A new policy toolkit

Matthew Taylor argues for a re-evaluation
of the policymaking tools at our disposal

Cass Sunstein explores the phenomenon behind groupthink

Francis Maude negotiates the shifting sands of current policy approaches

"THERE ARE WAYS OTHER THAN TOP-DOWN POLICY TO ENABLE AND ACHIEVE SOCIAL CHANGE"

MATTHEW TAYLOR, PAGE 10

"NEW APPROACHES SHOULD EMBRACE DIFFERENT DISCIPLINES"

VIKKI HEYWOOD, RSA CHAIR

This edition of the RSA Journal *suggests that we need to spend less time rehearsing the finer details of which policies work and more asking whether the policymaking process is working and exploring potential new approaches*

As the general election draws near, our political leaders will invest time convincing the public of where their party differences lie, where the policy lines are drawn and the key issues that polls suggest will shape our decision in the ballot box.

This journal puts the spotlight, not on what policies we need (although Rowan Bosworth-Davies makes a passionate case for the time being ripe for a new conversation about drugs policy), but on the process of policymaking itself. Matthew Taylor's piece argues that, in light of today's challenges, it may be time to update the policy tools we use. Meanwhile, Cabinet Office minister Francis Maude explores the moving targets that policy approaches need to nail, including the rise in public expectations of what government can and cannot deliver.

So what potential new approaches are there and can these actively engage more people into the process? For civil servant and comedian Ayesha Hazarika, policymaking does not need to be boring or confined to a relatively small elite in Whitehall. More power should shift to cities, according to Carolyn Wilkins, head of Oldham Council, who has been involved with the RSA's City Growth Commission.

New approaches should also embrace different disciplines: Andrea Siodmok, head of the Policy Lab, argues that adopting the best principles from design may be a more effective approach and Brian Gallagher, CEO of US philanthropic organisation United Way explains how we can shift policymaking (and power) from the few to the many, by using a collective impact method to solve problems.

These issues speak to the heart of the RSA and we are proud of our political independence. While we are not hidebound by particular positions, we are unashamedly interested in the role that public engagement in policymaking can play. We are increasingly committed to providing a robust evidence base for our work. And we are acutely aware – as policymakers are – that how you frame a problem and how you design a solution is the key to success.

While this edition focuses on some of the structural issues at play, the RSA always seeks to connect these back to the individual and their role in influencing positive social change. Our excellent public events programme, cutting-edge research and the socially innovative and entrepreneurial projects that Fellows create help us to question and test new practical approaches.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank all Fellows, RSA partners and funders for their support over the past year and wish you all the best for 2015. With several new developments planned, including the launch of a new website for Fellows, I'm confident that 2015 will be another excellent year for the RSA. ∎

INNOVATION

RSA WEBSITE

As Matthew Taylor announced at last year's AGM, we are replacing the RSA's existing technology with an up-to-date and fully integrated website launching this month.

Many Fellows have fed back to us that they would like easier ways to connect with each other. With this in mind, the new website will allow Fellows to:

- create a useful and informative online profile and share information about their skills and interests;
- search for other Fellows by skills, interests or location, and connect using an online private messaging service;
- comment and share ideas around key areas of RSA activity such as events.

The design and capabilities of the new site have been developed following detailed research and user testing among Fellows and non-Fellows. This will be the first step in an ongoing programme of work to improve how Fellows connect and collaborate with each other – new features will continue to be added after launch. In addition, the website will present information in a more accessible way for all users, including those using smartphones and tablets, ultimately allowing for a more personalised experience.

Find out more at www.thersa.org

EDUCATION

CLOSING THE CREATIVITY GAP

As part of the RSA's new focus on closing the creativity gap in learning throughout our lives (see Issue 2, 2014), our education team is aiming to launch two investigations during 2015 that will explore how further and higher education institutions can play a greater role in developing the creative capacities of their students and localities.

Despite growing demand for these institutions to foster employability skills (of which creativity and entrepreneurialism are seen as central by employers), very few non-arts courses focus systematically on the development of students' creative capacities. The nurturing of students' cultural capital – a key foundation for creative development – is also given low priority, and may be one reason why low-income students continue to achieve poorer achievement and employment outcomes.

FE colleges and universities are also increasingly regarded as key drivers of local economic growth and social regeneration, through the new knowledge they produce, students they teach, people they employ, and broader forms of engagement with their locality and communities. However, their role as 'anchor institutions' has been largely under-deployed, due to a number of structural and cultural barriers. Although innovative approaches to connect institutions to wider strategies are emerging, these are under-recognised, poorly evaluated and highly vulnerable to political changes and economic constraints.

'All our Futures', the 1998 government commission on creativity and culture in schools, had a significant impact on England's schools. Plans to commission a similar report for FE and HE were not pursued. Given rapid changes to both sectors, resource constraints and emerging thinking about pedagogy, now is an ideal moment to carry out these investigations.

We want Fellows' views to inform these investigations from the earliest stage. So, in advance of securing project funding, we are currently surveying RSA Fellows working in HE and will do the same for our FE Fellows in February.

To get involved, go to bit.ly/HEFellow

DESIGN

ROYAL DESIGNERS FOR INDUSTRY

Four of the UK's best designers were recognised for their outstanding contribution to design and society by becoming Royal Designers for Industry (RDI) at an award ceremony held at the RSA in November. Fernando Gutiérrez, Richard Rogers, Helen Storey and Neil Thomas join the ranks of fellow RDIs such as Terence Conran, James Dyson and Vivienne Westwood. Non-UK designer Gilles Clément was also given honorary RDI status for his creative and progressive application of ecology and science to sustainable landscape design. Said Helen: "It has been an absolute joy to find that my work has been recognised by the Royal Society of Arts and all that it stands for, not just for me, but for everyone who follows their intuition, beyond trend and towards the betterment of us all."
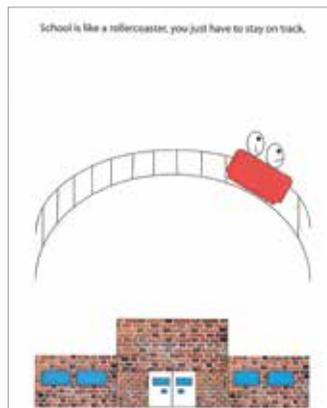
RSA ACADEMY

POSTCARD PERFECT

The RSA's Royal Designers for Industry (RDI) have been working with teachers at the RSA family of academies to develop design projects and challenges for their students.

Graphic designer Mike Dempsey RDI challenged Year 10 GCSE graphic products students at the RSA Academy in Tipton to design a postcard about their school.

Students were encouraged to reflect on their feelings about school and observe how organisations, products and celebrities presented themselves to the world. Designs could work to any size but ultimately had to scale to the proportions of a postcard.

Returning a few weeks later to judge the winning design, Mike praised the students on the playful execution of their ideas. "Good ideas on paper demonstrate how you bring your thoughts to life," he said. "Sometimes you need to push them a bit further to achieve a great result. Great ideas endure!"

The winner was 14-year-old Jack Freeman, whose design (above) of two figures riding in a red wagon over a building with the words "School is like a rollercoaster, you just have to stay on track" was praised by Mike for its playfulness and simplicity. In second place was Holly Hunt's humorous prose about the highs and lows of a day at school written across a sketch, and third was Jacob Bishop's photographic image of the RSA Academy with a sun and clouds hovering above. All three finalists' work were engaging graphic expressions of both good days and challenging days at school, executed with clarity and a warm wit.

▬ *For more information on RDI activity at the RSA Academies, visit www.rsaacademies.org.uk/projects/royal-designers-for-industry*

UNIVERSITY CHALLENGE

The University of Warwick and RSA Academies have set up a groundbreaking partnership designed to help young people aspire to, attain and achieve their full academic potential. This long-term programme of activities will increase pupils' knowledge about what a university education involves; help them gain the skills and experience to win a place at university; increase the number of pupils from RSA Academies who go on to higher education, particularly those from lower-income households or who would be the first in their family to go to university; and enrich education by involving academics in teaching.

Our programme starts with the youngest secondary pupils, and also includes opportunities for children aged nine to 11 from Ipsley CE RSA Academy. As they progress through secondary school they can join the University of Warwick programmes for Years 10–13 (ages 14–18), intended for students who might not otherwise consider applying to university. After visiting Warwick, students Daniel Langham and Aaron Davie came away enthused about higher education: "We were really inspired and wanted to go to university there ourselves. We are going to work really hard so that we can."

To learn more about RSA Academies, visit www.rsaacademies.org.uk

INNOVATION

DESIGN COMPETITION

The RSA Student Design Awards are now open for entries via http://sda.thersa.org. The annual competition challenges emerging designers to tackle social and sustainability issues through design and provides winning entrants with practical support to kickstart their careers. Entrants have until 4 March 2015 to submit their work, before judging begins on 16 March 2015.

This year marks the 90th year of the RSA Student Design Awards, making it the oldest student competition in the world. The RSA has developed eight briefs. Each asks students to identify a problem within a wider social, economic or environmental area that they believe really needs solving, and apply their skills to do so.
It therefore asks design students to think of themselves as agents of change, and often has a transformative effect on participants.

The Student Design Awards team offer support for universities and students in the form of tutor briefings, university visits and workshops.

Get involved and find out more at http://sda.thersa.org

FELLOWSHIP

EVERYDAY EMPLOYMENT

The Action and Research Centre has published a new report examining the barriers that prevent people from growing their business and taking on staff. While recognising the conventional obstacles of limited finance and burdensome regulation, *Everyday Employers* highlights a number of psychological barriers that dampen people's ambitions. This includes unfounded and exaggerated fears, cognitive biases such as myopia and the 'planning fallacy'. The last refers to the tendency to believe that we can do more on our own than is possible.

Several recommendations are put forward for government and business support practitioners, including introducing a business adviser role for accountants, embedding new 'story-editing' techniques within business support, and organising randomised meet-ups between business owners in local areas. The report concludes with a request for policymakers to call time on 'common sense' interventions, which are based largely on gut instinct rather than evidence of what works in practice. Both the Youth Contract and recent National Insurance contribution holiday are cited as examples of apparently sensible interventions that have failed to have an impact.

Commenting on the report, author and RSA senior researcher Benedict Dellot said: "Behavioural insights have long been used in the disciplines of health, financial planning and education. Yet rarely have they been applied to the world of business support. Our goal has been to plug this gap, and to add another lens through which to view the challenge of low growth ambitions among UK business owners. Our next step will be to find a government department, local authority or business support group that is willing to trial some of our ideas."

IMAGE: GETTY

HOW TO BUILD BETTER, MORE RESILIENT CITIES

Judith Rodin, president of the Rockefeller Foundation, will bring together groundbreaking research to show how individuals, communities, organisations and entire societies can avert disaster by fostering more dynamic and resilient cities.

Where: RSA
When: Tuesday 20 January at 1pm

HOW TO BECOME A SOULFUL ORGANISATION

Does your workplace need more soul? Author and coach Frederic Laloux will discuss the emergence in many different sectors of a whole new type of organisation – one that eschews hierarchy and bureaucracy in favour of truly purposeful and powerful structures and practices.

Where: RSA
When: Thursday 22 January at 1pm

RSA SELF-EMPLOYMENT SUMMIT

Enterprise Nation's Emma Jones features in this day-long summit held in partnership with Google and Etsy exploring how our economy and society need to change so that microbusinesses and the self-employed can flourish.

Where: RSA
When: Tuesday 3 February (full-day event)

CLIMATE-CHANGE QUESTION TIME

Leader of the Green Party Natalie Bennett will be one of seven high-profile players representing seven dimensions of climate change – science, behaviour, technology, culture, law, economy and democracy – in an interactive *Question Time*-style format. Part of ARC's Seven Dimensions of Climate Change project, supported by the Climate Change Collaboration.

Where: RSA
When: Wednesday 11 February at 6pm

Events and RSA Animate producer Abi Stephenson has selected the highlights above from a large number of public events in the RSA's programme. For full event listings and free audio and video downloads, please visit www.thersa.org/events

THE POLICY PRESUMPTION

At the heart of our politics is a fallacy that has plagued policy formation for far too long

by Matthew Taylor

I am writing these words sitting at my desk as 2014 draws to a close. In offices across central London, bright, dedicated people are also hard at work, researching, negotiating and writing the manifestos our major political parties will present to the electorate next spring.

These manifestos will contain different analyses of the state of the nation, different sets of priorities for the UK and different promises crafted to tempt the electorate without, their authors hope, creating too many hostages to fortune. But unless any party decides to make a radical departure from past practice, the manifestos will share a way of thinking about change, a view so ingrained in our political culture it is hard to notice and harder still to imagine being different: I call this way of thinking 'the policy presumption'.

The policy presumption is the assumption among national politicians and those who seek to influence them that the traditional means of policymaking – primarily, legislation, regulation and earmarked funding allocations – are the best ways to achieve social change.

The first ever Conservative Party manifesto, the Tamworth manifesto written by Sir Robert Peel in 1834, was barely 2,000 words long and contained no detailed policies. Since then, the number of policy pledges has grown and grown, reaching, according to one estimate, over 600 in 2010. In 2013, I spoke to someone involved in

MATTHEW TAYLOR IS THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE OF RSA

drafting the 2015 Conservative manifesto. When he told me his aim was to reduce the number of policy promises, he was clearly speaking more in hope than expectation. In their most recent party conference speeches, the three main party leaders announced around 20 new national policy ideas, with Labour's Ed Miliband going so far as to tell us exactly how many new nurses, doctors and houses he would mandate as prime minister.

Given the strength of the policy presumption, it might be assumed that, whatever has now changed in the world, it must have served a useful purpose in the past. Unfortunately, this is difficult to prove either way. Policy is ubiquitous, the analysis of social change is complex and contested, and constructing counterfactuals (asking what would have happened without the policy intervention) is more art than science. However, looking across the last 20 or 30 years, it is possible to compile a strong charge sheet. This starts with individual policy disasters such as those vividly described by Ivor Crewe and Anthony King in their book *The Blunders of Our Governments*. The poll tax, the child support agency, individual learning accounts and the private finance initiative are among the most well-known and expensive examples.

Then there is the overall record in the single area that has been most subject to the application of the policy presumption: public service reform. Over the past 30 years, there has been almost constant top-down reform of our education, health and criminal justice systems, yet public service

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"THE FASTER THINGS CHANGE, THE MORE PROBLEMATIC THE POLICYMAKER'S ASSUMPTION OF PREDICTABILITY BECOMES"

performance continues to be disappointing and productivity sluggish. Even when the last Labour government was pouring new funds into public services, managers and frontline workers were demoralised by the continuous stream of ever-changing instructions from Whitehall.

Finally, while most of this policy was said to be responding to public concern and demand, its implementation has been accompanied by a deepening and damaging loss of confidence in central government and the politicians who vie to run it.

AGAINST POLICY, THEN AND NOW

It might feel that we are more disillusioned with national politics than ever before, but the critique of the policy presumption is not new. The case can be made in philosophical as well as empirical terms.

The historian Peter Clark distinguished between 'moral' and 'mechanical' models of change among democratic socialists. The moral reformers, often basing their ideals in non-conformist Christianity, sought to create a new society from the bottom up, favouring models of mutualism and devolved power. But it was the mechanical model that won out in the form of Fabianism, a post-socialist version of which was seen in the centralism and fondness for legislation of the Blair and Brown governments.

But the most powerful critiques of the policy presumption have tended to be associated with the political right. Responding in large part to the scale of government economic intervention and the growth of the welfare state during and after the Second World War, economist Friedrich Hayek and philosopher Michael Oakeshott offered different but in some ways mutually reinforcing critiques.

For Hayek, as a market liberal, the fundamental problem with state intervention was knowledge. In a complex free society, the central state could never fully understand or predict the decisions of its citizens. In contrast, the market had evolved as a highly effective way of transmitting and combining individual preferences. As a social conservative, Oakeshott's critique focused on rationalism: the idea that all decisions can be made on scientific grounds in pursuit of some idea of human perfectibility. He argued instead for a respect for the way things are and for the tacit practical knowledge embedded in long-established ways of living and acting.

Oakeshott and Hayek attack the policy presumption from different angles, and they differed in their alternative prescription; Oakeshott saw Hayek's faith in the free market

as another form of rationalism. However, they share an insight that will be recognisable to many public service workers who have suffered the tyranny of the target culture; the tendency for state intervention to legitimise further state intervention even when it fails. Oakeshott wrote: "The planners regard the rest of the citizenry as parts of a machine, cogs to be readjusted and rearranged as called for by each new blueprint, each drawn up to fix the problems generated by its predecessor."

