

Why don't bees criticise each other?

A hive helpfulness approach to net

zero

Our collective journey to better outcomes is awash with opinion and criticism on how that should happen. The unintended consequence of this is to drive decision makers away from the challenge. If we were to take our cues from altruistic communities, criticism doesn't exist as we know it. If we adopted the helpfulness of the hive, we would get to net zero faster.

Many observers, consultants and specialists in climate change have a detailed understanding of only a few aspects of the whole system of climate change. The specialists and sectoral siloes celebrating their expertise in a single climate narrative.

The impact of this is felt in the argumentative expert, an area of psychology that has been interestingly observed by University College London's Climate Action Unit.

The UCL Climate Action Unit point out that much of the discourse in the climate change arena comes from experts' ability to develop a single point of view, elevating their opinion through collective agreement, and then disagreeing with any form of alternative view.

"People's sense of what is meaningful action on climate change is indeed fragmenting. This isn't by design, it's a side effect of our psychology: the more mental energy we devote to subject, the stronger we convince ourselves that we know the truth."
Dr Kris de Meyer UCL

As a result, a lack of progress in actioning net zero is caused by conflict created by expert opinions on what good looks like. Couple with this hive mentality, rabbit holes on the 'answer to climate change' are everywhere.

Corporations in flight from criticism

Critics are very quick to point out mistakes and lambast corporations with claims of greenwashing.

An example of this can be clearly seen in the aviation industry. Flying isn't going anywhere – Airbus forecasts that passenger traffic will grow by 3.6% every year until 2041 ^[1]. The aviation market is heavily fossil-fuel dependent, and there is no magic fix to this right around the corner. Airlines are branded as greenwashers whenever a sustainability strategy is announced^[2] regardless of whether they are actually supporting good outcomes.



It is easy, therefore, to understand why many organisations simply wouldn't bother. Keep your mouth shut, continue with business as usual, and thus avoid the barrage of greenwashing accusations that ensue following a sustainability strategy announcement.

This is triggering an ancient human trait. The human brain is still working on a 100,000 year old operating system. When challenged with criticism and complexity, humans avoid dealing with it.

Is criticism and the rush to establish guidance as 'fact' to back the criticism actually helping anyone? We know this is creating 'learned helplessness'. So probably not.

A call for Hive Helpfulness thinking

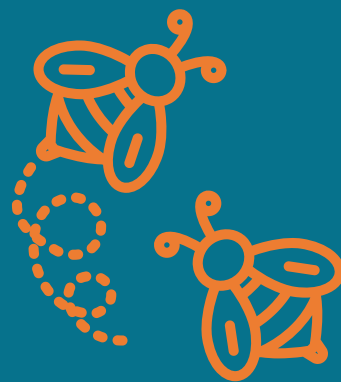
In our critical thinking perhaps we need to start a new philosophy. Rather than hive mentality following critics, could we not use our human character of 'following' to establish 'hive helpfulness'?

The term hive helpfulness was coined by Will Arnold-Baker from The Glorious Day, as a way of using hive mentality positively.

In the context of net zero, rather than the current hive mentality of continually throwing green muck as industries endeavouring to change, would it not be more useful to provide the signals to what 'good' looks like.

Whilst pure altruism of a beehive community might be a little bit too far to ask for human beings, the process of how bees share information isn't. A bee that finds a flower with nectar will communicate the location through their special waggle dance. This is received by an outgoing bee and their direction of travel is set. They may find a new, better flower in the same location or no flowers at all. On return they simply communicate to the advancement of the hives' knowledge of where nectar is.

In this altruistic process no bee (as far as we know) gets ridiculed if their knowledge does not provide bee Eden. Nor does the entire hive sit back and wait for one bee to tell the hive a single answer for them to agree with. The evolution of the hive has shown that collective exploration across a broad geography creates enough understanding for survival. No one bee knows everything, and collectively they know the direction of travel to share their own learning, without criticism. That's hive helpfulness!



So, for our human hive's journey to net zero would we not be better that we are helpful in our sharing of knowledge? Providing signals to the information we do know, accept it if someone does not follow the same path as it may not be useful, but it was helpful in informing the direction in exploration.

A bee doesn't communicate false truths, because the proof of endeavour is in the nectar it carries. We just need to be mindful that nectar comes from many places. A hive doesn't worry about a single bee that carries misinformation, because the collective hive's exploration is bigger than one entity.

If we took our cues from the humble bee, a hive helpfulness philosophy would strive to work in a collective good to support decision makers through individual contributions to the narrative and action on net zero. If less time is spent worrying about single companies greenwashing, and more in sharing knowledge, we will move faster to net zero.

Perhaps it's also time to take the foot off the neck of corporate achievement being only about the purity of the net zero Eden now. Surely the process of learning, which includes the integrity of owning mistakes, and allowing them to show progress, should be supported not criticised?

[1]<https://www.airbus.com/en/products-services/commercial-aircraft/market/global-market-forecast>

[2] <https://www.theguardian.com/business/2022/sep/26/easyjet-will-stop-offsetting-carbon-emissions-from-planes-roadmap-net-zero>