The management of regeneration: processes and routes to effective delivery

By Alan Southern

Introduction
(by Neil McInroy Director, CLES)

For over 20 years we have seen an impressive array of regeneration initiatives. Since the advent of a Labour Government in 1997 the range of initiatives has increased. Whilst there have been notable successes, their impact is variable. In attempting to increase the effectiveness of these initiatives, it is now increasingly recognised that 'delivery' is one of the key factors in ensuring positive success. In this *LOCAL WORK* Alan Southern from the University of Liverpool Management School, begins the process of teasing out those elements of success by focussing on the Management of Regeneration. In this Alan provides a route map to what makes a successful Regeneration Manager.

Why regeneration management is important

There is no single cause of the deprivation that blights many communities in the UK. Regeneration is multifaceted and regeneration 'managers' often deal with the symptoms rather than causes of deprivation. Their effort and commitment is a valid contribution in the fight against many of the most acute social and economic problems existing. However, precisely because the problems of degeneration are manifold, the management of regeneration needs to be efficient and clearly defined.

The different aspects of regeneration mirror the many and varied professions and careers within the field. It is no coincidence that regeneration has become an encompassing term that includes many people working in the public, private and voluntary sector. Whether projects are centred on health, education, transport or small firms' regeneration managers operate under quasi-market conditions and public sector accountability. Most regeneration initiatives develop as short-term projects. This is almost entirely due to the very nature of funding mechanisms that in turn, produce a particular set of difficulties to manage. It is these different aspects of regeneration that make the context of social, economic and physical renewal varied, interesting, energetic, complex and often chaotic.

The context of regeneration management

The context of regeneration management is a contradictory one. Too much top-down managerialism can displace the social and political dynamics that often operate locally. Places in need of regeneration are also fertile ground for contestation and conflict as well as for consensus building. Regeneration managers should serve as mere enablers assisting the development of a greater understanding of the causes of deprivation, and developing an overall increase in the social capital of a local community, thus making

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their job redundant. The paradox is that too much managerialism will sanitize the local political arena and this can be to the detriment of social, economic and physical regeneration.

The context of regeneration management results in a tendency for regeneration projects to look organisationally similar. Many initiatives take the form of 'small and medium sized public enterprises'.[1] It is common for regeneration managers to pursue particular targets and outcomes, to answer to a distinctive form of governance, to be 'funding-hungry', work in entrepreneurial ways, and to have multiple connections with other agencies. The social and economic ideals that underpin regeneration act to drive forward the processes of regeneration. Simultaneously, the limits to resources create an orthodox and rationale based managerial response that may well be antagonistic to the pursuit of social values and objectives. This potential conflict makes the management of regeneration different and possibly, more difficult than mainstream private sector management.
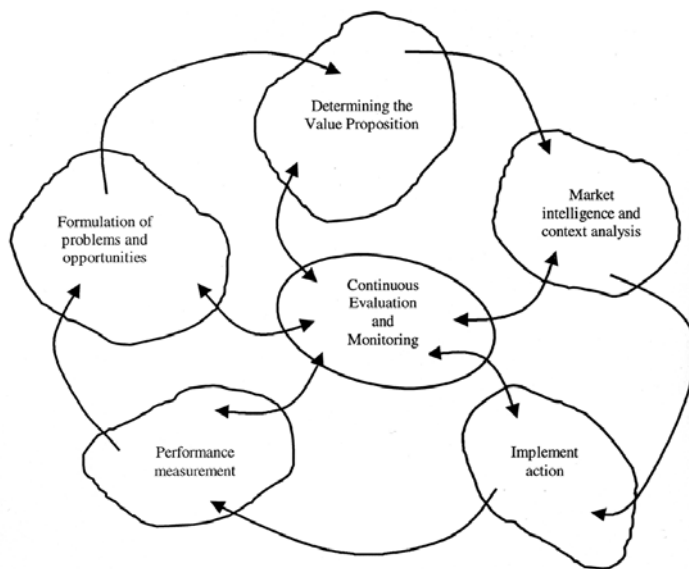
The process of regeneration management

The process of regeneration management is cyclical not linear. During the processes of early analysis, implementing action, measuring performance and through to the formulation of new problems and opportunities, regeneration managers should seek to have in place adequate systems of *evaluation and monitoring*, which feedback into the regeneration management cycle continuously (see Figure 1).

Determining the 'value proposition'

The value proposition is the essence of the regeneration initiative. It helps to capture what the aims and objectives of regeneration are to be, in identifying the problem to be addressed, in determining who the beneficiaries are and how they are to

Figure 1. The Cyclical Process of Regeneration Management

benefit. Yet the value proposition is the most difficult thing for managers to capture. However, it is only when the problem to be addressed is identified that a response can be initiated, and then conceptualised and planned.

