

GROWING THE NEW WAVE

How we can grow and develop our social sector *A white paper from The Optimistic Cynic*

1. End Fragmentation

We need genuine collaboration towards shared goals.

- Organisational interests need to take a back seat in our drive to achieve these goals.
- We need to look for partners outside of our specific sector to broaden our skills and resource base
- Collaborate bravely to break down barriers and change systems

We need to stop fighting over funding

- Accept that there will only ever be discrete levels of funding available to our NFP sector. Duplicating our services and resources simply dilutes that amount.
- We need to recognise the place of business (both 'social enterprise' and 'for profit') in supporting shared goals. This relies on meaningful partnerships, not simply expecting donations.
- Working with other organisations allows services to be delivered with economy of scale.

Scalability and Infrastructure

- There is a place for mergers and joint ventures. We need to look past our own brands and 'local solutions' if we wish to make significant differences beyond our own backyards.
- Local service solutions are also a valid option but we need to identify opportunities to share or leverage infrastructure. Duplicated infrastructure dilutes funding and diverts our focus from achieving our shared goals.

2. Listen, engage and disrupt

Forget just listening to those similar to ourselves

- Get out and about, listen to those who we look to support, and those doing the work. We don't learn the real issues and solutions if we restrict ourselves to hearing what managers, policy makers and politicians have to say.
- Experts can tell you what they think is happening. Those on the ground can tell you what it's actually like.

Group think holds us back

- When a sector has consensus about the issues and the way forward, it's likely that they have limited their conversations to between themselves.
- We must be brave enough to argue and challenge existing consensus. We need outliers, people who are heading in different directions. At the very least, this will test whether the majority are on the right path.

Challenge ourselves

- We need to disrupt our thinking and to this we must challenge and argue. Ask the questions and don't be afraid of the answers.
- We need people to point out where we are wrong so that we can improve. We also need to provide that opportunity to others

3. Balance our priorities

Strategic Focus

- We need to have clear long term goals with a planned strategy for how we will get there. Our vision should be bold and challenging, a story to bind us to a united future.

Responsive and flexible

- We need to balance this long term strategy with the ability to be flexible to meet urgent and changing immediate need. Organisational bureaucracy cannot prevent us reacting quickly when need dictates.
- We need to accept that our environment will continually change quickly and in ways that we will not expect. Embrace this challenge.

4. It's all about the impact

Charity restricts us

- The term "charity" is tarred with connotations of benevolent benefactors bestowing their grace and knowledge upon others, saving them from their burdens. This is not the story we want to tell and is a barrier to achieving buy-in from those we wish to support and those who wish to support us.
- Reliance on social service funding restricts our innovation and flexibility. Our organisations become focussed on processes and risk minimisation, not risk taking and achieving our true objectives.
- Doing good should never be assumed to be the sole realm of those with charity recorded in their constitution.

Focus on impact

- We need to be brave enough to rip up our rule books. Organisations develop rules and systems that they operate by. Further rules and requirements are implemented to meet the needs of funders. This stifles innovation and risk taking.
- Transparency is vital to ensure investment is impact not organisationally focussed.
- Celebrate successful impact more than simply rewarding effort.
- Maximum impact comes from addressing the root cause of an issue.

Make use of great resources

- Invest in good infrastructure that supports you to develop significant impact. It's about efficiency not blindly following the tradition of charities "making do" or buying cheap.
- Reward those that make a difference. Staff, management and boards should be made up of people with the best possible skills and the passion to make a difference. Remuneration should reflect a high performance culture. Recruit for impact not 'cheapness'.

5. It's up to you

- Never forget the why – why you are doing this!
- Talk with passion and inspire others
- Be brave enough to take risks
- Stand up for what you believe in
- Your actions should prove your words
- Let your values guide all you do
- Celebrate your successes