

Principles for networked innovation

Learning lessons from the RSA Networks project

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A SUMMARY OF THE PRINCIPLES OUTLINED IN THIS REPORT

Lessons for organisations about supporting more networked innovation

1. Start with relationships, not transactions

If the goal is to encourage people to work together on issues about which they feel passionate, organisations need to provide platforms for people to meet, build relationships and earn one another's trust. This approach, centred on building relationships, will be more fruitful in the long-run than thinking in terms of new products and services.

2. Be clear about the invitation

Even when the focus is on building relationships, there needs to be a clearly stated invitation that explains to people what is on offer, how they can get involved, what is being asked of them, and what they stand to gain from becoming a participant. This can take time to develop, but it is well worth the effort: an unclear invitation creates anxiety and frustration, which in turns leads to disengagement and disillusionment.

3. People need to be seen and heard

When people do decide to get involved and give freely of their time and energy, this effort needs to be recognised. In the culture of networks, such recognition can come in the form of a thank you as much as a paycheque, a new set of connections as much as a job title. Generosity and mutuality lie at the heart of networks and failure to 'see and hear' people will result in the failure of any network-based initiative.

4. Follow exciting leads

The best ideas can be found in surprising places, and networked innovation is not a linear process. There should always be space in the plan to follow unexpected leads, and it should be made as easy as possible for people to bring in their own connections and networks to increase the chances of a new idea emerging.

5. Understand an online presence as integral to the mission

Online spaces for networking don't work unless they are clearly connected to a wider set of activities that mix face-to-face meetings with virtual discussions. Once created, sites need to be easy to amend as people's requirements change. If they are for a large and diverse audience, the needs of both the intensive and the occasional user must be catered for in equal measure.

6. Understand patterns of participation

Any organisation that sets out to get everyone participating all of the time is doomed to fail. Participation needs to be understood in terms of when and how, rather than as an either/or question. This is an important principle and must be reflected in every aspect of the change project's design, including its success

criteria.

7. Not every networked idea is a good idea, or appropriate

Networks are not the same as a free-for-all where anyone's idea carries. There is still ample room for judgement in networks: the difference is that the criteria for judging are shared, transparent, and consistently used. Networks centred on innovation need to allow for the fact that ideas arrive at different states of development, and therefore there should be a number of 'ways in', depending on how developed the idea is.

8. Revel in reflected glory

The most successful networked approaches to change think about their mission, not their organisation – and this in turn requires a degree of humility and a willingness to share in success rather than claim it all to the organisation. Commitment is what drives people on to achieve social change – and people are more excited by missions than by organisational goals.

9. Let networked innovation models change the hierarchy

The true potential of new networks will not be realised unless they can be integrated with the hierarchy, rather than be grafted on to it. The goal is not necessarily to eliminate the hierarchy altogether – but it does need to change if it is to successfully and meaningfully support the action being carried by new networks. This can be challenging work.

10. Don't lose the human touch when going to scale

Networks are based on relationships and trust, both of which still require a 'human touch'. Scale can only be achieved organically, and from the ground up: a decree from head office will not create a sustainable model. Networks need to be imagined as a series of connections or nodes, rather than one central hub around which everything else revolves, and this must drive the growth strategy.

Lessons for managing the process of change

1. Embrace chaos

The start of any major change process is inevitably uncomfortable and confusing. This has to be allowed for, as people re-orient themselves to new realities. Attempts to move too quickly to a more planned phase risks failing to generate ownership of the change project.

2. Co-design change to ensure relentless focus on the experience of participants

Organisations often forget that their customers and users are important sources of insight and ideas. Finding ways of unlocking this through the change process is important for long-term success. Much can be learnt from design disciplines, which are routinely used by many of the most successful organisations around

the world to help them see their service offerings from a true customer perspective, in order to improve those services.

3. Prototype, incubate and learn

Where there is no blueprint for change, the only way of reaching a new destination is to experiment and then reflect. Doing this at a small scale initially is a way of managing the risks associated with change: it is through this process that organisations can determine which aspects of current ways of operating should be carried forward, and which should be discarded.

4. Mix mavericks and managers

All change projects need a mixture of inspiration and perspiration. Charismatic leadership plays an essential part of galvanising action and inspiring courage; but it needs to be accompanied by a more enabling form of leadership that is centred on empowering the team to carry the project forward.

5. Go beyond staff compliance: you need their deep commitment

Major change processes will not be sustained in the long term by compliance or exhortation. Hard work needs to be put in to gaining wide ownership of any change process and what it is trying to achieve.

INTRODUCTION: NETWORKED INNOVATION IN ORGANISATIONS

There is no precedent here, there is no specific methodology that's been written about in twelve textbooks, let's just give it a go and see what we can learn from it. I really really respect an organisation that is willing to take that kind of risk and a leader that is willing to challenge x-hundred years of a particular direction. Fellow

Over the course of 2007, the Royal Society for the encouragement of the Arts, Manufacturing and Commerce (RSA) engaged in a major process of change, seeking to transform itself into a 'network for civic innovation.' With the generous support of Nesta, the RSA was able to invest in a period of learning, development and testing of ideas. This report summarises what the organisation learnt in its attempts to move from a traditional hierarchical large scale organisation, to a much more connected and porous network focused on positive and powerful social change.

These lessons from the RSA experience are offered in the spirit of exchange and learning. Some, the team learnt through getting things right – and inevitably, some were learnt the hard way, through getting things wrong first time. But for any large-scale organisation wondering how to respond to a world in which networks, participation and collaboration are key, the following pages should provide some rich insights. In particular, we hope that the lessons here are valuable for any organisation seeking to play a part in mobilising large-scale social change through engaging and connecting people.

The methodology used to track progress at the RSA was itself a heady blend of action learning, ethnographic work, and relevant theory on networks, organisations, and change. These methods enabled the team to explore the gaps between external claims and internal realities, and public rhetoric and private thought. Alongside such techniques, the team used visual ethnography to offer an alternative and complementary way of understanding the RSA's story. We hope that the 'ethnobites' that accompany each section of this report illustrate recurring themes and issues. We also think that the film grounds the principles presented here in the inevitable messiness of any real change process.

The report is simply structured. We begin by providing some of the context – organisational, but also social and cultural – for the RSA's new mission. The rest of the document is then organised around a number of principles, each with some accompanying ethnobites. There are ten principles for fostering networked innovation; and five principles that outline an approach to managing complex, transformational change.

About the RSA

I love being a Fellow of the RSA. I love what it stands for and I want to be part of that. The talks are fascinating – you come away knowing a bit more about something you never would have known anything about, economic systems in Mongolia, drug gangs in New York. But you go to the talk and that's it – there's nowhere to take it, no follow-through as a member or a Fellow. I walk away thinking "I wish there were more ways to

build on that experience, to connect to other Fellows.” I just feel that it is good to receive the RSA experience – but it would be better to participate in it. New Fellow, June 2008

The RSA is a 250-year old organisation, which has always held a passionate commitment to positive social change and progressive thinking. Its founders were ‘ordinary men’ – involved in commerce and the arts, rather than coming from the clergy or the aristocracy – who shared an ambition for social progress. In its early years, the organisation was renowned for its incubation of new ideas and its support of transformational projects. RSA Fellows were involved, for example, in the major canal-building projects of the time, the incubation of the Great Exhibition, the founding of the Royal College of Music, and more recently, the launch of the first holistic skills-based curriculum.

As the Fellowship has grown, so the meaning of being a Fellow has changed. In recent years, a sharper distinction has been drawn between the ‘core’ organisation and its Fellows, with the latter being treated more as audiences and recipients rather than activists and collaborators. Of course, this is not universally true – the success of the Opening Minds curriculum is a real testament to the importance of Fellow energy in delivering innovative projects that make a difference – but it is the experience of the vast majority of Fellows.

The Fellowship now represents nearly 28,000 people, from all walks of life and all corners of the world. Many of these people join because they feel excited at the prospect of meeting and working with like-minded people from different backgrounds to them. They like being part of an organisation that shares their values and commitment to social progress. Ask most Fellows, and they describe a tremendous amount of good will to the RSA, albeit a good will that is clouded by some uncertainty of how to engage with the organisation in the ways they had imagined upon being invited to join.

The arrival of a dynamic, charismatic chief executive, Matthew Taylor, in winter 2006, created a palpable sense of untapped potential at the RSA, and it was this that catalysed a new mission for the organisation. Put simply, the RSA is now seeking to return to its roots, where becoming a Fellow means joining a network of civic innovators, and where civic innovation is about action and participation as well as discussion and thinking.

If the RSA doesn’t change into this kind of vision, I don’t see the point of the RSA in the future, it might as well not exist. Matthew Taylor

FILM:

- A New Vision for the RSA

In this introductory clip, the scene is set for the new vision of the RSA. The Chief Executive, Matthew Taylor, speaks of the ‘social aspiration gap’: the gap between how we think and behave now, and how we *need* to behave in order to create the society we say we wish to live in. He sets this up as a challenge for the Fellowship of the RSA, inviting them to help shape the activity of the organisation. In his new agenda, the RSA becomes an ‘RAC for civic innovation’, with a mobilised Fellowship which can begin to address and act upon the demands and ambitions of our current world.

Networked innovation: an organisational imperative in the 21st century

The sheer scale and complexity of the challenges that society now faces are forcing a shift in understanding about how change happens at all. Single, simple interventions are rendered ineffective in the light of global challenges such as climate change, community cohesion, and deep inequality. Across these and other issues, cause and effect are distanced from one another, and the interdependence of many different forces increases the risk of unintended consequences resulting from decisions made without acknowledging this complexity.

Government is no longer able to effect social change on behalf of citizens, if it ever was. Business, the third sector and indeed each of us – as consumers, parents and patients – all have a part to play too. As Matthew Taylor has argued, the ‘social aspiration gap’ – where people behave and think in ways that are at odds with the future they hope for – defines many of today’s problems. More than ever before, finding ways of galvanising these different actors around social challenges will be essential to creating the kind of society to which people aspire to live in.

In this context, what is needed is a ‘new collectivism’: a deeper understanding of the importance and necessity of working together, of recognising the collective imperatives as well as our individual needs; and a smarter use of the growing number of tools and resources to enable this mass collaboration in pursuit of social change.

