Create the Future Path for a Social Enterprise
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Description

This element is intended to help managers of a social enterprise: association, club, committee, group of trustees etc, though it can apply to any work team where social objectives are important e.g., in the voluntary, and parts of health and education sectors. It offers a way to create a future path by defining, establishing and maintaining the expectations, relationships and processes within a social enterprise, in a way which expresses the collective vision, core values and aspirations of all those involved, and which sustains members’ motivation. The method is demonstrated and practical guidance for adaptation to own needs is given.

Introduction

As a social entrepreneur, in addition to meeting operational objectives, you are searching for a way of capturing ideals and collective core values of those involved with you within the social enterprise. In short you are looking for a way of designing a social system.

This element draws on an approach from the new field of social system design (SSD). Underpinning this is a core value, which sees it essential that all members of the social unit recognise their interdependence with others, and that this should inform the consideration, and behaviour they display, during the design process and in practical action.

A Declaration of Interdependence, which members develop collectively, is a key part of the process, along with a Bill of Rights and Responsibilities. Such a Bill, which also continuously evolves, is a mechanism to ensure that everyone has the opportunity to achieve their agreed rights, but also has to recognise their responsibilities towards others.

Q. You have seen reference to similar styled documents before, but what seems different about this Declaration and Bill, and why might this be?

A. The titles extend ideals in key documents written for the US constitution. The originals reflect the challenge of the times, which was seen as the need to escape the oppression of a colonial power. These documents were fixed in 1776 and handed down. It takes an enormous political effort to agree any change or amendment to the constitution. In contrast this Declaration and Bill will be one that represents the values and ideals of your own social enterprise. It will be a living document; the approach allows new members to express their views and suggest change.

Social System Design

Organisations use predictive methods to considering the future, e.g. Delphi techniques, and scenario planning. Plans are developed for various futures. Such approaches assume that the future is uncontrollable. Not all assume we are so powerless, and SSD is intended to help groups and communities design their own future. Propositions underlying SSD are challenging:

1. it is a basic right of individuals, groups and communities to be involved in making decisions that affect them.
2. it is unethical to design social systems for someone else. It is ethical to design with others. In social systems, people who live in the system are the experts.
3. A designing community is comprised of people who serve the system, who are served by it, and who are affected by it. They collectively are the designers, and users of the design: they own the design. They are the user designers.

4. Designers of some social systems are trustees for future generations. They must constantly ask: how will the system we design affect the unborn?

5. They can exercise this right only if they develop competence that empowers them to take part directly and authentically in the design of the systems and communities in which they live and work.

6. Collective design capability empowers us to practice authentic, truly participative democracy. It enables us to guide the activities that enrich the quality of our lives, add value to the systems in which we live, and organise our lives in service of common good.

7. The role of the design professional is to develop resource and create arrangements and opportunities by which a community can learn how to engage with the design of their system.

Q. How do you find yourself reacting to these propositions? Which do you find yourself giving most support to? Which for you carry the most implications and are the most challenging?

A. If you react positively to the propositions then you will probably engage well with the approach taken here. You may find the first 3 points easier to relate to. You may be puzzled by 4. Statements 5 and 6 have considerable implications for education systems as competence for this is not addressed; 7 is contentious in that it questions the role of experts. It is difficult to meet these ideal propositions especially in larger scale social systems, however in smaller social systems like the typical social enterprise then we can look to practical ways forward.

Q. What does this say to you about designing the social system for your social enterprise?

A. An underpinning critique within these propositions is that typically social systems are designed and imposed upon others e.g., school systems are designed by people who last went to school some 40 years ago and these systems will probably remain in place till those unborn at time of design engage with them years later. It is likely that buildings and systems in old people’s homes are designed without ever consulting the elderly. A user-designer approach addresses this.

One challenge is setting a boundary for, and deciding, who should be involved in the design process. Also some stakeholders identified may not be accustomed to having their views sought. They will need positive encouragement to engage in systems design.


Dependence and Independence

These ideas can be interpreted in many ways, from, e.g. physical, emotional, intellectual development, moral values, and sociological, e.g. political, economic and legal perspectives. As we develop through childhood, puberty and maturity we are expected to become more independent. But at any given time an individual will be dependent to a particular degree, for example, on the educational system, the social welfare system, on an organisation for paid employment, and on family. Independency within a dimension will depend on the power (in terms of position, resource, expertise and personal power) that the individual has developed and which are valued within that culture.

