Peer-reviewed paper

Outside-in service design

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Abstract
The authors question the traditional approach to service design, which merely leads to model replication. In order to design a service effectively for a local community this article identifies a need for 'outside-in' service design to truly reflect the needs and environment of a particular community. Using the example of volunteering projects, the authors identify nine key factors that impact on the effective implementation of projects and suggest that consideration of these should form a template for other outside-in analyses by leaders. The authors pose a series of questions that leaders can apply to their own settings in order to explore the issues raised in this article.

Key words
Volunteering projects; community; entrepreneurs; multiple perspectives; mental health.

Many innovations in health and social care are borne out of an entrepreneurial spirit that works by identifying individual needs and then designing a project to address them. Innovators work 'inside-out' from the individual to the project and then to the community. In doing so, the characteristics of the community within which they work affects the shape and success of the project. But it is our belief that, in many cases, entrepreneurs are only partially aware of the effect of these wider cultural and environmental factors. Successful projects are then presented as models worthy of exact replication in other locations.

This paper explores an alternative to the replication of model programmes that has long been criticised (eg. by Bachrach, 1988). We argue that leaders need to adopt a broader overview, select their target and then enrich the traditional 'inside-out' approach with a new 'outside-in' perspective that includes an analysis of the community within which the project will operate. By working 'outside-in', new issues and opportunities are identified.

This enriched approach will merge the inside-out and the outside-in perspectives in order to create a project that is responsive to both the needs of individuals and the wider environment. Effective leaders adopt multiple perspectives on their chosen development project, and so embrace complexity. However, the thoughts set out below all arise from the outside-in approach, since this has received less attention in the literature. It is speculative and exploratory, with the aim of offering some particular viewpoints and raising questions that may be of help to leaders involved in existing projects or those embarking on the creation of new ones.

In order to focus our discussion, we consider the design of a 'supported volunteering' (SV) project that assists people with disabilities to

volunteer in mainstream settings. Volunteering has been found to benefit people with mental health issues (Casiday *et al*, 2008), and is supported by policies on community engagement and cohesion, social inclusion, employment and informal learning. We hope that readers will feel that this example demonstrates how outside-in thinking can be applied to diverse settings.

In considering the environment, we have identified nine factors that impact on SV projects, and may form a template for other outside-in analyses. Some of these are already well-known influences; others are not. The nine factors are explored below.

- **Macro issues:**
  1. the role of government
  2. local employment needs and opportunities
  3. personal resources.
- **Local culture and attitudes:**
  4. the appetite for formality
  5. the understanding of difference
  6. the social roles assigned to people receiving health and social care.
- **The voluntary sector:**
  7. the strength of the sector
  8. skills development
  9. social capital.

Each section below concludes with questions that leaders may wish to use and apply to their own settings.

Macro issues

The first group of factors are large-scale and well-known influences on volunteering projects that are explored from the perspectives of people who need additional support.

1. The role of government

Governments vary in the extent to which they sponsor community associations, from places in the world where informal gatherings are banned, to places where staff salaries or office buildings are provided and tax waived on donations. Similarly, in social policy, a range of government programmes converge on SV projects – regeneration, mental health and learning disability policy, employment, personalisation, disability discrimination, and the duty to involve people in decision-making.

These national factors combine with regional variations to create a complex and constantly changing map of opportunities for SV projects in the UK. Effective leaders must invest time in scanning the funding and policy environment for opportunities that are consistent with their purpose if SV projects are to prosper and become embedded in their local culture.

Q. What policy opportunities and constraints are having an impact on your plans?

2. Local employment needs and opportunities

Tolerating the oppressive effects of workless time can be profoundly disabling (Waddell & Burton, 2006), while volunteering can provide a time structure, physical activity, mental and social stimulation, a sense of purpose, identity and contribution – and can lead to paid work (Clark, 2003). Since people with disabilities are much more likely to be unemployed than other citizens (Office of National Statistics (ONS), 2009), SV projects can have a particularly beneficial impact upon the employment prospects of participants. Strengthening the links between volunteering and work opportunities can be done in a number of ways.