We need a new collectivism, but it can't be on the same basis as the old collectivism, the old collectivism was bureaucratic, was monolithic, it was top down, it was paternalistic, it was white, it was male, it was middle aged. The new collectivism has got to be very different – it has got to be bottom up, it has to be spontaneous, it's got to be networked, and its got to be egalitarian. Matthew Taylor

This emphasis on the importance of citizen action chimes well with notions of membership, identity and belonging, which are changing dramatically. People are searching for authenticity and meaning amid a world of brands, competing messages and demands. Our sense of our own agency has never been greater: in Ulrich Beck’s words, ‘people demand the right to develop their own perspective on life and to be able to act upon it’; and alongside this our desire for what Maslow called ‘self-actualisation’ underpins many behaviours and life decisions.

People today want to give something back but they want to give something back in a way that is about them growing and enjoying themselves and developing, and strengthening their networks. Matthew Taylor

If our sense of individual agency is growing, so too is the power of new tools designed to connect people together, unmediated by organisations, to collaborate on solving problems, to campaign, to share information. Leaps in technological development and the advent of web 2.0 have helped the world to truly see and believe in ‘people power’ as a force to be reckoned with. As Manuel Castells has argued, such self-organising networks are ‘an age-old form, but until the revolution in technology they could not manage co-ordinating functions beyond a certain scale’. The success of networked

campaigns such as Jubilee 2000, or America Speaks, is a testament to Castells' argument.

The place of organisations as we know them in this era of new collectivism is uncertain. It is one hundred years since the economist Joseph Schumpeter wrote of firms as the primary agents of production and economic progress; and many of today's business models and metrics are still governed by his worldview where organisations are the drivers of value in whatever form it takes. As individuals find tools to work together in new ways, this conception of the organisation will be increasingly redundant. Current business models, governance and operating frameworks will be challenged by the new collectivism in ways that have not been seen since the emergence of the mass production model at the start of the 20th century.

Still we lag betwixt and between providing today's value with yesterday's industrial solution. Karen Stephenson

How organisations should respond and redefine their purpose in relation to these shifting patterns of allegiance, underlined by new modes of connection and engagement, remains an uncertain question, even if the need for change is clear. The work underway at the RSA should provide a powerful set of insights and lessons to the many other organisations that are beginning to wake up to the need to reflect new realities in the way that they operate, and the ways in which they engage people.

This analysis is particularly pertinent for membership organisations. Whilst traditional forms of membership – lifelong allegiances based around a particular mindset rather than support for a specific issue – are declining, the desire to belong and to participate is stronger than ever. Membership organisations have an opportunity to refashion themselves in the spirit of this new collectivism, finding new ways of enabling, facilitating and scaffolding collaborative action in the pursuit of social change.

As we have seen in comments from Fellows about the meaning of their membership at the RSA, this agenda for organisations is not particularly about offering new products or services. Rather, it is about helping people pursue issues about which they are passionate, in ways that they could not through acting alone.

It is in this context that the RSA networks project was launched. It was inspired by the insight that Fellows valued the intangible but important benefit of new collaborations and connections from their membership far more than anything the core organisation could give to them. Given the global challenges of the 21st century, the project has been designed with a particular analysis of how change happens in mind – where the focus must now be as much on galvanising collective action as on pamphlets and thought leadership.

So the mission of the RSA networks project began as a desire to find new ways of support its Fellows as a network of civic innovators. The ambition is to do this through creating a stimulating 'market place' for fresh thinking, as well as strengthening the connections between Fellows, and facilitating new collaborations that lead to innovation and action.

I'd like the RSA one day to be seen as the AA of social activism that ... if something is needed in the place in which you live and you need people to take that idea forward, ...

who do you turn to? You go to the RSA because you want a body that has lots of different types of expertise, that isn't politically aligned, that has people who are shakers and movers, and want to give something back....

...I think the RSA speaks for a belief in human capability ... you recognise challenges, not to stand back from them and shake your head, but you recognise challenges in order to go towards them and say ok, human beings have tackled challenges in the past, we can tackle challenges again in the future. Matthew Taylor

As this report describes, the history, legacy and scale of the RSA make this agenda an almost Copernican shift for the organisation. The last year has helped to clarify the ingredients necessary to make the RSA a modern, dynamic, and exciting catalyst for civic innovation, as well as enabling the organisation to make some progress in reaching its new destination.

10 principles for organisations seeking to support more networked innovation

1. Start with relationships, not transactions

If the goal is to encourage people to work together on issues about which they feel passionate, organisations need to provide platforms for people to meet, build relationships and earn one another's trust. This approach, centred on building relationships, will be more fruitful in the long-run than thinking in terms of new products and services.

There is a deep desire from everyone to meet other Fellows who are interesting for a purpose. And to use that connection to help deliver on projects we feel passionate about.

I feel penned into my own sector in terms of network and debate and I'm excited by the opportunity to share, network and learn from people outside my discipline which might be relevant to my work and charities.

The RSA made a simple start to its 'networks project' (as it became known): it invited Fellows to get involved. It did this before there was much clarity about the parameters of the project, and in a very open way. While this was applauded at one level, it also sparked some lively debates about what exactly was being asked of people. For Fellows and staff alike, the ambiguity around the RSA networks 'offer' was confusing and disorienting. At the heart of this confusion lay a tension: about whether it was a transactional offer from the RSA to its Fellow – 'if you do this, we'll give this to you' – or a more relational offer – 'you feel passionate about this, and we can help you to do something about it.'

As the year went on, the organisation came to understand that if they wanted people to be contributors and active agents, then the focus must be on building relationships between Fellows, rather than conceiving of new transactions between the organisation and the Fellows alone.

Interestingly, many Fellows grasped the relational dimension of the RSA's invitation to get involved before staff did. While the RSA team were very focused on incubating new projects – as reflected in the early language they used around 'action', 'projects' and 'networks', the Fellows getting involved devoted their energies to creating more opportunities for people to build new relationships with one another.

The action [being proposed by Fellows] is currently very process-oriented – it is as if Fellows have put in a 'middle stage'. They are asking: how are we going to do this? And once the conditions are set up, then things can happen... if everything was working well you wouldn't need these discussions about process. Fellow

Two insights are revealed by this desire on the part of Fellows to build relationships. First, to work together, people need to trust one another: it is an essential prerequisite of action. Trust is not something that can be grafted on to relationships. It takes time to emerge, and requires a human dimension to interactions. Second, Fellows initially focused on what seemed like very 'process' heavy projects. In fact, what they were doing was trying to create new spaces and opportunities to build this trust, finding as

they did that there were not sufficient mechanisms in place at the RSA to do so easily.

The team successfully picked up on this dynamic and began to experiment with new event formats designed to help build that trust and enable Fellows to meet one another more directly. Most successful of these formats has been the 'ExchangeLab'. These events were designed to be informal, interactive and focused on the qualities of generosity and sharing between participants. Their success was reflected in the number of projects proposed, and new connections made.

A year of learning has helped the RSA to conceive of their vision in relationship rather than transactional terms. The offer is based less on the dynamic between organisation and Fellow, and more on the promise of potential – potential new relationships, new projects, new ideas. It is not necessarily about the RSA giving more money or time to Fellows – although it might involve that – but it is about creating fertile spaces for discussion and discovery. It is about creating a rich, interactive online resource, supported by a cycle of events designed to explore ideas and build relationships. Fundamentally it is about providing stimulating and supported places to think, meet, talk and plan.

This is a model based upon generosity and people's own motivations, rather than a model that is about applications and prizes. It is a model where the RSA is an enabler and a facilitator, rather than a judging panel. By conceiving of the new agenda in relational rather than transactional terms, the organisation can be much more confident in asserting that the new mission is not about Fellows telling the RSA what to do; rather it is the organisation signalling its commitment to Fellows to support their passions, through creating new opportunities for them to act upon them.

It made me wonder about the criteria which will be used to measure the success of the Networks project. The discussions and projects are probably easy to track over time but are there plans to measure the less tangible results of the project, which I think are really important? By this of course I mean the enrichment, both professional and personal, one benefits from connecting, meeting and corresponding with so many fascinating people.
Fellow

FILM:

- The Old Approach
- Views from the Fellowship
- Developing Offline Events

These clips start by examining the way in which the RSA used to operate: sacrificing relationships and network potential for the 'Walled Garden' of a centralised RSA, which kept staff *in* and Fellows firmly *out*. Fellows have been treated as spectators and consumers, rather than active participants, kept at arms length from organisational research and projects. The impediments to Fellow involvement diluted any genuine appetite to engage. The *Views from the Fellowship* supports this picture, showing how the Networks agenda was in fact the organisation that many Fellows thought they were already joining. Indeed, these early expectations of new relationships and connections were blocked, and Fellows explain they felt more like 'consumers, borrowing a brand'. This challenge is addressed in the case study of *Developing Offline Events*, in which a Fellow plans a network of people and workshop sessions to encourage face-to-face relationships, more interactive spaces and events, and a culture in which Fellows feel

comfortable to approach each other and network. A series of monthly events are planned, a new Talks format is discussed and a more appropriate hosting space considered, all of which focus on the need to 'build up the social side of the RSA' and stop it being an isolated and purely transactional 'member' relationship.

2. Be clear about the invitation

Even when the focus is on building relationships, there needs to be a clearly stated invitation that explains to people what is on offer, how they can get involved, what is being asked of them, and what they stand to gain from becoming a participant. This can take time to develop, but it is well worth the effort: an unclear invitation creates anxiety and frustration, which in turns leads to disengagement and disillusionment.

I'm new and I don't quite know where to start or what to get involved in.

The reason I joined was because I believe in what they are doing – but I'm already part of other networks and busy so is there a way to facilitate entry so you can contribute to make a difference?

The RSA created a huge challenge for itself at the start of its new mission, by deciding that it wanted to co-design the invitation with its Fellows. While this approach would clearly reap rewards in the long-run – the invitation would have been designed by Fellows, for Fellows – it added a layer of complexity at the start of the project that left many people unsure about the precise nature of the invitation.

Much of this confusion boiled down to an important question: who 'owned' the change that was being discussed? Was this the RSA consulting Fellows on which projects it should pursue in the future? Or was it inviting Fellows to use the organisation as a platform from which they could pursue their own passions, in collaboration with others who shared those passions?

Fellows and staff alike struggled to conceive of the invitation as an offer to pursue their passions, rather than an invitation to tell one another what to do:

One Fellow came up to me and said "this is all very interesting, now let's see what you do with it", and I responded, "no, let's see what you do with it!". Staff member

Fellows wanted to know what the RSA would do in practice to support their declared desire to support networks for civic innovation – would there be cash available? Staff time? Free space?

In turn, staff wanted to be reassured that the new mission would not simply add up to them having to deal with what became known internally as 'the spectre of the troublesome Fellow' – a character that loomed large, making unreasonable demands of staff and pestering them endlessly about a pet project that no one else had any appetite for.

