

## **EMBEDDING THE PEACE PROCESS: THE ROLE OF LEADERSHIP, CHANGE AND GOVERNMENT IN IMPLEMENTING KEY REFORMS IN POLICING AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT IN NORTHERN IRELAND**

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### **Abstract**

Embedding the Northern Ireland peace process necessitated that a series of key reforms in policing and equality were fully implemented, so that institution-building provided substance and structure to this process. While much of the literature around peace-building is focused on politico-military, legal and normative elements, and these are essential to reaching agreement, addressing objective grievances of the past and embedding a peace process, this article offers evidence to support the use of an additional perspective through which to view the modalities of change from conflict to sustainable peace-building. This organisational change lens provides a means of identifying the key elements for successfully embedding change in a fundamentally political venture; which are, in this case, leadership (champions of change and political will), resources, external change agents, and the necessary pacing and sequencing of the change process. These must be seen within the wider context of decision making in post-conflict Northern Ireland in an era of modernisation of government.

### **Introduction**

While negotiating the Belfast Agreement was a fundamentally political venture in which rights, equality and policing and justice were emphasized, structurally embedding the Northern Ireland peace process required the implementation of a series of key reforms in the areas of policing and equality. The outworking of this implementation process in policing and public authorities entailed radical reform processes, including the creation of new and intricate structures of government (Harvey 2001(a); Livingstone, 2001; Morison, 2001), the instituting of complex legislative devices underpinning social relations (Harvey, 2001 (b); Hughes and McCandless, 2006) and, in some cases, the creation of an entirely new government department (Murphy, 2006). This article focuses on the changes in two public sector organisations: the RUC and Newry and Mourne District Council. These processes are situated in the wider context of governance in post-conflict Northern Ireland. The findings offer some conclusions about the nature of institutional reform, its significance to the wider peace process, and how it enhances our understanding of peace-building through structural and cultural change in organisational settings.

## Background

As if to introduce our analysis of embedding peace in Northern Ireland, Jeong (2005) opens his work on peace-building in post-conflict societies by noting the centrality of a long-term approach to social and political change through institution building.

It is often assumed that a peacebuilding process ends with the establishment of a new government along with the introduction of economic recovery packages. Not much analysis has been conducted as to how institution building and political transition are undermined by the lack of social and economic foundations. While establishing a stable government at the centre is important, not enough attention has been paid to local political and social context, which can determine the sustainability of peacebuilding projects. (2)

And he concludes,

Since the goals of peacebuilding cannot be easily achieved in a short time span, international assistance has to pay more serious attention to programs designed to support long-term social change with a focus on development and institution building beyond the protection of refugees. A third-party intervention can be considered successful if it has had a real and positive impact on the dynamics of existing political and social structures. (219-20)

For more than ten years, organisational change to embed the Belfast Agreement has produced such 'real and positive impact'. To succeed peace-building must entail organisational change and institutional building (and equally important organisational restructuring) that accompanies such change. Thus the modalities of implementing change are central to peace-building.

Any discussion of the interrelationship between embedding peace-building and implementing reform through organisational change must be context-specific (Jeong, 2005). The Northern Ireland peace process witnessed the foundation and dissolution of many bodies and institutions and, at its core, many structures have changed. That has not been easy; not simply because it entailed change, but because this was integral to the peace-building project and involved complex political decisions as well as the implementation of structural change (Lederach, 1997).

A number of scholars have explored organisational change under political pressure and usually in the realm of public sector reform (Pettigrew et al, 1992; Moore, 1995). They contribute important insights into how the wider (political, social and economic) context is necessarily reflected in the institutional change process (Pettigrew, 1990), and why it is vital to understand that context in order to explain such change (Dawson, 2003b; Das, 2003).

Much of the international literature on peace-building concentrates on the politico-military dimensions (Victor, 2010; Regan, 2009; Jennings and Roelfsema, 2008; Glassmyer and Sambanis, 2008; Quackenbush, and Venteicher, 2008; Nilsson, 2008; Collier et al, 2008; Schneider and Wiesehomeier, 2008; Chandler, 2006; Said,

2006). Others focused their attention on legal and normative factors (Malinder, 2007; Blatz, 2006; Shinoda, 2002; De Rivera, 2004). This article places greater emphasis on the role of organisational change in consolidating peace settlements and rebuilding civil society in a post-conflict context. Explanations of reconstructing civil society in post-conflict societies appear to focus mainly on implementing economic rather than organisational and institutional reforms. Pugh (2005) critiques the hegemony of the 'liberal peace project.'

The means for achieving the good life are constructions that emerge from the discourse and policy frameworks dominated by specific capitalist interests – represented as shared, inevitable, commonsensical or the only available option – when they correspond to the prevailing mode of ownership. Economic wisdom resides with the powerful ... [and] political inequality leaves many with no control over the major decisions that affect their lives. (38)

Brewer (2010) is also sceptical about international peace-building. He regards political, economic and judicial reforms (in post-war Rwanda) as good governance, but claims these are insufficient for sustainable peace.

The good governance approach to peace processes is overwhelmingly desirable in its emphasis on reforms in these key areas. The conflict is likely to have been motivated by undemocratic notions of politics, economic inequality and unfairness and human rights abuses, and institutional reform that corrects the original causes cannot be criticized. ... I am not perverse enough to claim good governance is unnecessary; it is insufficient. (196)

Psycho-social dimensions, in reconciliation or social rehabilitation, are essential to sustaining peace; in pursuing 'truth' or managing the contradictions between political expediency and 'justice' in political prisoner releases. Brewer's at-length focus perhaps misses how intertwined these dimensions are in practice. This analysis demonstrates the modalities of embedding peace, including good governance and institutional reform, which are social peace-building that manage the predicaments of an antagonistic peace.

