

London School of Economics Sustainability in Practice Lectures

Positive Deviance: a strategy for our times
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Forum for the Future

- UK's leading sustainable development charity
- Work with around 120 partners in private and public sector, including government
- Run Leadership for Sustainable Development Masters
- Publish Green Futures magazine

Mission:

To show that a sustainable way of life is possible and desirable by taking a positive solutions-oriented approach

What I hope to do

Take a post financial crash perspective on SD and:

- Be clear the cause of *unsustainable* development
- Be clear about the urgency and scale of the challenge
- Consider the reason(s) for the incommensurate response from government, business, (and higher education)
- Outline new ways of thinking about – and therefore designing – commensurate responses
- Recommend ‘positive deviance’ as the best strategy – for educators, entrepreneurs and for all of us

“when they lost sight of their goals, they redoubled their efforts”

Mark Twain

How are we doing nearly 40 years on?



Edward Goldsmith 1928-2009
Photo Oliver Tickell www.edwardgoldsmith.com

Principles for a sustainable society:

- 1 “minimum disruption of ecological processes
2. Maximum conservation of materials and energy – or an economy of stock rather than flow
3. A population in which recruitment equals loss
4. A social system in which the individual can enjoy, rather than feel restricted by, the first three conditions”

Blueprint for Survival, January 1972

Symptoms of a whole system failure: *unsustainable development*



- + Loss of biomass and diversity
- + Mineral depletion
- + Waste overdose
- + Excess fossil fuel consumption
- + persistent poverty, Injustice. inequality

= negative feedback
on economy; on well-being; on
security; on life itself

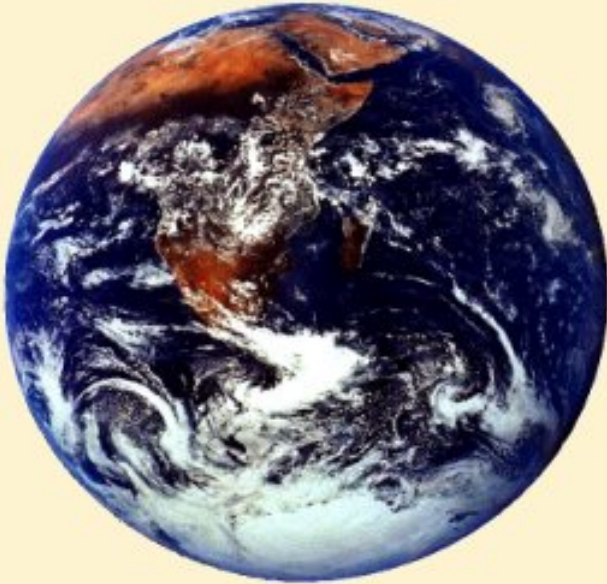
* Vitousek, Erlich, Erlich & Matson (1986)

Causes of *unsustainable* development 1 (the Earth's view of our behaviour)

- The laws of physics apply to you humans as well as to me, nature; yet you behave as if they don't
- Life is the result of great networking and collaboration; it is not a hierarchy with you humans on top
- Big, fierce, predatory animals should be rare; you are not
- The safety catch of evolution is its slowness; your human technologies have developed too fast, without thought
- Your spirit has evolved with you and throughout life, yet you live apart from it