Using the value proposition as a key initial milestone compels an active response, but at this stage the scope for intervention will still in theory be wide ranging. It will prompt a need for market intelligence, drawing for example on indices of deprivation. Then consideration is paid to the people who need to be involved, bringing about more thought concerning other resources required to support change, and so on. These act to scope the particular initiative and are based around a set of fundamental questions that include 'what are the social and economic objectives? What is the need for this project or service? What are the requirements of the beneficiaries? How can the project be staffed? What skills are needed to make this successful? And what is the timescale of intervention?' While the value proposition may appear to be business-like, it is essentially driven by the need for social and economic assistance and the call for interventions.

Evaluation and monitoring

In evaluating and monitoring, regeneration managers should be

wary of over control, of placing too much importance on retrospective data analysis and over emphasising formulaic outputs. Recent experiences in measuring outputs in the health service and in primary education have demonstrated how the search to meet formal (often quantified) targets can easily become a main managerialist reaction to expectations set out from funding bodies. Regeneration management that considers impact and change to be of key importance will regard outputs and results in a developmental sense, underpinned by a deeper and more qualitative process of change assisted by ongoing evaluation.

Moores and Spiers identify evaluation and monitoring as integral parts of the regeneration process. They see the aims of this to assess the project against specific targets in "a systematic and transparent manner, to inform the review or revision of the original targets and actions, and to arrive at a judgement overall of the outputs of the scheme and the added value it brings."[2] The authors put forward a distinguishing set of features that include setting strategic objectives, assessing inputs and expenditures, defining activity measures, measuring outputs, and determining gross and net impact. There can be little doubt that the process of evaluation is essential. Not only does it support clarity in determining scope of responsibility, but if correctly developed can link qualitative aspects of regeneration,

such as residents feeling good about safety and security, with the more rigid quantifiable outputs.

In reviewing the work of social enterprise Paton notes how evaluation of performance requires an input from those who are centrally involved in the initiative.[3] This is equally applicable in the regeneration arena where evaluation and monitoring should be a negotiated part of management and not perceived as some unitary and stable objective as more formal approaches believe it to be. While evaluation requires independent confirmation at key stages of the regeneration process, managers should consider just when the potential and perceived beneficiaries (key stakeholder groups) should become involved in this important process. The current period of regeneration is challenging orthodox processes of public sector management. Now is the time for community engagement in a very real sense – yet this is also a time when the communities in need of support are least likely to respond to orthodox methods of consultation and limited invitations to participate.[4] Ideally, participatory evaluation would be included in the operational plan of a regeneration initiative, but in a similar way to community engagement and capacity building, this form of participation is difficult to achieve.

In participatory evaluation beneficiaries, project workers and other stakeholders can actively shape the evaluation process and feed their critical observations into the cycle of regeneration. To ensure rigour in the continuous process of evaluation the regeneration manager needs to be confident of the investigations and data gathering conducted by project stakeholders. To accomplish this, time and resource are required for: data triangulation – where different methods and investigators draw information on the same feature and compare consistency and inconsistency in their results; stakeholder analysis where difference and consensus is identified and used constructively to achieve direct and relevant feedback; and impact analysis to shape the way performance of the project is measured.

Participatory evaluation is complex and hard to realize. It takes the regeneration initiative into a cycle of

Table 1. Reflecting on the process of regeneration management

Question to consider	Why the question is important
When are the beneficiaries of the initiative involved?	This is when the regeneration project is up and running. Regeneration managers need to consider whether or not involvement should come sooner and how appropriate early participation is. It is not easy to achieve participation at any time, and it may not always be appropriate to do this early.
What is the value proposition?	Regeneration management may well be business like but it is not a business as such. Regeneration management will encompass a particular set of ethics, a vision, a mission, and a set of (probably diverse) stakeholders.
Is managing regeneration a cyclical or linear activity?	Key managerial processes are cyclical. However, there are functions of regeneration management that also require attention, functions which are crucial in supporting the cycle of management.
Is regeneration management hierarchical or democratic?	Regeneration managers need to consider the processes of accountability, when and to whom. Top-down measurement pressures can be challenged through participatory evaluation systems. This is because outputs previously determined and without the involvement of beneficiaries may not meet the needs of the local stakeholders.

continuous learning, iteration and refinement that allow for rhetorical concepts such as 'best practice' to be put to the test. It raises features of regeneration that with the best will in the world are rarely identified, such as ownership and the ethics of the project, to support participation that enables change. The process of regeneration management can encourage people to participate but this is clearly a challenge for managers. With this in mind Table 1 poses a number of questions regeneration professionals might consider in the early stages of regeneration.

