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A Shared Responsibility: Maximising Learning from the Invest to Save Fund

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A Shared Responsibility: Maximising Learning from the Invest to Save Fund

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Summary

- The Invest to Save Fund helps Welsh public services transform the way they work. It supports the introduction of new approaches that make services more efficient and effective. It is important that the good practice which it supports is adopted as widely as possible.
- Research shows that for this to happen there must be effective mechanisms for sharing good practice; awareness of the opportunities for learning; a willingness to share learning and incentives to do so; and good relationships between organisations.
- It also suggests that organisations need to adapt good practice so that it works in their own contexts rather than simply ‘cut and pasting’ approaches from elsewhere. This means that face-to-face interactions are better than a one-size-fits-all dissemination strategy because they enable organisations to share knowledge that is difficult to codify.
- Public services, the Wales Audit Office (WAO), Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA) and Welsh Government can all do more to encourage learning from the new approaches that are supported by the Fund.
- Public services should liaise with each other when designing projects and take more responsibility for sharing good practice - in their own sectors and beyond.
- The WAO should assess how well councils and other public services are working together to share learning.
- The WLGA can use its networks to promote good practice from the Fund.
- The Welsh Government should give more emphasis to the importance of learning at all stages of the Fund. It should consider:
 - Promoting awareness of the Fund and of the good practice which it supports;
 - Ensuring that all projects are evaluated independently in order to identify lessons;
 - Requiring public services to develop clear plans to share the good practice which they develop;
 - Introducing a dedicated resource to support dissemination and learning activity;
 - Providing incentives for public services to share learning from projects supported by the Fund.

Introduction

The aim of this assignment is to provide independent expert advice to the Finance Minister on 'ways to enhance the prospects that public services will learn from and adopt good practice which is funded by Invest to Save (I2S)'.

In addition to a scoping interview with the lead official and colleagues, I have conducted seven in-depth, semi-structured interviews with officials from across different departments of the Welsh Government and representatives from the WAO and the WLGA.

I have accessed various documents on Invest to Save including the annual reports, the National Assembly for Wales Finance Committee report and both internal and external evaluations reports. I have also utilised previous research that I have conducted on organisational learning and findings from a current project examining different funding mechanisms in Welsh local government (in particular, Local Service Board-European Social Fund).

While this assignment focuses upon I2S, it is important to recognise that the issues raised in this note are, of course, not confined to the I2S scheme but common across other programmes in the public sector. I understand that there is potential to examine wider issues in a future piece of work.

This note focuses upon the following seven questions which were agreed in the commissioning document. I have grouped some of these questions together for ease of reporting.

1. What is known about the conditions which encourage learning from good practice?
2. What lessons can Wales learn from other programmes which have sought to encourage learning from good practice (for example the Beacon Council scheme)?
3. What factors inhibit learning in local government and in NHS Wales?
4. What action would local authorities and NHS Wales need to take?
5. Is the Invest to Save programme as currently designed and implemented likely to maximise the prospects for learning from good practice?
6. If not, what are the main changes that could be made to improve its effectiveness?
7. What action can the Welsh Government take to improve learning from the scheme?

Encouraging Learning From Good Practice

What do we mean by organisational learning?

‘An organisation learns if any of its units acquires knowledge that it recognises as potentially useful for the organisation’ (Huber, 1991: 126). Organisational learning is a multi-stage process.

- First, individuals from organisations need to interact (in a network or similar) and be exposed to new ideas;
- The second stage is where knowledge is acquired by the individual and then taken back to their organisation;
- The next stage is applying this new knowledge to the organisation so that it leads to action or changes behaviour;
- The final stage is service improvement if the actions or changes in behaviour are superior to the original behaviour.