An *unsustainable* human enterprise

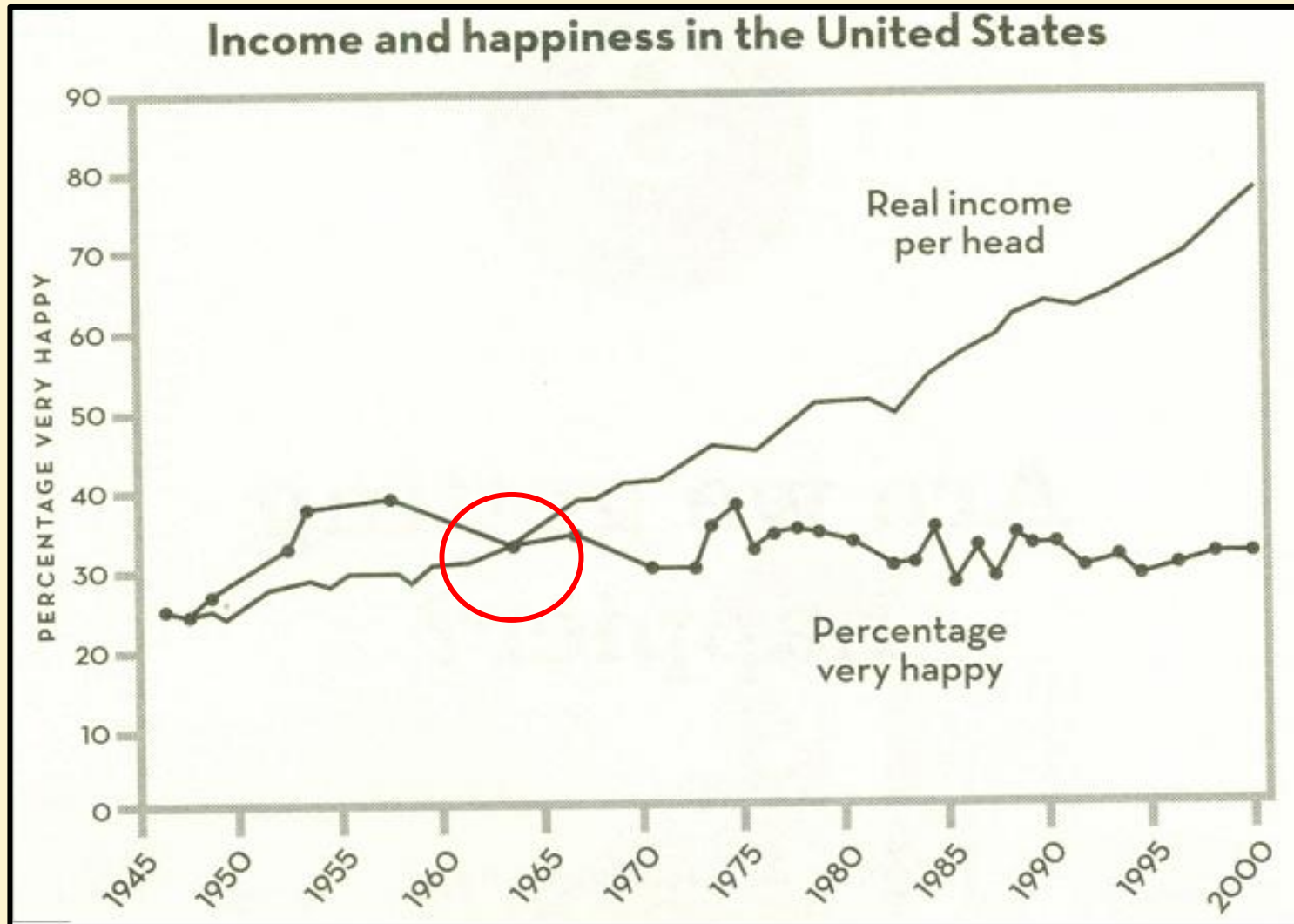
Shrinking supply side



Growing demand side

1946	2.2 billion
1972	3.6 billion
2009	6.8 billion
2050	9.2 (10.7) billion

And we are not even very happy



Causes of *unsustainable* development 2

introducing the *Compound Error Theory of History*

