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The Goal Programme for Public Service Reform and Innovation

Evaluation Vignette **6**
Sustaining New Ways of Working

September 2019

The Goal Programme for Public Service Reform and Innovation

supported systemic change in public services in Ireland and Northern Ireland with the aim of improving outcomes for people using public services. The programme, funded by The Atlantic Philanthropies, was delivered by the Centre for Effective Services (CES) in partnership with seven government departments in Ireland and Northern Ireland. The programme, which started in 2016, comprised nine strategic sectoral reform projects. These projects were exemplars for testing new ways of working in areas such as leadership development, innovation, knowledge management, collaborative work practices and capacity building.

The Institute of Public Administration carried out an evaluation of the Goal programme for CES. This vignette, on the topic of sustaining new ways of working, is one of the outputs of the evaluation.

Background

This vignette examines ways in which the Goal programme helped to sustain new ways of working. The last step in Kotter's eight-step model for sustainable organisational change is anchoring of the change. He notes that this is concerned with achieving cultural change and embedding the reform in shared values: *'the way things are done around here'*. There are many actions that can be taken to support the anchoring of change¹. As part of the Goal programme, work was undertaken to create the basis from which the projects could be embedded in the civil and public service, and that learning from these projects extended across the public services of Ireland and Northern Ireland. Of particular note, and examined here, were steps taken to develop:

- Departmental and bi-lateral sharing of learning
- The preparation of tools and outputs to support future working
- The exchange of new ideas and practices through workshops, meetings and presentations.

Departmental and bi-lateral sharing of learning

There was evidence of the new ways of working being tested and trialled in public service reform projects supported by the Goal programme and of these new ways of working being carried over into different settings. The *Embedding Innovation* project built implementation processes into its work across the public service in Northern Ireland. The *Children and Young People's Strategies* departmental project lead noted that it was the intention of the project to use existing consultation and co-design processes for an upcoming review of another policy area. Arising from the *Youth Mental Health and Wellbeing Pathfinder* project, the department started training other potential leaders of projects based on the experience learned from the project. They also ran another

¹ J.P. Kotter (2009), Leading change: why transformation efforts fail, Harvard Business Review, March-April.

pathfinder type project, much less reliant on external support, using the internal capacity they had created in-house as part of the Goal programme.

Lessons learned from the pilot knowledge network established as part of the *Developing Evidence and Knowledge Management* project were taken into account in the development of two further knowledge networks in the Department of Health. The Department has also informally shared their experience with the Department of Education and Skills and the Department of Children and Youth Affairs. The *Building Collaborative Working Practices* project has shared project material with the Department of Health and members of the Children and Young People's Strategies project team, and interest in learning from the project has been expressed by the Department of Children and Youth Affairs. This came about after the other Goal participating departments became aware of the collaborative working project at a Goal programme learning event held in Newry.

As one Department of Education and Skills interviewee commented of the Department of Health adaptation of their collaborative working tools:

“They've taken it, they've 'de-Department of Educationed' it which means that there's now a version that could possibly be used by another department.”

Preparing tools and outputs to support future working

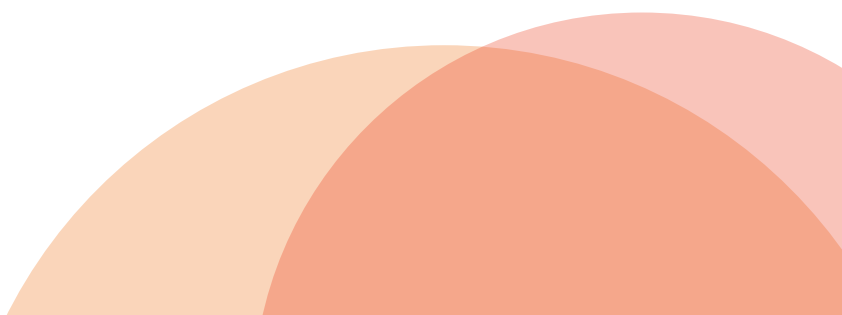
As part of the output of the Goal programme a number of evidence-informed documents were produced with a view to supporting policy and project design.

Examples include:

- evidence reviews on knowledge management, youth funding schemes, and mental health and wellbeing;
- a briefing paper on communities of practice; and
- a comparative review of international children and young people's strategies.

The topic of the use of evidence and data in the Goal programme is examined in more detail in a separate vignette 'Promoting the Use of Evidence and Data'.

There were also a number of outputs produced aimed at supporting the sustainability of the interventions and approaches once the Goal programme support comes to an end. In the *Evaluation Training for Civil Servants* project, a 'slide pack' setting out the material delivered in the presentations in the training modules is a central output. This material is available to inform future iterations of the training. As part of the *Embedding Innovation* project, a capacity building programme on implementation was developed for the Innovation Lab team. In the *Building Collaborative Working Practices* project, a management board checklist was developed that was intended to assist the management committee both when setting up and providing ongoing oversight of collaborative working groups. An implementation plan to embed the plan across the Department was co-designed with CES and others. The plan for embedding the change had three strands: picturing the change, implementing the change, and embedding the change. Specific tasks, actions, roles and responsibilities, and timescales were set out.