This early experience shows how important it is to set some clear ground rules – even when the desire is to co-design an invitation with its potential recipients. The team realised later on in the project that this process of parameter-setting would have been

aided by some careful work to illustrate possibilities through some well-communicated and engaging stories of what success might look like. In the absence of a blueprint, such stories could be important ways of people navigating uncertainties, and establishing what might be in or out.

Similarly, the team learnt about the scale of the shift in mindset implied by moving from a hierarchical conception of the RSA and its Fellows, to a more networked image of the organisation. Much of the world is still imagined in hierarchical terms, and in these terms the invitation could only be understood in terms of more products and services. This presented a real challenge: the RSA's 'offer' to Fellows only really made sense to those who had grasped the potential of a more networked world where organisations play a connecting role rather than a defining role. Not everyone recognised this, and once again this made it harder to articulate a well-defined invitation.

The RSA is changing, whether you like it or not, and there are some Fellows and some staff who really don't want change, who are very resistant... that's human nature, we'll always have that, but I think by showing positive messages... and by giving examples... you almost hush the naysayers. You'll only get them to change by giving them positive examples. Staff member, Networks team

FILM:

- Criteria and Definition
- From Discussion to Action
- Owning the Change

These clips explore the need to clearly define the project in terms of invitation and Fellow engagement. Questions are asked concerning the parameters of the initiative, the process involved and the degree of input required from both John Adam Street and the wider Fellowship. In *From Discussion to Action*, these concerns are voiced mainly by Fellows, who demand a clearer structure, a statement of expectation, and transparency regarding money and resource. *Owning the change* turns instead to the importance of message. The top team at the RSA need to take ownership of the vision and communicate it properly, telling the right stories to get Fellows – and staff – inspired. By doing this, the general understanding and interest levels will raise within the Fellowship. This doesn't guarantee that 'everyone will come with you' but it is asserted that the new vision will excite and gain more Fellows than it will alienate or lose.

3. People need to be seen and heard

When people do decide to get involved and give freely of their time and energy, this effort needs to be recognised. In the culture of networks, such recognition can come in the form of a thank you as much as a paycheque, a new set of connections as much as a job title. Generosity and mutuality lie at the heart of networks and failure to 'see and hear' people will result in the failure of any network-based initiative.

Many network theorists have documented a stark difference in culture between networks and more traditional organisations. One of the key differences rests in the 'currency' used. Whereas recognition is bestowed in traditional organisations through pay and

position, networks are characterised by the operation of a 'gift economy'. Here, the currency is in recognition and reciprocity. In trying to stimulate networks for action, it is essential to start trading in this currency, and therefore focus on the importance of 'seeing and hearing' active participants.

In the early days of the RSA networks project, a great deal of emphasis was placed on the development of an interactive online space for networking and collaboration. The fifth principle of this report explores the lessons from this process in more detail. For now, an important insight from early online discussions was that Fellows were frustrated by how irregular responses were to things they posted online, particularly from staff within the organisation. It made them question the commitment to the project, and reduced their appetite for staying involved, as they felt their presence and contributions were not being seen or heard.

So, online or more generally, facilitation work is a significant determinant of success for networked activity. It therefore stands to reason that giving people the time and skills to support network-based activities is an essential part of any change process. The RSA made several attempts to create a facilitation model for staff over the course of the project's first year, and struggled to do so successfully at first.

This failure stemmed from two key reasons. First, those staff who got involved in the facilitation training that was offered early on in the project were not given the necessary permissions and time from senior staff to do the work. It was not written into their job descriptions, it was not part of their reviews, and as a result staff felt they were being asked to perform a new facilitation role on top of their already-busy day jobs.

Second, facilitation requires a form of entrepreneurialism that does not always sit comfortably in organisations accustomed to operating through more traditional command-and-control models. Such collaborative approaches can operate against established protocols for staff evaluation and individual advancement and recognition. Junior staff regularly expressed anxieties about their freedom to respond, wanting to know whether they were facilitating as 'themselves' or as the 'RSA'. In short, there was not enough work done by senior staff to empower the internal network of facilitators in that new role.

As time has gone on, this initial difficulty in embedding a more facilitative approach has begun to change for the better. New staff in the Programme team will now have it written into their job descriptions as core activity. The new web team will dedicate some of their time to facilitating the online networks. Gradually, senior staff and junior staff alike are coming to see that far from being an additional thing to do, working with Fellows is a way of getting things done.

Of course, it is not just staff who need to learn new protocols in order to galvanise action within networks. Fellows too need to operate in a collaborative culture – a way of working that they too may be unfamiliar with. Certainly over the course of the first year of the project, the team came across many examples where Fellows saw the networks initiative as nothing more than a conduit for their own ideas, rather than as an opportunity to work with others. It took hard work – on the part of both Fellows and staff – to challenge this behaviour and maintain the open, mutual culture that the organisation was trying to create.

You are... trying to maintain an egalitarian atmosphere and a welcoming atmosphere but then having to deal with people who may have particular hobby horses, that may contaminate the energy of the group. Fellow

As part of the transition to a more networked reality, the team found that having Fellows working alongside them to carry responsibility for maintaining network protocols was essential. This more distributed notion of leadership is illustrated by the difference between Fellows starting sentences with 'The RSA should...' and 'How can we?...'. For many Fellows this is a significant shift in how they relate to the RSA and indeed other Fellows.

I think it highlights a developmental edge for the Fellowship as a whole, which is to find ways to collaborate, follow, build on others ideas, grow something together, rather than use the RSA individualistically to pitch an idea into a ready made arena. Fellow

I'm seeing here that in terms of really trying to encourage people to be straight about their experience of others in the network, it feels very important for me to moderate the kinds of conversations that are happening because people can get flamed and hurt, and pushed out or pushed in. Fellow

Both of these comments hint at how much leadership potential there is across the entire staff team and the Fellowship. Finding ways of unlocking and enabling a more distributed leadership has helped the RSA to build ownership of the network, as well as sharing responsibility between staff and Fellows for maintaining the gift culture, rather than that being a task for the organisation alone.

As we explore further in the sixth principle, 'seeing and hearing' those who are most active is particularly important. During the first year of the RSA's project, the team observed a number of key Fellows embracing a leadership role within the project. They participated in sessions, provided feedback, initiated experiments in networks in their local areas, and worked to bring together new groups of Fellows to build relationships and identify shared passions. Finding ways of thanking those people, of acknowledging their contribution, has been essential to their continued commitment. Failure to do so risks their disengagement and deep frustration.

FILM:

- Networks and Staff Roles
- From Discussion to Action

In *Networks and Staff Roles*, the Staff talk about the tension between the new demands on their working life and the lack of time and support to see them through. The need to factor in time for developing networks has not really been adequately addressed at the senior level. Staff speak of the need to model a new pattern of engagement with Fellows, and new kinds of research output, to match the new organisational ambition. In *From Discussion to Action*, similar concerns are voiced by Fellows, who demands a clearer structure, a statement of expectation, and transparency regarding money and resource to reward and recognise their work. Fellows need their contribution supported and Matthew Taylor speaks of the perils of not addressing this as a transparent process.

4. Follow exciting leads

The best ideas can be found in surprising places, and networked innovation is not a linear process. There should always be space in the plan to follow unexpected leads, and it should be made as easy as possible for people to bring in their own connections and networks to increase the chances of a new idea emerging.

Research into the nature of innovation has grown exponentially in recent years. For much of the 20th century, businesses treated innovation as the product and output of self-contained R&D labs. Their innovative activity was factored into the chain of inputs and outputs of the organisation as a whole: innovation remained part of a very linear process driven by inputs, outputs and gateways.

Increasingly organisations are moving away from this view of innovation. R&D sections are now expected to engage with a range of sources to 'horizon scan' for new and emerging ideas – to build up the social and intellectual capital of that company. 'R&D' is not a stage in the process, but rather something that suffuses the organisation. Innovation can no longer be treated as a specialised supply line with fixed points of entry.

So, if innovation is not a specialised supply line, what might it look like in a more networked system? Lessons from the world of technology suggest that it requires organisations to see their whole field of practice as a potential site for the generation of new ideas. Leading innovation academics have argued, for example, that in the public sector up to 85% of innovations spring from the frontline – those professionals and citizens interacting with one another at the point of service delivery.

For the RSA, this means the priority has to be creating the space for randomness, and allowing for what Ronald Heifetz has called the 'inefficiency of creativity'. The organisation will not be able to predict where the next new idea might come from, or what new collaborations might emerge from Fellows coming together. Civic innovation cannot be legislated for, or 'implemented' through a command-and-control system. Instead it has to emerge organically.

The videos accompanying this principle highlight two examples of projects that emerged, unplanned, from Fellows meeting and sharing ideas. What is clear from both the analysis and the experience of the organisation is that the best it can do is provide spaces and opportunities for new connections to be made, trusting that fresh ideas and projects will spring from these.

Over the course of the year, the team has increasingly come to recognise the organic nature of what they are seeking to create. Staff now spend much more time exploring the nature of the relationships between Fellows, rather than focusing on creating networks for the sake of it. We characterised this as a shift from manufacturing networks, to creating the conditions for networks to emerge and then flourish.

As part of this shift, the team began to explore a much more systematic approach to supporting new forms of engagement and dialogue, for example the Open Dinners format – a simple idea of bringing Fellows who live nearby one another together for an informal dinner party and discussion. As one Fellow commented about this event format:

I think this is an interesting and important experiment in a number of ways. Firstly, it's seeding peer-to-peer Fellowship engagement – which adds to the range of existing RSA/Fellow communication which is either RSA-led 'come into John Adam Street events' or Fellows pitching to the RSA 'please sponsor my idea or project'. It is about bridging purposeful and social interaction; the dinner party is a social gathering which may by chance stimulate serious conversation... here we are trying to give equal balance to the two in a new and interesting way. Fellow

Over the year, the RSA networks team relied on creating and hosting new events in order to create the necessary relationships and enhance the chances of new connections leading to innovative projects. The organisation is beginning to recognise that in order to maximise its chances of this happening, it not only needs to add new format events to its calendar, but also remodelling existing formats, such as the lectures and new Fellows' evenings. The real trick will lie in devising a regular series of events that map on to an ideal 'Fellows journey' over the course of a year.

The implementation of the new, interactive, online 'marketplace for ideas' will further support the opportunities for randomness. As the film about the Glory of Failure illustrates, knitting together online and offline opportunities for communication and networking needs to be seen as an integral part of enabling exciting leads to stay live, rather than losing momentum, or remaining trapped as an interesting post on a website.

