



the
futures
company

the coming together of
Henley Centre HeadlightVision
and Yankelovich

The Effectiveness Agenda

Designing for effectiveness: six principles

1. Make the most of what you already know
2. Draw the bigger picture of your users
3. Sound out your ideas, early and often
4. Understand impacts as well as inputs
5. Plan against the future, not the past
6. Look over the wall

Designing for efficiency doesn't work

Change is often expensive, and looking directly for savings can be counterproductive. Efficiency savings only take you so far – and as the private sector discovered with its Business Process Re-engineering fad in the 1990s, redesigning processes and systems just for efficiency is doomed to failure.

Organisational changes can take at least two years to bed down, as people remake their mental maps of how the business works; it was said of the repeated NHS reforms of the 1990s and early 2000s that they had made the NHS 'illegible' to both its staff and its patients. All of these approaches risk destroying one of your most valuable assets – organisational knowledge.

And yet, change is unequivocally what is required if high quality services are to be delivered in austere times. Organic change can be radical, if it goes with the flow of the changes in your service users lives. And constraint can be a powerful, even welcome, driver of such change. A fundamental principle of innovation is that the most creative ideas often emerge when a system is confronting new challenges.

The Effectiveness Agenda

From efficiency to effectiveness

For these reasons, at the Futures Company we talk about the importance of effectiveness. Effectiveness is about moving beyond the language of 'efficiencies', 'saving money', or even 'cuts' and improving user outcomes through innovative solutions while avoiding unintended outcomes.

The Effectiveness Agenda



1. Make the most of what you know

Public sector organisations always have huge volumes of under-utilised research and operational data in their files, without being aware of its potential value and application. There are also, always, pools of organisational knowledge – often at the front line – which have the potential to increase effectiveness. And there will also be good ideas within the organisation about how to improve

services which have been aired in different circumstances which may now have a new relevance. Finding this insight and expertise – and having someone take ownership of it – may be more cost effective than commissioning new research. And it invariably offers opportunities to generate new insight.



2. Draw the bigger picture of your users

Your service users have lives which extend way beyond their contact with you. They're motivated by many things, not just money or time. A deeper understanding of what drives attitudes and behaviours of current and potential service users, across a number of levels, often reveals unexpected

barriers to – or opportunities for – change. And service users are often surprisingly willing to engage with you to help understand these contexts.

By understanding the wider contexts of their lives, and the way your service fits into this, can help change the way you think about the user's service journey. Again, much of this information is already to hand; often your frontline staff who listen to service users every day can tell you a lot of what you need to know.

More for less in local government

The Total Place initiative has demonstrated the huge potential at local government level to generate increased value from existing insight assets within local authorities and across partnerships, whilst simultaneously improving outcomes for citizens through better joining up. The Futures Company is working with a London Borough to reconfigure its insight function to take advantage of these opportunities, improving insight to drive better decision making and commissioning, whilst reducing costs.

Transforming maternity services

We worked with the maternity policy team in the Department of Health to understand the maternity journey through the eyes of its customers – mothers-to-be. A customer journey mapping approach, which involved significant front line input, revealed that one of the most important 'choices' for women (not previously reflected in the care pathway) is the role of their partner, particularly in antenatal classes and during labour. The introduction of relatively minor service design changes to more fully involve the partner can potentially lead to significant benefits in terms of the well-being of the mother, baby and wider family members.

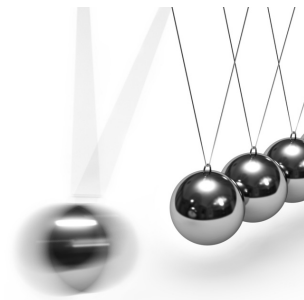
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3. Sound out your ideas, early and often

“Release early, release often” is a phrase heard often in the software world where developers use interested early adopters to trial new applications. Increasingly, there are models which make it possible to prototype new services this way as well, especially where data is involved. The No. 10 petitions site, developed by MySociety.org, went through three

iterations on the day of its launch. The trick, in the online and offline world, is to test small-scale design prototypes using a “safe-fail” approach to reduce risk – and adapt the design and the scale of delivery as you learn. The benefit of this ‘co-production’ approach is discovering how to improve the service before the design is locked in. And releasing data into the community may be the quickest way to stimulate innovation, as people who are interested in a service, use it to build applications they need.