A Route Map to being a Successful Manager

The managers of regeneration require a wide diversity of experience and expertise. The portfolio of skills and attributes that those who manage the regeneration process are likely to need are at the same time both generic and particular. Regeneration managers come from many professions: local authorities, planning, teaching, business. They will all, however, have to manage the regeneration process and engage in management functions.

Contained within the functions that regeneration professionals are expected to manage, there should be a general level of skills in the following areas:

- **General organisational skills.** These are necessary to develop the regeneration project. Sound financial planning is an essential organisational trait needed to underpin a clear value proposition, and to support the social and business case. The organisational abilities of the regeneration manager will draw together many of the management functions set out below.

- **Human resource management.** Few, if any, regeneration projects involve only one person. Regeneration managers need key skills that help them to recognise the strengths and values members of the project team may bring to regeneration. Human resource management not only requires skill to encourage initiative, but also authority to help navigate personal difficulties. Good skills here support the objectives of the project particularly around community development.

Strategic management. This aspect of management can be embodied in the process of regeneration, from start-up to exit. Constant monitoring and evaluation can help the regeneration manager to identify the social and economic threats and opportunities that the external environment can bring. The internal environment is likely to require an 'organisational culture', something that is demonstrated through a clear articulation of the purpose of the project, in other words, a culture that explicitly supports the value proposition.

Performance management. The management of performance is needed to provide reliable and robust information to support evaluation, monitoring and social auditing. While ultimately this will also need independent confirmation, regeneration managers need to have some knowledge of the impact of their efforts. A key part of the management of performance is the way information is used to feedback and strengthen or change the trajectory of the project (see above).

Marketing management. While place marketing is often associated with regeneration management, this is an aspect limited to only a small number of regeneration initiatives.[5] It may seem odd that regeneration initiatives would require marketing skills, but regeneration managers often have to convince a wider audience of the need to 'buy-in' to the activities that are put in operation. In an operational sense marketing is not likely to mean glossy brochures and superior web pages, but can mean marketing services to a local community, to a set of small businesses or to young parents.

Relationship management. Managing relationships is crucial in developing regeneration, and in ensuring successful regeneration. Regeneration managers have to manage a myriad of relationships that develop through the lifetime of a project. Regeneration managers have different roles to play in partnerships, networks, in consensus building and in brokerage. This skill is rarely acknowledged.

Technology management. Skills in the management of technology will depend on the type and scale of regeneration initiative. Initiatives that are technology-led, for example those concerned with information and communication technologies, will need a greater level of knowledge and expertise than those projects that use technology as a tool to support the regeneration process. At the very least, basic information system management skills will help to prepare the appropriate systems that are necessary to aid evaluation, monitoring and decision-making.

Risk management It may be a mistake to ignore the management of risk in regeneration. This is because regeneration projects have inherent risks attached to them. Sometimes these are articulated in the proposal (for example being concerned with displacement of other activities). However risks are more widespread and include social, economic and environmental risks. Risk consciousness is increasingly regarded as an important aspect of public sector management and we should encourage regeneration professionals to be aware of this aspect of management.

The functions of management identified here will not capture all the characteristics of every regeneration manager. Other aspects of regeneration management not covered here include interaction with the customers of regeneration, dealing with scale – both in terms of resources and geography – expectations and impacts, legal matters and of course the importance of bidding for funds. The requirement of the regeneration professional is to develop both generic and specific skills, and for this she or he requires support from both government and accreditation agencies.

Summary

It is unlikely during the next few years that many more new regeneration programmes will be initiated. This is going to be a period of consolidation and will involve attention being paid to 'bending mainstream services' that can support ongoing programmes of regeneration. It will also be a time when outputs and impacts will be scrutinized. Regeneration managers need to think carefully about the types of effect their project will have. Expectations from regeneration are constantly being raised. It is therefore important that those involved in regeneration consider the processes and functions of management with some clarity. Support for regeneration managers should help them recognise the iterative development involved in managing the regeneration process, and to identify the skill needs and levels of expertise they are able to draw upon. There is still much to do in supporting this group of dedicated professionals.

References

1   This term, SMPE, is used to describe a distinctive type of organisation that has emerged in the public sector. See Hoggett, P. (1996) New modes of control in the public service, *Public Administration*, 74.

2   See Moore, B. and Spires, R. (2000) Monitoring and evaluation, in Roberts, P. and Sykes, H. (Eds.) *Urban Regeneration: A Handbook*, Sage: London, pp. 205.

3   Paton, R. (2003) *Managing and Measuring Social Enterprises*, Sage: London.

4   See Banks, S. and Shenton, F. (2000) Regenerating neighbourhoods: a critical look at the role of community capacity building, *Local Economy*, 16 (4).

5   See for example 'Lesson 8' pp. 59-60 cited by Shaw, K. and Robinson, F. (1998) Learning from experience? Reflections on two decades of British urban policy, *Town Planning Review*, 69 (1).