

## **Community Anchors: securing their position**

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### **Introduction**

*“Grassroots groups that once brought us face-to-face with our neighbours, the agreeable and disagreeable alike, are overshadowed by the vertiginous rise of staff-led interest groups purpose built to represent our narrower selves. Place-based social capital is being supplanted by function-based social capital.”* (Putnam 2000, p. 184)

In June 2009, a group of people seriously interested in community anchor (CA) organisations met at the Tab Centre, Godfrey’s Place in inner East London to reflect on CAs. After presentations from the chief executive officers of Bromley-by-Bow Centre, Community Links and Toynbee Hall, there were three workshops, with prepared papers, responses and discussions, focussing on issues associated with CAs. Underlying these discussions were ideas of what CAs are, what they do, and of their effect. This essay arises from the anxieties expressed at the conference about the ability of CAs to demonstrate that they have a distinctive and special place within local communities, and concern as to whether this claim can be convincingly supported.

Such anxieties are deepened by the realisation that CAs fall outside the dominant – ‘discrete silos of service’ – mindset that conditions the attitudes and behaviours of many funders, policy makers and potential donors. This ‘silocentric’ paradigm favours contract-bounded ‘competitiveness’ or ‘cost saving’ over CAs’ missions of sustained, long-term presence and responsive support for their local communities. By contrast, CAs favour ‘responsiveness’ and ‘effectiveness’ over ‘efficiency’ – and ‘mission’ over ‘competitiveness’.<sup>1</sup>

This essay continues, but does not claim to complete, the discussions arising from the conference. Our proposals about how to assess CAs are tentative and invite critical comment and revision. Whilst we offer some further thoughts on CAs’ claims about their uniqueness and on how these claims might be ‘tested’, we have avoided disentangling some knotty – but, in our view, secondary – issues: what is meant by ‘local’ and how ‘community’ might be understood, are left for another discussion at another time. Suffice it to say here that what constitutes ‘community’ is contested – there might be one ‘concept’ but many ‘conceptions’ (Hillery 1955).<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless, in our discussion of CAs, we focus primarily, but not exclusively, on geographically-based communities, to which local people might, or might not, feel they belong. These demographic boundaries are inevitably ‘woolly’ to everyone except those statisticians who work with precise boundaries to analyse ‘neighbourhood’ statistics.<sup>3</sup>

### **Characterising ‘Community Anchors’**

Stephen Thake – who coined the term, ‘community anchor’<sup>4</sup> – has said that “CAs, if they are doing a reasonable job, enhance connectivity by protecting existing and building new bonding, bridging and linking social capital.” He argues that CAs must have a ‘presence’ provided by buildings – perhaps with open space and virtual space – “with open access,... a welcoming and safe environment,...non-intrusive and non-directional....If someone simply wants to come in for a cup of tea or play football or learn how to get onto the internet, that’s good enough....[Because they are] driven by the desire that individuals, families, groups and communities achieve their full potential....[CAs] need to be able to offer or to connect with an Aladdin’s Cave of activities that create endless pathways of self-growth

and discovery....They [also] need to know how to respect those confidences and enable people to address issues that have been raised”<sup>5</sup> (Thake 2007)

Looked at this way, CAs can be distinguished from: (i) second-tier organisations that support front line providers (some CAs also do this, but not as their primary activity); and (ii) ‘bridge-building activities’ (Harris and Young 2009), which are generally smaller in scale, less committed to the long term and perhaps more akin to a ‘project’ than to an ‘organisational presence’. Nevertheless, definitions of ‘community anchors’ are slippery. Whilst CAs share certain characteristics, they vary in how they manage and run their activities. Different government departments and organisations have contributed to the usage of the term and its defining characteristics. Suggestions include: idealism – ‘they are controlled by local residents’ (Home Office 2004); and expressions of hope – ‘CAs are often the driving force in community renewal’ (Community Alliance 2009: 1). We do not presume to resolve these teleological difficulties here, but offer instead a broad description of CAs and their work.

Typically, CAs are ‘locally-based’ and have ‘missions’ that concentrate on ‘big’ issues that are of vital importance to people living in their catchment area. The breadth of these missions leads them to be ‘places of many projects’ – or Stephen Thake’s ‘Aladdin’s Caves’. Some CAs’ missions focus on ‘the relief of poverty’, some on ‘social exclusion’, some on ‘social cohesion’ or ‘social capital’. Whilst there might be important differences between these missions, we concentrate here on their broad similarities. There is a vicious circle of poverty – exclusion – more poverty – more exclusion – and so on.<sup>6</sup> Toynbee Hall provides a useful illustration. Its ‘vision’ – ‘to eradicate all forms of poverty’ – might seem ‘individualistic’, but its ‘mission’ includes being a place where people “can share ideas and experience”. One of its ‘strategic aims’ is “to strengthen the local community and [Toynbee Hall’s] place within it”. It ‘aims’ to be supportive of the growth and development of community groups, civic and social action, and emphasises ‘inter-generational’ work. Similarly, in CAs generally, a seemingly ‘individualistic’ focus becomes dramatically more ‘social’ if there is a genuine – ‘holistic’<sup>7</sup> – attempt to see the individual in context. A ‘housing issue’ relates to an ‘employment issue’, which relates to ‘a child care issue’, which relates to a ‘child health issue’ and ‘causes’ an ‘education issue’, which ‘causes’ a ‘social behaviour issue’, which ‘causes’ an ‘employment issue’, which causes a ‘housing issue’.

## The question of organisation

In this essay, we characterise CAs as: (a) ‘local’, usually with a building; and (b) essentially ‘multi-purpose’ – not in the sense that their missions are ‘multiple’, but because their responses to local people and their concerns generally involve CAs in delivering of a wide range of services, social and economic programmes for and with local people. We would like to emphasise that, we are not claiming to be ‘comprehensive’, rather we aim instead only to identify some sensitivities and to set our main purpose in a wider context. Our interest lies more in the **organisational** questions of how CAs work and with what purpose, rather than in the **programmes** that they deliver. Our question is whether their long-term responsive presence in a place – their ‘whole’ – is demonstrably more valuable than the bundle of discrete services that they supply – the ‘sum of their parts’. At its simplest: ‘Is the community anchor model worth supporting?’

To carry this forward, we explore three interconnected issues:

1. How CAs’ broad characteristics distinguish them from ‘specialist providers’, such as housing charities, legal advice clinics, child care providers or animal sanctuaries.
2. The particular challenges that these differences generate for CAs in demonstrating their effectiveness as ‘whole organisations’ in order to (i) develop, maintain and refresh their own strategies – a ‘strategic governance’ dimension – and (ii) to secure ‘organisational’ as opposed to ‘discrete service’ funding – a ‘financial’ dimension.

3. The development of practicable ways (appropriate hypotheses that can be tested using reasonably accessible evidence) of addressing these challenges of measurement and demonstration.

Occasionally, it seems that CAs' distinctive role is recognised as important and that they are thought worthy of funding that will sustain them as 'organisations' rather than as 'service-delivery agents'.<sup>8</sup> However, the service delivery paradigm is overwhelmingly dominant. Consequently, both funding and policy making are, for CAs, (i) far too 'short-termist' (CAs are there for the long haul) and (ii) far too 'silocentric' (CAs are addressing fundamental issues holistically rather than providing – to take the opposite end of a spectrum of possibilities – a cheap<sup>9</sup> means of outsourcing publicly-funded services). In this essay, we say more about 'silocentricity' than about 'short-termism', but the two are interconnected and we believe that the former serves as a reasonable proxy for the latter.

### **Similar to specialist providers (and different)**

CAs share some characteristics and challenges with specialist providers. They must: (i) be efficient and effective providers of whatever services they undertake to deliver; (ii) balance their books; and, as Matthew Smerdon has recently emphasised (Smerdon 2010), (iii) maintain their charitable independence from funders and political influence.<sup>10</sup> It might be that CAs have some advantages in some of these regards. For example, where a CA provides services A, B, C, D, E and F, its organisational survival is not threatened by the withdrawal of funding for service C unless service C is making a surplus that sustains the rest of the organisation. By contrast, a specialist provider of nothing but service C would be destroyed as an organisation and left hoping that at least some of its staff might be saved from unemployment by the Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations 2006<sup>11</sup> – unless, of course, it has substantial reserves and/or assets.<sup>12</sup> Similarly, a CA might be more able to contemplate a robust response to attempts by the funder of service B to interfere in the workings of the organisation – provided always that the same funder does not support a significant proportion of services A, C, D, E and F.

More importantly in terms of this essay, CAs have some significant structural disadvantages in the competition for silocentric funding. CAs share many characteristics with, and perform many functions that are similar to those of other organisations. It seems to us that there is no strong reason to assume that CAs will necessarily deliver higher quality services to a greater number of people. In terms of efficiency and/or effectiveness, it is possible that CAs' discrete service delivery is sometimes weaker than that of more specialised service providers. CAs are more likely to suffer, within each silo of service, the disadvantages of 'diseconomies of small scale' (resulting in under-investment in research, training and system development) and, as organisations, the 'diseconomies of complexity' that flow from their many-bodied organisational character.<sup>13</sup> However, we argue that, if CAs can clearly demonstrate their strengths as organisations – the strengths that flow from their character and mission – and put these in the balance against silo-based disadvantages, their financial and policy vulnerability might be overcome.

It is in this context that we have sought to tease out what might be particularly advantageous in CAs and how such specifics might be identified, measured and demonstrated to a range of audiences that includes funders and policy-makers. We identify two principal mechanisms that it seems to us reasonable to assume will be active if a CA is achieving its mission effectively: (i) CAs' status as an 'attractor'; (ii) CAs' 'connectivity' within their organisation, across organisations and local communities. These mechanisms – means to the ends that are CAs' broad missions – lead us to formulate testable hypotheses that provide starting points for assessing whether CAs' claims to advantage have merit. We conclude with some outline suggestions about the methods by which such hypotheses might be specified and tested.

## Activities of Community Anchors

We have identified five aspects of the work of community anchors. In the everyday life of multi-purpose organisations, these will overlap and interact but for the purposes of this discussion we discuss each one separately. Whilst little in this brief account differentiates CAs from other third sector organisations rigidly, ‘co-ordinated service delivery’, ‘different services, same place’ and ‘local sensitivities and community leadership’ offer considerable potential for CAs to develop and demonstrate advantage as ‘attractors’ and ‘connectors’.