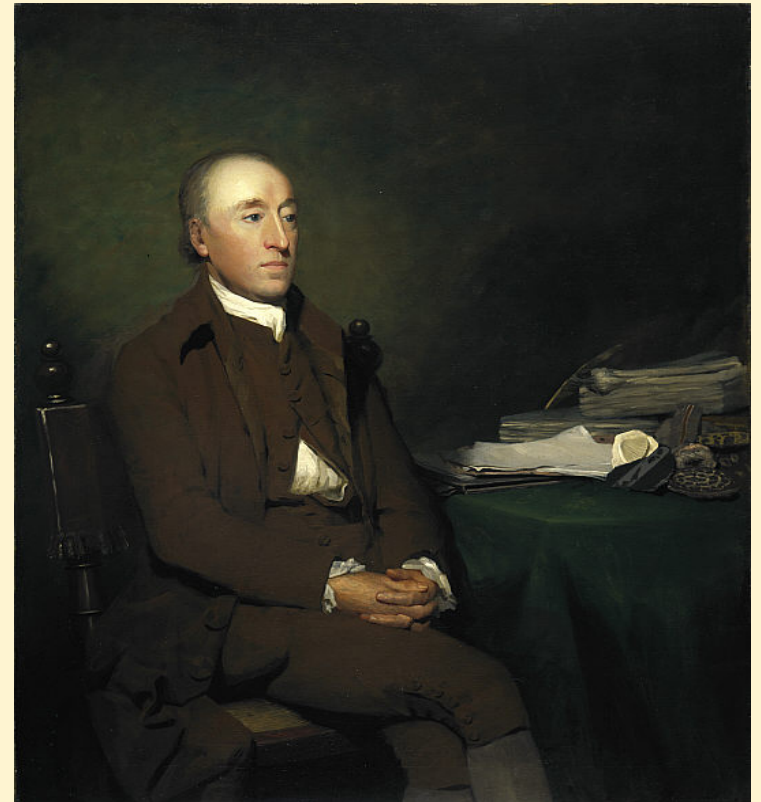
... or ... how bankers went off the rails

“why did nobody notice?”

HM The Queen, November 2008

The compound error theory of history

You've heard of Adam Smith
...but do you know this man?



The compound error theory of history

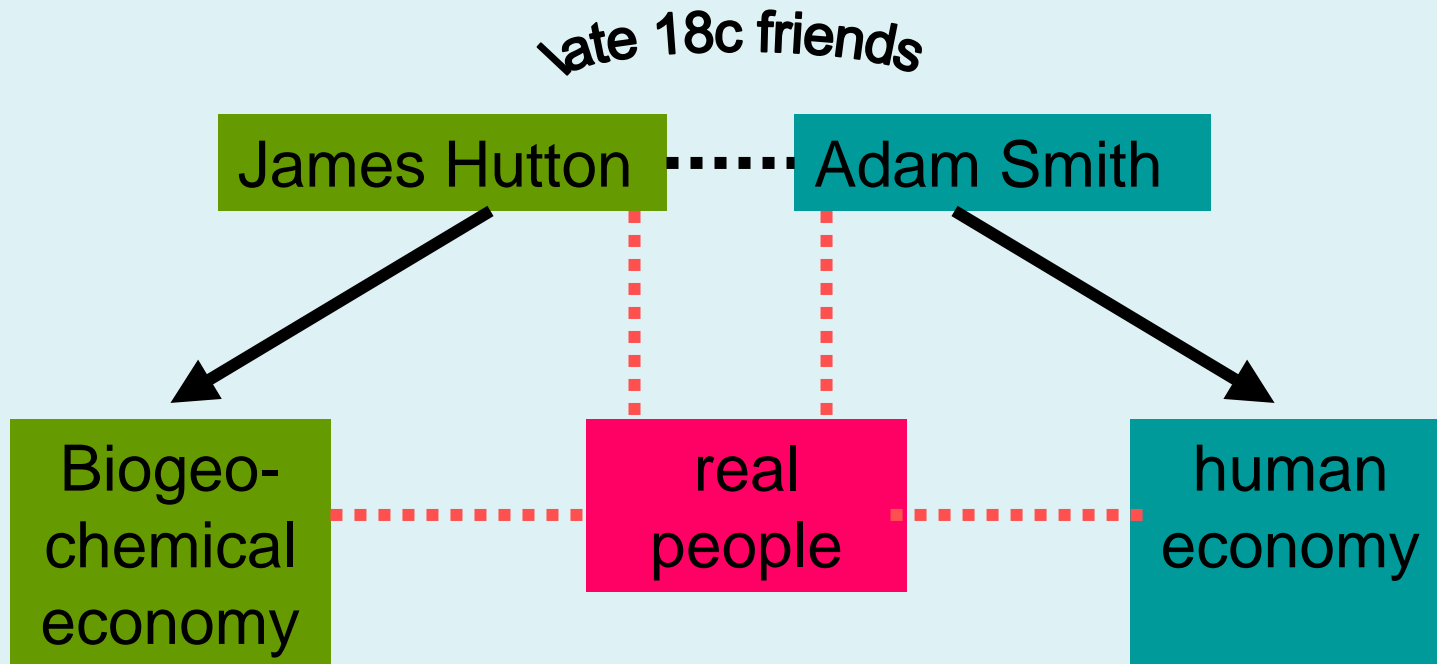


“the purpose of life, is
life itself”

