Learning update:

Total Place : An emerging approach

As the first phase of Total Place comes to an end, people involved in the process seem to be asking themselves three key questions:

1. What have we learned from our work together over the last nine months?

2. How can we articulate what we have learned to assist colleagues across the public sector in their own collaborative work?

3. What could we do next to build on what Total Place has taught us?

Each of the three guest articles in this update addresses one of these questions. John Atkinson, managing director of the Leadership Centre looks at the changes he has seen over the last nine months through lenses of 'Information, Identity and Relationships'. Mike Attwood, programme director at Coventry, Solihull and Warwickshire shares what he learned through a piece of change practice built around the Lean approach. And Irene Lucas, Director General, Local Government and Regeneration at Communities and Local Government offers some thoughts on the thorny questions surrounding the future for Total Place. None of the contributors claim to hold the final answer to any of the questions, but offer a personal window into their current thinking on 'this thing called Total Place'.

To start us off, our editorial examines the at times confusing and conflicting conversations happening about the future of Total Place and offers some thoughts on why this diversity of view might not be such a bad thing.

Total Place

An emerging approach...
By Karen Ellis, Leadership Centre Advisor

One of the interesting – and highly frustrating for some – aspects of Total Place so far is that it didn't come with a defined approach: no pre-determined outcomes or pre-designed processes, no tool-kit, no methods. It began instead with a set of minimal guiding ideas:

- Consider the three 'C's - customers, counting and culture.
- Design an approach to deliver both better public service and less cost to the tax payer.
- Choose a theme that is locally meaningful and nationally significant.
- Build in collaboration from day one – between local agencies; between public servants and citizens; and between local and national players.

Places who accepted the challenge of becoming a pilot were then asked to use their own discretion, to define not just the 'what' of their work (their chosen themes) but also the 'how'. Advice and support on the theory and practice of collaborative change was made available – from programme advisers, pre-pilots, colleagues from the LGA family – but each place developed its own approach, character and emphasis as the work went along.

Some places focussed strongly on governance and structures, others on redefining organisational processes. Some spent considerable time building a leadership collaborative among senior figures in their place, others gave most of their attention to work directly with customers. No one place did everything – no one place could have in the time available.

So, now that we have come to a pause in the process, it is a good opportunity to reflect clearly and carefully about our own answers to the three important questions:

What have we learned from our work together ?

How can share what we have learned ?

What could we do next, locally and nationally ?

What have we learned ?

If you ask any individual participant in Total Place what they have learned, you'll get a set of highly individual replies. Some people say that it's all been about relationships, taking in new perspectives, breaking down preconceptions of 'that tribe over there'. Others will say they have learned a whole set of new tools : for mapping systems, handling data, running workshops. A third group will describe some new theoretical model that has helped them make sense of the complex world out there. Still others will take the more sceptical view that they haven't learned anything new really - it's just confirmed their previous views of what matters.

Of course, none of this adds up to what some of us most need - an elegant articulation of an overall approach that can now be 'rolled out' nationwide across more or less willing Places. At this stage, it's important for us all to remember that this sort of emergent, 'messy' learning is at the core of all sustainable change – and that if we attempt to move too swiftly to define a 'totalising solution', we will miss much of the elegance and richness of the change.

How can we share what we have learned ?

It is deeply difficult for anyone to step back from their experience to give a full description of what they have learned during a change process like Total Place. Our tacit understanding always runs ahead of our ability to describe it explicitly so that others can understand it. However, this is not an excuse for a self-indulgent, 'you had to be there' attitude to what has been learned.

All of us that have been involved in the pilots (and indeed in the pre-pilots and parallel places) can point to significant personal, professional and organisational learning. The degree to which we choose to share those with others is, of course, a matter of personal choice and ethics, and, not unimportantly, whether you can find the breathing space to attend conferences, write articles, give interviews etc.