Another way of generating exciting leads is to increase the number of connections within the network. For the RSA this means opening up the Fellowship and making it easier for existing Fellows to propose new Fellows who they think could add something to the organisation's new mission. While the organisation is beginning to place greater emphasis on recommendations as a source of new Fellows, there is more it could do here.

The benefits of this new approach are clear. What we are beginning to learn from analysing activity on online social networking sites such as Facebook and LinkedIn is that there is a richness and complexity to people's personal networks that goes deeper than a single organisation ever could. Emerging leaders will often know other emerging leaders. Social entrepreneurs will have their own networks full of people who may indeed be interesting candidates for Fellowship.

In the future, as word spreads amongst social entrepreneurs about RSA networks, it may become an attractive option in terms of getting projects off the ground. These people may join the RSA to seek to deliver their projects, rather than joining other groups. Fellow

Just as online systems are moving from 'search' functions to 'recommendation' functions, so too should the RSA.

FILM:

- Glory of Failure
- Speaker's Corners Trust

These film vignettes provide two examples of where unexpected collaborations, through the Fellowship, have led to real outcome and action. *The Glory of Failure* was first

pitched as a concept (and little more than that) by Mitch Sava at the event on November 22nd. The motivation was to address the fact that whilst failure is vital to creativity and innovation it is often seen as something that must be avoided at all cost, disincentivising big ambitions and new projects. Other Fellows immediately responded well to this Network idea, and when an article appeared about it in the Journal the response was unprecedented: People were interested on an academic level, a personal level and because of previous work. This momentum could be accessed and acted upon by the new 'Networked' RSA. *Speaker's Corners Trust* is another example of the unexpected collaboration of two previously unconnected Fellows. Peter Bradley and Louise Third came together to organise a launch event in Nottingham around raising the quality of public debate. A advantageous combination of interest and circumstance meant that the event took form quickly, generated significant interest and led to an exciting programme of debates.

5. Understand an online presence as integral to the mission

Online spaces for networking don't work unless they are clearly connected to a wider set of activities that mix face-to-face meetings with virtual discussions. Once created, sites need to be easy to amend as people's requirements change. If they are for a large and diverse audience, the needs of both the intensive and the occasional user must be catered for in equal measure.

One of the defining features of the first year of the RSA networks project was an online space for Fellows to propose, discuss and comment on ideas. This became known as the 'platform'. In many ways it is the visible evidence of the journey of the whole project, as well as being a digital manifestation of many of the wider themes and issues which the change process inspired.

As with the overarching project, the team committed to a co-design approach to developing the site. It has been through several iterations, driven by the feedback given by users both through the site and at a series of events to reflect on what was working and what was not. This dedication to user testing would, it was hoped, ensure that the site was fit-for-purpose and met people's needs.

However, the huge diversity of the RSA's Fellowship posed something of a challenge to a co-design approach. An early survey of use of technology amongst the Fellowship revealed that there was a very broad spectrum of know-how, ranging from Fellows who barely owned a mobile phone, to Fellows at the forefront of emerging technologies.

The Fellows who played the most active role in the platform's development were often those who were already interested in social media. As a result, many less savvy Fellows found the site hard to use and navigate. There was no easy 'shallow end' for occasional or light users, and the site demanded an unacceptably high level of social media know-how for the majority of the RSA's current Fellows.

I think the online systems are critical [to engaging people on the fringes of the activity], but it's really difficult to get the design right. For example, how do I get a quick overview of what projects/ideas are attracting most attention right now? And how do I distinguish between attention in the form of online angels-on-the-head-of-a-pin debating points and attention that relates to real action? Fellow

Finding ways of making any online presence fit-for-purpose for its users is of course essential. The RSA has learnt over the course of the year that many of its Fellows are not looking to *do* collaborative work online, but instead to find people, and share and discuss ideas. Online social networking, to have real power, needs to be connected to face-to-face events and planning sessions. Discussion on the platform after the successful RSA Exchange event was much more focused and engaged. Finding ways of binding online and offline interactions is as important as making the online space fit-for-purpose.

That said, learning from the RSA's experience, online networks need proper nurturing for them to really take off as lively, interactive spaces for discussion and debate. Just as in the real world, people need to be 'seen and heard' virtually, and this cannot be left to interested staff alone, important though their contributions are. Investing in an online community facilitator, whose role is to connect people, share content from other parts of the RSA's site, and help to maintain a collaborative culture, will be essential as the organisation moves the beta version of the platform into a more solid and integral part of the main RSA site.

FILM:

- Online and Offline Issues
- Developing Offline Events

At the beginning of the RSA Networks project, the ambition and vision was occasionally conflated with the need to develop an online presence. The 'marketplace for ideas' was seen to *be* RSA Networks itself, and was expected to define, implement and mobilise a new way of working. The problems with this expectation were quickly revealed. *Online and Offline Issues* explores various concerns and fears regarding the 'platform', as it became known to the team. It begins by illustrating the fear some staff had of contributing: they felt neither empowered nor entitled to contribute online. Fellows pick up on this fear, and also comment that there has been too much emphasis on the technology, to the loss of a real understanding of the Networks goals and any kind of qualitative involvement. Fellows believe the challenges need to be addressed, firstly by investing in some dedicated online community development and management (to make a platform that is fit for purpose); and secondly by allowing the online capacity to supplement the important face-to-face experience to build community. In the case study of *Developing Offline Events*, a Fellow plans a network of people and workshop sessions to encourage these face-to-face relationships, asking for more interactive spaces and events, and a new culture at the RSA in which Fellows feel comfortable to approach each other and network.

6. Understand patterns of participation

Any organisation that sets out to get everyone participating all of the time is doomed to fail. Participation needs to be understood in terms of when and how, rather than as an either/or question. This is an important principle and must be reflected in every aspect of the change project's design, including its success criteria.

When the system is rolled out to 27,000 Fellows, I suspect that there only may be 100

people who will have the energy to really want to do anything major. But 100 is still very good. Fellow

Arguably, the start of the RSA project was characterised by a degree of naivety about levels of participation from Fellows. The aspiration of a 'network for civic innovation' conjured up images of all Fellows running projects through the RSA. In reality, of course, most Fellows are already busy, and use multiple channels and networks to do work that they care about. As time went on, the team began to understand that when thinking about Fellow participation, the key issue is 'when and how' rather than 'either/or'.

The nature of participation in networks is something that writer Clay Shirky has studied. In his recent book, he argued that it is a mistake to assume that participation should follow the traditional 'bell curve' model, where the law of averages prevails and the goal is to get everyone into the middle of the curve. In contrast, Shirky demonstrates that networks will follow the 'power curve' instead: where the most active 1% of participants contribute significantly more than the next 1%. In other words, some participants matter more than others. At any one time, a small handful of Fellows will be very active; a few more will be engaged but not as intensively, and the vast majority will be observers and commentators, rather than participants.

This pattern has been reflected in the RSA's own experience over the past year. It is an important reminder that the organisation's aspiration should not be to have all 28,000 Fellows contributing the same amount as one another all the time. Rather, it should create opportunities all the way up the 'ladder of participation' described by Sherry Arnstein.

I'm not saying to people, if you are in the RSA you have to be involved, you have to have ideas, it's absolutely fine, people will come in and out. There will be Fellows who come to lectures occasionally, read the journal, pop to the website and then suddenly out of the blue, they will walk down the street and will think 'someone should do something about this'... and there the RSA network will be. Matthew Taylor

What really matters is that the work of RSA networks in the future caters for all levels of participation. As well as building a strategy for the 'top 100', the team needs to plan for working with the vast majority of Fellows on the edge of the activity, rather than centre stage. After all, these are the people who may become more active if the invitation is appealing enough. As one Fellow said:

I feel the process and systems need to be designed for people who are only on the fringes of the activity, paying attention intermittently. The people who don't carry around a mental list of all the project ideas under development, don't know the politics and the personalities, and quite probably don't care to know them. Fellow

So when seeking to stimulate action-focused networks, it is a mistake to focus on action alone. Conversations, meetings and debates have an inherent value – both as what one Fellow called a 'thought composter', and as the potential sites from which civic innovations could emerge. The RSA has also reflected on how it might engage with its most active 1%. There are many ways in which this uneven participation could be enshrined in how the organisation supports and encourages Fellows' networks. Wikipedia, for example, gives additional editorial rights to its most active contributors. Jubilee 2000 elected members to form a co-ordinating committee. As the accompanying

film illustrates, Fellows themselves have ideas about how they could be recognised for their commitment to playing a more active role in RSA networks. The RSA is now in the process of creating an 'ambassadors network' to recognise those Fellows who give disproportionately of their time. It is a tough balance to strike between recognising and thanking those Fellows, and resisting the temptation to turn the relationship into a transactional one.

We've got 27,500 Fellow and we're going to have more and more and more. SO if at any given moment 5% of our Fellows were active then we'd have well over 1000 people working... remember what Margaret Mead said – 'never ask whether a small group of people can change the world, that's all that ever has'. Matthew Taylor

FILM:

- What Will Success Look Like?

In *What Will Success Look Like?*, the Chief Executive, Matthew Taylor, talks of the importance of the 'good life well lived' and invites people to get practically involved, working together around a table. A picture is drawn, tracing a continuum between Staff and Fellows activity, one which creates a 'Bigger Us', of collaboration and brokerage of people, ideas and energy.

7. Not every networked idea is a good idea, or appropriate

Networks are not the same as a free-for-all where anyone's idea carries. There is still ample room for judgement in networks: the difference is that the criteria for judging are shared, transparent, and consistently used. Networks centred on innovation need to allow for the fact that ideas arrive at different states of development, and offer alternative ways in depending on how advanced the thinking is.

One of the debates that characterised the last year of work at the RSA was about the question of judgement and quality control. For many members of staff, their initial fear about opening up opportunities for Fellows to propose ideas was that the ideas would not be of sufficient quality to be associated with the RSA. As we explore in the ninth principle, in many ways this fear was mis-directed: most Fellows were not looking for the RSA Programme team to adopt their idea; rather, they were seeking other Fellows interested in working together.

That said, it is certainly the organisation's new mission has to allow for the possibility that an idea that grows from a Fellows' network could become a core part of the RSA's programme. It also has to allow for the possibility that some Fellows *will* be seeking a deeper, more substantive input from the core RSA organisation to support their work. The failure of the team to grapple with the question of what a transparent ideas evaluation process looks like during the first year of RSA Networks was confusing and created anxiety about what the organisation was trying to achieve. Until resolved, this will remain an important part of the RSA developing and articulating its invitation to Fellows.