Conditions which encourage learning and good practice

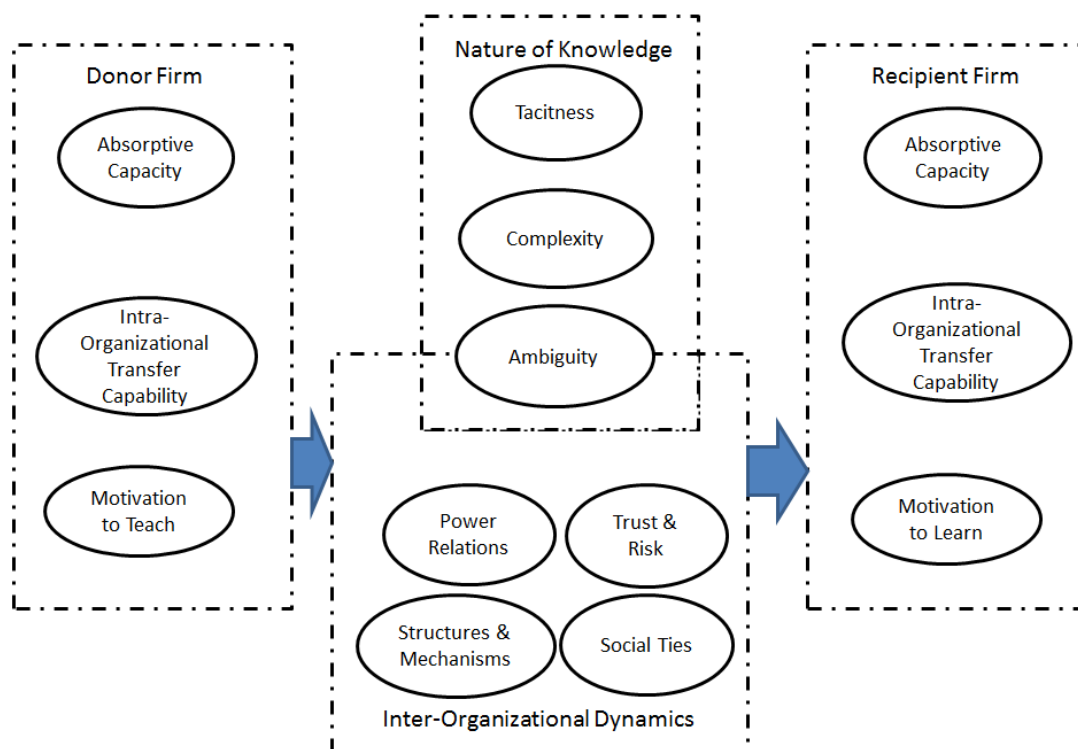
Literature on organisational learning suggests that there are a number of conditions that need to exist within an organisation and between learning partners for the transfer of learning to occur (Child and Faulkner, 1998; Nahapiet and Ghoshal, 1998; Finger and Brand, 1999). In order to understand organisational learning, it is not simply the quality of the new knowledge that is important, you also need to focus on the **source of learning, the recipient of the learning** and the **context** (Szulanski, 1996; Rashman and Hartley, 2002).

A number of theoretical models have been designed which outline the relationship between the sender and the receiver of learning and the processes and actions which lead to organisational learning and improvement. One such model (Figure 1) suggests that both the donor and the recipient need **absorptive capacity** to recognise the value of new knowledge and use it (Easterby-Smith et al., 2008). Absorptive capacity is the preparedness of an organisation to absorb external knowledge which is largely dependent upon prior knowledge and skills, including shared language, technical knowledge and team functioning (Cohen and Levinthal, 1990).

The donor organisation needs intra-organisational transfer capability so that they can disseminate the knowledge to the recipient in an effective way. The final factor which influences knowledge transfer is both the **motivation to teach and learn** from the respective partners. The **nature of knowledge** is also important as various studies have shown that how the knowledge is stored (its tacitness) and its complexity can determine the success of organisational learning. **Tacit knowledge** is personal, contextual and often embedded in practice which makes it difficult to articulate i.e. 'know how'. **Explicit knowledge** concerns rules and facts that can be articulated and codified i.e. 'know what'.

The inter-organisational dynamics are the factors which enable learning to be transferred. Easterby-Smith et al. (2008) suggest four main factors: power relations, trust and risk, structures and mechanisms and social ties. These inter-organisational factors come from private sector research and not all are relevant for the public sector. Power relations and trust between organisations are perhaps less of an issue in the public sector than in the private sector, although regardless of sectors, people are more likely to absorb knowledge from those they **trust** (Gambetta, 1988). Also, organisational learning is more likely to occur in an arena where there is a **willingness to take risks** and acceptance that mistakes can be made.

Figure 1: Factors influencing inter-organisational knowledge transfer (from Easterby-Smith et al., 2008)



The **context** within which learning takes place is an important enabler. Research in the private sector suggests that a firm's ability to learn from another firm is dependent upon the **similarity** of both firms' knowledge bases, organisational structures and dominant logics (Lane and Lubatkin, 1998). Research in public services has come to the same conclusions as there was also a preference for learning from similarly sized organisations facing similar issues (Downe et al., 2004).

Although leadership is not specified as an enabler in its own right in Figure 1, it can be grouped under structures. **Strategic leadership** is regularly cited as being an important variable in implementing organisational learning (Vera and Crossan, 2004; Bate and Robert, 2002). Introducing change is often dependent upon an individual or a small number of individuals working together (Downe et al., 2004). These political or managerial **champions** are those tasked with co-ordinating knowledge transfer and generally making the learning happen. It does not matter who the champion is, what is important is whether the individual is able to influence, shape and create the climate for change.

Social ties are another factor which enables learning to be transferred. Successful inter-organizational learning is more likely to happen where it is embedded in a collaborative relationship (Child and Faulkner, 1998) and this relationship relies upon good social ties between participants. Where knowledge is tacit, learning can only take place where people are willing to share and this is aided if there are good relationships between participants. Dopson found from the health sector that 'tacit and experiential knowledge is perceived by clinicians to be a persuasive form of knowledge' (2006: 85).

