The long journey from theory to practice

Introduction

The subject of this paper is the relationship between research findings and how practice is influenced. The particular context is the voluntary and community sector and social enterprises, organisations that have limited resources with regard to money, time and knowledge of how to adapt their behaviour in response to research findings. The research in question relates to the issues around these organisations measuring the social impact of their work.

The policy context has two facets: the requirement of voluntary and community organisations (VCOs) and social enterprises (SEs) to measure the social impact of their work; and the requirement for research to be disseminated in order to maximise its impact. Both of these drivers originate in government and both have survived the change of government in 2010, being part of both the previous Labour and current Coalition agendas.

This paper describes in detail one research project that was carried out by an academic institution on behalf of a public sector agency with a small practitioner agency as a delivery partner. It goes on to describe the impact of the research when it was applied in practice.

The Guild is a specialist consultancy that has worked with social enterprises and voluntary and community organisations for twenty years. We have a research facility and deliver training. We have undertaken monitoring, evaluation and impact measurement for a range of organisations, using different tools and approaches. We have written this paper to reflect on our learning from this project.

The policy context

Social Impact Measurement (SIM)

As public sector spending budgets are reduced, local and national public authorities are increasingly asking for delivery organisations to measure the impact of their interventions. This marks a significant change from the early 1980s when regeneration programmes were required to monitor expenditure against outputs (number of people receiving training, size of office accommodation created, etc) and in which services contracted out to external bodies quantified their returns as unit costs. Since the early 2000s a considerable literature has been created, exploring methodologies and frameworks for improvement measurement. Organisations such as the Social Audit Network and Social Return on Investment Network have developed robust measurement methods.

Public funding is becoming more competitive and voluntary and community organisations are identifying the need to demonstrate to others the value of their work. The wide range of tools and approaches available has made it difficult for some to find a way of measuring their work that is manageable within their existing resources, has currency with funders and others and reflects their values and goals.

Research impact
The Higher Education Funding Council has introduced impact into its new programme as a criterion for funding academic research:

> *The sub-panels will assess the 'reach and significance' of impacts on the economy, society and/or culture that were underpinned by excellent research conducted in the submitted unit, as well as the submitted unit's approach to enabling impact from its research. This element will carry a weighting of 20 per cent[1].*

The Economic and Social Research Council's Delivery Plan[2] identifies that creating, assessing and communicating impact is central to its activities. Research bodies are increasingly seeking ways to demonstrate that their findings can be applied in the wider community as well as in the academic context of adding to a body of knowledge and expertise.

This context enables academic and non-academic (practitioner) partners to benefit from the process of developing academic research into a practical tool.

The setting off point

The genesis for the research described in this paper took place in 2008 at a board meeting of Social Enterprise East of England (SEEE). A discussion took place at which it emerged that nobody understood the difference between Social Return on Investment, Social Accounting and Auditing and the various other methods available or under what circumstances one model should be used rather than another[3]. As a result it was decided to arrange an event at which the subject could be discussed in more detail.

SEEE regularly ran summer and winter schools for members, at which there were presentations, debate and learning about new agendas and issues relating to social enterprises. The winter school following the board meeting was held in January 2009 and the subject was measuring social impact[4]. Speakers were invited from New Economics Foundation (nef) to talk about Social Return on Investment (SROI); the Social Audit Network to talk about Social Accounting and Audit (SAA); and Professor Christine Whitehead from the Cambridge Centre for Housing and Planning Research at Cambridge University described a cost benefit assessment she had made of Emmaus, a large and influential social enterprise in the region. Each presented their approach and experience and the SEEE members reflected on these and planned what could best be offered to social enterprises. The social enterprise lead at East of England Development Agency (EEDA) was present

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[1] Assessment framework and guidance on submissions (2011-14), HEFCE, July 2011
[2] Delivery Plan 2011 – 15, Economic and Social Research Council
[3] Attended by NS as a SEEE board member
[4] Attended by NS

at the event and subsequently EEDA identified funding to carry out a piece of research into social impact measurement. The tender was advertised in summer 2009 and the work was commissioned in December.