In typical Western culture and organisational forms, to be independent is usually regarded as strength. Conversely, to present as dependent is often construed as weakness. Person specifications for most senior jobs include the criteria of ability to work independently, and candidate success in selection for such a job can be closely linked to how they present against that criteria. The degree to which this generalisation will apply depends on the cultural and organisational context, and we should certainly question this for the social enterprise.
Q. How do you react to this analysis? Given this discussion what does this imply about you and others operating within a social enterprise, where the recognition of interdependence will be very important?

A. Allowing everyone to participate in decision-making also offers advantage of drawing on the creative potential of all. Those who are used to acting as leader, driving decisions and plans, will have to reconsider how the leadership role is exercised in this new context. As we shall see later a practice of sharing or rotating leadership may be useful during certain stages of the design process. However, allowing everyone a chance to input to decisions needs to have safeguards and in systems design, as we shall see later, this is handled through conversation rules which the enterprise itself agrees.

Interdependence

This term is generally used to imply interconnectedness between parts and that any change in one part (of a system) may affect another part. In natural and environmental systems, even with a relatively small action in one part, interconnectedness can produce a re-circulating chain-reaction effect and may in the end have an enormous impact on overall system behaviour. The impact is unpredictable, as a wide range of factors and conditions will be in play. This unpredictability and its corollary, difficulty in analysing and linking cause to effect, is the basis of what we mean by complexity.

Human activity systems, our social systems, display the same interconnectedness. Cause and effect of change can be equally difficult to link, not least because the key components of the system, human beings, have free will.

Human Interdependence

“No man is an Island, entire of it self” (John Donne, 1571-1631)

Human interdependence
The degree to which individual human beings do not, and cannot, live in isolation from their fellows. Implying, as it does, the degree to which each individual depends on others and the extent to which others are, in turn, affected by the individual's action, the notion of human interdependence contrasts with an excessively individualistic view of the human condition. Human interdependence thus embraces a set of assumptions about the social nature of humanity, and ethical assumptions about considerate and responsive conduct. (Barry Jones,1995)

We are setting out to develop a process for the enterprise which will collectively represent the right balance between the aspirations of the individual and which also recognises the interdependence of actions and its effect on others. What considerations will need to be highlighted in any Declaration and/or Bill will be up to your social enterprise to explore and decide.

Outline approach

Here is the approach we shall use. We call it a methodology rather than method, as the latter implies that we have a sausage machine, and turn the handle and out comes what we need. The methodology is really a framework of the possibilities that a group
may freely adapt to suit their context. There are 4 stages in the complete framework, described below:

**Introduction** (establish core values and ideals, draft of Declaration of Interdependence, share and explore views, amend draft) - this stage can involve as few as two people

**Development** (cascade dialogue with others, amend the draft, and collectively clarify it)

**Incorporation** (develop Bill of Rights and Responsibilities)

**Review** (collective experience of enterprise, amend Declaration/Bill).

**Q.** How much of this might apply to your social enterprise?

**A.** Without knowing more about the process you will only be able to answer this in a general way. What you might have reflected is that the context of application is the crucial determinant of how far the social enterprise might be able to follow this framework. A major factor will be the size and resource available to your enterprise. If the group is small, it might be sufficient to explore only one stage of the process. Which stage is chosen will depend on the needs perceived by the group at that time. If the group is very small, it may not even be necessary or appropriate to produce any documentation. The process of engaging with the approach may be sufficient in itself. My assumption is that resource will be available within the majority of groups to produce some kind of Declaration and/or Bill.

The case studies I will introduce with the screens that follow will help to clarify the importance of context and the range of possibilities.

**Could this work for us?**

It is time that we looked at a case study application. Follow the link below to the website of the International System Institute (ISI), an international group of over 100 researchers and social system design practitioners. Note the key features of page content.

http://www.isiconversations.org/about/interdependence.asp

The ISI meets the description of a social enterprise in that they share common values and ideals relating to new ways of approaching and designing the future with communities. This collective Declaration identifies areas of commitment: compassion, diversity, development and excellence, which are especially important to the ISI for their own work and conversation.