The good news is that there is much to be learnt from elsewhere about how to develop mechanisms for assessing the quality of ideas. Networked innovation is not tantamount

to a free-for-all. Many other organisations that share a similar ambition to the RSA are beginning to experiment with incentive structures, which enable people to seek further support to enhance and grow an idea into a more substantial project.

There appear to be two common dimensions of process used by most organisations seeking to encourage and support networked innovation. First, some kind of mechanism for prioritisation, often enlisting participants, for example formats such as user voting or a dragon's den. The emphasis is on creating a mechanism that is transparent and recognised as legitimate by all participants. Second, these organisations all have some basic 'gateways' to check the alignment between an idea and the mission of the organisation. Together, these approaches create an environment that recognises that ideas can come from anywhere, but not all ideas are equal.

I would have thought that a small committee/brainstorming of Fellows to act as a promoting and sifting group could push things along, if that's not happening already.
Fellow

For the RSA, there are many places from which ideas for new work emerge. They can come from the Fellows, from the Programme staff, or from the Chief Executive's office. The most important principle in developing a clearer description of the journey of an idea is that there is a single process, rather than one mechanism for assessing Fellows' ideas, and another for assessing internally-generated ideas.

A secondary principle rests with creating a process that allows for ideas at different stages of development to be put forward. For example, UnLtd has three categories people can use to submit their concepts: a 'seed' which is an initial project or a bright idea, a 'plant', which is a fledgling project for possible development, and a 'tree', which denotes a project that already exists in some form. Reviewing the range of ideas proposed and discussed over the course of the first year of RSA networks indicates that this form of 'grading' is an important part of enabling people to indicate what forms of support or connection they are seeking.

An open culture has to afford a safe landing area for ideas which are conceptual and not polished and thought through properly - as well as those that are. Fellow

In all the excitement of Fellow-generated and Fellow-led projects and ideas, the RSA must not forget the huge respect with which many Fellows regard its Programme work. Even before RSA networks was launched, there are many examples of Fellows collaborating and working with staff on existing projects, from the RSA's work on carbon, to arts and ecology, to future schools.

I also see enormous potential within the RSA to actually continue to generate ideas itself and to draw Fellows into some of this work. A great deal of the benefit of a networked Fellowship on a conceptual level is the potential for collaborative innovation. Sometimes this may include drawing expertise and interest towards an idea. Fellow

The organisation needs to continue to value its own ability to generate ideas and start projects. RSA networks puts a challenge back to the Programme team to find ways of systematically involving Fellows in all its projects, rather than leaving it to chance or relying on the staff to engage Fellows in their spare time. Far from being a discretionary activity, staff need to feel that it is an intrinsic part of all RSA projects, even those that

are generated from within. Finding ways of communicating that, through the use of individual performance assessments, project design, and mechanisms for judging which projects were successful, needs to be a priority alongside the work on developing a simple process for dealing with ideas.

FILM:

- Criteria and Definition
- Some Perspectives on Leadership

Criteria and Definition explores the need to make the terms of what ideas can be supported transparent. It questions what can be labelled an 'RSA Project' and what lies outside of that remit. Staff talk about the fact that this has never really been addressed, but is coming into sharp focus through the implementation of Networks. In a session held by a network consultant, he talks of the immediate task of defining what lies *outside* of support and resourcing raising the element of judgement. This is built upon by the equally urgent task of making these prerequisites visible, so that the RSA are open to input - but not subject to endless debate. In *Some Perspectives on Leadership*, Fellows and Staff talk of the balance between an open process and the need for quality control, elimination and direction. They identify the gaps at a senior accountable level to create certainty, fixity and clarity to the agenda that they now have to work with. Action and understanding are inhibited by a lack of transparency and leadership.

8. Revel in reflected glory

The most successful networked approaches to change think about their mission, not their organisation – and this in turn requires a degree of humility and a willingness to share in success rather than claim it all to the organisation. Commitment is what drives people on to achieve social change – and people are more excited by missions than by organisational goals.

The RSA is a curious hybrid of organisational forms. Part thinktank, part membership organisation, part campaigning platform, it has an extraordinary opportunity to realign itself to the wider dynamics of social, technological and cultural change outlined earlier in this report, in order to further its commitment to social progress. This opportunity rests in its ability to fashion an organisation that makes the very most of its considerable assets, blending the scale and diversity of its membership with its ability to connect people in new ways around issues they care deeply about.

But how does such a mission-driven, networked organisation define success? Over the course of the first year of the networks project, the RSA began to discover that success itself is redefined in a more networked reality. When the mission is bigger in its ambition than any single organisation can achieve; when the mission demands the action and involvement of thousands of people to create the change that is dreamt of, then organisations need to find new ways of basking in glory. They have to learn to share the limelight. This is a hard lesson to learn for almost all organisations, accustomed as they are to securing their ongoing existence through claiming sole responsibility for any success.

A fascinating study by two academics at Stanford University recently investigated successful mission-driven organisations to explore these issues further, and to understand the factors that made them so effective. They found that these organisations

had rejected many traditional measures of organisational success – for example, growth in income, staff, a new office and so on – and instead looked relentlessly beyond their core organisation, to other partners who could help them deliver that mission. They recognised that what they could achieve alone would be nothing compared to what they could achieve through collaborations and partnerships with others sharing a similar mission.

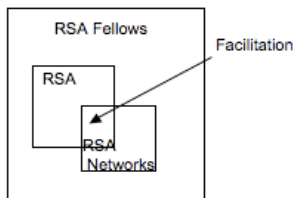
By cultivating their networks, rather than seeking to grow themselves, the researchers found that these organisations ‘achieved their mission far more efficiently, effectively, and sustainably than they could have done by working alone’.

There are some fascinating parallels with the lessons that the RSA has learnt this year. For much of the time, the networks team tried to help the organisation shift its perceptions of where its boundaries lay, in an attempt to conceptualise of the Fellowship as a network of people able to help deliver the stated mission of the RSA. This was challenging work – organisational mindsets exert a powerful grip despite growing evidence about the power of more networked ways of achieving change – and has not yet been entirely successful.

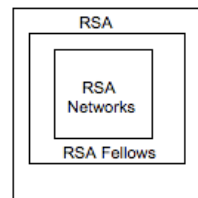
One revealing incident occurred during an early session with the internal facilitators’ team. A disagreement emerged about people’s mental map of what the networks project was trying to achieve. An external networks expert drew a map where the Fellows contained the RSA; a member of staff instantly challenged this, placing the RSA as a larger entity, controlling and containing the Fellowship:

- Power and structure at the RSA. What does it look like?

Network Expert



RSA Staff



There are two significant implications that grow out of a focus on mission rather than organisation, and on networks rather than internal process.

First, those charities that choose their mission first forsake one of the classic emblems of organisational success: recognition by others. The glory of success becomes *reflected* glory, as Fellows begin to build relationships between themselves, unmediated (although supported) by the core team at John Adam Street.

Second, the reason the organisations that were studied were able to so confidently entrust their partners to deliver on the mission is that they spent disproportionate amounts of time reviewing the alignment between the missions of their partners and their own. They invested heavily in creating the time and space for different members of the networks to come together and reinforce that sense of shared endeavour. In other

words, trust began to replace control. The core organisation had complete faith that their partners understood the mission and would only operate in ways that would help achieve stated goals.

For the RSA, this hints at the importance of the organisation having faith in the Fellowship, and believing that there is an alignment between the mission of the organisation and the values of the Fellows. As we have already seen, for some staff, operating in a culture which had previously encouraged cynicism and defensiveness in the face of the Fellowship, this is a significant challenge. It is a challenge that is reinforced by a recruitment strategy for Fellows that has occasionally seen growth in numbers as its key metric for success.

Similarly, Fellows themselves need to see the RSA as a platform for achieving social change, rather than simply as a avenue for personal advancement. The focus for everyone needs to stay on the social impact of the network, rather than individual or organisational interests. This focus cannot be created through one-off events, but needs to be continually explored and reinforced through meetings, online discussions, and the journal.

As this analysis shows, the barriers standing in the way of a more networked mindset, where glory is often of the reflected kind, are significant. But forsaking traditional forms of recognition is worth it for the massive increase in potential impact that comes from operating as a network, where mission replaces organisation, and trust replaces control.

FILM:

- Collaboration and Ownership
- Discussion to Action

In *Collaboration and Ownership*, important questions are raised regarding the reality of working together. Who 'owns' the process and the output and who is acting on whose behalf, are constant struggles. As a Fellow turns to the a Staff member and says: "This is all very interesting, let's see what you do with it"; the Staff member replies: "No, let's see what you do!" This confusion stalls self-directed activity. Staff identify the need to share, cross-pollinate and encourage Fellow-led initiatives but retain the desire for ownership and direction. It takes a mind-shift to realise that more can be initiated and completed if collaboration supercedes ego. In *From Discussion to Action*, Fellows demand a clearer structure, a statement of expectation, and transparency regarding money and resource. A Networks Consultant talks of the work needed to transform the RSA from a think-tank into a do-tank, where people come to the RSA for collaboration on projects and to make things happen. Alongside this, the necessary space for thought and reflection should be made clear, by a more visible manifesto of what is expected from the Fellows.

9. Let networked innovation models change the hierarchy

The true potential of new networks will not be realised unless they can co-exist with the hierarchy, rather than be grafted on to it. The goal is not necessarily to eliminate the hierarchy altogether – but it does need to change if it is to successfully and meaningfully support the action being carried by new networks.

This can be challenging work.

Across the world and across many industries, nimble, fluid, networked coalitions are beginning to challenge the traditional hierarchical models that exist. One only has to look at the ascendancy of Mozilla Firefox's open source web browser – the David to Internet Explorer's Goliath, or Wikipedia's wild success in decimating traditional encyclopedias, to sense the potential of these forms. We are in the foothills of the transformation implied by the new ease with which passionate, motivated people can come together and achieve far more than isolated, hierarchical organisations driven by traditional incentives such as profit ever could alone. These newer affiliations rely on individuals and groups of individuals who exist well beyond the walls of the core organisation. As the third and the eighth principles show, they appear to operate on incentive systems that are based on recognition as much as personal economic gain.

This networked or open innovation movement is beginning, slowly but surely, to replace the more traditional notions of innovation and how change happens. A growing number of companies, particularly those in the software development and product design worlds, are beginning to open their design processes out to networks of participants, often to people existing beyond the boundaries of the organisation, thereby ceding some degree control over decisions about future investments. Journals are full of the success stories from companies doing so.

There is something of a messianic tone to the current analysis and advocacy of networked innovation models. The most vocal disciples predict the end of organisations as we know them, defined as they are by hierarchies and command and control models. Existing models of value creation, intellectual property and other such organising principles will be obsolete in the future.

