality treated as two separate realities, and the challenge is how to make it one common reality; “the water crisis brought us in that direction”

00:33:30 Map developed by city government that made individual household water usage visible; data analytics; dashboard showing dam levels; everybody was learning data analytics; “in the age of fake news, data that’s real is a very simple thing to understand”; but: data outdated; limited city government resources to fix this; unsuccessful attempts to bring tech industry and city government together; various reasons for resistance within city government; internal politics within the bureaucracy of the City of Cape Town

00:37:54 From February to June 2018 kept working with wide variety of organisations, on themes of communication, data analytics, behaviour change; people wanted to get involved; trying to understand lay of the land of IT infrastructure in the city government to see how it could interact with volunteer resources within IT infrastructure in the local tech community; huge challenge of mapping vulnerable people in the city in preparation for Day Zero; consistent failure of city government to make use of solutions being offered free of charge on a volunteer basis from business and civil society resources

00:43:00 Warm meetings with city government repeatedly followed up by cold bureaucratic response; “there’s a lack of a functional interface”; available resources not used by city government

00:44:30 Need for coordinating volunteer activities

00:46:30 In Cape Town there is a form of political correctness / identity politics, at the expense of choosing the best solution; “there are lots of systems within the big system that aren’t functioning”

00:48:10 Great job done in saving water; but correctness and transparency of information an issue

00:49:28 Sense that city government’s attitude is: “please come and engage with us, but not really”; “in the end what I realised was really needed was a reinvention of how this all works”; he presented to the water and sanitation department a rethink of how citizens and municipalities interact with each other; idea of citizen has changed; tech can play a role

00:53:10 Acknowledgement within government that proposal presented was brilliant; simultaneous warning that he would meet resistance within government

00:54:30 The contrasting view that innovation, change, disruption is desired, because the way things are currently functioning is not working for everybody; he is still left with a fear for his children: “Are we going to have water twenty years from now? Climate change is real. It is obviously real. That’s what we just went through”; how do we know appropriate action is being taken?

00:56:10 Cape Town city government should stop referring to itself as “The City”

00:57:50 “We still don’t know each other”, but we should not just view that as a racial issue; “how do we really embrace diversity?”; it’s about a much deeper and more profound perspective on emergency preparedness; listen deeply to what’s going on rather than just push solutions; “there are so many conflicts going on because people aren’t taking the time to really reflect and listen and work together towards a solution”

01:04:24 “I’ve spent the year understanding how Cape Town’s got into the position where it is; I think it has incredible potential to break free, and create something new, but it’s going to take a very different approach to the one that currently exists” – has to be a rethink of how various foundation organisations work together, and technology, data analytics and AI also have to come into play

01:05:33 How to go about to raise awareness and change behaviour; if you want to change behaviour go to the people whose behaviour you’re trying to change and get them to engage with the problem; “the communication to the people you’re trying to reach should actually come from them”; understanding the dynamics that drive that: how we understand and influence each other’s actions; social physics; different mentality between conserver and consumer

01:12:03 The Day Zero term was a focal point, a very useful term; it helped people to focus on what was important; it was a rallying cry that made sense and was very helpful

01:13:3o Wikipedia conference and “editathon” on Cape Town water crisis articles; resistance to use of terms “Day Zero” and “crisis” from official tourism body; “Day Zero” is IP; it worked

01:19:40 Two very different mindsets: “I’m an expert in something; and there’s a correct way of presenting something” versus a mindset that is open to not knowing the answer and therefore needing to rely on other people and other sources to find out what the answer is; how do you have a meaningful exchange between these two mindsets?

01:21:30 On a worldwide basis, delivering good service is always a challenge; you need resources to do this; in a country with limited resources you need to be very creative in how you go about solving those problems; we are not doing that in Cape Town

01:22:15 His summary: in the democratic process, as he experienced it during the Cape Town water crisis, we suffer from four main problems: 1) silo-based thinking with ego-based decision-making; 2) lack of meaningful engagement in modern democracy; 3) a lack of acceptance of a change in conditions and of the necessary willingness and ability to confront the crisis with a sense of urgency; 4) we don’t trust each other; to solve that we have to do the opposite of each

01:33:50 Succinct summary of the four things he learnt from his involvement in the Cape Town water crisis

**BIO**

George Gabriel is a social innovator, entrepreneur and facilitator. Rooted in the Cape Town tech ecosystem, he works creatively in emerging spaces between institutions and sectors to test new possibilities for collaboration that can solve complex social problems. In mid-2017 he helped the Cape Town hospitality sector develop its water strategy as a response to the worsening drought conditions. As the water crisis deepened, he was asked to participate in and facilitated a variety of business-to-government-to-civil society fora where rapid innovation was being called for. His experiences are documented in this interview. George was born and educated in the US where he received his degree in sociology and anthropology. He also lived in Norway for 15 years and in Cape Town since 2011. He is deeply committed to the social and economic transformation of South Africa.