James Hutton

A friend of Adam Smith
(and executor of his
will), Hutton also wrote
a blockbuster: *Theory of
the Earth*

The compound error theory of history



Sara Parkin, from
Positive Deviance,
forthcoming

To return to the Queen's question

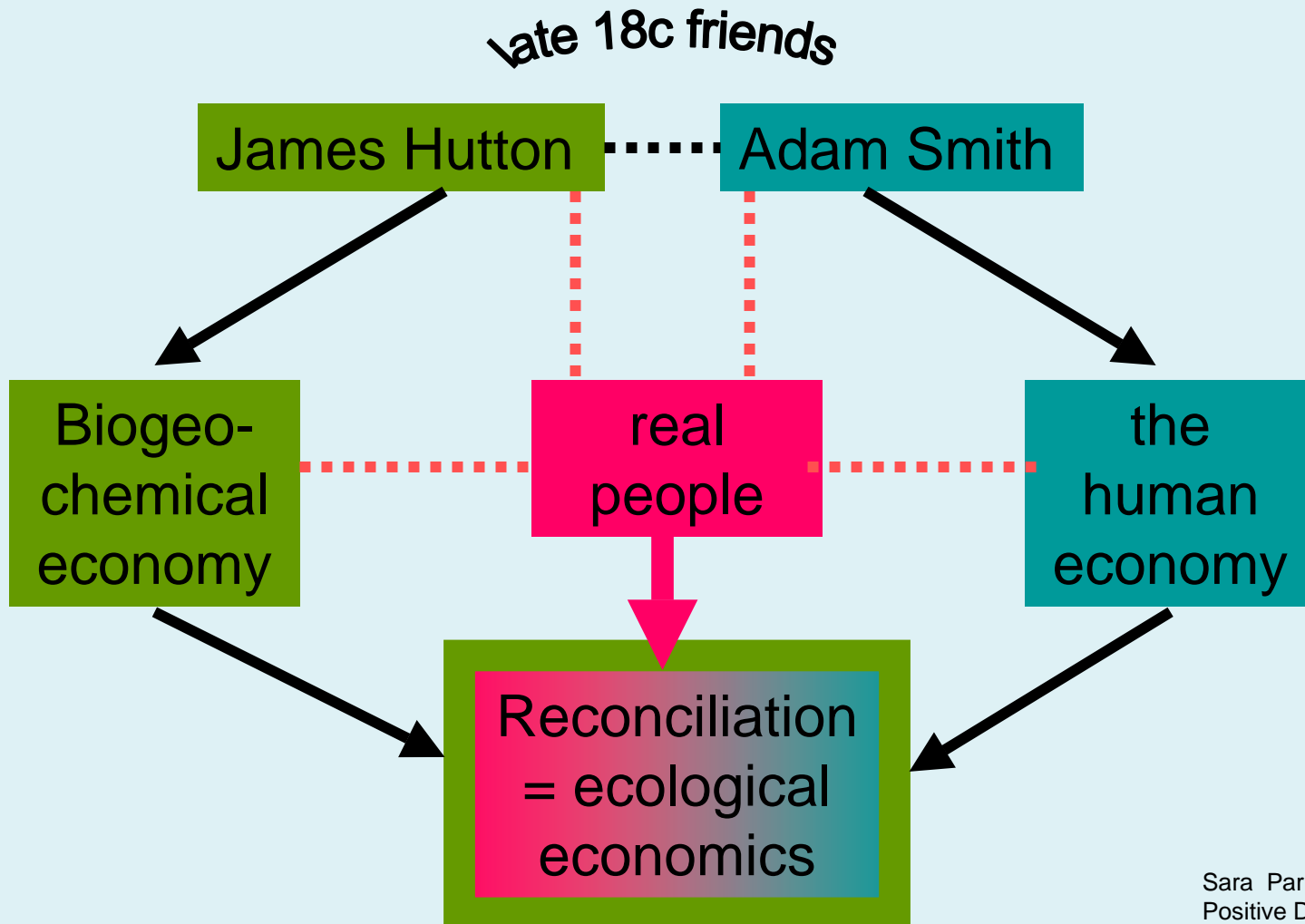
Answer by Professor Garicano (economist) “someone was relying on someone else ... and everyone thought they were doing the right thing” ¹