4. Understand impacts as well as inputs

Any decision can trigger unintended consequences. Social and public systems are large and complex, and they respond to change in different ways. Sometimes these lead to ‘penny wise, pound foolish’ outcomes, where a saving now leads to much greater public expense later. There are ways to test for

unexpected outcomes before implementation, using strategic foresight and systems tools to help manage for uncertainty. It helps if you’re able to consider the bigger picture of the impact of your decision and its consequences on other departmental policy too.



5. Plan against the future, not the past

Fundamental redesigns are expensive. So, if you have to change it, make sure that the new organisation or service will still be fit for purpose in five years and ten years time. Of course you can’t predict what’s going to happen in the future, but you can build up a good picture of how your operating environment is going to change – and design an organisation that is resilient enough to be able to cope with those changes.

Traintimes.Live Underground Map

Traintimes developed a live map showing the real-time locations of London Underground’s trains, using Transport for London’s data and APIs, in just a few hours. It’s available online at the moment, but could be picked up as a commercial mobile application.

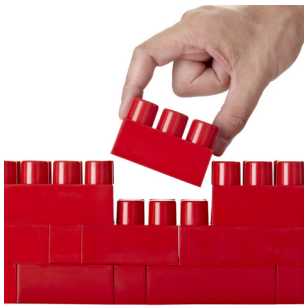
Long term costs, short term costs

There are some public institutions where social and political pressures have ‘locked in’ poor outcomes – as Kenneth Clarke pointed out recently, observing that prison was an expensive option for minor offences and had huge negative social costs. And there are others where the short-term saving may simply pile up costs later. The Olympic legacy plan for free swimming, initially for over-60s, later for under-16s and potentially for everyone from 2012, was one of the first post-election cuts by the DCMS. The evidence suggests that swimming is one of the best ways to engage people in exercise, with compelling physical and mental health benefits. The long-term cost may well be borne by the health service.

Planning the future of water

The Environment Agency used a set of existing scenarios to help understand the future of water demand in the UK, working closely with The Futures Company. By testing a range of policy ideas against the scenarios, they identified, for example, that taking action to reduce water demand was going to be more effective than building new reservoirs to increase supply.

The Effectiveness Agenda



6. Look over the wall

Picasso once said “Bad artists copy. Good artists steal”. A key principle of innovation is that stealing is good. Look widely – at other countries, other sectors, and other services. The Futures Company, for example, helps clients to learn from existing innovation using our network of ‘Streetscapers’ who spot manifestations of change in leading cities across the globe. At the same time, context matters;

simply copying usually fails. The key to success is using external ideas as stimulus, then taking care to ground them in the particular circumstances of your service users or potential users.

Although these different elements may appear to offer only incremental benefits, the research that is available suggests that anything that helps take a holistic view of your service and system can improve performance by a quarter or more. However, it does take some preparation and planning.

Stars, mountains and chessboards

There is a paradox here. Change is needed, but it is costly, difficult, time-consuming, and unpredictable. And negotiating change often becomes an internal process, with trade-offs made between different interests and departments. It’s easy to lose sight of the service user or client.

One of the problems is that organisations – especially when they’re under pressure – can get the purpose, their goals, and their strategy blurred. Short-term demands push out of mind the long-term purpose. The futurist Hardin Tibbs has a useful model – ‘star’ (purpose), ‘mountain’ (goal), and ‘chessboard’ (strategy) – which he uses to help organisations separate these out.

When organisations get these confused, they start malfunctioning. Toyota’s recent problems, with vehicles crashing because of design and engineering mistakes, are a case in point.

In trying to be the largest and most profitable car company in the world, they had confused a goal – the mountain – for their purpose – their star. Their customers – Toyota drivers – ended up paying the price for this.

The Futures Company helps organisations navigate the short term challenges while keeping their wider purpose and goals in view.

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Learning from Eldercare

The American specialist insurance company Eldercare wanted to keep its customers living in their own homes for longer – reducing costs and improving their quality of life. It set up a timebank whereby its more active members could earn credits against their insurance costs by helping the less active with in-home chores. This helped its older members stay out of care – and Eldercare discovered it also improved the self-esteem and mental health of its slightly younger members.