### *Project-led services*

Conference delegates unanimously complained that ‘silocentric’ commissioning practices, with their emphasis on service level agreements for single purpose organisations, undermined a potential advantage of CAs to provide all-encompassing services to meet multiple needs – often described as the ‘holistic’ response that they perceived as an advantage of CAs.<sup>14</sup> Consequently, many services are commissioned by local authorities as discrete target-driven and time-limited projects with lines of accountability to the commissioning agency rather than to local people themselves. Whilst they are the beneficiaries of the CA charities and the main focus of CAs’ missions, ‘service-users’ are not often the CAs ‘customers’.

For reasons mentioned above, it is difficult to see that CAs will have systemic advantages – of efficiency, effectiveness or better value for money – over specialist organisations, when measured within this silocentric framework. Many, different third sector organisations have years of experience delivering services, highly qualified, knowledgeable and skilled staff who live in the area, and are responsive to changing local issues. Similarly, amongst specialist organisations, the quality of services will vary. Implementing social interventions is a challenge for all organisations and, as academic studies have found, failure to alter policies that are not working and failure to implement policies and social programmes effectively is common, even where the consequences of not succeeding are serious (see for example Tuchman 1984; Ormerod 2005). Whilst CAs might claim that the breadth and depth of their knowledge of local communities adds to their effectiveness and/or efficiency in the delivery of discrete services, this will almost certainly have to be demonstrated using silo-based criteria, at least until silo funders can be persuaded – by evidence of CAs’ effectiveness as such – that their criteria should be altered.

### *Co-ordinated service delivery*

At the same time as discrete services are commissioned by local authorities, pressures from local and central government push organisations from all sectors to ‘join up’ or co-ordinate their services to provide a seamless provision for service users. Partnership work occurs when agencies with different roles and responsibilities come together and, with their different perspectives and expertise, find solutions to particular issues such as domestic violence, child abuse, getting young people into training or employment. Research has repeatedly found that co-ordinated working between different statutory agencies and community groups is often riddled with rivalries and conflicts that lead to inefficient and sometimes ineffective responses (see for example Sampson *et al* 1988). The conditions and circumstances that lend themselves to effective co-ordinated work lie in a genuinely shared interest that leads to sustained attitudes that favour co-operation. This should result in effective joint procedures, information-sharing protocols and integrated practices.<sup>15</sup> It is not clear, however, that staff at CAs will always be more ‘professional’ or effective in partnership working. Some CAs might – by ‘connecting’ – be particularly good at working with others to co-ordinate service delivery, but others might not.

### *Different services, same place*

CA buildings often provide an opportunity for anchors to invite other organisations and groups to use their premises to provide services and activities. These services and activities, which typically are complementary to those provided by the host CAs, enable ‘holistic’ services to be offered to clients in the same place. Specialist organisations can also be in the same position. Voluntary groups with sporting facilities or performing arts groups with theatre or dance space are able to share their facilities with other groups and they can also ask other services to use their facilities to provide their clients with additional services, such as sexual health advice or financial literacy training. There is a plethora of such organisations, including children’s centres, youth centres, community centres, that follow this practice. Some, like children’s centres, have integrated services for families and run training and employment programmes for parents and carers as well as pre-natal classes, nurseries and health services. They, like CAs, have an ‘holistic’ ethos.

Where multiple services and activities take place ‘under one roof’, a potentially distinctive benefit lies in the ease of effective cross-referral. Staff can take a person ‘across the corridor’ and introduce them to a staff member of another service, whom the referring member of staff knows already. This avoids having to give clients maps and instructions about buses so that they can find a new service themselves. It reduces the risks that clients will decide not to ‘take up’ the new service, or will fail to find it due to the cost and complexities of using public transport. A personal introduction might have other implications for clients: they feel welcome and valued, and, as a result, might be more likely to talk about their concerns. These practices can occur within any type of organisation. Similarly, cross-referrals and easy exchange of information can occur between organisations or social enterprises sharing the same place.

Typically, whatever partnerships they might have, CAs offer ‘one organisation, many services’. In this sense, a CA is itself an ‘internal partnership’ and has the potential to be better integrated organisationally than does a multi-organisation ‘external partnership’. Furthermore, some CAs might – by ‘attracting’ and ‘connecting’ – be able to offer ‘something for everyone’ across age, ethnic or cultural background or particular need, and to offer more options and opportunities to individual clients and to organisations.

### *Local sensitivities and community leadership*

Organisations that work in local communities often claim that they have their ‘finger on the community pulse’, that they understand better than most the social and economic dynamics of community life and know about the needs of even the most invisible and isolated local people. They make a claim to be ‘good listeners’. From this ‘Heineken’ position (‘...the parts that others cannot reach’), such organisations argue that they are able to: identify unmet needs and gaps in provision; conceptualise social problems; and give a ‘voice’ to local people by publicly articulating local needs. A straightforward relationship between the **extent** of connections and the ability to gauge the mood, feelings and issues within a community seems, however, unlikely. It is more likely that the **quality** of these connections will be significant in the same way that **quality** jobs in an area – flexibility, empathetic management and an absence of work place bullying – are better for the mental well-being of local people than large numbers of ‘boring’ and poorly managed jobs (Warr 1999). Nevertheless, the greater the connectivity, the more opportunities there are for obtaining a better understanding of local sensibilities.

Similarly, the more financially independent the organisation, the greater the potential it has to respond to community needs and to take responsibility for alleviating them. Such an organisation can bring additional resources to a community. It can offer to nurture community groups to assist with unmet needs by offering them accommodation and skills training. It can bring in further resources through

strategies such as match funding. Crucially, these ‘independent’ organisations are not reliant on securing grants, or meeting the outputs, targets and outcomes required by funders. They are in a position to adopt a flexible approach and to shape the intervention themselves. The realisation of this potential is however dependent on organisations’ interpretations of their situations and circumstances in relation to their local communities.

Organisations can also act in ways that are calculated to reduce social tensions and to build a sense of community. CAs often claim to address ‘causes’ as well as ‘symptoms’. Because their *raison d’être* goes beyond the provision of merely alleviative services, it is reasonable to expect that CAs can – by ‘attracting’ and ‘connecting’ – contribute significantly in this regard and foster social capital (Putnam 2000).<sup>16</sup> However, fostering social capital is a difficult task, as Putnam’s recent work outlines. His analysis of extensive US data seems to demonstrate<sup>17</sup> that, in the short run, increased diversity increases individuals’ tendencies to ‘hunker down’ and that familiarity alone will not necessarily increase social capital. Just as Max Weber warned that ‘[p]olitics is a slow boring of hard boards’ (Gerth and Wright Mills 1958: 128), Putnam concludes that, “[t]he task of becoming comfortable with diversity will not be easy or quick, but it will be speeded by our collective efforts and in the end well worth the effort” (Putnam 2007: 165). Nevertheless, encouraged by demonstrable progress made over time in the US armed forces and in some religious groups, he is optimistic that there is a positive way forward for social capital in the longer run. “[M]y hunch is that at the end we shall see that the challenge is best met not by making ‘them’ like ‘us’, but rather by creating new, more capacious sense of ‘we’, a reconstruction of diversity that does not bleach out ethnic specificities,<sup>18</sup> but creates overarching identities that ensure that those specificities do not trigger the allergic, ‘hunker down’ reaction” (Putnam 2007: 163-4). CAs set out to contribute to this challenging, long-term process of nurturing communities, but will need to demonstrate that their approach is producing on-going benefits if they are to be resourced adequately.

#### *A ‘voice’ for the ‘community’: advocacy*

Given the strength of their communications networks, third sector organisations are often well-placed to give ‘voice’ to local people’s concerns.<sup>19</sup> We might reasonably expect CAs – by ‘attracting’ and ‘connecting’ – to be particularly well-placed in this regard. Thus in the early 1980s, Community Links facilitated the voicing of the concerns of local people that Ronan Point-style tower blocks were dangerous but still in use.<sup>20</sup> Nevertheless, a local housing charity or a neighbourhood law centre could have responded to the same challenge. Indeed, it is possible that the majority of campaigns come from specialist organisations and are about issues within their particular range of concerns. Where a CA undertakes a significant role in a particular area of concern, it sometimes gains the prominence that positions it well to campaign. Toynbee Hall’s role in the ‘Capitalise’ programme of debt advice, linked with its long history in providing legal advice, provides a recent example.<sup>21</sup> Some third sector organisations, including some CAs, employ people as ‘campaigners’, usually to work on a specific, pre-identified campaign.

Where politicians, civil servants and local authority administrators have a single preoccupation, narrow responsibilities and specialist knowledge, their invariably ‘silocentric’ approach can be disadvantageous for CAs. Within the particular silos, the large specialist providers are probably well-placed to build the kind of sustained and close relationships that CAs might find difficult to emulate and exploit.

#### **Community Anchors: their historical roots and institutional arrangements**

Whilst the term ‘community anchor’ has recently been adopted<sup>22</sup> by policy-makers, the histories of multi-purpose, locally rooted, service providers, located in a building within the communities they serve, help us understand the current anxieties and dilemmas about justifying CAs’ existence. Many

CAs have long histories. Some were university or religious settlements, others arose from individual religious convictions of service or from more secular sources of inspiration, spotting particular social needs and seeking to address them through innovative insight and charismatic opportunism. Their ethos might encourage reliance on doctrine or the intuitions of experience rather than on the rational appraisal of options.<sup>23</sup>

Where – by ‘attracting’ and ‘connecting’ – it is well-rooted in its local communities, a CA gives ‘meaning’ to a local area. Its building might be ‘iconic’ and a local landmark that has a symbolic and intrinsic value for local people who value the CA’s existence even when they do not visit its building or use its services. In this way, a CA is an ‘attractive place’ that may act as both an ‘end’ (‘every community needs one’) and as a ‘means’ (‘their services are responsive and suit us really well’). Organisations which are ‘attractors’ also have an affective or emotional ‘pull’ that fosters feelings of attachment, and which strengthens their ‘attractor’ mechanism. Thus CAs might be particularly effective in drawing to them people who require assistance and might offer local people – valuable but not easy to quantify or monetise – reassurance that the CA is there, should they wish to seek advice and support at sometime during their life time.