## **Context**

Commentary on the Northern Ireland peace process has been largely political (Bew, 2000; Bew et al, 2002; Cox et al, 200; Cox et al 2006; Gormley-Heenan, 2007; Hennessy, 2000; Little, 2003; Livingstone, 2001; Mansergh, 2000; McCall, 2006; McEvoy, 1999; O'Leary, 1999), and legal (Bell, 2000; Breen Smyth, 2007; McCrudden, 1999; McCrudden, 2004; McEvoy and Morison 2003). Indeed, although the impact of conflict on public service provision was identified long ago (Williamson and Darby, 1978) this commonplace experience has not been subjected to serious research. The single study that has addressed organisational aspects of peace-building in Northern Ireland (Eyben et al, 2003) does not employ an organisational change

paradigm. The ‘causes’ of the conflict are contested. Catholics cite the lack of equality and human rights, and the sectarian division in Northern Ireland as the two main causes; and scholars have documented institutionalised discrimination and widespread injustice. Protestants prioritise ‘the IRA’ and ‘paramilitary use of violence’ (Irwin, 2004). Reforms may not have been fully understood by the public, but the referendum resulted in a seventy one per cent vote in favour of the Agreement, and gave legitimacy to legislation (McEvoy et al, 2003: 961; Harvey, 2001: 26-27). Approaches to peace-building through institution-building and organisational change include reform of policing, the judiciary and security sector, with the intention of promoting human rights, and institutional change to promote social justice and rehabilitation (Jeong, 2005; Brewer, 2010).

The Belfast Agreement provided impetus for reforming policing and introducing the equality and good relations duties; leading to the Independent Commission on Policing in Northern Ireland (1999) and the Northern Ireland Act (1998).

Northern Ireland had an almost exclusively Protestant police force, and profound inequalities in employment and income between Catholics and Protestants; despite existing fair employment and equality legislation. Intention to change these was as much a feature of the Agreement as was reform of security arrangements and decommissioning of paramilitary weapons. Institutional reform came with statutory obligations on public authorities, under Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act (1998) to produce equality schemes, to conduct equality impact assessment of new and existing policy, and implement the duties to promote equality and good relations. The statutory duties to promote equality and good relations arose from the hard fought negotiations for peace.

Considerations of equality and human rights, and policing reform were central to reaching a settlement and prioritised in order to address objective grievances of the past; with the history of electoral gerrymandering, and systematic, institutionalised discrimination in housing and employment. The Agreement rested on the legal and normative principles of equality of opportunity, human rights and respect for diversity (Harvey, 2001b; Bew et al, 1999 and 2002), leading both the British and Irish governments to legislate to ensure impartiality, human rights, equality, respect for diversity, and a series of civil, political, social, cultural and human rights (The Agreement, Constitutional Issues, Paragraphs 1(iv) to 1 (vi), 1998). Achieving a fair society based on reaching “reconciliation, tolerance and mutual trust” required new law that addressed the constitutional status of Northern Ireland, power sharing, police reform, and protections for equality and human rights. The Agreement “necessitated an important human rights and equality agenda (and this is where the uniqueness of the settlement lies)” (Morison, 2006: 240). The Northern Ireland Act provided this. Alongside Section 76 concerning anti-discrimination, Section 75 of the Act enshrined positive duties to promote equality of opportunity and good relations.

Section 75 (1) required designated public authorities to have “**due regard** to promoting equality of opportunity” between persons of different religious belief, political opinion, racial group, age, marital status or sexual orientation, men and women generally, those with and without a disability and those with and without dependents. Section 75 (2) required these public authorities to have “**regard to the**

**desirability** of promoting good relations among persons of different religious belief, political opinion or racial group”; and was intentionally weaker. Promotion of equality was the priority for the statutory sector. Until 2006, the Section 75 (2) duty was given scant consideration.

Section 75 (1) and Schedule 9 advanced beyond any other equality legislation and amount to “the fourth generation equality laws, based on a positive duty to promote equality, rather than simply to refrain from discriminating” (Fredman, 2002: 122). It extended beyond anti-discrimination as “Mainstreaming concentrates on government pro-actively taking equality into account. It does not concentrate on discrimination as the problem to be resolved” (McCrudden, 1999: 1769).

The pre-eminence of Section 75 (1) was intentional and political, as the debates in the House of Commons make clear (Hansard, 1998 a, b, c, and d). A senior Civil Servant and Advisor to the Secretary of State in 1998 recalled the debates and key questions around these statutory obligations, “A hierarchy had to be established because of the ‘danger’ of the equality duty being undermined. ... as the good relations duty might be used to dilute the power of the equality duty. ... They had influence with Mo and Kevin McNamara.” This ignited a heated debate that continues to this day, although no conflict exists between these duties.

The idea that community relations is in some way in constant tension with equality is a dangerous notion. It is either an attempt to retain the status quo with respect to existing levels of inequality or it is an attempt to retain policy making and administrative turf, neither of which is a suitable way of dealing with the problems. (McCrudden, 2004: 22)

Labour politicians, influential academics, and voluntary-community sector leaders, were emphatic that the equality duty should be as robust as possible – given the utter failure of the 1990s Policy Appraisal and Fair Treatment. Its intention was to reverse structural inequalities between nationalist-catholic and unionist-protestant groupings. The community relations lobby was more exercised by sectarianism and inter-community hostility than inequality. The duties are interdependent and “good relations cannot be built on basis of inequality and disadvantage” (McCrudden, 2004: 72). However, that does not make promoting good relations secondary; as the Newry and Mourne District Council case-study shows.

The problem arises from a discourse of reconciliation which lacks explicit connection to social justice, equality and human rights; which are essential to peace-building. Brewer (2010) takes issue with Lederach’s ‘moral imagination’ peace-building theory that dominates in Northern Ireland.

Thus, without acknowledging it, Lederach is forced to draw on his Christianity to describe the moral precepts peace builders use ... In truth the moral imagination is another in a series of ideas within peace studies that deploy quasi-religious discourse. (2)

Embedding peace in Northern Ireland required that the ‘two-traditions’ model of religious conflict be jettisoned, in favour of promoting good relations and equality

together. Policy implementation and public service delivery cannot adversely affect anyone in the nine equality categories. Sinn Fein (then) saw good relations as “a sop to Unionists” threatening equality. Most Unionists saw the equality agenda as a concession to Nationalists (Goldie, 2008; Hayward and Mitchell, 2003).

Just as equality was a lynchpin in reaching agreement, reform of policing was essential to democratic transition, human rights protection and justice; given the history of internment, trial without jury and deep-seated distrust of the police and judiciary among the nationalist population.

