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Scottish Evidence Summit 2018, Part One

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Introduction

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Transcript

Introduction

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I'm just going to sort of touch on some of the learning, I have absolutely relied on researchers. Both the Blue Sky thinkers and the others who have done the research and problem solving.

See when you try to do anything new you need a firm platform off which to jump because you're going to try and do some really unusual things, some difficult things, you're going to try and change processes and working patterns and I needed good research to really make that a platform from which I could start to make some change so, I mean I always use this and it came back to … I was really fortunate to meet some people with really big brains like Harry Burns and Phil Hanlon from the University of Glasgow and some other researchers in Scotland.

I think sometimes we underestimate just how great some of the thinkers that we have in Scotland there are and Thomas Homer-Dixon wrote this and it's always stuck with me because I remember when we were first doing violence and I'd went to see somebody, and as I said to you, you know, I wanted to do violence reduction. Somebody had said, "It's too big, don't bother." It's so complex, so complicated, the way that we're set up just now, we almost felt institutionally unable to try and tackle something new.

You know, we felt that it was … we didn't know where to start and I know that I'm taking this, so I feel a bit, I feel I shouldn't really say this, but he wrote this about 2009. So, you know, see the stuff that's down in London just now, I have lost count of the phone calls that I've had over the last 2 weeks about "can you just come down here and can you tell us about London?" And what I want to say to them is you know, it's "what should we do?" What we want to do is jail young people more, we'll give them longer sentences … cos that'll work. I'm sure America's tried that, and if that worked, America would have no crime. And actually, what I want to say to them "go and have a read" … the research is out there about what works, but can I tell you, it's your ability to deliver it that's the challenge".

The gap between here, knowing what to do and the research and the ability to deliver is what's called The Ingenuity Gap, and that fundamentally is our challenge … and that's for us as leaders and for people at all levels of the organisation to just think "what else could this look like?" To go back and read, to understand the evidence, and then to put it into practice.

And I think Sheila has been trying to organise for me to speak to the BBC on Thursday, and that's exactly what I'll be saying. The evidence is there … it's whether you're brave enough to actually try and do something about it.

And I think we were lucky when we started because we were pretty much idiots, we wanted to do something about violence, we didn't want to look at it from a criminal justice perspective and I had a bit of a health background so I knew that there was different models to use. And it's probably the best thing I ever did, you know these things that it's more by luck, than good judgement – because when we were starting violence reduction, we kept it simple stupid. We first off wanted to look at surveillance and data collection … and I know this isn't about data and we knew that there was a model about identifying risk and protective factors, and you all know that and research why it occurs, develop and evaluate interventions, and find out what works. And we didn't know a great deal about that but there was research out there and we commissioned research to be able to try and fill

those gaps for us and then it was this bit which was all about leadership …
implement and scale it up.

And I suppose we learnt quite a lot through that in terms of how to bring on
research, because people were really keen on the data bit. If I had more
conversations about "ah, but Karen, we only know 30% about the violence
that's out there." And "you know, why is it people carry knives?" And you
know the answer was, "I don't know it all, but I know enough to be getting on
with." I had a firm enough platform from the researchers that were out there
to start to do things that were slightly differently.

And even now I sort of thank some of the researchers that were with us from
St. Andrew's and Glasgow University and other places who understood the
messiness of what we had to look at, understood the fact that we were
dealing with human behaviour and sometimes you couldn't always measure
it precisely. It wasn't like a clinical trial or a randomised control trial, it was
really difficult, and you had to fix whilst it was moving … and that's a real
challenge.

And there was a bit of action research – and I suppose we were lucky enough
to come into contact with World Health Organisation because we had a
whole body of research that was out there. They gave us a framework, they
gave us something big to do … now lots of it was very culturally specific,
there was stuff that was trialled in East Africa and West Africa and in the
States but they had almost done these massive Campbell collaborations
around what they thought worked and this is what they come out with at a
big strategic level – and actually that was quite simple and then we were
lucky enough to have … and I see Ewan at the back there … then we had
people like Scottish Government who refined it down for us and actually told
us what worked.

And see in truth, I didn't need any more than that it was quite easy to start to
think about how we could start to trial things, to involve researchers at the
very beginning, to then commit to stuff long term and lots of it, and see if we
could actually change what Scotland looked like. And I've always been

eternally thankful because they made us look good. We didn't really have the sort of where with all to commission lots of research and to be honest we just needed to get on and do it, and we needed to tailor it as we went along and so we were really lucky – but I suppose the challenge isn't … interestingly, I would just say, having now done this – see what doesn't work, we actually do quite a lot of that in Scotland. I hate to say it … just because we look at research and we think "look at all this evidence base" – and even the stuff in the middle we're trying to work out, you know and I think there's lots of stuff in there, the middle bit, that does work but we need more evidence but see that what doesn't work, even though we know it doesn't work, we still do it, we still fund it and can I tell you the brave thing for us going forward is not to think about what … about decommissioning the stuff that doesn't work because we're not doing the people that we serve, I don't think, any great favours and we haven't got any money so we have to talk about not commissioning but decommissioning.