The journey begins

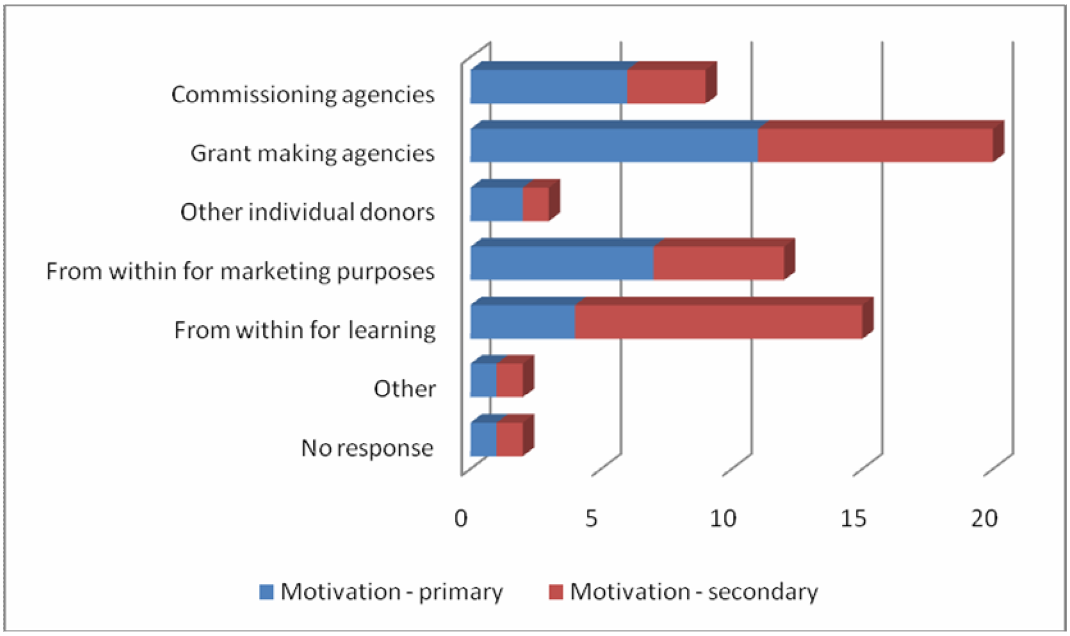
The tender was won by a partnership consisting of The Guild, a specialist social enterprise consultancy, acting as project manager and delivering a particular strand of the commission on social enterprise development; Centre for Enterprise and Economic Development Research (CEEDR) at Middlesex University, undertaking the research into social impact measurement (SIM); SEEE, also working on the social enterprise development strand and chairing the steering group; and Mutual Advantage, another specialist consultancy, working on a third strand on public sector procurement. This paper only relates to the SIM research strand.

The research study undertaken by CEEDR reviewed methods being used by voluntary and community organisations and social enterprises in the East of England. Interviews were carried out with 40 third sector organisations, 32 of which had carried out some form of social impact measurement. A further 10 organisations or individuals providing training in social impact measurement to organisations in the region were also interviewed.

The study identified the main motivations that led organisations to undertake a social impact measurement exercise; what approaches and tools are most commonly being used to measure social impact; the costs incurred by organisations measuring impact and their experience of the methods and tools they had used.

The main motivations

> *Pressure from grant making agencies was the most common motivating factor (stated by 19 of the 32 interviewees), and this can be both through requiring social impact measurement evidence in applications as well as requiring organisations to collect impact measures once they have received funding. In this way organisations are marketing their services to funders. Having information on social impact was not seen as the only way to get support, but it was important for attracting attention and as one organisation stated, "getting them through the door". This information was also being used to attract donations from individuals and demonstrate how far their money would go to address particular problems. Again this can be seen as a form of marketing in an increasingly competitive fundraising environment.*
>
> *Figure 1. Motivations to measure impact*