Hayek and Oakeshott were both responding to the highly extensive and centralised state of the Second World War and Labour's postwar government. Since then, the state has pulled back in some areas, particularly in relation to the ownership of industrial assets and the oversight of economic planning. Indeed, the neoliberal ideology of state non-interference was in part responsible for the failure of governments like the UK's to spot and mitigate the risks that led to the credit crunch. However, while the central state has pulled back in some areas, in others, particularly in relation to public services and criminal justice, it has become ever more active and controlling.

Although the modern state is very different and, in some ways, much less extensive than in the postwar era, aspects of our own age reinforce Hayek's critiques. The more complex and interconnected things are and the faster things change, the more problematic the policymaker's assumption of predictability becomes. We, the objects of policy, have changed too. Modern citizens are more sceptical, more questioning, quicker to react, adapt and mobilise. Individual learning accounts failed as soon as fraudsters realised how easily they could be scammed. When, more recently, claimants on incapacity benefit discovered they could challenge the outcomes of their work assessment, the news spread like wildfire and the system quickly seized up from a backlog of appeals.

It is not that the modern world makes policy irrelevant or impossible. After all, as policy is simply the means by which those in power pursue their objectives, any move away from the policy presumption is itself a policy. Nor does this critique involve an Oakeshottian scepticism about the pursuit of social progress; in many ways, life is better today than ever before. But there are ways other than top-down policy to enable and achieve social change, ways more suited to the 21st century and the attitudes and capabilities of modern citizens. Three broad, overlapping approaches in particular deserve more consideration: devolving power, collective impact and design as policy.

DEVOLVING POWER

On the face of it, the problems the modern world presents to policymakers – the pace of change, complexity, a more demanding and assertive public – could all, to some extent, be mitigated if decisions were made closer to people. Local agencies are more able to form a relationship with communities; they can get to know more about those communities and, because their interventions are smaller in scale and their lines of decision-making shorter, they can respond more quickly to change.

But while locally made policy might be less problematic than national policy, it can still be badly designed and implemented. And anyway, some city regions are as big as small nations. So the argument for decentralisation has to go beyond scale. The way effective local politicians and managers tend to work is based less on the unilateral use of power and more on convening partners and negotiating solutions. This is how Brookings researchers (and previous *Journal* contributors) Bruce Katz and Jennifer Bradley describe the contrast in the US context: "The federal and state governments, at their core, establish laws and promulgate rules...highly specialised, overly legalistic, prescriptive rather than permissive, process oriented rather than outcome directed. Cities and metropolitan areas, by contrast, are action oriented. As networks of institutions (for example, firms, agencies, schools), they run businesses, provide services, educate children, train workers, build homes and develop community. They focus less on promulgating rules than on delivering the goods and using cultural norms rather than regulatory mandates to inspire best practice."

While the policy presumption is generally about how a fixed quantum of power and money is used – spending on this programme, not that programme; enforcing this behaviour, not that behaviour – the practice of local governance assumes that additional power can be generated as a result of instilling shared purpose and achieving synergy between different people and agencies.

One example is provided by the network of 'cooperative councils', which the RSA has helped support, based not just on the traditions of mutualism but on recognising the importance of the ethos and model of change practised by a local authority. »

COLLECTIVE IMPACT

In an influential piece in the *Stanford Social Innovation Review*, John Kania and Mark Kramer define the basic premise of collective impact: "That large-scale social change comes from better cross-sector coordination rather than from the isolated intervention of individual organisations."

Almost as simple as the definition is the five-step method Kania and Kramer describe as characterising schemes in contexts as varied as a city alliance to reduce childhood obesity and a major corporate social responsibility initiative to improve the lives of cocoa farmers in the developing world. Collective impact relies on a shared mission between the private, public, voluntary and community sector participants. The mission then needs to be translated into a set of targets to which all the partners commit and that they then closely monitor. The partners need to agree clearly defined and differentiated roles and commit to high levels of communication between them. Finally, there needs to be a 'backbone' or 'anchor' organisation that focuses on maintaining the partnership and keeping it on track.

While collective impact schemes may look easier to develop locally, there is no reason why this approach can't be adopted by a central government, as long as that government is willing to look beyond the policy presumption, be more open about how it determines its priorities and be more humble about how extensive its unilateral power can be.

With the benefit of hindsight, Labour's bold pledge in 1999 to abolish child poverty (now effectively abandoned) is a good example of an important and radical initiative that would surely have been well suited to a collective impact methodology. Blair's government should have sought prior public support agreement for the goal (it wasn't even in the party's 1997 manifesto) and garnered commitments from all parts of society, including disadvantaged people themselves. Instead, the policy presumption turned what could have been a national crusade largely into a technocratic process of welfare reform designed by Treasury experts.

Some might fear that collective impact looks like a revamping of the corporatist models of governance that fell from favour decades ago in the wake of economic failure and industrial strife (although versions of such an approach have arguably served Germany and parts of Scandinavia pretty well ever since). But while '70s-style corporatism was a technocratic and closed process restricted to government and peak employer and employee organisations, collective impact is open, mission driven and inclusive.

Of course, at any level of governance, such an approach can only be applied in a small number of priority areas, but this recognition can itself help policymakers be more realistic about the span of their social influence. Also, while in some areas (for example, national infrastructure and defence) technocratic national policy will continue to be dominant even here, more open and authentic public and stakeholder engagement could lead to better decision-making processes and outcomes.

DESIGN AS POLICY

A third alternative framework to the policy presumption comes from a design perspective. Most people associate design with physical objects like clothes or home interiors, but as a discipline it has long been extended into services. While designing processes and interactions may be very different to furniture, there are common principles that both characterise

"WE NEED TO DEMAND MORE VISION BUT LESS PRESCRIPTION FROM POLITICIANS, AND EXPECT MORE ENGAGEMENT AND ACTION OF OURSELVES"

its approach and differentiate it from the policy presumption.

Unlike policymakers who try to get things right first time and often suffer (along with the rest of us) the consequences of failure, designers tend to use an experimental method, trying things out and being tolerant of or even welcoming failure. Designers also tend to adopt a user-centred approach to understanding a problem. This means looking in great depth not just at what people say, but how they actually live and use products and services. In contrast, despite occasional attempts in Whitehall to apply the insights of behavioural sciences, the policy presumption tends to rely on a simplistic carrot and stick view of human motivation.

Designers are more likely to engage product and service users in the very process of design and prototyping; indeed, many designers get their ideas from the way in which people adapt existing products and services. Emerging from these practices, the design method provided very fast feedback loops at each part of the process.

In a recent essay, Christian Bason, the former head of Denmark's cross-governmental innovation hub Mindlab, describes the shift from the current policy model to 'design for policy' in terms of a number of dichotomies: the current model that advocates resisting complexity versus a 'design for policy' model that embraces complexity; a problem-oriented reactive approach versus vision-oriented proactive one; a system focus versus a citizen focus; unilateral action versus shaping new alliances; and strategy emphasis versus impact emphasis.

There are now 'design for policy' centres in governments and city authorities all around the world, including a tiny version in Whitehall itself.

BEYOND POLICY – A NEW CIVIC CONTRACT?

Although the election campaign will see politicians reinforce the policy presumption with every promise they make, it is in reality a paradigm in decline in the face of modern realities and the ever-growing evidence of its failure. Before the last election, the Conservatives spoke about the 'post-bureaucratic state' and 'the Big Society', both of which offered alternative ways of thinking about the role of government policy in social change.

These important ideas were inadequately developed and were damaged by political scepticism (including inside the Conservative Party itself) and their association with austerity measures. Nevertheless, in the best work of Francis Maude's Cabinet Office, there are ministers and civil servants trying new approaches to change, albeit still at the margins of the system.

Moving beyond the policy presumption would mean a complete overhaul not just of the way government works but of our whole system of parliamentary accountability. But this is not just a challenge to politicians and civil servants.

Interest groups of all kinds, from trade associations to thinktanks and charities, often display the presumption that all problems can be solved by traditional policy. It is, after all, much easier to write a pamphlet calling for a new Whitehall funding pot or a change of law than engaging in the messy and difficult process of building local or national alliances of organisations willing to take action themselves.

The policy presumption is also easier to capture in a press release. While never losing an opportunity to criticise government for interfering or overreaching, the media too is hooked on the policy presumption, seeing the identification of any problem in society as grounds for demanding that politicians act, and act now.

And we, as citizens, need to stop demanding impossible things of government. As pollster Ben Page has said: "What the British people want is simple – Scandinavian welfare on American taxes." Failing to accept either the inevitable trade-offs between social goals or to acknowledge the degree to which progress involves changes in citizen norms and behaviours, the policy presumption helps explain public pessimism and disaffection. The past 30 years have been a malign *folie-à-deux* between policymakers and citizens, resulting in ever more policy pledges couched in ever more detail, even as the world has become more complex and less predictable. It will take a generation, but we need to reverse that process, demanding more vision but less prescription from politicians and expecting more engagement and more action of ourselves.

If that seems naïve, look at some of the best of what is happening in the modern world, from neighbourhood planning to the sharing economy; from social enterprises to genuine local public service collaboration. These are signs of what we at the RSA call the 'power to create', a model of change that starts from people taking action rather than waiting for politicians to act on their behalf.

The future is out there waiting to be grasped, but we won't do so unless we and our political masters start to move beyond the policy presumption. ■

A CHANGING GAME

As society's problems shift and change, so too must policy. We need approaches that are innovative, realistic and flexible

by Francis Maude

The chancellor, chief secretary to the Treasury and I recently laid out ambitious plans to make £10bn of savings from efficiency and reform for 2017–18 and £20bn for 2019–20. These savings will contribute to fiscal consolidation and help us focus resources on the frontline, part of this government's long-term plan to ensure the country lives within its means.

Savings of this scale will be challenging. But it is also an opportunity to transform Whitehall, to apply new technologies and to redesign services around the needs of users, not bureaucrats. This government is firmly on the side of hardworking people, and they expect their taxes to be spent wisely. Making efficiencies and cutting bureaucracy is what any government ought to do.

I am pleased to say we have gone beyond the *Yes Minister* experience of an economy drive. In that series, the Economy Drive episode results in a proposal to scrap the tea lady. Recently, I was reminded of how Margaret Thatcher began her economy drive in 1979. She instructed the Treasury to find £800m in public spending cuts. When they managed that, she immediately asked for a further £400m by 9am the next morning. She reasoned that if it was that easy to find £800m, then she clearly had not asked for enough in the first place.

In the first days after the 2010 general election, we did not know a great deal about how our efficiencies would be made. But we were certain that they could be made. Our view was that no great organisation is ever running at maximum efficiency; it is always possible to make savings. We were right, and civil servants across the country embraced the new agenda. Last year, we announced we had made unprecedented savings of £14.3bn

FRANCIS MAUDE IS MINISTER FOR THE CABINET OFFICE AND CONSERVATIVE MP FOR HORSHAM

compared with a baseline of Labour's last year in office. So now, four and a half years into government, we have a much clearer view of how we can make future savings.

Back in 2010, Britain was still reeling from the Great Recession. We could not carry on simply spending money, but we were determined to protect the frontline services hardworking people rely on. With less money, as well as an ageing population and rising public expectations, we had to do more for less. As the adage goes, when you've run out of money, then you have to think.

From day one, we started work to transform the Cabinet Office into a proper operations centre, building teams of officials who could scrutinise spend in departments. The new Efficiency and Reform Group had the power to stop spend in certain areas through tough controls that cut across Whitehall. Back in 2010, departments were paying up to 10 times more than each other for simple things like printer paper. IT systems were not compatible with one another and prime property was under-used.

I would not want to claim that we had everything planned out from the start. It is only more recently that I have outlined my five principles for reform. These are the guiding blocks that have underpinned our work so far and will shape our drive for future changes. The first principle, which underpins it all, is openness, because being transparent builds trust, sharpens accountability and drives improvements. Taxpayers can see how their money is spent and people can judge how services perform. Last year the 10,000th dataset was released on http://data.gov.uk, the UK's open data portal. It is already the largest in the world and growing.

The second principle is tight control from the centre. There is no good reason for departments to pay different

prices for the same goods and services or to refuse to share buildings. The Treasury and Cabinet Office need to work closely together as the government's corporate centre.

Tight control at the centre should be matched by looser control over delivery, which is the third principle. So we are shifting power away from the centre and diversifying the range of providers of public services. Public service professionals should be free to do their jobs in the ways they know best; that is why we support mutuals and joint ventures to spin out of the public sector, and we want to do more business with SMEs and the voluntary sector.

The fourth principle is digital, because as well as being cheaper, services delivered online can be faster, simpler and more convenient for the public. GOV.UK, the new single domain for government information and services, has revolutionised our online presence, winning a coveted design award along the way. We are transforming 25 of the busiest transactional services to be digital-by-default 'exemplars', designed around the needs of the people who use them.

Fifth, there needs to be a truly innovative culture, so public servants have permission to try sensible new ideas. We need to learn from Silicon Valley's 'fail fast' motto and Israel's start-up nation. Our programme of civil service reform is all about supporting a faster and less bureaucratic system that is focused on outcomes, not processes. But changing culture is a serious challenge.

I recently sponsored a prize at the Civil Service Awards for the best failure. The winner had to show that they had tried a sensible new idea but also that, when they realised it was not working, they stopped and learned from their mistake. Too many of the entries were from people who had tried excellent new ideas. That is great, but the best companies learn just as much from what does not work as what does. We need to capture more of that, and support people in taking sensible risks.

The winner of my award was the Land Registry Property Alert team. Last March, they launched an award-winning property monitoring service. This allows people to sign up to monitor properties and receive alerts if, for example, an application is made to change the register. Just three weeks before the proposed launch, the team faced critical feedback from staff and users. Rather than plough on, they went right back to the drawing board. The reworked design was a runaway success, attracting more than 12,000 users, excellent customer feedback and an IT Innovation in Business Award.

Why does this matter? If the public sector does not innovate, we will never be able to improve services. For the whole period from 1997 to 2010, growth in public sector productivity remained at 0%, even though it had risen by nearly 30% in the private services sector. I do not believe that damning statistic is an indictment on the devotion and, indeed, brilliance of our public servants. What it reveals, to borrow Lord Hennessy's apt phrase, is that too often the civil service is somehow less than the sum of its parts. Systems, processes, rules and top-down control all hold people back. That needs to change.

Many years back, as a minister in John Major's government, I drew up the Citizen's Charter. It was one of the first programmes concerned with the systematic improvement of public services. At that time, the Treasury struggled with the idea that services could be improved without spending more money. Predictably, departments, faced with demands for better quality, confirmed the Treasury's prognosis by demanding more money. Over the past four and a half years, this government has proved that defeatist consensus wrong, showing that it is possible to deliver more services for less money. We have killed forever the seductively comfortable myth that when it comes to public services, you cannot get more for less. You can.

"WE HAVE KILLED THE MYTH THAT WHEN IT COMES TO PUBLIC SERVICES, YOU CANNOT GET MORE FOR LESS. YOU CAN"

The demands on public services are only going to grow. People are living ever longer and their expectations of the quality and accessibility of services are growing. Never again will the state be able to stand still. Technology has changed everything. When you can shop online at midnight and bank from your smartphone, the public expects government to operate in the same transparent and responsive way.

Over the next five years, government will have to look objectively at whether it is best placed to deliver services in house. We will need to open up the public sector in areas ranging from operational delivery to 'back office' services. The alternative may not always be conventional outsourcing, as it was in the past. Instead, we are supporting alternative delivery models.

Our work during the past four years has demonstrated that structural change can drive down the cost and improve the quality of public services. We are already tracking more than 100 public service mutuals across England. They employ 35,000 people and are delivering £1.5bn of public services, ranging from libraries and elderly social care to mental health services and school support.

The results are dramatic. Waste and costs are down, while staff satisfaction is up. Staff absenteeism – a quick barometer of morale and hence productivity – is falling and professionals are in the driving seat. When I ask people in these public service mutuals whether they would go back to working for the council, health authority or other authority, the answer is always a resounding no.

Take MyCSP, once a neglected part of the Department for Work and Pensions responsible for processing civil service pensions. We helped the group spin out from Whitehall and set itself up as a mutual joint venture, jointly owned by the staff, a private-sector partner and the Exchequer. When I went up to visit the staff during the (admittedly rather too slow) process of spinning out, I was berated for the delays. In its first year since leaving government it won 47 new clients. The staff have received dividends in both years since spinning out, in 2013 pocketing an average of £2,000 each. And they are also substantially cutting the cost to the taxpayer of delivering their service. Quality is improving, despite the fact that they are having to deal with some complex legacy issues and the outdated technology we bequeathed them.

