

Cross-cutting problems – a new take

Cross-cutting is a term that has been around for a long time, in two different specific contexts (apart from the generality of its application to even older ideas, such as cross-cut saws - for cutting across the grain of a piece of wood).

Here we are considering cross-cutting problems in a social context, where the problem in question cannot be tackled by one agency acting alone. Success comes through several agencies collaborating and sharing their resources to achieve a shared goal. This is a relatively recent application of the term. Good examples are the need to reduce alcohol-fuelled violence, knife crime, truancy, teenage pregnancy and, these days, the need to improve the credibility of the political system and the politicians who operate it. Visiting two of those older applications does provide a couple of insights in the nature of cross-cutting social problems, and offers a glimpse of some solutions.

- In the film industry, cross-cutting is an editing technique most often used to establish action occurring at the same time in two different locations.
- In computer science, cross-cutting concerns are aspects of a software program which affect (crosscut) other concerns.

The two key messages:

The former points to the need for simultaneous actions. The latter points to the complexity of the problem, in the sense that multiple concerns are linked, and that solving one is not going to be without its effects on others.

1 Cross-cutting problems are 'wicked'

When we consider these characteristics of cross-cutting problems, and compare them with the research into wicked problems, we rapidly conclude that all cross-cutting problems are, by definition wicked. Here are some insights into the nature of wicked problems.¹

Wicked problems have no simple, linear solutions because they:

- Are either novel or recalcitrant.
- Are complex rather than complicated (cannot be solved in isolation).
- Sit outside single hierarchies and across systems – 'solutions' often create other problems.
- Often have no stopping rule – there is no definition of success.
- May be intransigent problems that we have to learn to live with.
- May be symptoms of deep divisions – there are often contradictory certitudes.
- Have no 'right or wrong solutions' but 'better or worse developments'.

¹ Adapted with permission from the work of Keith Grint of Warwickshire University Business School

- Involve securing collective consent, instead of trying to secure the ‘right’ answer.
- Demand solutions that are feasible not optimal; they need handling rather than solving.
- Contain inevitable uncertainty & ambiguity – cannot be dealt with through ‘correct analysis’ – Keat’s “Negative Capability” applies².
- Are problems for leadership not management; they require political collaboration not scientific processes - the leader’s role is to ask appropriate questions and to develop collaboration.

That last bullet point introduces the concept of the style demanded of people responsible for securing positive outcomes in communities through tackling wicked problems. For comparison, the table includes two other types of problem.

	Command	Management	Leadership
Problem	Critical	Tame	Wicked
Space	Tactical	Operational	Strategic
Time	Short term	Medium term	Long term
Solutions	Assumed and imposed from above or without	Developed through applied experience - based on analysis	Multiple, partial - developed through exploration and emergence
Style	“Just do it - it does not matter what you think”	Déjà vu - “I have seen this problem before; I know what processes will solve it”	Vu jàdé - “I have never seen this problem before; I need to to get a collective view on what to do about this”
Power	Coercive	Calculative	Normative
Uncertainty	Low	Moderate	High
Approach to uncertainty	Provide answers about solutions	Organise processes that will develop solutions	Ask questions about implications and possible, partial solutions
Key actors who design and implement solutions	Commanders and their followers	Process operators and people in related specialisms	Anyone, but especially operational people, operating across functional and organisational boundaries

2 Parallel streams of thought

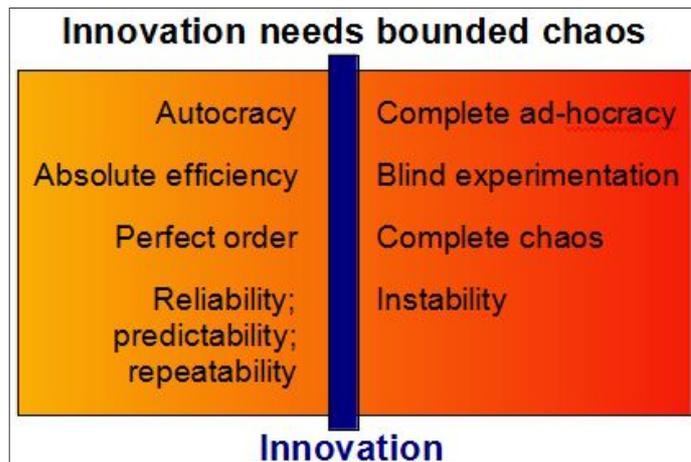
None of this is new. If we look back to 1956, we discover the work of Ludwig von Bertalanffy,