Ellison (2007) eloquently argues for the centrality of policing legitimacy within the democratic process, indeed as the central axis on which such governance rests. Within a developing peace process the institutional framework within which processes of transition and change take place represent the scaffolding of new organisational processes and social learning. If the scaffolding is not sufficiently constructed or doesn't address the very real issues of concern, then the entire project is unstable. Within the Northern Ireland case, the new structures (such as a new changed police service, new legislative requirements to build equality and good relations) represented such a form of ‘scaffolding’ for peace. Negotiating such a process of reform dated back to the Republican and Loyalist paramilitary ceasefires in the early 1990's; and concerned the organisational impact that would result from this ‘standing down’ of the (state) apparatus of violent conflict. An initial internal move towards a ‘fundamental review’ of the Royal Ulster Constabulary organisation informed a protracted and fiercely controversial process that was to become externally instigated reform. Reform was determined by the provision in the Belfast Agreement for establishing an Independent Commission with a remit to examine police reform. The Commission was chaired by the Right Honourable Chris Patten, CH, formally Governor of Hong Kong and a Cabinet Minister. The Commission's remit was to ensure that “policing arrangements, including composition, recruitment, training, culture, ethos and symbols, are such that in a new approach Northern Ireland has a police service that can enjoy widespread support from, and is seen as an integral part of, the community as a whole” (ICPNI 1999:123). The body reported in September 1999, making 175 recommendations, the most controversial of which were to make changes to the name, the badge and the uniform. The British Government's general agreement with the Patten Report enraged Unionists in Northern Ireland and signalled a faster pace of change. In response, the RUC leadership accepted these recommendations and the organisational change process began in earnest.

Critical points in the negotiations and a series of crises catalysed change in both policing and the law on equality and anti-discrimination. At the same time the Northern Ireland peace process coincided with a new trend in governance, after the 1997 British general election, and the emergence of what Bovaird and Löffler (2003) call public governance. Public management or administration is quite distinct from public governance. The former concentrates on managerial (‘top-down’) techniques and ‘value for money’ where public governance directs its focus on consultation, partnership and the participation of civil society. Public management “uses managerial techniques (often originating in the private sector) to increase the value for money achieved by public services. ... in public sector organisations ... [and] in public service organisations, whether public, voluntary or private sectors.” (Bovaird and

Löffler, 2003: 5). In contrast to public management, for Bovaird and Löffler public governance means, “the way in which stakeholders interact with each other in order to influence the outcomes of public policies.”

‘Modernisation’ requires government to work in partnership, promote social inclusion, consult ‘stakeholders’ and function in ‘joined up’ governance, while demonstrating appropriate leadership (Chaney and Fevre, 2002; Morison, 2006; Richards, 2003; NIO, March 2006). Willmott (2003) sees the role of government, both locally and centrally, as enabling local communities to be “the main driver of change”.

In this article it is argued that both the RUC and Newry and Mourne District Council possessed drivers of change who produced enhanced processes and change outcomes that amounted to good public governance; despite having to manage crises and political contention throughout the entire and lengthy process.

Although the equality duty took primacy over promoting good relations – in law, in practice, in procedure and in the politics of peace process – evidence shows that promoting equality and good relations together resulted in the most significant advances in peace-building. Research findings demonstrate that local Councils in Northern Ireland varied considerably in their approach to promoting equality and good relations, and that the obstacles to this were largely political (Goldie, 2008).

Portrayals of Northern Ireland as a model of reconciliation tend to ignore the hostile and divisive social, political and economic relationships which preceded the conflict, further deteriorated in the last three decades, and still need urgent attention as polarisation, polemic and division remain (Shirlow and Murtagh Shirlow, 2006; Murtagh and Shirlow, 2007; Goldie and Ruddy, 2010). Thus, the context of reform and organisational change is inextricably linked to both peace-building and implementing the modernisation agenda of governance. In that context there are four crucial dimensions of implementing reform.

### **The Four dimensions of Implementing Reform**

The experience of policing reform in Northern Ireland and implementing Section 75 shows that there are four essential dimensions to embedding peace-building. These demonstrate the necessity of organisational leadership, providing the necessary and appropriate resources, the diverse roles of external change agents, and decisions taken on the pace and sequencing of the change process itself.

#### *Leadership*

Analysis of research data on RUC reform shows that leadership was a crucial factor in the change process, at different levels within the hierarchy of the organisation and at particular junctures in the development of that process. Dawson notes that it is tempting to seek out flawless heroic figures when researching leadership, especially the charismatic leader driving change (Dawson 2003b). Although one figure necessarily dominates discussion in the RUC case (the Chief Constable Ronnie Flanagan), effective leadership can be clearly seen at other levels within the organisation. Examining leadership roles more generally, it is clear that a numbers of

layers are significant. The first and most obvious is that at the very top, occupied by Sir Hugh Annesley, Flanagan himself, Colin Cramphorn and Hugh Orde, during the research timeframe. The layer below consisted of what was described as the “Top Team,” comprising of the Chief Constable’s Policy Committee. This group contained the key individuals within the change process, including the Assistant Chief Constables (ACCs), the Change Manager, the Programme Manager for the Change Team, as well as individuals Flanagan had signalled out for the ‘operational inspectorate.’ These may be regarded as the second leadership tier within the organisation. Below that were the more dispersed District Commanders who were regarded as vital to the effective implantation of the change process on the ground. So, the three tiers of leadership are the Chief Constable, the Top Team and the District Command Unit (DCU).

In the structure of the RUC, it was Commanders who put in place and implemented the process of organisational change. Commanders represent the structure through which the organisation put in place the process of change and carried it through. The central focus of Flanagan and his transformational leadership role is reflected to a lesser degree by the role and behaviour of the other tiers. The Top Team acted as a facilitator of change and a constraining mechanism when the pace moved too fast. The DCU commanders managed the process on the ground and had a particularly important role in terms of the structural change and uncertainty which characterised the early process.