We have only just scratched the surface of what can be achieved. The achievements so far must be a foundation for greater reform in the years to come. We have proven the model and need to now roll it out on a larger scale. Over the next five years, government will work hand in hand with staff groups and public service leaders across the public sector to ensure they have access to the right expertise and can share best practice. My aspiration remains that, in the longer term, we should see a million people working in public service mutuals, delivering higher quality public services at reduced costs. Every mutual is a new company, paying tax and providing jobs, yet many have and will choose to set themselves up as not-for-profits, investing their surpluses in delivering even better quality services.

But as we set free public-service professionals, we also need to complete our work to transform the heart of government into a real corporate centre. This year, the prime minister appointed the first ever chief executive of the civil service, charged with a mandate to accelerate and oversee our efficiency and reform programme. Cross-departmental leaders covering commercial and procurement, digital, human resources, property, major projects and communications report in to the chief executive. This gives him the ability, through these teams, to build talent in these functional fields inside departments, including overseeing recruitment and managing careers.

Achieving £20bn of further efficiency and reform savings for 2019–20 will require substantial commitment and drive from ministers and officials at the centre and right across departments. Our approach over the past four years was to forsake the usual big-bang white paper and instead to identify best practice and replicate it. We wanted to avoid being told that 'X may very well work in practice but it would never work in theory'. This approach has paid dividends. It is what I call the JDI school of government: just do it.

A different picture of Whitehall is emerging. It is one where the day-to-day running of frontline services is pushed as far away from the centre as possible, putting real power and responsibility into the hands of public servants. The centre of government will be run as a far more unified and integrated operation. Back office services will be shared between departments. More policy will be developed outside of Whitehall and pooled policy teams will work to several secretaries of state.

There is a lot of hard work coming over the next few months and years. That is part and parcel of being a reformer. The job never ends. Because there are always new opportunities, and it is always possible to find better ways of doing things and making government more efficient. Delivering simpler, clearer, faster services is a task that should never end. ▪

POLE POSITIONS

Understanding how extreme views arise is crucial in today's world. New research sheds some light on the role that groupthink plays

by Cass Sunstein

Every society contains deliberating groups. Religious groups, corporate boards, labour organisations, political parties, juries, legislative bodies, regulatory commissions, faculties, student organisations, internet discussion groups. All of these and many others engage in deliberation.

My purpose here is to investigate the striking empirical regularity of group polarisation, and to relate this phenomenon to some questions about the role of deliberation in the 'public sphere' of a heterogeneous democracy. To put it succinctly, deliberation often breeds extremism. To put it in somewhat more detail, members of a deliberating group predictably move towards a more extreme point in the direction indicated by their predeliberation tendencies.

Notably, groups consisting of individuals with extremist tendencies are especially likely to become still more extreme, and the magnitude of their shift is likely to be greater (a point that bears on the wellsprings of violence and terrorism). The same is true for groups with some type of salient shared identity (national, ethnic, or religious). When like-minded people participate in 'iterated polarisation games' – in other words, when like-minded people meet regularly, without sustained exposure to competing views – extreme shifts are all the more likely.

Two principal mechanisms underlie group polarisation. The first points to social influences on belief and behaviour and, in particular, to people's desire to maintain their reputation and their self-conception. The second emphasises the limited 'argument pools' that exist within any

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group, and the directions in which those limited pools lead group members. An understanding of the two mechanisms – involving reputation and limited argument pools – illuminates a great deal, for example, about likely processes within political parties and legislatures, not to mention ethnic and religious groups, terrorists, criminal conspiracies, faculties, environmental groups, institutions engaged in feuds, workplaces and families.

THE BASIC PHENOMENON

Group polarisation is among the most robust patterns found in deliberating bodies. It has been found all over the world and in many diverse tasks. The result is that groups often make more extreme decisions than the typical or average individual in the group would (where extreme is defined solely internally, by reference to the group's initial dispositions).

Consider some examples of the basic phenomenon, which has been found in more than a dozen nations: a group of moderately pro-feminist women will become more strongly pro-feminist after discussion; citizens of France who are mildly anti-American, after talking become more critical of the US and its intentions with respect to economic aid; white people predisposed to show racial prejudice, after deliberation offer more negative responses to the question of whether white racism is responsible for conditions faced by African-Americans in US cities; and white people predisposed not to show racial prejudice offer more positive responses to the same question.

As statistical regularities, it should follow, for example, that while those moderately critical of an

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ongoing war effort will, after discussion, sharply oppose the war; that those who believe that climate change is a serious problem are likely, after talking, to hold that belief with considerable confidence; that people tending to believe in the inferiority of a certain racial group will become more entrenched in this belief as a result of deliberation; and that those tending to condemn the US or the UK will, as a result of discussion, end up condemning the US or the UK with some intensity.

There have been two main explanations for group polarisation, both of which have been extensively investigated. The first, involving social comparison, begins with the claim that people want to be perceived favourably by other group members, and to perceive themselves favourably. Once they hear what others believe, they adjust their positions in the direction of the dominant position. The result is to press the group's position towards an extreme, and also to induce shifts in individual members. People may wish, for example, not to seem too enthusiastic or too restrained in their enthusiasm for a current war effort, same-sex marriage, efforts to reduce climate change, feminism, or an increase in national defence; hence their views may shift when they see what other group members think. The result will be group polarisation.

The apparent explanation is that within groups, most people are likely to want to take a position of a certain socially preferred sort, or at least to care how other group members think about what they say and do. In the case of risk-taking, for example, group members may want to be perceived (and to perceive themselves) as moderate risk-takers – as neither cowardly nor reckless – and their choice of position is partly a product of this desire. No one can know how people will react to a particular position until the positions of others are revealed. Thus individuals move their judgements in order to preserve their image to others – and their image to themselves.

A related finding is that when people find that other people disagree with them, they tend to find those others less likeable and less competent than they did before. What's more, when people find that other people disagree with them, they tend to think of themselves as less likeable and competent than they did before! These findings can exert pressure on people to accept the dominant position within a group.

The second explanation, emphasising the role of information and persuasive arguments, is based on a simple intuition: any individual's position on an issue is partly a function of which arguments presented within the group seem convincing. The choice, therefore, moves in the direction of the most persuasive position defended by the group, taken as a collectivity. Because a group whose members are already inclined in a certain direction will have a disproportionate number of arguments supporting that same direction, the result of discussion will be to move individuals further in the direction of their initial inclinations.

The key is the existence of a limited argument pool, one that is skewed (speaking purely descriptively) in a particular direction. Members of a group will have thought of some, but not all, of the arguments that justify their initial inclination. Consider the question of whether to take risks or to be cautious, whether to support same-sex marriage, whether to take aggressive action against climate change, or whether to favour a current war effort. In any group, the total argument pool will inevitably be tilted in one direction or another, depending on the initial predispositions of the people who compose the group. If people are listening to one another – and they usually do, at least to some extent – there will be a further shift in the direction of the original tilt.

The political scientist Russell Hardin has emphasised what he calls "the crippled epistemology of extremism", by which he means to refer to the fact that extremists know only a small set of what is true (and what they know may well be false). The problem is not that they are poor, illiterate, or crazy; it is what they think they know. When limited argument pools produce group polarisation, it is fair to say that group members are suffering from a crippled epistemology. They are learning from one another, which is by itself not bad but if the argument pool is narrow, skewed, or incomplete, they may find themselves going in an unjustifiably extreme direction.

Note that this claim does not mean that people are biased in their approach to evidence, or disregard evidence that contradicts their predilections. To be sure, all of this may be true, and if so, group polarisation will be aggravated. But the claim is narrower. Within any particular group, people might well be listening openly to one another, including to the evidence that group members bring to bear; they might be unbiased and willing to hear any arguments that are offered. If the group has an argument pool that, on balance, supports a particular conclusion (climate change is not a problem; the

US cannot be trusted; a war needs to be ended), that very pool will lead group members to a more extreme version of what they thought before they started to talk.

It is also true that affective factors are quite important in group decisions, and such factors will significantly increase or decrease polarisation. If group members are linked by affective ties, dissent is significantly less frequent. The existence of affective ties thus reduces the number of divergent arguments, thus narrowing the argument pool, and also intensifies social influences on choice. Hence the likelihood of a shift, and its likely size, are increased when people perceive fellow members as friendly, likeable and similar to them. In the same vein, physical spacing tends to reduce polarisation, while a sense of common fate and intragroup similarity tends to increase it, as does the introduction of a rival 'outgroup'.

Another aggravating factor is whether people think of themselves, prior to joining or otherwise, as part of a group that has a degree of solidarity. If they think of themselves in this way, polarisation is all the more likely, and it is likely to be more extreme too. Thus, when the context emphasises each person's membership in the social group engaging in deliberation, polarisation increases. This finding is in line with more general evidence that social ties among deliberating group members tend to suppress dissent and, in that way, to lead to inferior decisions. This should not be surprising. If ordinary instances of group polarisation are a product of social influences and limited argument pools, it stands to reason that among group members who think of one another as similar along a salient dimension, or if some external factor (politics, geography, race, sex) unites them, group polarisation will be heightened. (Religious groups, and close-knit political organisations, should beware.)

POLARISATION IN ACTION

Group polarisation is inevitably at work in feuds, ethnic and international strife and war. One of the characteristic features of feuds is that members of feuding groups tend to talk only to one another, fuelling and amplifying their outrage, and solidifying their impression of the relevant events. Informational and reputational forces are very much at work here, producing cascade effects, and group polarisation can lead members to take increasingly extreme positions. It is not too much of a leap to suggest these effects are sometimes present within ethnic groups and even nations, notwithstanding the usually high degree of national heterogeneity.

In the US, sharp divergences between white people and African-Americans, on particular salient events or more generally, can also be explained by reference to group polarisation. The same is true for sharp divergences of viewpoints within and across nations. Group polarisation occurs within Israel and among the Palestinian Authority; it occurs within the US and among those inclined to support, or at least not to condemn, terrorist acts.

Many people have expressed concern about the processes of social influence on the mass media and the internet. The general problem is said to be one of fragmentation, with certain people hearing only more and louder versions of their own pre-existing commitments, thus reducing the benefits that come from exposure to competing views and unnoticed problems. With greater specialisation, people are increasingly able to avoid general-interest newspapers and magazines, and to make choices that reflect their own predispositions. The internet is making it possible for people to design their own highly individuated communications packages, filtering out troublesome issues and disfavoured voices.

With respect to the potential problem, evidence continues to accumulate, and at this stage we lack clear empirical evidence. But an understanding of group polarisation explains why a fragmented communications market may create difficulties for democratic societies. If some people are deliberating with many like-minded others, views will not only be reinforced, but instead shifted to more extreme points. This by itself cannot be said to be bad – perhaps the increased extremism is good – but it is certainly troublesome if diverse social groups are led, through predictable mechanisms, towards increasingly opposing and ever more extreme views.

THE VIRTUES OF HETEROGENEITY

Within companies and governments, rules and institutions should be developed to ensure that when shifts are occurring, it is not because of arbitrary or illegitimate constraints on the available range of arguments. This is a central task of institutional design, and something like a system of checks and balances might be defended, not as an undemocratic check on the will of the people, but as an effort to protect against the potentially harmful consequences of group discussion.

Group polarisation can be heightened, diminished and possibly even eliminated with seemingly small alterations in institutional arrangements. To the extent that limited argument pools and social influences are likely to have unfortunate effects, correctives can be introduced, perhaps above all by exposing group members to arguments to which they are not inclined beforehand. To the extent that institutional proposals are intended to increase public participation by promoting deliberation among ordinary people, they would do well to incorporate an understanding of these facts, which are sometimes neglected.

The value of deliberation, as a social phenomenon, depends very much on social context; on the nature of the process and the nature of the participants. Here, institutions are crucial, because they can increase exposure to diverse information pools and reduce the pressures from a particular set of social influences. One of the most important lessons is among the most general: it is highly desirable, in some ways even a security imperative, for nations to create spaces for deliberation within groups of like-minded people without insulating group members from those with opposing views, and without insulating those outside the group from the views of those within it. ∎

Wiser: Getting Beyond Groupthink to Make Groups Smarter by Cass R. Sunstein and Reid Hastie is out now.

DESIGNER POLICIES

Policymaking is always being asked to do more for less. Can design-led approaches help bridge the gap between government and citizens?

by Andrea Siodmok

Across the world, the role of design has been gaining prominence as a transformational tool for governments. Today in many western countries, 'labs' have been set up to bring an experimental approach to building knowledge and creating system change to address the challenges facing governments and citizens.

At first glance, design has little relevance at the vanguard of government thinking. Yet, looking a little closer, we see design in its many

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guises embedded within the narrative of the progressive reformers of the civil service.

For example, the UK government's change engine, the Efficiency and Reform Group, is tasked with delivering more than £10bn of efficiencies, savings and reforms a year on behalf of UK taxpayers. Its aim is to "save money, transform the way public services are delivered, improve user experience and support UK growth". Improving user experience is an activity readily associated with design and design principles.

Likewise, the Civil Service Reform plan wants "a clear focus on designing policies that can be implemented in practice",

calling for a more collaborative, open approach to policymaking involving "true co-design". Design and reform are more linked than we might first imagine; in some ways they are two sides of the same coin. They share a common etymology, where reform derives from the Latin *formare*, to form, or shape. The verb 'design' derives from *designare*, to mark out, devise, choose, designate or appoint, with 'policy' meaning a plan of action or way of management. Of course, reform is not purely about efficiency, it is also about efficacy: more a case of reform follows function and what policymakers call 'outcome-oriented' policymaking.

In response, the Cabinet Office has been experimenting with new thinking and approaches that promise to deliver better policy outcomes. Through its Government Innovation Group, it has been investing in new ideas, incubating and scaling those that work. As a result, a number of start-ups from government have gone on to gain international acclaim, copied by other countries, collectively saving billions of pounds for the taxpayer. The Behavioural Insights Team, known colloquially as the 'Nudge Unit', is only four years old. The multi-award-winning Government Digital Service is an ambitious toddler at three and a bit, and the latest family member at less than a year is Policy Lab, which I head. All three use design, digital and data in new ways to transform how government works.

Through the Policy Lab, policymakers are experimenting with new forms of open policy. Its existence is born out of a recognition that government needs to get better at policymaking; open it up, make it quicker, more digital and more connected with the people affected by it. In today's fast-paced, highly interconnected, culturally diverse world, our current approaches to the development of policy may need to be expanded. In times of change, the lack of certainty and the prevalence of intractable, 'super-wicked' problems calls for different modes of governance, leadership and management. Under these conditions, stewarding new ideas from strategy to delivery is an increasingly urgent challenge.

To be effective, any new policy or strategy needs to be intrinsically linked to the context within which

it operates, able to respond more dynamically to changing conditions. In contrast, most political systems are still based on a command-and-control model, where policies are directed from the centre and implemented through the machinery of government in one form or another. The idea of top-down, expert-led policy from the centre still dominates. Yet there is ambition, led by the cabinet secretary Jeremy Heywood, to make open policy the default in Whitehall. This in turn raises the potential for co-creation and participation of citizens in policy formation, even democratising policymaking itself.

Ronald Reagan captured the sentiment of the increasing gap between government and citizens when he remarked that: "The nine most terrifying words in the English language are: I'm from the government and I'm here to help." The nature of politics, while democratic, is also inherently elitist. The Whitehall bubble appears to some as faceless and remote from its citizens and their concerns. In reality, the scale of operations behind the scenes in government is greater than many believe (albeit smaller than before); there are just over 400,000 civil servants, with 20,000 people who self-identify as policymakers. The perception of government as secretive and remote does not bear much scrutiny, as both government and parliament are more open, transparent and accountable now than at any time in history. With the panopticism afforded by 24-hour media – from BBC Parliament to Twitter – comes new expectations from the public, in particular greater expectations about the responsiveness of the state, adaptability of government and flexibility of its services.

DIGITAL, DATA AND DESIGN

There are currently three forces – digital, data and design – that promise to bridge the gap between citizens and the state. Taken together, they are likely to transform public services and bring about potentially far-reaching changes in the process of policymaking. Policymakers need to know how to unlock new opportunities presented by these and how to respond with improved ways of working, including the potential for entirely new systems and governance. Much has been written about the power of data and digital; however, design is increasingly seen as important in tackling complex challenges by focusing efforts on the needs of users, not bureaucrats.

