

Steve Reeve and Mark Hughes

University of Brighton Business School

s.d.reeve@brighton.ac.uk

Steve will give a talk on the role of the People and *Organisatipnal Development Strategic Framework and Integrated Implementation Plan*, before, during and after the N.I. Local Government transformation.

The following slides represent an illustration of some of the 'temperature taking' of the feelings, aims and morale of the large number of staff, elected members and representatives of several institites who took part in the above project.

In particular, at a critical stage of this voluntary project immediately after the first announcements that the 26 were to become 11.

Some 30 members representing the six pillars who were staying at the conference venue overnight were invited to take part in an attempt to gauge the mood and drivers behind the project, using an 'illuminative evaluation' technique.

Narratives and discussions which had been witnessed by the authors of this talk during the preceding stages of the project had been assembled as 'phrases'

Each participant was asked to choose the most and least appropriate/explanatory phrase for different stages of the project to their mind.

This allowed us to position the very specific driving forces for the project against a series of classic academic theoretical principles.

- The following slides represent the 5 themes and multiple phrases, followed by the results of the exercise . . .

How we are going about the strategy

‘there is a job to be done’ (EE/PC)

‘a team effort where we’re learning from each other’ (OD)

‘we’re benefitting from real expertise’ (PC)

‘learning from other councils’ (OD/PC)

‘generating best practice’ (PC/od)

‘orchestrated well by the commission’ (EE)

‘to realise our vision’ (EE)

‘learning from each step and passing it on’ (OD)

‘increasing our capability as we learn from each other’ (OD/ee)

‘we’re reading from the same page thanks to sound leadership’ (EE)

Ways to achieve our expectations

‘the commission has shown us a way forward’ (EE)

‘the involvement of key organisations to lead us’ (EE/pc)

‘the resources and expertise offered to the programme’
(PC)

‘strong sense of direction’ (EE)

‘reputable leaders offering us advice’ (PC)

‘actively getting together and communicating’ (OD/ee)

‘being given the chance to organise this ourselves’ (OD)

‘benefitting from the knowledge of experienced players’
(PC)

‘hearing about “good” and “different” from other
councils’ (OD)

Shape of success

‘the realisation of the framework strategy’ (PC)

‘the outcome looking close to what we aimed at’ (PC)

‘standardised council approaches to people and HRD’
(PC)

‘more coherence than the current situation’ (OD)

‘difference across councils but better approaches to
people issues’ (OD)

‘a viable alternative for government to consider’ (PC)

‘The way that N.I. councils will operate in future’ (PC)

‘we’ll have learned lots about our differences’ (OD)

‘other small European regions might use our model’ (PC)

‘approved but different approaches to get the right
outcome’ (EE)

Moving on

‘we can only improve if we understand how the current councils work’ (OD)

‘we can’t force a new way of doing things, that will have to evolve’ (OD)

‘it is imperative that the old culture is changed’ (PC)

‘this is about improving the service local people experience’ (EE/pc)

‘different strokes for different folks – we need to know why councils behave differently’ (OD)

‘it’s no good changing structure if behaviour doesn’t change’ (PC)

‘a local council reflects its environment, we forget that at our peril’ (OD)

‘I’d rather we shift the culture than have a shift imposed’ (EE)

Our purpose

‘cut through the waffle and deliver excellent services’
(EE)

‘learn together what local service excellence means to us
and local people’ (OD)

‘councils staffed with thoughtful and capable people’
(OD/ee)

‘standardised processes so that staff are trained to deliver
to their best’ (PC)

‘a culture where we all strive for learning and self-
improvement’ (OD)

‘better a localised model than a centrally imposed one’
(EE)

‘better a few motivated self-learners than a raft of
standardised training instructions’ (OD)

‘never mind staff development, just deliver a 21st century
level of service’ (PC/ee)

How we are going about the strategy

- There was a strong positive reception towards the phrase **‘a team effort where we’re learning from each other’** this represented a positive OD message.
- Negative : **‘we’re reading from the same page thanks to sound leadership’** which represents a kind of coercive form of employee engagement