² 'The concept of Negative Capability is the ability to contemplate the world without the desire to try and reconcile contradictory aspects or fit it into closed and rational systems.'

who first articulated open systems theory. An open system is a conceptual entity composed of interrelated and interacting parts existing in an environment with which it continuously interacts. The parts of the system may in turn be systems themselves - the environment may be volatile. Reflecting on that statement suggests that wicked problems occur in open systems.

Innovation has also become a hot topic, for rather longer in the commercial world than the public sector. Businesses have always been driven by the need to innovate in products, in the never-ending effort to find a sustainable competitive advantage. In the current circumstances in which there is a need to improve service quality and delivery at the same time as reducing costs, the public sector faces an increasing need to innovate. The diagram here illustrates one of the challenges facing would-be innovators in both sectors. Innovation happens at the boundary of order and chaos - the zone that has been tagged 'bounded chaos'.

The issue is about the balance between the need for innovation and the need for control. On the face of it, given that all innovations are a leap into the unknown, there is no innovation that does not appear to threaten the stability of the organisation and its structures and processes. In reality, the problem is often over-stated. There are two complementary reasons for this.



On the one hand, all innovations are subject to both formal and informal controls, which limit their potential to cause serious harm. This is especially true as most valuable innovations are going to come from more junior people in the hierarchy, and they have less power to dispose of large, costly resources, and hence less potential to cause harm. The three controls are:

- Natural survival - the desire of most employees to continue to get paid at the end of the month.
- Experiential learning - the immediate feedback that occurs when new ideas are tried in operational arenas.
- 'Corporate council' - the decision-making centre where big resource allocation decisions are made.

On the other hand, the goal of perfect order represented on the left hand side of the diagram is simply not attainable, and, as the desired state does not exist, hence it is hardly at risk from innovative changes to products, services, processes and management practices. There are many reasons why the state of perfect order is unattainable, but perhaps three will suffice here.

- First, at the point where the organisation in question interfaces with the community, legislative bodies, other local agencies, competitors, suppliers and customers, there will be exceptions to expected routines. It is impossible to legislate for all of these. Predictability and repeatability immediately break down.
- The world has become a highly volatile place and shows every indication of becoming more so. In that circumstance, the achievement of perfect order would simply mean that the organisation had become out of touch with its environment. The real-world process of

ongoing adaptation to a changing world means that perfect order is a pipe dream.

- In the real world of organisations, (as distinct from tidy organigrams and process diagrams), real people doing real work come up against many constraints on their ability to perform. These constraints arise through externally imposed conditions and internally designed procedures and practices. None is the result of an act of intentionality, but the constraints exist nevertheless. Good-hearted employees, and especially those service delivery people in direct contact with customers, invest physical, intellectual and emotional energy developing and applying workarounds³ to the constraints. Generally these involve sharing information and resources across functional boundaries, within the organisation and between organisations, to deliver value to customers.

This last point is critically important. These informal networks of people, make and implement political decisions, in their desire to produce good results for the business, They, by definition, operate at the boundary of order and chaos, and, as such, are a vital source of innovation. If they are suppressed in the search for perfect order, often accompanied by reams of highly detailed, prescriptive procedures, the same chaotic-systems behaviour that existed before will still exist - it will simply operate underground and be hidden from view. Instead of trying to control or suppress informal networks, sensible leaders use them to identify the constraints that are operating and get them fixed. This means that energy that was being devoted to workarounds gets transferred to adding positive value - the organisation, its customers and employees.

Reflection on the nature of real-world innovation and informal networks suggests that both are very well adapted to the need to handle wicked problems, and that means cross-cutting problems as well.

A more recent change has been the move towards open innovation. This is the use of shared knowledge and skills, between members of the organisation and members of other organisations, particularly with people in non-related specialisms, to accelerate internal innovation. The assumption is that firms can and should use external ideas as well as internal ideas. This development serves to strengthen the parallels between innovation, open systems and how wicked problems should be tackled.