The **culture** of an organisation is an important influence on its capacity to generate innovation and implement learning (Nonaka, 1994) and needs to be supportive of knowledge transfer. Technology can be an important enabler but it is not the easy solution to organisational learning problems – 'it makes connection possible, but it does not make it happen' (O'Dell and Grayson, 1998). What makes organisational learning happen are people creating, acquiring and utilising knowledge within the organisation.

The enablers outlined above can of course be barriers so, for example, where there is no trust between disparate members in a poorly designed learning structure, this will militate against learning being shared. A range of authors have considered the barriers to organisational learning. O'Dell and Grayson (1998), for example, outline four potential barriers to learning and change. They suggest that **ignorance** (e.g. individuals with knowledge not realising that others may find it useful), **capacity** (in terms of money and time), **relationships** (between people, and needing a critical mass of people) and **motivation** (no 'real' reason to transfer information) can all act as barriers. These barriers

can exist at different levels – at the individual level (getting the right people involved and ensuring that those who have the knowledge share it but recognising that this requires time and effort) to the organisational level (where sharing learning needs to be part of an organisation’s culture).

This section has outlined the conditions which encourage learning from good practice. It is not simply a case of having a check-list of enablers – do these things and your organisation will be a learning organisation – although practitioner-focused literature would seem to suggest this. What works in one organisation will not necessarily work in another as the context is different and they may face different barriers to organisational learning. For successful knowledge transfer to take place, there needs to be a focus upon the originating organisation but also the recipient organisation. Later sections of this note will assess the extent to which these factors inform current strategies to share good practice from Invest to Save projects.

Learning From Other Programmes

Various governments have introduced schemes to encourage the spread of good practice and learning across the public sector. In the United States, the Innovations in American Government programme has been recognising and promoting excellence and creativity in the public sector for more than 20 years.

In the UK, the Government has introduced a number of mechanisms of inter-organisational learning such as peer review (Jones, 2004; 2005), the capacity building programme (Nunn, 2007) and the Beacon Scheme (Rashman and Hartley, 2002; Downe et al., 2004; Rashman et al., 2005). All of these initiatives aim to improve services through organisational learning.

The Beacon Scheme was introduced by the Labour government in 1998. It is particularly interesting for this assignment because it had two main goals – the celebration of excellence through an award and the diffusion of good practice and learning across the public sector. Beacon awards were given to those councils judged to be excellent in a particular service area. They would then be **required to disseminate the ‘best practice’** by hosting events, visits and work shadowing from other councils.

Assessing the impact of award schemes is hard and largely relies upon the perceptions of those involved. Hartley and Allison (2002) found that respondents could identify gains that they had achieved personally from attending events such as gaining new knowledge and

having the opportunity to challenge current thinking. But **they could not easily identify how their organisations benefitted from the network** beyond reporting findings of the event back to colleagues.

Two papers have examined the extent of organisational learning and change in public services through the Beacon Scheme (Downe et al., 2004; Rashman et al., 2005). The results suggest that learning has taken place but managers had not learnt as much as they had expected. 77% of respondents to a survey expected to learn 'a fair amount' or 'a great deal' about 'developing new solutions to problems', but actual learning was lower with most respondents (41%) learning only 'a little'. Overall, more than half (55%) of attendees at learning events stated that they had made, or intended to make, changes to procedures after learning 'best practice' from other authorities.

There is evidence of improvement over time. When the survey was repeated three years later, 79% of respondents reported that they had made a change in their council which was attributable wholly or mainly to attending Beacon events. 52% of managers have made 'improvements to working practices' and 38% have 'introduced new working practices'. Rashman et al. (2005) concluded that organisational learning is more effective where the **culture of the organisation is receptive** and where **key 'champions' work well together**.

An example from the Beacon scheme

In one authority, learning was brought back from an event and disseminated to staff using a variety of methods including a short report to senior managers and training sessions. As a result, new working practices were introduced which led to the clearing of a backlog of housing benefit claims and the time taken to process the claims reduced. The government has recently used this authority as an example of how to clear a back-log, so the recipient of the learning from the award winner is now acting as the donor of learning for others to learn from.

Research on Beacons concludes the following:

- Context is important as organisations (and individuals within them) can learn in many different ways in different places. **Good practice needs to be grafted and transplanted rather than 'cut and pasted'**;
- Relational learning is better than formal learning events or dissemination;

- Explicit knowledge is easier to share than tacit knowledge. Face-to-face interactions can help to share knowledge that is difficult to be written down.
- Beacons led to changes in behaviour, improving morale etc. but it is difficult to identify links to improvement;
- Councils became more willing to strive for excellence and share their learning with others. This boosted the reputation of some organisations
- The incentive of becoming a Beacon council and using the award logo on all documentation motivated some councils to apply. More than 200 councils applied in year one; and
- There are concerns about whether the councils awarded Beacon status were actually providing 'best practice' or whether the winners were simply better at completing the application process (Hartley and Downe, 2007; Brannan et al., 2008).

