



Learning from experience

An interview with Gloria Esposito

Gloria Esposito was drawn to her auto-related work because of her passion for the environment. She is the Head of Projects for the Low Carbon Vehicle Partnership (LowCVP), a public-private non-profit with over 170 members, whose mission is to accelerate the shift to low-carbon vehicles and fuels. An environmental scientist by training, Gloria has a Masters in integrated pollution control, specialising in atmospheric chemistry.

How did you get involved in auto-related work?

I spent the formative part of my career measuring and modelling air pollution emissions, first in a research group that now runs London's air quality network. That involved calibrating instruments that measured air pollution emissions and, on the regulatory side, controlling industrial emissions. I then went to a consultancy where the work was understanding and controlling traffic emissions.

I worked in local government and that's really where the interest in low-emission vehicles started. I was in charge of air pollution and climate change policy in regards to road transport and so had to develop a strategy for reducing emissions. That looked at the council's fleet of low-emission vehicles and trialling electric vehicles, hybrid vehicles. I helped install the first biomethane gas refuelling station in the UK.

Then I moved to the Low Carbon Vehicle Partnership where my expertise really expanded to a number of different vehicle types: cars, vans, trucks, buses. It really looked at influencing national policy in this area, doing policy research, development, trying to understand what the barriers and challenges are. We work very closely with the automotive industry, with the fuels and technology suppliers to move the industry forward in terms of accelerating the market.

And how do you think that's going here?

It's going well. Obviously, there are a lot of challenges to get to mass market adoption of electric vehicles but the government is taking some very bold moves in terms of their policies, understanding how the actual number of vehicles and the infrastructure need to increase, and putting soft and hard measures in place, providing funding and different support mechanisms to encourage that adoption.

The LowCVP are trying to promote best-practice policy measures. We publish guides, like a low-emission taxi guide, where we look at low-emission vehicle policies across the world, picking out best practice and showing exemplar city through case studies. We think that's critical, that other cities can learn from. Why reinvent the wheel?

Do you consider yourself a petrol- head?

I'm a technology head. I don't actually own an electric or a low-emission vehicle (laughs). I've just got an old Pulsar. But I'm interested in innovation, in making changes and in using technology and policy in order to do that for the benefit of the environment.

What is your favourite part of your job?

It's a very interesting, evolving, fast-paced area. You get to have a direct impact on changing policy. So many of the projects I've been involved in that improve air quality and reduce climate change have actually been put in place by the government. And you are constantly learning something new. I don't come from an engineering background but I've learned a huge amount about different technologies and fuels. You meet very



interesting people from a number of different sectors that are involved in this area as well, and that's really exciting.

What's like to be a woman working in this field?

We stand out, most definitely, because it's very male-dominated. It would be wonderful if there were more women because we have a different mindset, creativity and insight that gives us a way of handling certain issues and providing solutions.

I think the industry needs to be made more attractive and science as a whole made more appealing. There are low numbers of women that go into engineering and that's something that needs to start in school and at university, to get that interest, to get that motivation.

For low-carbon cars, where do you think we are going to be in 5 years?

Right now low carbon cars are about 2 percent of new car sales so I think we can escalate to about 4 percent in 5 years. There's going to be a point where battery technology advances and the costs of those batteries are going to go down but the biggest issue is going to be making sure that the infrastructure is in place and the grid is ready to deal with that extra demand when that time comes.

Does the LowCVP have a big role in this?

We certainly have a voice in influencing government. We've got an interesting project called the EV Network Group, where we bring together key players involved in projects and initiatives related to establishing a smart grid. This means making sure that the automotive industry and the infrastructure providers and the energy networks come together, understanding what each other does and communicating to government. One of the merits of our organisation is bringing these fractious groups of stakeholders together.

What do you think are important leadership skills?

Passion for what you do. Being creative. Having integrity. Having persistence. Having a vision for what you want to do and how you are going to do it. These are critical in terms of leadership.

My organisation is held in high regard because of our strong analytical side, the information we provide, the strength of our arguments. We are very solutions-based in what we do, and that provides gravitas.

Yes, so the way that we influence policy, the way we bring people together, the way we provide robust evidence, all of that is driven by having those intrinsic leadership elements.

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