Finally, there is the idea first suggested by Louis Sullivan, an American architect, in 1896. He coined the expression 'form follows function'⁴, and embedded the thought in the short verse in the sidebar. He also said "It is the pervading law of all things organic and inorganic,"

*Of all things physical and metaphysical,
Of all things human and all things super-
human,
Of all true manifestations of the head,
Of the heart, of the soul,
That the life is recognizable in its expression,
That form ever follows function. This is the
law.*

Before considering the implications of this for cross-cutting problems, a more recent but still old example should serve to demonstrate the principle of form following function that is discussed below.

In 1950, Jean Monnet, a Frenchman, had an idea while rambling through the Swiss Alps. Back at the Commissariat Général du Plan in Paris, he and a small team devised a scheme under which all

³ A workaround is a bypass of a recognised problem in a system. A workaround is typically a temporary fix that implies that a genuine solution to the problem is needed. Frequently workarounds are as creative as true solutions, involving outside the box thinking in their creation.

⁴ 'Form follows function' is a principle associated with modern architecture and industrial design in the 20th century. The principle is that the shape of a building or object should be primarily based upon its intended function or purpose.

French and German steel production, together with the steel resources of any other European countries that cared to join, would be placed under a High Authority, whose decisions would be binding on all. The aim was to deal with a crisis of over-production, foster modernisation and eliminate loss-making mills. In other words, the focus was on the performance of the industry, and the need to tackle its most pressing problems.

The project appeared too modest to live up to Monnet's claim that it would "... form the first solid base for the European Federation essential for the preservation of peace". But so it proved, for its very modesty and focus on operational performance was its source of strength. Various attempts to promote European unity at the highest political levels produced little but verbiage. Monnet's great insight was that dealing with a critical issue of the economy could produce a greater integration from below⁵.

3 'Form' and the question of collaboration

This relates to the current concern with the need for collaboration between local agencies. This concept is beyond dispute, and a cursory examination of the ideas expressed in section 1 above will bear out that position. What is on the table is the question of the best route to achieving the collaboration that is most likely to deliver effective (multiple, partial) solutions to cross-cutting problems, and hence real, positive outcomes for local communities. The implication of the European Coal and Steel Community story is simple but profound. The best place to start is with the problem itself, and for the people directly involved to work with whomever necessary to develop and implement innovative, partial solutions. This will lead automatically to collaboration between local agencies and other organisations.

To illustrate what may happen if the start point is collaboration, three examples are provided:

- One local authority decided it needed a collaboration strategy. Five years on, the strategy is still in development, but nothing has actually started to happen on the ground.
- Another local agency decided that it needed a clear policy on collaboration, to guide the actions of its employees. The next two years were spent in defining the terms to be used in the policy document.
- One set of local agencies has developed good cross-agency structures under the banner of PACT. (Partners and Communities Together). Reading the minutes of one their recent committee meetings, there is much discussion of form, but virtually nothing about actions to improve performance.

In all three cases form has preceded function, and maybe that is why the functionality of what has been produced thus far is so limited. For more detailed examples, it is worth checking the CPA report "Tackling problem drug use" of 24th March 2010, and the Action Plan 2008-2011 entitled "Drugs: protecting families and communities". Form is there in abundance but little function is to be seen.

Another insight into the way that form takes over from function is in the 'outcomes' column of the Action plan 2008-2011. Presumably there is an 'outcomes' column because of the current concern that outcomes should be the focus for management's attention, not inputs or outputs (see the extracts from a DC&LG report below). The snag is that in the Action Plan column for outcomes, there are few to be seen. What is actually there is just another set of woolly aims, more like inputs

⁵ The British Government dismissed the plan as ill thought out and flimsy, and stayed out - but kept on talking about the need for unity. Shades of driving on the left, the metric system and the Euro?

and outputs than outcomes. In fact, there is a total absence of hard numbers in the outcomes column - see the table⁶ for a brief analysis of the action plan. Coming from a government that so admires the use of targets brings to mind the cry of 'physician - heal thyself'!