Answer by Fredrick Soddy (Nobel Prize winning chemist)
“you cannot permanently pit an absurd human convention [compound interest] against the natural law of the spontaneous decrement of wealth (entropy)” ²

“Planet finance is beginning to dwarf planet earth” ³

1. Guardian 12 November 2008
2. Quoted by Herman Daly *The Crisis: debt and real wealth* Feb 09 www.bicusa.org
3. Niall Ferguson *The Ascent of Money*, 2008

Correcting the historical compound error



Sara Parkin, from
Positive Deviance,
forthcoming

Foundations stones of economics disrupted¹

- Behavioural economics: “predictable irrationality” ²
- Neurophysiology: we are *social* animals and we like to collaborate and be fair ³
- Psychological happiness (subjective well being) and philosophical happiness (living a good life) as new objective for economic activity? ⁴

1. Guardian leader 1 September 2008
2. Daniel Airey (2008) Predictable Irrationality
3. Good description in Daniel Golman (203)07) Social Intelligence
4. Layard (2006); Grayling (2003)

The all important equation 1974

$$I = P \times A \times T$$

I Impact on environment

P Number of People

A Affluence, aka consumption

T Technology or techniques of that consumption

The all important equation today

$$I = P \times A \times T$$

I Impact on environment

P Number of people

A Affluence, consumption

T Technologies/techniques
of that consumption

by 2050?

down by 50%

up to 9-10 billion

up, say 3% pa

∴

need to improve
by 70-90%

Can we design our way out of this?

Do we have a plan?



Foyer of Merrill Lynch office, London
Photo: Sara Parkin, September 2008

- Scale and pace of change needed
- Scientific basis of that change
- Social basis of that change
- The importance of leadership

Getting real: global trends to 2025

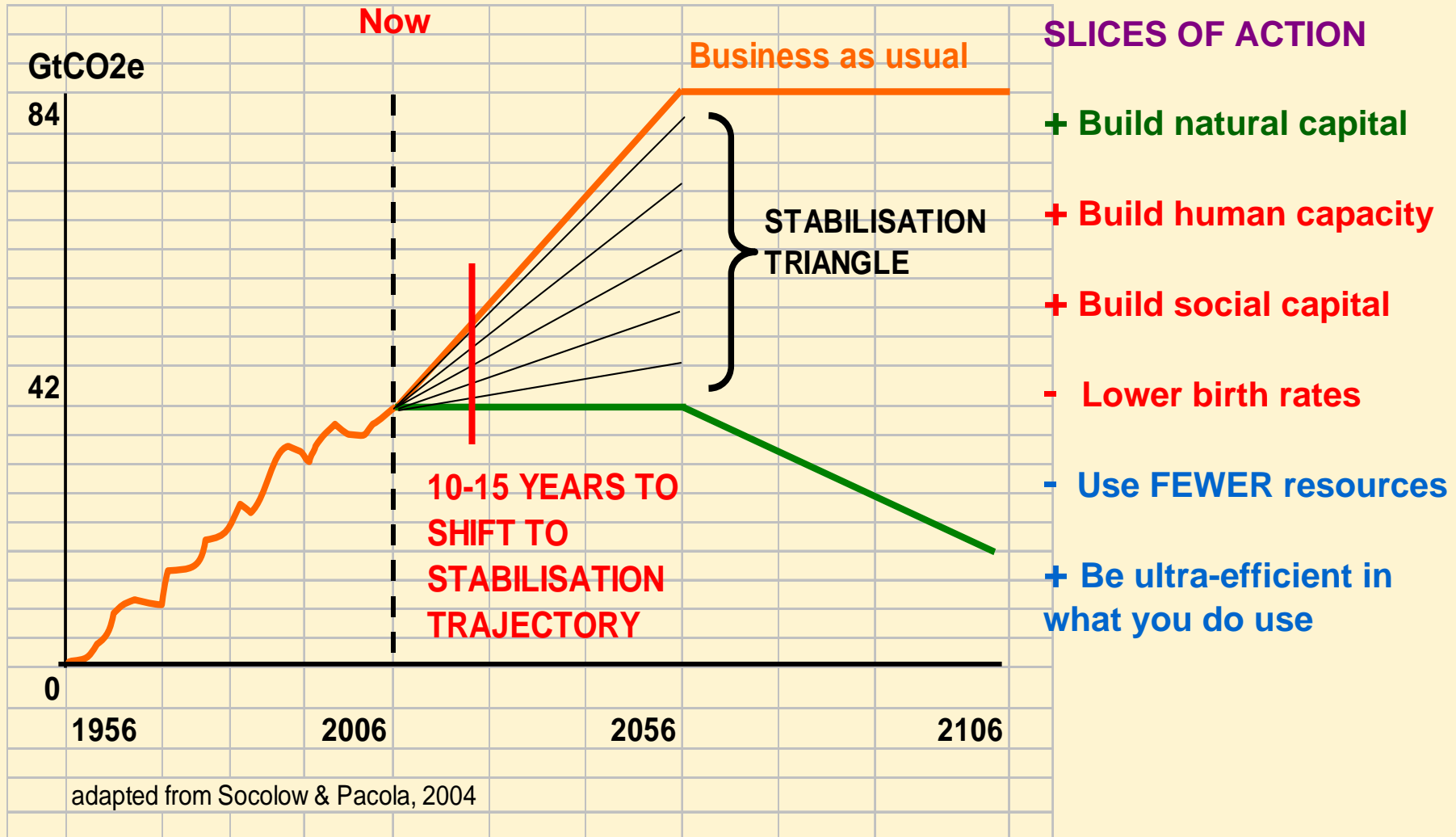
The hallmarks of tomorrow's world will be scarcity – of land, water, oil, food and 'air-space' (for greenhouse gases)