In the health sector, collaboratives have been introduced which aim to provide a bottom-up learning based improvement process. Here, horizontal networks are set up which 'enable a wide range of professionals in a large number of organisations to come together to learn and 'harvest' good practice from each other' (Bate and Robert, 2002: 645). These collaboratives were adapted from the Institute of Healthcare Improvement's 'Breakthrough Series' in the United States.

Recent research in the UK has identified a number of factors that are common to those collaboratives which have the greatest impact. First, it is important **to involve the right people**. Collaboratives work best when they are **voluntary, inclusive** (of all disciplines and patients), multidisciplinary and have **senior support to make change**. Second, they have to focus on topics where there is established good practice and a large gap between current and ideal performance. Third, good collaboratives set **clear goals that team members buy into** and are accountable for. Finally, **appropriate resources** need to be provided and outcomes **evaluated robustly** to assess performance (Health Foundation, 2014)

Factors that Inhibit Learning

This section explores the main obstacles that inhibit learning in public services. The literature review has outlined a number of barriers to learning which include:

- Mechanisms for sharing learning;

- Awareness;
- Responsibility;
- Incentives; and
- Relationships.

It discusses these barriers in relation to Invest to Save and outlines what can do to improve the situation.

The first barrier is the **mechanisms** that are currently being used to share learning. The assumption in Welsh public services seems to be 'build it and they will come' with little evaluation of whether any approach has worked or not.

On-line structures

There are various on-line networks set up in Wales to share good practice. 'Good Practice Wales' <http://www.goodpracticewales.com/home> is a single access online portal to Welsh Public Services good practice and knowledge. It places a particular focus upon sharing 'Case studies'. All ten of the latest case studies loaded between July-August 2014 are focused on recycling. The user is then faced with 214 pages of further case studies.

While the Wales Audit Office are a 'good practice partner' in this portal, they also have their own site called Good Practice Exchange (GPX) <http://www.wao.gov.uk/good-practice> The Good Practice Exchange is based on the following principles:

- 'Not reinventing the wheel';
- Adapting not adopting;
- Not advocating a one-size-fits-all approach; and
- Acting as a 'conduit' for the sharing of knowledge.

Like 'Good Practice Wales', the site uses case studies, but there are only 17 posted across 2013 and 2014. The GPX also organise **shared learning seminars** which include a 'call to action' at the end of the seminar focused on what actions will be taken in the future. Some delegates are contacted a few months later to ask about any progress made on their recommendations. There is 'mixed success of this approach' as it depends upon the recommendations they make and for whom. One cynical interviewee remarked that, 'It insults everyone's intelligence that people will change after attending a workshop'. There needs to be more thought given as to how learning from these events can be turned into

action. Are there similar themes for the Welsh Government (or other organisations) to learn from and make changes? If so, who is collecting this information and what, if anything, happens as a result?

An example from the Good Practice Exchange

There have been some successes from the events where an example of 'good practice' has been shared and adapted in another authority. A presentation from Monmouthshire County Council on the benefits of agile working has led to similar approaches across Wales. The council agreed to share its business case with others and made visits to other authorities to explain how it worked for them. It is that face-to-face contact which can motivate and inspire people to go for change. It is, of course, expensive to bring people together in seminars, but it can act as an enabler for further contact and then action.

It is not clear how effective on-line mechanisms are in sharing good practice and improving public services, but different mechanisms continue to come on-line. The LGA's Knowledge Hub is one of the more recent additions. Given that it is not clear if the on-line approach is working, it is surprising that investment is continuing and there seems to be reliance upon this type of activity. It is unlikely that senior officers are going to spend much, if any time, on such mechanisms in the hope of picking up good practice. Just putting case studies of I2S projects on-line is not the answer.

Networks

Networks (such as collaboratives in health) are where individuals come together in a collaborative arrangement to share knowledge and good practice. The theory here is that people learn through engagement and interaction with others and the resulting knowledge is tacit (Brown and Duguid, 1991). The way to promote organisational learning is to recognise its tacit dimension and to support communities as they develop the mechanisms for sharing knowledge. The process of transfer is not easy as there needs to be careful consideration of the most appropriate method to transfer different types of knowledge (e.g. the use of site visits, mentoring, shadowing etc. to share tacit knowledge) (Dixon, 2000).

There are a large number of well-established professional networks in Welsh public services. As one interviewee suggested, 'There are networks all over the place. Every time I open a

cupboard here, there is a network'. They should be a prime avenue for sharing information and good practice, but it is unclear whether this is actually taking place. Just because a network is in place does not mean that learning is occurring. A common complaint from the Welsh Government is that networks can bring people together to complain about Welsh Government policy rather than using it as forum for sharing good practice and service improvement. Another common complaint is that there is often no action between meetings of the network. There needs to be more follow-up of actions resulting from each meeting.

There have been a number of similar projects put forward for I2S funding which implies that organisations (particularly health boards) are not always talking to each other. If similar organisations are delivering similar things, it is vital that there are good contacts between them. Directors of Finance meet regularly so ideally they should be sharing information on potential projects. The onus could be placed on health boards and local councils to liaise rather than the Welsh Government 'matchmaking'. A couple of interviewees wondered whether there was a pan-Wales information group or a network which focused upon transformational service change where I2S projects could feature more consistently.