The ISI had been in existence for some years before the Declaration was proposed, so there was already a considerable level of agreement about aims, and core values. The Declaration was initiated through conversation, first in a sub-group, and then within the ISI as a whole. It remains open to change.

**Stage 1 - Personal reflections**

Here we begin to establish agreement to core values and ideals of the SE, what areas are really important and whether documentation would be useful.

I assume that you will be prepared to act as a champion for this approach within the SE. As the “initiator”, you will need to initiate a process of cascading dialogue/conversation/workshops on these ideas with other colleagues. Start with some personal reflections:

Will others share your vision that such a process would be useful and desirable?
What core values and beliefs might be identified? Is there a reason for believing that there is a common set of shared values and beliefs? Could this be expressed as a future vision of how the community should work together? Would individuals in the community develop personal commitments to achieve that vision? Will it be helpful to develop physical documents of this kind, or just to have a draft declaration (and in due course a draft bill of rights and responsibilities) as mechanisms for debate?

Now find at least one other person who you think might be positive about these questions.

Stage 1 – Seek a confirmation

After briefing, ask the second person to read the ISI declaration and to reflect, from their own perspective, on the following:

Do they share the initiator’s vision that a design process would be useful? What future vision do they have for the SE? Would they feel a personal commitment to making an effort to achieve that vision? Does the ISI Declaration capture for them the key issues in terms of core values and areas of commitment which ought to be addressed? Could they sign up to it? As it stands? (unlikely), or with some modification and clarification? (more likely) What statements need amending?, or need clarification? Are there major omissions? Is the language appropriate?

Arrange to meet your colleague to share ideas on a future vision for the SE and possible the redrafting of the declaration. Note questions to clarify during the development and incorporation Stages. Here’s how this part of Stage 1 progressed in other applications:

1. A Community Health Care NHS Trust – a team of trainers who worked with a healing group – chose to use “respect” rather than “compassion” in their Declaration
2. Translated into Italian as a Family Declaration of Interdependence and used by a facilitator to help a group of nursery teachers and assistants who had experienced very bad internal personal conflict. This required very careful handling and drawing out past problems was an important precursor.

Stage 2 – Dealing with any past conflicts

If there has been any history of conflicts and difficulty in your SE it may be important to get to the roots of this before the draft Declaration is introduced. A useful way of doing this is by having an initial workshop session based around three questions for individuals to answer:

When did being a member of our SE really work for me?
When was being a member of our SE not enjoyable?
Identify some key words that reflect the core values you would like to see embedded in our SE?
This activity might reveal additional areas of commitment that could be incorporated in a draft Declaration before the main dialogue of Stage 2 begins.

**Case study:** This method was used with a group of teachers in a UK primary school that experienced leadership problems in the past. The Appendix shows how this group responded to the 3 questions this link.

### Stage 2 - Developing the Declaration

There are two possible routes from here:

(a) use a draft declaration as starting point and then modify to suit, or
(b) develop a declaration more or less from the beginning

**Modification Route:** To decide whether to adapt either the ISI Declaration or the NHS Trust Training Centre Team Declaration (see Appendix) ask yourselves:

Does this draft declaration capture the key issues in terms of the areas of commitment - compassion, diversity, development, and excellence - which ought to be addressed? Would these be the right areas of commitment for our context? What other areas, if any, might need to be addressed?

Are there any points within the document, including the introductory statement and concluding statement, which we would like to delete, re-express, or add?

Is the language appropriate?

These questions can be triggers for conversations and workshops with colleagues. Everything is up for debate, and it is expected that the wording and style of the declaration will evolve until a version emerges which is acceptable to all.

**New Start:** If colleagues do not find the draft declaration a useful starting point, use this blank template (see Appendix) and develop one from scratch.

### Stage 3 - Incorporation: Bill of Rights and Responsibilities

This should be worked on in largish groups or as a whole community. Meaning will now be added to the ideals within the declaration, and to how *interdependence* is interpreted by the group. There are two possible approaches:

(a) use a draft as a starting point and then modify it, or
(b) develop a Bill more or less from the beginning

**Modification Route:** To decide whether to adopt or adapt the example Bill in the Appendix, ask yourselves:

Do 'areas of freedoms' adequately reflect our declaration of interdependence? Should some 'areas of freedom' be deleted, some re-defined or new ones added?
Are the individual rights and responsibilities within the areas sufficient and adequately expressed?