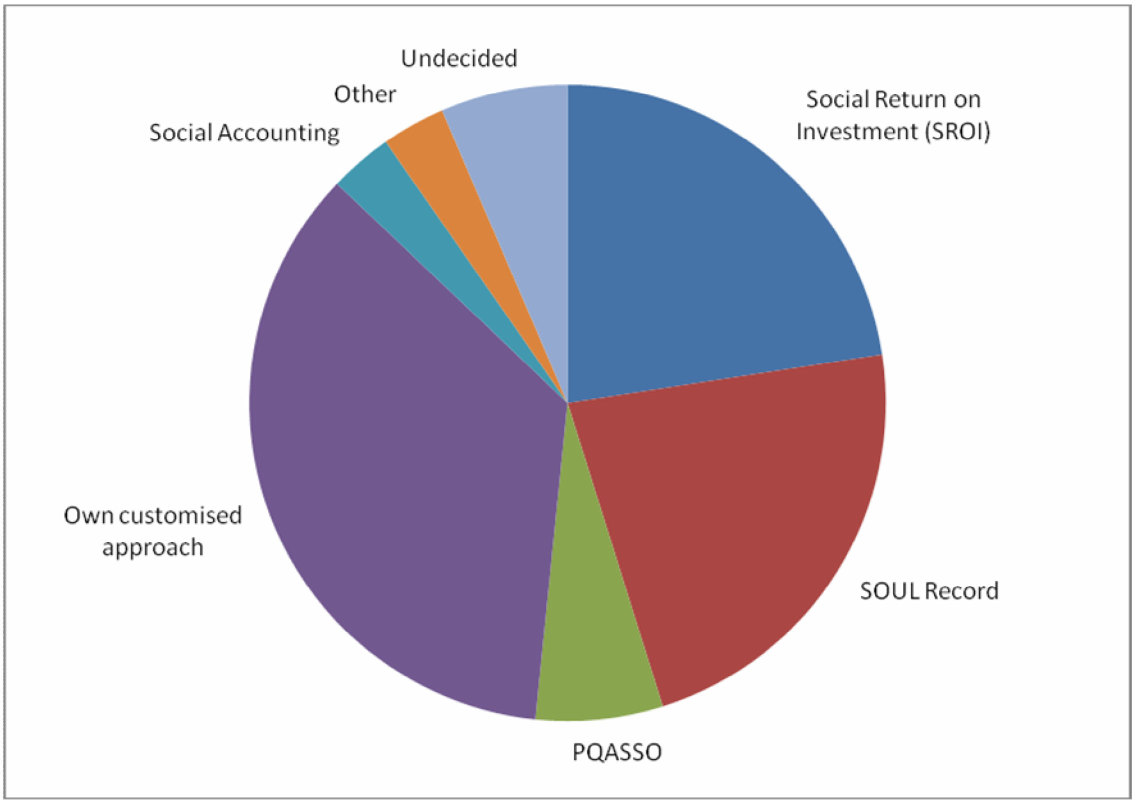


(N= 32, based on a sample of organisations responding to requests sent out through regional networks)[5]

The following tools were being used by the sample organisations

Figure 2. Approaches to measuring

[5] Joining the Dots: Strand 2 Measuring the economic and social impact of local services; Social Impact Measurement (SIM) experiences and future directions for the Third Sector organisations in the East of England, Centre for Enterprise and Economic Development Research/Third Sector Research Centre at Middlesex University with Malin Arvidson, Third Sector Research Centre at Southampton University



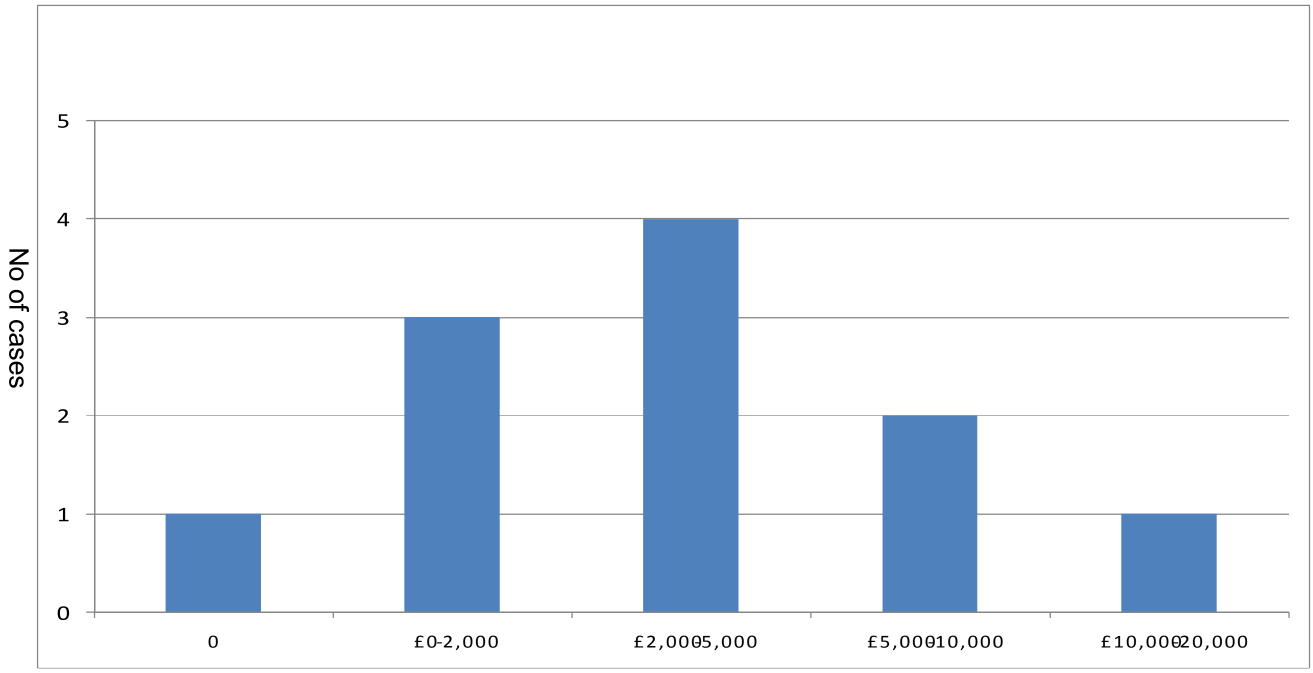
[6]

Costs of the processes

The study also asked organisations the costs of their social impact measurement approaches and the results are presented in Figure 4. This question could only be answered by 11 organisations that had set out to do a SIM exercise separately to their other work, and estimates have been included for the costs of staff time in collecting and preparing data.

Figure 4: Costs of measuring impacts

[6] Ibid.