Actions	Inputs	Outputs	Outcomes	Targets
87	69%	25%	5%	0%
NB One 'outcome' was too woolly to be classified				

None of this is to suggest that the Action Plan does not contain a lot of value - the chances are that much value will flow from it. The point is that following 'form' does not, on its own, produce 'function'. Just labelling what used to be called something else does not convert that 'something' into outcomes.

4 The current state

This opens the door to the question of why wicked problems have become so important at the current time, and why there is so much talk about cross-cutting problems. One interpretation would be that there is a dawning realisation that treating wicked problems as if they are critical or tame has not produced the results that our local communities want and need. It could even be argued that many of today's wicked problems are the result of earlier attempts to solve community problems using command or management approaches.

Another thought that might be considered is that bureaucrats the world over love to write reports, strategies, policies and plans, as they also revel in committees, meetings, and minutes - but are generally less delighted with the thought of getting involved in service delivery - which has the inevitable attachment of accountability. That simply means that in a highly bureaucratic system, form will always be developed before function is considered, and that is a short route to not delivering much by way of ground floor results.

Another driver of the current obsession with form is the 'programmes' (often labelled 'reforms') so beloved by politicians - that are imposed on leaders of local agencies through yet another 'political imperative'. One possible reason for the frequency of these programmes is the politicians' need to be able to claim that they are 'doing something'. Since politicians do not engage with service delivery, 'programmes' are their only resort. In any case, programmes enable politicians to do the only thing they are capable of doing - throwing money and resources at problems, irrespective of the evidence that this rarely has any effect on the incidence or severity of the original problem.

The challenge presented by these programmes is exacerbated as soon as they acquire a name. The history of change programmes suggests the likely outcome. The failure rate associated with change programmes that you believe will depend on which piece of research you read. The general view is that 75% to 100% fail, in the sense that they do not achieve the results that were set out in their own programme specification. Where these change programmes have a name the failure rate is virtually 100%.

Many of the changes that are introduced are structural, as this is a common version of focusing on form over function. There is little evidence anywhere, in private or public sectors, that structural changes do much for improving performance. There is plenty of evidence that points to structural changes being vastly expensive in their consumption of resources, and that means that while the structural change is rumbling its way through the organisation, management's eye is taken off the performance improvement ball. Needless to say, while all this is going on, operational people are

⁶ It is recognised that the table is based on judgements made by the author. As such, they are themselves open to challenge. For this reason, those judgements have already been reviewed. In the event that there is residual error, it is unlikely that the overall picture, as presented, would change significantly.

still there, doing their best to deliver high quality services - in spite of the disruptions coming from central Government.

The extent of the 'structural change' problem is perhaps well illustrated (in the sidebar) in the list of structural changes made in the NHS over a quarter of a century. Given that there is also evidence that suggests that new organisation structures take about two years to settle down, an average of just under one restructuring per year is bound to do more harm than good.

As another take on the nature of the challenge, here are some extracts from a 1999 report published by the Department of Communities and Local Government. (DC&LG).

"... the public policy system has been through a number of fundamental changes or paradigm shifts, from an input-driven system, organised around professional knowledge sets, and with a loose relationship between centre and locality to a system of tighter central control, a focus on efficiency and throughput, and the creation of purchaser/provider relationships. While this centralised second paradigm delivered efficiency gains, it was poor at effectiveness in the achievement of outcomes, particularly in cross-cutting areas. For that reason, we argue there now needs to be a fundamental change - a shift to a third paradigm should be driven by a focus on outcomes and effectiveness.

The system of tighter central control and focus on efficiency should be halted, with a 'tight-loose' framework - tight on outcomes, loose on the means of achieving them in particular circumstances.

Re-orientating professional practice to work in an outcome-focused way will be crucial to tackling cross-cutting issues.

Audit and inspection bodies must also re-orientate their own work to take account of the cross-cutting agenda. A world where service is delivered through vertical and horizontal supply chains is more complicated to audit, and understanding which outputs are likely to lead to desired outcomes is problematic, but adaptation is important. Care must be taken not to overload the policy system with inspection processes that fragment rather than integrate."