The Policy Lab was launched at the beginning of April 2014, funded and supported by all 17 major government departments. Its brief, set out in the Civil Service Reform plan and agreed by the Civil Service Board, is to bring new tools and techniques to policymaking, from data science to design.

The lab's theory of change is that using design principles to approach complex problems can result in better outcomes, and that training policymakers in design research methods – including using or commissioning ethnographic research – has the potential to transform the way that policy is made in government. For example, the term 'prototype' is not widely used in policy. We know that to prototype generates imperfect truths, but with the right approach it also generates data about the future. This evidence of what works and, more importantly, what does not, can be very powerful. Success, therefore, is predicated upon identifying failure and managing the inevitable risks of pursuing one or another course of action. The opportunity cost of not changing is often much greater. In this respect, the role of the lab is to identify the new and emerging work practices that promise to support (and potentially transform) the way policy is made.

We are building and sharing practical tools that can become part of the new vocabulary of open policymaking. And while the lab is in its infancy, we are learning about its potential through a range of projects with departments. One of the first is with the Ministry of Justice, where we are using ethnography to understand and improve people's current

"TO PROTOTYPE GENERATES IMPERFECT TRUTHS BUT WITH THE RIGHT APPROACH IT ALSO GENERATES DATA ABOUT THE FUTURE"

experience of settling disputes after divorce and separation, in particular through family mediation. Another was the Northern Futures project with the deputy prime minister's policy team. In October, the Policy Lab held an open ideas day which generated 1,200 hours of ideas in one day across events in eight cities. From this, new networks were created and ideas developed that helped inform investments in the autumn spending review. It is through these and other projects that we are starting to understand how the lab can be of value to departments. So it was great to see the deputy prime minister's policy team collecting a set of tools to use without us; no lab or unit should be a bottleneck in change.

While we mostly associate design with physical things, these are just the touchpoints that make up the experience. In the real world, the traditional disciplines of design – fashion design, graphic design and industrial design, to name a few – are brought together as a single experience. Yet, this joined-up experience can be designed too: it is called service design. Service design looks at a person's experience end-to-end. Marketing author Philip Kotler describes a service as "any activity or benefit that one party can give to another that is essentially intangible and does not result in the ownership of anything". Service design, while rapidly blending with digital design, is important to public and private sector efficiency. Yet it probably makes up less than 5% of the design profession as a whole. This is surprising when put in the context of the service sector representing over 70% of the UK's GDP. Manchester Business School Professor Bruce Tether suggests that, even by crude reckoning, we would need half a million more service designers to fill this gap compared with the number of designers successfully supporting manufacturing and architecture. This dematerialisation of design can be a tricky subject to raise when, in many countries, the very word design is fundamentally linked to physical things.

In the broadest sense, design adds value to experiences. When we see the word 'designer', we often expect to pay a premium. While we do not need designer public services, we do need well-designed ones. We should be mindful of the quality of services and focus our efforts on the ultimate outcomes that our public investment seeks to deliver. Do we create a better queue in the doctor's surgery or redesign the service experience of booking an appointment end-to-

end? Better still, do we design ways to enhance the quality of our lives so we are less likely to get ill in the first place? These are big contextual, strategic questions, ones that cut across sectors, and policymakers grapple with them every day. In contrast, much of the practice of professional design is not concerned with what executive director of futures at the Future Cities Catapult Dan Hill describes as the "dark matter" of transformation: its context.

A DESIGN APPROACH

Good policy requires a successful blend of politics, evidence and delivery. Policymaking is both an art and a science, requiring finely honed skills to bridge the world of theory and practice (or strategy and delivery). Design is implicit in policymaking. If you search any policy document, from our national security policy to banking reform, you will find the word 'design' mentioned, and not just used as a noun. We seldom, if ever, consider designers when we design policies. There is of course a significant difference between a 'design policy' that seeks to further the interests of the creative industries, and the application of design for policy that seeks to further all areas of policy through good design.

So how does this process of design come about and what can it bring to government? Design is lots of things, but for me it is 'purposeful creativity'. In terms of an approach, design brings practical tools and techniques to help refine questions, synthesise a range of constraints, unlock creativity and test assumptions practically. A good design process essentially puts ideas through their paces. It both opens up possibilities and tests the best ones through the practical application of prototyping and testing. The verb 'to design' raises the potential for 'design thinking' as a way of connecting creativity to innovation. As Sir George Cox noted in his *Cox Review of Creativity in Business* for the Treasury: "Design is what links creativity and innovation. It shapes ideas to become practical and attractive propositions for users or customers. Design may be described as creativity deployed to a specific end."

FROM SOLUTIONS TO OUTCOMES

The OECD estimates that 80% of the impact of any product or service is determined in the design phase, early in a project when key decisions are formed and tactics

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"DESIGN IS THE INVISIBLE HAND WORKING ALONGSIDE OTHER PROFESSIONS, MAKING THINGS USEFUL, VALUABLE OR DESIRABLE"

established. Many of the outcomes policymakers seek are a result of early policy decisions. In government, policy successes and failures can often be traced back to decisions made in the first 10% of the process. If advice is to be effective in response to a changing context, policy and implementation expertise need to be brought together at the design stage. It makes sense that we should look at ways to improve public services by focusing on the early stages of policymaking, where the potential to determine policy outcomes is most profound.

In terms of outcomes, there are three distinct qualities of design: usability, desirability and simplicity. The first brings usefulness and relevance for the public. Second, desirability helps deliver better-quality experiences. And finally, by creating simplicity, reduces failure and thereby saves time and effort across the system.

P is for people, not politics, policy, professions or process. As organisations scale, it is easy to lose sight of the people they serve. This is true in both the private and public sector. As we put in management systems and processes, we tend towards universal, scalable solutions over personalised, bespoke options. If you try to design for everyone, you suit no one.

How can we put people at the centre using design principles to make policy that is relevant to those affected by it? Public servants liberally use terms like patient-centred care, but our hospital signage is still written in Latin and patients still move from specialist department to specialist service. Imagine the difference if at the GP surgery, the roles were reversed and more truly people-centred, and each consultation started with the words: "The patient will see you now."

Can we create public services that are valuable to the public, so that they are delighted, even proud of their existence, while simultaneously saving money? We tend to spot design when it goes wrong: poorly laid out forms, websites we cannot navigate, confusing signage, transport links that do not join up and queues at the Post Office. So why don't we design things really well? If we are not careful, it is easy to design problems into our public services and late in the day it is harder to design them out. Really good public services not only help deliver great service, they also deliver value. In this sense, value is not just about cost, saving money and time, it is also about the quality of the experience.

Design is so ubiquitous that we barely notice it most of the time. It is the invisible hand working alongside other professions making things useful, valuable or desirable. Staff time associated with services is the greatest cost to the public sector. The time staff spend compensating for bad design across our public services is not only costly, it can also take them away from serving the public or, worse still, make the public hostile to them. This was the case in the Design Council's Accident and Emergency redesign, which not only showed that good service design could reduce aggression to staff by 50%, it also improved staff morale.

Given that services are 'rendered', the idea of 'lean consumption' points to the huge savings that can be unlocked by improved service-design thinking. But it is not just in the cost of running services that savings can be made, it is also indirect costs associated with the time spent by service users that can have a significant economic impact. In New Zealand, experiments have shown that reducing patient waiting time has increased efficiency across the system. The King's Fund pointed out that: "The Canterbury health system can claim it has saved patients more than a million days of waiting for treatment in just four clinical areas in recent years."

BUILDING SKILLS BEYOND DESIGN

Of course, design is not a panacea. It is ironic that design, as ephemeral as it is, runs a real risk of being the next management fad applied to cure the ills of government. There is no doubt that design has a long-standing pedigree. The Design Council, set up by government, is celebrating its 70th year. Yet it isn't immune from hype. Although good design is important, it is only part of the answer.

Many of the examples of design in public services have been undertaken with external design consultants working on behalf of the system from outside. These agencies vary in size and specialism and can bring new thinking and challenge the system to be more people-centred. However, design is too important to be left to designers. Why? Three reasons.

First, 90% of design decisions are not made by designers. The significance of 'silent design', was first raised by pioneering design management experts Peter Gorb and Angela Dumas in their 1987 paper. Informal design decisions shape all the parts of our environment, from policy decisions to public services, that influence our daily routines and behaviour. Many assumptions are already built into the brief by the time it is handed over the fence
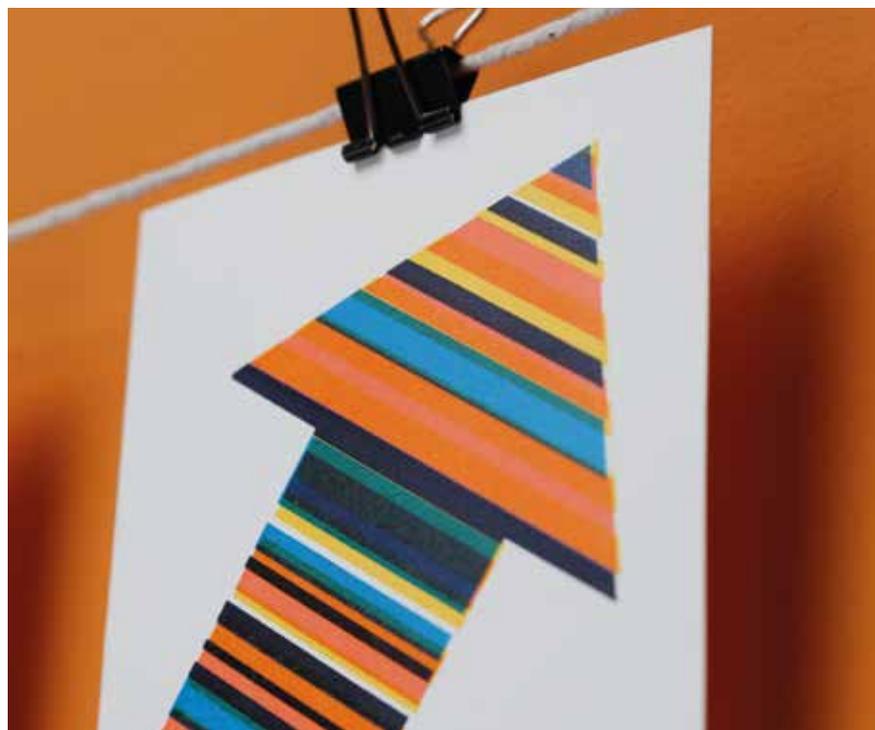
to a consultant, whose licence to challenge may not be significant.

Second, designers are not the only source of creativity, ingenuity and innovation. Everyone is creative, yet some people have honed their skills and applied them as their chosen profession. In the early stages of idea development, creativity does not need to be specialist; it can be inclusive, open and participatory, involving co-design.

And third, ideas are not the only problem. We are inundated with great ideas: from crowdsourcing to open policymaking, ideas are everywhere. The difficult thing is making them happen, and navigating the system from inception to implementation, from strategy to delivery. More often, we lack the skills and organisational capacity to channel ideas. Unless the organisation's culture supports change, embedding learning as part of its everyday business, innovation will be stifled. Therefore, culture is a significant determinant both of innovation potential and its replicability.

NEW HORIZONS

Design, digital and data can and are delivering more for less across the public sector. Looking to the future, there is a need to double our efforts and embolden our ambition. As budgets are squeezed, policymakers, civil servants and public servants alike will need to become more resourceful in finding better alternatives to existing service delivery. Christian Bason in his book *Design for Policy* posits that design for policy requires the emergence of "the sense-making public manager". The shift is characterised by a move from facilitation to stewardship; envisioning new futures, where public servants are adept at embracing complexity, shaping new alliances and delivering customer centricity.

How can we better equip civil servants with the skills, knowledge, tools and techniques to embrace change? We need to find the right balance of literacy and fluency, as well as building confidence and competence. Some techniques and skills are not easily mastered, requiring policymakers to commission specialists, for example in design and data science, where they are needed. Other tools and techniques simply need adapting and tailoring for the civil service context.

The Policy Lab provides a safe space to trial these new ways of working, enabling civil servants to try things out and see what works, with an explicit focus on practical application within departments. Its role is to experiment, stress-testing tools and techniques that could become commonplace, removing unnecessary jargon or complexity.

Over the past century, design methods have evolved alongside changing problems, often in response to the introduction of emerging technologies. Looking ahead, we have a constant supply of new tools to test, software to trial, techniques to master and share. The lab will capture and codify tools that show promise. The acid test is whether our methods get used. Design, along with policy, will continue to evolve, which is what is so exciting about working in the lab. We are drawing together different fields of knowledge, and where tools do not exist, we are inventing new ones. ■
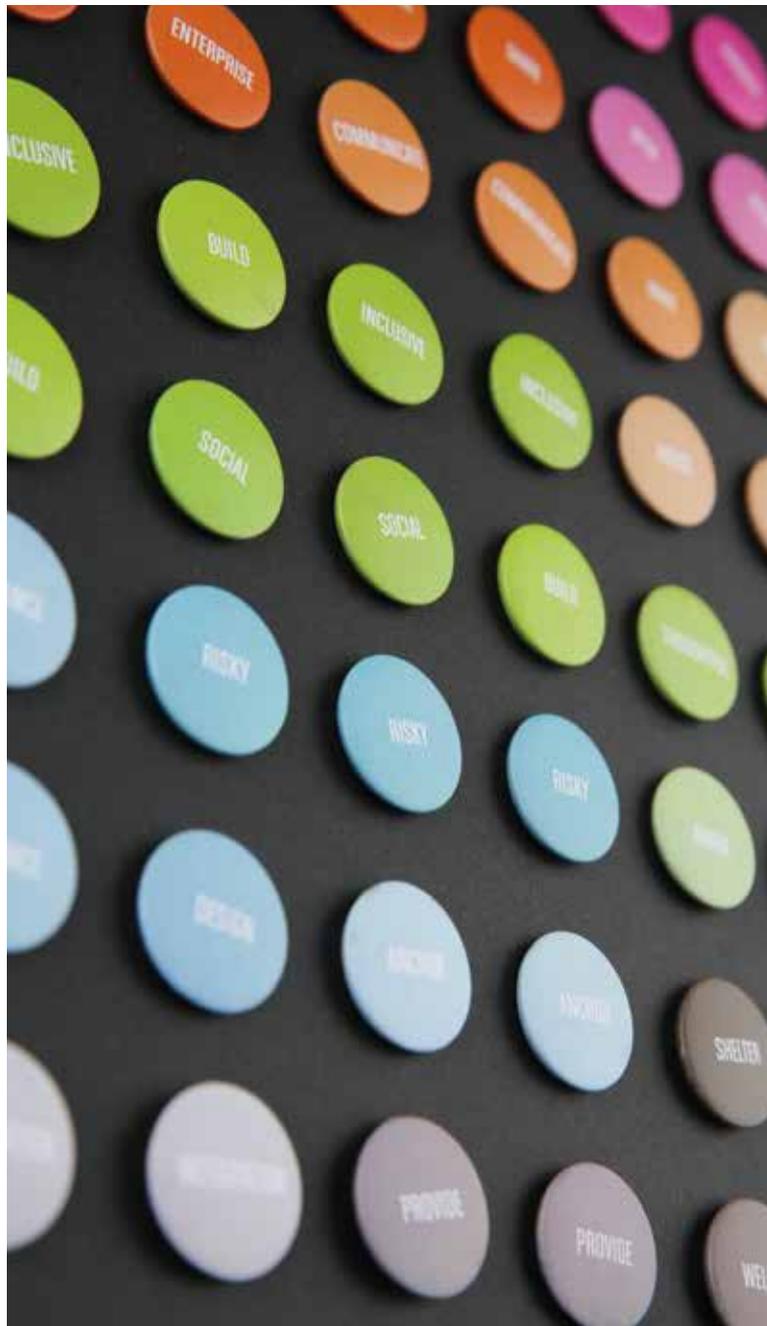
COLLECTIVE IMPACT

To achieve lasting social change, we must take a more rigorous, collective approach to philanthropy

by Brian A Gallagher

Few now doubt the significance of community investment. I hear it from our partners and see it play out in the communities we serve every day. Investing in people has never been more important and its value has never been more understood. The questions now become: How do we ensure that our investments are creating the right kind of change? Is the change inclusive and sustainable? And what is our role in driving it? What I believe we should be talking about is systems change.