Single purpose organisations might also provide this ‘intrinsic’ or ‘existence’ value. Places of faith serve this function for some groups of people. Thus, CAs are not the only ‘attractors’, and, whilst we do not have data to confirm or reject a claim that they are superior ‘attractors’, we argue in this paper that CAs might be better suited to attracting a greater range of local people.

As organisations, CAs have developed varying internal structures. Some are loosely structured – internally flexible, with a flat management structure – whilst others are more bureaucratic. Some may have a strong commitment to service user involvement in the delivery of services and in the management and/or governance of the organisation, whilst others may be informed by other values and ideologies. Nevertheless, CAs that are organisationally different from each other might perform similar functions and deliver similar ranges of services in their communities. Our particular interest in this essay is the sustained responsiveness of CAs to the deep-seated multiple problems found in local areas. There may be enduring characteristics that keep people living in poverty, such as debt, mental health issues and high levels of anxiety and depression, and high proportions of people with few or no formal educational qualifications; but new problems also arise and demand responses. This is especially true: in areas of migration (see Putnam 2007), where different cultural practices are imported into an area, where the unintended consequences of new policies become apparent, and when there are sudden changes in national and international economic activities, e.g. the effect on employment levels of industry closures caused by recession. Developing sensitivities to such changes in social problems and responding to them with adaptations in policies and practices is the business of many different types of community-based organisations, but what organisational structures and cultures are most effective for this purpose? What types of institutional arrangements lend themselves to flexible responses to meet these ongoing and changing social problems? Can CAs – by ‘connecting’ – demonstrate any convincing advantage?

### **Ideology, interests and information**

A useful study conducted by Weiss (1995) offers a challenging, research-based model<sup>24</sup> that outlines how decisions within organisations are a product of interplay between ideology, interests and information within the particular institutional setting. Ideas about what changes will lead to what outcomes are often implicit and supported more by experience or gut feelings than by research and data. Staff motives often arise from ideology that can lead to resistance both to following rules and to change. Organisational structures and norms influence how staff define their interests. In this model, decisions are primarily self-interested from the logic of the decision makers’ position and tend towards the maintenance of the status quo. Whilst information and knowledge can lead to revised

understandings of social problems, some types of information are prioritised above others within organisations and institutional procedures influence the kinds of information that are available from what sources and to whom (see also Lipsky 1980; Rosenthal and Peccei 2006). The implication of Weiss' argument is that, for the following reasons, some organisational forms are – because, we would argue, they are better ‘attractors’ and connectors’ – more effective than are others at bringing about social improvements.

- The interaction of (a) theories of action about how to bring about improvements with (b) new information and knowledge, changes perceptions of social problems and alters actions. Crucially, this process relies on the open-minded responsiveness of those empowered to make organisational decisions and of frontline staff who make practice decisions. Can CAs demonstrate advantage over specialist organisations in these regards? This is a key question.
- Some organisational structures and cultures might be less responsive to emerging social problems because their decision-making processes are shaped more by the logic of organisational culture and structural arrangements than by the concerns of communities, and because institutional cultures and traditions exert a conservative ‘pull’ towards stasis. Again, when CAs have progressed beyond their early creativity – perhaps their first ten years of institutional existence – are they more responsive than specialist organisations? Or is the crucial point that, as we have suggested above, only those organisations, whether CAs or other third sector organisations, which are profitable and have a strong balance sheet can take revenue risks, and perhaps also policy risks, thus allowing them to be responsive? Without financial security, the organisational survival imperative takes over and all kinds of third sector organisations are likely to become instruments of policies not their own.

## Typology of authority

Max Weber's evolutionary typology of authority and its resulting organisational forms has considerable explanatory power in the context of third sector organisations, including CAs. Weber argues that organisations reflect the nature of the authority within them. Authority can be: (a) ‘charismatic’ – as when the conquering hero, or entrepreneurial founder, is respected for her energy and achievement and her essentially personal authority dominates; (b) ‘traditional’ – where authority is passed on to family members (and/or long-standing friends or supporters) and patterns of behaviours become accepted simply as ‘the way we do things around here’; and (c) ‘rational-legal’ – where authority, that is to say ‘legitimate power’, is based on evidence and argument led by disinterested (but not ‘uninterested’) professionals (Runciman 1978: 210 and 226-250).<sup>25</sup> Karl Popper's words resonate with the ‘rational-bureaucratic’ model: “All democratic long-term policy must be conceived in terms of impersonal institutions ... the problem of controlling the rulers, and of checking their powers, was the main institutional problem – the problem, in short, of designing institutions for preventing even bad rulers from doing too much damage” (Popper, 1966: 131). Potentially, there are external ‘rulers’ (the funders) and internal ‘rulers’ (the trustees and managers). Third sector organisations are strongly disinclined to think of themselves as ‘impersonal institutions’ and they are often deeply involved with the personalities of the various internal and external ‘rulers’. It is arguable that, along with the vital role of reserves and capital, CAs' long term success depends in considerable part on their ability to plan and manage rationally. However, we see no reason why CAs might be intrinsically better than specialist organisations at rising above the negative effects of various kinds of authority.

## Comparison Crunch

Some comparison with specialist third sector organisations helps to clarify whether CAs have comparative advantages as providers of local services, as ‘movers and shakers’ strategically within an area, and as ‘drivers’ for policy improvements beyond ‘the local’. Whilst we recognise that an unintended consequence of our essay might be to set up a false dichotomy between CAs and other



voluntary and community organisations, that is not our purpose. By making comparisons, we are doing no more than explicating the process by which we have identified the two mechanisms that are particular to CAs that are working well. By making it explicit, this process is opened to criticism and discussion that will enable us to refine our hypotheses.

One of the messages from the conference was that CAs are ‘connective’ and ‘responsive’ rather than ‘isolationist’ and ‘reactive to funders’. In short, this is one of CAs’ claims of advantage. In assessing these claims, we would therefore wish to: (a) consider how information about social problems in a local area is exchanged within a CA; (b) find the sources of the ‘flows’ (for example, service users, local councillors, new research and data, media and so on); and (c) examine which presenting issues are acted upon, which are ignored and for what reasons (see Copps and Vernon 2010: 14, box 2). Also of interest are the means by which information is passed on – informally through casual conversations or formally through meetings and reports – and, to whom. As conversations about problems and challenges continue, they move further away from the original sources, and something akin to Chinese whispers can occur. Issues and information can often change form and be reinterpreted within the CA’s organisational structure, dominant culture, and procedural requirements. Nevertheless, an optimal outcome of information ‘flows’ is a prompt response to the social problems that local communities themselves identify and define.

Such responses are identified by adaptations of practices and adjustments to the allocation of resources. They can be found in all types of organisations. A youth club can bring in drug specialists if young people start to use crack, or employment specialists if unemployment is a significant issue. A legal advice centre can build a link with a housing charity or a health centre. These services do not have to come from within the same organisation. They just have to be provided readily and effectively. Yet CAs might indeed have an advantage – and exploit it effectively. They work across a range of services and are likely to have a broader client base than do specialist organisations. A wider range of concerns is presented to a CA, especially if it delivers specialist personal services. Consequently, CAs’ networks of information exchange are likely to be more diverse and reach more extensively into communities. CAs might fall into the ‘usual suspects’ trap,<sup>26</sup> but, if all other things were equal, their potential to learn from local people and organisations about their concerns and aspirations would be greater than that of smaller single purpose organisations and that of large national or regional specialist providers. The realisation of this potential – for a better understanding of the complexities of local social problems and for a response that recognises these complexities at a community level – seems to us to depend upon the organisation’s effectiveness as an ‘attractor’ and ‘connector’.

## **Breadth and Depth**

On the other hand, narrow purpose organisations might be expected to have more in-depth knowledge about a particular kind of disadvantage and perhaps better research resources and networks of assistance. A charity that specialises in using a particular sport as a response to counter the lack of confidence that characterises many disadvantaged young people might be able to: (a) garner support for research from the national body for that sport; (b) through the national body’s endorsement, secure the involvement of the top players; and (c) secure the fund-raising assistance and access to the political connections of the major organisations. All other things being equal, a CA would find this more difficult.

Whilst CAs have a potential advantage in the breadth of their experience, knowledge and understanding of local people's personal and social concerns, a larger CA might develop an internal structure that is strongly 'funder-facing' and, in practice, 'silo-based'. Information coming into one silo might then be no more likely to be passed to another silo than to another organisation.<sup>27</sup> Where a CA is working well as an 'attractor' and 'connector', we should be able to identify:

- an organisational structure and culture that allows and encourages responsiveness to new information and that drives action leading to social improvement;
- an organisation that is at the forefront of re-formulating problems and concerns and finding new solutions by re-allocating resources and adjusting practices;
- the CA recognised as a 'leader' by the community and by policy-makers and funders.

These characteristics will be facilitated and supported by:

- an organisational structure that facilitates – rather than inhibits – information flows and enables the organisation to learn from its own successes and errors and from other similar organisations (Coppes and Vernon 2010: 16-17);
- internal procedures that enable sources of information to be routinely collated from current and potential service-users and from other comparable organisations;
- regular analysis<sup>28</sup> of this collated information that enables the CA to reassure itself and others that it brings benefit, and minimises harm to service users and potential users. In addition, if it has rejected opportunities arising from the flow of new information and knowledge, such analysis allows the CA to be sure it has done so only for sound reasons that accord with evidence as well as with its values and principles.

CAs and specialist organisations that have reserves and/or capital are probably able to identify community needs, develop programmes, and allocate resources more promptly and effectively than specialist providers or CAs with minimal capital who are struggling to balance their books in line with funding stipulations. Organisations that are 'connective' and 'responsive' in spirit and practice are probably those which will use their independent resources more promptly and with a greater community effect. But can CAs demonstrate their realisation of this potential advantage?

### **Assessing the particular**

In most of the foregoing discussion, it has been apparent that many of CAs' activities are not unique to them. Consequently, the claims of organisations of many other types are often similar to those made by CAs. To a considerable degree, many specialist third sector organisations can claim to: employ local people as staff and volunteers; provide community leadership; stimulate the local economy through new investment; and provide services and activities that knit local communities together.