In other words, the nature of the problem was known as far back as 1999 - but the symptoms are still with us. The key question now is all about the characteristics of the current state that need to

The NHS: a quarter of a century of change

- 1982: Abolition of Area Health Authorities
- 1982-85: Introduction of general management
- 1985: Creation of NHS Board at the Dept of Health
- 1989-93: Establishment of NHS Trusts
- 1989-95: Creation of GP Fundholding & Commissioning
- 1989-95: Setting up NHS Management Executive (later NHS Executive)
- 1990: Replacement of FPCs (Family Practitioner Clinic) by FHSAs Family Health Service Authority
- 1991-97: Reconfiguration of Health Authorities
- 1991: Restructuring of NHS Organisation Boards
- 1994: Reorganization of RHAs (Regional Health Authorities)
- 1994: Abolition of FHSAs & incorporation into Health Authorities
- 1995: Reconfiguration of Acute Services & Trusts
- 1996: Abolition of RHAs, incorporation into NHS Executive
- 1997: Abolition of GP fundholding, replacement with PCGs (Primary Care Group)
- 2000: Abolition of NHS Executive, incorporation into the Dept. of Health
- 2001: Abolition of NHS Executive Regional Offices, move to Regional DHSCs (Directorate of Health & Social Care) at Dept of Health
- 2001: Replacement of larger health authorities with SHAs (Strategic Health Authorities)
- 2001: Replacement of PCGs with PCTs (Primary Care Trusts)
- 2002: Creation of Foundation NHS Trusts
- 2002: Creation of Health and Social Care Trusts
- 2005: Merger of 300 PCTs into 100 larger PCTs
- 2005: Merger of 28 SHAs into 10 larger SHAs
- 2006: Reorganization of Dept. of Health to split NHS and DH responsibilities

change, and the first steps that will enable organisations within the system to move away from that state, in the desired direction. Here is a quick summary of some of the characteristics of the current state that need to change:

- Over-emphasis on form over function - too many formal approaches to tackling wicked problems, leading to too many Boards (leadership), committees, task forces, working parties, formal programmes.
- A lack of understanding of the true nature of outcomes⁷, or lip service paid to the need to focus on outcomes, more than inputs and outputs.
- Lack of clear accountability for outcomes.
- Too many structural changes.
- Too many reports, strategies and action plans, and not enough ground floor action.
- Too many cases of command and management responses instead of leadership.
- Resources not tied closely enough to outcome-driven action.
- Too many KPIs applied to local agencies and not enough applied to central functions⁸.
- Too many controls, flowing from too many KPIs, and, probably too many controls that target issues of compliance and conformance.
- Too much scrutiny focused on methods and processes and less on shared goals and outcomes
- Lack of the organisational conditions that would enable operational people to innovate in local solutions to local problems, that would enable improved service quality and delivery, and a higher quality of life for people in the community.

5 First steps

As has been noted above, cross-cutting problems and actions to tackle them are more concerned with the long term, rather than the short term. Given the volatility of the world we live in, it becomes impossible to have goals that will stay valid for the long term, unless they are expressed in the most general way - and then they become 'aims'. One way of dealing with this is to regard strategy as 'moving away from' instead of 'moving towards'.

That insight is reflected here, and there is no tidy prescription offered that would add up to any sort of long range plan or strategy for dealing with cross-cutting or wicked problems. What is offered is a set of ideas on actions that could be taken that would represent significant steps away from the current state as noted above. The actions are not in any priority order, and, as with all wicked problems, they are linked to each other, meaning that none will stand alone. It also means that, as with all innovations, there are no guarantees of results.

An implication is that operational people and their immediate supervisors will need to be trusted

⁷ There are several different ways of defining outcomes. One simple way is contained in the logic diagram: Inputs>>>Activities or Processes>>>Outputs>>>Outcomes. 1) Inputs (resources such as time, money, employees, information, relationships and equipment) 2) Work activities, programmes or processes 3) The immediate outputs of the work that are delivered to customers 4) Outcomes or results that are the long-term consequences of delivering the outputs.