Those organisations that have embedded the SIM approaches in their service delivery were not able to answer the question as data collection was being carried out by all staff. For larger organisations, particularly those with public service contracts, such approaches are a requirement to the delivery of the service and therefore the cost of SIM cannot be distinguished from the delivery operations. In such cases respondents reported that hundreds of thousands of pounds are put into reporting systems that satisfied commissioners and the prime contractors that were subcontracting to these third sector organisations. The costs of the IT systems and labour were covered by the payments within the contracts but it entailed the organisation investing upfront, before they had been assured of the contract. However, without the systems in place they would not have been able to have the contract, and so considered it to be a very good use of their resources. Similarly, grant funders are encouraging organisations to include monitoring and evaluation costs in their bids and businesses plans so measuring impact is not seen as an external cost but part of the service delivery.[7]

The study concludes:

This study has shown that there is no holy grail for a detailed impact measurement without spending time and money. The amount of resources allocated to this will depend on the objectives of the organisation. The report does not set out a single methodology but outlines the range of approaches that are each suitable for different purposes[8]*.*

[7] Ibid.
[8] Ibid.

Following the production of the research report the partners took part in the normal dissemination activities for this type of contract. The report was submitted to the funders and the wider stakeholder group, we organised a conference that was attended by 120 people at which the findings were presented. The report was published on partners' websites and promoted through newsletters etc. However, we had access to a placement through the Knowledge Transfer Partnership (KTP) an initiative to encourage collaboration between universities and businesses that we had tried to organise to help with the research study. Thinking about how we could use a three month placement, we identified that we could develop a guide to help organisations to select what was the right tool for them to use.

The journey continues - using the research findings

The KTP placement was approved and we appointed a researcher who was employed by Middlesex University and given academic supervision. She was placed within The Guild who provided day to day management support. Helene, our researcher, had a background in environmental impact measurement and began the job of sorting out the forty impact measurement tools identified by CEEDR in their research.

We knew that there was an existing directory of social impact measurement tools, which at that time contained over eighty different tools. We did not intend to replicate this and we never aimed to produce a comprehensive list of what was available. However, the findings from the research had identified that people working in voluntary and community organisations did not know how to choose which tool best suited their needs. In the process of producing our guide, we began to articulate the complexities of deciding what measurement process to adopt.

The types of tools

The first important decision was to identify the types of tools that people could use, and to categorise the tools available according to these types. These were:

- Monitoring tools (measuring outputs)
- Evaluation tools (measuring outcomes)
- Quality assessment tools (measuring customer satisfaction, fitness of the organisation etc.)
- Social or environmental or economic impact measurement tools (measuring impact)
- Overarching frameworks that contain some or all of the above

We then designed a self assessment process that led people though the choices available to them and finally summarised the most commonly used tools, providing links to where they could be obtained.

The key issues that emerged from the research that influenced people's choices were:

- How much did it cost?
- How long did it take?
- How much did it impose on staff time?
- How robust would the evidence be?

The guide took people through all these characteristics, helped them identify which would be the most important to their organisation and where they could find out more.

The guide was published in September 2010[9]. It was available free in electronic format and cost £5 for a hard copy. Again it was promoted through being launched at a conference (SEEE's AGM), on The Guild's website and in our newsletter. It was also covered in the sector press having a front page article in Third Sector Magazine. From The Guild's perspective, when we promoted the product it appeared to be valued more highly because of the involvement of an academic institution. Over 500 copies of the guide have been distributed.

In order to promote the guide, The Guild decided to run some training in SIM in October and November, targeted at voluntary and community organisations, social enterprises and public sector agencies. We planned six workshops for up to 15 people, to be held in each of the six counties in the eastern region. We charged a small fee (£10 for VCOs and SEs and £25 for others). The Norwich workshop quickly sold out and we ran a second session there, making seven events in all. The workshops were planned to take half a day and to be an introduction in how to use the guide including a basic introduction to SIM.

Early in 2011, we were offered a small sum of money by EEDA, as an extension of the original contract, to deliver some additional workshops before the end of the financial year. We organised a further six workshops, plus an event targeting public sector agencies that are using or planning to use SIM as part of the commissioning and procurement process.

In total we delivered fifteen workshops to 140 people between September 2010 and March 2011.

We began each workshop by asking participants what they wanted to know, what they hoped to gain from the session. This enabled us to collect all the questions that people had when they came to the training.

There were common themes to the questions and we were able to address many of these in the sessions. Among the most frequently raised questions were:

[9] Getting Started in Social Impact Measurement, Rinaldo,H., Fitzhugh, H., Stevenson, N., the Guild, 2010

- What is the difference between SIM and SROI (the model that most people had heard of)?
- How to go about the technical process of SIM?
- How to ensure that the evidence collected is relevant and appropriate to what the organisation is trying to achieve

The following table gives a summary of the questions raised by the participants.

