

Understanding Social Innovation

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1. Need a broader understanding of innovation.

- Broader application not just to high tech, manufactured, private sector. Can apply to low tech, services, public and private.
- Broader sense of motivation – innovation not just motivated by profit but by public goals. Indeed innovators in most fields often not initially motivated by profit.
- Broader account of where innovation comes from, how it develops. From traditional pipeline, linear model to something more collaborative, iterative, in which users/consumers/demand plays a critical role in developing, adapting new solutions.

Innovation often about developing, adapting, blending, remixing existing ideas rather than developing entirely new ones.

2. Social innovation = application of a new idea or a new application of an existing idea that yields lasting social value, i.e. not just to the direct consumer, addressing a social need in a more effective way.

Social innovation linked to but different from social entrepreneurship and social enterprise.

M Yunus – the social entrepreneur.

Grameen Bank – the social enterprise.

Self administered, community based microfinance – the social innovation.

Of course want more Yunus' and more Grameens. But what trying to spread is the innovation, so it successfully taken up in more ways in more settings.

Scaling social change not just about scaling an organisation or influence of an individual but understanding how an innovation that developed in one setting can be taken up in many.

Most of innovation literature focuses on the creation/invention phase when most of the big gains/changes come from the adoption/dissemination phase.

Big issue is social innovation is really propagation, understanding how widespread changes in behaviour come about.

3. Well if confine ourselves to just the formal public sector – tax funded services, activities, which have a public purpose – then clear that need innovation across the board.

- Incremental to improve existing services.
- Joining up existing services to create more seamless solutions.
- Extending services to new groups/areas – extension of family services/child care.

Each of these is difficult. But even more challenging are two other innovation challenges.

- First, intractable problems where traditional service solutions seem to have failed, or worse exacerbated the problem – Neets and drop outs from the school system.
- Second, emerging problems that current public sector not designed for – chronic disease, ageing, climate change.

These last two need transformational, radical social innovation.

Often the most intense social issues where these two overlap. Socially disinvested, disconnected communities facing big new challenges.

4. Look at two examples of work done with Participle to address these intractable/new challenges.

- Diabetes/chronic disease:
from condition to lifestyle,
patient to participant,
ameliorative service to prevention/self management.
- Ageing:
from care to well being,
need/deficit to participation and relationships,
service to economic and social development.

Other work in its wake – youth, ageing and isolation, chaotic families.

5. What have we learned about the kind of innovation required to address these kinds of issues?

(i) Framing Counts

How challenges are framed will determine the kind of innovation you get.

If you frame the challenge in terms of improving/adapting existing services then you will get incremental innovation at best.

To get radical innovation need to frame challenges from below and above the service.

From below, the point of view of the individual/family/social network.

e.g. Diabetes don't see a condition, see a person. What they want is a life worth living not a treatment.

Ageing – people want to age well, rather than a better care service.

Have to see problem/challenge from bottom up and the whole system, not from the service.

(ii) People enact change

Lasting social innovation invariably involves people enacting change themselves in their lives, rather than having an external service solution delivered to them.

That entails:

(a) understanding, tapping into their motivations, to change their behaviour

and

(b) building their capacity to contribute.

Traditional services do not motivate and do not build capability. New solutions will need to.

Means not just addressing people as consumers, but as contributors, participants.

Not starting solely from deficit/need to be diagnosed and serviced but from capabilities and assets, opportunities to be taken.

(iii) Relationships are critical

See solutions through the lens of relationships rather than individuals or services.

- Key services really depend on relationships.
- Capacity and motivation to act depend on relationships, peer support.
- Well being, full life relationships critical.

Put relationships and social networks at the heart of policy.

(iv) Public sector orchestration

The public sector has a vital role in this but it has to be more than a service provider or commissioner of contracted service delivery.

Public sector as an orchestrates collaborative innovation, which like to involve households, social enterprise, private sector, public services, bits of infrastructure but also lots of behaviour change.

Put it another way: the state cannot go it alone.

Public sector has to license, support, sponsor the creation of new capacity to devise solutions in society and the social market, not just within narrow public service delivery channels.

Public needs to collaborate with other sectors to create solutions with enough diversity.

And needs to be able reach out of service institutions into society, daily life.

(v) New Measures

Need to measure costs, value creation and scale of impact in new ways.

Narrow service based accounting creates misleading view of all three.

- Focus on narrow departmental/service costs rather than wider social costs of a problem.
- Underestimates the value that might be created by innovative solutions: measure efficiency gains for a service not wider social outcomes or personal measures.
- Scale of impact = scale of organisation.

Need to rethink all three.

First, need to address wider, lifetime social costs of problems, e.g. chronic disease, chaotic families.

Second, need wider measures of public value creation, lifetime value of preventative, intensive upfront investment. And need to marry these to more personal measures of value and outcome – does it work for the people involved.

Third, scale of impact can come from many initiatives loosely joined not just from national, top down national initiatives. How build up scale from bottom up as well as top down.

(vi) Political Leadership

Broadly collaborative, collective even, process, which requires political leadership to maintain the momentum for innovation. Though not necessarily from politicians alone. Can come from outside the formal political process as well.

Danger of politicians seeing themselves as chief exec of Public Service Delivery Inc.

6. Lots of issues, difficulties –

- developing shared frames and expectations;
- showing results;
- building capacity;
- shifting resources from inside to out, old services to new, running existing services while creating new ones.

Sense of crisis – status quo is taking us backwards - vital.

Think of public purposes not public services.

Create solutions not deliver them.