First, SV projects can improve their skills in discovering volunteers' talents and interests via guidance interviewing (Department of Innovation, Universities and Skills (DIUS), 2008), person-centred planning and inclusion (Poll *et al*, 2009) or profiling the person's previous employment experience, skills and aspirations (Leach, 2002). Second, while many agencies merely offer a choice of available vacancies, the SV project can actively 'carve' voluntary jobs to: suit the individual and offer job preparation; target occupational areas needed by the local economy; and link closely with employers and support people in making a smooth transition from volunteering into paid work. Third, effective exit guidance provided in partnership with local supported employment, vocational guidance, or education and training providers will help those people who want to progress from voluntary to paid work. Fourth, strong employee volunteering schemes (Muthuri *et al*, 2009) will ensure that once people are employed, they can amend and then continue their voluntary activity as part

of their employer's contribution to building local social capital. Finally, volunteering can be utilised as a route back into work following a prolonged period of absence related to ill-health.

However, there are hazards to viewing volunteering exclusively as work preparation. If volunteering roles mirror paid jobs and a culture of performance targets, regulation and dismissal of 'inappropriate' people dominates the volunteering sector, people will be excluded, their contribution wasted and those who cycle through episodes of acute illness, volunteering and employment will experience disruption at each transition.

As the local employment market is such a crucial element of modern society, leaders will negotiate a positive relationship with it as a key factor in the design specification for their project.

Q. What is the profile of employment opportunities in your community? What are other local agencies doing to support people to get paid work?

Q. How will your project relate to the employment agenda?

3. Personal resources

While there are islands of creativity and generosity in the most impoverished communities, it is clear that poverty has a direct and damaging impact on the amount of energy available for others (Warr, 1987). Juggling limited funds and a poor diet can leave people feeling listless, erode hope, divert available resources into survival or job search and leave little for others.

Employed people can be cash rich but time poor. Demanding forms of employment, long hours spent commuting and punishing ambition can leave successful business people with little time or energy for others. Entrepreneurial skills may be devoted to building personal wealth rather than voluntary endeavour for the community.

There are a number of ways in which people in your community may lack the resources needed to participate, including the following.

- Lack of money. Disabled people may be unable to afford the transport, clothing or equipment needed to engage in your project.
- Lack of the right label. Some projects are funded to work solely with a particular group, while others have gained permission to work with anyone who needs additional support.
- Lack of assertiveness. In some target communities, assertiveness is rare and your project may need to link closely with training programmes or advocacy groups to address these issues.
- Lack of room for new experiences. While modernised social services are individualised, flexible and community-based, they may also be complex. People who experience difficulty in moving from one environment to another may find that this capacity is already used and there is no room in their lives for additional activities. Your project might wish to build close links with personal development opportunities that promote stress control and time management.

Effective leaders will review how poverty is expressed in their target community and consider how to respond to these different kind of needs.

Q. What is the poverty level in your community? How is that expressed?

Q. Are there other local agencies supporting the empowerment of your target community? Which approaches seem to work locally?

Local culture and attitudes

The three factors above impact on large-scale issues for which there are robust indicators – the amount of sympathetic government policy, the level of employment and the resources available to potential participants. We now move on to subtler factors that have an equally pervasive, if less measurable impact across society as a whole. These are the appetite for formality in local communities, the understanding of difference, and the social roles assigned to people in receipt of health and social care.

4. The appetite for formality

The pattern of accepted behaviour in one neighbourhood may favour informal helping

networks, while elsewhere the same people would form an association and appoint a chairperson.