In terms of how appropriate the organisational leadership was, it is fairly clear that Flanagan’s approach to leading the organisation through such a difficult and complex process was conscious and nuanced. In his unwavering defence of the organisation externally and his internal challenge to his members, he set the tone for how the organisation would move ahead. By continually reinforcing the aims of the process alongside the length of time it would take and negotiating successfully on severance, Flanagan presented the organisation with a path forward which, though difficult, was at least perceived as achievable. Inevitably, the contribution made by the Top Team was overshadowed by the Chief Constable’s profile. At the same time, they had to see through the logistical challenges of managing the change process, organisational restructuring, dealing with the highly emotional issues of changing the name and badge and the long periods of uncertainty, and this required a steady hand on the tiller. The Team was as diverse as could be expected within a largely homogenous organisation and represented both those who were publicly and privately arguing for change as well as the more sceptical. By including people with different if not divided opinion on change, the Team was able to avoid the usual tendency in hierarchies to ‘group think’ and make progress on change. Tensions existed but overall, their approach seemed to work well. The training and consultancy support afforded to the initial DCU commanders left them in a strong position to move into the new structures and take up their new responsibilities. However, relatively quick turnover in staff (encouraged by voluntary severance) created a more challenging environment to those who replaced them. It is clear that changes in the organisation’s leadership seem to have precipitated a breakdown in the training strategy. Although the scope of this research was limited and useful data on the DCU commanders in this respect was not available, given the rapid pace of change and the change of leadership,



such difficulties were to be expected.

Leadership was a pivotal force in the change process in local government as they implemented the Section 75 duties to promote equality of opportunity and good relations. If crisis acts as a catalyst for reform then two predicaments triggered change in Newry and Mourne District Council. The workforce was very unrepresentative in terms of the religious background of employees, and there were potentially serious repercussions from contentious parades in Newry. The Council initiated a process of change primarily in response to discussions with the Fair Employment Commission (which became a directorate of the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland on its establishment in 2000) about the serious under-representation of Protestants in the workforce. The Council was predominantly Catholic/Nationalist in terms of both staffing and elected members. Less than 5% of the population of Newry were Protestant/Unionist, and the ward had no Unionist Councillors. This was a Nationalist Council with thirty elected members of whom thirteen were Sinn Féin, nine SDLP, three UUP, two DUP, two Independent and one Green Party. Newry town had no Unionist representation. They had maintained a 'no flags' policy for seventy years and did not support any Royal celebrations until 2003. In 1996, they tackled the fair employment problem by beginning a protracted process of discussion, dialogue, and organisational change. The then acting Chief Executive, Tom McCall, engaged external practitioners to develop anti-sectarian and internal equality and community relations work; which was stalled until he became Chief Executive. This led to the Relationships in Equity, Diversity and Interdependence (REDI) programme in 1998. By 2001 the Council had relocated community relations in a new Equality Unit in the Chief Executive's department employing a Senior Equality Officer, an Equality Officer, a Good Relations Officer and an assistant Good Relations Officer reporting to the Director of Administration. "One of the things we did was to take community relations from where it was – on the periphery of Council structures – into the centre, and set up an Equality Unit." (Chief Executive)

Moving that function from the organisational periphery to the centre, in the Council's equality unit, signalled an understanding at the most senior level that promoting good relations is essentially an integral part of promoting equality and good governance. In the 1990s Newry and Mourne Council was unique in addressing internal sectarian 'community relations' issues from an equality perspective and in their focus on external communal problems, by creatively using consultative, participative mechanisms to find solutions. During the change process that developed over a decade, this Council adopted an organisational model of change; in contrast to the partnership and political models used by other Northern Ireland local Councils.

The second and external crisis happened in summer 1998 with plans that Newry would host the County Down parade of The Loyal Order of the Royal Black Preceptory. (Although separate from the Orange Order, the two are often confused. Their web site notes "Two years after the formation of the Orange Order in 1795, the Royal Black Institution came into existence in Ireland in 1797 with its foundations based firmly on scriptural truths and the propagation of the Christian Reformed Faith.") This parade caused concern among the police, Council officials and most elected members, as it threatened Nationalist counter-demonstration with the possibility of widespread rioting and violence. The Chief Executive had this matter

put forward for reasoned consideration in an embryonic forum, where discussions led to a tactical resolution. The police presence at the parade was minimal, and it was agreed there would be no organised counter-demonstration. Some years later, in 2006, the Sinn Féin Mayor of Newry attributed success to the good offices of Mediation Northern Ireland who facilitated this resolution, and gave credit to the leadership of the Chief Executive. Tom McCall vividly remembered the outcome of their deliberations, some eight years later.

There must have been twenty-five to thirty thousand people who came in that day and paraded. And because of what had been done – not by Newry and Mourne Council as we only facilitated it – there was such a low-key presence of police, there was no demonstration from the people who didn't want the parade. (Chief Executive)

Successful results, which were in no small part due to Tom McCall's political skills, convinced everyone involved of the wider value of discussion and mediation in a private dialogue. They recognised that contentious issues could be discussed and even resolved through mediated dialogue. The first discussions had concerned a crisis around parading. When participants envisaged the prospect of a wider agenda, the Good Relations Forum (GRF) was created. This was facilitated by the Council and began as a secret space for dialogue. When it became widely known and only then officially acknowledged, it became a private and confidential place to address problematic relationships and local sectarian issues. "*It was very much Chatham House Rule*" according to Tom McCall, because confidentiality was essential to suspending mistrust and facilitating political risk-taking – both of which were essential in finding even partial resolutions and embedding a culture of change. As building more trusting and effective relationships between rival factions needed time, this forum continued.

The champion of change was the Council's Chief Executive, both before and after he was confirmed into his post. Tom McCall recognised that Newry and Mourne Council had to address uncomfortable truths and make radical changes in both the 'process' and 'product' of local government. As soon as he took up the reins he instigated and robustly supported the REDI programme, understanding that the pace would be slow. The aims of this programme were to: "value the diversity of its staff, improve the quality of life of all its citizens, address local distrust between the different political traditions and seek to promote an interdependent community locally." (Eyben et al, 2003)

Tom McCall ensured that REDI used the foundation of an internal development group to form a coalition of Council staff at all levels, brought together on a first-name basis, and supported by trade unions and elected members in their ongoing work, and international exchanges. The 2001 REDI Declaration of Principles was a model of good practice, and accepted by officials, trade unions and elected members.

## Declaration of Principles

This declaration is supported and endorsed by the staff, Elected Representatives, Trade Unions and Management within [District] Council.

