REAMP
An Approach for Resolving
Complex, Multi-Stakeholder Problems
by R. Scott Spann, Founder, Innate Strategies[1]

Some things seem impossible. It especially seemed impossible to get a variety of stakeholders – all with different perspectives, different goals, different constituencies, different measures of success – to come to shared understanding and agreement about how to work together to achieve something completely new – something that would advance both the needs of each of the individuals and the collective as a whole. Yet, this is precisely what RE-AMP, conceived by Jennie Curtis and Rick Reed of the Garfield Foundation[2], set out to accomplish in 2004. Their pioneering effort with 24 utilities, regulators, foundations and NGO's – catalyzed by their emergent goal of reducing greenhouse gas emissions by 80% by 2030 – has since grown to 120 organizations endorsed by 8 Midwestern governors and has made REAMP an active leader in the national climate change conversation.

And just in case one is tempted to believe that such a process is only applicable in the context of the U.S., it's also been successful in Guatemala, working with CARE international and the Quiche and Mum peoples to resolve poverty and social injustice – engaging with a diverse range of stakeholders spanning leaders in the military and intelligence services, former guerilla leaders and village councils, leaders in the Catholic church and the leading Mayan shamans and philosophers – 30 different perspectives in all. In the end, they, too, were able to come to shared understanding and agreement about their reality and how to change it for the benefit of their society as a whole.[3]

So, several questions now emerge. What did they do, how did they do it and, most importantly, can it be repeated? This final bit – can it be repeated – has become particularly important in light of the kinds of complex, multi-stakeholder problems – wicked problems – now emerging both locally and globally.

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[1] Scott was the consultant engaged to design and facilitate this process. For more about this approach, please visit www.innatestrategies.com
[2] See www.garfieldfoundation.org. BTW, Jennie & Rick continue to actively guide this project.
[3] for a brief review of this process, there's an article on the Resources page on our website – entitled "The Promise of Systems Thinking".

Let's begin with a big question

How do we solve truly complex problems – problems that have impacts across broad geographies and over long time frames – problems with multiple, diverse stakeholders – problems that impact our economy, our health and well-being, our way of living, and our environment – simultaneously? How do we really get our minds around them in a way that enables us to act effectively on them – individually and collectively – especially given that problems of this kind are increasing at an increasing rate in our interconnected, interdependent, globalizing world?[4]

That's the kind of problem that we set out to engage – the kind of problem that we wanted to be able to solve reliably, predictably, repeatedly.[5]

And, surprisingly, we did. At the end of three 2-day meetings spread over six months, the 24 leaders not only agreed to collaborate, they had developed a deep, comprehensive understanding of their shared world captured in the form of a large one-page map – one that they all agreed explained how that world, their world, worked. Just as importantly, they had developed simple, unquestionable strategic clarity about specifically how to solve that problem – a shared, mutually agreed upon clarity and insight that both explained and altered their strategies of the last 20 years. Finally, and most importantly, they were among the first in the nation to establish an aggressive (and realistic) goal for climate stability – to become the "leaders in reducing greenhouse gas emissions by 80% by the year 2030".

A deeper dive

So what did they do? And, more importantly, how do you (better yet, how do we) do that – reliably, predictably, repeatedly?[6]

With that outcome in mind, let's give you first a rough frame and then dive a bit deeper into the details.

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[4] For example, see Lester Brown's Plan B 4.0

[5] Since the initial work with REAMP, we've had a chance to work in similar ways with a variety of groups, achieving similar outcomes. As a result, we've had a chance to reflect more thoughtfully on the what, how and why of our methodology – coming to deeper, fuller understanding about it. As a result, while much of what we did in REAMP was clear to us at the time, some of these insights have emerged since then.

[6] BTW, this article covers the launch of RE-AMP – from initial interviews to strategy formulation and the agreement to collaborate. For more on the ongoing execution of RE-AMP (initially facilitated by Dave Sibbett), without which none of their success would have happened, see www.reamp.org .