Theme	**Example**	**Number (% of all questions)**
Technical aspects	Process of carrying out, how to do particular things	36 (20)
Tools	What tools? How recognised?	29 (16)
Terminology	What is SIM? What are other terms? How relate to SROI?	25 (14)
Proving	Report to funder / potential customer or demonstrate to community	20 (11)
Measurement	Clarity on indicators	17 (10)
Purpose	Why do it? How can SIM help?	15 (8)
Funding or supporting VCS orgs	Need to evaluate suppliers, how to do so? How to help build in? Good practice	14 (8)
Context and knowledge	Current practice / thinking / discussion etc.	11 (6)
Problem solving	Avoiding pitfalls / addressing difficulties of obtaining info / embedding	10 (6)
Interpretation	How to know how to analyse, what to claim etc	8 (4)
Theory of change	Clarity on aims, inputs, outputs, outcomes	5 (3)
Resources	How much cost, how much time, relative ease	4 (2)
Other		9 (5)
Total		178

Some specific examples of questions participants had included the following:

> "Want to understand what social impact measuring is and how it works"
>
> "To measure impact our project has on the community"
>
> "What methods/products to use when"
>
> "To know the difference between user involvement processes and SROI"
>
> "Best method for a public sector authority to measure and evaluate suppliers' social impact through a tender process"

“How social impact measurement can help to improve what we do and how we do it and how we make a difference”

“What methods are suitable for small community organisations with few resources?”

“How can I judge what would happen if our organisation wasn’t here?”

“How can it demonstrate cost effectiveness of preventative interventions?”

Once we had established what the participants wanted from the programme, remainder of the session consisted of:

- A description of our identified five foundations, or building blocks, for undertaking SIM
- A brief introduction to theory of change – including working on some examples experienced by participants
- An exercise to identify the types of tool (described above)
- An individual exercise supporting participants to use the guide using one possible variable

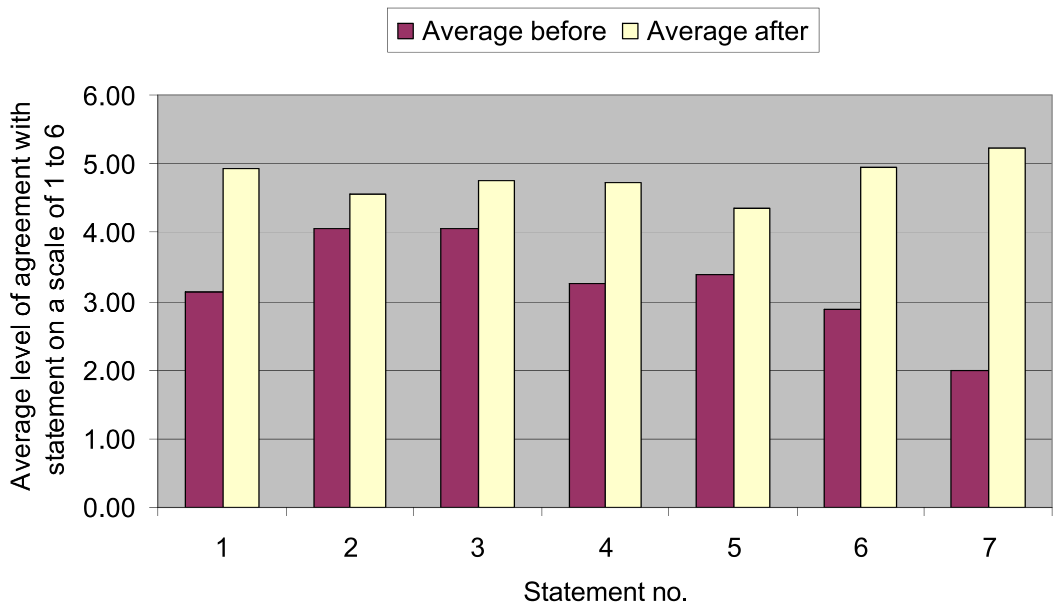
Through these methods we were able to address the issues that the participants raised in the opening session.

The feedback from participants was extremely positive, particularly from people who had encountered other sources of information about SIM.

In order to evaluate the impact of the sessions on the participants (and by way of illustrating the ‘distance travelled’ approach) we asked participants a series of questions at the beginning of the session and asked them to score themselves on a scale of one to six according to how strongly they agreed or disagreed with the following statements.

Num	Statement
1	I am confident that I can explain what social impact measurement is to my colleagues
2	I can describe the type of change my organisation wants to create
3	I can identify the types of evidence my organisation already collects
4	I have in mind some new questions my organisation could ask to better understand whether we are creating the change we need
5	I know what can be claimed in the basis of the evidence my organisation collects and also what it cannot prove
6	I know the difference between quality systems, outcome tools, social impact measurement frameworks and impact tools
7	I know how to use the 'Getting Started in Social Impact Measurement' guide to explore my social impact measurement options

We asked them to score themselves against the same statements at the end of the session. We also invited them to make any comments.



Some of the comments made included:

> "The trainers were knowledgeable and appropriate. A lot of ground to cover, so not easy. The fact that one comes away with concrete actions rather than theoretical knowledge is great."

> "Very useful and I plan to investigate several tools and incorporate some means of measuring social impact as part of a review of our organisation."

> "I can totally see the benefits of SIM particularly in relation to success in bid writing / evidence."