Happily the Leadership Centre is finding that many of you do want to share your learning for the benefit of colleagues outside the immediate programme system and we are trying to find outlets for sharing your learning with others (see our box at the end of this update).

What could we do next ?

Right now, as is often the case with a successful 'brand launch', there are lots of people offering their own answers to 'where next ?' – senior officials in national Government; politicians, both local and national; agency leaders; management consultants – in short, anyone who has had anything to do with the process so far (and some who haven't)! And this is a healthy thing, albeit rather confusing and frustrating at times.

Some us want to define and describe new processes for governing : new financial flows, inspection and performance processes. Others want to focus on democratic and managerial accountability and governance believing that changes in that domain will be the difference that makes the difference. Still others want to form a whole new social contract with citizens, maximising ideas of co-production and citizen accounting. Of course, no one of these areas can form more than part of any answer going forward.

The multiplicity of conflicting 'solutions', next steps, core learning etc being sometimes heatedly discussed shows the vibrancy and possibility of a potentially (r)evolutionary set of ideas for public service in the 21st century.

Identity, Information and Relationships
By John Atkinson, Managing Director, Leadership Centre

Much has been made of Total Place as a 'Whole Systems' intervention. Working with whole systems is now increasingly listed in government literature as being a key requirement of effective leadership in addressing the issues we face today. The term however, is exceptionally vague. Some people can list over forty different philosophies that might constitute a whole systems approach. Total Place has tried to remain pragmatic in the face of all of this and has plotted a course through the work that is mindful of the theory but rooted in everyday experience.

Myron Rogers has worked with whole systems for decades and has worked with repeated cohorts of the Leeds Castle programme. He suggests a way of looking at the work we do, that looks like this (Figure1).

In many arenas in Public Service, our time is primarily spent in the first three circles. We focus our activity on the structures necessary to get our work done, the policies

So given that I have described Total Place as trying to remain pragmatic, it might be worth looking at what this has practically meant in my work over the last months.

Taking first the issue of identity, I have interpreted this as determining who we mean when we say 'we' and what it is that 'we' are trying to do. In putting together different groupings of people to address the themes of Total Place we have made new connections between Whitehall and

> " Through Total Place, people have made new relationships and strengthened old ones "

Places, across different areas of local geography and between the state and citizens. This focus on a different 'we' - that citizens and their stories inform what we do, that policy is designed collaboratively between

Figure 1: Myron Rogers
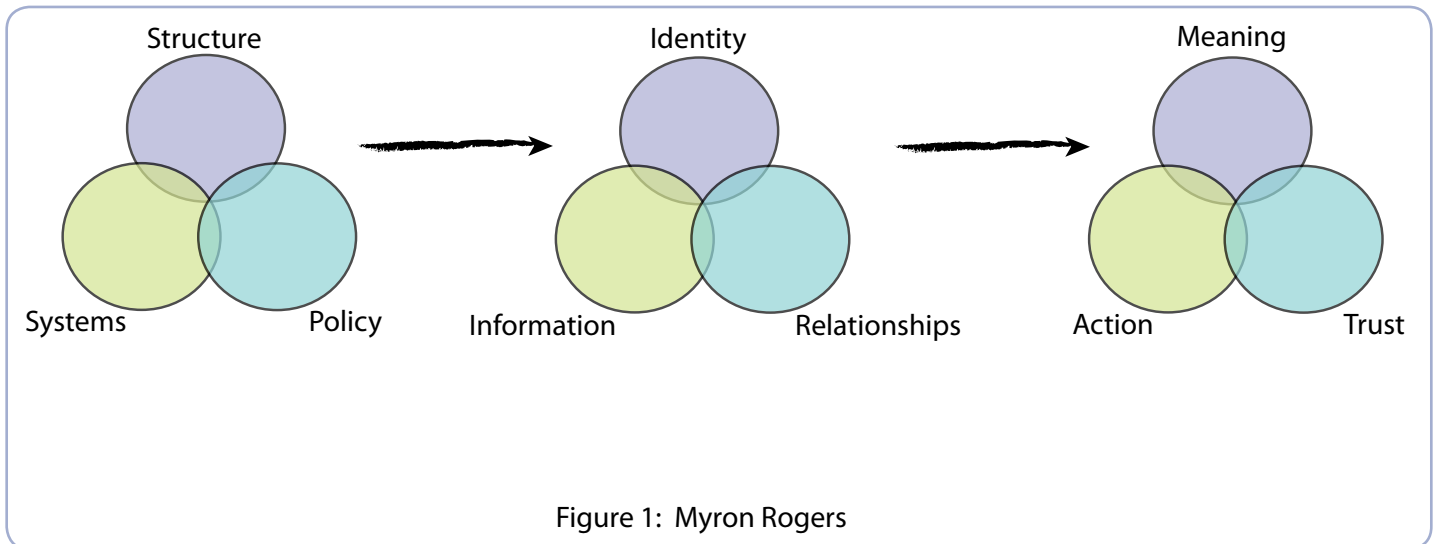
that we wish to pursue and the systems or mechanisms by which we do this. These are not bad things to be done with our time. Yet they fail to significantly address the important dynamic at play. Our work takes place with people, human beings, with all their capacity for creativity, their prejudices and beliefs and the emotional responses they bring to each other and their work together. Trying to treat them as parts of a delivery mechanism, some giant machine controlled by levers of power, self-evidently doesn't work.