Networks vary on how often they meet and their level of activity between meetings. It is important, therefore, that networks are not relied upon as the sole source for sharing learning about I2S. Those who are currently involved in networks should be asked how they think they are working, what can be done to improve them and how good practice identified from I2S can be shared most effectively.

Case studies

Dissemination activities often rely upon the use of 'case studies' (or pen portraits) produced by the successful organisation. These typically cover the aim of the project, objectives achieved, key learning lessons, next steps and contact details. In I2S, these are helpful to Welsh Government in explaining what the funding is doing and can be 'a means of identifying opportunities'.

The Wales Audit Office used to produce 4-5 page case studies but after feedback from users, now use much shorter documents (1 page) covering high-level questions. Enough information needs to be provided for interest to be sparked and for conversations to begin.

Users are more likely to read shorter documents.

The second factor is **awareness**. This is where individuals have knowledge but don't realise that others may find it useful. The extent of learning in an organisation depends upon its

culture. Some public organisations have a culture that is open to learning and strategic leadership can facilitate this. In other organisations, there is no such culture or leadership and information sharing is poor. Public service organisations have a responsibility to share good practice internally but also to the wider sector. A number of projects may only disseminate locally through internal mechanisms and press releases. We explore below what the Welsh Government currently does to promote the scheme and how this could be improved.

Third, there is the issue of **responsibility** and who is tasked with sharing learning from good practice. The organisation receiving I2S resource could perhaps be more proactive and take ownership of the learning opportunity. Public sector organisations need to publicise the fact that they have been awarded I2S funding. It should be something to show to the public that an organisation is innovating and efficiencies are being produced. The focus of knowledge transfer is often on the donor organisation offering best practice for the recipients to learn. This means that there needs to be either altruism or an incentive for the donor unless they are also able to learn from others (Hartley and Downe, 2007). In the absence of any organised structure, potential learning can be lost.

There seems to be reluctance for public sector organisations to sell themselves, both to Welsh Government, and to other organisations. As one interviewee suggested, 'Look what we've achieved. 'We don't tend to do that, do we?' It could be made part of the programme, that organisations are required to disseminate the learning from the project. They could cover what went wrong and how they overcame problems as well as distilling the lessons for other potential bidders.

There is also a role for others to act as conduits such as the WAO, NICE, research councils, and the WLGA. The WAO could ask councils whether they had considered using I2S while the WLGA should be doing more to share best practice.

Linked to the issue of responsibility are **incentives** (for individuals and organisations). Once the I2S resources have been received, there is little incentive to share the learning from the project. While some organisations may be enthusiastic about sharing their good practice because of the boost it gives to their reputation, (both within particular professional groups and with Welsh Government), others may not be so forthcoming.

It is clear that there is learning from the I2S programme which has the potential to be shared and adopted/adapted by other organisations. Referring back to Figure 1, there needs to be a motivation to teach as well as to learn. There is no reason to suggest that there could be an unwillingness to share and to learn, so what is missing is the impetus to make it happen.

Relationships between organisations are the fifth factor which can inhibit learning. There is a strong feeling from some organisations that they can't learn from certain others because of differences in context, politics, size etc. This 'not invented here' syndrome or 'tribal mentality' is difficult to overcome. Given the large size of I2S projects, it also raises the question about whether there are sufficient opportunities for learning, especially when most projects are sector-specific.

There is though potential for cross-sector learning from some of the I2S projects which seems to be currently unexploited. Managers from across sectors may not meet often enough to discuss the potential for cross-sector savings.

Encouraging Learning Through Invest to Save

Introduction

Is there really a problem in the first place and how would we know? The general feeling from interviewees was that ideas do spread and that this may happen without the Welsh Government always knowing about it. Public sector managers will not report discussions about sharing good practice on I2S (or anything else) back to Welsh Government. The example of three projects on digitalised patient records suggests that this isn't necessarily the case, but in another area (transcribing service for doctors), an applicant had been to see a health board that had already been funded through I2S. There is also evidence of learning from the Gwent Frailty Project.

This section will explore what is currently being done to share good practice and outline actions the Welsh Government could take to improve its effectiveness. Some of these actions are short-term and could be introduced immediately; others are recommendations which are more long-term in nature.

What is currently undertaken by the Welsh Government?

One of the four main objectives of the Fund is to 'promote dissemination of lessons learnt and best practice arising from projects' (Welsh Government, 2013). The Finance Committee recommended that 'the Welsh Government continues to promote case studies, encourage institutions to emulate successful schemes and to champion I2S through the Public Sector

Leadership Group' (National Assembly for Wales, 2013). This section examines the mechanisms in place to capture the learning resulting from the projects and outlines recommendations for improvements.

The Finance Minister announces the opening of the scheme each year, the team issues a press release and the Minister visits projects. A **letter from the Finance Minister** about the I2S scheme is sent out every year to Leaders/chief executives and the programme has also featured in the local government settlement letter issued by successive Ministers with responsibility for local government.