> "Very useful especially making me focus on 'clarity of purpose'!"

> "Clear, concise, presented what could be a complicated subject in an accessible manner."

> "Content explained how to get started and examples helped to put this into practice."

What did this tell us?

This evidence suggests that the workshop and the guide were pitched at the right level and used the right sort of language to explain the process. A number of comments were made during the sessions that the language was free of technical jargon. The level of response to the training offer suggested that people were interested in the subject and wanted to know more. As the courses were delivered in the context of public service spending cuts it was clear that participants recognised that they would increasingly be asked to measure and demonstrate the impact of their work and needed to invest in obtaining the skills and knowledge to do this.

We've got this far, where do we go next?

When we organised the second programme of training courses, we reflected on whether other additional support might be required by the group of people who were interested in the SIM process. The budget from EEDA was sufficient to enable us to offer a series of one to one diagnostics for VCOs and SEs that had attended any of the training courses. These were very quickly taken up and we delivered the diagnostics between February and April 2011 to seventeen organisations.

Our experience of delivering the training demonstrated that although participants had found it extremely useful and well delivered, they were not confident in being able to explain the process and cascade their learning within the rest of their organisation. During one of the later workshops, two participants suggested that we should sell one of the exercises (a game to identify the different type of tools) so that people could use it in their own organisations. Our original intention was that they would use the guide to do this, but it seemed that some people, especially those working in smaller organisations, needed more help.

The next stage of the journey - diagnostics

In January 2011, we offered the opportunity to all VCOs and SEs that had attended the first training programme, or were booked onto the second programme, the opportunity to book in for a free diagnostic session with our researcher. We offered eighteen places of which seventeen were taken up. One further session was booked then repeatedly postponed by the organisation. The diagnostic meetings aimed to provide some organisations with some additional help to start the SIM process. The feedback was extremely positive and we gained further understanding about what these groups need in practice to implement SIM if they do not have the budget to buy in expert assistance. Different types of organisations booked a diagnostic, but they were mostly medium sized, locally based voluntary organisations. The clients included small voluntary groups (only one paid member of staff or entirely run by volunteers), some local groups that are part of large national agencies, large and small social enterprises.

Each organisation received a one to one consultation with our researcher that lasted between two to three hours. The organisation could identify who they wanted to attend the meeting and attendees included paid staff, volunteers, trustees, funders and, in one instance, two other consultants.

We analysed their requirements on the basis of the following criteria:

- Where on the spectrum they started – what was their existing activity?

- What issues emerged during the diagnostic and what help was needed?
- Did they select a tool or a method for meeting the identified needs?
- What was the group dynamic – who attended the meeting and what impact was this likely to have regarding implementation?

Starting point

All of the seventeen organisations were carrying out some kind of monitoring activity to measure outputs. Some were doing this comprehensively but others held only a minimal amount of data. Eight organisations were measuring outcomes as part of project evaluation, three organisations were doing a small amount of outcome measurement, and the remaining six were not doing any. Six organisations were measuring customer satisfaction in the quality or the services they offer. Only one organisation was doing any systematic engagement with its stakeholders to measure change and two more were doing a small amount. One organisation had done a major piece of work in the past to measure its impact and two others had undertaken some impact measurement. Only two organisations were undertaking any systematic collation and analysis of the data they collected, one of these was part of a national federation and is contractually committed to providing data in a specified format. Three small and relatively new organisations held very little other than anecdotal evidence regarding their performance.

Key issues

There were two main areas of need that were identified in the diagnostics. The first was the collation and analysis of their existing data and developing a systematic approach. The only organisations that did not have this requirement were those that were too small and new to hold any significant amount of data. Some of the larger organisations had masses of data but were simply not doing anything with it that would provide them with any meaningful information. Some data was collected at the behest of funders and in cases where organisations had more than one funder they had many streams of data, often duplicating other streams. One organisation was collecting data using over ten different formats for its various contracts.

The second issue was management and resources within the organisation. The key issue that emerged from the diagnostic discussion for eight organisations was that they needed to identify someone who was going to lead the social impact measurement process and thirteen organisations needed to address getting the buy-in of various stakeholders. In some cases these were colleagues who would have to undertake additional work to collect data, including volunteers. In some cases it was management and/or trustees who would need to support, and in some instances find money for the process. In some cases it was funders who might need to adapt their requirements. This was reflected in some of the group dynamics in the interviews (see below).

Other issues that emerged were: the need to use engagement techniques to ensure that stakeholders, particularly service users were participating in the impact measurement process; this was an issue for eight organisations; identifying a theory of change (three organisations); identifying the community (two organisations) and measuring change (two organisations).

Our analysis of these needs was that most of the organisations needed more basic and fundamental help with getting ready for undertaking a social impact measurement rather than detailed technical support to implement a process.