- Leaders and their ideas matter
- Economic volatility introduces a major risk
- Geopolitics rivalries trigger discontinuities more than does technological change ...

...and the greatest of these is leadership: “leadership matters, no trend is immutable, and ... timely and well-informed intervention can decrease the likelihood and severity of negative developments and increase the likelihood of positive ones”

The US National Intelligence Council, 2008

A plan for investing in our future: no silver bullet, but millions of right actions



Positive deviance as a strategy for change

A growing number of people are practicing **positive deviance**. They are doing the right thing for sustainability – *despite* the barriers, wrong rules and processes, and uncooperative colleagues. And doing it in a way that brings other people along.

Daniel Barenboim
Cooperative Bank
Russell Simmons
Seikatsu Club

Zopa
W L Gore
Sandbag
Grameen Bank

Divine Chocolate
Ecology Building Society
The Carrot Mob
Prince of Wales

“to be truly radical is to make hope possible, rather than despair convincing”

Raymond Williams

Case for university leadership: Intellectual leadership

- all the evidence, ideas and policies we need are there, in UK universities
- but that body of knowledge is:
 - a) not joined-up or coherently presented
 - b) not speaking to others in a language they can hear
 - c) not producing sustainability-literate graduates in volume

Case for university leadership

Institutional power

- opportunity for organisation level trials and exemplars through ‘action research’ (in partnership – particularly place-based)
- opportunity of sector to influence others by translating outcomes:
 - a) Practical examples of what works
 - b) Policy implications of taking things to scale

Stuff is happening: is it enough?

There is some progress

- Funding council initiatives (low-carbon, LGM)
- Higher Education Academy, EAUC
- Awards – Green Gown, THES
- New UUK strategic group for SD
- Student Green League uni ranking

HE leadership on the other planet?

- Mandelson speech, RAE-REF
- Student demand: Future Leaders Survey
- Employers and employability

