



MEASURING WELLBEING IN NORTHERN IRELAND: ROUNDTABLE 3

Wednesday 27th August 2014, Queen's University Belfast

Introduction

The third Carnegie Roundtable on Measuring Wellbeing in Northern Ireland comprised:

- Experience of an innovative methodology to explore the some of the challenges behind new narratives and focusing on outcomes.
- Working group sessions.
- A presentation from the Alliance for Useful Evidence.

Discerning a Wellbeing Narrative

Drawing on the work Dr Otto Scharmer of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Dr Bobby Moore led a number of interactive conversations with members in the form of an inquiry into why there is a widespread belief that organisations collectively create outcomes (and side effects) that nobody wants. Yet key decision makers do not feel capable of redirecting this course of events, to address dilemmas such as massive inequality in the global and in national economies, unsustainable mass consumption, and in educational establishments that fail to develop people's innate capacity to sense and shape their future. He invited members to consider the importance of 'attention', suggesting that a central blind spot of our times is the place within or around us where our attention and intention originates. He introduced an important distinction between learning as "downloading" or learning from the past; and learning from the future as it emerges or "presencing". Drawing on their own experience, members were invited to investigate this alternative, which means to sense, tune in, and act from one's highest future potential – the future that depends on them bringing it into being.

Working Groups

1. Performance Framework

The working group considered the Roundtable's exposure to the Scottish National Performance Framework during the study visit to Scotland. It was agreed that simply replicating the Scottish approach in Northern Ireland would not work but the clear focus on shared outcomes and the concept of such a framework were particularly valuable. While the working group considered a framework to be an important part of the Roundtable's

proposals, they recognised that cultural change in the ways of working across government is a more important concept. It is important to flesh out how a range of issues might be reflected in a framework and how an outcomes-based approach and the use of logic models, for example, might be applied. It is more important to focus at the level of wellbeing domains than on the detail of measurement and indicators. We need to be clear about what we mean by terms such as 'outcomes based' and 'performance framework'.

2. Scrutiny

The group felt that there is an important issue of lack of trust in government. Scrutiny should focus on evidence and address the question of why an outcome has or has not taken place. It should be intelligible to the wider public and should encourage wide-ranging conversations. The 'bear-pit' of scrutiny as often reported in the media is not helpful and diminishes public trust. There is a need for non-adversarial accountability for outcomes to the Assembly and to the wider public. We should examine the complex web of regulation and consider the tensions in the role of the third sector in helping to deliver on behalf of government while also holding it to account.

3. Ways of Working

The Carnegie UK Trust's recent report 'The Enabling State' was considered to provide a strong intellectual underpinning for the changes needed in ways of working across the public sector. Four themes for further development were identified: (1) the opportunity presented by the introduction of community planning for joining up the delivery of services at a local level and extending this approach to the centre through Single Outcome Agreements, as in Scotland; (2) the need for preparatory work on the next Programme for Government over the next year and the integration of the outcomes-based framework approach; (3) the development of policy development training for the NI Assembly, local government, NICS and civic society along with encouraging the creation of local think tanks; (4) the importance of a communication strategy to get public debates about the potential of outcome based approaches to tackle some of Northern Ireland's long-term problems.

4. Creating a Compelling Narrative

A narrative is something that must be developed collectively through the engagement of the whole of society. It might include words and phrases such as friendship, neighbourliness, and the preciousness of peace. It is important to understand the class issues that divide our society and are largely neglected. There are a range of narratives and perspectives to be explored drawing on experiences such as the civic forum, the women's movement, the Maiden City Accord and the UK City of Culture, for example. The private sector has an important role to play both in creating a living wage and addressing health and mental health issues in the workplace. Like an orchestra, every part of society has a part to play in the narrative. The words of a Fermanagh farmer were recalled: "A happy, healthy people at peace and proud of their place". There was a plea to use words like love and compassion and not to be frightened of doing so.

5. Public participation and communications

A citizen focused platform is essential and the language used must reflect this. Community planning is the way into this conversation - a vehicle for engaging people in local issues but also in the wider discussion of the kind of Northern Ireland we want. Creative approaches to communications are important. For example, an intergenerational approach might be taken to generate a conversation and develop scenarios with people in different stages of their lives from 7 to 107.

Alliance for Useful Evidence

The Roundtable also heard from Jonathan Breckon of the Alliance for Useful Evidence, an open-access network of more than 2000 individuals from across government, universities, charities, business and local authorities in the UK and internationally. By championing the need for useful evidence, the Alliance provides a focal point for improving and extending the use of social research and evidence in the UK. The aim is to become the hub for evidence initiatives in the UK and a member of staff will shortly be recruited in Northern Ireland. Further information is available at www.alliance4usefulevidence.org.