Instead, Myron suggests we should spend our leadership attention on identity, information and relationships. He suggests that by doing this we create an environment that builds the necessary trust (see Helen Bailey's comments in update 3), which in turn ensures we address the appropriate rather than historical actions and that together this will make work in the public service altogether more meaningful for all those involved be they providers or users of a service.

departments and agencies - creates a new identity and allows us new possibilities. The variety of different meetings, workshops and forums and the growth of the CoP and other 'e'-processes have all helped to build a sense of identity around the work of Total Place and what it might mean.

At the same time, getting new information into our discussion has been critical. The most important source of this has been the citizen. Raising the profile of people's stories of engaging with the state has meant that different perspectives have emerged. Put alongside this, the wealth of data from the deep dives about how we really provide services and the cost of this (as indicated from the Total Counts) and the conversations we have about what we could do and ought to do become different.

'Identity, Information and relationships' continued...

This leads to a different set of relationships. Through Total Place people have made new relationships and strengthened old ones. The quality and quantity of relationships that we have directly impacts on our ability to get things done. One senior civil servant describes me as judiciously using the car-park, train station, late-night mobile phone call to cajole, dragoon, seduce or otherwise persuade an accountable individual to do something useful for the betterment of Total Place. I have long held that despite our use of formal communications techniques with their media strategies and communications plans, it is the informal means that build relationships and serve to get things decided and done. There has been no substitute in Total Place for racking up the travel miles and the mobile bill.

So one element of Total Place is the requirement to move away from the comfort of policy, structures and systems and into a vaguer but more purposeful world that asks more difficult questions.

• Who are the people that we really need together to solve the problems we face?

• What do we collectively know that we can use to move us forward?

• How can we forge new and stronger connections with the people we need to in order to deliver altogether better services in a time of tough financial constraint?

If Total Place has increased our willingness to consider those difficult questions, it has been time well spent.

Leaning towards change

Ben Alcraft interviews Mike Attwood, Programme Director of Total Place, Coventry, Warwickshire and Solihull

The following article was prepared from a short interview with Mike Attwood, Programme Director of Total Place in Coventry, Warwickshire and Solihull.

In the grand tradition of storytelling, Mike tells us about one of the many practical projects spawned by the Total Place programme.

As part of their focus on improving the outcome and experience of children and carers in relation to education, one of the challenges his 'Place' faced, was recruiting and retaining teachers more efficiently, providing a better service at lower cost across the three authorities of Coventry, Warwickshire and Solihull.