But I suppose the bit for me is sometimes the point of failure is when they start to apply it to the groups that we do and now it's great taking research and I read these fantastic papers about how you should do stuff and then tried to apply it to a really complex group of people and you know and I want us to talk about they're increasing as well cos they were quite a complex group of people and I suppose the realisation for me that we actually need to involve those who are most affected by our decision maker and by lots of the things that we're trying to implement because for us, that's where we're going to make a difference.

People matter, you can do great research projects, you can tell us how to do and I've just been flicking through some of the stuff but see at the end of the day people really matter but there's a cultural context to this, there are ways that people like to be dealt with and it's that old 5WH thing that McGuire wrote about, about who, what, why, where, when and how. And actually, to work out how we make things work, we needed to employ people with lived experience because they were perhaps the biggest change that we had in doing some of the violence reduction work.

Sorry, I'm making this a bit dry, I should have tried to put some more examples in.

And I was quite struck by something you said at the very beginning about innovation, it's really interesting here, I was looking around the blocks here about the enlightenment in Scotland and about how great inventors Scotland were and about the innovations that really took over the world. My experience hasn't been about innovation and research like that and I was … Vicky (… unclear) who writes for Business Insider had done this – and it was about how innovation takes place and what she says is, "what you get is Yay, shiny thing" … so, the early adopters and the innovators. And then what she says is "you get a chasm" … so you you try out something new and you find it works … so this is what researchers are doing. And then you get a chasm – and then you get, maybe actually they think you get an early majority who take it on and you get a lay majority (… unclear) – and that's how they think that innovation works.

And frankly, that's not been my experience. This has been my experience. You get the innovators and the early adopters and then what you get is a chasm. So, you prove something … I can see people nodding around the room who've all tried to do innovation and try and implement research, you prove that it works and then nothing … and then you just wait, and you think everybody else is going to take it on, and nothing happens. And actually, what I've found is the key to it is leadership. If you can work with the chief exec's and you can work with the management and sell it to them and look at their leadership skills and try to scale things up – then that is fundamentally the key. Because I mean if we've tried stuff in Scotland, you would think that London would be looking at us and think "well they've tried that there, that would work." And I know that they tried stuff for like 2 months and then thought, once they got the headlines and newspaper headlines and say "yes we're doing this." And they didn't go any further and didn't really commit to anything long term.

So, there are real challenges in how we use research, how we use it to change people's behaviour, how we change people's outcomes, and I don't think we should be patting ourselves on the back because we're a bit like that as well. We like new shiny things, we have a thousand pilots that never fail. We like to invest in them, but we don't try always invest in things that work and I suppose that for me it's that old T S Eliot quote, the idea of the reality of the shadow. And can I tell you lots us are in the shadows, you know and sometimes it's that it's too hard, it's too difficult, it'll take a bit extra money and it's a really complex bit. And I think that's the bit I would speak about in terms of having been a leader of a different organisation and perhaps doing that now is that there's lots of people that think "you know that I quite like the status quo, Machiavellian once wrote that reformers always have challenges because people like doing things just the way they are just now so they don't like taking on new things.

And when I was looking at some of the research and I came across this quote by Louis Pasteur last night who said, which is quite nice, "Nothing can give more happiness than increase the number of discoveries, but his cup is of joyous full when the results of his study immediately find practical implications." And that is absolutely … for the research that has come through my door, saying that I would quite like to look at the phases of the moon and why violence goes up now that actually is of heehaw use to me frankly cos I can't stop the phases of the moon. But to actually find a practical application that you could put into place and actually change people's lives is probably the nirvana for me and I was looking at some of the phases of research and wonder why it failed.

So, you've got your discovery in research and actually translation into dissemination had changed and actually think where I think it fails is translation into dissemination, I don't know how many have read papers recently where you sort of read the abstract then start to read the introduction, the methodology etc. and get lost and I was reading some

papers that I've written last night and realised that actually I'd fallen into the exactly the same trick.

I had written it for peer reviewers so I'd used all the language that peer reviewers like and tried to make it in a scientific language that completely alienated people from trying to put it into action and then wondered why nobody really picks it up and how you disseminate it. I mean we're working with Glasgow University just now trying to think about how you would do some of these lovely pictures, how you would start to use infographics to almost illustrate some of the research findings that people have had so we make it much easier for people who are practitioners out there to pick it up and run with it and then we would change.

In a way health's quite easy, my sister's a geneticist, so she does all the gene sequencing, etc. and it's very hard and fast. Some of the social work and some of the social science work that you're doing just now and social services work, you don't have control of all the variables, theirs is no definitive way of going forward and sometimes it's messy, its unreconstructed and sometimes it's quite difficult to replicate. But for me, in terms of I suppose the lessons I've learned, how do you do it?

Risk mitigation, empathy, you need a deep connection with the people you're trying to serve. They're not subjects, they're not variables, you need to have some understanding and when you're doing the problem solving particularly in some of the social work areas which is just so complex, empathy is critical. You need to prototype, you need to fix this whilst it's moving. That always really upsets some of the researchers that I'm working with because you're always having to change it, there's no defined methodology, sometimes you have to just keep changing and having meetings every week saying, " Is it working, is it not?" and then going forward and openness and transparency for a quick understanding, I slightly love failure analysis, I quite like looking why things haven't worked.

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