

LEARNING POINT 27:

developing *Business Juggler* as part of a continuous improvement approach within the voluntary, housing and social economy sectors

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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Other formats

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The Scottish Centre for Regeneration is part of Communities Scotland, the Executive's housing and regeneration agency.



What are learning points?

Learning points share what people have learned from their experience in regeneration. They share the lessons from people working or talking together, or from research into issues and evaluation of what is happening. Learning points are one of the ways that help people and organisations identify what works and what doesn't work to improve their practice.

What is this learning point about?

This learning point looks at the challenges of introducing continuous improvement to organisations working in the voluntary, social economy and housing sectors across Scotland. Continuous improvement helps organisations become more effective because they become involved in an ongoing cycle of objective setting, action and review .

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The Scottish Centre for Regeneration, part of Communities Scotland, funded Quality Scotland to carry out trials with five social economy organisations, five housing associations and five voluntary organisations. The trial had three stages:

- 1 A facilitated self-assessment session.
- 2 A benchmarking trip to Govan Initiative – an organisation recognised as a leader in continuous improvement approaches across Europe.
- 3 A follow-up session with each organisation.

During the facilitated self-assessment, organisations looked at their strengths and weaknesses and planned for the future of their organisation.

The tool used for the self-assessment, *Business Juggler*, is a web-based interactive self-assessment tool that asks organisations to score themselves against 36 statements covering key elements such as leadership, processes, people, resources, strategy and results.

It has been developed by the Centre for Competitiveness in Northern Ireland and is ideally suited to small businesses or departments within larger organisations. The main aim of the tool is to identify priorities and develop an action plan for improvement.

What is known already?

Many small organisations, regardless of their sector, have difficulties introducing an improvement cycle. Common barriers identified include:

- resources are stretched and organisations feel time can be better spent in other activities;
- funding difficulties mean that organisational development takes a back seat;
- lack of awareness within organisations of tools and supports which are available and their potential benefits; and



- some confusion over the relationship between improvement tools and other national quality standards.

What are the important issues examined?

Several issues were explored as part of the trial, including:

- whether *Business Juggler* is a suitable method of self-assessment in the housing, social economy and voluntary sectors;
- whether there are specific conditions required to use *Business Juggler* successfully; and
- what resources are required to implement *Business Juggler* effectively?

Participating organisations identified four common priorities that they needed help with during stage one. These were:

- mission, vision and value statements;
- customer satisfaction;
- internal communications; and
- community involvement.

In stage two, Govan Initiative shared its methods and experiences of these four priorities with the participating organisations.

What has been learned?

Business Juggler was seen as an appropriate tool by 93 per cent of the organisations in the trial. All participating organisations made progress

against action points suggested by *Business Juggler*. Their main comments on the tool were:

- it acted as a catalyst for discussion amongst the participating staff;
- it was very quick to use and the results were available instantly – a real benefit due to pressure on resources and time;
- it was very useful for action planning;
- it highlighted clearly the areas of strength and areas for improvement;
- it helped focus senior management teams on action plans for the key issues effecting their organisation, leading to a greater commitment to deliver the plan; and
- its simplicity and speed meant that it was a good first step towards organisational development;

However, a small minority of organisations felt that the language was not tailored to their sector and this could be off-putting, and some found the scoring system hard to comprehend. They also felt that funding the self-assessment process beyond the trial was problematic despite initial success.

In introducing continuous improvement tools into social economy, housing and voluntary organisations a number of points should be considered.

- Adequate staff resources are needed to implement the action points.
- New staff need to be brought up to speed as staff changes can make implementation difficult.
- Success is more likely if sound funding is in place.
- If lots of changes are happening in an organisation they will need to look at whether the initial self assessment is still relevant. If not a new self assessment should be carried out.

- The commitment from a chief executive or senior management within an organisation, both at the self-assessment stage and during the implementation of the action plans, is very important. If a commitment is not there it is unlikely that the programme will be successful.

What next?

Introducing and supporting a culture of continuous improvement will continue to be a challenge worth taking by the type of organisations involved in the pilot. In the future the effective use of a tool like *Business Juggler* will require:

- a clear commitment and close involvement from the organisation's chief executive or senior managers;
- any best practice visits to be structured to allow more discussion and to ensure a more detailed comparison with the host organisation;
- Quality Scotland to look at *Business Juggler* in more detail and review the possibility of making minor language changes to the tool; and
- thought to be given on how organisations can be encouraged to develop their continuous improvement approach once the pilot has ended and whether further support is needed.