In fact, it is not necessarily the case that these new forms do away with hierarchy altogether. They don't: as Geoff Mulgan and Karen Stephenson have both argued, we are not yet moving towards a world where hierarchies have no place at all. Their value remains, and indeed many of the examples of networked innovation models that are cited in current debates clearly retain some degree of hierarchy within them. Take Wikipedia, which is described by founder Jimmy Wales as part democracy, part meritocracy, part anarchy, and part aristocracy. Or Linux, where its founder Linus Torvalds drove the vision, resolved tensions and maintained focus. In both of these examples of networked innovation, clear leadership remained. Indeed, there are many tales of the risks of creating a pure network. The open source movement in software development has many stories of initiatives 'forking' in the midst of the egalitarian ideal.

So, rather than seeking to replace the hierarchy with the network, the goal instead needs to be to find the best possible way of accommodating the strengths of each whilst minimising their weaknesses. So while networked forms can be very good at facilitating exchange and organising knowledge, hierarchies remain important for mobilising at scale and targeting resources. Networks may hold the key to change, but hierarchies hold the capacity to follow through on opportunities at scale.

The co-existence of hierarchies and networks is almost inevitably an uneasy one. As Charlie Leadbeater has argued recently, the conflict between 'the rising surge of mass collaboration and attempts to retain top-down control will be one of the defining battles of our time'. For the RSA, then, this is not about banishing one systematic approach and

embracing a new one, but about bringing both into the same operational space. As Karen Stephenson argues, 'networks contain the innovation which is incorporated by the hierarchy and thereby changes that hierarchy'. Speaking of an organisation with whom she worked, she stated, 'hierarchies and networks are yoked together in the yin and yang of organisational learning'.

So Stephenson's work suggests that we should see hierarchies and networks as overt and covert manifestations of the same social reality: networks always exist – the question is not, how to create them, but instead, how to see them and recognise their value in an organisational context. In these terms, the RSA networks project is about finding ways of foregrounding networks for the organisation, making more of them and finding new ways of the outcomes from network activities to shape and influence the hierarchy. As Matthew argued:

It can be a hierarchy but it should be a subtle and organic one.

As the RSA networks project unfolded, it threw up some intriguing questions about the future shape of the organisation if networks are seen as a structural imperative in this way, as well as a set of activities described as 'networking'. As the accompanying films show, it forced the organisation to confront how it will do more to embed the principles of networked models into the operating framework of the RSA. Throughout the year, the organisation had a strong urge to fit networks within the hierarchy, to minimise their potential disruptiveness.

Networks will have succeeded when there ceases to be a networks team necessarily, when everybody that works within the RSA is 'networked' as it were... and thinks how to connect and collaborate with Fellows. Senior staff member

Finding ways of foregrounding networks, of 'seeing' them in ways that render them an integral part of the organisation rather than a hidden value, is challenging to many beliefs about knowledge, power and rules of engagement. The RSA made some good progress this year in reimagining itself as a more networked organisation, but in many ways it is only at the beginning of the change in mindset that is required to deliver on the true ambition of the RSA networks project. The staff who were most closely engaged in the project understood this, but also recognised how much work remains to help others in the organisation adjust their mental maps of how the RSA operates:

Our next challenge is trying to see it as one big picture rather than seeing it still as different parts of the organisation... So if we could manage to see what the RSA does as basically a combination of networks that Fellows run, projects that Fellows and staff do or that staff just do on their own maybe.... And the web, and the regions... and it all becomes... one big picture then we start to [move towards a map of the 'ideal']. Rather than seeing it as streams it becomes a map. Staff member, networks team.

FILM:

- Networks and Hierarchy
- Networks and Staff Roles
- Networks and Programme

In *Networks and Hierarchy* Laura Bunt maps the location of the Networks team against

the wider organisational structure. Initially, Networks sat outside the organisational hierarchy, with very little facilitation between various departments and their remits. As she goes through the ways in which this has changed over the course of the RSA Networks lifetime, she reaches an 'ideal' map of a networked organisation – a picture of knots and threads – where the different components of activity, of Staff and of Fellows, becomes a connected picture of efficient information flow. In *Networks and Staff Roles*, the Staff talk about the tension between the new demands on their working life and the lack of time and support to see them through. The feeling is that time to develop Networks needs to be factored into their working life, and that this hasn't really been adequately addressed at the senior level. Staff speak of the need to model a new pattern of engagement with Fellows and new kinds of research output, to match the new organisational ambition. Finally, *Networks and Programme* looks at the re-structuring of the RSA, in which Programme development needs to be more intimately connected to the Network work with Fellows, re-addressing and re-framing where ideas come from.

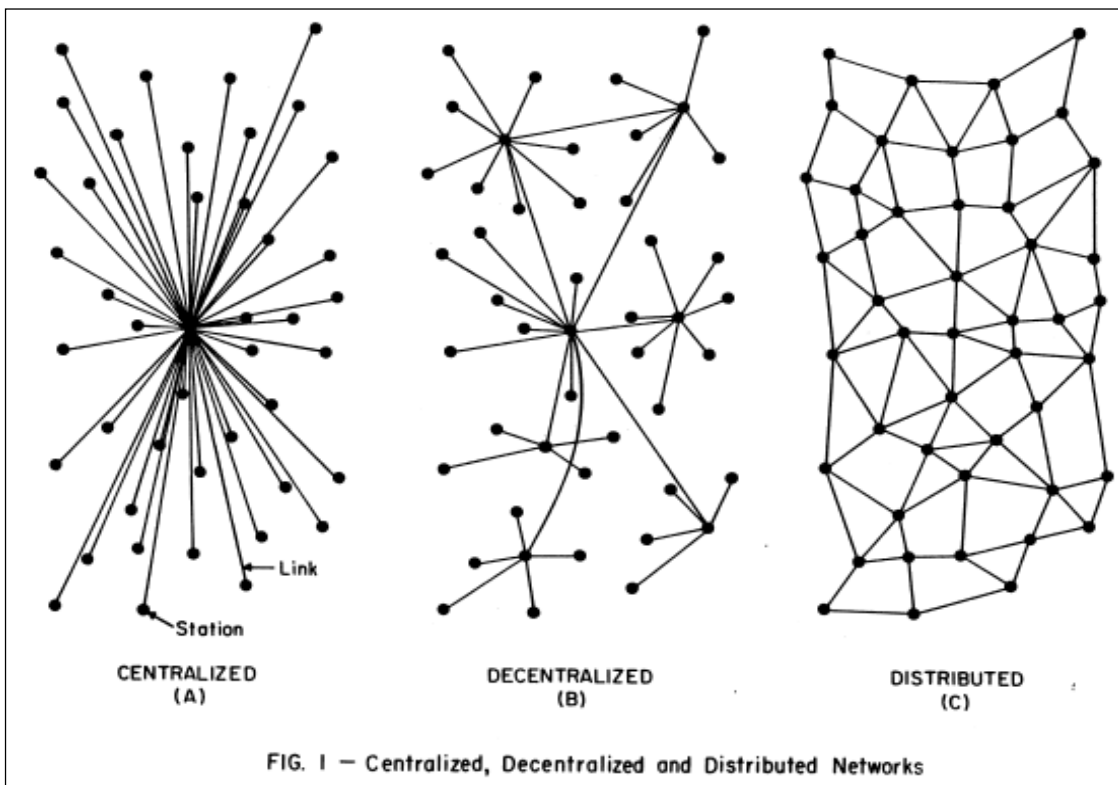
10. Don't lose the human touch when going to scale

Networks are based on relationships and trust, both of which still require a 'human touch'. Scale can only be achieved organically, and from the ground up: a decree from head office will not create a sustainable model. Networks need to be imagined as a series of connections or nodes, rather than one central hub around which everything else revolves, and this must drive the growth strategy.

As we have seen already, trust and relationships are at the heart of truly powerful networks. Without the essential asset of trust, people cannot form meaningful collaborations that seek to achieve the RSA's desire for positive social change. Many other initiatives sharing similar goals, such as the Social Innovation Camp, remain small-scale, enabling the development of close relationships and high levels of trust. Given the size of the RSA, the task of 'scaling up' the work of the networks team, of reaching out to all 27,000 Fellows rather than the several hundred who are currently involved, is not an easy one. Successfully going to scale cannot be done at the expense of losing the all-important human and relational dimension of successful networks.

For much of the first year, the networks core team at the RSA operated with little or no reference to the existing regional infrastructure at the RSA. However, already the RSA's organisational reach goes well beyond John Adam Street itself. It has a regional dimension which, like many old membership organisations, looks and feels bureaucratic and out of step with both wider societal shifts and the new ambition for the organisation. It is made up of Chairs and Boards who organise events and visits for Fellows living in that area. Small amounts of money are devolved to these regions, depending on the number of Fellows within the area, to support this activity.

Some of the regions are very active; others feel more like a closed club for the initiated. The advent of the networks project disrupted this infrastructure. The responses of the Fellows who are active within the existing regional framework has been very mixed. For some, it threatens the status quo; as we see on the accompanying films, for others it is an opportunity to dismantle a set of arrangements that no longer serve any useful purpose in the context of the desire to foster greater action and innovation amongst the Fellowship.



Innovating and reconceptualising the regional infrastructure is an essential part of the question of how to go to scale. Traditionally, it has been part of a 'chain of command' where the central RSA is the hub around which everything revolves. In a more networked setting, leadership needs to become much more distributed as a way of maintaining human-scale relationships, so that the RSA central is a node, participating actively but not always leading work. Stronger links need to be built more laterally, and every 'node' in the network should be seeking to make as many connections as they can. The diagrams above illustrate this point.

As the films show, there has been some successful work between the networks team and regional chairs this year who are interested in creating a more networked future through modelling a new form of regional infrastructure. The film *Modelling Success in the Regions* shows the Deputy Chair of the North West region, describing their work. She concludes:

If you look, by the time we get to the end of this year, in terms of this area geographically, hopefully we will have disbanded the traditional committee and the concept of traditional events, we will have set up an investment panel, and investment committee, what it does, is it actually proves that something is happening... we are a completely different organisation now than we were twelve months ago.

The richness of local relationships, partnerships and groups already in existence cannot be developed and maintained by a central organisation; the RSA is now in the process of building on the tentative steps of the past year through continuing to support innovations in regional governance, as well as employing several regional outreach workers and facilitators to oil the wheels of change.