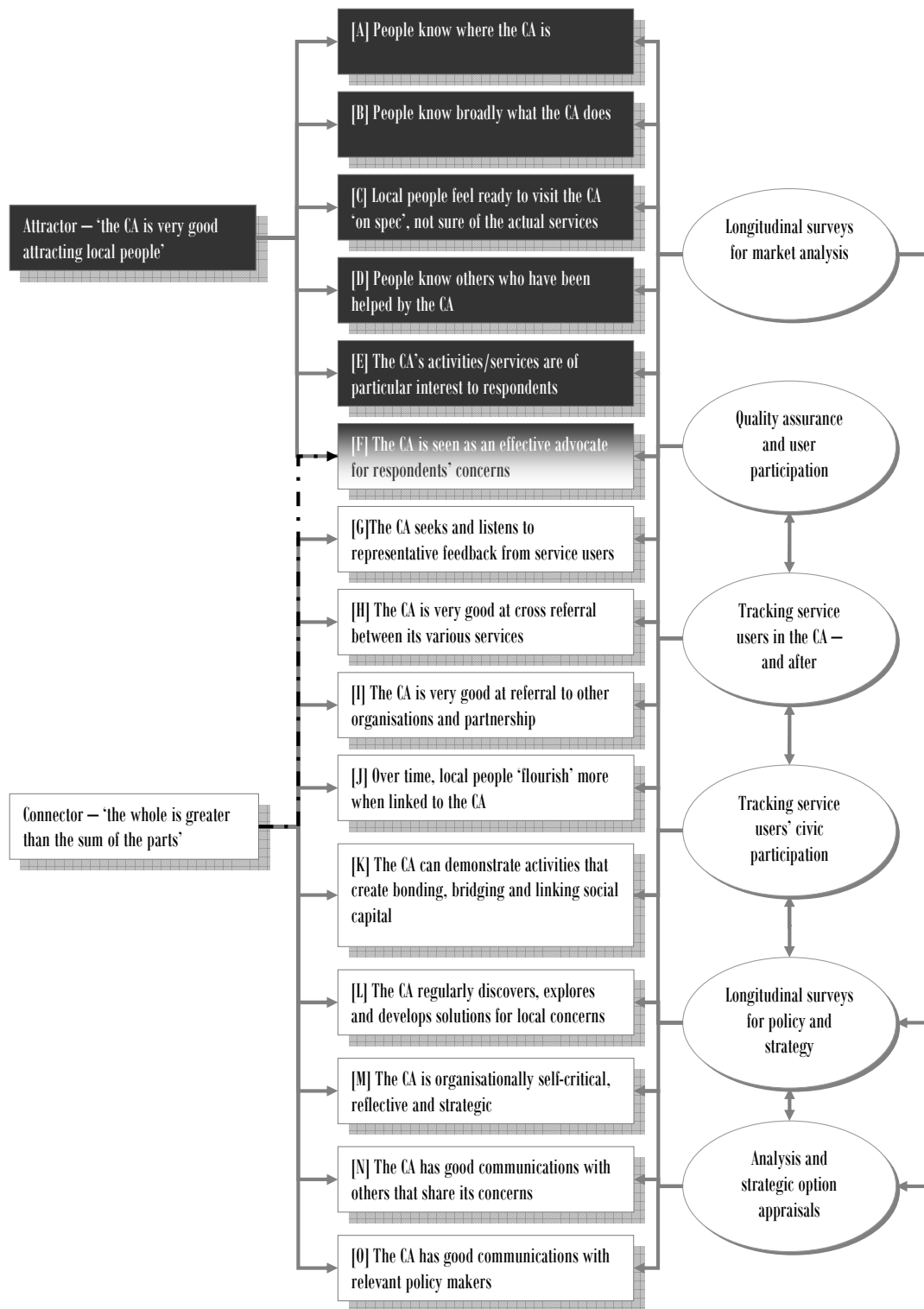
To make those features that might be particular to CAs more explicit, we use the framework proposed by Pawson and Tilley for realistic evaluations (Pawson and Tilley 1997). The essence of their argument is that, to understand whether a social intervention or programme is successful, it is necessary: (a) to understand the 'context' of the intervention; and (b) to discover whether, within that 'context', there are identifiable 'mechanisms' that, by either removing or countering social or behavioural problems, generate the desired 'outcomes' of a programme. The schema is therefore: 'context – mechanism – outcome'. In some 'contexts', 'mechanisms' will be active and can be shown to account for change. In other 'contexts', the same 'mechanisms' might not lead to changes or the 'outcomes' might be unexpected or even undesirable (Sayer 1992; Pawson and Tilley 1997). The key question becomes, 'Which contextual characteristics (including here the characteristics of the CA as an 'organisation') activate mechanisms that achieve positive outcomes?' This question can be explored as usefully in contexts in which programmes have failed as in those in which they have succeeded.

Since we have conceptualised community anchors as institutions that are themselves tentative solutions to social problems (Popper 1968; Burgess 2002), and we understand that CAs aim to alleviate poverty and disadvantage, we can conceptualise CAs as interventions in the same way that Pawson and Tilley refer to social programmes. CAs are not merely ‘organisations’ but are ‘long-term social programmes’, the performance of which can, in principle, be evaluated like that of other ‘social programmes’. Like all interventions, CAs are, as we have discussed above, underpinned by values, ideologies, rules and procedures with a set of outputs, targets, outcomes and impacts.

### **When Community Anchors work well**

In this essay, we take an holistic or integrative ‘whole organisation’ approach, which presupposes that CAs can be conceptualised as ‘social programmes’; and we propose several hypotheses that might enable CAs’ achievements to be tested and demonstrated. To develop these hypotheses, we have: (a) started with propositions in the following form: ‘if a CA is working well then  $\phi$  is the outcome we would expect to happen through particular mechanisms’; and (b) identified some characteristic examples of  $\phi$  that we believe to be particular to CAs. These characteristics are illustrative examples of circumstances in which we anticipate that ‘attractor’ and ‘connector’ mechanisms will be causally active, thereby enabling CAs to bring about social improvements that are particular to them. Our suggestion is that, in assessing the performance of CAs, it is these mechanisms that encapsulate the significance of CAs as institutions. Our examples are illustrative rather than exhaustive and there may be additional contextual features that activate these mechanisms for some CAs.

Each of the two key mechanisms – ‘attractor’ and ‘connector’ – is a claim to advantage and, as such, a high level hypothesis. The claim that CAs are very good at attracting local people is a (hypothetical) proposition that is testable empirically. Similarly, the claim that ‘the (organisational) whole is greater than the sum of the (service delivering) parts’ is a testable hypothesis about internal and external connectivity. We have developed hypotheses which relate to specific activities which encapsulate the ‘attractor’ and ‘connector’ mechanisms. These specific hypotheses enable useful and reliable data to be generated and we suggest how these data may be collected, for example, through surveys and tracking users. The following diagram summarises these processes.



The discussion that follows explains in more detail our thinking behind this diagram. From our earlier discussion, which explores the possibility that CAs have distinctive characteristics, we identified four characteristics of CAs and in the following section we identify, for each characteristic, the context within which it occurs and the mechanisms that explain what outcomes may be expected when these characteristics are present. To measure these characteristics we have developed hypotheses and suggested a research method for 'testing' them. Each hypothesis has a letter (A-O), which can be

identified in the diagram above. In this way, we describe our theory about how the performance of CAs, as organisations, may be assessed.

The characteristics we discuss below are: organisational visibility and attraction, open communication, strengthening their communities, and advocacy and policy improvements. To explain how the context, mechanisms, and outcomes are linked, we describe for each characteristic the context within which we expect the mechanism to be active, or to be inactive, the mechanism, and the outcomes and impacts.

### *Organisational visibility and attraction*

**Context:** Within its communities, a CA has a ‘status’ that is derived from its historical roots, its buildings and its present reputation. It will have a place in ‘community talk’, for example, in giving directions to Canning Town tube station you might say, ‘as you are going down the road, MacDonald’s is on the left and, further down, Community Links is on the right’. It contributes to the identity and definition of its local area. The Bromley by Bow Centre is clearly a ‘place’ within its locality; it is known not just for its specific services but as a place of support and sanctuary, in the non-ecclesiastical sense of refuge and safety.

**Mechanism:** The CA’s ‘status’ acts as an ‘attractor’. People know of the CA and where it is, should they ever need it (in that sense it has ‘option value’). They visit the CA if they have a query or a problem. They come to the CA if they wish to make a positive contribution, for example, through volunteering or setting up a social enterprise. The ‘attractor’ mechanism is unlikely to be activated where a CA has a reputation for delivering poor quality services and/or if it is not welcoming and respectful to visitors when they first enter the building and/or if thought to be ‘too stuck in its own rut’.

**Outcomes:** new service users, repeat users and high levels of users within the same families, demonstrating high levels of satisfaction.

**Impacts:** reduced proportion of local community with unmet needs and an improved sense of individual and community well-being.

<i>Hypotheses</i>	<i>Method for testing</i>
<i>Hypothesis A: People know where the CA is located</i>	After establishing a baseline, longitudinal surveys of service users and non-service users in the area
<i>Hypothesis B: People know what the CA does</i>	
<i>Hypothesis C: Local people are prepared to visit the CA ‘on spec’ if unsure that it offers the precise service that might be needed</i>	
<i>Hypothesis D: People know others who have been helped by the CA</i>	
<i>Hypothesis E: The CA’s activities/services are of particular interest to respondents</i>	
<i>Hypothesis F: The CA is seen as an effective advocate for respondents’ concerns</i>	

### *Open communication*

**Context:** Their multi-purpose functions give CAs a breadth of knowledge – and some specialist knowledge – about: personal issues; community problems; the effects on their local areas of international and national social and economic policies and trends; and an understanding of how to encourage and motivate those living in disadvantage and poverty.

**Mechanism:** connectivity within CAs and connectivity across organisations.

**Outcomes:** These may include local people contributing to the development of the CA's programmes and strategies, regular cross-referrals between services, whether provided by the CA itself or by other organisations.