1. The Elected Representatives, Staff, Management and Trade Unions within Newry and Mourne Council staff, fully commit themselves to the principles of Equity, respect for Differences and Relationship-Building across sectarian divisions.
2. We accept that everyone has the right to work and live free from any form of intimidation due to religious, political, cultural or national differences and commit ourselves to ensuring freedom for all those who work for the Council from any form of discrimination by word or actions.
3. Representation or promotion of cultural, political and religious identities should be achieved in a manner that shows respect for each other, promotes diversity and can lead to creating mutual respect and understanding.
4. Any attempt to prevent the employment, continued employment or career development of any individual within the Council due to religious, political, cultural or national differences, will be vigorously opposed. Anyone involved in such activity will be subject to disciplinary procedures.
5. All staff are committed to ensuring that their behaviour can in no way make any other staff member feel uncomfortable or victimised because of their religious, political, cultural or national identity.
6. Councillors will endeavour to use language and conduct themselves in a manner that makes no other Councillor, the community or members of staff feel belittled or degraded. They will endeavour to engage in respectful politics and avoid behaviour that could cause greater divisions within the wider Council area.
7. The Council will endeavour to ensure that all Council premises shall be environments where anything that identifies a particular community allegiance, that could give offence or discomfort to individuals, groups or the community, would have to be acceptable to other 'majority' and 'minority' communities.
8. The Council will proof the delivery of all services and fundraising against agreed 'Community Relations' principles.
9. The REDI Development Group will regularly monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of this Declaration and all associated structures, procedures and training. It will engage with Elected Representatives, Management, Trade Unions and Staff on any changes which may be required in the future to ensure continuous improvement. (Eyben et al, 2003)

This declaration coincided with the Council producing an equality scheme. (Since 2000 all designated public authorities must produce Equality Schemes which have approval from the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland.) For its time, it was far-reaching and committed all staff and Councillors to fully implementing Section 75. As the Chief Executive reported, it had immediate impact on Councillors' decision making.

In the past, when Councils took decisions – somebody wanted money – it was more or less horse-trading. Could you get the number of votes in that boardroom for that group to get that? And there would be deals between different parties. Now, when we are distributing grants there's a very formal system in terms of how we measure. It's not done as it was in the past. ... In that alone the decision-making processes of Council have become improved.

A crucial outcome of this leadership was the fact that the REDI programme and its Declaration of Principles both preceded and strengthened their Equality Scheme. The Chief Executive also took a lead by admitting some uncomfortable truths, such as the findings of surveys which recorded the distrust and alienation of the Unionists from the Council; it was 'a cold place for Protestants'; and the Council had a "complacent nationalist culture" characterised by "a majority culture tied to an informal culture of politeness and a tacit culture of 'it's time they know their place' [which] finds it difficult to accept the other as being different and entitled to their place. This situation is reversed where Protestants are a majority." (Eyben et al, 2003)

In 1999 the Council conducted an external survey to measure how residents viewed them. A social audit survey was also carried out, with Council help, by the Protestant 'cultural' community-based project Altnaveigh House; formed from the Altnaveigh Orange Lodge. Both these surveys found the Council was seen as sectarian. Although uncomfortable, officials and elected members acknowledged this and took action.

Some of the ... perceptions were not very complimentary to Newry and Mourne but there was maturity amongst the Councillors to understand that whether or not people internally liked the outside perception, it nevertheless was what people thought about this Council. There was that maturity to be able to deal with it. (Chief Executive)

### *Resourcing*

Notions of change incentives tend to focus on a range of financial and non-financial mechanisms that facilitate the 'unfreezing' of existing organisational processes (Lewin, 1951; Lawler, 2000). An unusual aspect of the RUC change process was its dependence on the singular method of financial incentive in order to 'kick start' the process, by providing for voluntary severance and the resultant lack of performance incentives to change for those who chose to remain. There are clear reasons for this. The RUC was a public sector organisation in the midst of a turbulent period of social and political change. While the British Government (the funding source) understood that the peace process and policing change would incur a huge financial outlay, it also knew there were potentially huge savings to be made if security costs in Northern Ireland dropped, as they would do in a relatively peaceful situation. The UK Treasury was persuaded of the need to front-end a substantial financial commitment. However, although the public service nature of policing provided opportunities for those who chose to leave, it did not offer the same financial incentives for change for those who remained.

A distinctive element in the change process in policing in Northern Ireland was the very significant financial resources made available to those managing it, and particularly the resources provided as part of the voluntary severance process. These costs were defined by the organisation as 'Patten non-severance' and 'Patten-severance' expenditure. Patten non-severance expenditure was used to 'take forward the implementation of ...Patten related business cases' (PSNI 2002). These business cases included: the provision of training; increased numbers of part-time reserve officers and civilian support staff; development of a new police training college; improvements in the appearance of police stations; staffing structures for the new District Command Units; and Information Technology system upgrades. Patten severance included lump sum payments, commutation; pension; and administration costs. Severance fundamentally changed the power dynamics within the organisation by drastically diminishing the influence of 'securocrats' and the old guard over the behaviour of colleagues; in that sense it eliminated their power base (French and Raven, 1959) and laid the basis for the change process to progress. However, as other organisational members pointed out, there was a real issue about where the space for the next round of recruitment would come from. Indeed, it is most likely that the organisation now faces a period of relatively little internal movement for quite some time as these young superintendents, Chief Superintendents and ACC's have remained in the ranks for years and the promotion impasse has reached further down the chain of command.

Making such huge resources available to the change process in reforming the RUC was the direct result of the political environment and context. The future of policing had been a priority in peace negotiations and was seen as essential to moving Northern Ireland into a new phase. Its significance for the British Government was clear. Given the political risks that had been taken in the wider peace process and the difficulty getting political movement on many areas of concern around policing, it would have been surprising if the change process had been allowed to fail due to the lack of resources. Despite the degree to which the organisation was financially resourced to facilitate the change, existing internal resources (such as IT capability and even morale) were low. Financial resources went some way to fill those gaps. It is a contextual judgement as to how appropriate this strategy was, but in light of the enormous political resources and time spent trying to reform policing, providing appropriate resources seemed like a relatively straightforward evaluation.

Resources for the change process in Newry and Mourne Council were more akin to performance incentives than those entailed in reforming the RUC. The problem was that the Council had so few Protestants in the workforce that they risked being legally censured on equality grounds for what could be perceived, and possibly proven to be discrimination. This required a politically adept response, to radically transform the organisational culture and the structure of the equality and good relations functions. Tom McCall did not have a hefty subsidy from the UK Treasury but he had sufficient financial leverage, staff and political support to initiate the REDI programme, facilitate the Good Relations Forum, and a political education programme for elected members.

