**ROYAL SOCIETY OF ARTS CREATIVITY IN PUBLIC SERVICES NETWORK MEETING**

**AN EVENING WITH MAX MOULLIN – FEEDBACK ON TABLE DISCUSSIONS**

Max Moullin, director of the Public Sector Scorecard Research Centre in Sheffield, began the meeting with a 30-minute talk outlining three important aspects in developing effective creative thinking in public services: focusing on outcomes, collaborating across organisational boundaries, and developing an organisational culture based on improvement, innovation and learning rather than a top-down blame culture. He also explained how these aspects are fundamental to the [Public Sector Scorecard](http://www.publicsectorscorecard.co.uk/).

Participants then moved between three tables, World Café style, to discuss questions related to each of these three aspects. Feedback is given below.

**QUESTION 1. OUTCOMES FOCUS.**

**How can we facilitate more creative thinking focusing on the outcomes that really matter to users and stakeholders, including value for money?**

How can we get public services to focus more on outcomes rather than process outputs? These outcomes include strategic outcomes (e.g. reducing obesity), service user outcomes, and financial outcomes such as value for money. An example of a process output is the time it takes to handle an application for benefits or a planning application.

Do the organisations you have worked for or with (or as a service user) focus on outcomes or do they evaluate themselves on process outputs? If the latter, do they relate clearly to the outcomes desired by users and other stakeholders?

The round table discussions led to the generation of these ideas and issues…

* Be clear about what we really mean by outcomes e.g. corporate social responsibility set in hours
* Need a shared view of outcomes – or at least acknowledgement of different views
* Some things have undue prominence e.g. what give you money i.e. grant givers rules
* Things that aren’t easy to measure get overlooked
* People/groups have a different set of motivations therefore different set of targets
* Is there scope for bringing people together to agree?
* Need to be mindful of starting points e.g. financial constraints
* Culture of cuts means people not psychologically in right place for change
* Cuts can encourage innovation e.g. Lewisham libraries
* Give value to the qualitative data as well as quantitative – need to support internal marketing
* Bring in wider range of views – service users e.g. pupils and parents
* Help people to feel/be less dictated to
* Encourage public debate about what they want from public services – but may just lead to people wanting grammar schools
* Political outcomes determined from the top – then get fragmented
* Outcomes aren’t necessarily defined/set in interests of service users – service users have too little say in what a positive outcome is
* Can you give the community the chance to decide most important things for them?
* Get the political and administrative boundaries right – some more things done at a very local level
* Don’t do enough honest learning of what works more or less well
* Proper voice for services users – less paternalistic
* The leadership culture in an organisation is really important
* Need to measure the right things e.g. in occupational health how many people return to work and stay there rather than speed of referral
* Interrogate the data – use it as starting point for further q’s – get perspectives of different parties
* Celebrate and capture the success stories – individually and by depts.
* Health happy staff members – turnover, sickness, survey data
* Teacher shortage – different approach to looking after staff
* Financial challenges

**QUESTION 2. CROSS ORGANISATIONAL / DEPARTMENTAL COLLABORATION**

**How might we facilitate more creative thinking through joint working across organisational boundaries rather than working in silos?**

Many problems facing us today require effective working across organisational boundaries (or indeed boundaries within an organisation) e.g. improving health and social care, reducing inequality etc.

If you work in the public sector are there areas where you need to work with people from different departments or organisations? If so, how well do you work with them? Do you understand each other’s problems? Do they appear to have different targets or objectives?

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*Challenges*

* Existing community – being done to not with
* Conflict with housing association, LA, developers and lenders, politicians example
* Financial viability issues
* Outcomes being in completion
* Commissioning approaches
* Need managers who understand creativity
* Short termism
* Blame culture – keep out of trouble – compliance culture
* Capturing outcomes if they’re anecdotal rather than data/numbers
* Getting stuck on a treadmill

*Solutions*

* Partnerships – stakeholders, involve service users from the start, ABCD (asset based community development)
* Facilitation and mediation services
* Being realistic
* Cooperation at every single level (inc. senior and middle managers)
* More networking so people understand each other’s work/roles
* Co-locating workers in challenging locations
* Development of unexpected community members – rapport with residents
* Recognising informal achievements – assets, quick wins
* Understand why you’re collaborating – show each other, senior leadership collaborating
* Recognising multiple skills and disciplines are needed
* Human centered approach – build empath is crucial
* Making sign over successfully
* Plan together
* Reward structure/good incentivisation
* Evaluate and celebrate successes
* Aim for win win / ‘scratch my back, I’ll scratch yours’

**QUESTION 3. A POSITIVE PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT CULTURE**

**How can we nurture a positive performance management culture that supports creativity in public services?**

Public sector organisations are generally given top-down targets, usually from central government, that they need to achieve. However, many of the outcomes that matter to service users are not included in these targets.

How is your work or the work of your organisation evaluated? Is it on outcome measures or mainly process outputs? What happens if targets are not met?

Does there appear to be a blame culture or a culture of improvement and innovation? If the former, how can this be addressed?

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| *Negative* | *Positive* |
| Lack of trust?  Targets: front end of process  Targets: multiple targets become meaningless  Qualitative is hard to measure  Individual v team targets  External criticism of public services  Expectation to produce immediate response (troubled families – lack of recognition of outcomes)  Lack of long term thinking?  Quicker and cheaper to impose targets – control and fear! | Accountability (for the right things)  Positive customer perspective measures  Balance process measures  Scalability issues  Positive rewards rather than punishment and blame (a range)  Celebrates success  Safe spaces – if things go wrong  Organisation recognises when learning happens  Team targets/measures |

* Engage groups from the start, gives validity to any measures (community/customer (internal and external)
* Common ownership of solutions
* Devolved accountability
* Create identities/business units free from norms of institution ‘franchises’
* Subsidiarity – what does outcome look like on the ground – appropriate?
* Leadership culture:

In line with positive behaviours?

Values and behaviours

Recognize courage in taking risks

Right people in leadership

Connection to purpose/outcomes – mobilizing collaboration

Hierarchies – risk aversion?

Please note: The ideas and issues expressed during the round table discussions are intended to promote further exploration of the challenges and opportunities related to creativity in public services. They are not intended to represent the views of the Creativity in Public Services Network leadership or the RSA.

Martin Wheatley, Chair RSA Creativity in Public Services Network

with thanks to Paul Neville FRSA for facilitating these discussions.