**Impacts:** CAs are more responsive to local people and are recognised by local people to be so. A virtuous circle of engagement, communication and social action takes root in the CA's interaction with its local communities. (Copps and Vernon 2010: 13)

<i>Hypotheses</i>	Method for testing
<i>Hypothesis G: The CA seeks and listens to representative feedback from service users</i>	Quality assurance and user participation arrangements.
<i>Hypothesis H: The CA is very good at cross referral between its various services</i>	Tracking service users in the CA – and after. Define and measure 'effective' partnership working, including 'co-location with other organisations. Regular reflective reports on how partnerships are working.
<i>Hypothesis I: The CA is particularly effective at partnership working</i>	A peer review element will ensure that the views of all partners' perspectives are taken into account. Comparisons with findings from service-user surveys will also be informative in assessing how CAs are performing.

### *Strengthening their communities*

**Context:** CAs aim to strengthen their local communities, to improve connectivity and to reduce the rate of pathological (meaning that something has 'gone wrong') presentation of individual problems. CAs engage with 'communities' and 'individuals', sometimes trying to reach the former through the latter.

**Mechanism:** Connectivity to local communities, through individuals and through groups. CAs might undertake activities that engage individuals in groups and act as a 'bridge' between groups that might be exclusive, defensive and/or combative. CAs might seek to build individuals' confidence (whether in personal, social or economic life) and encourage engagement in the civic process and in civil society more generally.

**Outcomes:** These may include reduced numbers of people reporting that they feel excluded or isolated, improvements in individuals' sense of well being, and greater participation in civil society.

**Impact:** Reduced conflict, and improved 'community' sense of flourishing.

These two hypotheses are discussed in some detail below.

<i>Hypotheses</i>	Method for testing
<i>Hypothesis J: Over time, local people ‘flourish’ more when linked to the CA</i>	Tracking service users in the CA – and after <sup>29</sup>
<i>Hypothesis K: The CA can demonstrate activities that create bonding, bridging and linking social capital</i>	Tracking or sampling civic participation Tracking or sampling present and past service users’ joining of groups

### *Advocacy and policy improvements*

**Context:** With its finger on the ‘pulse of a community’, its capacity to make or broker independent financial contributions to ‘the community’, and its advocacy role, a CA can be expected to be at the forefront of re-conceptualising social problems, adjusting existing solutions and identifying new possibilities.

**Mechanism:** connectivity i.e. information flows within CAs, and between CAs and policy-makers and administrators and politicians.

**Outcomes:** These may include identification of changing concerns within local community, changes in working practices, initiatives to influence funders and policy-makers.

**Impacts:** The CA is recognised within its local communities and by relevant policy makers as an important broker that can be relied upon to speak knowledgeably and reasonably representatively about its local community, and to be capable of implementing changes in policies, rules, procedures and resource allocations.

<i>Hypotheses</i>	Method for testing
<i>Hypothesis L: The CA regularly discovers, explores and develops solutions for local concerns</i>	Regularly considered by the Board: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Longitudinal surveys for policy and strategy</li> <li>• Quality assurance and user participation arrangements</li> <li>• Networks and information flows mapped and reported regularly [The range of sources and the volume and quality of the information received from them will need to be identified, as will the extent to which the CA has utilised the information purposefully.]</li> <li>• Analysis and strategic option appraisals</li> <li>• List of policy changes to which the CA has contributed</li> </ul>
<i>Hypothesis M: The CA is organisationally self-critical, reflective and strategic</i>	
<i>Hypothesis N: The CA has good communications with others that share its concerns</i>	
<i>Hypothesis O: The CA has good communications with relevant policy makers</i>	

### **Measuring performance: some practical issues considered**

We recognise that there are very real practical issues involved in implementing our proposals and that CAs are constrained by limited resources. In this section we discuss some of the ‘tricky’ issues that require decisions if staff are to measure the performance of a CA, as an institution. Whilst our list of challenges is not exhaustive, the solutions suggested are intended to demonstrate a practical and

feasible approach. We describe some measurement challenges, practical challenges, and the challenge of embedding the findings in organisational practices. Each is discussed in turn.

### *Measurement challenges*

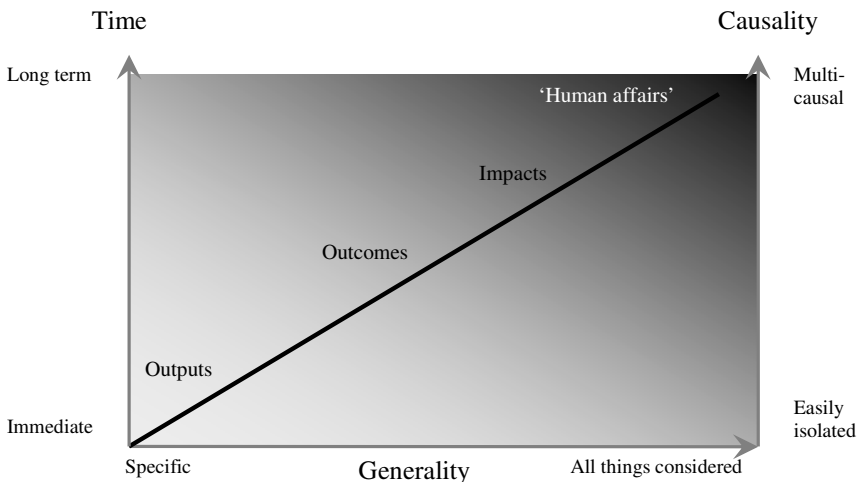
It is readily apparent that inputs and outputs are barely adequate for measuring the usefulness of particular projects, let alone evaluating multi-purpose organisations over time. For this reason, shortcomings in the measurement of the performance of CAs are always likely. Working towards minimising these shortcomings is, we believe, a realistic approach.<sup>30</sup> Some difficulties, however, are more intractable than others and, whilst it is important to acknowledge stubborn problems and to minimise them, it is sensible to assume that, whatever is done, they will not disappear completely.

In essence, ‘outputs’, ‘outcomes’ and ‘impacts’ are all labels for the ‘consequences’ of interventions. How might they be distinguished? If appropriate criteria can be identified, ‘consequences’ can be evaluated, but that might not necessitate a three part typology of ‘kinds of consequence’. We might consider three variables:

- (a) The level of **generality**, or of abstraction, of the assessment criteria. They might be couched in very specific terms (how many young people were convicted of a criminal offence during the crime prevention project’s life?) or, at the other end of the scale, as more general ‘all things considered’ judgements (did local people flourish more as a result of the intervention?).
- (b) The **time** dimension – measurement close to the time of intervention is simpler than measurement several years later. The problems of multi-causality are exacerbated over time. As the years pass, it becomes harder to disentangle particular causes from particular effects. We might call this ‘longitudinal confusion’. But, for CAs, it is the long term that matters. Their aim – and hence their claim – is that their long term presence in the locality is beneficial and worth financing as such.
- (c) The **causal** dimension. CAs are not the only interveners. Whilst the consequences of an intervention in one small and well-bounded group can be distinguished reasonably easily from those of extraneous factors, the consequences of a CA’s work in a locality will be hard to distinguish from the consequences of: the state of the economy; school policy; policing style changes; the actions of the local authority in regenerating an area or introducing free school lunches; the advertising campaigns of manufacturers and retailers; media messages; the effect of celebrity role model behaviours, and so on. At the upper end of this scale we have to engage with the overall complexity of human affairs.



These variables can be related in the following way:



Most of our hypotheses focus on aspects of ‘attraction’ and ‘connection’ – and we recognise that these are largely ‘means’ rather than ‘ends’ but, as Copps and Vernon (2010: 18) comment, “In many cases, it may not be possible to capture results directly.”<sup>31</sup> Whilst a mission to build social capital might be fulfilled through ‘connecting’ people, the validity of our approach depends primarily on the assumption (reasonable, in our view) that CAs are much more likely to be achieving their purposes and fulfilling their missions if the ‘attractor’ and ‘connector’ mechanisms are working well. Indeed, we would also argue that unless the ‘attractor’ and ‘connector’ mechanisms are working well, a CA is unable to achieve its purpose, whether that is focused on ‘poverty’, ‘social exclusion’ or ‘social capital’.

#### *Selecting and measuring impacts: the example of ‘flourishing’*

If we tackle CAs’ missions and purposes directly, we are drawn to indicators of overall ‘happiness’, ‘well-being’ or the extent to which individuals and communities ‘flourish’ in the CAs’ catchment areas. However, the unavoidable risks of multi-causality and longitudinal confusion (identified above) suggest to us that it is impracticable to use such measures to identify CAs’ particular causal contributions to any changes that the indicator might show over time. Consequently, our model is less ambitious: our two hypotheses (J and K) that bear on ‘well-being’ or ‘flourishing’, focus primarily on the CAs’ service-users rather than on the community at large in the catchment area. We are encouraged by the conclusion in *The State of Happiness* that “[t]he most useful data – from the point of view of the development of public policy and resource allocations – is that which [involves the] comparison of small geographic areas or the experience of different groups.” (Bacon et al 2010: 38).<sup>32</sup> Our approach focuses on “small geographic areas” and “the experience of different groups” and we believe that some practicable instruments – perhaps informed by Copps and Vernon (2010: 18-19) and Steur and Marks (2007) – can be devised.<sup>33</sup>

Nevertheless, choosing appropriate indicators to measure impact is a significant challenge. We have chosen to use ‘flourishing’, although we have only outlined the ways in which ‘flourishing’ might be measured and captured. We considered a number of options; for example, it matters whether the purpose of a CA is to make individuals ‘happy’ – providing some equivalent to Nozick’s famous ‘experience machine’ – or to improve their ‘well-being’<sup>34</sup> or ‘purpose in life’.<sup>35</sup> We expect CAs to tend towards the latter but we prefer Armstrong’s term ‘flourishing’ (Armstrong 2009).<sup>36</sup> Armstrong suggests that ‘flourishing’ is a more sophisticated multi-dimensional concept than ‘happiness’, which currently tends to be associated with high levels of excitement and pleasure. He argues that “[f]lourishing is compatible with all sorts of pains and difficulties and losses and disappointments. ... So the fact that someone is living a really ... rich, ... interesting and viable life, doesn't mean that

they're going to feel ... buoyant and cheerful all the time. ... [M]any of the important processes in life – having relationships, bringing up children, undertaking risky but serious work – are going to involve disappointment, frustration, loss, anxiety and so on.” He sets out to “capture th[e] sense that ‘flourishing’ is something that can keep on increasing in a way that perhaps happiness doesn't.” (Armstrong 2009)

Individuals can – and do – ‘flourish’ but it is difficult for them to do so ‘individually’. The Aristotelian roots of Armstrong’s work reminds us that we are mostly ‘social animals’. It follows that groups and communities too can ‘flourish’. Again, this does not mean a complete freedom from difficulty but a broad trend of increasing physical, material, social and intellectual prosperity.<sup>37</sup> Furthermore, it is difficult to imagine a community that ‘flourishes’ that does not comprise individuals who, in their individual ways, are also ‘flourishing’,<sup>38</sup> and we take the view that it is at this level that useful data can be collected by CAs.