As the Council was 'a cold place for Protestants,' it was extremely difficult to recruit unionist-protestant staff. Decision-making in the Chamber and in sub-

committees would have to change if perceptions of Newry and Mourne were to improve sufficiently to change that. Tom McCall used the new mechanisms of power sharing, Section 75 obligations and community engagement as resources for change. He engaged external change agents such as Mediation Northern Ireland, the trade union sponsored anti-intimidation unit Counteract, academics and political educators to put a fairly risky agenda into practice. Officials, backed by him, and supported by facilitators and mediators, briefed local politicians to improve their understanding of politically contested issues. These private sessions were highly charged, emotional and demanded personal courage and honesty from participants.

And then you had other hard nights where people came in and told their stories about how they had been victims. ... A lot of people were tearful and the people who weren't tearful were very quiet. (Chief Executive)

The Chief executive applauded the risks and adaptations that politicians had made to improve local relationships and support peace building; both inside the Council and externally. And he spoke of the 'generosity' and 'maturity' of elected representatives.

Being politicians there are certain risks involved in doing certain things but we've been lucky that we have had a group of Councillors who have been prepared to do that and push the boat out. (Chief Executive)

Indeed the Councillors did 'push the boat out'. Greater acceptance of other peoples' perspectives was evident in Nationalist-Republican co-operation in the Ulster-Scots Committee. Newry and Mourne had been one of the first Councils to form an Ulster Scots Committee, which was significant because it had maintained a policy of flying no flags (in Council premises or at events) for seventy years and refused to erect flags and bunting to mark the Queen's 1953 coronation (Palley, 1972). In 2005 Ulster-Scots language, literature and 'culture' were normally very much the preserve of Unionists, and yet a Nationalist-Republican dominated Chamber had voted to establish this committee.

Using the leverage of the new political dispensation of devolved government (even though it was not then in operation), power-sharing was a resource that Newry and Mourne used to radically effect the change process. In formal politics there was positive impact from a growing political co-operation, and the willingness of those in power to engage with minority or less powerful parties and groups. The Chamber was persuaded to operate the d'Hondt system of proportional allocation of posts, ensuring greater representation than a first-past-the-post system, but, as that did not guarantee minority parties a share of positions, Councillors did not apply d'Hondt rigidly. They took a pragmatic and practical approach to ensure every party was included.

Whilst we use the d'Hondt system to distribute chairs and the like, they don't apply it absolutely, to the letter, so that the smaller parties and independents get a share – particularly on bodies outside Council. The group leaders will sit down and take a very pragmatic view of it – and that's to their credit. (Chief Executive)

They're very realistic. If somebody works all day there's no point. They'll put somebody else in position I've heard some Councillors talking about it ... ensuring the Council is represented – not just certain individuals. (Equality Officer)

This shows that the Council's change process resulted in the regular practice and mainstreaming of promoting equality and good relations, as intended in Section 75.

### *External change agents*

Intentional change occurs when “a change agent deliberately and consciously sets out to establish conditions and circumstances that are different from what they are now, and then accomplishes that through some set or series of actions and interventions either singularly or in collaboration with other people” (Ford and Ford, 1995: 543). In the literature change agents are usually defined as either a subset of internal leaders (Pettigrew and Whipp, 1991; Stace and Dunphy, 2002), or as external agents who are often consultants brought in to facilitate the process (Grey and Starke 1984; Williams et al, 1993). These people are seen as having significant legitimate power which they can deploy to motivate the change process (Buchanan and Badham 1999; Pettigrew and Whipp, 1991). The change agents themselves are defined as those who ‘facilitate change in the particular area in which it is needed’ (McCalman and Paton, 1992: 144). The political role and political activity of the change agent are of particular relevance within the process (Pettigrew, 2003).

Although the RUC (and even the PSNI in some respects) has an unusually closed organisational culture (Brewer, 1991), the profoundly political nature of the process, meant that change agents from outside the RUC played a role in ‘thought leadership’ within the organisation. This was particularly so when people with a community relations focus were involved and given a large amount of international exchange. Five different types of external influencers can be identified in the process of reforming policing in Northern Ireland. The first can be described as ‘academics’ who used two methods of engagement. The first method was used by those who sought out and engaged by the RUC themselves, in a consultancy and advisory role and the second approach to engagement was from academics who actively sought out the RUC to work with them. This includes academics who were interested in issues of conflict, division and good relations, but also a number of anthropologists who had specific interests around parading and crowd control.

The second category can be identified as ‘community relations focused.’ While there was some overlap between academics and this category, those with a community relations focus were mostly people with a practitioner interest in building better relationships and the organisational results of failing to deal with the impact that the

Northern Ireland conflict had on public service delivery and the implementation of new public policy. The aim of these community relations practitioners was to foster change and improve relationships both within the organisation and between the organisation and the wider community. The third category is the commercial consultants that the RUC commissioned for their specific skills, of which a number of consultant types can be identified. For example, the police used a great deal of outsourced public relations support both to enable them to deliver key messages to a wider audience and to overhaul their internal communications systems which were regarded as 'sub-optimal.' External consultants were also used to manage the new 50-50 recruitment system, which aimed to redress the serious religious imbalance in the predominantly Protestant workforce, by recruiting Catholics and Protestants in equal numbers; among other functions. The last category comprised external political agents who engaged with the organisation to further their own political objectives.

Newry and Mourne's experience was less intense but no less political than the reform of the RUC. The REDI programme, the political education programme and numerous mediation events were run by external change agents. The Chief Executive and a cross-section of Council employees led a protracted process that was facilitated by the trade union sponsored Counteract and academics from the University of Ulster Future Ways unit. They were given an unusually free hand in an organisation that, as local government, could be characterised as risk averse, and they developed the capacity for change in the organisation. By 2005, change had created a culture and practice where equality and good relations issues were raised proactively in the Council's everyday industrial relations negotiations.