This requires integrated systems where all sectors – business, government, and NGOs and civil society – set and commit to big, bold shared goals and leveraging each other's experience and expertise to achieve them. This is a fundamental shift in a decades-old approach to addressing human need.

Systemic change of this nature presents a number of challenges. Perhaps the biggest is changing cultures rooted in dated ideas and siloed strategies, and creating a culture of collaboration and collective impact. Making a commitment to and being accountable for supporting larger shared goals is a new way of thinking for all levels of community, from large public institutions and multinational corporations to individual donors and community-based NGOs.

In the *Stanford Social Innovation Review, 2011* management consultants John Kania and Mark Kramer describe collective impact as a: "disciplined effort to bring together dozens or even hundreds of organisations of all types to establish a common vision and pursue evidence-based actions in mutually reinforcing ways". We at United Way share their view that there is no one silver bullet approach to addressing today's issues. Complex issues require an equally complex response. To that end, the authors suggest that successful collective impact initiatives share five key conditions that distinguish them from other forms of collaboration.

First is a common agenda. All partners, across sectors, share a vision for the change they are seeking, including a common understanding of both the problems and strategies to solve them. Second, there is a focus on shared measurement, with partners agreeing on the data being collected and the processes for measurement. This aligns partners around specific shared goals and holds everyone accountable to the same outcomes. Next is the idea of mutually reinforcing activities: partner contributions that are intentionally differentiated to leverage individual experiences and expertise, while at the same time being coordinated to support the larger shared strategy. Fourth is continuous communication. The idea is that consistent and ongoing communication between all partners is essential to building trust, and maintaining common motivation and accountability. The final condition is backbone support. Collective impact strategies require a separate organisation or organisations with the skill set to serve as the initiative's to coordinate the entire effort.

United Way is in a unique position to serve as a partnership's anchor or 'backbone'. We advance social progress around the world by improving education, financial stability and health. We focus on creating lasting solutions by addressing the root causes of challenges, because in the long term, sustainable change requires tackling the source, and not just the symptoms, of key community issues.

United Way's distinct contribution is our ability to engage disparate elements of a community and mobilise individuals against their most pressing local concerns. In that anchor role, the priority for local United Ways is ensuring a disciplined approach to each element of their collective impact strategies. That's collaboration 2.0. Along with our partners in Latin and North America, Africa, Central and East Asia and across Europe, United Way is already working to lead more rigorous approaches, and they are yielding tremendous results.

In Salt Lake City, we are focusing partner schools, area businesses and other NGOs to create cradle-to-career opportunities for children. The strategy hinges on identifying and sticking to specific, predetermined measures for family and student success. In Shanghai, United Way is playing the community's anchor role in helping to address the needs of their rapidly growing immigrant population. In this case, partners created community-led daycare centres specifically to address Shanghai's 200,000 migrant children.

Again, the collective impact model reflects changes to increasingly complex human needs around the world but it also reflects how we define community. Our interests today extend much further than our own backyards. To that end, we are working with our partners to scale the strategies that work and make an impact in the communities in which they have an interest. With the 'Flying Challenge Initiative', United Way has partnered with Airbus Corporation Foundation to target at-risk, high-potential students in vulnerable neighbourhoods, promote middle school success and, ultimately, provide students with the skills they need to transition into a career in science and even aeronautics. Launched in Toulouse, the employee-led tutoring and mentoring effort was a tremendous success and, importantly, has now been scaled to Wichita and Madrid. Same goals and measures. Same mutually reinforcing activities and strategies. Scaled impact on two continents and in three countries.

Again, the systems in place to meet the scale and complexity of today's human need were built for another time and another economy. Over the next 10 years, future successes like the ones noted above, and beyond, depend on government, business and an active and engaged civil society working together, seamlessly, to achieve the big, bold, shared goals they have for their communities. NGOs and civil society must play a leadership role.

Ultimately, the goal has to be social stability. This leads to economic investment and growth. Growth leads to opportunity. And, if we are able to distribute the opportunity, all people in all communities will succeed. There has never been long-term, sustainable economic success without enduring broad-based human success. ■

BRIAN A GALLAGHER IS PRESIDENT AND CEO OF UNITED WAY WORLDWIDE
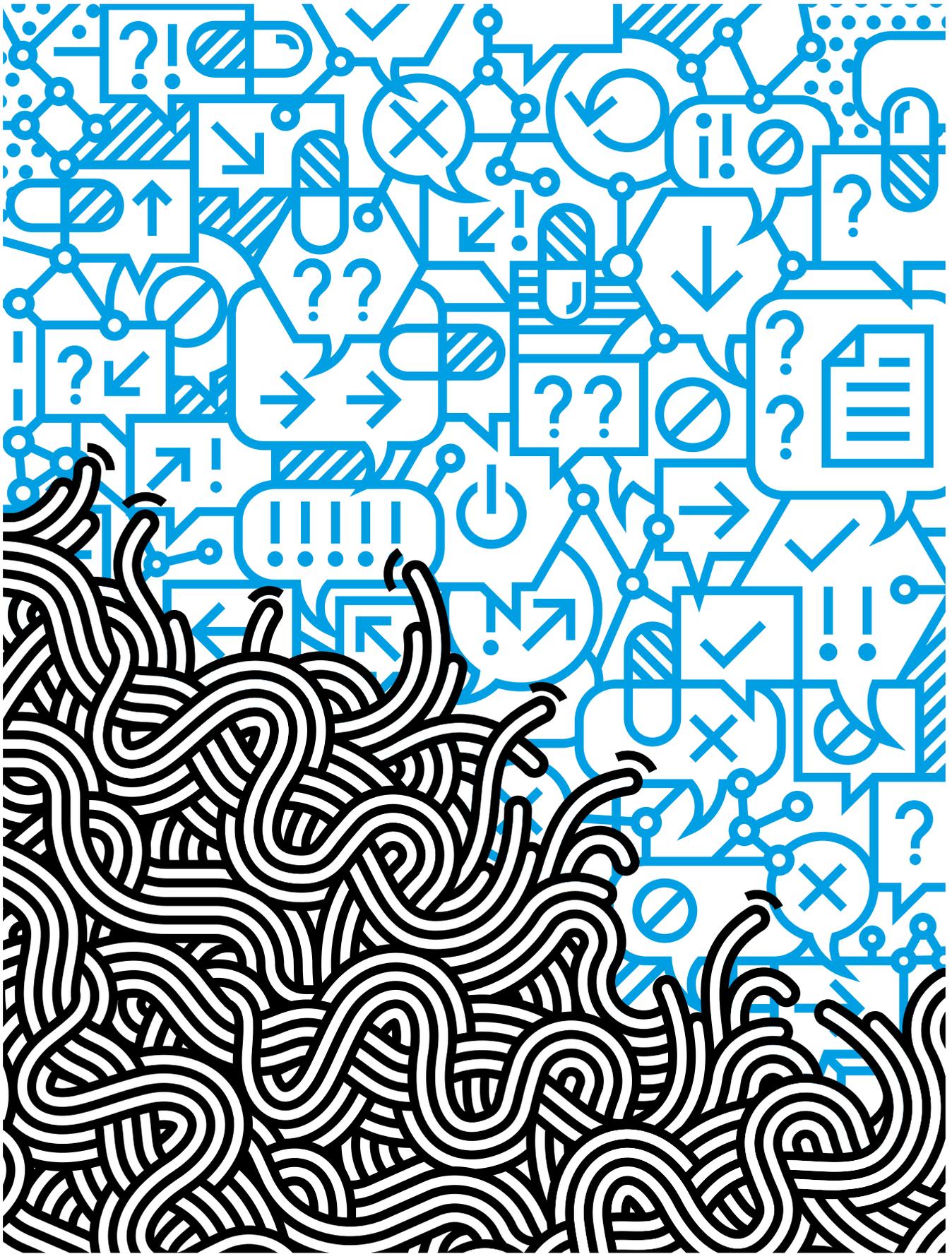
BOTTLED UP

The conversation around drugs has been suppressed for far too long. It is time we had a real debate

by Rowan Bosworth-Davies

Drug policy in the UK is based on taking measures to reduce the supply and demand for illegal drugs, and increasing the rates of recovery of those who are drug dependent. To this end, much emphasis is placed upon the interdiction of illegal narcotics, both at our borders and in our cities, upon police action to arrest, punish and thus deter people who take drugs, to reduce demand. Elsewhere in the world, where our influence can be exerted, the emphasis is on restricting supply through naval taskforce arrests and seizures.

The government's policy has had some limited successes. Thanks to harm reduction programmes such as needle and syringe exchanges, the UK has some of the lowest rates of HIV among injecting drug users in the world. At the same time, the number of people being treated for drug-associated conditions has steadily increased.

So, why is it, that in the run-up to a general election there is still so little appetite for wanting to both trumpet our successes and tackle head on where we need a change of direction? As a former Metropolitan Police detective, I find the unwillingness of our political leaders to engage the public in a more informed debate about where our choices lie, both frustrating and a sign of how out of touch they are with the public. So what could this debate look like?

First, we need to understand the illegal drug market better, and be prepared to tackle the financial institutions that enable it to flourish. I have publicly engaged in the debate on drug control and interdiction for many years. One thing that drives me is seeing the almost total failure of the UK anti-money laundering laws to help prevent and forestall the handling and dissemination of vast sums of illegal money generated from trafficking illegal narcotics. This has resulted

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in billions of pounds being poured into the coffers of the organised criminal traffickers. Despite all rhetoric to the contrary, successive UK governments have failed to commit themselves to punishing those financial institutions that handle the proceeds of crime and drug trafficking. In 2012, in the US, HSBC was fined $1.9bn after pleading guilty to facilitating the laundering of drug profits from the Mexican cartels. However, in the UK, not one bank-controlling hierarchy was investigated, prosecuted or convicted for these crimes.

Second, we need to understand the knock-on effects and true costs of government's commitment to maintaining a strong policy of criminalising individuals who are arrested in possession of even small amounts of drugs such as cannabis or ecstasy. This signals a lack of clear understanding of their own research and serves to discriminate against black people. An extract of evidence gathered by Release and published in 2014 makes chilling reading. It showed that more than 50% of stop and searches are undertaken for drugs, with the police in England and Wales stopping and searching someone for drugs every 58 seconds. Black people were stopped and searched for drugs at 6.3 times the rate of white people, while Asian people were stopped and searched for drugs at 2.5 times the rate. This is despite the fact that drug use is lower among black and Asian people when compared with their white counterparts. In addition, black people are more likely to receive a harsher police response for possession of drugs: in 2009/10, 78% of black people caught in possession of cocaine by the Metropolitan Police were charged for this offence; 22% received cautions. In comparison, 44% of white people were charged for the same offence and 56% received cautions.

Our current approach has other counter-productive effects. For example, giving drug users prison sentences, without providing proper support either in prison (where all kinds of prohibited drugs are often available), or on

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ILLUSTRATION: ANDREW GIBBS

their release, will almost inevitably lead to an increased risk of greater addiction. This can lead to other risks, including the risk of death post-custody, reduced risk of recovery (because treatment is disrupted), increased risk of homelessness due to a lack of suitable housing after release, and of course, a range of impacts on their families and communities.

Third, there needs to be more robust evidence and clarity to help us define the problem that we are trying to solve. This means making a distinction between the relatively definable number of those people who become addicted to drugs and need treatment, and that significantly larger, indefinable group who use drugs recreationally, but who do not experience physical or mental addiction, and whose existence is much more difficult to determine. While the government continues to assert that the use of narcotics is decreasing – and this may be statistically identifiable over the longer term – it does not provide any degree of granularity for specific explanations.

Indeed, the evidence demonstrates that there has been a relatively sharp increase recently in the use of cocaine and ecstasy, particularly among younger people. Anecdotal evidence from university campuses gives every indication that young people routinely enter higher education secure in the knowledge that the entire range of chemical substances, including so-called 'legal highs', will be readily available for their every need, and that a high number of young people look upon time spent there as an opportunity to experiment with a wide range of prohibited drugs.

The fourth thing we need to do is be much clearer and more direct with the public about the harms involved, including the financial costs they bear. Quantifying and putting a cost on such diverse types of harm is methodologically challenging. Nevertheless, anecdotal figures put the annual cost to society of maintaining the prohibition of Class A drugs alone in the region of £15.4bn a year. This does not take into consideration the costs associated with the interdiction of Class B or C narcotics. The equivalent estimate for Scotland is £3.5bn.

Yet, after 40 years of the so-called 'war on drugs', drugs are cheaper, more potent and far more widely used now than at the beginning of this futile crusade.

Despite mounting evidence against them, the UK government remains doggedly committed to anti-drug policies and the mainstream political parties are nervous about taking leadership on this issue. The result contributes to the perception that the police routinely discriminate against young people and black people, while the financial burden on the taxpayer remains heavy as we continue to pour billions of pounds every year into the pockets of organised crime. For any government committed to taking a strong stance on law and order, being identified as the leading facilitator of the profits made by criminal gangs in providing illicit narcotics to the UK should be a bitter pill to swallow.

There are other ways. Indeed, a groundbreaking document published (after months of suppression) in October 2014 by the Home Office, showed that there is no evidence that tough enforcement of the drug laws on personal possession leads to lower levels of drug use. By examining international drug laws, it finally gave the lie to 40 years of almost unbroken official political rhetoric that only harsher penalties can tackle the problem caused by the likes of heroin, cocaine or cannabis.

The report highlighted the experience of other European countries. For example, the evidence of narcotic control from Portugal, where the emphasis is on treatment as opposed to wholesale prosecution for possession of relatively small personal amounts of narcotics, demonstrates a very positive alternative approach. In the US, the experiment with legalised cannabis is returning significant tax revenues for the state of Colorado. Last September, the state brought in $2.94m from sales taxes on recreational cannabis alone. Considering a 10% tax rate, this means sales during the month of September were just under $30m; an irony when you realise that the figure is $3m lower than during the month of August, when the state brought in $3.31m in recreational cannabis sales tax revenue.

"OUR POLITICAL LEADERS NEED TO SAY WHAT MANY OF THEM ALREADY ACCEPT: DRUG ABUSE IS A HEALTH PROBLEM, NOT A LAW-ENFORCEMENT MATTER"

To argue that we need to follow the evidence is not to say that we can afford to be complacent about the harm that drugs – whether legal or not – can have. No society should promote the recreational use of drugs, and we should be deeply concerned about the extent of drug abuse worldwide, including the destructive impact of violent drug gangs and cartels. However, neither problem is remedied by the UK's current policy of drug prohibition, which leaves the control and delivery of narcotics in the hands of organised criminals. Drug abuse and gang violence flourish in a drug prohibition environment, just as they did during alcohol prohibition.

Rather our political leaders need to be prepared to say what very many of them already quietly accept: that adult drug abuse is a health problem and not a law-enforcement matter, provided that the abuse does not harm other people or the property of others. We should advocate the elimination of the policy of drug prohibition and the inauguration of a replacement policy of drug control, regulation and taxation, in the same way as regulations and taxes are applied to the purchase and receipt of alcohol and tobacco.

Supporters of such a policy will come from those with a wide range of political thought and social conscience who recognise that in a post-prohibition world it will take time to strike a proper regulatory balance, blending private, public and medical models to best control and regulate 'illicit drugs'. Different drugs pose differing risks of harm. As such, in a post-prohibition world, we must recognise that an appropriate set of regulations and control for one substance may not be a suitable or sufficient regulation and control for another substance. The nation states of the world must be allowed the regulatory latitude to try new models that wisely balance the notions of freedom over one's own body with the need for common sense regulation of drugs to reduce death, disease, addiction and harm. Such regulation must not accommodate casual, unregulated or indiscriminate drug sales, and the government has a public health obligation to accurately ascertain the risks associated with use and a duty to clearly communicate that information to the public by means of labelling and warnings, similar to that which is done regarding food, tobacco, alcohol and medicine.

An inordinate number of people have been misguidedly imprisoned for breaches of nonviolent, consensual drug crimes. Such a policy affects young people disproportionately, considering the long-term significance of a criminal conviction on their careers and future employment prospects. Those suffering from drug abuse afflictions and addiction, who want help, should be provided with a variety of assistance, including drug treatment and drug maintenance. Ending drug prohibition and regaining control of excessive criminal justice expenditures would ensure that a mere fraction of those savings would be more than sufficient to pay for expanded addiction services.