The aim of this particular project during the Total Place programme was to apply a Lean methodology, improving the recruitment process for school-based staff by engaging them in re-designing and streamlining the work across schools and local authorities.

The process was started in Solihull, with Coventry and Warwickshire engaged as learning partners, or as Mike called them, 'thinking partners'. Using Solihull as a model, they continue to roll the work out across the sub region and they're now exploring the opportunity for a wider sub-regional shared human resources service.

The traditional approach to the problem would have been for HR professionals to conduct a table top review (on their own) of how inefficient the service was and come up

with a cheaper service that was very remote and impersonal for the people that actually used it. Instead, working under a more collaborative 'Total Place' approach, the team brought together service users across schools, frontline HR staff and senior HR leaders using a LEAN approach to process improvement.

This approach has enabled them to put the voices of service users and frontline staff back in the middle of the process and look at the experience of the customer in a very human way. By getting the school secretary, who deals with the day-to-day recruitment of teachers in a room with the HR team, they engineered a situation where the innovation and practical understanding of frontline staff was in the same physical space as those with the power to give strategic permission for change.

Recognising the intrinsic value of the frontline staff that is working in the service on a day-to-day basis has been an important part of this process. They inevitably have the practical skills and experience to understand what gets in the way and by equipping them with the tools and knowhow to help lead the process of change, whether it's better LEAN technology support or greater customer insight, they are an increasingly valuable resource.

Another powerful realisation during this project is the amount of energy frontline staff put into working around existing processes.

'Leaning towards change' continued...

If this project succeeds in harnessing that energy into re-designing the service and getting it right the first time, then they will have started to build better, vital and lasting relationships between frontline staff and strategic management. Moreover, they will start to convert that negative 'work around' energy into a positive energy for change and enable frontline receivers and frontline deliverers of a service to jointly hold up a mirror and work together on making that service better.

In Mike's view, this particular project brings together the counting process and the culture process very effectively, combining an analysis of the efficiency of existing processes with a look at the style of service the customer actually requires. The project has created an excellent 'proof of concept' model that can be drawn upon further down the line. For example, if schools feel confident they have a more efficient, personalised teacher recruitment service then they may be willing to apply it to other areas in the future; such as grounds maintenance, catering or telephone services.

So what's been the benefit of working across three very different Places as part of Total Place?

They've been able to work across multiple authorities and agencies on a support and challenge basis. The first local authority to go through the process wasn't just working in its own micro-system and they were therefore less likely to be parochial and introverted about the possible solutions.

By working together and recognising the need for change; Coventry, Solihull and Warwickshire are doing just that.

The box that follows contains a brief summary of Lean...

Lean Goals:

The four goals of Lean systems are to:

1) Improve quality: To stay competitive in today's environment an organisation must understand its customers' wants and needs and design processes to meet their expectations and requirements.

2) Eliminate waste: Waste is any activity that consumes time, resources, or space but does not add any value to the product or service. There are seven types of waste:

- Transport (unnecessary movement of materials)
- Inventory (excess inventory not directly required for current orders)
- Motion (extra steps taken by employees because of inefficient layout)
- Waiting (periods of inactivity)
- Overproduction (occurs when production should have stopped)
- Over Processing (rework and reprocessing)
- Defects (do not conform to specifications or expectations)

3) Reduce time: Reducing the time it takes to finish an activity from start to finish is one of the most effective ways to eliminate waste and lower costs.

4) Reduce total costs: To minimize cost, an organisation must produce only to customer demand. Overproduction increases inventory costs because of storage needs.

This process was specifically designed around manufacturing production systems (Toyota) but It's increasingly applied to service organisations.

Collaboration and Total Place

Ben Alcraft interviews Irene Lucas, Director General,
Local government and regeneration, Communities and Local Government

The following article was prepared from a short interview with Irene Lucas, Director General, Local government and regeneration, Communities and Local Government.

