ENABLING SOCIAL ACTION PROGRAMME

FINDINGS FROM LEEDS WORKSHOP #3: MAKING STORIES COUNT: WHY AND HOW WE SHOULD BE EVALUATING THE IMPACT OF SOCIAL ACTION
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Findings from Leeds Workshop #3: “Making Stories Count: Why and How should we be evaluating the impact of social action?”

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ABOUT THE PROGRAMME
The Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) is working in partnership with the universities of Sheffield and Hull on Phase 2 of the Enabling Social Action (ESA) programme. We are collaborating with local authorities to support them to co-design, co-produce and co-deliver services with local people, service users, and civil society organisations, to embed social action in their routine working. The programme will support commissioners through a range of activities:

- Action learning partnerships with 6 local authorities to support new ways of delivering services.
- Champions who will share learning and insights and galvanise local networks through events.
- 6 national events to bring together a growing peer network.

WORKSHOP #3
Our third workshop took place on 30 October 2018 in the grand setting of Leeds Civic Hall and was co-hosted with Leeds City Council. The workshop was well attended with 150 delegates registered for the event. The theme of the event was on why and how we should be evaluating the impact of social action. The day commenced with presentations from Councillor James Lewis, Deputy Leader of Leeds City Council and Prof Jane South of Leeds Beckett University. Delegates were then introduced to our new ESA champions; Andrew Donaldson, Kristy Ball, Rachel North and Joe Micheli. Across seven breakout sessions, groups heard from presenters from different organisations on their approaches and measurement tools. Sessions were recorded with permission from participants and quotes used in this report have been anonymised. The following section explores the key findings from the sessions. It builds on our scoping findings and first and second workshop reports¹.

¹ Enabling Social Action Scoping Research Findings: https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/management/esa
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Participants reflected on the different approaches to measuring impact. From the seven presentations the key issues which emerged from discussions included:

- A suite of measurement tools were welcomed by participants and a “one size fits all” approach to measuring impact was deemed problematic.
- Individual or tailored approaches for measuring can help organisations but there needs to be an awareness of the limits of drawing comparisons with others using the same measurement tools.
- There are challenges with some measurement tools in terms of its flexibility and capability for dealing with complexity and when multiple agencies are involved.
- Different audiences, including funders, are interested in mixed approaches to evidence which incorporate both qualitative and quantitative evidence. Using visualisations for both qualitative and quantitative can bring the ‘headline messages’ to life.
- Collaborative approaches to measuring impact was seen as a strength of some approaches.
- Thinking ahead about why and how to measure impact is important. Working in collaboration with others to make decisions on what to measure and how at an early stage before measurement was encouraged.
- Some approaches could be time consuming or costly where infrastructure needs to be built in.
- Additional support, training and useful resources alongside measurement tools can be helpful for users.
- Responsiveness was seen as key and there needs to be a step change in understanding how well we have listened and acted upon that.
MAIN FINDINGS

A ‘speed dating’ style approach for presentations was utilised in which seven speakers from different organisations rotated around three separate groups of delegates. During each of the three sessions speakers presented to seven groups for 10 mins followed by 15 mins of questions. A further 5 minutes after each presentation allowed delegates to reflect on what they have heard and allowed time for presenters to move to the next group to present. Speakers provided an overview of the types of impact measures, tools and approaches that they advocate and its potential benefits to users.

Delegates came from a range of backgrounds, mainly commissioners and VCSEs, and have different views on how these may be useful to them. To help delegates to consider these they were given note sheets to record their perceived strengths and challenges of each approach and how what they have learned might be useful to their organisation. A member of each group was asked to summarise their overarching perspectives on what they had heard during the sessions in the final feedback session of the event when all groups reconvened at the end.

The following is background information from the seven presenters at the event:

➢ What Works Wellbeing, Ingrid Abreu- Scherer
➢ Social Value Engine, Claire Watts
➢ Triangle Consulting, Paul Muir
➢ Social Audit Network, Lisa McMullan
➢ NEF, Graham Randles
➢ Social Value UK, Ben Carpenter
➢ Social Enterprise Mark CIC, Richard Cobbett
Social Enterprise Mark CIC

Social Enterprise Mark CIC is the international social enterprise accreditation authority, which recognises and builds the capabilities of social enterprises as competitive, sustainable businesses, dedicated to maximising social impact. Our world-first accreditation ensures that the business model remains ethical, credible and commercial. We provide clear standards for the social enterprise sector, which is unregulated, defining what it means to be a genuine social enterprise.

The Social Enterprise Mark is the only accreditation to provide an independent guarantee of an organisations’ commitment to creating positive social change. Applicants are externally assessed against a set of sector-agreed criteria. The Social Enterprise Gold Mark is the first standard of social enterprise excellence, which enables social enterprises to stand out from the crowd by demonstrating excellence in key business areas.