⁸ See the companion paper to this one entitled Managing Performance for some ideas on how this challenge might be approached.

to a considerable degree - but then that should be 'situation normal' anyway. It is only operational people who are in touch with day-to-day events and conditions 'on the ground', and it is only operational people that deliver results. Everyone else is an enabler of operational people delivering results, or should be. One of the aims of the first steps listed below is to increase the degree to which operational people are enabled to innovate and deliver better services.

- 1 Examine formal structures and protocols, specifically those that were set up to develop formal programmes in response to Government calls for (cross-cutting) collaboration to tackle wicked problems:
 - ◆ Check to see how many operational people are involved.
 - ◆ Check to see how many people from the community are involved - from existing groupings and from folk who just live in the community.
 - ◆ Check the records of the work being done to see how many actual, action-oriented decisions are being made - referring decisions to later or other groups / meetings do not count.
 - ◆ Check the work being done, to identify the balance between a focus on policies and procedures, on the one hand, and actions to implement multiple, partial solutions to local community problems, on the other.
 - ◆ Check to see what operational people say about the actions that have been taken as part of the 'programme', and the degree to which they enable them to do their jobs more easily and more effectively.
 - ◆ Check to see what actual results have been generated, where there is an evidence chain substantiating the causal link. (We took Action X that produced Result Y.)
 - ◆ Check all policies and instructions issued, and decide where they are on the scale from detailed prescriptions (highly undesirable) to purpose and broad guidelines (highly desirable).
 - ◆ Check the work being done to establish the degree of innovation involved.
 - ◆ Check that the work being done has a clear accountability link with desired outcomes.
 - ◆ Check that any outcomes listed are real outcomes, and not inputs or outputs dressed up as outcomes.
- 1 Unless there is clear evidence that the 'programme' work being done is adding real value to operational people and to the local community, start dismantling formal structures and protocols and consider how a better focus might be created on 'function' rather than 'form'.
- 2 Whether they are driven by 'new programmes' or otherwise, check any restructuring plans that might exist for the real benefit intended - will they really benefit the community? Unless you are very sure that a real benefit will be delivered, park the plans until such time as real evidence of the benefit is available.
- 3 Check out the strategies, plans, policies and reports that are generated. How close is the connection between them and the ground-floor, service-delivery actions that will improve the quality of life for the community. If the answer is 'not a lot', check the resources being consumed in the production of all this paper, (or its electronic equivalent). Consider how

these resources might better be directed at either service delivery, or enabling better service delivery.

- 4 Review the various actions or programmes currently planned or already being implemented to tackle major, cross-cutting problems. To what degree does the way that these were set up have the characteristics of 'command' or 'management' approaches? To what degree did leaders initiate action more by asking questions to focus people on issues and possible consequences, than the issuing of objectives, targets, policies and instructions? What are the opportunities for leaders to start asking those questions, and get more people thinking and acting in relation to desired outcomes, and less about formal processes and practices?
- 5 To what degree do operational people and their supervisors have a degree of freedom to develop new ideas and test them, without having to ask for permission from above?
- 6 To what degree is innovation and the testing of new ideas a normal activity in the organisation, or is it something that is more strongly represented in policy statements than peoples' ordinary working lives?
- 7 Do a quick check on the budget for the organisation to see where the money goes. How much of it is committed to outcome-driven service delivery, and how much is 'overhead', where the links with desired outcomes are very far from clear? If the proportion being devoted to the latter is uncomfortably high, check to see what actions could be taken to change the balance in the desired direction⁹.
- 8 Check the KPIs in operation. How many of them are imposed from without? How many set internally? How many of them directly relate to the desired outcomes? How many do not?
- 9 Of all the KPIs in use, how many of them are true indicators of performance, in the sense that success in achieving them will make a significant difference to the local community - the headline outcomes? How many of them could more properly be classified as diagnostic information, only to be accessed if one of the headline outcomes is not being achieved, or where there is no significant movement in that direction?
- 10 Consider consigning the majority of KPIs to diagnostic information, concentrating instead on the headline outcomes that are desired. Stop routinely measuring and reporting diagnostic information, and change the process to one that is ad hoc.
- 11 Ensure that throughout the organisation key accountable people have a limited number of KPIs for their own function, that are all important performance standards, that define contributions to achieving the organisation's headline outcomes. Make sure that the whole thing is driven by purpose - selection of outcomes and performance standards included.
- 12 In this process, apply the 'Golden Six' rule throughout. Few, if any, people can handle more than about 6 KPIs at any one time. Go beyond that, and not only do human limitations start to appear, other systemic problems occur as well.
 - ◆ First, there will be unwanted and unexpected consequences of many KPIs, that are really diagnostic information being treated as targets - people will deliver what is measured, and that may mean that they take their eye off the really important outcomes. ('Gaming' is another likely consequence of having too many of the wrong kind of KPIs - see the next bullet point.)

