



RELATIONSHIPS FOUNDATION

think relationally

Counting the social cost

Whether it's a global corporate or a local company, businesses inevitably impact communities. They can bring significant benefit, but they can also cause significant damage. As part of our work on social sustainability, we've been helping one business consultancy to develop ways to measure a company's social impact.

Every business needs to keep a close eye on its financial sustainability. And with growing concern over the environment, companies are increasingly eager to demonstrate their role in environmental sustainability. Yet for all but the most ethically-conscious companies, the third component of the so called 'triple bottom line', social sustainability, is largely unexplored.

Part of the reason for this is the difficulty in assessing social sustainability. The framework for measuring financial sustainability is relatively objective and well-defined. There are also numerous tools to help provide quantitative measurement of environmental impact. But when it comes to measuring social impact, the situation is not so objective or clear cut.

The first step is to define what social sustainability is. By its very nature, social sustainability is a little subjective – in order to assess impact and measure progress there needs to be an initial value judgement about what kind of society we are aiming for. This is where we found that relational thinking and the framework we have developed to analyse relationships had something useful to offer the discussion.

Applying the relational framework

We identified a range of relationships that can be dramatically affected by an organisation's work practices, employment policy, advertising, investment decisions and patterns of engagement with local communities. This range includes relationships between employer and employee, in extended families, with neighbours and



How do you measure a company's social impact?

community, between richer and poorer neighbourhoods and between ethnic groups, intergenerational relationships in the community and local political relationships.

Applying the five dimensions of relational proximity (directness, multiplexity, continuity, parity, and commonality) we were able to suggest a range of indicators by which companies could measure their effect on social sustainability.

Reporting on environmental and social impact is currently not compulsory for organisations in the UK. Yet just as environmental campaigning has forced companies to prove their green credentials, so should the growing concern about our society encourage them to take their social impact seriously. We hope that the principles we have developed will enable a better understanding of that impact and ways of working that benefit and build society. ■

Our report for Oakdene Hollins will be published in the near future and available to download from our website.

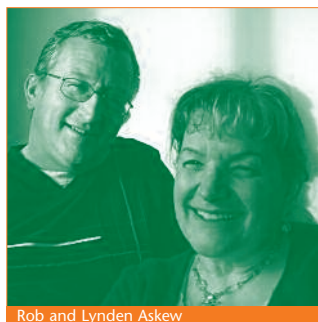
Divorce week

Posted by: Phil Caroe Posted on: 9 January 2007

More couples start divorce proceedings this week than at any other time in the year according to new research. But, says editor of InsideDivorce.com, Faye Rowe, "we are still a nation of romantics at heart. Seventy per cent of divorced people still believe that there is a perfect man or woman out there." To be honest though, I can't help wondering whether the belief that marriage can be perfect and effortless isn't the reason why their marriages didn't work in the first place...

Read more blog posts on our website – www.relationshipsfoundation.org

Frontline view



Rob and Lynden Askew

Rob Askew and wife Lynden work for Time for Families, a charity that aims to support family life by strengthening relationships between couples and with their children. They run two-day courses in HMP Durham and HMP

Wolds Private Prison in East Yorkshire to support relationships between prisoners and their partners.

How do you persuade prisons to let you run these courses?

It's become easier, but we are in many cases opportunists. We must have someone who works in a prison, usually in resettlement, who has heard of what we do. We need a champion inside. But if you can convince prison management that what you do can reduce re-offending, then you will have their support. That ticks their boxes.

The re-offending bill for the country is estimated at £11 billion a year and there is a campaign at every level of the prison service to reduce re-offending rates by 10% by 2010. Some doubt whether this can be achieved but it colours everybody's thinking, and it is now recognised that maintaining family ties is important in reducing re-offending. More than half of prisoners lose contact with families when they are in prison and if accommodation is linked to the family home, then they lose this too, and their employment prospects are drastically reduced.

How does your course help prisoners and their partners stay together?

Partners of the prisoners are invited into prison for the day. Typically, we have five to ten couples on each course. The basic two-day course looks at the couple relationship and in particular relationship skills such as communication, conflict resolution, good and bad listening, understanding each other's needs and personalities, and negotiating change and forgiveness. Forgiveness is a key one which, though not always comfortable, is nevertheless one that they are always keen to engage with in a profound way.