Social Value Engine

The East Riding of Yorkshire Council's External Funding Team in partnership with Rose Regeneration have developed an online social value tool called The Social Value Engine. The Social Value Engine provides a systemised and academically robust assessment of social value which helps you to forecast, plan and evaluate your activities. The system has been developed to offer a wider context to the outcomes of a project. Further information on the Social Value Engine can be found at https://socialvalueengine.com/how-do-you-measure-social-value/

Claire Watts is the External Funding & Policy Manager and Andrea Turton is the External Funding Development Coordinator at East Riding of Yorkshire Council who have worked on the development of the Social Value Engine and continue to support organisations measure their social value using the Social Value Engine.

What Works Centre for Wellbeing

Ingrid Abreu Scherer is Civil Society Lead at the What Works Centre for Wellbeing, an independent and collaborative centre bringing together the best available evidence on wellbeing. She joined the Centre in 2015, and works with charities, funders and researchers to develop effective programmes and build the evidence on what really works. Ingrid outlined the key measures and tools which can help evaluate wellbeing in communities and they offer a number of resources on how to measure wellbeing impact which can be found on https://whatworkswellbeing.org/
The Social Audit Network (SAN)
Established in 2001, the Social Audit Network (SAN) is an association of practitioners promoting and supporting the practice of social accounting and audit. Our ‘Prove, Improve, Account’ framework provides a structure for organisations to analyse the difference they are making for their communities. Further detail can be found at [http://www.socialauditnetwork.org.uk](http://www.socialauditnetwork.org.uk) The presentation shared information about SAN’s approach, underpinning principles and practical examples of how organisations have benefited from embedding social accounting and audit into their way of working.

Social Value UK

Before looking at how to measure social impact Ben Carpenter explored what it is and why it’s important. Social Value is about the important changes in people’s lives. It’s not about cost saving to the government, it’s about individual wellbeing.

There are 2 key reasons to measure: 1) to report this to funders 2) to learn how to create more of the positive changes and less of the negative. Ben acknowledged that both these drivers are about accountability. Accountable to those that fund us and accountable to those we serve. So in the latter, it is about giving a voice to those who are not normally heard to capture all changes experienced not just the positive intended ones.

Finally, Ben posed a provocative question: what if we stopped trying to measure an amount of social impact /value and instead, put more emphasis on how responsive organisations have been to the impact data they collect? Responsiveness being the actions or decisions taken to improve services.
New Economics Foundation

Graham Randles, Managing Director of NEF Consulting (NEFC) discussed a range of practices used by NEFC for impact measurement. NEFC’s approach is based on the principles of Social Return on Investment (SROI) and begins by engaging the key stakeholders to understand the theory of change of the project or programme and the outcomes that matter. This leads to identifying indicators to measure what matters and developing suitable tools (surveys etc) to collect data. Graham discussed the pros and cons of monetising outcomes: this can be useful to capture attention but it can be misleading to try to compare monetary values between different programmes and stakeholder groups. He noted that it can be very effective to combine quantitative data on outcomes (monetised or not) and qualitative information, such as stories. Ultimately the approach chosen must suit the needs of the project or programme and should be tailored for the requirements of the evaluation.

Triangle Consulting, Outcomes Star

Outcomes Stars are holistic and empowering tools that are designed to meet the need for outcome measurement whilst improving keywork for service users, services and commissioners. There are over 30 different versions of the Star, each tailored to a specific sector and co-created with services and service users. The tools are based on robust evidence of what works in practice and when used well add significant value to both measuring and improving outcomes. When used in the context of evaluating social action they can make a unique contribution by helping to demonstrate the individual outcomes interventions are achieving with service users, all of which can be analysed and with other sources of data and built into a bigger narrative about change.

FEEDBACK

Participants offered feedback on the seven presentations they had heard including reflections on their strengths and challenges and ideas for cross cutting themes. The following are some reflections:

In a presentation from NEF participants were asked: “So how do we capture positive impact for the people that we are working with? For us it is a multi stage process. We start from a strong theory of change to capture that mission and what you are trying to achieve but then delve down into the detail and ask, how are we going to create change?” Tailored or “bespoke” approaches were needed to do this as “there may be different outcomes for different groups within your programme” but could also lead to difficulties with
drawing comparisons. The benefits of mixed approaches was also emphasised for a range of audiences: “The quantifiable bit is really important but the qualitative stuff is also really important and the two need to go together….Why is it important to have both? Funders will demand it but it is also the headlining bit.” Lastly, the NEF presentation encouraged visualisations of evidence: “People love infographics and it works with both qualitative and quantitative.” One participant reflected from experience on this point that: “Certainly for many organisations if you can show you are measuring the impact in a variety of different ways...then you make yourself more attractive to funders.”