Success for me would be that there was a seamless set of activities at the RSA and that they were all distinctive, so that I could take you to an RSA branch in a town in Yorkshire and they'd be working on a really interesting community initiative which was partly informed by ideas that they'd picked up from lectures and work in the Society, but I could

also take you downstairs to a policy wonk who had been working away on a project, but said that critical to the way that we are working was the fact that they had a group of one hundred fellows who were advising them, taking ideas out, maybe even testing those ideas in their community, and it would be very difficult for you to say “well that’s where the programme ends and that’s where the fellowship begins”. That’s the ultimate vision I want to work towards. Matthew Taylor

FILM:

- Setting the Conditions
- Modelling Success in the Regions
- The Networks Exchange Lab

Setting the Conditions looks at the mapping of a new organisational structure, to build capacity and support and create the right kind of space for Networks to sit. The new networked map allows for ideas to rise and be recognised, but it is clear that this is a picture that had to *evolve* rather than be dictated or manufactured from the start. *Modelling Success in the Regions* turns to the North West as a ‘best practice’ example, which can inspire elsewhere. Here the structure has changed into a funding body, launching a new approach which creates a completely different picture of the organisation. *The Networks Exchange Lab* shows how, when moving to scale, human contact and network-to-network relations are vital. In this session, Fellows engage in an offline version of the platform, where they Propose/Discuss/Support Network ideas. One of these Networks, Open Dinners, provides a forum for Fellows to meet and have intimate conversations over dinner, around a particular topic.

Principles for managing the process of change

The RSA's experience this year has generated many powerful insights about a model of networked innovation operating at scale. It has also yielded some important lessons about how to manage such large-scale, ambitious and yet disruptive change. Any organisation seeking to move towards a more networked model could also learn a lot here about the process of change, and ways of managing it successfully.

1. Embrace chaos

The start of any major change process is inevitably uncomfortable and confusing. This has to be allowed for, as people re-orient themselves to new realities. Attempts to move too quickly to a more planned phase risks failing to generate ownership of the change project.

The networks expert Karen Stephenson sees chaos as a positive part of any change process, calling it 'a necessary stage, replete with informal and ad hoc meetings where the principals confront anomaly and exploit ambiguity.' The first stage of most organisational transformations is a period in which various interpretations of what is going on are examined and reviewed, only to be rejected, in frustrated attempts to clarify an ambiguous situation. These apparently chaotic discussions and flurries of ad hoc activities are essential parts of people finding their way: far from being non-productive, chaos is an important response to most novel situations. The often messy unfolding of daily events can lead to a better, and more shared, understanding of the initial problems.

Many large organisations have a habit of innovating to stay the same, and finding smart ways of crushing new initiatives that threaten to disrupt the status quo. In these early periods of change, new ideas are often met with scepticism. Confronted with this situation, change teams need to find ways of engaging people in thinking about the possibilities presented by new ideas. At the RSA, the core team did this through attempting to create an internal network of staff facilitators, who were offered training, and encouraged to put a fire under nascent Fellow activity. While this approach was not entirely successful – the facilitators' network never really took off – the efforts to kickstart the work created spaces for staff to explore their hopes, fears, expectations and assumptions. As the films illustrate, staff talked extensively about their concerns, both for themselves and their individual roles, and for the whole process of the RSA project.

It has been said that this is going to be how we work, but I think partly because nobody is terribly sure of exactly what that means, there is still a lot of confusion about what this is going to mean for the Programme team. Junior staff member

The early days of the project and their chaotic nature demonstrate how the very acts of negotiation, conflict and confusion were important in the formulation of a shared purpose, individual commitments, and a clearer definition of the parameters of the change project.

It takes some courageous leadership to permit such chaos, which flies in the face of many daily organisational imperatives around efficiency, clear targets and well-defined staff roles. The RSA was lucky enough to have a Chief Executive who recognised the importance of creating space for this new work. Matthew argued that the first year would

be a chance to test out the idea and explore what it might look like in practice, and raised the possibility that as much could be learnt from failure as from success. But as leadership expert Ronald Heifetz argues, maintaining this degree of openness to new possibilities, of retaining an exploratory mindset, gets harder over time:

*Most failures in [new approaches] are a product of our difficulty in containing prolonged periods of experimentation, and the difficult conversations that accompany them... in mobilising 'adaptive work' from a position of authority, leadership takes the form of protecting elements of deviance and creativity in the organisation, in spite of the inefficiencies associated with these elements. 'Adaptive Work' in *The Network Effect**

That said, chaos cannot reign indefinitely. In Stephenson's typology of change, she charts two further stages. First, coalescence, where some of the emerging behaviours and patterns from the chaos phase are routinised and where middle managers are tasked with managing change, often with a lack of access to resources or strategic leadership. And second, leadership, where there is a clearer definition of the work of the change process, and an appointment of a senior champion to 'own' it, and provide the necessary legitimacy and agency for others. Of course in reality, progress through these phases is more nuanced and contradictory than the neatness of the scheme suggests, but nevertheless, as the films show, it does provide a useful framework, and reminds us that chaos is an important part of change, alongside careful planning.

FILM:

- Chaos
- Coalesce
- Lead

In Stephenson's typology, chaos is an inevitable first stage of any change process. The confusion, panic and lack of clarity is played out in the vignette *Chaos* by the staff as they try to make sense of the vision. The round table discussion raises doubts and questions as they try to work out what this new vision means. This phase is full of hopes and fears, worries and concerns, but felt both productive and creative in its 'chaotic reality'. *Coalescence* looks at the raising interest within the RSA, as people begin to get entrepreneurial and make connections. We see the vision begin to enter into people's consciousness. Many of the early Networks that emerge are process-oriented as Staff and Fellows try to 'live out' a different model in practice and take responsibility for some sort of collective vision. *Leadership* sees this move into the realm of corporate strategy and the implementation of a new working order for the RSA as a whole. The Networks team begins to work more closely with Matthew Taylor and the new executive team, to really scale the early effort.

2. Co-design change to ensure relentless focus on the experience of participants

Organisations often forget that their customers and users are important sources of insight and ideas. Finding ways of unlocking this through the change process is important for long-term success. Much can be learnt from design disciplines, which are routinely used by many of the most successful organisations around the world.

Organisations often struggle to see their work from the perspective of their own customers and users. And yet achieving this perspective can be revealing: the level of dissonance between an organisation's stated intention, and a person's experience of that organisation, determines the extent to which people trust, or get engaged.

It is the users or members themselves whose eyes and ears are needed to make this journey to seeing an organisation from a fresh perspective. Yet many organisations, including the RSA, grapple with cultures that seek to keep customers out of the picture, avoiding the disruption that their perspectives might bring to the organisational view of what is going on.

Working with Fellows on the whole range of 'touchpoints' – those moments where they come into contact with the organisation – was a technique used partially successfully in the first year of the RSA's project to understand where their new invitation was being undermined by current interactions between Fellows and the RSA. This is a technique that is used extensively by many of the most successful commercial service organisations. For example:

Everything we do should be characterised by obsessive and uncompromising attention to detail. We know that any journey is made up of many little experiences and that it doesn't take much to turn a happy customer into an unhappy one. We cannot afford this and we must not let this happen. Virgin brand book

As the RSA has learnt that trust and relationships are the cornerstone of all new projects and collaborations, it has begun to start asking itself about the extent to which existing processes or infrastructure encourages or hinders engagement between Fellows. To what extent do lectures give Fellows the opportunity to meet one another? How can the restaurant and bar make it easy for chance meetings to take place? How 'searchable' is the Fellowship database if you don't know what you are looking for?

Perhaps the key insight that came from this co-design process was that for many Fellows, it is a source of enormous pride to be invited to join the RSA, only to be followed by a sense of disappointment, uncertainty and frustration as they struggle to understand how to get involved with the organisation, as these comments from new Fellows show:

When I joined... I had the view that the RSA was more as it is now, much more outward looking and much more involved with networks... so in that first six months of being a Fellow I think I probably felt a little disappointed... Fellow

It feels a little impersonal, not really like joining a community... I've not yet received an invitation to come to the house for a new Fellows' evening, or even something less formal like an invitation to come to the bar on a particular evening to meet staff and/or Fellows. Would be nice to feel there was a regular programme of social events that I am now invited to. Are there any fellows I should meet, based on your inviting me to join? Fellow

This insight – of the mismatch between initial pride and subsequent disappointment – hints at the importance of an ongoing programme to explore the 'Fellows' journey' and understand how it might shift to reflect the new mission of the RSA.

There is a further benefit to a co-designed approach to change. The power of the insights from mapping the Fellowship experience can be used to create consensus about priorities and the nature of the change being pursued within the organisation. Eurostar went through a similar process, and the head of marketing there comments:

Mapping the customer journey brings together services, products and experiences... it's the only way you can see how they interact and how the brand adds up to more than the sum of its parts. Doing the journey made staff admit where it was going wrong, because they could see it all in front of them.

Finally, as the RSA has learnt this year, their Fellows are deeply insightful about the possibilities and requirements implied by the RSA networks projects. Opening up the change process to involve them bred many of the most successful ideas, as well as giving those Fellows a real sense of ownership of the change being attempted. This point is made powerfully in the accompanying films.

FILM:

- New Fellows Evening
- Networks Exchange Lab
- Modelling Success in the Regions

The *New Fellows Evening* is the first, and therefore one of the most crucial, organisational touchpoints. Here we see Networks immediately introduced to new Fellows, offering them a meaningful way to contribute as a Fellow to the activity of the RSA. As they learn about the fundamentally unique nature of the RSA from the Chief Executive they also learn of the new importance given to working together as a Fellowship. In the *Networks Exchange Lab*, we see the power of the user perspective brought to life as ideas and initiatives are pitched and discussed. In this session, Fellows engage in an offline version of the platform, where they Propose/Discuss/Support Network ideas, reinforcing the new vision of the RSA as a body for civic innovation. *Modelling Success in the Regions* turns to the North West as a 'best practice' example, which can inspire regions elsewhere and, in fact, John Adam Street. Here the structure has changed into a funding body, launching a new approach – and one which creates a completely different picture of the organisation. The central role of Peter Fell, the Regional Chair in the North West, shows the crucial role Fellows can take in scaffolding change, bringing the true ideal of co-design to life.

3. Prototype, incubate and learn

Where there is no blueprint for change, the only way of reaching a new destination is to experiment and then reflect. Doing this at a small scale initially is a way of managing the risks associated with change: it is through this process that organisations can determine which aspects of current ways of operating should be carried forward, and which should be discarded.

Matthew Taylor's decision to embrace a year of learning and development as a way of incubating his new vision was a bold one. Rather than theorising about effective models, the RSA embarked on a period of experimentation and learning through doing. A tremendous amount of hard work has gone into the RSA networks project since it was originally conceived in early summer 2007. All of this activity was governed by some

simple principles, as well as taking the co-design approach described above.