Timothy Leary, the guru of psychedelic drug use in the 1960s and proponent of the phrase, "turn on, tune in, drop out", once questioned whether most Judeo-Christian societies prohibited a wide range of narcotics because they could not find a morally acceptable way of taxing them. You do not have to be a fan of Leary's to believe that perhaps the time has now come to have that question answered. ■

FELLOWSHIP IN ACTION
EMPOWERING PRISONERS

At textile manufacturing business and training centre Handmade Alliance, prisoners from HMPS Brixton are the first in the UK to obtain City & Guilds qualifications within a working business while on day-release.

It's a source of justifiable pride for the participants, and for CEO Mairi Duthie, who was inspired to set up the social enterprise in 2013 after a 20-year career in commercial design and two years as director of an in-prison charity. "Handmade Alliance was founded to create an out-of-prison destination where prisoners could learn skills and become self-sufficient, fulfilled members of society," she said. Mairi's design-world experience helped to identify a gap in the market – the difficulty in finding producers of smaller volumes of high-quality, UK-made textiles – and the business has 100 designer clients. It was shortlisted for the prestigious Responsible Small Business of the Year Award 2014 by Business in the Community.

Having won £2,000 in Catalyst funding from RSA, the business was able to support vital prisoner work placements. "Our team is made up of people from the programme itself, so everyone has an active part in our success," said Mairi. While the need for funding is still acute, in 2015 the enterprise opens its doors to day-release and ex-prisoners across London, bringing rehabilitation one step closer.

■ *To find out more visit www.handmadealliance.org*

HELP YOURSELF

Increasingly, policy shifts are putting the onus on us to be better. Can we be the people the policymakers want us to be?

by Vincent Deary

"We're all broken." This may be the first line of my next book. You read it here first. It's actually a steal, like a lot of my best lines, from a TV show. In this case the show *Weeds*. I won't burden you with too much backstory, for the line speaks for itself. Let's just say it comes at a point where there should be high drama. The woman uttering the line has just been betrayed by the man who is meant to love her; her dignity sacrificed for his political gain. It unfolds in a public space and the viewer is expecting escalation. Instead, there is a moment of exquisite calm and gentleness, a lull. She leans in, smiles ruefully, caresses his cheek and sighs: "It's OK, we're all broken." It's an act of grace, of forgiveness. A moment packed with understanding and compassion. Life is not easy for many of us. She knows this. We struggle to enact our values, to be happy, kind, at peace. We rarely feel safe enough to act upon our better impulses. Life is hard. She knows this, and she lets him off the hook of yet another struggle, refuses to add to his burden of guilt and shame. It's an act of love.

The 'burden of care' is a term used in the health service to describe the way our ageing and degenerating minds and bodies may place demands upon those around us. Health researcher Carly May and others have begun to also think about the burden of treatment: "The burden continues to increase as healthcare systems shift an ever-growing list of management responsibilities and tasks onto patients and their caregivers. This is real work, which requires considerable effort from patients, their caregivers, and their extended social networks." The authors suggest that one of the questions doctors should be asking their patients is: "Can you really do what I am asking you to do?"

VINCENT DEARY IS THE AUTHOR OF *HOW WE ARE* AND A HEALTH PSYCHOLOGIST

The 'expert patient' is someone whose knowledge of their condition and proficiency in its management allows them to become a kind of mentor for other patients with the same condition. These illness alumni are relatively rare, a small proportion of the diseased population, helping others along the way of their illness journeys. Now, a new kind of patient is being suggested by healthcare policymakers: the 'active patient'. According to a recent King's Fund report, between 25% and 40% of the population have low levels of 'activation'. By which, they mean that they are more likely to "feel overwhelmed with the task of managing their health" and to "misunderstand their role in the care process". As if we had been miscast in the sick role and kept fluffing our lines and missing our marks. In his Reith Lectures on the future of medicine, Dr Atul Gawande argues that where once we died of medical ignorance, now, with the advance of medical knowledge, we (also) die of medical ineptitude and the failure of health professionals to put what is known into proper practice. And now, if we fail to shoulder the burden of treatment adequately, our own ignorance and ineptitude becomes part of this causal pathway of medical failure. The inactive patient becomes an agent of their own demise. More is being demanded of us. Can we manage?

We are not good enough patients, and we are barely adequate as people. We lack character. But don't worry, there's a policy for that. Early last year, the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Social Mobility produced their *Character and Resilience* manifesto. The report enthusiastically discusses how schools and institutions can help to instil and develop our non-cognitive or soft skills at every stage of our lives. The soft skills are a rag-bag of traits: "In simple terms, these traits can be thought of as a belief in one's ability to achieve, an understanding of the relationship between effort and reward, the patience to pursue long-term

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goals, the perseverance to stick with the task at hand, and the ability to bounce back from life's inevitable setbacks. These various attributes all fall under the broad heading of 'Character and Resilience'."

However, this collection of traits is not so arbitrary. As listed here and in the Cabinet Office's recent literature review, *The impact of non-cognitive skills on outcomes for young people*, it is obvious that a very old, Stoic idea of character as wilfully developed virtue is at the heart of governmental thinking about the kind of citizens it wants us to be. All that has really changed since ancient times are the names of the virtues. Wisdom has become 'meta-cognitive ability'; courage has become 'perseverance', 'conscientiousness' and 'grit'; temperance has become 'self-control' or 'self-regulation' and justice has become 'empathy' or 'emotional intelligence'. David Cameron, quoted in the manifesto, is very excited about teaching us character. It is, he says "a new law for social mobility" and "one of the most important findings in a generation for those who care about fairness and inequality". So to make a better, fairer society, we needed to become better, fairer people. Can we manage that?

The government is concerned about us, and it wants us to be concerned about ourselves. Foucault suggests that in our evaluation of ancient Greek philosophy, we have privileged the maxim "know thyself" and forgotten the equally important injunction "to be concerned, to take care of yourself". This care for the self manifests in these philosophical systems as "technologies of the self" that "permit individuals to effect by their own means or with the help of others, a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct and way of being, so as to transform themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection, or immortality."

"Technologies of power", on the other hand, are authority's attempts to suggest the kind of self we should aspire to become, and to promote or enforce the means of so becoming. The meeting between technologies of power and technologies of the self is what Foucault calls Governmentality. As Nikolas Rose and others have noted, a certain kind of subject is implicit in neo-liberal Governmentality; a subject who is obliged to be free and responsible for their own wellbeing. But we don't, not immediately at least, experience this as governmental coercion, for the link between the technologies of power and the technologies of self, in neo-liberal democracies, is mediated by experts. We are not coerced to self-improvement through governmental fiat, we are compelled by evidence and objectivity, by science. Each of the policy documents cited above are at pains to link their suggestions to evidence-based outcomes: the active patient will live longer, the resilient pupil will get a better job. We are presented with the evidence so that, as rational, autonomous subjects, we may freely choose to become 'better' people. This free, self-directed, self-improving self is the kind of subject the policymakers want us to be. Do you think you can manage that?

I'm on stage in front of about 300 people. It's being recorded. I'm nervous. I'm sitting in between Paul Dolan, professor of Behavioural Science at London School of Economics, and Beatrix Campbell, veteran political commentator. It's just gotten heated. On my right hand side, Paul is defending an avowedly utilitarian notion of happiness in which good feelings come from maximising our opportunities for pleasure and purpose in daily life. To my left, Bea is reminding us, to frequent applause, that as long as there is inequality and discrimination within our society, we can't really be happy. I know what they both mean and try to say so. As a practitioner of cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT), I know that one of the first therapeutic moves in mild to moderate depression is to work on re-engaging in activities that give us a sense of achievement or enjoyment. So Paul's pleasure/purpose thing resonates; I get it, we really can manage ourselves better. Equally, I know where Bea is coming from. Clinically, I work a lot with long-term conditions and we, the active patients and myself, frequently come up against the limits of how much the individual can change their life without changing the social, political and economic circumstances in which that life is embedded. For instance, I regularly see the physical, financial and emotional costs entailed by the individual in having to prove that they really are ill to a sceptical benefits system. It's at those times that I become acutely aware of how woefully idiocentric the CBT model can be, and how difficult it is to really change your life by only managing your responses to it.

"People are upset not by things, but by their judgements about things." I am at the *Stoicism Today* conference and this quote, from the Stoic philosopher Epictetus, has been used a lot, in particular to illustrate the similarities between CBT and Stoicism. Or more than similarities, to show the Stoic roots of CBT. And these ancient progenitors made no bones about the idiocentricity of their system. That was its point. One of the key manoeuvres of stoicism, *qua* technology of the self, was the serenity prayer move: the ability to distinguish between what was within and what was outwith one's control. And for the Stoics, the sphere of influence of the self was limited to the self, and not even to the self as body – which like every other external thing was ultimately bound to fail us – but to our judgements and actions. We cannot control or determine our circumstances, never completely and never with certainty. We can only manage our responses to them. Which is where the virtues come in. Wisdom, our meta-cognitive ability, enables the discernment of our current sphere of influence; courage, or perseverance and grit, helps us to change what we can; temperance, or self-regulation and self-control, helps us to master our emotions and accept what we cannot change. As attendance at the conference attested, Stoicism is going through a revival. These are the skills, the ethics, that the policymakers want us to learn, this is what is being taught in schools and workplaces, barracks and prisons. Character. Resilience. Virtue. We are being taught how to manage life by managing ourselves.

Slavoj Zizek argues that Buddhism, or at least the current Western enthusiasm for some of its practices and values, serves as the perfect "ideological supplement" to late capitalism. Buddhism, rather than being a spiritual escape from the "madness" of consumer culture, is exactly what allows us to fully participate in it by renouncing: "any attempts to retain control over what goes on, rejecting such efforts as expressions of the modern logic of domination. Instead, one should "let oneself go," drift along, while retaining an inner distance and indifference toward the mad dance of the accelerated process." Others have argued that the resilient, externals-independent individual is the perfect subject to endure a recession economy and a state of endemic political, financial and social insecurity. According to Julian Reid in *The Neoliberal Subject: Resilience and the Art of Living Dangerously*, as uncertainty and unpredictability become the new normal, so "the policy problematic of liberal regimes of governance is undergoing a global shift from that of how to secure the human to how to render it resilient". Security, and the longing for it, become, in this regime of Governmentality, a kind of pathology; we are no longer to expect or seek certainty but rather to embrace and accept challenge and danger. As Evans, Brad, and Julian Reid describe this state of perpetual emergency in *Resilience 1.2*: "The resilient subject is a subject which must permanently struggle to accommodate itself to the world, and not a subject which can conceive of changing the world, its structure and conditions of possibility." What better subject to manage the zero-hour contract, the gig economy? They don't keep us safe anymore, and we aren't to expect them to. It's a shift in governmental policy that the authors call "politically catastrophic" and "fundamentally nihilistic". Forget changing the world; just look after yourself.

We are all fragile. Maybe that's a better opening, less bleak. Easily broken. I talk to Caroline, a therapy colleague, about a client. How they are in a state of permanent autonomic arousal, always on guard, never at peace. They are exhausted. "It's about safety," she says. "I try to get my clients to tune in to when and where they feel safe, to what safety feels like. They've often forgotten what it feels like". Her phrase resonates for days. The feeling of safety. Can you remember? Almost as if it has been removed from the curriculum, taken off the shelves. Even resilient subjects need an occasional ceasefire. It's what makes the act of televisual grace we opened with so compelling. You can see its impact on the recipient who, for a few moments, is allowed some rest from strife and self-defence. As he relaxes, lets his guard down, you can see the sadness settle into the muscles of his face, the battle-weariness. Of course a few shots later the drama resumes, but just for a moment, one human being looked after another, offered them temporary reprieve. It reminded me of the phrase my friend Morag is fond of repeating, in part to quell her own inner Calvinist: "People are transformed by love, not by condemnation." ■

DEVOLVING POWER

Forming policies from the city level up is the surest way to help our citizens

by Carolyn Wilkins

Throughout 2014, there was a great deal of attention paid to devolution, and we are seeing the ongoing impact of the Scottish referendum in the current debates about city mayors and English devolution. While Scotland was the focus for much of last year, we have also seen the announcement of the devolution agreement for Greater Manchester, with labels such as 'devo-Manc' and 'devolutionaries' appearing in the media. For me, these labels were more than just headlines or soundbites: the first reflects the importance of place in the devolution agenda, while the second alludes to the hopefully revolutionary nature of the work under way.

Devolution is moving at pace, both in terms of work under way to implement it but also geographic coverage. The 2014 Autumn Statement confirmed Greater Manchester's devolution deal, and outlined a number of key investments in transport, culture and science and innovation. Announcements on funding for a new Sir Henry Royce Institute for advanced materials research as well as the Factory theatre and exhibition centre will strengthen the city region's offer and profile. The Smith Commission published in November 2014 set out a number of recommendations focused around powers to strengthen the Scottish Parliament's ability to pursue its own vision, goals and objectives. Both illustrate that devolution is an approach that can vary in scope and focus.

Unleashing Metro Potential, the final report of the RSA's City Growth Commission, highlights the fact that the delivery of the change required by the devolution deal will pose serious questions for central and city-level governments, especially in terms of working cultures, capacity and accountability mechanisms. These are questions we are working through, and will continue to do so over coming months, within

CAROLYN WILKINS IS THE CURRENT CHIEF EXECUTIVE OF OLDHAM COUNCIL

both my own district of Oldham and Greater Manchester.

Devolution provides an amazing opportunity for the city-region to do things differently, and to focus on those issues that will result in the greatest change. It means local areas gaining real levers to grow their economies, which is a fundamental shift in approach in England. Equally importantly, as Lord Peter Smith highlighted at the launch of the agreement last November, "devolution is about improving lives". It should bring a greater ability to allocate resources in ways that ensure local people are equipped with the skills and confidence to benefit from growth. We must not be distracted from this as we work through the arrangements necessary for devolution.

In Greater Manchester our strong track record of collaboration should stand us in good stead in this regard; the devolution announcement is located within a strong culture and tradition of collaboration. The RSA's City Growth Commission uses 'metro' to describe the larger constellations of cities and towns that constitute a functional economy within built-up areas. The 10 districts of Greater Manchester have long recognised their economic and social interdependency and the Manchester Independent Economic Review (MIER) back in 2008/9 provided a compelling articulation of this. MIER has informed a great deal of our approach in the city-region, including the Greater Manchester Strategy, and more recently our integrated growth and reform plan, developed because we recognise that achieving economic growth in isolation from public service reform will not enable us to achieve the wider social change we are striving for across our communities. This chimes strongly with the point made in *Unleashing Metro Potential*; that only through such integration can the city-region thrive as a whole system and create socially inclusive, environmentally sustainable places where people want to live and work.