Volunteer bureaux in the UK generally restrict their support to formal volunteering in which a person makes a commitment and is recognised as a volunteer. Alongside this we may observe a wide range of spontaneous and informal acts of kindness that are sometimes called 'informal volunteering'. Communities that dislike formal organisations will have few formal volunteering opportunities and so an SV project working in this kind of locality needs to learn how to support a person to take on informal volunteering, and so embed their activities within the local culture.

However, the increasing professionalisation of volunteer management, with its attendant risk management forms, insurance, supervision structures and vetting schemes (Barnes & Sharpe, 2009), relentlessly pushes the field further and further away from informal volunteering as a legitimate activity. Meanwhile, communities appear to be losing their appetite for formality and so projects need to promote friendship, link with families and create single-event and informal opportunities to participate, accompany others, spectate or contribute in any number of *ad hoc* ways.

Effective leaders in SV and other projects navigate the space between the managerialist pressure to increase formality and the informality of the community.

Q. How do things get done in your community?

5. The understanding of difference

Communities vary from one another and, over time, in the explanations that are used to give understanding to events such as the birth of a disabled child, the onset of mental illness or a traumatic accident. Some community narratives interpret these events as 'blessings in disguise' while others may initiate legal action. These narratives may or may not be openly articulated, but they lead to varying attempts to lay blame or demand action from the individual, the family, neighbours, colleagues and the State. In communities where the individual is strongly blamed for their misfortunes, individuals will be discouraged from offering help. For example, popular UK attitudes of suspicion towards homeless people or asylum seekers (Wray *et al*, 2008) may increase the blame attached to these groups and simultaneously reduce the help offered to them by other citizens.

The people that a project targets may share these popular attitudes with the general public and will certainly be influenced by them. Meanwhile, managers, occupational health staff, media reporters and local opinion-formers may reflect similar attitudes and close down opportunities. Effective leaders will monitor the range of opportunities offered and taken up, and explore the politics of labelling and discrimination with potential participants.

Q. What stereotypes and narratives exist in your local community that affect your project? What has happened in the history of your local community to influence these ideas? Are you in touch with opinion-formers that influence the local community?

6. The social roles assigned to people receiving health and social care

Communities vary in the extent to which they put pressure on people who use health and social care services to view themselves as active or passive, givers or receivers, empowered or compliant, ambitious or despairing. Health and social care services that have a long history of casting their users in the role of passive recipients (Wolfensberger, 1992) may fail to see people's potential as contributors to the wider society. Where this weakened identity is adopted by people themselves and by family members, other agencies and volunteer-involving organisations, it creates a destructive spiral of lowered expectations and performance.

Some projects have challenged this hurtful spiral through community awareness activities, either by submitting materials to the press or by taking training to schools and other community audiences, celebrating the contribution of 'unlikely' role models. Effective leaders position their work amongst a family of allies promoting citizenship and social inclusion, disability rights, diversity and good experiences. They advocate for people's right to assert their own choices and preferences. They recast the doctor/patient relationship within a context of reciprocal citizen/community ties (Reed & Harries, 2008),

co-production, peer mentoring and self-help. Leaders share power so that participants become involved in the design and delivery of services. Participants can move on to paid jobs in the agency and they can contribute to the design and delivery of service evaluation (Shaping our Lives *et al*, 2007) welcoming the prospect of a member 'buy-out' as people take over the running of the project.

Q9. What status and expectations are attributed to people who use local health and social care services? How will these shape your project?

The voluntary sector

Our final group of factors that may influence the shape of the project concern the nature of the voluntary sector itself. We begin with the broad concept of social capital and then move on to examine the strength of the voluntary sector and finally the skills it brings to the project.

7. Social capital

Social capital (Putnam, 2000) refers to the extent to which people interact and care for each other in practical ways, and to the extent of trust and reciprocity in those relationships. The focus is upon all the networks and relationships in a community, rather than just those manifested in a single group. It is a concept that embraces both formal activity, perhaps expressed through regular voluntary work and membership of community associations, combined with any informal activity that supports relationships and promotes personal well-being. Formal membership activities will, of course, often spill over into informal friendships and social contact outside the activity and beyond the formal relationships. It appears that volunteers who gain the most are those who have built informal friendships with their colleagues, perhaps by inviting co-volunteers out for a drink after the work is over or by attending a Christmas party together (Argyle, 1996).

