

BROADENING HORIZONS: SOCIAL ENTERPRISE MARK CIC CONFERENCE

5th & 6th June, University of Winchester

Conference Summary Notes

Simon Donovan, Manor House Development Trust (MHDT):
Leading a social enterprise to create social impact



Key points from main presentation:

- Simple goal: "Happy People". Develop a holistic approach to create strong, resilient communities.
- Address through a range of interconnected interests – environmental: youth issues; unemployment; prejudice/diversity; loneliness; gangs/violence.
- Dealing with "truisms" when defining strategy – getting beyond the "soft" language of community development that is open to interpretation and defining your product.
- Through working with an IT Company, MHDT began to think in terms of "platforms" – *"We don't do community development. We provide the platform to enable others to"*.
- These platforms include:
 - Connect: creating synergy by pooling people together around a common set of goals.
 - Empowerment: setting up clubs and other social enterprises.
 - Space: acquire temporary and permanent assets that help generate income.
 - Influence: talk to stakeholders in shaping objectives and use this to build evidence that compels government and other key players to make changes that benefit the community.
 - Organisation: engage ideologically motivated people that drive the project, including those on board and employees e.g. local people for local projects; environmentally interested people for environmental projects.
- Introduced a new CRM system to help improve social impact measurement.

Questions and Answers:

1. *How did you find/develop an appropriate CRM system?*

Used Salesforce as the main platform, which was free, but MHDT needed to develop other applications in support of the process. A Pathfinder bid was used in commissioning a gaming company to develop these. MHDT used a mixture of both their own internal and other external "social impact nerds" to map out different processes and the underlying framework on which the system works.

2. *How did you engage with other organisations/stakeholders to help identify what social impact to measure and how to go about doing this?*

This was part of the aforementioned mapping process used to develop the framework. In helping ensure it became an embedded activity, when putting together bids and tenders, MHDT also allocated specific funds to the task of social impact reporting.

3. *What best expresses what MHDT are doing/What are the "key markers" of social impact – is it possible to come up with common benchmarks to share?*

"You are what you measure". Be careful to avoid adding bureaucracy that actually prevents you from doing what you do. Ensure sub-contractors are tasked with collecting evidence in easy ways as they go along. This is about instilling disciplines of collecting evidence [that make it second nature].

Identifying key markers/common benchmarks is problematic as measures are always likely to vary according to the nature of the activities involved – this is why mapping out processes and methods is important in appropriately informing what these look like.

4. *How important is social impact reporting to corporate/How do you prepare data in a way that makes it accessible to multiple audiences/ How do you measure "happiness"?*

Very important but if you cannot say what you need to on a single page, they probably won't read it. Developing a succinct language is very important. It isn't an exact science but should be better than simple anecdote.

Use short statements, infographics that convey information quickly.

In measuring "happiness" there are national matrices that provide comparative benchmarks and "social impact nerds" referred to these when formulating questions that are consistently used – keep asking the questions and constantly interview people.

Mark Holder Forum:

The initial question posed was *"Do we have a community of SEM Holders/What is important to you about being a Mark Holder?"* Discussions then ranged into other areas as follows below.

- Table discussions suggest that the majority of people did not become Mark Holders for reasons of "joining a community", but because they were more interested in the concept of formal accreditation and the additional credibility this conferred. There were mixed opinions about the actual benefits of networking.

- There was some discussion around whether more could be done to establish a stronger sense of Mark Holder community. Points and questions raised included:
 - collaborating on contractual tenders;
 - what do we actually mean by “community”;
 - people would like the Mark did have more value when tendering for a contract;
 - creating synergy between how Mark Holders appear “on the outside” with how they behave “on the inside”.
- The idea of Mark Holder forums was discussed. These could be sector based or geographical and/or focus on particular subject matter, including:
 - social impact management – particularly establishing common social impact markers that others can replicate;
 - best practice;
 - common challenges.
- *What can SEMCIC do to help better galvanise a community ethos?*
 Ideas included developing a depository of resources and closed online areas for discussions, helping promote opportunities for joint procurement venture. The conversation raised doubts about whether SEMCIC was ideally positioned to perform all these roles (particularly promoting joint procurement opportunities) as we occupy a very broad position and needs must focus on activities that will benefit the majority.
- The perennial question of reinforcing the Mark to Commissioners was raised. Amongst points touched upon:
 - it was said that unless you are on the radar of particular people, the Mark is unlikely to make a difference; it would be more effective trying to create a “knowledge bank” of social enterprises that do different things and circulating this to budget holders for reference, rather than waiting for tendering or bid opportunities;
 - this was further echoed by another point made, in that if you are a social enterprise that is seen to do well and receives good PR to this effect, then you are more likely to be approached for work again;
 - Universities, Local Authorities and other “big procurers” could be encouraged to commit to a formal “pledge” through which they agree to allocated a certain % of their procurement budgets to accredited social enterprises;
 - social enterprises need to work on their trading credentials more rather than becoming overly reliant on Commissioners.