Reflections from participants on their experiences of Social Return on Investment (SROI) were mixed with some stating it was inflexible for their needs when working with complexity and multiple agencies:

“It seems to be the only framework which comes out with a pound at the end of the sausage machine….with no framework to get the investment which a lot of us are under pressure to demonstrate.”

“I’ve sometimes got stuck when [using] multiple outcomes….and partners working together...we’ve hit a block because it isn’t flexible enough.”

“Having used it my concern is it becomes quite rigid- certainly the SROI becomes a rigid framework which requires consistency...The more you get into a very defined system such as that the less fluid around social action you actually tend to be....the system requires so much bureaucracy to get it up and running it tends to go away from what you are trying to achieve.”

“I have done SROI and SVI (Social Value International) before and with complex programmes where you’re trying to impact on social action and you’re working in very flexible and organic ways on the ground, to try and have a consistent approach across departments and organisations and collate back into systems is a real challenge.”

The Social Value Engine presentation described a rigorous pilot stage to refine their measurement tool and encourage users to think carefully about what to capture: “they are not thinking enough about the deflators and not thinking about what impact others may be having.” They offer considerable support to users and also “keep a close eye on what is going on” and “make sure everything has been taken into account” in terms of the kinds of claims that are made. To help with these considerations they offer training on considering deflators and help support users to access a growing bank of research evidence. A further
benefit is that multi user licenses enable others in the same organisation to share assessments with other and this can be useful for learning.

Collaboration with others at an early stage before measuring impact was encouraged by Social Value Engine: “work early on to identify what they thought the outcomes were going to be in a collaborative stakeholder kind of way and then think about what evidence could we collect in this context to allow us to use that. If you haven’t thought about it before you started it is hard to do that retrospectively.” In response one participant described working in coproduction: “We do do that in terms of setting what we think is important….We have involved people” but identified challenges of “different levels of ownership and different levels of understanding.” Overall one participant reflected that: “it sounds like a really good methodology. It’s never just the cost of the license, it’s all of the infrastructure you need to put in.”

Participants heard how Triangle Consulting’s Outcomes Star approach is useful for key workers and service users in “understanding the journey of change underpinning the star.” Service users may see changes in their lives in terms of social skills development, health, meaningful occupation and also feel supported by the key worker and organisation. Participants acknowledged that the Outcomes Star could “help to support change” and could be “flexible”. However, one participant commented that the “reliance” on the relationship between key worker and service user could be problematic. Beyond the individual level, there was some discussion on how it is starting to be adapted and used as a ‘community star’ to “be used in a more imaginative way…and would give a broader perspective at a community level.” The Outcomes Star is used across the UK and increasingly used to look at community level change.

Social Value UK discussed ideas of responsiveness which participants took on board: “the idea of responsiveness in terms of how well have we listened to users and how well have we acted upon that-there was widespread support for that. There needs to be a step change across the whole organisation for this….a change to their thinking.” In another group, participants also reacted positively to Social Value UK: “We liked the idea of responsiveness and responding to people and trying to show qualitative change through stories….we are servants so we should be doing what people want out there instead of bringing in inappropriate impact measures that are quite intrusive and crude sometimes.” Another strength of the Social Value UK presentation was its identification of measures that are adaptable: “One size doesn’t fit all! It was good to see a number of different metrics were being used.”
On What Works Wellbeing, participants reflected: “by focusing on wellbeing this is focusing on prevention-a way of focusing on preventative interventions. Whilst it’s useful to look at national meta data and compare local contexts to national averages, to make a case for support for early intervention there could be issues with looking at data that’s a couple of years old vs real time data. Attribution can also be difficult at a small local level although it’s really useful to be pointed towards validated survey tools. This would be useful for benchmarking. Another point for small and voluntary orgs is to fund evaluations properly and it’s difficult to collect data at the beginning and end.”

On the Social Enterprise Mark, participants argued that: “The key issue was the cost for social enterprises and actually getting recognition from funders for this accreditation.” Participants felt that the Social Enterprise Mark presentation convinced them about “qualifying impact with stories and that was welcomed and quantifying it- in terms of how much is re-invested in terms of the intervention.”

One group reflected on the importance of evidencing impact driven by a need to both prove and improve services. It was necessary to prove if something is working or not working for future funding decisions and help plan and inspire others to help with further development of services. However, widespread feeling was that there is a risk this means greater accountability to funders rather than service users. What is needed is to advocate basic principles to measure social value that involves a range of stakeholders to understand what has changed. Participants argued that it is key to make sure we hear all the changes and shift power towards users in determining what is working well.

