

PSI Re-Use: The Cultural Divide

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Despite the increasingly high level political & institutional support afforded to the PSI Re-Use agenda as evidenced in many governmental policy initiatives (including a range of recent pragmatic solutions arising from Belgium, Denmark, France, Spain & Sweden), there is a clear and evident risk that the full economic value of the public information resource will fail to be delivered unless we can attempt to bridge the cultural dichotomy which has long existed between the Private & Public sectors within the wider pan European economic model.

The adversarial & antagonistic attitudes which are as prevalent in many areas today as they have ever been despite many governmental initiatives, continue actively to impede and obstruct the flow of information as a resource in its own right and to threaten the Re-Use agenda.

Pressures for access & engagement from within the Private sector continue in many areas to be blocked by 'Gatekeeper' attitudes from within large areas of the wider Public Sector where protectionist and obstructive attitudes often lead to a decrease of effective PSI re-use.

The private sector 'cultural drivers' are often borne from entrepreneurial instincts which by necessity are proactive, fast moving and subject to cutting edge commercial pressures whereas those within the generality of the public sector may often be seen as reactive, risk adverse, bureaucratic & lacking in the commercial awareness that permeates the private sector. This often negative interface between public sector & private sector within the economic system is where the widest dichotomy is evidenced and where the divergence in culture is at its most apparent.

If we really are intent on promoting the re-use agenda, we need to eradicate the proliferation of silo mentalities, narrow self interest agenda and resistance to change which whilst not confined to the public sector by any means ARE in many areas a fairly common indicative phenomena.

Peter Krantz, (www.opengov.se) has produced a Paper which states authoritatively, that whereas the information resource will increase in value within a system as it is actively shared and promoted, it will actually decrease in value & degrade in circumstances where it is hoarded. The views & objectives of Opengov are mirrored in the UK by the Open Knowledge Foundation (www.okfn.org) who have recently reaffirmed the need for improved and co-operative working relationships between public & private sectors.

Within the Pan European market there is great political support and vision which is increasingly providing & promoting a compelling argument to actively share the information resource but although the political leadership (as evidenced in the OPSI Model within the UK) remains highly focused, inertia and ignorance in large areas of the public sector continue to stifle progress and actively threaten the public sector information reform agenda. Making the best use of resources & paving the way for progress in effective service delivery remains a major challenge and one which needs to be addressed if the strategic aims of the re-use agenda are to be fully achieved.

The structure of high level management within the public sector from where 'leadership' would be expected to flow may itself be part of the problem. ([Robert Heller – Management Today](#))

- The principle of the 'Generalist' still rules
- Rapid high level staff turnover diminishes the growth of expertise
- Objectives are often inappropriately estimated as a result of inadequate planning
- The chain of Command is long

- Policy directives lose impetus as they filter many levels of Bureaucracy
- The effective focus of downstream policy implementation suffers

There are of course very real resource implications implicit in delivering policy change and public sector bodies are by their very nature often overly pressured in financial terms in coping with the funding & fulfilment of their primary public task duties. Within the UK in particular, there are centres of excellence where the information resource is managed & promoted to the highest standards. In those areas of the wider market where the attainment and achievement of goals is evident and recognised, we should seek to build on that success leading by example to show how the public and private sectors can work supportively in promoting an open information resource that is available for re use and subsequent provision of value added services.

Notwithstanding same, the cross cultural interface where the custodians of the public information resource & the highly charged commercial pressures of the private sectors meet and interface continues to remain an area where the divide in workplace culture is at its greatest and where attitudes can often be seen as attritional. It is precisely THIS area where the strongest leadership is needed and where the potential benefits of successful policy implementation will be seen to be most effective in producing deliverables deriving from effective re-use.

It is certainly the case that the public sector needs to and must be engaged proactively as a full & active participant and stakeholder in the PSI Re-use agenda. Clear and unambiguous policy directives need to be laid down from within the political leadership through a structured educative programme emphasising the 'win win' ethos where the added value of effective psi re-use itself promotes downstream economic growth & revenue generation to the benefit of all.