Is it hard to create an environment in prison where couples can talk openly about their relationship?

We use a facilitating style – where couples work together, talk about their feelings or things like their dream holiday. We want to equip them with the skills to build a stronger relationship, and we try to steer them away from particular issues of conflict. But there is a willingness, a desire to talk about real things, concerns close to their hearts. It's often around raising of children while the man is in prison, pressures involved, financial issues, that sort of thing.

How do you build trust in the group?

It never ceases to amaze us the level to which the prisoners and their partners engage with us. The easiest way we've found to form

a relationship of trust with them is to incorporate our own experience in terms of self-revelation, which I know is a no-no in terms of counselling but we are not counsellors, we are facilitators. For example, with the forgiveness material we will always illustrate it 'live'. Lynden or I will have an issue the other one doesn't know about and we will go through the forgiveness process in front of them.

What other practical steps do you use?

We take them through a number of things – talking, communication, expressing yourself. People begin to say 'I must learn to talk, not opt out or fly off the handle, we can talk things through and come to a solution.'

We are gradually gathering up relationships but it takes time to get a depth of relationship. Through the course you help build trust and the relationship is able to grow.

Along with our colleagues working in HMP Brixton, we've pioneered the involvement of Peer Facilitators – that is prisoners and their partners who have already taken the course who are then involved in running it. They help present material, recruit for the course, help deliver it and give some illustrations. Often they are not great presenters, but even if they are just reading a script the fact that they are peers outweighs anything else. It has a big impact if it's coming from someone who knows what it's like on the inside. And it's of great benefit to the facilitators themselves, not only in reinforcing the content of the course but in feeling that they've got something to contribute. ■

You can find out more about the work of Time for Families at www.timeforfamilies.org.uk

Join the Rnetwork

The Rnetwork is a group of people committed to building a more relational society. You can become a member by committing regular financial support of at least £5 a month (or £2.50 for those on low incomes) to our work. We also award honorary membership to people doing exceptional work to build relationships in innovative ways.

We provide the opportunity for members to network with each other, and give them access to resources that will help them make their own corner of society that bit more relational.

So if you haven't joined yet, why not give us a call today or join online at www.relationshipsfoundation.org/rnetwork

RNETWORK 

Which way for well-being?



Our well-being should include things like our physical vitality, our emotional maturity, our ability to think morally, developing our mental and creative capacities, and exploring spirituality and meaning. Not only could a sole focus on happiness miss out on investing in these components, it could potentially lead to an irresponsible and harmful emphasis on individual pleasure seeking.

Well-being therefore needs to be a much broader concept of what good lives look like. And when we look at the things that make for a good life, we discover that good relationships are fundamental. Many aspects of well-being are established during child development when relationships with family and community are critical. As adults, our well-being relies directly on

a wide range of relationships, both personal and professional; it also relies indirectly on the consequences of a range of other personal and organisational relationships, for example between public sector agencies.

From lifestyle magazines to politicians, everybody seems to be talking about well-being. Although we all know roughly what it means, it's much harder to say exactly what it is, or what to do about it. That's why we're now working on a project to examine well-being, the role of relationships and how to encourage national well-being.

There's little doubt that whatever well-being is, we certainly need it. While in many ways we've never had it better, the rates of stress and depression, addictions, crime and family breakdown all indicate that something is surely missing. Despite the optimism of past decades that a flourishing economy and technological advances would deliver wonderful lives, some people are now starting to wonder whether we might in fact have been following the wrong path all this time.

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This sense of dissatisfaction has led to a rapid growth in the study of well-being at a serious academic and policy level. What has emerged from the research is a strong call to refocus politics to prioritise our subjective well-being – or in other words, our happiness. With research data showing that levels of happiness have hardly improved in this country over the last 50 years, the quest for happiness has captured the public imagination and the national debate. But is happiness really what it's all about?

Our subjective experience of life is undeniably a crucial component of our well-being. Yet if well-being describes the goals for getting the most out of life, surely there is more to it than just happiness?