Participants reflected that we need to be aware that the ways in which we measure and collect data need to be done sensitively and consider the impacts of the process of measurement on service users: “sometimes it affects relationships with people.” Overall one participant commented that across presentations there was consideration over who the various key stakeholders involved in understanding impact are: “We called this ‘Whose impact is it anyway?’ And there was a cross cutting theme over the presentations.”
Feedback sheets

As well as the verbal feedback at the end of the event following the seven presentations, feedback sheets were administered and asked delegates to consider the strengths and challenges of approaches and how what they heard may be useful to their organisation. We received 35 feedback sheets from participants and the following is a selection of anonymous written responses to the seven presentations:

Social Audit network

Strengths: “Acknowledges the importance of case studies/stories/qualitative info.”

“Stakeholder involvement in the process - brings in senior leaderships and awareness raising.”

“Starts with inward reflection - understanding themselves as an organisation and what they want to achieve in terms of impact.”

Challenges: “Time consuming, not easy to compare.”

How might it be useful to my organisation: “Good tool for organisations to use as a organisational development process and for commissioners to use to drive quality and build capacity. I might recommend this as a tool to use in the VCS to drive quality and impact measurement. Could be used in peer approach.”

What Works Wellbeing

Strengths: “Could help with our co-producing groups. particularly liked the community wellbeing idea.”

“I think directly applicable to helping us measure the impact on volunteers...really good handout and interesting debate.”

“Good ideas to improve wellbeing...combating apathy is a challenge. Helpful for community engagement and development.”

How might it be useful to my organisation: “Helps to develop how we might build the measures into our work.”

“I can keep advising charities/social enterprises to undertake case studies as a low cost, impactful measure.”
Social Value UK

Strengths: “Coproduction with all stakeholders.”

“Shifting power….Movement from impact measurement to impact management.”

“Counteracts blunt financial assessments, can be a real indicator of change.”

How might it be useful to my organisation: “Ensures accountability is to people and not funders.”

“Will look at other tools and talk to other commissioners about different approaches to procurement and commissioning.”

“Will consider membership.”

Triangle Consulting- Outcomes Star

Strengths: “Collaborative.”

“Intrinsic change is measured.”

“Tracks change/outcomes over time, visual and individual focus.”

Challenges: “Might be overly time consuming/resource intensive.”

“Need to have continued engagement with individuals over time”

Social Value Engine

Strengths: “Easily comparable, robust economic approach.”

“Supported by recognised research, flexible.”

“Follows relevant government recommendations.”

Challenges: “Seems very high tech for managing small amounts of money in our case and we are wouldn’t have the budget to invest in this for neighbourhood/grant management ...would be useful for our programme supporting people into work.”
NEF Consulting

Strengths: “Different measurements for different organisations.”

“Recognises people, processes, resources and impact and asks why. Participative process and bespoke indicators- Great! but not so early to draw national comparisons if indicators are bespoke.”

Challenges: “Very involved process- could be lengthy.”

How might it be useful to my organisation: “Would need to look at the toolkit.”

Social Enterprise Mark

Strengths: “Could improve perceptions of organisations or improve practices of organisations.”

“Regulation of Social Enterprise sector lending credibility.”

“Encourages best practice.”

“Ensuring Local Authority commissions Social Enterprises that make a difference.”

How might it be useful for my organisation: “Shows commitment and good governance….signpost Social Enterprises to it who are at beginning of journey (at least started training).”

“May want to register…would probably want to strive for gold mark.”

CONCLUSIONS

There is a great deal of interest in the rationale and process of measuring social action. Participants valued the opportunity to hear from a range of presenters on different approaches and tools for measuring social action. Participants reflected on the ways that the different approaches and tools would be useful for them, their organisations and more broadly in their communities. We hope that these discussions will continue as part of the Enabling Social Action programme’s Peer Learning Network and in future events.
NEXT STEPS

The next stage of the action research programme involves working with six local partnerships on social action projects to co-produce solutions to issues faced by the communities. We are currently working with York City Council and Stevenage Borough Council in our first series of Enabling Social Action Partnerships (ESAPs). We will work with a further 4 Local Authorities in our second series of ESAPs commencing January 2019.

Future events will continue to provide forums to share examples of good practice and learn through our network. We are planning Peer Learning Network events for 2019 and 2020 so please do get in touch with any ideas you have for topics or formats for the events.

Our initial report based on scoping discussions in April 2018 with commissioners and VCSE groups, our first workshop findings from our Birmingham event and our second workshop findings from our London event can be found at: https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/management/esa/research

If there are themes and issues highlighted within reports which you feel need further investigation or you have relevant case study examples and reports which you would like to share, please contact the research team (contact details below).

You can also share your views and experiences and highlight any ongoing initiatives by engaging with us via twitter @Enabling_SA  #socialactionnetwork   #co-creatingchange

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