ABCs OF MSD: K is for… KEENNESS TO KINDLE KILLER DISCUSSIONS AROUND KERNELS OF PEER-TO-PEER KINDNESS… in exchange for GOOD KARMA

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Well, would you have opened this if it had said *"K is for… knowledge-sharing"?* Go on… you've opened it now…

You're busy, I get it… Here's the summary upfront… Jim very generously shared his excellent half-century of field reflections with us in the last 'ABCs…' post (loved it, Jim, thanks). Rob's offerings from a distilled quarter-century (plus, sorry!) are always sublime, as are Kate's… who is prolific! I also took a lot away from Mayada's guest post. Every contributor in this series has enlightened me in one way or another, big or small. I tip my hat to them all and express my gratitude! Whether it's for half-altruistic or completely non-altruistic motives, it's not important. You see, I don't understand what else our knowledge is for, if not for sharing! We are all, in fact, colleagues – a community of 'development industry' professionals – united, presumably, by our decisions to dedicate our working lives towards (so we hope) actions that make the world a better place to live in. This is, of course, a quest without an end – a 'fool's errand' – made both a little less never-ending and foolish if we mutually agree to better inform one another as to what works, how, and why. In our sector, the neologism and portmanteau 'cooptition' – ugly as it rolls off the tongue – appeals to me, and outright collaboration even more so. There are thousands of like-minded souls just like you out there in our industry… we need to do much more of this… blah, blah, blah… yes, we all know it, so let's jump forward now. Allow me to offer one reason why we should and several half-baked ideas as to how we could improve our knowledge-sharing…

Why: We may all concur with one thing… it is not straightforward to implement a systems development project, less straightforward again for an entire organisation to adopt and roll-out a systems development approach. At least, I've never heard any other MSD Team Leader say that their work is easy. Depending upon who you ask, it is either complicated, complex, or both. Getting the great results that we all want to see from our systems development programming, should, in theory, come from those who have found a path through the thicket sharing their newly acquired wisdom with others who are still mid-thicket! Knowledge-sharing can unlock improved industry-wide (not firm-specific!) performance, which, again in theory, should give rise to greater confidence in the approach/es among its funders. With more and more well-designed and executed systems development programming, so we believe, comes greater, longer-lasting social impact. Not that simple what with politicians and all, but in theory, right? So, if you're a 'believer, rather than squabble over slices of a presently-still small cake, let's bake ourselves a gigantic cake and eat heartily! If you're a 'non-believer' (and I can understand why some remain unconvinced), surely you couldn't disagree with the believers' trying to better themselves? There is a sweet 'theory of change' in this paragraph somewhere. Is it too much to say that quality knowledge-sharing (or rather the sub-optimal performance of knowledge-sharing systems to date) is the systemic constraint impeding the en masse adoption of systems thinking and practice in development quarters?

How: The massive cake requires several ingredients and large quantities of each. Brace yourself, dear reader… I'm about to launch into an extended cake-themed metaphor, which I will surely come to regret. The first ingredients arrive courtesy of so-called 'good souls', who share their

learnings voluntarily (the '*flour*'). We could/should improve just how distilled and easy-to-read/access/navigate, as well as how attractive, social, and timely these learnings are (by adding some '*eggs*') – see the Behavioural Insights Team's EAST Framework for behaviour change – but this is all often pro bono (hence my use of 'good souls') and such dedication to the utility, originality, and useability of the knowledge being shared is a tall order amid many other work priorities. The second set of ingredients arrive from donors funding long-term 'knowledge platform' initiatives – BEAM Exchange, MarketLinks, and alike – as well as different events, and online networks/e-discussions (the '*butter*'). Many knowledge products (guides, manuals, case studies, research reports) on these platforms are fully funded by the platform budget, mobilised ad hoc/one-off additional donor contributions, or indirectly via the budgets of the many donor-funded projects/programmes that invest in creating their own knowledge products. There is, however, often still a great deal of pro bono contribution 'from the field' (both organisations and individuals) that is required to bring these paid-for knowledge products to life and also to make these platforms generally more vibrant and value-adding on a week-to-week basis (the '*milk*'). Indeed, more specifically, a lot of the funded knowledge products rely on one contractor (who benefits financially and reputationally) synthesising and editing the crowd-sourced practices and insights from a whole bunch of altruistic interviewees/survey-fillers (sharers) who do not 'benefit'. This is all great. Let's keep saying yes to interviews and keep filling-in surveys. I'm not arguing against that. It's just that all of this – the flour, milk, butter, eggs – well… it produces a rather bland (and small) cake! We need other ingredients that add a little sweetness, spice, taste, pizzazz and dare I use the word… 'scale' (see: *baking soda*). Can these ingredients be found through harnessing incentives, string-pulling, and better resourcing?

- Sugar: Could we find a way to appropriately reward interviewees and survey-fillers to get even more or perhaps richer/sweeter responses? This could be simple spotlighting, and attributing credit where its due, including links to the LinkedIn profiles of contributors as click-throughs from the final published e-document (given that everything is published and hosted online). Maybe money or prizes (lottery-style or straight-up) makes sense where anonymity is needed?
- Jam/Chocolate/Fruit: Could we vote for/nominate the excellent blogs/musings/smaller pieces of research that capture our interests and fulfil our needs as practitioners, and through such a mechanism, recommend funders to resource those ideas that we would love to be explored more fully, or even providing minimal funding so as to transform the original work into something more visually attractive/appealing… or even to plainly financially compensate the authors after the fact? Our 'likes' reflex – or our need to select a number of stars from among five – could be harnessed to reward knowledge-sharing pioneers, no? On the same (open access) voting platform, we might also think to host a mechanism for practitioners to request research topics or insights on X, Y, or Z? Perhaps, the knowledge products being paid-for and supplied is out-of-kilter with the knowledge practitioners are demanding? Did you ever read someone's work (excellent or otherwise) and wonder why they'd done it and who they'd really done it for?
- Baking Soda: Could donors/funders unleash a mighty wave of knowledge-sharing if they were to incorporate points for applicants 'demonstrating (quality) knowledge-sharing' into their proposal-scoring systems? Yes, there needs to be careful consideration to implement this properly; also to how scoring panels might more easily proxy for 'quality'. Not unrelatedly, it is the worst kept secret that knowledge products are 95%+ "here's a success that we've achieved", irrespective of whether or not the account presented is full or partial, objective/ independent, or indeed whether a bus could be driven through the measurement system that has produced the impact data therein! The 'failure reporting' trend did not manage to knock the 'look at us' trend off its perch. Could well-constructed and well-delivered (quality) failure-sharing be rewarded with more points in the proposed scoring system than its opposite?

Look, we all have different taste in cakes. And I'm happy to accept that this cake could swap-out a few ingredients in exchange for others. I'm into sticky toffee puddings with custard, Eton mess, and pretty much anything with a lemon flavour. Springfield Centre founder, Alan, had a sizeable sweet tooth… and famously loved a Crunchie. Very fitting. But if anyone wishes to hire me to run a proper consultation with regards to different ingredient/cake preferences… I'm on LinkedIn! As a disclaimer, the call-to-action should not be confused for an offer to engage me for cake baking purposes (for which, one of us would certainly be disappointed)!

In addition to thanking Springfield Centre for all its immense knowledge-sharing efforts (past, present, and future), both paid and unpaid, I'd like to also dedicate this post to Zenebe Uraguchi from Helvetas, who really leads by example with his knowledge-sharing gift, enthusiasm, and commitment… he inspired me to do a little better with my own knowledge-sharing.

Thank you for reading and bye for now!