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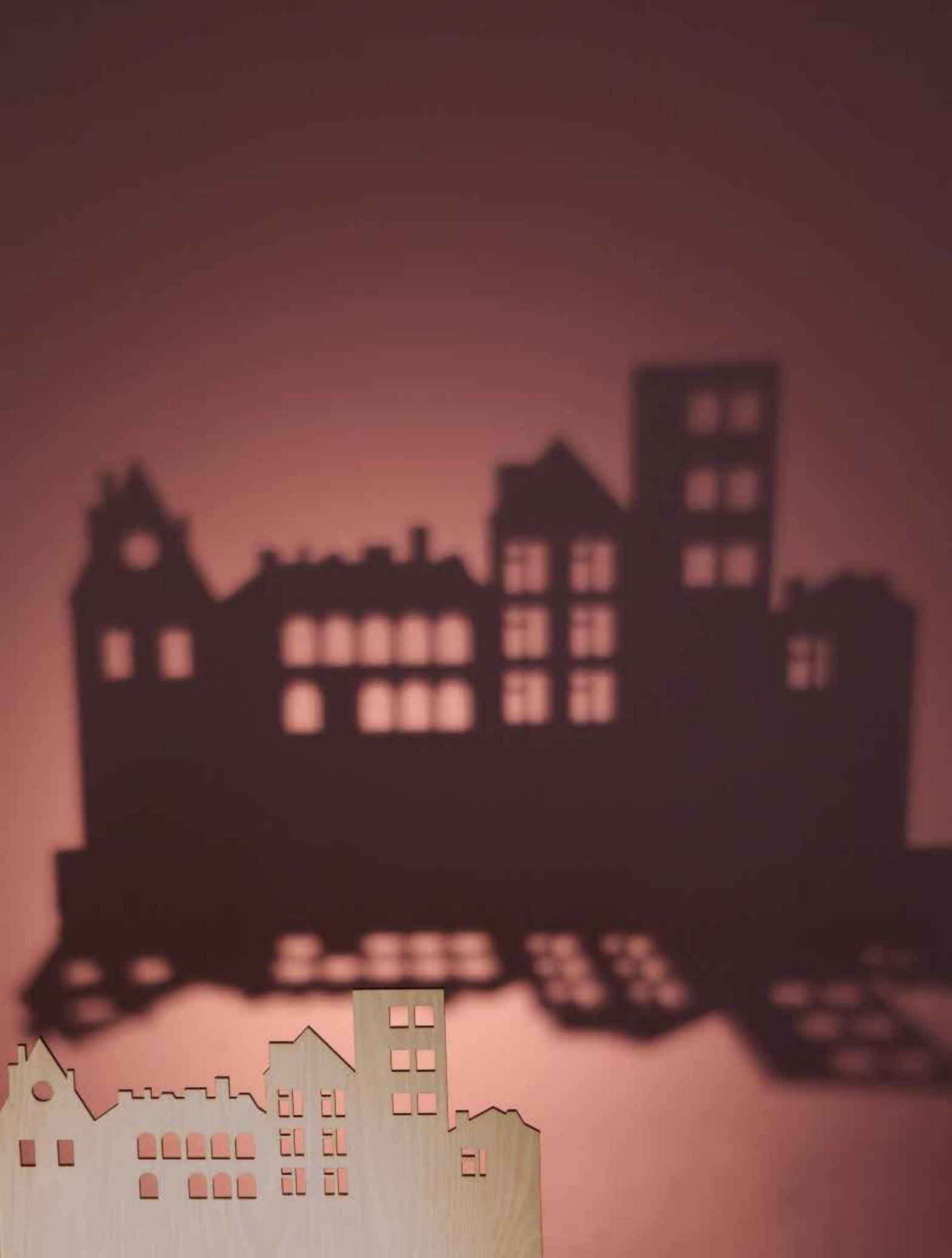
"POLICYMAKING HAS TO BE MORE GROUNDED IN THE EXPERIENCE OF THOSE WHOSE LIVES IT WAS DESIGNED TO AFFECT"

The devolution deal covers some major areas of policy currently developed at a national level. These include skills, health and social care, housing and transport, as well as police and crime commissioner responsibilities. Clearly, national policy will continue to be developed, not least because devolution does not yet apply to many areas in England. So, the relationship between national, city-region and local policymaking will not disappear as a challenge. What is needed is a policy response that breathes new life into policymaking. The City Growth Commission attests that: "Centralisation has self-evidently failed to tackle the issue of uneven economic development and public sector outcomes." We do not want the same charge to be laid at devolution's door in the future. A significant challenge, therefore, is to ensure we do not simply transfer things that do not work at a national level to a city-region level where they still will not work.

Devolution has the potential to create a much greater diversity of policy responses to maximise the opportunities, as well as tackle the significant challenges faced by our cities. The process of devolution to date gives early positive indications of a changing relationship, as the deal has very much been a process of negotiation between the centre and the city-region. Clearly, there are some fixed elements to the devolution framework, particularly in relation to governance. But even on this issue there appears to be the potential to fashion these in a way that works for particular places – for example, the emerging differences between the London and Greater Manchester models of elected mayors.

This flexibility is vital, as a major failing of policy to date has been a massive under-appreciation of the extent to which place matters. Place is not simply synonymous with geographic and administrative boundaries; it is about a much deeper, richer understanding of communities and their relationship with their environment, the values they hold, the ways in which they connect with each other, who they trust and how they engage with public services. Policymaking needs an intimate relationship with the character, history and reality of our towns and cities. A policy population footprint of 2.7 million can still fail to effect social change, but there is a much greater chance of success than for a policy population footprint of 53.9 million. But only if this also engages in a dynamic way with even more localised communities. Devolution in Greater Manchester is devolution to local government. Policymaking needs to engage with the unique character and ambitions of each local authority area in a meaningful way.

A centralised system imposes structural limits on the ability of local areas to be creative and pioneer reform in public services. Separate funding streams and specific policy prescriptions impose constraints on the ability of organisations and services to respond to the challenges they face. Local innovations are already demonstrating the greater impact that approaches more relevant to the particular needs and circumstances of places can have, across a range of areas.

The extreme social conditions and inequality we see across the country, and across the metro area, are not the result of a lack of policy. But I believe the approach we take has an impact. The dominant model of policymaking in the public sector continues to assume that policymakers identify problems, gather and review data about alternative possible solutions, select the one that best matches their goals and then hand over to others to implement. My experience of public services, including policymaking, is of a relatively closed system with a strong bias in favour of professional perspectives and views, where local voices and intelligence are often silent or silenced, brought in too late or simply discredited. Insufficient weight is placed on the knowledge and experience of individuals and communities, and the policymaking process is too often divorced from the wider political system. At best, it is seen as a linear relationship, managed by professionals throughout and engaging different stakeholders at 'appropriate' points. Those involved in developing policies intended to achieve significant social change often have no direct lived experience of the issues under consideration.

Unleashing Metro Potential calls for more place-based, data-driven and outcome-focused policymaking. I agree that this is important, and believe we need a fundamental change in how we design and develop our policies. In my experience, evidence-based policy can often mean either evidence that this policy has worked somewhere else already, or evidence in terms of facts and figures. All too often, deeper evidence about context and place is missing, meaning policies are not rooted in reality. An example of how we are challenging this in Oldham is the Education and Skills Commission we launched in 2014, sponsored by the leader of the council, Councillor Jim McMahon and chaired by Baroness Estelle Morris.

In Oldham, we have seen unprecedented investment across the borough in state-of-the-art school buildings, upgrading existing facilities and expanding sites to accommodate growing pupil numbers. The commission is an opportunity for the council and our partners to reflect on and evaluate

that progress, and to look at how standards, services and opportunities can be even further improved. We know from the experiences of others that commissions like this can be very effective catalysts for positive change. Importantly, the commission is exploring the wider system of education, considering the role students themselves play in their own learning, but also the contribution of governors, parents and the wider community. A narrow education policy focused solely around teaching in school will not be enough.

Our ultimate aim is to define a new Oldham education standard that all partners will aspire to achieve, so that all of our young people are well prepared to meet the challenges they may face in future years. It is the processes involved and the perspectives and voices considered in developing this standard that are key.

This reflects the wider approach we are taking in Oldham to fundamentally change the relationship between public services (including the council) and communities. This is driven through our cooperative agenda and approach. Our discussions are not focused on trying to achieve a target operating model for the council that takes into account the amount of money taken out of local authority budgets. Instead it is focused on the values and behaviours that set the character and tone of the organisation, and maximising the value to Oldham of every public sector pound spent.

Policymaking in Oldham is as much about the approach that we take and the way we work, as it is about the things we are doing. And we are doing a huge amount. The recent announcement of a £60m regeneration scheme that will transform a significant part of Oldham (as well as finally bring Marks & Spencer to the borough) is just the latest element of a comprehensive regeneration programme. But the way we do this – through procurement processes that have a strong focus on social value, introduction of the living wage, a residency requirement for entry-level jobs, as well as using our influencing role through the Fair Employment Charter to get others to work in a similar way – is key. Our Cooperative Values are driving what we do and how we work. This puts our policy efforts into a very different space to traditional local authority strategy.

It is not an abstract 'back office' function somehow divorced from implementation. People with 'policy' in their job title are as likely to be out knocking on doors to encourage people to sign up to the latest fairness campaign as they are to be raising money for the Cooperative Oldham Fund. Policymaking has to be much more grounded in the lived experience of the people whose lives it was designed to affect. Standardised approaches struggle to deal with complexity or difference. In Greater Manchester and Oldham we have discussed the need to set standards rather than to look to standardise. This then allows a system that does not stifle creativity or innovation. It allows for the nature of place to be reflected and incorporated.

National policy covers a vast array of issues, from health and social care to early years and child protection; from planning and housing to worklessness, education and welfare. It is often heroic in focus and scale, but this can mean that small, incremental steps where policy is actually being translated through to sustainable social change on the ground are overlooked. A disconnect between policymaking and policy implementation can lead to frustration and blame, but can also lead to individuals being labelled as 'hard to engage' and 'resistant to change'. Our ambitions must not blind us to the importance of change for individuals and communities, or lead us to forget that the judgement of success can be very subjective. In Oldham, we recognise that delivering a number of high-profile, large-scale projects is important in building trust and confidence, and can act as catalysts for wider change. But on their own, they will not deliver the totality of change we are after.

So yes, devolution is an incredible opportunity for Greater Manchester, and for Oldham. But it must bring with it the ability to integrate policymaking with the voices and experiences of our communities, and to connect much more intimately with place. Rather than spend time focusing on the constraints of the system within which we work, we can instead direct our energies to relentlessly drive change across the system. To help us with this we need an agile and inclusive policymaking approach focused on the art of the possible that really does support us in improving people's lives. ◼

TEEN SPIRIT

Adolescence gets short shrift on the agenda. But growing evidence suggests it is a crucial period for personal development

by Louise Bamfield

Adolescence is a life phase that does not lack attention. Youthful adventures have long been romanticised and pathologised, attracting alarm and fascination from older generations in equal measure. In recent times, anxious parents have been hit by a boomerang generation of rebounding 'kidults' and 'adulescents' slouching their way towards adulthood. Young people today are facing bleaker life chances: a precarious job market, stagnating wages and poor prospects for progression, compounded by exorbitant rents, rising costs of living and an increasingly punitive benefits system.

While lip service is routinely paid to the importance of securing successful 'youth transitions', policy action has been much weaker in addressing the symptoms, let alone the underlying structural causes of youth insecurity and unemployment. Youth strategies under both the current and previous governments appear seriously underpowered, taking a truncated view of what matters, why and for whom during adolescence. Since the early 2000s, government efforts to promote social mobility and break intergenerational cycles of disadvantage have been caught up in the mantra of 'early years' investment and intervention. As Nobel Prize-winning economist James Heckman expresses it: "Like it or not, the most important mental and behavioural patterns, once established, are difficult to change once children enter school."

What is missing from this analysis is proper recognition of the complexities of human development: the non-linear, discontinuous nature of cognitive development and the scope for psychological and emotional growth during adolescence, early adulthood and beyond. While the foundations for healthy development and secure relationships are laid in infancy, they are not permanently fixed. Recent research has cast new light on the structure and functioning of the adolescent brain, revealing adolescence to be a second window of opportunity for cognitive and emotional development, as well as a period of heightened sensitivity to social threats and experimentation, which may involve risk.

Care is needed in interpreting this body of evidence, especially since brain scans and images of 'stunted'

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brain development have sometimes been used to dubious effect in public policy. Neuroscience can only tell us so much: the making of synaptic connections in the brain cannot explain the nature of learning or other psychological processes. While it may be tempting to present adolescence in policy terms as the new 'early years' (a golden, time-limited moment for intervention), we should resist the urge to 'rank' life phases in order of importance. Instead, we should focus on unlocking the psychological, cultural and institutional barriers that often prevent continued learning and development throughout life.

Promisingly, a growing number of studies show significant benefits for boosting motivation, effort and achievement during adolescence, at low cost and with sustained effects over time. Young people can benefit from the knowledge that their brains are still growing and developing. Controlled experiments show that teaching students that the brain is like a muscle – it gets stronger when it is used – can lead to significant and sustained improvements in attainment. Carefully targeted interventions at this sensitive stage of life can help to promote

FELLOWSHIP IN ACTION
CRACKING THE CODE

If you needed any more evidence that computer coding is no longer for geeks, the enthusiastic teenagers at Cambridge Coding Academy will set you straight. Dissatisfied with how coding is taught in schools, Raoul-Gabriel Urma, RSA Fellow and Cambridge University PhD candidate, co-founded the Cambridge Coding Academy in June 2014. It aims to teach 14 to 19-year-olds the basics of how to code in a day, through designing simple games and apps at interactive workshops. "The technology industry is the fastest growing industry right now," said Raoul. "There are 10 billion devices in the world and it's predicted there will be 200 billion by 2020. So computer code is actually the most used language in the world. And kids, they should be learning it." Having just won Catalyst funding from the RSA, and with a further 20 workshops planned in early spring, the academy looks set to go from strength to strength.
■ *For more information, visit cambridgecoding.com*

positive beliefs and reduce negative thoughts and feelings, which otherwise act as a barrier to learning, achievement and wellbeing. For some, the effects have been substantial in terms of breaking negative spirals of thoughts and behaviour and changing individual trajectories for the future.

To achieve lasting change, this type of targeted intervention needs to be part of a much broader and ambitious strategy that aims to achieve far-reaching shifts in cultural outlook as well as providing practical opportunities for young people. Taking the long view of adolescence, we can see how changing social and economic conditions over the past century from production to consumption have transformed the economic role and status of young people. What has been lost is the chance for adolescents to make a real contribution and be rewarded in adult ways. This has been linked in clinical studies to diminished confidence and self-efficacy, increased mental health problems and declining life satisfaction.

Rather than holding young people in suspended animation while they struggle to gain full economic independence, we need action to restore lost adult connections and rewards and extend opportunities for them to take responsibility in multiple spheres of life. We need to think bigger about adolescence; about what young people can do for themselves, for one another and for society itself.

The contemporary period has seen a shift away from an authoritarian style of parenting to one that is more open and democratic. While few would regret the decline of domineering parenting, some worry that the pendulum has swung too far: away from discipline and self-reliance, and towards permissive, overprotective 'helicopter' parents who hover over their children's lives and prevent them from making their own decisions. Although worries about an infantilised younger generation appear exaggerated, it is still important that they have the chance to make their own decisions and learn from their own mistakes.

There is still much scope for transforming the life chances of young people during adolescence and early adulthood, not just in the early years. Brought up in the shadow of the financial crisis, credit crunch and uneven economic recovery, the future might well seem bleak to them, but it is not yet hopeless. Today's teenagers are routinely described by enthusiastic advocates as the most ambitious, charitable, committed, connected and ethically minded generation ever to pigeon-step their way towards adulthood. Despite the lurid headlines and recurring moral panics about the state of Britain's youth, repeated studies show growing levels of civic engagement and declining rates of drinking, smoking and drug-taking among the current generation of young people. Far from living up to the stereotypes of dissolute, promiscuous and profligate wasters, they appear to have a high sense of personal responsibility, be more averse to risky behaviours and care about a wide range of social issues. ■

The RSA's new report on adolescence will be out this spring.

HELEN SADDLER

Helen Saddler is a senior policy adviser for the Greater London Authority (GLA). "My job is to scope out what work we can do, as part of the education programme, to specifically help and support children with special educational needs," she explained.

Helen initially trained as a primary school teacher and, after teaching a high proportion of children with severe special needs, came to realise that teacher training should devote more time to this area. "More needs to be done at a higher level within education policy, to focus on this vulnerable group," she said.

Before joining the GLA, Helen worked for the Cabinet Office as a youth policy adviser. While working in these roles, she developed a strong understanding of how policy is developed and implemented, which she would like to explore further through RSA seminars and workshops.

Alongside fellowship, she will continue working on her PhD, which considers the role of teaching assistants in mainstream primary schools. She will also be focusing on her new business, Inclusive Classrooms, a professional development programme for teaching assistants, set to launch in February. She looks forward to learning from other Fellows who have set up similar charitable organisations.

DAN EBANKS

With more than 14 years working in policy, Dan Ebanks has worked in a variety of roles, from consultancy firm Matrix Knowledge, focusing on how evaluation can improve evidence-based policymaking, to more hands-on policy implementation at PA Consulting, focusing on the content and delivery of services.

As Director of House PPD, the consultancy he set up in 2008, Dan works with both central and local government. "We're working in Lambeth council – they're a council at the vanguard of thinking about how to do things differently in terms of open policymaking and service design," he said. One project, co-designed and produced with local young people to help deliver services, has been held up as an exemplar, and Dan continues to look at different ways of problem solving for councils. He believes one such alternative is the Made in Lambeth model, which takes a 'hackathon' approach to local challenges and looks to involve local people who might otherwise be excluded.

Dan feels the biggest problem facing policymaking is the lack of openness, evidence and ownership by local citizens, including residents, council officers and councillors. Getting local stakeholders and communities involved in co-creating a new way forward is key to a more effective and enlightened system.

IN BRIEF

Here are a few more new Fellows who are working to drive social progress:

Paul Vaughan is the senior manager for policy, communications and area management at Fife Council. He is particularly interested in finding solutions to social problems.