Tools and approaches selected

The organisations that received a diagnostic had very different starting points, as described above. Some were already using appropriate methods that needed refining while others had very little in place. The needs identified were also very diverse, depending on their situations, so the approaches and methods identified were consequently very wide ranging. Seven organisations planned to investigate Social Return on Investment further, although this was not a definite commitment to using it, one of these planned to look at a specific heritage industries SROI. Two organisations identified the SOUL approach to measuring distance travelled and two identified the Outcomes Star. Three organisations selected the Museums, Libraries and Archives (MLA) method. In two diagnostics, the key issue for the organisation was identified as being the need to undertake environmental impact measurement as well as social impact measurement and appropriate methods were identified. For other organisations the process identified the following approaches: Community Impact Mapping and developing a generic Balanced Scorecard.

In addition to these standard methods, two organisations identified tools that had been developed specifically for their type of organisation – a Council for Voluntary Services and a Leisure Services social enterprise. Two organisations were developing bespoke models. Some organisations were going to use an approach published by the Aspen Institute to develop a Theory of Change.

In terms of new approaches that organisations were going to adopt, the diagnostic interviews identified some of the following:

- Developing a qualitative coding system for the organisation’s work
- Explore the distance travelled approach
- Undertaking an in-depth data audit to map what information the organisation already holds
- Starting to measure the social impact for volunteers of being involved with the organisation
- Exploring linking the organisation’s work to mental health resilience steps
- Planning to use a tool called the Jelly Bean Tree, this is an evaluation tool frequently used in education and other projects working with children.

Re-setting the compass

Having completed the diagnostic sessions with a randomly self-selected group of voluntary and community organisations and social enterprises, we began to reflect on what we had found out about their needs. The main thing we found was that we were further away from our destination than we had originally thought and that the guide did not start early enough to help people find their way.

Our guide to getting started in SIM helps organisations to identify what type of SIM approach they need, and to select one from amongst a range of existing methods. It became clear in our analysis of the diagnostics that there were issues that many organisations need to address before they can start to measure the impact of their work in a systematic way.

For many small voluntary and community organisations and social enterprises the most common issue was of resources. Some of the very small groups simply did not have sufficient paid staff to undertake anything more than extremely light touch approaches to measuring impact. Others, slightly bigger organisations were doing some work but often in a wasteful and unsystematic way – having spent time and money on measuring impact they had very little to show for it and felt frustrated. Some organisations were seeking the oxymoronic goal of a light touch approach that produces robust data (and which is preferably free to use and takes little or no staff time). Some individuals who had attended the earlier training courses were trying to convince sceptical managers and colleagues that the work could be justified but that they should be realistic about what they can achieve.

Our cohort provided some rich anecdotal evidence of the issues these organisations are facing.

One VCO is managing over ten evaluation processes for its various projects, imposed by various funders and contractors and yet has no overall picture of the impact of their organisation. Their main aim was to be able to identify where duplication is taking place and how to negotiate with the funders a way of rationalising their systems to produce information in a manageable and meaningful way.

Several organisations were collecting some information, such as how many participants had attended sessions, but not how many sessions each had attended. Others were collecting data on all their work but undertaking no analysis so the work was wasted as it didn't tell them anything. Other organisations were enthusiastically pursuing a range of approaches but not reflecting on the quality of the information they produced. The process helped one organisation recognise that it was measuring the impact it had on its end users well, but was not measuring the impact that it had on the volunteers who gave their time to the project. Two arts organisations were unaware of what the norms were in this sector and aim to find out who is measuring what, using which tools and approaches.

In several cases we identified skilled and knowledgeable people within organisations, who had the know-how, if not always the capacity, to take this work forward. In one particular instance an individual with skills and knowledge was a very keen advocate for SIM within her organisation but had no ability to influence others to adopt the practice. In a similar situation in another organisation the individual had latent support but no assistance to implement SIM. Some organisations were taking a common approach of measuring what was easy, rather than what was most significant. In one organisation the diagnostic was used as an opportunity to convince sceptical funders that the process was worthwhile, inviting two funder representatives to attend the diagnostic meeting.

The most common solutions that the diagnostic recipients decided to take forward were the most pragmatic. These included:

- Co-ordinating existing processes
- Analysing existing data
- Allocating resources to SIM
- Identifying their Theory of Change
- Planning how to report findings
- Planning a realistic time table
- How to engage staff and volunteers in the process
- Finding out what others were doing
- Making sure that change can be attributed to the organisation's activities
- Identifying the community served
- Piloting approaches in a limited way before adopting them in the whole organisation

The Guild is currently developing a new tool to assist organisations to put these building blocks in place to help them when they decide to take on a particular approach to social impact measurement.

Are we there yet? What did the process tell us?

There are lessons in this process for academic institutions, public authorities (as commissioners) and delivery organisations (VCOs and SEs).

There is a great differential in organisations' starting points to participate in a process such as SIM. Our cohorts (research sample and diagnostic participants) were amongst the most advanced in their thinking but they still lacked much of the knowledge they would need to put a viable system into place. Even the most 'user-friendly' of tools and writings have assumed prior knowledge that does not exist. Our work to produce guidance for VCOs and SEs was given greater weight by virtue of being backed by independent academic research, but the research needed translation into a practical process using everyday language.