Our proposals in hypothesis J (over time, local people ‘flourish’ more when linked to the CA) and hypothesis K (the CA can demonstrate activities that create bonding, bridging and linking social capital) are, we believe, modest and manageable when focussed on present and past service users. Measured improvements in their personal sense of flourishing<sup>39</sup> and joining of bridging groups and participation in civic life would, if they compared favourably with measures of such things in the local population as a whole, constitute evidence that the activities of the CA are beneficial.

### *Practical challenges*

A series of practical decisions are necessary before information can be collected. We give two examples of the types of decisions staff will be required to make and offer some suggestions about how these challenges may be resolved.

Firstly, a key question is: what is a CA’s catchment area? It can probably be defined geographically, either by reference to ward boundaries or to natural barriers such as rivers, railways and arterial roads. However, the boundaries chosen will determine the ‘place’ to which any survey questions about ‘place’ will refer. The issue is not free from difficulty. In the study of Canning Town and Custom House (Community Links 2006), a wide range of bottom-up responses was received to the open question, ‘What do you consider to be your neighbourhood?’

<i>Response</i>	<i>Percent</i>
Canning Town and Custom House	45
My street	20
My block	13
My estate	10
Newham (i.e. the borough)	8
Other	4

Whilst it would seem unreasonable to impose a particular definition on local people and inappropriate to require all CAs to adopt the same definition, once a CA has explored the issue with local people, it will need to draw its boundaries clearly and to maintain them for several years. Within any geographical boundary, there are likely to be several ‘communities’. They might be relatively discrete but there might also be overlapping. Individuals will sometimes relate ‘community’ to ‘neighbourhood’. At other times, they might have class, ethnic or religious considerations in mind. Because conceptions of ‘community’ are contested and unstable, our suggestion is that surveys follow geographical boundaries, and that they include checks to identify if the organisation is failing to reach a particular ethnic group.

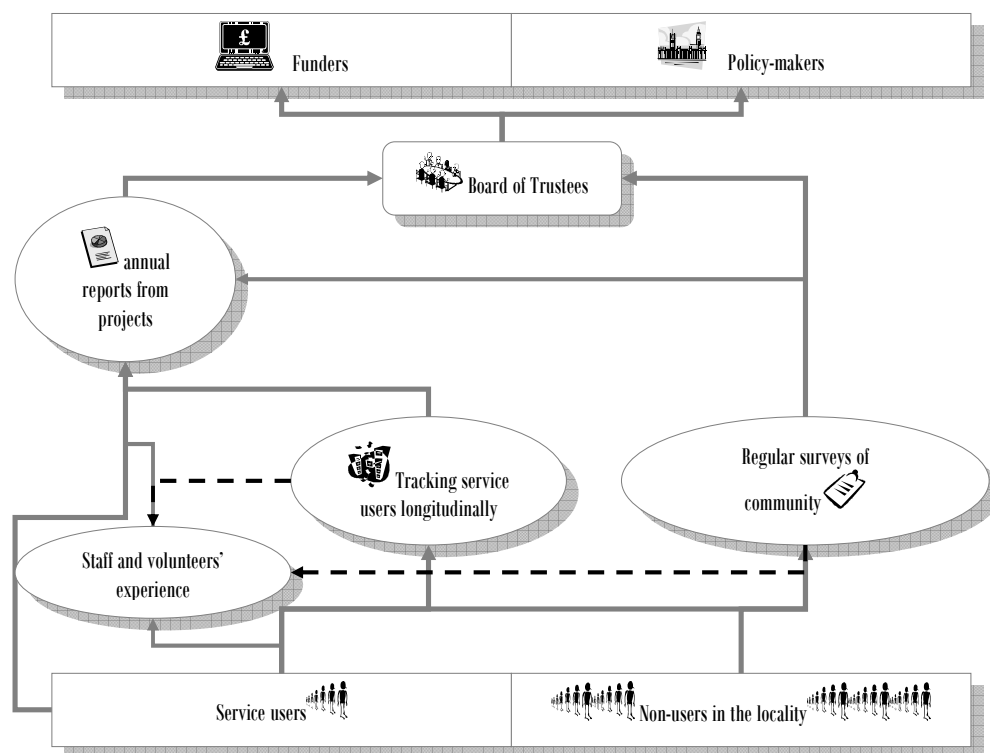
Secondly, decisions are required about how to interview a sample of non-users who are representative of the selected geographical area. Having a representative sample of non-users enables generalisations to be made about the whole population that does not use the CA, and this gives staff more certainty about developing appropriate strategies to engage with non-users. Whilst this is always going to be a difficult task, it is possible to compare the age, gender and ethnicity of users with the demographic information that local authorities use for neighbourhoods (usually at ward level) and which is derived from the most recent census. By making a comparison with the census data, it is possible to identify some ‘gaps’ in the types of service users. Using this information, community researchers can then carry out a survey on streets throughout the geographical area identified by the CA as its ‘catchment’, and approach people whom they expect to be non-users and ask them to complete a questionnaire.

### *Embedding performance measures organisationally*

A third challenge is to embed the findings from the research into the organisational structure. This requires all staff to discuss the findings and for information to be presented to trustees, funders and policy-makers. The organisation’s information flows should:

- enable the CA, and particularly its Board of Trustees, to be sure that it is (a) responsive to all relevant parts of its communities and (b) ‘internally connective’;
- be apt to inform funders and policy makers of the local needs and of the means of tackling them.

The diagram below shows how information might flow through a CA.



Compared with this idealistic scheme, most CAs start from a low baseline. Data, of the kind which we suggest, are scarce and more energy and resources are likely to be required – not least in staff training – in order to embed findings as everyday practices rather than performance exercises. CAs will argue that they cannot afford to make the investment but, in our view, such is the current power of the silocentric funding paradigm that they cannot afford not to do so.<sup>40</sup>

## Concluding comments

In this essay we have proposed that, as organisations, CAs have two distinctive mechanisms, an ‘attractor’ mechanism and a ‘connector’ mechanism. We have argued that, when these mechanisms are active and working well, the performance of a CA as such will be favourable and it can justifiably claim an advantage. We have outlined the contexts within which we think these mechanisms will be active, and we have identified some outcomes and impacts that might be expected. Through the identification of testable hypotheses, we have described the way in which we think this might happen and we have described activities that CAs might undertake to foster and maintain their advantage. We have also made some suggestions about what we think is a realistic approach towards data collection. We are mindful that our suggestions are limited and not fully developed, but we think that we have discussed some of the more difficult problems associated with measuring performance, and through our discussion on ‘flourishing’ have shown how giving meaning to an indicator is an important part of the process.

Whilst this essay has, in our view, achieved its purpose, namely, to further the discussions that took place at our conference in June 2009 in East London, our proposed model for an organisational or institutional approach remains under-developed. We believe that our proposals can be improved by further discussion and critical comment. We hope, therefore, that this essay has been sufficiently stimulating to continue the debates and we look forward, with interest, to receiving readers’ comments.

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The authors would like to thank the following people for their observations and comments on an earlier draft: Emma Ahmad, Mike Aiken, Ben Cowell, Susie Dyer, Jon Griffith, Matthew Scott, Matthew Smerdon and Stephen Thake. Their contributions sharpened our thinking and improved our essay. The usual disclaimer applies.

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## End notes

- 1 Whilst commissioned contracts in the ‘silos of service’ that are so unhelpful to community anchors will not disappear, we argue that it is possible to fan the few sparks of recognition that community anchors are local, multi-purpose – and indeed special – into the flame of a ‘community anchor paradigm’ that will be more ‘relational’, longer-term and sit, with its own power and legitimacy, alongside the entrenched ‘silos of service paradigm’. This is close to bassac’s mission: can community anchors themselves do more to help? (bassac is the British Association of Settlements and Social Action Centres.)
- 2 On ‘concepts’ and ‘conceptions’, see Gallie 1955-56 and Dworkin 1977, pp. 82-84.  
On ‘community’, see Knight and Robson, “Our findings might support Margaret Stacey’s suggestion that the term ‘community’ should be abandoned altogether. (Stacey 1969) No doubt, she was influenced by Hillery who, in 1955, found no less than 94 uses of the word ‘community’ in everyday use. (Hillery 1955). We believe, on the basis of the use of the word ‘community’ in this study that the word should be used with caution. As Raymond Williams, said ‘Community can be the warmly persuasive word...[but] unlike all other terms of social organisation (state, nation, society, etc.) it seems never to be used unfavourably...’ (Williams, R (1976) *Key Words*, Fontana, London). Following Raymond Plant, we believe that those who use the term community in their work should ‘explore a meaning before they espouse a cause’ (Plant, 1974).
- 3 In this context, the names of CAs are interesting:

Organisational title	Style of name	Relationship to ‘place’	Signals nature of services
Community Links	Evocative rhetorical	Weak	Weak
Aston-Mansfield	Traditional	Only by reputation	
Cambridge House			
Toynbee Hall			
Bristol Barton Hill Settlement	Geographical	Strong	
Bromley-by-Bow Centre			