At the highest level of working in a complex, multi-stakeholder context, we're basically doing two things at six organic levels to enable four outcomes – captured here and explained below:

Creating: At the level of:	Relationship	Clarity	Ability
Self	Grounding in your context, experiencing your system and choosing your role	Internalizing a systemic point of view and taking a personal stand	Leadership
Another	Engaging with others in their passion, their work goal & a success story, and adding value to them	Creating an individual causal map of their goal, their top 3-5 core competencies and their story	Trust
Team	Gathering around shared passions, discovering a positive goal, and describing your shared reality	Discovering and assessing your global goal by understanding that goal's behavior over time; mapping the system as a whole	Innovation
Organization	Sharing the work & worldview with the organization and exploring its implications	Analyzing your map to discover your solution set; assessing the organization's fit with reality	Execution
Constituents	Engaging constituents, helping them to shape their identity and define what they seek	Formulating a viral strategy for execution at the constituent level	Scalability
Ecosystem	Giving critical stakeholders a voice, demonstrating your strategic understanding and adding value	Integrating stakeholder goals, needs and value exchange via a thoughtful, balanced stakeholder assessment	Sustainability

As for the two things, in order to solve for the complexity, we need to create *clarity*, to engage the multiple stakeholders who will need to coordinate to address the problem/opportunity, we need to create *relationship*. We need both the clarity and the relationship to create *shared understanding and agreement* about four necessary outcomes – coming to shared understanding and agreement about 1) the state of the

reality we're seeking to change, 2) what's causing that reality, 3) where to intervene in that reality and 4) the structural then behavioral changes required to actually change that reality. And, we need to thoughtfully, rigorously do this at six organic levels – 1) the level of the individual, 2) with one another, 3) in teams, 4) as a group as a whole, 5) with the larger set of our "constituents", and, finally, 6) at the level of the ecosystem – whether that be the social or natural ecosystem – or both.

One more bit about the meta-level frame. While many bodies of work have contributed to this methodology[7], we're drawing fundamentally on two domains of work. One domain, achieving clarity amidst the complexity, requires the application of the rigorous body of work originated by Jay Forrester known as system dynamics (SD). SD enables us to greatly simplify and integrate the complexity of the situation without sacrificing (actually, by enhancing) our ability to see and understand the real world.[8] The other domain, creating deep, sustainable relationships, draws on the latest learnings from individual and group psychology.[9] Applying the principles from this domain enables us to create practices and then processes that align with the innate impulses and behaviors of individuals and groups. Integrating the two, step-by-step, ensures that we're building relationship and clarity at one level before relying on those as a key resource at the next level and, then, the next. Okay, enough of that...

In practice, this shows up in a relatively simple and commonsensical way – working first with individuals, then with subgroups[10] and, finally, with the group as whole. This way of working is in direct (and deliberate) contradiction to the traditional "top-down" ways of working to achieve most goals – yet, paradoxically, produces results that include and then transcend the original goal.[11] So, using that frame, a little more on what and how...

At the Individual level in REAMP, we needed to establish relationship and clarity about the purposes, concerns and circumstances of each of the individual participants. We chose to do so based on the assumption (if not the reality) that if we're not able to

[7] For more on this, see the whitepaper on our website referring to "impossible".
[8] Resources for systems thinking and system dynamics can be found on our website.
[9] Again, see our website for more.
[10] Subgrouping refers to a specific approach developed by Yvonne Agazarian whose work (Systems Centered Training) plays an critical role in this process. For more www.sct-institute.org or check our website for recommendations about her most relevant publication.
[11] As a quick example, RE-AMP's presenting goal was to "increase the amount of wind energy in the Midwest" and evolved to "reducing GHG emissions by 80% by 2030" – a radically different goal that included and transcended "wind energy".