⁹ See the companion paper entitled Managing Performance for some ideas on how to do this.

- ◆ Second, contradictions will start to appear. Achieving one target will mean losing out somewhere else. This can produce the syndrome known as ‘they will get me one way or another’. With a complex set of too many targets, everyone is bound to fail on something. This can lead to manufactured results, where what is on paper does not reflect the reality.
 - ◆ Next check the KPIs one more time. How many of them are really about performance, and how many are better described as being focused on compliance and conformance? If there are any of the latter, please remember that there are many totally compliant organisations out there whose real-world performance is very poor - and they hit the headlines too often, with all the excuses already in place - ‘we followed all the rules’.
 - ◆ As a final thought - if a lot of the KPIs are imposed from without, it is not impossible to simply stop measuring against them, and stop reporting on them. Several police forces have done precisely that with Home Office targets, and their Chief Constables are still in place. In passing, it might be noted that they are among the better performing police forces, which suggests that the better protection is performance, not compliance! It might also be concluded that sometimes leaders have to make bold decisions.
- 13 Recheck the use of resources already suggested above. How much is being spent on measuring and reporting against all those KPIs? What real difference does it all make to on-the-ground service quality and delivery? To the community? If the link is tenuous, at the best, time to start reassigning resources to more productive activities.
- 14 When the scrutiny teams arrive, what is the main focus of their attention? Is it on purpose, shared goals and outcomes, and especially on outcomes where cross-cutting collaboration and sharing of resources are being applied? Or is it more on internal methods and processes, together with compliance with regulations and policies? If it is the latter, time to do a little negotiating with the scrutineers to shift the focus to more productive areas.
- 15 And then there is the general issue of innovation. This will flourish only if the conditions in the organisation enable it to happen. There are several ways of expressing this, and here is one set of enabling conditions:
- ◆ Challenge - how challenged, emotionally involved, and committed are employees to their work?
 - ◆ Freedom - how free are staff members to decide how to do their job?
 - ◆ Idea time - how much time do people have to think things through before having to act?
 - ◆ Dynamism - how eventful is life in the organisation?
 - ◆ Idea support - are there the resources to give new ideas a try?
 - ◆ Trust and openness - do people feel safe speaking their minds and offering different points of view?
 - ◆ Playfulness and humour - how relaxed is the workplace - is it okay to have fun?
 - ◆ Conflicts - to what degree do people engage in interpersonal or inter-functional conflict or ‘internecine warfare?’ Or do they comfortably confront conflicting objectives and priorities with their peers, and negotiate shared solutions?
 - ◆ Conversation - to what degree is issues or purpose-focused conversation across functional boundaries the norm rather than an exception? Where it does happen, how much is natural (‘part of the way of life around here’) compared with how much is structural

(through management-established meetings, working parties, Boards and the like)?

- ◆ Risk-taking - is it okay to try something new, and fail?

16 Perhaps a quick review to establish the degree to which these conditions exist would either suggest that you can relax on this front - or perhaps that more action is needed!

Any of the first steps described above are likely to lead to unexpected insights and results. None of them is guaranteed to produce any particular, predicted result. All of them, in one way or another, link to what is needed if local government agencies are going to be more successful in tackling cross-cutting problems. All will lead to important enablers of that success.

So while the exact results are not guaranteed, two things are. One is that there will be highly valuable movement in the desired direction - towards an organisation with a better capacity of working across functional boundaries, in collaboration with other local agencies, to tackle local wicked problems. The second is that the journey will be exciting, with a few bumps and minor crashes, as well major leaps forward. But then it is still impossible to make omelettes without breaking eggs, and a less-than-perfect omelette is better than no eggs at all.