Professor John Diamond is director of the Institute for Public Policy and Professional Practice at Edge Hill University. He is also currently chair of the Association for Research in the Voluntary and Community Sector.

Diarmid Hearns is head of policy for the National Trust for Scotland, where he has become increasingly aware of the RSA's role in bringing together experts from different backgrounds to discuss issues of common interest.

Naomi Turner is head of Group, Manufacturing, Design and Innovation for the All-Party Parliamentary Design and Innovation Group, a forum for open debate between parliament and the UK's design and innovation communities.

Ruth Driscoll is head of policy and public services at the National Council for Voluntary Organisations. She is keen to use her experience to help others get their social projects off the ground.

YOUR FELLOWSHIP – ENGAGE WITH THE RSA IN FOUR MAIN WAYS

1 Meet other Fellows: Network meetings take place across the UK and are an excellent way to meet other Fellows. Check out the events taking place, on the website.

2 Connect online: Like the RSA on Facebook, or follow us on Twitter @thersaorg using #thersa hashtag. There is also a Fellows' LinkedIn group, our network can be found at www.rsafellowship.com and blogs at www.rsablogs.org.uk

3 Share your skills: Fellows can offer expertise and support to projects via SkillsBank using a form available online.

4 Grow your idea: RSA Catalyst gives grants and support for Fellows' new and early-stage projects aimed at tackling social problems.

Explore these and further ways to get involved at **www.thersa.org**

CATALYST UPDATES

Bad Idea was set up by Anthony Gerrard in 2012, as a response to the rising number of NEETS (young people who are not in education, employment or training) in Glasgow. The project runs a flagship competition encouraging secondary school children to come up with imaginative ideas and past suggestions have included a proposal of better care homes for dementia patients and a toothbrush with toothpaste built in. Over a four-day workshop children work up business models, use social media, seek funding and present to a judging panel who decide the winner. This year Bad Idea will be scaling up to launch the Seven Cities project throughout Scotland and a Kickstarter campaign with the support of the RSA Catalyst team.
■ *To find out more, visit www.badideaorg.com*

Despite its apolitical starting point, interest in designer Sarah Drummond's letter-writing project, Dearest Scotland, was hugely boosted by the recent Scottish Referendum. Aiming to "crowdsource a future vision of the country" by encouraging people to write letters about what Scotland means to them, the Catalyst-funded project has gathered so much momentum that it is being extended past its initial January deadline. Gathering responses from around the country, including MSPs who discussed the project at a members' debate, Sarah has expanded the initiative to include workshop templates and tutorials that teachers and youthworkers can download. This year Sarah will seek funding for Scotland-wide exhibitions, compile a Dearest Scotland book from letters received and curate an exhibition inside Scottish parliament.
■ *To find out more, visit www.dearestscotland.com*

Founded by Daniel Charny and James Carrigan in 2012, Fixperts is an online platform connecting those who need a problem solved with makers, designers, and those who, through their skills and knowledge, are able to fix things and solve problems. The 'fix' is filmed and put online, enabling viewers to gain insight into the design process and give them the confidence to repair and fix things themselves. Catalyst funding has enabled Fixperts to be registered as an entity and the next step will be take it into more schools and encourage professionals to volunteer their skills for high-level projects such as award-winning initiative 'The Right Trousers', where designer Alon Meron created a special belt to enable a recovering stroke victim to close his trousers using only one hand.
■ *To get involved, visit www.fixperts.org*

COLLABORATE TO INNOVATE

Charles Clarke's article ('The Too Difficult Problem', Issue 3 2014) overstates the singularity of party politics as the barrier to solving difficult public policy questions.

His article typifies the emerging trend towards a one-party state, with politicians being more concerned with legacy, as they will have to be responsible for the delivery of their own policies. Unity against left-field parties is part of this trend.

An alternative is to develop competence in collaborative problem solving, at both individual and systemic levels, using responsive networks rather than hierarchies and public policy workers who can gather expertise rather than act simply as singular-issue experts.

It is not just politicians who have strong belief systems, but it is know-how in harnessing this, rather than the veneer of setting it aside, that is already working.
– Esmee Wilcox FRSA

LOVE, DEATH, SELF AND SOUL

19 November 2014

Dr Jonathan Rowson proposes a framework for a post-religious spirituality

One of the best ways of looking into the roots of the spiritual is to ask broadly three questions, I think. They are: "What are we? How should we live? And why are we here?" The last is a tough metaphysical one beyond what we can answer definitively. How we should live is an ethical question that stays with us. But what are we, we're getting somewhere with. We're beginning to understand who we are better, and most of the third-person scientific views are actually corroborated by our own experience.

I'm going to mention four. The first is that we're on autopilot all of the time. Doing meditation makes this abundantly clear. The spiritual injunction to 'wake up' is grounded in an increasingly sophisticated understanding of the fact that we're not only creatures of habit but habit-forming creatures. So we're built almost to put ourselves to sleep and the spiritual injunction is: "If that's what science tells us and that's what we see in our experience, waking up makes a lot of sense."

Second, we live in two different worlds most of the time. Consciousness plays a kind of trick on us and tells us it's one coherent thing, but we have two ways of being: one is very analytical and precise, breaking things down and stripping them of context; the other is more holistic and particular and grounded in the broader context of things. The problem is that the part of us that wants to speak of more emotional, soulful, spiritual things struggles to be heard in public life because it's up against this very analytical slicing-and-dicing mentality in our culture.

Third, we live in our bodies. Your body is hugely awake and alive with things going on if you know how to interrogate it. Almost all of spiritual experience, any kind of transcendence, any kind of sense of oneness and wholeness, begins in the body.

The other thing is we live with other people. We evolve through relationships with others. The critique from religion – that typically there's no community; you're just on your own trying to do your own spiritual thing – misses the point that any meaningful spiritual development will come through relationships, often teachers or peers. It must be grounded in the psychological rootedness of relationships.

These four things help you understand that the spiritual has real roots in human nature that are grounded in science and that are also available to us experientially.

In the full flowering of that understanding we discover the things that matter to us are not what we previously thought mattered. Our place in the world matters less than our ground; our status, our personality, our identity, matters less than this sense of being alive, this deep sense of gratitude for being here. I call it love, death, self and soul.

Love gives us the promise of belonging in the world. We love the things that help us feel at home here. Death, we avoid. Yet those who have a near-death experience report a much richer, fuller life afterwards. What does that mean, given that we know we're going to die? It means that death has to be a bigger part of the public conversation, facing up to the fact that our time is finite and not to waste it.

The self is actually quite problematic; when you look at it, you see that you're chattering all the time in your own mind, trying to shore up a sense of personality and identity that actually is quite flimsy. Tracy Chapman sings "all that you have is your soul". There's a sort of deep truth in that. Whereas the self has been revered and celebrated, the soul has been somewhat forgotten. But we need this perspective of grasping and looking for something slightly beyond our reach. It's not easy to bring back the soul into public language but we need to work a bit harder to speak more confidently about it.

These four things are all injunctions in their own way. The issue is to love more fully and deeply, to know what you love and why, to confront your death, and live differently as a result. To know yourself more deeply and see that something that needs to be transcended. The self is something that may not be fully real and we need to come to realise that. The soul is something we need to know more deeply, often through arts, or richer forms of enquiry as we create.

The spiritual is worth fighting for, you know. Don't let the fact that it's unclear and contested, and lacking institutional roots and clear tradition, stop us talking of the things that matter most in our lives. ■

TOWARDS AN EDUCATIONAL (R)EVOLUTION?

6 November 2014

Dr Debra Kidd argues that education has become fixated on conformity and compliance at the expense of creativity

To want something you really have to be able to imagine it. And to imagine it you have to have some element of experience in it. For many of our children that experience is limited, so they need people to be the imaginers for them. They need people who will be the architects of hope for the future.

Teaching should be about building possible futures for children; it should be about scaffolding and tooling them until children can dream and imagine for themselves. Sometimes those dreams might seem inconceivable or impossible, but it is a teacher's role to show children that no matter where they come from or no matter what they have experienced, the possibility always exists.

But imagining a future involves a forward motion and currently our political educational system is not a forward-thinking system. It is a system that loops every five years in short-term thinking.

In politics, imagination is a luxury that most politicians do not feel they can afford. Because of this, we have a backwards-looking education system that instils a fear of the future into our children. Instead of being peddlers of hope and promise, we educationalists have become harbingers of doom, instilling a belief in children that they are only as good as a narrow set of examination results and only as good as the status of the future job they will hold.

At the Festival of Education in 2013, Charles Leadbeater drew a really good analogy between the education system and manufacturing in the mid to early 20th century. He talked about an aircraft, the DC-3. In the mid and early 20th century it was the aircraft of choice, but it flew at an altitude that took you through cloud cover. This damaged countless aircraft – to the point where airlines sometimes couldn't even fly them. Leadbeater argued that our politicians, passionate and committed as they may be, are like passionate engineers of the DC-3, tinkering to keep it in operation but afraid to take the risks required to improve it.

Of course, somebody invested in a Boeing engine and the rest is history. We need that somebody in education now. We should not be giving pupils one chance, one shot, at an examination. We should be moving away from this belief that our examination system is a more reliable indication of achievement than teacher assessment. We need to look carefully at how we measure the schools' success and their accountability systems. We have to think about the fact that a better society may not lie in exam results.

What if our goal was not just a great job, but a fulfilling life? What if we were measured on our contribution to society, regardless of whether or not we were in paid work? How would this change our education system?

What if, in addition to exploring some of the best that has been said and thought, we also pointed out to children all the things that have not yet been said, or not yet been thought, that are still to be done and still to be discovered, that the best lies out there in the future and they are the ones going to be doing the discovering, the thinking and the doing. That is not a fearful future, that is a hopeful one, and it is one we should be aiming to build. ◼

IMAGE: GETTY

DEBUNKED

Think you know what policymaking is?
Time to think again

by Ayesha Hazarika

Political communication – or spin – is routinely derided, but policymaking seems to occupy a higher, more worthy plane. In government or opposition, the Policy Unit – which is where big-ticket policy ideas are explored and ultimately agreed – is regarded with reverence, partly because no one quite knows what happens there. What happens in Policy Unit stays in Policy Unit.

You might have imagined a hushed room of Gandalf-like figures chin stroking, being cerebral and generally brimming with knowledge about every subject imaginable. Only when you become involved in policymaking yourself does it dawn upon you that your preconceived ideas were but a lie. It's definitely time to debunk some myths.

Myth number one: only policymakers can dream up ideas. Not true. Anyone can help craft policy. Smart, enduring policymaking is about trying to find the answers to the problems in our lives. The answers are out there, but you have to leave SW1 to find them. The traditional idea factories found in Westminster, academia or lobbying groups, do not have the monopoly on wisdom. Talking to people from different walks of life and different parts of the country is how you make better policies and get away from what can feel like an echo chamber of the same topics, narratives and experiences.

The Older Women's Commission recently held a series of meetings around the country with women in their 50s and 60s, to talk about how their roles within their families and society are changing. There are lots of important public policy ideas and challenges to think about in this particular demographic, yet they feel politicians and policymakers rarely engage with them and their issues.

Myth number two: policymaking is linear. It isn't. Policy works best when it's integrated with a communications strategy and not just the meat in the political sausage machine.

AYESHA HAZARIKA IS A STAND-UP COMEDIAN AND CHIEF OF STAFF FOR HARRIET HARMAN MP

There was a lot of grumbling about the introduction of the forward-look 'grid' in 1997, but it is now standard practice. I was starting out in the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food press office when the concept of the grid was introduced. The idea that the press office should know what policy was being devised, when it might be published and how best to announce it was met with snorts of laughter, as if people were being asked to become some kind of Time Lord and predict the future. Cue the press office being completely taken by surprise when a ban on beef on the bone – quite an important food safety measure, in light of the BSE scandal – was announced by a celebrity chef, live on a cookery programme. It is fair to say the grid was operationalised pretty swiftly after that.

But the necessity of running an effective grid should not mean that policy is made in haste to fill a slot. The most successful events are built around having a solid, well-considered policy announcement to showcase.

It is important for policy and press teams to be able to join forces to explain to politicians where there is and is not a decent policy hook. This is what prevents press releases with headlines like 'British cheese is SUPERB!' being issued. Now, that fact may well be true, but the minister who had demanded this particular release could not understand why this groundbreaking story had failed make the papers.

Myth number three: policy is just about statistics. No, it is about stories too. The best policies work when they are rooted in a clear argument about the problems facing people's lives, as well as having the supporting technical evidence. They are the policies that tend to stick.

So don't believe all the mythology around how policy is created and get involved in the discussions about the things you care about. Like all politics, policymaking is at its best when it's collaborative, involves a wide pool of people, comes from all parts of the country and speaks to the real challenges in our lives. ■

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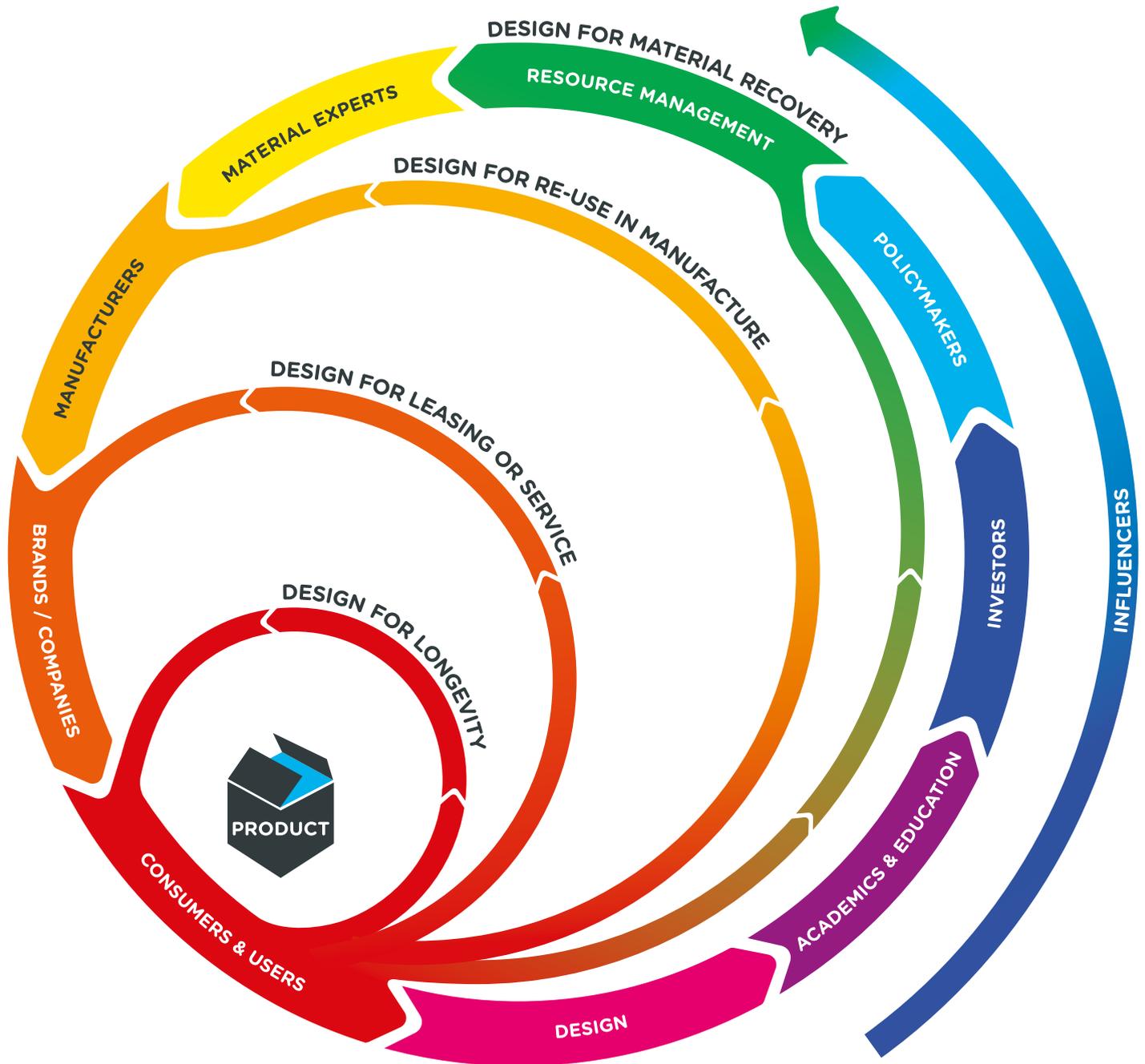
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