The next questions explored revolved around the use of the Mark: *“What examples or suggestions do people have of how the Mark is being effectively used? How else can SEMCIC work to make it more visible? What better ways of using it are there?”* Discussions/points covered:

- Be more sophisticated. Put the Mark “front and centre” of the company profile and marketing.

- Make clear to customers that “if you spend money with us you can create social impact”. Promote the message of social enterprise being a better way of doing business and encourage people to buy by association.
- Work in tandem with SEUK’s “Buy Social”
- Promote the Mark internally to employees and other stakeholders in order to enhance the perception of what type of business a Mark Holder is (which includes distinguishing it from being a Charity).
- Consider how to better target communications and build understanding. Influencing through specific channels can be better than broad, general methods (e.g. getting Sainsbury’s involved with Fairtrade did a great deal more to promote the standard than anything else prior to that). Build conversations that are not just about head on promotion.
- Use case studies rather than simple branding messages in promotional activities.
- Ask who you are trying to build your profile with – where, who and why?

SEMIC agreed to review existing resources and remind people what is available via the website. We also said we would think about how we would help people prioritise actions they take – how they can focus on one or two things rather than attempt to do everything.

In Conversation with John Denham:

Key points of interest noted:

- Students of the 1970s were instrumental in helping drive forward the social enterprise movement. Social conscience influenced the development of organisations interested in addressing rising concerns of the day such as homelessness, substance abuse etc.). People who wanted to do something innovative that was *business led* not simply social led.
- There is a growing devolvement of government responsibility in tackling social needs and the debate around social policy is “utterly absent”. The public sector responsible for such concerns has become “cowed and timid” and there is a loss of independency – a lack of resolve to stand up for what is required (e.g. cuts in pensions just being accepted instead of it being argued that this was counter-intuitive to helping achieve results).
- Responding to the question “*are social enterprises going the extra mile to address these concerns?*”; it is about ensuring they have a range of common objectives against a range of different backgrounds.
- If social enterprise is going to remain relevant, it needs to be put in terms of BREXIT. How do we build common ground and a world-view of multi-culturalism to help persuade those that do not get it? What conversations do we need to continue? We need to understand why people voted why they did – what discussions are needed and how is the dialogue maintained?





- Universities have an important role to play – they need to be producing the same kinds of people that emerged in the 70s and get beyond simply reinforcing their own view of the world and sense of “hubristic liberalism”.

Panel Discussion: Pushing the boundaries of social enterprise: engaging with new markets



Key points of interest noted:

- Social enterprises need to concentrate on how they build resilience, escaping locked funding arrangements in which they are constantly being asked to do more for less.
- The sector needs to find ways to diversify and become more innovative in providing solutions to different problems (e.g. helping get the railways back on track). How do we collectively encourage and help harness this potential?
- Universities represent “anchor institutions” in promoting public good. As large employers with broad resources they are in a position to create leverage with different communities of interest, provide space and technical support. They should be educating students to be these change-makers and provide extra-curricular options that promote such interests.
- Social enterprise and social entrepreneurship needs to become the “new norm”.
- Social enterprise need to recognise how they can create impact across a range of interactions – through their employees, through their supplier relationships, through the resources/stock etc. they purchase – not just through what they provide.
- Social enterprise needs to be bold in presenting the alternative it offers, demanding the best for the service they provide, not the cheapest. Generating profit is what allows them to create greater benefits. They need to communicate the ancillary benefits of what they do, not concentrate on not being beaten on cost.
- What people working in social enterprises do is important and should be valued – they deserve to be paid well and social views on how people in care roles (for example) are paid need to be changed in recognition of this.
- When do social enterprises identify themselves as such to their customers and when “pitching” to new clients? No clear answer to this but the ground has shifted from 10 years ago and it is not something that necessarily enters the conversations as early as it once stand. Focusing on what a social enterprise does, how it does it and the quality of their service is more important than the label.
- Social enterprises should create “engagement points” for customers to better understand the social value they can contribute to (point made by HisBe, so this may be easier in a retail type setting but seems an interesting point for all to consider in terms of how they could make it work).