The first of these principles was about the importance of prototyping elements of the whole model, rather than 'piloting' a single, fully formed model after a period of research and thinking. For example, the team experimented with new kinds of events for Fellows, and different models of staff support for networks. This distinction between prototyping and piloting is a significant one: it has enabled the team to reflect on manageable chunks of change, and only then ask how best to knit them all together. This is an effective way of managing the risks of entering uncharted territory without a map to indicate where to go next.

Perhaps the most tangible example of this prototyping approach in action was the development of the online dimension of RSA networks. Launched as a beta site in November, the first version was built in three days after some rapid user research. Making it live enabled people to play with it, and offer feedback on the basis of attempts to use it rather than thinking about it simply at a conceptual level. Over the course of the year, as the project has evolved, so too has the 'platform'. Through continuous testing of new features and layouts, interspersed with further periods of user consultation and reflection, Fellows have played an active role as prototypers and designers of the future site. The result is that the organisation can now invest in a new, more stable version of the online networks space, as an integral part of the main RSA site, with a greater degree of confidence that they are creating something that is fit-for-purpose.

The second principle of the RSA networks project design was centred on the need to invest considerable time and energy in learning and reflection activities. Whilst the ambition for RSA networks has remained constant, the activities and the changes required to deliver on that ambition have changed over the year. The work has been refined and redefined as more has been learnt. The RSA was lucky enough to be supported by Nesta in these reflexive activities, meaning that it has been able to use more time than it ordinarily would in exploring issues and tensions in order to drive the future project.

The RSA has also been able to innovate in the way it has gone about reflecting on progress. Rather than containing learning work in more traditional meetings and progress reports, it has worked with network theorists, anthropologists and film ethnographers, drawing on a wide range of knowledge and experience to place the RSA's work alongside theory and practice from elsewhere. The techniques associated with anthropology provided a rich seam of insights that highlighted the gaps between what was being said and what was being done, or what was being experienced. It has been a challenging approach in many ways, but has also unlocked an authentic and honest evaluation of progress so far.

The project also highlighted an interesting question about incubation versus mainstreaming of a new model of the RSA as a network for civic innovation. In practice, the team spent a great deal of time and energy in its first year seeking to make the case for a more networked reality, with only partial success. Looking at the innovation literature, we might make the case for an approach that places greater emphasis on incubation, rather than this mainstreaming approach. In many large organisations seeking to recreate themselves for the modern world, the most successful way of doing so appears to be to draw a line around a new space that is not governed by the rules and patterns of day-to-day organisational life.

A good example of this incubation approach can be seen in the Prudential's decision to create the first ever online banking service, Egg. They realised that their particular model of banking was in decline, and that in the future they would need to find a new business model in order to keep their customers and maintain their profit margin. But, equally significantly, they realised that they would find it almost impossible to come up with this fresh model within the constraints of their own organisation. They saw that the power of existing institutional patterns and norms would work against the kind of transformative innovation they were looking for. So they took the bold decision of setting a team free, and waited to see what they would come back with.

If legacies seem too strong in organisations, as it sometimes did at the RSA in the past year, the solution may well be to incubate a new approach rather than attempt to mainstream it. It is exciting news that this approach is likely to form part of the RSA's strategy for the second year of the project.

FILM:

- Nov 22nd
- An Ambitious Agenda

The first vignette captures the activity of November the 22nd – the launch event for RSA Networks and therefore the new organisational ambition. Introductions highlight the guiding purpose; and the participation from the Fellows that follows, shows the high level of interest and engagement. Open space discussions lead to the proposition of new ideas and Fellows feels a positive buzz about the day. The degree to which this was a 'pilot' or a full 'launch' is put under question however, and this is particularly well framed in the demonstration of the online capacity. Matthew Taylor finishes by talking about the necessary combination of ambition *and* patience, highlighting the need to prototype and learn. *An Ambitious Agenda* highlights the fact that this is an environment for experimentation and learning, and reminds the audience that this kind of change is unprecedented and therefore risky, challenging and ambitious. Fellows talk about the admiration they have in seeing a big cultural institution 'taking a shot' and the Chief Executive explains the need for success stories to really explain and illustrate this new ambition.

4. Mix mavericks and managers

All change projects need a mixture of inspiration and perspiration. Charismatic leadership plays an essential part of galvanising action and inspiring courage; but it needs to be accompanied by a more enabling form of leadership that is centred on empowering the team to carry the project forward.

The principle of co-design underlines the importance of involving users in the development of change projects, and the content they contain, but this does not remove the need for clear leadership when it comes to the change process itself. People need to have a clear sense of where they are, and feel that there is a planned, phased process within which the disruption of new initiatives and ideas can be managed. Fellows and staff alike broadly perceived that this was lacking at the RSA during the last year. Indeed the Chief Executive himself was candid about this issue:

I've never had a number 2 on this. I've always known... I'd never claim to be a manager without having other people around me to do this... whose job is to manage me... I've been searching for the right person and we've had huge problems in finding them, but that's not through want of trying. Matthew Taylor

This sense of a gap in leadership at a senior level in the organisation was widely perceived as a problem by Fellows as well:

I think the gaps have been mainly at the senior accountable level, I think there is a huge amount of creative and supportive energy amongst the staff... what has been missing is a person on the top executive team who has really been visibly accountable for the whole networks process. Fellow

Where there was a lack of managerial capacity for the project, Matthew himself provided an enormous and significant amount of charismatic energy, playing an essential galvanising and tone-setting role. In processes of change, this kind of leadership is crucially important. It can be tremendously powerful in garnering support and deep commitment from staff:

Even just down to small things, like Matthew will go into meetings, if Fellows organise meetings here that he thinks are interesting, he'll just pop in... and sprinkle a bit of pixie dust. Senior staff member

At various crisis points in the project, it was Matthew's leadership that rescued the work and re-energised otherwise despondent staff:

It is important to have that support from the top as well, and to get his take on why we are doing this and to hear him speak quite strongly and passionately about it, it was good, it was really useful. Staff member, networks team

What emerges from this analysis is the importance of both aspects of leadership: the managerial and the maverick. Either on their own are unlikely to maintain momentum and see through disruptive change. The RSA's recent appointment of a new Director of Fellowship finally provides the organisation with the combination it has been lacking for a year now, and promises a more stable, managed process of change and development.

FILM:

- Some perspectives on leadership
- Balancing leadership in networks and hierarchies

In *Some Perspectives on Leadership*, Fellows and Staff talk of the balance between an open process and the need for quality control, elimination and direction. They identify the gaps at a senior accountable level to create certainty, fixity and clarity to the agenda which they now have to work with. Action and understanding are inhibited by a lack of transparency and leadership. It becomes clear that the charisma of the maverick innovator at the top, in the form of the Chief Executive, is not enough, and needs to be accompanied by a methodological management which can see through the vision and make it practicable. *Balancing Leadership in Networks and Hierarchies* shows the role leadership plays within different forms of organisational structures. The need for a point of accountability is highlighted, as is the 'psychological leadership' to inspire change. Despite the different form and structure networks take, a management/leadership role is

still central to the 'sense' of the organisation.

5. Go beyond staff compliance: you need their deep commitment

Major change processes will not be sustained in the long term by compliance or exhortation. Hard work needs to be put in to gaining wide ownership of any change process and what it is trying to achieve.

The scale of change that the RSA was seeking is not something that can be forced on to individuals, or grafted onto existing organisational processes. To really make the vision a reality, there needs to be deep staff ownership of the new mission. Once again, this has implications for people in leadership roles. The RSA has learnt this year that charismatic leadership is essential, but on its own not enough, to garner the kind of staff commitment that is necessary.

Privately many staff acknowledged that they had got more involved in the project because the Chief Executive had made it clear how much importance he personally attached to the work. Involvement represented a smart tactical move as much as anything else, rather than springing from a deeper understanding of the potential of a more networked RSA.

Earning people's commitment takes hard work, however, People need to emotionally believe in the possibilities of the change being proposed, as well as intellectually engage with it. In a world where command models still dominate our vision of how change happens, the RSA team did not do enough to build powerful stories about the potential of more collaborative ways of working. There was a poor grasp – theoretically and in practice – of emerging trends around campaigning, collective action, open innovation and mass collaboration models – across the organisation.

Sharing ownership of change also takes particular forms of leadership. The charismatic style of the Chief Executive energised people in meetings, only to depress them even more when they returned to their desks to find that there remained a disjuncture between public rhetoric and their actual organisational experience. As one member of staff said:

What is not fine is to be doing one [thing] while pretending to do another... it's about being honest. Senior staff member

The leadership expert and academic Ronald Heifetz has written extensively about the significance of 'mobilising people' when it comes to leading what he calls 'adaptive work'. He defines such work as any activity where there is an uncertainty about the precise nature of the outcome, and a lack of clarity about how to get there. As was the case with the RSA networks project, adaptive work requires that people get involved, that they do not stand on the by-lines waiting to see what happens. As Heifetz argues:

When mobilised, allies and friends become not followers but participants... they become partners.

In this comment, we return full circle to the original mission of RSA networks: to create the world's largest network for civic innovation, bringing extraordinary people together from many different backgrounds to work together in pursuit of positive social change.

Our final film offers some reflections from the Chief Executive about just how powerful this network could be in the future. The first year of the project has demonstrated the enormous potential within the RSA. The organisation is now poised to really make something of it. A year of learning and development means it can enter a phase of transformation clearer and more confident about what it is seeking to achieve. A fantastically strong staff team whose roles cover all aspects of the Fellows' experiences is in place to lead this change. And a growing cohort of Fellows – many of them fresh with the energy of recent membership – are finding new ways of engaging with the RSA as collaborators and partners, rather than passive audiences.

The process of change without a blueprint is hard work, and it takes a level of courageousness to maintain the energy and focus needed to overcome people's natural resistance to new initiatives. The RSA experience offers some powerful lessons for others, and the organisation should be congratulated on its determination and willingness to stay the course so far. The task now is to build upon what has been learnt, and to go further than ever in embedding the values and principles of RSA networks, so that it becomes the beating heart of the organisation. The real work begins now.

FILM:

What will success look like?

Here the Chief Executive, Matthew Taylor, talks of the importance of the 'good life well lived' and how Fellows can contribute to this experience. He invites people to get practically involved, working together around a table. *What Will Success Look Like?*, therefore draws a picture, tracing a continuum between Staff and Fellows activity, creating a 'Bigger Us' – an 'Us' which speaks of collaboration and brokerage of people, ideas and energy.