



'The Big Society' or 'The Third Way'
When spin takes over, reality leaves the room!

By Pat Dade (who should know)

I have been a researcher for more years than I care to remember. I have been, variously, a consultant and advisor to many major organisations – corporate and otherwise – in both the public and private sectors. My views have been sought on the application of research to campaigns and communications targeted at behaviour change in all its forms. I have had the pleasure – and the dismay – of working with all three main political parties (at Westminster) while they were out of power.

While I have worked with many government departments, I have only once worked with Downing Street. I was called in by the No.10 Policy Unit in the early days of the first Blair term to be part of a group to help advise the government on the meaning and application of the 'Third Way'.

Now, I love the projects that I work on and I am stimulated by the professionalism and drive of all our clients - but this was something special. I was very excited. I diligently interrogated our database and prepared my thoughts - mentally comparing the project to the work that had been done by the Clinton Administration. I have to say I was more impressed with the yearning of the British population, as shown in our research, than I was by the application of the American government of the time.

Our research showed that a significant proportion of the population had already moved beyond the 'left vs right' political orientation that has dominated British politics for over 100 years. This 'New Way' was in a Values area that was primarily populated by traditional Labour voters and Liberal Democrats.

Portending the Values shifts that would culminate in the defeat of 'New Labour' 13 years later, New Labour voters tended to hold more traditional views but also to be more disengaged from the political process. The continuation of traditional 'left vs right' political orientations have led to what David Cameron has called 'Broken Britain' - people no longer engaged with the political process.

Anyway, back to the story.

On the day, I show up all bright eyed and bushy tailed, ready to help the Government to apply Third Way thinking to the whole range of initiatives over which they have power.

The Third Way seemed the perfect solution – the empowerment of the Queen's subjects to change their behaviours in such a manner that they became active citizens, working through their own expertise as the people who were 'closest' to the issues, problems and opportunities in their own communities. Now was the time for those 'in power' to begin to enable those 'without power' and facilitate their energies and passions alongside the non-governmental organizations who 'could help' – using their resources of money and expertise, in their own self interest of course – to implement changes in the lives of 'ordinary people' who couldn't achieve changed behaviours using the limited pool of skills in their communities.

This was the ultimate win-win situation that I had been encountering in the boardrooms of our major clients for years. The urge to become more involved in the communities where they were located was a theme that ran through every discussion about the future of their enterprises. This was also a theme that had run through various community groups we had



worked with, as they attempted to organize and publicise their issues – often with little more than ‘word of mouth’ methods.

We had been involved in discussions with community groups in London and various think tanks when it looked like the GLC was going to be reformed, after being abolished during the Thatcher years, and this theme came up time after time – government not telling people what to do, but coordinating, advising and ‘skilling up’; involving citizens in the ways and means of changing behaviours in their communities.

The Third Way seemed to offer a natural progression away from ‘left vs right’ into a whole new method of political discourse for the 21st Century – a method that would be led by the changing values of the British population and not imposed by a traditional political framework.

The host for the day was a very principled man who I believed really wanted to just “dot the i’s and cross the t’s” intellectually on a project that he had the expectation was well thought out and ready for implementation by policy makers and administrators waiting for their instructions.

I think his disappointment was as great as mine at the end of the meeting.

The vast majority of the participants were so unlike the population that we had been measuring for decades that, literally, they had no idea of how to unleash the creativity of the multitude of British communities, and had even less idea of how corporate boards would become involved at community level. Too many of them had no conception of how Values determined the way people would react to government stimuli. They had no idea of what the ‘Third Way’ was, or could be. This was not because they were not capable of thinking – these were some very powerful and developed minds – it was more that they were incapable of thinking through the minds of other people and were instead tied to their own conceptions of ‘what was good for other people’.

Without a solid basis for understanding the minds of ‘other people’ this orientation lead decision makers and advisors to fall back on anecdotal evidence or limited studies on small groups of the population. This lead to a lot of hot air and personal opinions masquerading as professional insight. After all, everyone has the right to an opinion and therefore the right to rebut the opinion of others if it doesn’t agree with theirs. The old adage says that the more decision makers there are in the room the more likely it is that more data and less knowledge will emerge from the session. (Actually, I just made that up).

I guess New Labour did come up with a ‘Third Way’ in the creation of PFI schemes across many of the sectors in which they had power and patronage. They ‘listened’ to the voice of the people but only heard the shouts of the huge business consultancies and financial institutions that have subsequently laid waste to the economy, communities and individual hopes and desires within the body politic.

In an earlier piece, I wrote about the struggle between BOTU and Ubuntu, which is another way of trying to understand the basis for the Third Way or, as it being called now, the Big Society.

<http://www.cultdyn.co.uk/ART067736u/viewpoints/Ubuntu-BOTU.pdf>

Since those days of heady expectation at the start of the first Blair government, we have witnessed the continuing rise of those with BOTU values in acquiring the levers of power and patronage to the detriment of those holding Ubuntu values. This is nothing new – but



what is new is the numbers of people in British society who hold Ubuntu values - or Inner Directed values, in Maslow terms - compared to any other time in our history.

Britain is in a Values War at the moment and the Coalition is a symptom of the change so desired by a large portion of the population. The natural values-based antagonisms and the politics that resides at each end of this spectrum of political values can be seen in the follow-up article at

http://www.cultdyn.co.uk/ART067736u/viewpoints/Heartland_Ubuntu_BOTU.pdf

For those new to the CDSM values oriented viewpoint, this is a good introduction to the nature of the 'natural' stresses and strains within the new Coalition government. This is not the traditional 'right vs left' battle – this is the battle between the exercise of naked power (that constantly needs to expand by denying it to others) and the creation of a power base that also expands – but by constantly engaging and empowering others.

The solution to the very real issues raised by these Values orientations lies not in one gaining advantage over the other – but by honouring the Maslowian Needs of each and turning the satisfaction of those needs in 'the other' to a meeting of one's own needs. This is 'win-win' in Games Theory, which policy makers will be well aware of, but it is also how great campaigns of behaviour change have been conceived and applied. This is a universal definition of success - from political earthquakes and revolutions to world class brands of consumer products.

Over the years we have been involved in creating changes in all manner of cultural behaviours. At the present time we are working closely with consultants working to understand and change dysfunctional behaviours at the ground level in local communities. This is not the place for grand, billion pound, hi-tech projects – this is the place for unleashing the imaginations and desires of local people in their own communities.

This is the natural place to look for a cost effective creation of the Big Society and not a place to make those necessary budget cuts driven by the failure of the BOTU solutions.

At CDSM we are committed to improving constantly our cultural measurement tools and working hard to gain deeper insights from the data produced – with partner organizations ranging from consultancies and universities to businesses who demand greater involvement with their customer's communities from their decision makers. This wealth of experience COULD be used by the decision makers in the Coalition.

I haven't been invited to join the great and good advising the Coalition on ways of achieving their Big Society – yet.

Please feel free to pass on our name!