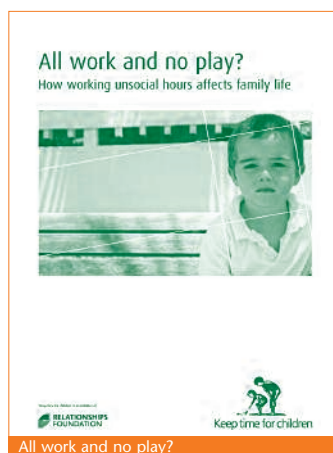
When we look at the things that make for a good life, good relationships are fundamental

So if we want to encourage well-being, the most effective policy route is to encourage positive relationships across society. This is not a case of telling people what to do in order to make them happy, but creating the right kind of conditions in which relationships can grow. We believe there are three main ways to do that. The first is to encourage the motivation for relationships. This means shifting our culture to replace those values that don't increase well-being with ones that do. The second is to ensure the opportunity. Even if you have the motivation, it's impossible to build relationships if you don't have the opportunity, which means looking at factors like time, geographical distance and social skills. The third is to give the support. Relationships are sometimes hard work, and a little support could make the difference between coping and breakdown; sometimes people find themselves alone, and what they need is not so much a service as a supportive relationship.

Our work on well-being doesn't provide all the answers by any means. Yet by making a distinctive contribution to the national debate on well-being, we hope to take that debate further and a step closer to making a significant difference to the well-being of our nation. ■

'Thriving lives: which way for well-being?' will be launched on 19 April to the All Party Parliamentary Group on Sustainable Relationships and will be available to order in print or download free from our website.

News in brief



Media coverage

In our last newsletter we announced the launch of our report, *All work and no play?*, which reviewed the findings of two research projects by the National Centre for Social Research in association with our 'Keep time for children' initiative. The report got good media coverage, including a double-page article in the Independent on Sunday and a feature in Bella Magazine, and was also promoted in a recent article by Guardian expert

Anne Karpf. You can download the report from our website, or contact us for a printed copy.

Flexible working

Keep time for children has continued to campaign for measures aimed at allowing parents to spend more time with their children. We have met with the DTI and joined with other organisations in lobbying our case, and have worked with members of the House of Lords to raise questions to ministers on these issues. It's encouraging

that the Minister for Children, Beverley Hughes, has recently indicated her support and we hope that the sustained pressure which we and others have generated will result in further concessions in this Parliament.

Relational lens

We are currently working on a new book that will enable leaders in the private, public and charitable sectors to understand and apply relational thinking. So far we've secured corporate sponsorship from Ogilvy One, John Lewis Partnership and Land Securities, and are in discussions with other potential sponsors. We anticipate that the book will be published in 2008.

Finances

Our accounts for the year ending August 2006 show that the total income for the year was £353,122 (£301,426 in 2005) against expenditure of £361,943, a deficit for the year of £8,821. This result means that our funds carried forward (reserves) fell from £39,631 in 2005 to £30,810 in 2006. About half of these reserve funds are earmarked for specific projects, so on a day-to-day basis the situation can feel more fragile than these figures would indicate. A full copy of our accounts is available on request.

As a charity we rely almost entirely on private donations, so we are very grateful to all who continue to give to support our work. Thank you. ■

Events and Resources

Relationships 24/7

The keynote speeches from this one-day conference are now available to download as a single document from our website: 'Social Intelligence at Work' by Professor Gillian Stamp, 'The Sikh Perspective' by Dr Indarjit Singh and 'From Vertical to Horizontal' by Rt Hon Oliver Letwin MP.

'An Unexpected Tragedy'

This, the first report from Relationships Forum Australia, sets out to establish whether there is a link between changes in Australian working patterns and aspects of well-being associated with relationships, particularly those in families, but also including friendships and participation in the broader community. The report cites data on working patterns across a wide range of high-income countries, including data from our Keep time for children research. Relationships Foundation acted as advisers to this project.

Relational Health Audit accreditation course

The next one-day workshops will be on 30 April and 14 September. Please see our website for further details.

Weblog

Keep an eye on our blog, 'First thoughts', on our website for the latest news and comments on relational issues in the media. The blog also gives you the opportunity to add your thoughts to ours!

Rethink

Place your bets With the licensing of the UK's first super-casino, we ask who's really to blame for gambling problems.

Spending their inheritance Why looking after the environment is a real relational issue.

Download these articles from our website or sign up to receive future editions by email. ■

More resources are available online, check our website for the latest downloads – www.relationshipsfoundation.org

Editor: Phil Caroe