People working in VCOs and SEs need a lot of support if they are to implement the measurement of their social impact in a meaningful way. It will not be sufficient for them to react to what their funders demand in relation to a single strand of work. This can result in a small organisation trying to manage over ten monitoring and evaluation processes without having an overview of how these activities make a difference in the context of their other areas of work. VCOs and SEs will need to make clear and thoughtful decisions about what and how they want to measure. They need to select methods that are appropriate to the goals and values of their organisation, proportionate to the resources they have, and endure that are consistently and systematically applied. They should recognise that many excellent tools already exist and they do not need to invest time and money in developing new ones. However, as the CEEDR research showed, they can 'pick and mix' from existing tools and methods.

Public sector agencies funding these organisations need to be aware of this and to recognise the value of a range of approaches without imposing a 'one size fits all' approach that aims to make their own lives easier. They should also recognise that the organisations they support should use or adapt existing methods rather than develop new ones. Public sector agencies operating in similar fields such and health and social care should work to co-ordinate their measurement requirements for delivery organisations to avoid duplication and wasted resources.

What enabled the journey to take place?

In order to write this paper it has been necessary to reflect on the process that was undertaken and the reasons why we think it has been of benefit to us and to our clients and why we think it is worthy of sharing with others.

In the first stages it was beneficial to have social policy agencies and practitioners finding the space and time to reflect on the current situation and think about its implications. This included people having the opportunity to express what they didn't understand.

During the research stage and the development of the guide, it was important to have a mutually respectful relationship between an academic organisation and a practitioner facing organisation, in which the practitioner recognised the value of the independent research and the academic researchers accepted that their work needed a 'translator' to create practical benefit to the end user. This included sharing ideas and branding. Furthermore the capacity created through the Knowledge Transfer Partnership was invaluable in taking forward the development of the guide once the initial funded contract had been completed. It should also be recognised that being able to recruit a high quality KTP placement was valuable to the process – and also to note that the placement enabled the researcher to gain employment in a related field directly because of this experience.

Thinking about what we, as the practitioner organisation, were able to contribute to this journey, we should state that we are a well established organisation with a good track record of delivery and a good reputation in the voluntary and community and social enterprise sectors. We were able to access organisations to attend the training and to deliver it in a way that we knew would be effective. But we are also reflective practitioners and we invested time in thinking hard about how to make the process of SIM more accessible, listening to the feedback we received and being open to suggestions made by the participants of the training and the diagnostics. Most importantly we have the ability to translate complex ideas into simple and practical language.

As a business we also recognised that the investment of our time in this process would be returned. We recognised that this was a market opportunity for us as SIM is in line with government and other policy agendas and that there was a market gap for this level of support tools.

Did our journey take us where we wanted to go?

The main feature of our journey from theory to practice is that it is a long one, and one which not many people have travelled from beginning to end. At the practice end, we have people running organisations to make a difference in their community or in the wider world. In many cases they are passionately committed to what they do and have an inherent belief that they are making a difference. By their nature, many would be described as activists and pragmatists[10], people who get on and do things, who make things happen and who are likely to view time spent on anything other than 'doing' to be wasted. If they are to be enabled to spend time reflecting on what they do to find out if they are really making the differences they claim, then the approaches they use must reflect these motivations.

Many approaches to measuring social impact, and indeed most research studies, are designed by theorists and reflectors[11]. The most valuable and credible approaches to measuring impact are those that people have spent time thinking about, reviewing and revising. The job is then to turn them into a process that can be used by practitioners without them necessarily needing to know about the underlying theories.

The existing methods and approaches aim to describe a generic process through which delivery organisations can review their various activities. However, these organisations all feel different and their first instinct is often to design or commission a process that is specific to their own needs. A key learning point on our journey was that organisations presented with any process, product or tool will immediately ask: "what's in it for me?" They will want to know how to interpret the specifics of what they do and how they do it. Any generalising theory or method is most likely to overlook this response. The training and diagnostics we delivered gave people running these organisations the opportunity to express their individual needs and to fit the

[10] Using Honey and Mumford's Learning Style Models, Learning Styles Questionnaire, Honey, P. and Mumford, A., Peter Honey Publications, 2006
[11] Ibid.

processes around them, rather than the other way round. The process helped them to apply what methods they could use and to adapt others to fit.

The gap between the theoreticians and the activists was bridged by helping people in VCOs and SEs to identify what they had already, help them work out how existing approaches could be delivered to meet their needs, ensure they had sufficient resources to implement any actions and help them negotiate with the people that this would affect: the funders, users, staff and volunteers.

We have used the findings from the SIM research carried out by CEEDR to help make a difference to individual voluntary and community groups and social enterprises in their ability to measure the impact of what they do. We have taken a theoretical approach and, through various stages, developed practical tools that organisations can use to help measure and improve their impact in the communities where they are trying to make a difference.

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