For such a letter to be effective, however, the message needs to be cascaded through the organization. Information about I2S needs to land on the desks of those who are able to influence those taking the decisions i.e. it needs to go wider than the Leader/chief executive. Generally, more needs to be done to explain how the process works, that it is well governed, and that the application process is not complicated or bureaucratic.

The Welsh Government has introduced two new questions on the expression of interest **application** form – 'What arrangements are you proposing to capture the lessons from this project? How will it be evaluated and what plans are there to cascade learning and findings?' Applicants have a maximum of 35 words to cover these questions. The dissemination of learning from the project is not an assessment criterion in stage two of the process. While the evaluation of the project is included in the delivery assessment, there is no mention of learning and dissemination in this assessment, nor in the FAQ document. The Welsh Government needs to give greater emphasis on learning and sharing good practice in all stages of the application process.

'**Annual reports**' bring together case studies of projects produced by the recipients of I2S funding. The three reports to date provide details of some of the I2S projects and have the potential to share knowledge quickly versus face-to-face contact. They aim to give a flavour of the project and name for a key contact who can provide further information. The I2S team are therefore acting as a conduit to making links. Unfortunately, these key contacts can often quickly move positions so the champion for the project is lost along with a certain amount of tacit knowledge.

It is unclear how attractive a large compendium of case studies produced by external evaluators is to potential users.

The **Public Sector Leadership Group** (PSLG) is meant to champion the learning from I2S (and other programmes) within Welsh public services. It should help to promote the programme, make links between I2S projects, tease out areas for service transformation and

potentially push for a pan-Wales approach in some areas. Twelve meetings of the PSLG were held between September 2011 and February 2014. According to the minutes, I2S was mentioned on only two occasions – a proposal for a project and a mention of I2S as a potential funding opportunity. It may be that I2S features in the four work programmes (e.g. on asset management and effective services for vulnerable groups) but no documentation was available in the public domain to check.

To be effective, information shared at these meetings needs to be shared ‘back at the ranch’. One interviewee suggested that cabinet members and Service Heads would not necessarily be aware of the work of the PSLG.

A former member of the PSLG suggested that they don’t talk enough about good practice and that there is a concern that civil servants and ministers can hear about a project and think that it would be relatively straightforward to replicate similar changes. There is of course the danger that good practice is highlighted without sufficient evidence that it can deliver. As the literature suggests, the sharing of learning depends upon context and things cannot often just be copied and pasted. The evaluation of projects used as good practice examples needs to be robust and projects need to be nurtured before they can be replicated across public services. Finally, it is not clear what leverage I2S has under existing governance arrangements to facilitate joint working across Welsh Government so that linkages are being made across government departments.

Website

I understand that the website for the I2S programme is due to be updated and this may have some impact on levels of knowledge and engagement. Updating the information on a website can, however, only go so far.

Engagement in networks

The Welsh Government has held workshops with health boards armed with examples of successful projects with the aim of encouraging thinking and applications. This is a good approach which should be replicated in other sectors and be part of an annual cycle of events.

Two I2S projects have been showcased in a 'Buildings Management' WAO Shared Learning Seminar, but many more I2S projects could feature in similar events. There are significant opportunities to feed into WAO (and other) events and Welsh Government need to be proactive in doing this.

There is always room for improvement in how existing mechanisms described above can be used, but there are also other ways in which the sharing of good practice can be improved.

What can the Welsh Government do to improve the sharing of learning?

The literature review concluded that there are five main barriers to learning, which include:

- Mechanisms for sharing learning;
- Awareness;
- Responsibility;
- Incentives;
- Relationships.

I will now examine where the Welsh Government could introduce changes to address these barriers.

Mechanisms for sharing learning

Different mechanisms are needed to do different things – so the I2S team will need to determine the best vehicles to achieve outcomes. The website is used to display basic information about the programme, case studies are used to highlight how and why the projects have delivered efficiencies which can be shared at learning events, but in order to imbed the learning, peer-to-peer learning should be encouraged.

Peer mentoring could be made part of the learning process so that successful I2S projects pass on their experiences of what works and why. Organisations could guide others in putting a bid together, designing a project plan, calculating potential cost savings or even helping to design a new I2S project. Lots of practical support could be provided. On the face of it, here doesn't seem to be much of this peer learning conducted in Wales, but there is great potential for the Welsh Government to use some additional resource to make it work. Put simply, where a project has 'worked', representatives from that project could be funded

to meet other people face-to-face (sharing tacit knowledge) to explain what worked, what didn't and why.

More attention needs to be placed on providing the best support for both the provider of the learning and the recipients. For example, the provider may have excellent performance in delivering efficiencies but it does not mean that they will be excellent at transferring this knowledge.

The WAO have initiated contact with I2S to look at past projects and see what good practice can be shared. Opportunities to sharing learning face-to-face should be taken.