**A New Start:** If colleagues do not find the draft Bill of Rights and Responsibilities a useful starting point, take the blank template in the Appendix and develop one from scratch.

To show the intended flexibility of the approach look at the simple bill (or social contract) in the Appendix that was developed by 9 and 10 years olds for use in their class.

**Stage 4 - Review**

> It is important to review the group experience periodically.
> One way is to invite members to give examples of their past experience of the group using the trigger questions:

**When was being in the group a positive experience?**
**When was being in the group a negative experience?**
**What alternative behaviour might have avoided a problem?**

Such feedback will help to expose whether the Declaration and the Bill capture all the groups needs, and if amendments are needed.

The documents could be expected to change as new staff members come into the group and they are offered the chance to take part in the evolving design.

**Changing mindset**

To create a vision and images of the social enterprise we want to become, share values, find common ground, and have mechanisms to review progress, we need to re-think how we interact. Most interactions today reflect a mindset of competition. As Banathy and Rowland have commented:

> “We fight for the floor, insert ourselves in momentary silence, and attempt to convince each other of right (me) and wrong(you). This discourages listening and meaningful collaboration, the very things necessary for us to create a future together.”

**Q.** Does this seem familiar?

**A.** It’s certainly familiar to me. I recognise this as a characteristic of academic debate when the aim is often to carry the day with one’s own position. Academics and other professionals, e.g. politicians, lawyers, whose culture is linked to “their” truth, may need time to adjust to a new way of interacting with others.
Making it happen: Conversation

The words *dialogue* and *conversation* are now being used to describe a new way of interacting.

Here’s an SSD view of conversation:

- In conversation, people focus on carefully worded triggering questions. They take time to think before speaking. Everyone has an opportunity to share thoughts. Everyone else listens.
- Conversation enables a deeper understanding of others’ views. Rather than saying “no, you’re wrong” participants ask “what do you mean?”
- Conversation opens up creative capacity. Active listening and reflecting allows us to see connections more clearly. It opens them to possibilities rather than closure to views that they do not immediately share. It enables us to see AND relationships rather than OR relationships.

**Conversation OK: but we need some rules**

We need rules for *conversation* of this kind. A group should be encouraged to develop their own rules. They could either use an extract from their own Bill, or the following starter set for consideration:

- Display tolerance, patience and consideration to others.
- Honour and respect each other.
- Listen to others, attempt to understand the point of view being expressed, reflect and respond.
- Not to dominate.
- Not to offend.
- Avoid losing control of one’s feelings.
- All ideas are viewed as contributions to the group for consideration, accepting that not all ideas are used.
- Free exchange of ideas; public ownership of ideas.
- Equal opportunity to participate.
- Stand for what one believes in.
- Equal opportunity of action and decisions; but take responsibilities for actions and decisions.

**Conversation safeguards**

Experience with SSD conversations has shown it useful to operate a system of “guarantors” to safeguard the process. Guarantors might be appointed (and rotated) to monitor adherence to:

- The selected theme
- Opportunity for equal participation
- Honouring diversity and every contribution made
- Developing team rules and spirit
- Establishing common ground
- Being open to emerging/new ideas
- Shared leadership and other roles

Rotation of responsibility, hopefully by a system of individual volunteers, can provide an additional benefit of fostering personal development.
Summary

Having completed this element you should now:

1. understand the aspirations and principles underpinning social system design (SSD)
2. appreciate how the ethics of SSD could match those of your social enterprise
3. appreciate how techniques from SSD could help your enterprise define its future path
4. become familiar with a basic SSD methodology to help with this
5. be equipped to incorporate these ideas into practice

I hope that you will try to champion the use of these ideas in your social enterprise. You may download a .pdf version of this main text and use Word version of the Appendices to the element which also includes the example documents. If you use this material please acknowledge its source.

If you have found this element interesting then please feel free to contact the author through the i10 office

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References
Banathy B.H and Rowland G., 2004, Creating the Future, online at
Barry-Jones, R.J.,1995, Economic Globalisation and Interdependence, Francis- Pinter, London

Disclaimer
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Appendices (see separate downloadable Word file)

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