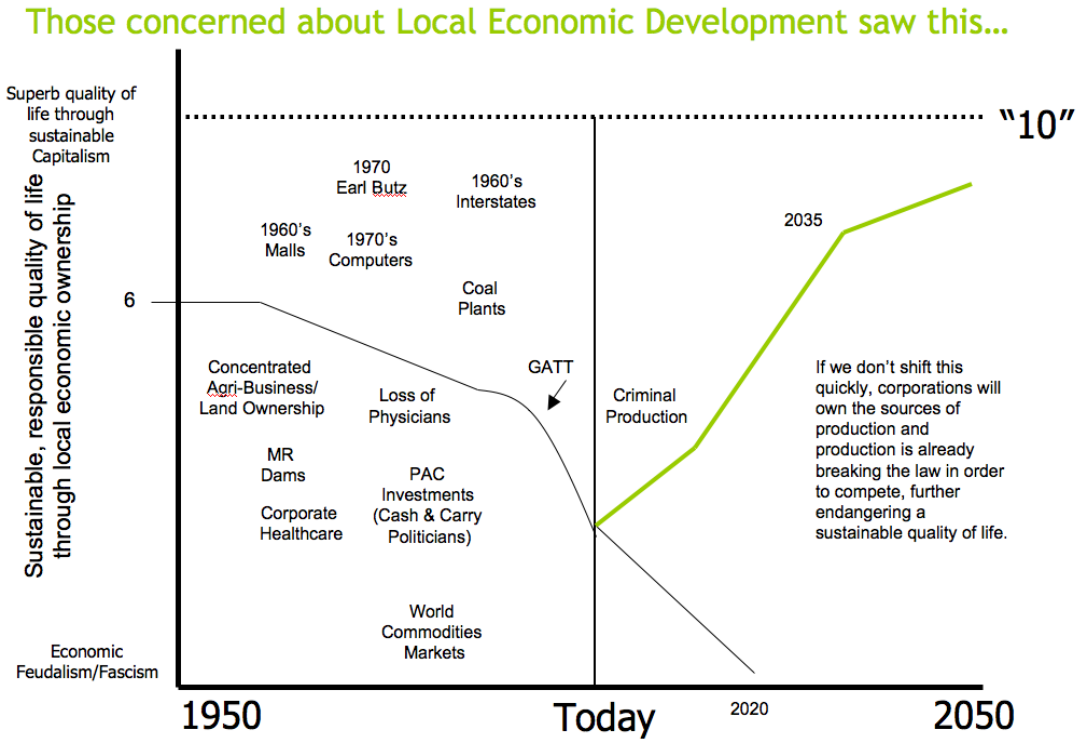
satisfy those individual needs in our overall process/project, the participants would have very little reason to engage in the project – much less, engage sustainably over time. To do that, we interviewed each individual asking basically three questions – 1) what are you trying to cause 2) for whom (or what) and 3) how do imagine that will happen. And, in order to be sure that our conversation was grounded in reality, we ask them answer those questions by telling us their best success stories.[12] By engaging in the interview with the kind of rigorous curiosity made possible by systems thinking/system dynamics, we're able to elicit quite robust understandings of their "mental model" about how they actually do what they do. We then went away and rigorously mapped their story using methods developed in system dynamics that ensure their story is complete, congruent and reflective of reality. We then reflected their story back to them in a much clearer, simpler and, therefore, impactful way than they had initially relayed it.

This created several resources at the individual level – people felt (and were) genuinely heard, understood and appreciated. Their goal and their mental models were greatly clarified – both for us and, as importantly, for them – actually adding value to them in the process. And, they got a little introduction to systems thinking but, luckily, through the lens of their own reality – not the lingo of ST/D. Finally, we built trust with the group – one on one – something much more difficult to do in a full group setting– trust we could then "port" to the next level(s).

At the subgroup level in REAMP, we needed to establish relationship and clarity about the differing key themes/voices present in the group at large. And, we needed to create a "practice field" for the more difficult conversations yet to come – both within the group and, as the work would eventually develop, in the real world. This is where Agazarian's work kicks in. She offers a great insight when she says that a group must first integrate "the differences among the apparently similar" before they can integrate "the similarities among the apparently different".[13] Putting that into practice was fairly straightforward. Since we'd interviewed and mapped each of the 24, we were in a great position see that there were four key themes/concerns in the group – those doing their work because the cared about 1) the environment, 2) local economic