We have evolved further. What the [REDI] Group did was to nurture the culture which allowed for the future development of such policies as our Dignity At Work Policy and our other policies such as Work Life Balance and new Grievance policies. The Group created the opportunity to raise issues within a safe and shared space which enabled the Council to deal with and move on from such issues. We now have what we call the ... Joint Council Committee where all the Trade Unions and our Directors come together to discuss issues pertaining to the workforce. (Senior Equality Officer)

External change agents need a working understanding of the organisational culture in which they are working, as Das (2003) has shown to be necessary. The confidential report of the REDI change agents was candid in admitting that they 'did not have the stories' or the appropriate practical experience to exploit opportunities for experiential learning in the change process. They were successful because the REDI participants engaged fully in the programme and the Chief Executive did not demand more than they could offer. The advantage of this relaxed view of the external change agents was that the internal group had to take greater ownership of the process, which had positive impacts within the three year project. "Ownership of the process by broad sectors of society is the key to the effectiveness of the participatory mechanisms upon which peace accords depends. It may be more difficult to achieve social transformation and other major changes than political compromise at the top level" (Jeong, 2005: 33).



Other change agents were engaged in political education for Councillors and in a series of mediated dialogue events. Although these ran in parallel for three years, they operated in silos. As essential learning from one stream of change development did not feed into the others, REDI was not part of a greater integrated process of change. Yet, ultimately, the combined results of the work of external change agents provided experiential learning that was mainstreaming into enhanced practice, by officials and elected members, in decision-making, participative governance and effective power-sharing.

Public perceptions and public relationships with the Council also changed. For example, Unionist residents knew that one of the new Equality Officers was a Unionist and a member of a Loyal Order band, and one of the Good Relations Officers had previously worked in Altnaveigh House; displacing the perception that this was ‘a cold place for Protestants.’ It is significant that external facilitators ‘got a fair wind’ in this Council from a patient Chief Executive. He appreciated the legitimacy that trade union and academic status conferred on the people leading the process, and tolerated their inability to integrate the full process or fully understand the workings of local government the nuances of that organisational culture.

### *Pace and Sequencing*

Reform of policing was a priority, in which timing and sequencing were finely nuanced, as Jeong recognises in his analysis of building peace (Jeong, 2005). He explains,

Some activities need to be implemented prior to others, but many activities (police reform, human rights education and democratization, sociopsychological reconciliation, etc.) can be pursued simultaneously with different levels of intensity from the outset. The timing and sequential order have to be considered in light of the unique circumstances of each operation. (32)

However, that wider process of sequencing, in terms of the peace process itself, was mirrored at particular organisational levels by a careful management of change internally in policing. In sequencing organisational change processes it is generally agreed that there must be an emphasis on establishing a sense of urgency about change itself, forming guiding coalitions and developing and communicating a vision (Kotter, 1996; Pettigrew, 1992; Moss-Kanter, 1983).

While the RUC case tends to be consistent with these models in its sequencing, it diverges sharply in two respects. Although the ‘pace’ of the process was largely dictated by outside forces, when severance became a viable method of reaching the desired level of employee turnover, these external forces (generally lacking political support from Nationalist communities) also formed a serious obstacle to recruiting new officers and put considerable pressure on the process in its early stages. While a guiding coalition internally may have been established early, the lack of an external coalition created real operational difficulties. Given the intensity of the organisation’s relationship to its context (not at least with the Republican refusal to

back policing and justice), this presented a major deficiency. However, this was to some extent outside their control.

More significantly, the organisation did not heed Kotter's (1996) famous advice to create a sense of urgency so as to spark initial momentum. Indeed, examining the messages the RUC leadership was communicating internally at the early stages of the process, Flanagan was doing just the opposite: consistently talking down the change and reassuring officers of the security of their own prospects and the importance of the organisation to the future of Northern Ireland. At the same time, we should remember Pettigrew's (2003) claims about the significance of political skills and the overwhelming importance of context. In an already heated political atmosphere, where rumours were rife and the voices of injured police persons and police widows were the loudest in the RUC, the last thing that was needed was any greater sense of urgency. Rather reassurance, emotional empathy and a holding period allowed the organisation and its members to become accustomed to the idea of change, without needing to do much about it. Some of those interviewed were critical about the slow pace during this initial period and what they saw at that time as the Top Team stifling change.

Yet, when it came, change was rapid. This was evident around the changing of the name from the Royal Ulster Constabulary to the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI), and the introduction of new symbols. For example, the period from April 2001 to April 2002 saw the instigation of the new DCU areas with DCU commanders, the constant refrain from Nationalist community leaders for Catholics to join the new police service, as well as the introduction of the new title of PSNI, agreement on new symbols and uniforms, and the first intake of PSNI recruits. In addition, the training for new recruits placed an emphasis on community policing and human rights, in contrast to the previous precedence of security considerations. Severance was taking effect rapidly, freeing up space within the organisation for new blood. There was also the retirement of the first Change Manager and Chief Constable Ronnie Flanagan himself, and the graduation of the new recruits. The gradual introduction of the process was followed by a swift and radical programme of change, under the firm control of the leadership at the three levels outlined above. While the internal 'pacing' of the early part of the process might now seem careful, risk averse and considered, the later phase was brisk and fast moving. This internal pacing was determined both in practice and tone by the leadership and in particular by the Chief Constable. Given the challenges that faced policing at that time and the intense external pressure under which it was operating (as well as operational pressure from continuing community disorder), the gentle pace of the initial phase seems to have been an appropriate leadership response, since a rapid pace of change may well have created organisational crisis and greater instability. While some wanted change to move more rapidly, analysis from the perspective of the overall process makes it seem like a plane that is travelling very quickly but full of passengers who are restless and unhappy with the length of the journey. Clearly the process needed leadership (and in particular that of the Chief Constable) to act simultaneously as a defender of tradition and a persuasive innovator for change. This was evident throughout the three layers of leadership. It can reasonably be concluded that the sequencing and pacing adopted were as appropriate as was possible at the time.