There are a range of networks in place across the public sector and interviewees mentioned the specific and specialist nature of many of these networks. It is not clear whether there is a network in place which covers service re-design/transformation where learning from I2S projects could be discussed and shared. Rather than set-up a new network, it would be more practical to piggy-back on an existing network where it can be shown that this network has a record of success in sharing knowledge. If no such network is in place, a new network could be a way for strategic players, within or across sectors, to share good practice on 'what works'. The Minister for Finance could launch this network to give it some credibility and impetus.

Where I2S projects from NHS Wales are using different models to do similar things (e.g. make services more patient focused or improve the integration of non-emergency transport), there is the potential to learn from these different approaches as if it was a natural experiment.

The Welsh Government should consider:

- Giving greater emphasis on learning and sharing good practice in all stages of the application process;
- Introducing the requirement that robust dissemination plans are part of the application process as projects are likely to have ideas on the most appropriate mechanism to share learning;
- Introducing a process of peer mentoring so that successful I2S projects are required to help other projects to learn from their experiences, so the sector is helping itself;
- Providing some resource to support this peer mentoring;
- Providing support to the donor of the learning on how to promote lessons learnt and share best practice;
- Ensuring projects work with the Local Government and Government Business Analytical Team at the beginning of the project to design how to evaluate the project;

- Requiring projects to complete a 'lessons learnt' document so what has been learnt through the process is formalised and made explicit;
- Using different methods to spread the learning (e.g. by using existing themed seminars run by WAO, WLGA and others) and electronic methods (e.g. providing updates on the progress of projects to networks by email);
- Using shorter summaries of projects to help to 'get the message out';
- Continuing to analyse the number of hits and downloads of reports on its website to assess the popularity of different styles of reports;
- Ensuring that there is a champion in the Welsh Government (which could include a Minister (for Local Government and Health in particular) and senior civil servant) for a particular project or group of similar projects;
- Asking participants in existing networks how good practice identified from I2S can be shared most effectively; and
- Setting up a new network focused on transformational service change spanning NHS Wales and local government.

Awareness

It is clear that the Finance Minister is a strong advocate for I2S and has conducted various activities to 'get the message out' including meeting a group of Directors of Finance to explain the benefits of I2S. The Finance Committee report identified the value of ministerial buy-in and leadership and one interviewee suggested that support 'can't go to a higher level'.

Efforts have been made to sell the scheme to other sectors e.g. higher/further education (and HefCE) and various networks have been attended as well as conferences. But more needs to be done to promote the scheme to those parts of the public sector which have not, to date, applied in m(any) numbers. All parts of the public sector need to know about the scheme and not stumble across it accidentally. A view from one interviewee was that I2S, 'hasn't penetrated local government' and the profile of the scheme needs to be raised. A few interviewees suggested that the application process is not as bureaucratic as other schemes (in particular when applying for European funds) and the Welsh Government need to get this message out.

I2S is likely to remain most attractive to those organisations where there are no alternative funding streams e.g. Welsh Government sponsored bodies. The Welsh Government needs

to be realistic about involvement from local government as they can get grant funding and have powers to borrow. One interviewee was blunt in saying that, 'No-one wants to take money and repay unless they have to'. There could be more interest from local government if the opportunities for grant funding are reduced and/or once reserves have been run down. Rather than one-off attempts, efforts need to be maintained until it comes to the point where no more interest is ever likely to be provoked.

The Welsh Government should consider:

- How to do more to promote the programme, explain the application process and the successes generated;
- Targeting information on I2S to councillors. The portfolio holder for finance would be a good person to champion the programme and bring it to the attention of officers;
- Organising open days for people to see the project 'in action'; and
- Visiting service-based networks to share knowledge on a successful project.

Responsibility

The Finance Minister has suggested that 'We should be able to transfer that (medicines management) so that it happens in every hospital' (Hutt, 2012). But who is responsible for taking the lead in sharing that learning – is it the health board, Welsh Government or should there be an agency whose mission is to share learning?

We've already mentioned above that public sector organisations and others (e.g. the WLGA) have a responsibility to share learning from I2S. The Welsh Government is well placed to take a strategic view over different policy areas and funding streams (not just I2S but also Regional Collaboration Fund (RCF) and Local Service Board-European Social Fund (LSB-ESF)) to bring the learning together. But, no organisation is currently taking an overview and co-ordination role. This means that successful I2S projects are not disseminated widely nor learning from good practice maximised. To make the most of the good practice, 'There needs to be somebody somewhere who is bringing it all together'.

There is potential for the I2S team to lead the sharing of learning, to 'feed the beast' as one interviewee described it. This would mean a stronger outward-facing role than at present and more face-to-face contact with public sector organisations. It can play a 'matchmaking' role in bringing organisations together to put in collaborative proposals or to see links across projects. But the team is relatively small and only so much can be done by existing members.