[12] We're drawing here upon the works of David Cooperrider (Appreciative Inquiry) and Jerry Sternin (Positive Deviance). BTW, this is in direct & deliberate contradiction to a "problem-centric" approach which may not elicit an understanding of the very resources that weren't present when the "problem' happened.
[13]Forgive me, Yvonne, for possibly bollixing your intent here. (again, see www.sct-institute.org)

development, 3) safe, reliable, economical energy, and 4) good policy formulation. So, we shared these four groupings with the 24, asked them if this was the complete set (it was), and invited them to attend any one or all of the subgroup meetings. (BTW< this required that we schedule them sequentially vs. in parallel). The only requirement we asked was that they not attend because they "should" (i.e., it was their job, their organization felt they should, etc.) but because they were genuinely concerned/passionate about a domain. We explained that this was particularly important as we'd need that/their energy for the work we had to do. True to Yvonne's words, while the first few minutes of each subgroup meeting was friendly and quite polite, very shortly, we were engaged in feisty conversations about what was most important in each domain, the real world state of each domain, what was causing that reality, where to intervene, etc. So, to channel that energy productively – to deepen relationship and clarity – we engaged in four levels of work. **First**, we had the group come to agreement about the goal for the domain – one that would satisfy each individual in the subgroup. **Second**, using a *behavior over time graph*[14] we had them determine four things – 1) the current state of their goal, 2) how their goal had behaved historically – based on facts vs. opinions, 3) how it was likely to behave going forward, and 4) how it needed to behave if their goal was to have any chance of coming to be. An example of one of those graphs is reflected below:



[14] A tool from system dynamics – see www.pegasuscom.com for more info

Third, once they clearly understood how their goal was "behaving" – and that it was in response to a system (a political, economic, social, technical, etc. system) – we walked them step-by-step through a rigorous model of the system that was causing the reality that they – and each of the other subgroups – were experiencing – a model developed by integrating their 24 individual interviews. We did so in accordance with principles and practices from systems dynamics so that we could ensure that the map was an accurate reflection of their reality. **Fourth**, given that they knew that each of the other subgroups were going through the same process – and once they could see and understand how system at large that was shaping reality, we asked them to speculate about a goal that would satisfy the group as a whole. By asking this of each group – and integrating key concepts from each of their goals, we eventually arrived at a mutually beneficial, consensually agreed upon goal.

At each level of their work, their experience of relationship and clarity steadily grew, culminating in what can best be described as *solidarity* – something we all too rarely experience in our culture but seem innately designed to seek out.[15] This solidarity, coupled with their mutually agreed upon goal, their increased awareness about the state of reality, the quality and quantity of information exchanged among each of the participants as they grappled with their behavior over time graphs, and their shared realization of the crisis each domain was likely to encounter produced a high level of palpable energy within each subgroup – both individually and, especially, collectively. This now heightened level of shared awareness and understanding prompted the emergence of a goal that moved the 24 far beyond their original goal of "increasing the amount of wind energy in the Midwest", positioning them "to become the leaders in reducing greenhouse gas emissions by 80% by 2030". It's important to note that this was not a BHAG (big hairy audacious goal), not a "stretch goal" but a goal based in the their shared understanding and agreement about the state of reality – about what was causing that reality – a goal that, though startling to the group, was simply based in the math of reality.