- 4 The term ‘local anchor’ was used by Stephen Thake in ‘Building communities, changing lives’, Joseph Rowntree Foundation, October 2001, <http://www.jrf.org.uk/publications/contribution-large-independent-neighbourhood-regeneration-organisations-regeneration> (accessed 5 February 2010). He used the term ‘community anchor’ in a paper that he gave to a Development Trusts Association’s conference, held at Oxford Town Hall on 17 and 18 September 2007 (Thake 2007).
- 5 In this essay, we regard CAs as service providers that sometimes work in partnership with or support other organisations. In 2007, Thake put the case somewhat differently, arguing that “no single organisation can provide all the needs, hopes and aspirations of everyone. So that [Thake’s] sense is that a community anchor organisation is a cluster of organisations, a network of organisations doing different things but with shared outlooks – joined at the mind.....However, it does not preclude a single organisation or a single organisation with subsidiaries being an anchor organisation – just that it is very difficult. They need to facilitate the growth of other groups and organisations under their umbrella – rather than seeking to do everything themselves.” Whilst this is an important difference, it is not pursued further here.
- 6 Indeed, the notion of ‘exclusion’ would be meaningless were there no ‘community’ from which to be ‘excluded’. Individual poverty is mostly linked to, if not solely determined by, socio-economic factors.
- 7 There is significant ambiguity in the term ‘holistic’. It can mean to look at the multiple aspects of the individual’s problems here and now. Or, to look at the individual here and now in the wider context of his or of her family and/or communities. Or, to look at the individual over time – a ‘whole life approach’. These senses are not mutually exclusive.
- 8 By way of recent example, John Denham, Minister for Communities (2010) includes the following encouragement that seems sensitive to the particular case of CAs: “Running the most effective and efficient operation is not the same as conducting a crude cost cutting exercise that sacrifices all notions of standards. It is simply not good enough to offer the most bog-standard, lowest-cost service, contracted out in bulk to the lowest bidder. Indeed, that runs counter to the whole ‘Total Place’ approach; where it is the drive to deliver better services which promotes greater value for money, by focusing more - not less - clearly on the needs of individual users. It does not, for example, make sense to exclude the many excellent voluntary and third sector providers. They may not offer the cheapest contract in terms of narrowly defined cost/benefit in the short-term. But they can deliver important additional social outcomes such as jobs for the workless and marginalised and better quality service which saves money in the long run. Third sector organisations – as well as groups of local public service employees and new private sector providers – must have the chance to show

how they could deliver the outcomes local people want by new ways of working, and new ways of delivering services – not just asked to compete to deliver the current services at the lowest possible cost. I do have a real concern that the third sector is not getting the opportunity to play its part in the big issue of public service reform locally. I have invited in representatives from local government and the third sector to discuss the issues and look at how we can address this.” However, the title of the speech – ‘More for Less’ – might dampen optimism.

- 9 See Milbourne 2009, p.293, “Why would community organisations and user groups tackle intractable social problems with poorer resources and infrastructure than deployed by public services that failed?” Milbourne cites Ellison and Ellison, *Creating 'Opportunity for All?' New Labour, New Localism and the Opportunity Society*, (2006) Social Policy and Society, 5: 3, 337-348, at page 341, who stress that “in the context of new localism, participation and involvement can be, ‘ambiguous goods’ with ‘equal scope for disempowerment and alienation,’ because of the complexities of power and interest involved, the paucity of resources and lack of value accorded to legitimise efforts.”

If – under the influence of the ‘personalisation agenda’ – public funding moves from ‘organisations’ to individual service-users, the nature of the problem will change. The service-user will become the customer and CAs will be under greater pressure to convince potential service-users – who might have realistic choices of where to spend their entitlements – to become actual service-users with the CA. CAs will have new needs to interact with funders and policy makers. CAs will want to ensure that, where needed, the funding for individuals in their communities is adequate. Furthermore, the volatility of such a funding regime will exacerbate the already serious shortage of funding for ‘the organisation as such’.

- 10 Smerdon 2010, at p. 3, offers the following elucidation of ‘independence’ and its significance: “...the freedoms of independence are of pivotal importance to the substance of voluntary action – what it is, how it is done and how effective it is. Independence gives voluntary organisations the **freedom to challenge**, to be a channel for dissent and a platform for influence often in the face of statutory indifference, and in some cases active resistance. Independence is also what voluntary organisations use to identify and **understand needs that government cannot see**, and may actually choose not to see. Then, against a backdrop of relatively standardised public services where taking risks is difficult, independence is one part of voluntary organisations’ ability to **pioneer new approaches**, working with people in ways that meet their needs, **irrespective of the priorities of the funding body**. This may be about being innovative, but it may just be about providing **support to people falling outside or through statutory safety nets**. Finally, independence is important because some people who have reason to be wary of government, or who need support to challenge government, come to voluntary organisations specifically because they are not government. Independence for these organisations is what **gives people the confidence and trust to seek the support they need**.” (emphases added)

At p.2, Smerdon points to the adverse consequences of commissioning: “Organisations are increasingly pressured into adapting to meet the requirements of commissioners, not the needs of the people who use their services.” It is “hard to maintain quality” and “increasingly the government definition of quality is at odds with the sector’s definition.”..... “[O]rganisations that deliver services, but are not involved in their design, shoulder all of the risks – of failure for users, of damaged reputation and of a weakened organisation.....[T]here is pressure to self-censor in front of statutory funders for fear, real or perceived, that funding will be withdrawn as punishment.....[T]he capacity to work in different ways, to innovate and be flexible and responsive to local circumstances is eroded by the standardisation that commissioning requires.”

- 11 TUPE, for short.
- 12 Most probably, it is the strength of reserves and assets that are critical in preserving ‘robust independence’, irrespective of whether the organisation is a CA or a specialist provider.
- 13 The accumulation of data within a particular silo of service (for example, a CA might deliver legal advice just as might a specialist neighbourhood law centre) might reveal some patterned advantage or disadvantage for delivery through a CA when compared with relatively specialised (dominant paradigm compliant) regional and national providers. CAs’ principal advantage could be that the wider view of the community that the CA standpoint provides improves communication and appreciation of the service-users’ concerns and needs. It seems to us improbable that the data in any particular silo of service would reveal a systemic advantage in favour of delivery through a CA and, whilst they clearly merit further investigation, we do no more here than signal the potential disadvantages.
- 14 See also Milbourne 2009, p. 289. “Paradoxically, differences of approach are the very reasons for seeking to involve community organisations in the resolution of entrenched social problems” but “[c]ompetitive funding regimes, generic targets, broad planning criteria and more sophisticated bidding processes all favour bigger, better resourced organisations, while concealing the advantages that small community organisations offer.” See also note 9.
- 15 See Vangan and Huxham, *Enacting Leadership for Collaborative Advantage: Dilemmas of Ideology and Pragmatism in the Activities of Partnership Managers* (2003) 14 British Journal of Management S61-S76; *Doing Things Collaboratively: Realizing the Advantage or Succumbing to Inertia* (2004) 33 Organizational Dynamics 190-201. See also Weaver, *Take your Partners*, a paper presented at an IVAR seminar held on 13 March 2008.
- 16 In *Bowling Alone*, Putnam identifies three kinds of social capital: ‘bonding’, which brings people closely together but can have a “dark side” (Putnam 2000: 350-363) in that such groups can become exclusive and defensive; ‘bridging’,



by which communication and association are built across boundaries and barriers; and ‘linking’, in which people participate in civil and/or civic society.

- 17 See also Dawkins’s critique, *Reflections on Diversity and Social Capital: A Critique of Robert D. Putnam’s “E Pluribus Unum: Diversity and Community in the Twenty-First Century – The 2006 Johan Skytte Prize Lecture”* (2009) 19 Housing Policy Debate, 208-217, <http://www.mi.vt.edu/data/files/hpd%2019.1/outlook-dawkins.pdf> (accessed 9 February 2010), for which reference we are indebted to Jon Griffith.
- 18 The dimensions of ‘diversity’ considered in the study are not solely ethnic. “Most fundamentally, however, economic inequality does not appear to be a significant confounding variable in our analyses of ethnic diversity. First, as I have already noted, our standard model directly controls for both income inequality and poverty. Second, we have been able to discover no significant interactive effects between economic inequality and ethnic diversity – that is, our core finding that diversity produces hunkering is equally true both in communities with great economic disparities and in those that are relatively egalitarian. Economic inequality is very important, but it does not appear to cause, amplify or obscure the apparent effects of ethnic diversity on social capital.” (Putnam, 2007: 157)
- 19 To its credit, the government decided in 2008 to fund organisations to develop the idea of campaigning, recognising that sometimes the campaigns might be uncomfortable for government. NCVO, with bassac, were chosen as intermediaries and bassac set up its ‘Louder’ web-site: see <http://www.louder.org.uk/>. Sadly, in November 2009, the Minister for the Third Sector announced that this funding would be withdrawn and transferred to the Hardship Fund. The recession provided the justification given.
- 20 On 16 May 1968, a gas explosion knocked out an end wall panel on the 17th floor of the Ronan Point tower block, causing a partial collapse that killed five people and injured another 17. Frances Clarke’s recent article in New Start magazine (<http://comlinks.beepweb.co.uk/linksuk/wp-content/PDF/RonanPoint.pdf>, accessed 9 February 2010) explains that buildings of that design continued in use in Newham. “However, by the 1980s disquiet among high rise tenants was widespread. After Community Links visited a range of estates in a double decker community bus and met with tenants, the Newham Tower Block Tenants Campaign (NTBTC) was born. The campaign moved rapidly from estate to estate during 1981 and 1982 holding public meetings and electing estate committees.” The eventual result was the demolition of the blocks.
- 21 See <http://www.capitalise.org.uk/>
- 22 Perhaps the key governmental recognition came in June 2007 in DCLG’s discussion paper, *Third Sector Strategy for Communities and Local Government*, <http://www.communities.gov.uk/documents/communities/pdf/324564.pdf>. (accessed 9 February 2010)
- 23 As ‘institutions’, CAs have sets of rules, norms and cultures that regulate decision-making and behaviour. Often their names and ‘brands’ reflect their origins. Their historic foundations set their styles and the missions from which their strategies grow. In turn, these strategies imply the standards and objectives by which they – but not necessarily silo-based funders – would wish to assess their current performance. Their historical beginnings encapsulate the values and principles which underpin them. These institutionalised traditions influence how CAs interact with local people and with the other agencies and groups working in the area.
- 24 ‘Models’ are like a carpenter’s or engineer’s template. The work in question can be measured against them.
- 25 To focus on the application of this taxonomy to third sector organisations, consider whether the major decisions about what risks to take, what work to do, and what strategic directions to pursue are made after a full and disciplined option appraisal (that considers the status quo, the proposal and at least one other approach to the problem and models the hard and soft benefits and burdens for a period of several years) and how many are instead the result of habit or of a leader’s only gently tested inspiration or hunch – and then there is ‘following the money because we have to survive’. Weber comments (Runciman 1978: 23) that “bureaucratic rationalisation (note: Weber’s meaning here is closer to what we might call ‘professionalisation’ rather than to ‘the dead hand of bureaucracy’) can be a revolutionary force of the first order in its relation to tradition...its revolution is carried out by *technical* means, basically ‘from the outside’ ....; first it revolutionises things and organisations and then, in consequence, it changes people, in the sense that it alters the conditions to which they must adapt and in some cases increases their chances of adapting to the external world by rational determination of means and ends.”
- 26 Local authorities are especially disposed to having a few people who can be congenially and conveniently regarded as the ‘representatives of the community’. But CAs are not immune from this syndrome.
- 27 Consider the comparison with subject-based academics in universities. Their loyalty and networks are often primarily to other academics in their subject community at other universities world-wide. See Becher, A. and Trowler, P. (2001), *Academic Tribes and Territories: Intellectual Enquiry and the Cultures of Disciplines* Buckingham: SRHE and Open University Press.
- 28 Too often, the effort of collection and collation exhausts organisations and they have no energy for its analysis.
- 29 See notes 32 and 33 for some possibilities for the development of appropriate instruments.
- 30 There is a broad consensus, including specialist providers and CAs, that ‘outputs’ are often too narrowly-based or are inappropriate measures of the fundamental purpose of a single intervention. CAs will add that the ‘outputs’ of discrete