As part of the *Reform of Youth Funding Schemes* project, a performance and oversight framework was developed. The framework consists of five elements: a logic model; a before and after questionnaire; a focus group; a financial reporting template; and a progress and review meeting. For each element, the framework outlines:

- a) An overview of the tool, its use and its role
- b) Instructions to support practitioners in using the tool
- c) Instructions for gathering and collating the information regarding who is expected to do what and where the information goes.

This framework was seen as very positive and useful in terms of future monitoring of the revised youth funding scheme within the Department of Children and Youth Affairs. It was trialled with 23 sample youth projects across the country. There were some outstanding issues concerning the measurement/evaluation of impacts, and the use of the logic model, however these are challenges across human services and not just for this project.

One set of documents produced during the Goal programme received particularly widespread interest and was published for general use. These documents are *15 days: A practical guide to leading accelerated, high impact collaboration in the Irish Civil Service*² and *15 Days: The Toolkit*³. These were outputs from the *Youth Mental Health and Wellbeing Pathfinder* project. These documents provide a 'how to' case study and guide for public servants in departments and agencies who are trying to work across boundaries to develop and implement policies on 'wicked issues'.

² <https://effectiveservices.org/resources/15-days-a-story-about-collaborative-problem-solving-in-public-services>

³ <https://effectiveservices.org/resources/15-days-the-toolkit>

Exchanging and embedding new ideas and practices

In Northern Ireland, the *Leadership Development Programme* for senior civil servants played an important role in driving and embedding the culture change needed to embed reform. Participants across the programme noted much greater collaboration and a changed leadership culture, which according to those involved would be sustainable:

“The programme has helped create an expectation of a different type of leader. People are grasping that and are seeing the benefit of it... the project has helped change the leadership context.”

(Leadership Development Programme participant)

A noted benefit of the programme was the increasing emphasis on collaboration across departments at senior level in the civil service. This was noted as a weakness beforehand. Participants referred to a greater sense of collective responsibility for the future development of the Northern Ireland Civil Service and commented on the importance of demonstrating a visible leadership role. This collaborative focus is being further developed through a Top Leaders Forum, arising from the success of the *Leadership Development Programme*. This forum is a senior management network for Grade 2s and 3s (Permanent Secretaries and Deputy Secretaries) that meets monthly. One senior manager described the forum as illustrative of a change in culture at senior levels towards more engagement, collaboration and networking.

Also in Northern Ireland, a senior civil servant involved with the *Embedding Innovation* project noted the Department of Finance's hope that through the Innovation Lab, new ideas and ways of addressing policy problems can be embedded in the public sector:

“I hope [there] will be [a] bigger legacy from us for the system, or at least parts of the system, and it will start in train a series of other things to help grapple with the problem of how do you kill off old antiquated stuff, and allow the new stuff to breathe.”

Goal Learning Days

CES ran two learning days for Goal project participants, in September 2017 and October 2018, both in Newry. The purpose was to provide an opportunity for Goal project leaders and other key people to come together to share their work and learning.

Feedback from participants was very positive. People were interested to hear about the projects that they were not involved with and highlighted the value of the cross-border element of this learning. Hearing about the common issues and lessons learned across projects was found to be particularly helpful by the attendees:

“No matter what you say when you send me stuff, actually hearing people talk about their experiences is invaluable. I thought the learning event was really good... You actually see the tangible benefits of the projects, people present and [show] how it's making a difference, it really brought [to life] all the projects, till that point I'd only seen on paper. And there were a lot of connections that we hadn't really thought until we got to hear what was going on.”

“At Newry I was struck by the degree of emergent knowledge, the energy around the initiatives and the challenges and benefits of collaboration within and between government departments.”

Learning about other projects and being able to identify people to follow up with later were benefits commonly highlighted. Being able to meet with other project participants, in the words of one project lead, enabled them to “join the dots”. It was also seen as a useful opportunity to reflect on the challenges and opportunities posed by reform efforts more widely.

Conclusion

Two key elements of a successful learning organisation are that they learn from experience and have an ability to transfer knowledge⁴. In terms of embedding change and sustaining new ways of working, it is important that learning is not seen as an activity that lies in a particular ‘province’ such as the training division, separate from the mainstream activity of the organisation. Instead, work activities such as the Goal programme projects should be viewed as learning opportunities, where successes and failures are recorded and reviewed, and lessons learned from the experience.

A key objective of the Goal programme was to embed organisational and cross-organisational learning to sustain the new ways of working fostered through the projects. This required the development of evidence-based tools, outputs and other resources (learning from experience); the dissemination and use of that information; and the creation of structured learning opportunities such as the Goal programme learning days (transfer of knowledge). Such activities and opportunities have been proven to assist in anchoring and sustaining change within and across organisations.

⁴ Garvin, D.A. (1993), Building a learning organisation, Harvard Business Review, July-August.

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