The entrepreneurial university

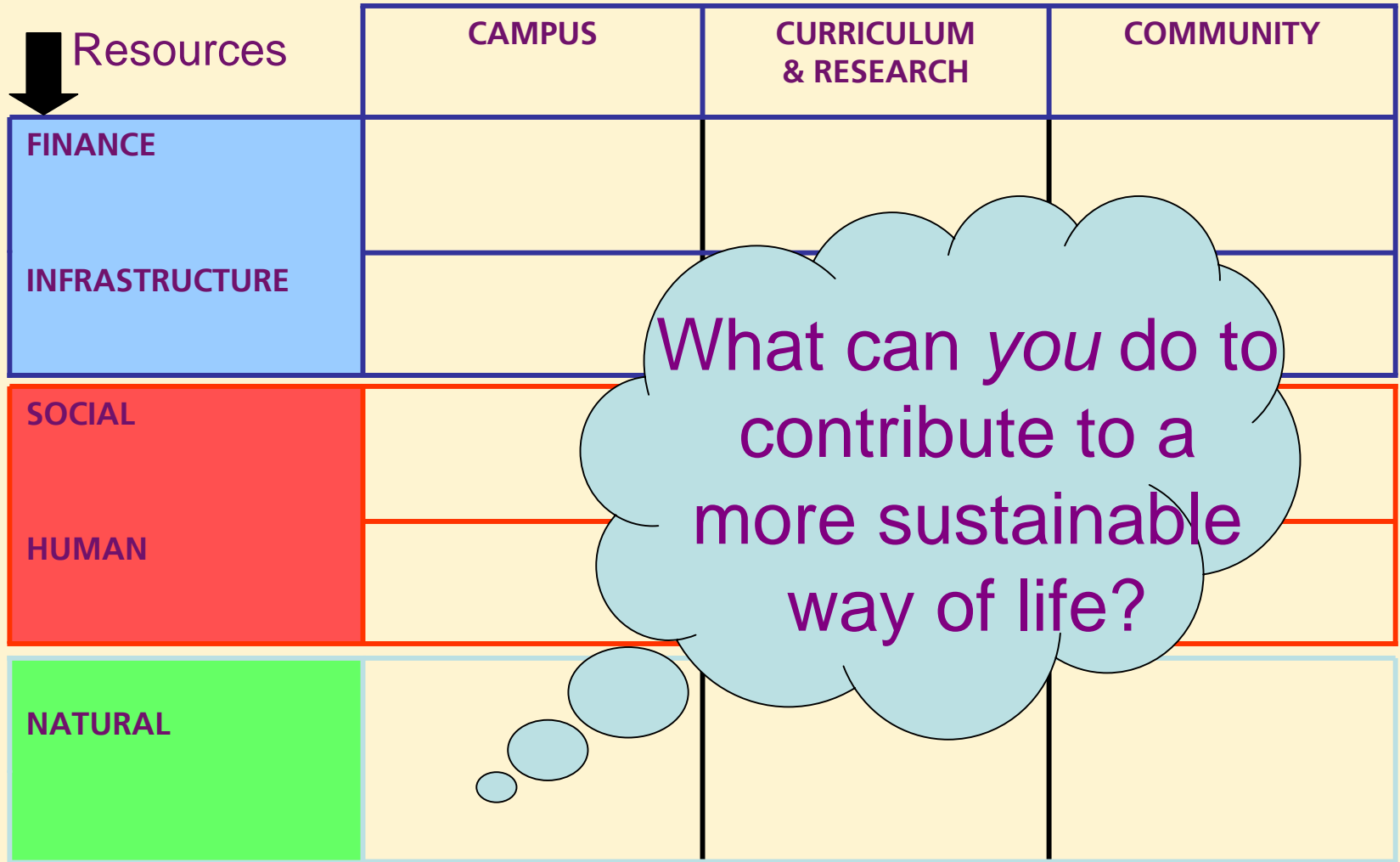
1. Prioritises practical action for SD

- a) right pace and scale (it is very urgent)
- b) focus on people and behaviour change
- c) concentrates on the “socially useful”

2. Encourages positive deviance

- a) institutionally
- b) in influencing others

It is a whole institution undertaking



How HE can grow contribution

	CAMPUS	CURRICULUM	COMMUNITY
FINANCE	pensions accounting	destination university	Procurement for resilience
INFRASTRUCTURE	new build & refurbish	experiential learning	transport
SOCIAL	good governance	'retrofit' workforce	Business links Share space
HUMAN	Staff training	All graduates sustain'y literate	one-stop green information
NATURAL	carbon reduction bio-mass increase	Low-carbon innovation waste reduction	partner with local government wildlife orgs, etc

“Always do right. This will gratify some people and astonish the rest” Mark Twain

The Positive Deviant: sustainability
leadership in a perverse world,
Earthscan
June 2010

Thank you for listening!
www.forumforthefuture.org