Ways to achieve our expectations

- There was a strong positive reception towards the phrases **‘actively getting together and communicating’** & **‘strong sense of direction’** suggesting overlaps between OD and employee engagement in terms of ways forward.
- In contrast **‘the involvement of key organizations to lead us’**, perhaps exemplifying expert-led programmatic change, showed up as not appropriate

Shape of success

- A fascinating dichotomy appears under this heading, There was a clustering of positive reaction towards the phrase **‘The way that N.I. councils will operate in future’**, which reflects an OD approach in the local sense, suggesting an appetite for practitioner models.
- However, the transfer of such a practitioner model to other cultures and places **‘other European regions might use our model’** provoked a strong negative response.

Moving On

- A positive reception for the phrases **‘this is about improving the service local people experience’, ‘it’s no good changing structure if behaviour doesn’t change’** which appeared to signal a collaborative, or at least organic recognition that changed behaviour might represent a more complex issue than change programmes might suggest.
- Alternatively, **‘different strokes for different folks – we need to know why councils behave differently’, and ‘we can’t force a new way of doing things, that will have to evolve’**, provoked negative reaction despite their explicit organizational development overtones as reflecting the framework strategy development process. Perhaps this is an indicator that there is a limit to the analytical nature of the organizational development approach, amidst a realistic recognition of the need for change under constrained circumstances.
- The rallying slogan, **‘it is imperative that the old culture is changed’** symptomatic of programmatic change and employee engagement drew strong negative reaction and appears to be a step too far for the comfort of the delegates.

Our Purpose

- The phrase **‘never mind staff development, just deliver a 21st century level of service’** caused negative reaction, perhaps implying again, that an overbearing task focus at the expense of personal or organizational development does not describe the ethos of the whole enterprise.
- On the other hand, **‘better a few motivated self-learners than a raft of standardised training instructions’**, appeared to be too liberal an organizational development concept for the nature and needs of the times, drawing a negative reaction, whereas
- **‘a culture where we all strive for learning and self-improvement’** seemed to capture the aspiration around an organizational development-oriented move forward.

7 considered the phrase **'strong sense of direction'** with its proximity to the engagement agenda and a unitarist ethos as most appropriately descriptive of their experience,

7 considered the phrase **'standardised council approaches to people and HRD'** which suggests an interest in fairness and hence unitarist engagement as most appropriately descriptive of their experience,

8 considered the phrase **'actively getting together and communicating'** with a strong resonance to OD, and the developmental and pluralistic learning aspects of employee engagement as most appropriately descriptive of their experience,

10 considered the phrase **'a team effort where we're learning from each other'** with its clear connection into an organizational development frame, as most appropriately descriptive of their experience,

11 considered the phrase **'this is about improving the service local people experience'** as most appropriately descriptive of their experience, and would seem to suggest the direction (or vision) beyond the strategy and would appear to encompass a kind of ethically driven employee engagement type of solidarity.

7 considered the phrase **'we're reading from the same page thanks to sound leadership'** with its unitarist but employee engagement emphasis as least appropriately descriptive of their experience,

8 considered the phrase **'there is a job to be done'** with its task focused and instrumental implication as least appropriately descriptive of their experience,

8 considered the phrase **'it is imperative that the old culture is changed'** with its inherent flavour of unitarist, normative and instrumental drive firmly in the EE or PC paradigm as least appropriately descriptive of their experience,

10 considered the phrase **'the involvement of key organizations to lead us'** with its connotations of outside expert knowledge and concept of direction rooted in the programmatic change arena as least appropriately descriptive of their experience,

14 considered the phrase **'never mind staff development, just deliver a 21st century level of service'** with its overt yet not unusual nod toward instrumental programmatic change or brutally led employee engagement as least appropriately descriptive of their experience,

15 considered the phrase **'other European regions might use our model'** with its implications of model-based change tending toward programmatic change as least appropriately descriptive of their experience

Thanks for listening,

And our very best wishes go to the staff of the
LGSC in all their future endeavours

Steve and Mark