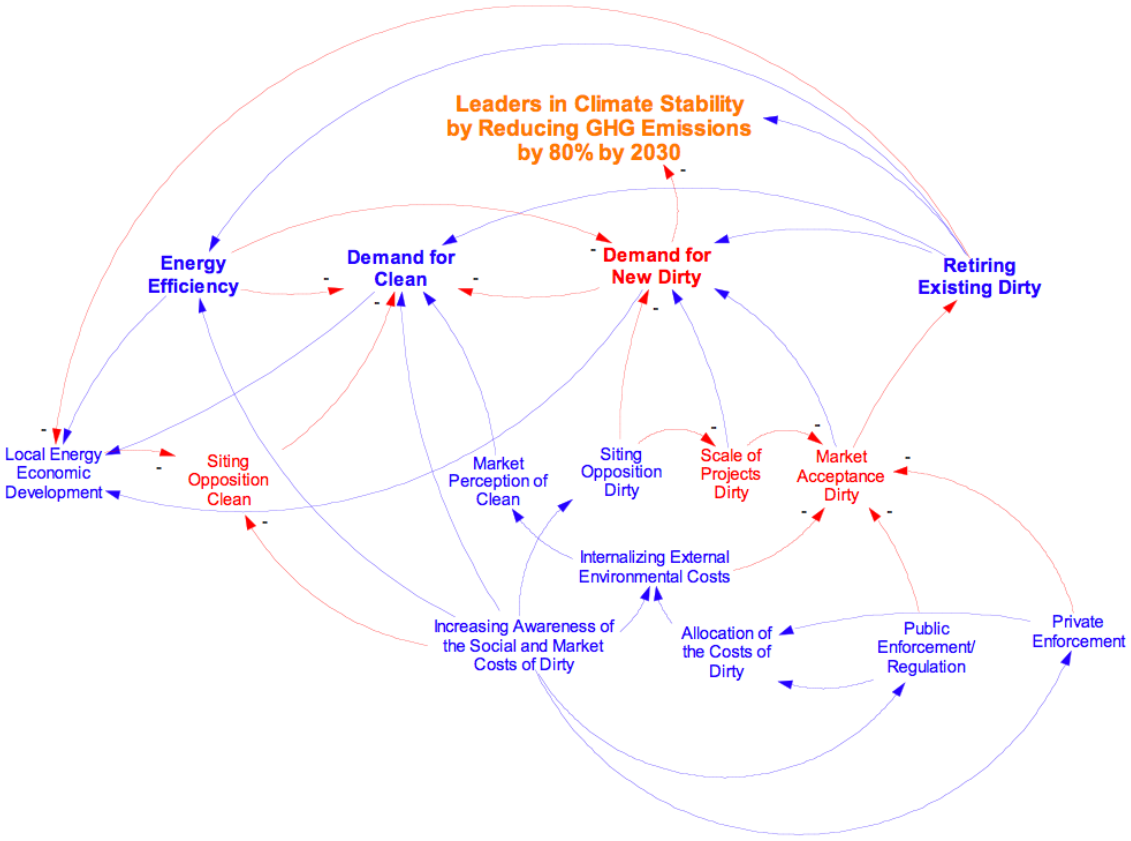
[15] For more on this, see some of Chomsky's work on specific efforts to fracture the naturally occurring solidarity among the population at large from the 1920's through today. Additionally, there are emerging lessons from cognitive neuroscience, behavioral psychology and ethology supporting the notion.

This, too, created several resources for the individuals and the group. In addition to revisiting and deepening the resources created at the individual level, at the subgroup level, we introduced and anchored new experiences, resources and skill sets that would serve us going forward – e.g., the ability to have fact vs. opinion-based conversations; the habit of inquiring vs. opposing; the ability to use simple, rigorous frames to (literally) "hold" a complex conversation; and the ability to appreciate and even "inhabit" another's perspective, to name a few. Most importantly, however (and referring back to those four fundamental outcomes (i.e., the state of reality, what's causing that reality, where to intervene in that reality and the ability to make the structural *then* behavioral changes), subgroups were able to come to shared understanding and agreement about the first two of those four outcomes – the state of their reality and the cause of that reality. So, that leaves just two more....

At the level of the group as a whole, it was now time to address the next of the four fundamental outcomes – where to intervene in the system. Once we had a solid map of the system (i.e., of the causal structure that determined their reality) – and once we were clear about the goal that would satisfy for the group as a whole, we were in a position to "interrogate" that reality to determine where, specifically, to intervene in the system to move it in the desired direction – i.e., toward that 80% reduction in GHG emissions by 2030.[16] This required a formal analysis of the systems map – looking for/at the systems archetypes, evaluating how the different resources were trending over time, assessing stakeholder value exchange across the system, determining the systemic levers, etc. This analysis was performed by the consulting team in collaboration with a handful of credible experts from among the 24 as a prelude to a series of teleconferences where we reviewed and validated the analysis with the 24.[17]

The final map summarizing the overall analysis, strategy and leverage points is reflected below:[18]

[16] Btw, it's significant to note here the importance of a measurable, time-specific goal. You might be surprised at the degree of serious thought that's evoked when you clarify a goal like that – much more powerful and useful than simply "reducing GHG emissions" would have been.
[17] We initially attempted to have the group of 24 conduct the analysis and quickly realized that it required more time and thought than we had available – and that the level of systems sophistication required to do the analysis was not yet in place. So, we adjourned, did the analysis offline, and re-convened in the Fall.
[18] Those resources in blue needed to increase, those in red decrease. A blue arrow represents a positive relationship – e.g., as Demand for Clean increases, Local Energy Economic Development increases. A red arrow represents a negative relationship – e.g., as Retiring Existing Dirty increases, Local Energy Economic Development decreases.