Where it has been shown through robust evaluation that services have been improved through redesign and efficiencies achieved, there are opportunities for Welsh Government to mandate change in the NHS. The Voluntary Early Release Scheme was an idea which came from one health board. They were encouraged to speak to other boards to see if there was interest and the project was rolled-out across NHS Wales. A number of interviewees were concerned that there was a lack of strong top-down behaviour to say 'just do it'.

It is, of course, different for autonomous organisations like local councils which can't be held to account for not adopting good practice. While there is some support for the Welsh government to say, 'We really like this project. Its' been proven to deliver. This is what is going to be across the region and you all then need to work together to make it happen'. If the Welsh Government wants change in this sector, it probably needs to use legislation to make it happen. It has been argued that public organisations could be asked to 'adopt or to justify' why an idea of good practice may not be appropriate. This seems a fair question to ask so long as councils are able to explain and give reasons why an idea may not work locally.

The Welsh Government should consider:

- Whether one organisation needs to provide leadership of the process;
- Giving greater thought as to who is currently responsible for sharing good practice and bringing the learning together;
- Placing more emphasis on organisations to share learning from I2S (see recommendations above);
- Using the I2S team to proactively share good practice on a wider basis than to date;
- Making the learning from I2S projects explicit - by extracting the key learning lessons from the projects;
- Making further efforts to push collaborations across sectors;
- Assessing which projects could cross sectors from health to local government and vice versa (e.g. LED lighting project at the University Hospital of Wales); and
- Being more proactive in rolling out projects where circumstances permit this.

Incentives

I've recommended above that organisations should be required to share learning from their project with others and to work with their peers in developing future applications. The Welsh Government does not need to provide any incentive but they could commission expert

support and advice for projects so that they are able to share their good practice in the most appropriate way.

The Welsh Government can use the leverage of resources to get projects to talk to each other and then see if an idea could be scaled up.

The Welsh Government should consider:

- Introducing a dedicated resource for dissemination and learning activities;
- Using some of these resources to help organisations construct innovative ways to share learning from I2S projects;
- Assessing whether a non-financial incentive (e.g. an award) may help to improve levels of applications from some sectors; and
- Determining whether more money could be put into the I2S pot to incentivise further involvement.

Relationships

It will always be difficult to overcome the ‘not invented here’ syndrome which prevents an organisation learning from others. The I2S programme has a number of strengths which may help to alleviate this problem. One interviewee, who was not directly involved in I2S, remarked that organisations would be more likely to trust good practice from I2S than other sources because there is evidence that the project has delivered. The fact that an organisation has to give the money back focuses the mind and creates an incentive. The assessment panel was also described as being of a high-calibre and a rigorous application process is in place. All of these factors help in determining whether a project is viewed as being legitimate and one that can be learnt from, regardless of differences.

While costs can be included for evaluating a project, it is not clear how many projects have been independently evaluated. The requirement to have some sort of evaluation carried out will help to provide evidence on how outcomes have been produced which can then be shared with others in the public sector.

There were more than 100 applications in the first round of I2S which were mainly small projects. This causes administrative efforts to appraise them all and ‘the return on investment was pretty low for some of them’. The Welsh Government should continue to emphasise that there is flexibility in the system on the minimum threshold as a small amount

of investment can have far-reaching benefit. A wider range of projects would also provide more opportunities to learn.

The Welsh Government should consider:

- Continuing to encourage and suggest to public service organisations where there are potential projects to learn from;
- Ensuring that all projects are independently evaluated;
- Making learning and dissemination part of any future external evaluation;
- Sharing the experiences of different sizes and types of projects so as not to exclude the potential for all organisations to learn;
- Giving thought to whether greater learning could be generated from funding a larger number of projects; and
- Continuing to help support those who wish to make an application.

Conclusions

This assignment set out to examine ways to ensure that learning from the Invest to Save programme is identified and adopted by public services in Wales. It has outlined conditions from the literature which encourage learning, assessed whether these applied to I2S and what changes could be introduced to improve opportunities for learning. It has concluded that the Welsh Government need to give greater emphasis on learning and sharing good practice but also place a responsibility on organisations to work with their peers in sharing existing practice and potentially initiating new ideas.

There is room for improvement in how existing mechanisms can be used, but there are more fundamental questions which need further examination. The most significant one is about responsibilities. Maddock suggests that, 'There are few people in the public sector whose job it is to find innovations or to fund them, grow them, assess them and spread them about. Innovation has had nothing like the focused attention paid to performance management. And, unlike in the private sector, very few people get to the top because of innovations they have pioneered' (2007: p. 4). Sharing learning from good practice is often seen as an optional extra – something that can be bolted on at the end by holding a seminar in the North and another in the South of Wales. There is an assumption that 'build it and they will come', without examining the value of using different mechanisms for sharing learning. Good practice is currently being wasted as it is not being shared effectively.

Finally, all the evidence suggests that I2S is a good scheme with some projects delivering significant returns on the investment. The fact that opportunities for learning are not being maximised is a message that is frequently heard across other programmes such as ESF-LSB. There is, therefore, potential to bring together learning from across funding streams, so learning is not conducted in silos.



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