This invites us to consider the extent to which the project deliberately sets out to stimulate trust and informal relationships across the whole community, or does it only concentrate on its own participants.

Effective leadership will examine where and how these informal relationships form in the community, and consider its role as a catalyst for such contacts. Leaders might arrange meetings on neutral ground, foster links between the participants of similar projects, organise community festivals and ensure that tea breaks are long enough for people to meet one another. Leaders will plan the legacy of the project – what relationships, trust and sense of affiliation will endure after the project closes.

Social capital also highlights the importance of *bridging relationships* – those that span the social divides in our community. Effective leaders will find ways to bring people together on an equal footing, including those who represent different segments of the community.

Q. How well do people know their neighbours and care about their area? What contribution might your project make to this?

8. Strength of the voluntary sector

The presence, scale, strength and impact of the voluntary organisations that already exist in the community will impact upon your project. Overall, the UK has a strong history of voluntary organisations but, despite this, local communities vary considerably. The scale of operations, the coverage provided by the sector, its fragmentation or coherence, its capacity to innovate and challenge traditional thinking, and its longevity will all vary from place to place. Some voluntary organisations take on a brokerage or direct support role, while others stimulate the development of new entrants to the voluntary sector.

Effective leaders will: ensure that their project is involved in the identification of unmet need in the community; feed environmental intelligence through to commissioners, infrastructure organisations within the third sector, regeneration agencies, major employers and local politicians; and take up a strategic position for the benefit of the wider sector and community, rather than their own parochial interests.

Q. Are there opportunities or gaps in the array or work of voluntary organisations in the area?

9. Skills development

Local funding, training opportunities, support networks and media, such as publications,

may be generously provided to develop your leadership skills. An absence of such skills can hasten the demise of well-motivated projects due to the lack of technical expertise. For that matter, if colleagues in neighbouring agencies have incomplete or inaccurate knowledge of your project, then this can stifle your work. Lone workers can be networked into structures of cross-agency mentoring and support, where they can connect with research, information exchange and peer support to extend the shared understanding about the clinical and social benefits of their project.

Effective leaders will tap into opportunities to develop their skills, and also contribute to the wider process by ensuring that other stakeholders in their project and in the whole community are supported too, and gain good knowledge of their project along the way.

Q. Do people involved in your project and other stakeholders have access to evidence, guidance, support and skill development?

Q. Where are the established 'communities of practice' where people pool their learning?

Conclusion

In the UK, social care services are being transformed by the concept of personalisation, but here we offer an enrichment of the concept by suggesting that projects should be designed at the interface of inside-out and outside-in thinking – so that projects are both person-centred *and* community-focused. Profiling the local community in which the project is to be embedded generates a fruitful list of questions and perspectives to shape the project so that it is tailored to the particular strengths, needs, culture and ways of being successful within that local community.

This profiling raises questions about the:

- macro ordering of society – policy, employment and resources
- cultural factors – attitudes to disability, appetite for formality and understanding of difference
- third sector – its strengths, skills and social capital within the community as a whole.

These nine factors may provide no more than a starting point for your own profiling task, as each project idea will find reflections or echoes in the wider society within which it is designed to operate. But we hope that we have shown that each project can be shaped through outside-in design as well as by an inside-out approach – and that this may be particularly important when beacon projects are replicated in new locations.

Implications for leadership in practice

- When developing a new project, leaders should adopt a broad overview and then enrich the traditional 'inside-out' approach with a new 'outside-in' perspective that includes an analysis of the community within which the project will operate.
- Effective leaders adopt multiple perspectives on their chosen development project, and so embrace complexity.
- By working 'outside-in', new issues and opportunities are identified.

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