We asked Irene to think about the question:

At this stage in the programme, what do the Total Place pilots and Whitehall need to continue working on together.

This was her reply:

The initial pilot stage of Total Place will come to a natural conclusion with a meeting of the High Level Officials Group, followed by a briefing into the ministerial group. At that point, we in Whitehall, alongside colleagues who have been involved in the pilots, and the parallel places, need to think through what this might look like in terms of an adoptable model.

There are, inevitably, different levels of buy-in across Whitehall departments. Some are very enthusiastic and can see the benefit in terms of better outcomes for individuals and communities, de-duplication of cost and simplification of process for colleagues and the citizen journey. Others will require more encouragement to embrace Total Place principles. Individual Director Generals across Whitehall have been enthusiastic champions. All understand the need to work differently in a very economic climate.

Irene's position is that for Total Place to succeed, it needs to be collaborative, it needs to be inclusive and it needs to involve the whole system in a debate around what she calls, 'the art of the possible'.

'It's absolutely essential that Whitehall departments and local leaders of public services are at the heart of thinking this problem through the right approach. It has to be led across-sector; not by one part of the system promoting it as the panacea'.

Many of the Total Place pilots' findings demonstrate that - even with the constraints detailed in their interim reports - a willingness to "just do it" and strong local leadership (as opposed to central diktat) allowed many places and agencies working within them to step up to the mark and find innovative solutions within those constraints.

The in-depth descriptions of those constraints have been listened to very carefully by Whitehall Departments; and proposed solutions to many of them (though not all) have been embedded in Smarter Government. Those solutions will be pursued with a view to reducing the burdens upon local government and other agencies to enable them to empower people in agencies who serve local communities to work better together.

Some of the constraints identified by Total Place pilots are:

- The performance frameworks
- The inspection frameworks
- The way in which grants are issued with really quite strong ring-fencing conditionality placed upon the way in which they are spent
- The way in which perhaps policy and strategy is developed centrally without consideration for the whole system (i.e. Could we change the degree to which local places have ownership of policy and strategy if it were co-created and co-produced?) in a whole system model of collaboration
- Locally imposed barriers

We all want to reduce the cost of the agencies in a locality, and if the message coming through is that reducing the high degree of performance framework, inspection and ring fencing is one way to do it, then it could have wide spread buy-in within the next government, across all of the parties.

Local authorities are empowered by the "Wellbeing Power" to do whatever it takes to deliver social, economic or environmental well-being for their communities and many Total Place pilots have used that power to do some really innovative, leading edge thinking, without asking permission from 'The Centre'.

In all of the pilots that Irene's had the privilege of seeing firsthand, there's been a high degree of innovation, creativity and boundary pushing, without the use of any special powers or change. If we want to take this further, we need to make sure that we put in place the proper processes, or (arguably) reduce the processes and agree a new paradigm.

But there is still a degree of prescription about the way in which services are delivered (and the silos in which they're delivered) – so to change that would require new statutory powers or changes in regulatory frameworks.

Nevertheless, some of it does come down to a willingness to work in new ways. You can, within the existing powers, go a great deal further than many

authorities and agencies have. For Irene, people in those places with the will to work more collaboratively will find a way of moving the agenda forward, talking to 'The Centre' (where it's appropriate to do so) to agree how to remove the statutory or regulatory barriers for that to continue, or suggest changes to policy.

But there's no doubt it can require unpicking and there are some thorny issues such as governance, accountability and responsibility, which need careful consideration, not quick fixes. Any trust that's brokered during this process will be quickly damaged if these issues haven't been thought through well enough and something goes wrong.

The questions we need to address now are:

- To what extent can a 'Total Place way of working' be shared effectively across the country, over what time frame.
- What might the methodology around the next iteration of Total Place look like.

These are not easy issues to resolve but it's imperative that we get people from across the whole system, focusing their minds on how we might do this better…because none of us is as clever as all of us.