In Newry and Mourne Council the pacing and sequence of change was similar to policing. It was protracted, slow to take effect and dependent on the context of change. The process in Newry and Mourne was precipitated by the combination of a crisis in fair employment (with the serious imbalance in the Council's workforce) and the public perception that it was sectarian, from audits and surveys in 1999, 2001 and 2003. The process began with a sense of urgency, given the fair employment problem but change came slowly. It took three years to produce the REDI Declaration of Principles, and a further two years for the appointment of a second Good Relations Officer (implementing a key recommendation of the 2003 survey). The local Ulster Unionist Assembly member, Danny Kennedy said that REDI seemed "alright in theory" but took years to show practical benefit; "It is very, very slow, painstaking work that perhaps doesn't yield fruit or benefit for a period of years." REDI ran for three years in tandem with the political education initiative and the Good Relations Forum. These happened in silos which hindered the free flow of learning and information from REDI into the wider organisation. However, the pace and sequencing of these aspects of the change process were necessarily calibrated to provide time to build confidence and suspend distrust, and limited to the professional and practical skills and expertise of external change agents who, like the change champion Tom McCall, were embarking on an experimental journey taking them into new and uncharted territory.

Mainstreaming the promotion of equality and good relations was paced to accommodate developments in the formal politics of power sharing in the Chamber, the wider peace process, and the informal politics of transforming conflict and distrust into community collaboration. Sequencing depended on progress that was politically possible given the available resources, which were as often symbolic as they were financial.

However, slow as it was, this change process did more than was required by equality regulations and Section 75. Newry and Mourne Council turned an organisation, and a Chamber, from a closed and 'cold place for Protestants' into an open and welcoming space for all.

### **Discussion and a note of caution for the future**

This discussion of organisational change to implement reform has been contextualised in the Northern Ireland peace process and government modernisation in the United Kingdom since 1998. The promise of reform of policing and the Section 75 duties to promote equality and good relations were crucial to arriving at a settlement and embedding peace-building. Both police reform and implementing new duties entailed change processes that required four essential components, in the form of skilled senior leadership, appropriate resources, the use of effective external change agents, and the pace and sequencing of the change process itself. Skilled leadership was apparent in the successful reform of policing and mainstreaming the operation of Section 75 in Newry and Mourne District Council, and the resources required were forthcoming.

There are diverse roles for external change agent, some of which are technical

(relating to the new policing command structure), where others are more finely nuanced (such as public relations, the change from ‘securocrats’ to human rights and community policing advocates). In local government external change agents brought legitimacy (for nationalists and lower-status officials, from the trade-union-sponsored Counteract), relationship-building skills (for officials, Councillors and other key actors) and political education (through ‘emotionally intelligent’ mediated dialogue). Although these were not sufficiently coordinated, the Council and Chief Executive were able to interweave the different strands over time. Importantly, no matter how diverse the roles of external change agents were, the client organisation retained a strong sense of ownership of the change process.

It is essential to monitor and review the pace and sequence of the change process. The lengthy lead into Sinn Féin’s political support for policing and justice hampered progress in community policing, despite the many changes (in name, badge, uniform, recruitment etc.). In the Council the protracted nature of the REDI process mitigated against any sense of urgency for organisational change, although it resulted in a strengthened equality scheme.

In both cases a wide range of external change agents were used to good effect and the pace and sequencing of change was calibrated to suit political necessity and organisational circumstances. However, conditions in Northern Ireland have changed. Sinn Féin signed up in support of policing and justice, and power over these items were devolved to the local Assembly in April 2010. Dissident Republicans have not accepted this and the high level of violent threat to the police poses a very real danger and may hinder some of the operational objectives of reform, which place greater emphasis on community policing and human rights than the security-centred policing of the conflict. Another threat is the result of the current economic climate as cutbacks in the policing and justice budget are expected.

The Reform of Public Administration in Northern Ireland was set to reduce the number of local Councils from twenty six to eleven by 2010-2011, which would have merged Newry and Mourne into one of the new ‘cluster’ Councils. Although this has now been postponed until 2014, it will happen and joining with Down Council may present problems, as that Council has not yet mainstreamed the equality and good relations functions. It cannot be taken for granted that the future Chief Executive of this cluster Council will possess the skilled leadership and commitment or give the time and priority needed to mainstream the promotion of equality and good relations that Tom McCall brought to Newry and Mourne. In addition, devolved government has already cut the Community Relations budget, which may signal a change to a more equality focused approach to good relations than in the past. Equally it may signal that the views of the two largest political parties will dominate the peace-building project. Although for diametrically opposed reasons, neither the Democratic Unionist Party nor Sinn Féin has traditionally given support to community relations work. Both have sent out ambiguous messages about peace-building to their electorates. On the one hand, the DUP belittles the equality agenda and, on the other, Sinn Féin puts promoting equality before good relations (at one stage calling it ‘a sop to Unionists’). Neither accept that they ‘play sectarian poker’ in electioneering, but both parties draw support along largely, if not exclusively sectarian lines.

## Conclusions

As noted in the introduction, much of the literature around peace-building is focused on politico-military, legal and normative elements. While these are essential to reaching agreement, addressing objective grievances of the past and embedding a peace process, this article offers evidence to support the use of an additional perspective through which to view the modalities of change from conflict to sustainable peace-building. This organisational change lens provides a means of identifying the key elements for successfully embedding change in a fundamentally political venture, which are in this case: leadership (champions of change and political will), resources, external change agents, and the necessary pacing and sequencing of the change process. These must be seen within the wider context of decision making in post-conflict Northern Ireland in an era of modernisation of government. Peace processes are not separate from public policy and service delivery. Indeed, reform and new practice are essential in maintaining and sustaining peace processes. It is therefore important to understand how to 'do' change in established public sector settings where the organisational history is not conducive to promoting the rights, equalities and social relations on which peace-building is founded.

It is clear that the change process in policing reforms and mainstreaming the operation of the equality and good relations functions both entailed a carefully managed, skilfully paced process that succeeded because it was supported by appropriate resourcing and the use of external change agents. However, these two cases map the process in a particular context, and circumstances have changed. While the peace-building project is on a steady course, there are new pressures and demands on the new policing and mainstreaming the equality and good relations duties in local government. Community policing is a move away from the security-based response that characterised the RUC during the conflict, and requires a safe environment in which to operate. Promoting equality requires more than non-discrimination, and must address the structural and cultural dimensions of an organisation that foster distrust and the 'chill factor.' While the immediate problem is not a return to widespread and violent civil unrest, the future of the peace-building project is not copper-fastened when policing is under increasing pressure and over-emphasis on promoting equality rather than good relations may obscure the vital role of trust-building.

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