

## FOREWORD

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David Fleming would be so thrilled that you are holding this book in your hands. He was one of the most intelligent, kind and funny men it was ever my privilege to meet. I would also unreservedly go so far as to say that he was one of the most original, brilliant, urgently-needed, under-rated and ahead-of-his-time thinkers of the last 50 years. Let's see whether by the end of this book you agree with that statement or not. I suspect you will.

I don't remember who it was who introduced us, but sometime in 2005 I rang him, as in my explorations around the idea of resilience his name was coming up again and again. This was in the very early days of the Transition movement, when it was still an idea taking shape, assembling eclectic ideas with a magpie eye for the shiny, the interesting, the new. Our key motivating question was how you might intentionally build more resilient communities in such a way that every step felt like a step forward, a rewarding, nurturing, inspiring, positive step. No-one really talked much about resilience then, which was why I was so keen to talk to David.

He was charming, and fascinated that anyone would have taken sufficient interest in his work to pick up a phone and call him. After an hour long conversation, he said he would send me a copy of the draft of a book he was working on, in case there was anything in there that I might find useful.

A couple of days later, a beautifully bound copy of *The Lean Economy* came through my letterbox—one of, as I later found out, only a handful of copies sent out to people whose opinion he respected. It is often said of the Sex Pistols' first gig at Manchester Free Trade Hall that although only 50 people came, every person had their lives changed, and went on to form seminal bands, record labels and publications. It was the same with that early version of *The Lean Economy*, impacting massively on the small circle of us fortunate enough to get copies. I still contend that had that early version been published there and then, it would have been hugely influential and impactful. At that stage it was smaller than *Lean Logic*, but at that moment, with so many of us floundering about trying to piece together

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models for building resilience, *The Lean Economy* was rich with insight. Looking through things I wrote and published at the time, many of them list, in the references “Fleming, D. (2006) *The Lean Economy* (Unpublished)”.

But David didn’t do editors, and he certainly didn’t do deadlines. Shortly after he sent me his book, he gave a talk in Totnes that I facilitated. I told him he had 40 minutes to speak, and after 50 he was still going. I tried gesturing him to wind things up, but he was so into the flow of his stream of ideas that he wasn’t stopping for anyone. After an hour I started making quite firm “draw it to a close now” gestures, to which he told the audience “ah, now he’s telling me I need to wind up . . . Anyway, let me tell you about . . .” and he was off again. He finally drew to a close after 80 minutes of speaking.

A talk by David was always a mesmerising experience. He talked at a speed that for him was the only way to keep up with the rate at which his brain generated ideas. Hands often went up to ask him to slow down a bit, a suggestion he would comply with for about 2 minutes before he inevitably picked up speed again. One of his most memorable presentations was at the 2009 Transition Network Conference at Battersea Arts Centre. It was titled “Wild Economics: Wolves, Resilience and Spirit”. To this day I couldn’t really tell you what it was about, other than it was a fascinating, breakneck and hilarious trip through the mind of David Fleming.

*The Lean Economy* became a constant feature of life around David. Ever-present under his arm was a tattered working version, constantly revised, scribbled on, amended. I had always rather naively assumed the idea of editing was to make something shorter, more concise, but under David’s editorial process, *The Lean Economy* just seem to grow ever larger.

My suggestions that he needed an editor and, dare I say it, a deadline, were charmingly laughed off. He was in discussions with publishers, he’d tell me, and anyway it’d be finished in a couple of months. One of my favourite memories of David was in 2007, when he came to my wedding, in an old youth hostel perched high above one of the most beautiful stretches of the River Dart in Devon. The sun shone for the first time in weeks, and at the crack of dawn, when most people were sleeping off hangovers, David later told me he was awake and up, sitting at a bench overlooking the river, editing *The Lean Economy* in a blissful outdoor reverie.

Some time later, he announced that he was going to completely rework *The Lean Economy*, and that it was now going to be called *Lean Logic: a*

*Dictionary for Environmental Manners*. I had a long conversation with him about whether the world actually needed a “dictionary for environmental manners”, indeed whether it would even have any kind of idea of what such a thing actually was or to what use one might possibly put it. He listened very patiently and carried on regardless, and I’m glad he did. Although I still contend that *The Lean Economy* should have been published, as it was, back in 2005, *Lean Logic*, and now this brilliant paperback version so lovingly created by Shaun Chamberlin, beautifully capture the extraordinary thing that was the mind of David Fleming. Both have the distinct advantage over *The Lean Economy* that they have passed through the hands of an editor, and in this case, an editor who worked closely with David for years.

His mind wasn’t a linear thing. It leapt from one thing to another to another, making connections that no-one else ever would. Being the most widely-read person I have ever met helped. I remember a great discussion we had where I asked him what gave him hope. After a long pause he said “Bach”. He introduced me to some of the classics of what one might think of as early resilience literature, such as *The Worm Forgives the Plough* and George Sturt’s *The Wheelwright’s Shop*, for which I am deeply grateful. He was a great friend and supporter of the early London Transition groups, often attending their events, and acting as an elder. Personally I learnt so much from him, and he was always willing and happy to talk through and debate ideas, and to share his thoughts on the emerging Transition model, something he was a great admirer of.

His death in November 2010 came as a huge shock. The last time I saw him he was as full of his usual indefatigable curiosity as always, fit and well, the very physical embodiment of the “lean” that he so enjoyed prefixing everything else with. Death was the one deadline he wasn’t able to evade. At the time, he still had the umpteenth rewrite of *Lean Logic*, complete with its strikethroughs, scribbles and notes in the margin, with him. That final working version was self-published by his family shortly after his passing, but I am so delighted to see my dear friend and mentor’s work edited properly by Shaun and presented to the world.

In many ways, I have seen a lot of what I do as being about trying to make David’s ideas (in so far as I managed to grasp them) intelligible to a wider world. For me, much of that is captured in my favourite quote of his.

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Localisation stands, at best, at the limits of practical possibility. But it has the decisive argument in its favour that there is no alternative.

Genius. Now Shaun Chamberlin has done a far better job of clearly and intelligibly presenting his ideas than I could ever do. History will come to place him alongside Schumacher, Berry, Seymour, Cobbett, and those other brilliant souls who could not just imagine a more resilient world, but who could paint a picture of it in such vivid colours. Step into the world of David Fleming, you'll be so glad you did.

ROB HOPKINS