services are incapable of capturing CAs' broad, long term, holistic effects as organisations. There is also a consensus that 'outcomes' are somehow better but that 'impact' is what really matters. Some funders have joined this consensus. Whilst there is, in our view, a strong case for a more careful examination of these issues, we do not attempt that here. Instead, we do no more than point to some definitional difficulty and connect the issues to our approach to the identification of appropriate and testable hypotheses.

Armartya Sen distinguishes 'culmination outcomes' – which describe 'what happens' (for example, someone is arrested) – from 'comprehensive outcomes' – which take account of "processes, efforts and conducts" (for example, the arrest is arbitrary and/or illegal). He argues that, "the role of human agency cannot be obliterated by some exclusive focus on what happens only at the culmination; for example,....if and election candidate were to argue that what is really important for him is not just to win the coming election, but to 'win the election' fairly', then the outcome sought must be something of a comprehensive outcome." (Sen 2009: 22-23 and 215-221). CAs and the people that they serve are, in this sense, 'human agents' and "processes, efforts and conducts" matter to them, whether they are actors or recipients. Arguably, CAs can provide some of the 'process values' that contribute to Sen's 'comprehensiveness' of outcomes.

- 31 Cops and Vernon (2010: 1) argue that: "Charities may be able to measure outcomes directly (for example, the number of people helped into employment), measure indirect indicators (for example, the number of people who say that they are more confident in applying for jobs), or use a logical justification (for example, having a coherent argument of how its activities help people find employment)."
- 32 Drawing on Steur and Marks (2007), three levels are identified: "(i) universal level: overall and cross cutting measure of people's life captured by a single-item measure; (ii) domain level: measure outcomes with different thematic objectives (e-health, education, community safety) and across different domains of life (personal, social and place); [and] (iii) targeted level: focuses on the underlying or protective factors that impact on people's wellbeing. This could include indicators associated with resilience, self-esteem and competency, either focused on particular groups or geographic areas." (Bacon et al 2010, pp.32-35) At the targeted level, the problems of multi-causality and longitudinal confusion do not disappear but might be manageable.
- 33 Bacon *et al* (2010: 38) argue that "metrics that help build understanding of individual's wellbeing across different domains of people's lives, and how the different domains interact are also important." Steur and Marks (2007: 27) argue that, at the targeted level, indicators can be used "(i) to improve understanding of local needs, particularly of vulnerable groups or specific service users, to help inform the design and delivery of local services and interventions; (ii) to review performance and inform local action in relation to 'closing the gap', where efforts to improve psychological feelings and functioning (around building self-esteem, confidence, aspirations, autonomy and so on) might be needed to reduce inequalities and achieve better outcomes for more people; (iii) to measure the wellbeing impact of specific initiatives or services being delivered at a local level, through tracking progress and capturing 'distance travelled' in relation to how people feel and function; [and] (iv) to assess and highlight the importance of targeting resources by local authorities and their partners, towards the enabling/protective factors for people's wellbeing, to encourage a shift towards more preventative approaches and to improve local area outcomes over the longer term." However, the useful indicators shown by Steur and Marks (2007: 37) are not capable of distinguishing with any precision the effects of one possible or contributing cause from those of another.
- 34 'Happiness' might be close to 'pleasure'. As the over-riding 'good', 'pleasure' is vulnerable to the classic objection that morally vicious, sadistic, pleasures rank equally with the pleasure of seeing one's children graduate. Here, other values must surely out rank 'pleasure'. Similarly, there is also the objection that mindless pleasures rank equally with more cerebral and weighty matters. In *The Rationale of Reward*, Book 3, Chapter 1, p. 206, [http://books.google.co.uk/books?id=6igN9srLgg8C&dq=%22the+Rationale+of+Reward%22&printsec=frontcover&source=bl&ots=QuWsWq2pRu&sig=4IM25IEs6AEQwRmVJ4DkvKHkUTs&hl=en&ei=1-IUS\\_KSJI6k4Qak2ujTBg&sa=X&oi=book\\_result&ct=result&resnum=1&ved=0CA0Q6AEwAA#v=onepage&q=&f=false](http://books.google.co.uk/books?id=6igN9srLgg8C&dq=%22the+Rationale+of+Reward%22&printsec=frontcover&source=bl&ots=QuWsWq2pRu&sig=4IM25IEs6AEQwRmVJ4DkvKHkUTs&hl=en&ei=1-IUS_KSJI6k4Qak2ujTBg&sa=X&oi=book_result&ct=result&resnum=1&ved=0CA0Q6AEwAA#v=onepage&q=&f=false) (accessed 9 February 2010), Jeremy Bentham said, "Prejudice apart, the game of push-pin is of equal value with the arts and sciences of music and poetry. If the game of push-pin furnish more pleasure, it is more valuable than either." Others have been less convinced by this quantitative approach. In *Anarchy, State and Utopia*, Robert Nozick postulates an 'experience machine' that will stimulate a person's brain to induce pleasurable experiences. Those plugged in to the machine cannot tell whether or not the experiences are real. Nozick's argument is against hedonism, the pursuit of pure pleasure for its own sake. Would many choose the machine over real life?  
Thomas Hurka <http://philosophybytes.com/2009/04/thomas-hurka-on-pleasure.html> (accessed 9 February 2010) offers a way through some of this difficulty. Hurka distinguishes: (a) simple and localised pleasures – enjoying an ice cream; (b) simple and extended pleasures – an overall good mood; (c) 'localised pleasure that', for example, West Ham scored a goal; and (d) 'extended pleasure that', for example, my life as a whole is going well. An organisation that existed to further sense (a) would be very different in terms of purpose and impact from one that prioritised sense (d), which gets close to some senses of 'well-being'.
- 35 Ryff, *Happiness is everything or is it? Explorations on the meaning of psychological well-being* (1989) *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 57, 1069-1081.

- 36 CAs are not the only bodies that might be concerned with community 'well-being'. Local authorities have power under Local Government Act 2000 section 2 to do anything (including spending but not raising money) that they consider will promote economic, social and environmental well being in their area. However, restrictive judicial interpretation has not encouraged adventurous use of the power. There are now moves to substitute a wider power of 'general competence' that might be less likely to be constrained. See Crawford, *Beyond well-being*, [2010] New Law Journal 168-170.
- 37 Armstrong argues that the "central idea of 'civilisation' is the integration of material prosperity, – ... the getting and spending bit – and spiritual prosperity – .... the meaning, ideas, the finer things, depth of meaning, depth of understanding. [T]he idea of 'civilisation' is that these two human projects are integrated and really help one another. It's not just that they coexist, it's that they actually assist one another." (Armstrong 2009). In this sense, a 'flourishing community' is a 'civilised community'.
- 38 See Armstrong 2009. It can be objected that the metaphor of 'flourishing' is inappropriate to human society, since trees and weeds can 'flourish' – mindlessly. However, Armstrong argues that, "Flourishing is compatible with all sorts of pains and difficulties and losses and disappointments..... So the fact that someone is living a really ... rich and interesting and viable life, doesn't mean that they're going to feel .... buoyant and cheerful all the time because many of the important processes in life, having relationships, bringing up children, undertaking risky but serious work, are going to involve disappointment, frustration, loss, anxiety and so on. So I think that flourishing is helpful because it doesn't give us this misleading idea that living a good and worthwhile life is the same as being .... cheerful and buoyant all the time."
- 39 Steur and Marks (2007: 33) suggest a range of factors that together might provide a measure of the extent to which individuals are 'flourishing' – or, in Steur's and Marks's terms, enjoying better 'well-being'. Their list includes: self-reported limiting long term illness; satisfaction with present standard of living; feeling able to demonstrate competence in daily life; quality of time spent with family; satisfaction with support received from others; feeling of belonging to neighbourhood; satisfaction with access to green spaces; perceptions of anti-social behaviour; and sense of fair treatment by local services.
- 40 In order to develop processes that will maximise the utility of the data collected and analysed, CAs should also explore:
- the development of benchmarking clubs, perhaps using the good offices of bassac; and
  - the use – say on a three-yearly cycle – of self-evaluation reports, based on the data that they collect, that are then formally reviewed by peers (or by Adam Smith's 'impartial spectators' much relied upon by Sen 2009, see pp. 44-6 and 124-152) and service-users. Such reports can have a very simple structure, exploring three questions: (a) what is the CA trying to achieve?; (b) how does it know that it is succeeding?; and (c) how might it do these things better?

These elements would strengthen CAs' strategy formation and service-delivery performance and would combine to articulate a 'CA paradigm' that is backed with data and can then be used to counter the power of the presently dominant paradigms that threaten the survival – or at least the continued achievement of their fundamental holistic and responsive purposes, their very *raison d'être* – of CAs that do not have massive capital.