That's it (for now) and good luck...
By Karen Ellis, Leadership Centre Advisor

This is our last Learning Update for this phase of the Total Place initiative. To gather together our collective learning at this point, the Leadership Centre have commissioned two pieces of work involving Total Place colleagues from Places and Whitehall. These are :

1. A Learning History narrative, telling the diverse personal and systemic stories of the participants in Total Place (to be published in May).

2. A 'Total Place Users Guide' (title TBC), offering a set of practice, theories and ideas about human system dynamics that have been useful to programme advisers and leads throughout the duration of the work (to be published in March).

Four cornered approach

Karen Ellis, 2010

Taken together with the place reports and the final summary report (documents that will describe the 'what' of Total Place), these two pieces of work will attempt to help those outside the immediate pilot system to not only understand what happened but also what it felt like. They will, as far as possible, give warts-and-all accounts of what did and didn't work. These will be human accounts that include descriptions of interpersonal behaviours, group dynamics, highs and lows; not just a sanitised version of how it should have been in a perfect world, with perfect players who make no mistakes.

We hope that these pieces will be of use to anyone who wasn't with us from the beginning of the Total Place journey and meaningful to those who were. We're not trying to come up with all the answers, mainly because we think those answers are still a work in progress but also because we know the answers are inevitably contested – as all radical ideas should be. There's no simple solutions, no toolkit, no formal instruction manual: just a way of moving our learning on, one step at a time.

And finally, for those of you who like to do your learning collectively, the Total Place Summit will take place on May 25-26 in London. The summit will be an opportunity to bring civil servants from across the system together to broaden and deepen the Total Place approach. We will aim to generate a space for creating the next phase of Total Place, post-election and share our experiences and knowledge to date. It will also be an opportunity to share learning from the Total Place Learning History.

Further details will be announced soon...
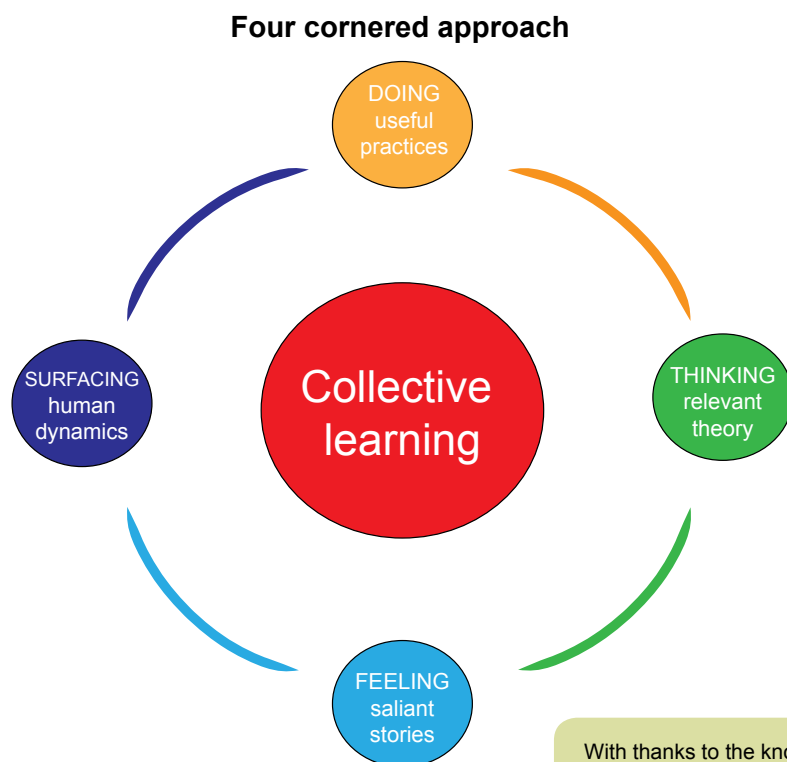
With thanks to the knowledge management team - and a special thanks to Karen Ellis for putting the updates together on our behalf