The results of the analysis were quite surprising, explaining why the strategies of the past 20 years hadn't yielded the hoped for results while, at the same time, clarifying how the strategy going forward needed to be sequenced if REAMP was to be successful. Briefly, regarding the prior strategy, every time an energy efficiency project was successful, it killed the demand for clean energy – i.e., with excess capacity in the system (due to the energy savings) who needed to build more capacity. Similarly, when a new clean generation facility was built, it made the need for efficiency projects (i.e., the return on saving energy) less attractive – i.e., why save energy when you have this new excess capacity. So, clearly, if energy efficiency and clean energy projects were to emerge simultaneously, they needed to do so in a way that did not create excess capacity.

As for a new strategic approach, while the key to achieving their goal would clearly seem to be retiring existing dirty (i.e., the moment you shut down a dirty plant – assuming you could do so, you immediately cut GHG emissions) that would only make things worse! Let me explain – systemically. The system's default condition is to

construct New Dirty energy plants – i.e., the manufacturers are used to producing coal fired generators, contractors are used to building such facilities, the railroads look to deliver coal, and the coal companies are determined to supply it. So, if they did successfully close an existing dirty facility with, say, a remaining useful life of10 years, they'd likely immediately prompt the emergence of a new dirty facility with an 80 year useful life – making their goal even harder to achieve. So, clearly, we needed to be thoughtful about this.

Instead, based on the analysis, they realized the need to 1) stop the construction of new dirty plants, 2) ramp up the acceptance of energy efficiency and clean energy and, once that's in place, 3) then, and only then, begin to close existing dirty facilities. Given that insight, they established four working groups – one for each key driver – and recognized (and formalized) the need to coordinate their activities over time to ensure proper sequencing and pacing of their activities.

REAMP Today. It's useful in thinking about how to replicate this to point out that there are two general dimensions to affecting change at scale – the deep work and the broad work. And it makes particularly good sense to go deep before you go broad, lest you risk a shallow, diffuse response to the needed change in reality – one that all too often results in a passing fad vs. a sustainable foundation for change The original work that Rick and Jennie had envisioned was the deep portion of the work – work that achieved the first three of the four fundamental outcomes – creating shared understanding and agreement about the state of reality, what's causing that reality and where to intervene in that reality. Today, they and the rest of REAMP are engaged in the second dimension – going broad – expanding to 120 organizations endorsed by 8 Midwestern governors and active in the national conversation on climate protection.

At a more practical level, they've helped to cause a variety of legislative and regulatory advances including higher clean energy standards in Illinois, Iowa, Michigan, Minnesota, Ohio, South Dakota and Wisconsin; better energy efficiency standards in Illinois, Iowa, Michigan, Minnesota, Ohio, and Wisconsin; decoupling pilots in Illinois, Michigan, Minnesota, and Wisconsin; improved building codes in Illinois, Iowa, Minnesota, Ohio, South Dakota, and Wisconsin; and they've blocked 28 new coal fired facilities- just to name a few of their many accomplishments.

That big question. So, back to our presenting question. Is it possible to solve seemingly impossible problems – the kinds of truly complex, multi-stakeholder problems that are emerging at an increasing rate in our interconnected, interdependent, globalizing world? Based on our experience with REAMP, in Guatemala and in other projects, I'd say the answer is yes – for two reasons.

First, it seems that by integrating the best of systems thinking/dynamics with the leading edge understandings in individual and group psychotherapy, we've developed a set of principles, practices and processes that offer a reliable, predictable, and repeatable process, weaving relationship and clarity throughout the process – working from the level of the individual through to the group as a whole and beyond to the ecosystem at large.[19] In each case, participants (even those who, themselves, didn't imagine this was possible) have developed the same skill sets and discovered their own systemic solutions to problems that before had seemed impossible.[20]

Secondly, and probably more importantly, we simply have to solve these kinds of problems – that's what's up for us today – that is the work of our world – now and, likely, for the foreseeable future – if our children and grandchildren (and even most of us!) are to have a world worth living into.

So, as it becomes clear for each of us that this is possible – even necessary – especially now, we'll each be left with our own question: "Now that we know this is doable – and a bit about how – what could possibly stop us?"

Cheers,

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[19] For a more detailed look at the process, see the paper on our website dealing with "the impossible".
[20] for more examples, visit our website.