Where have all the radicals gone? How normative pressures can blunt the radical edge of a social enterprise.

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Where have all the radicals gone? How normative pressures can blunt the radical edge of a social enterprise.

Abstract.

Purpose: This paper tracks the operations of a radical social enterprise, ‘New Horizon’ which attempted to provide a different approach to improve the independent living and employment opportunities for disabled people. The longitudinal study covers a period from the New Labour project in the late 1990’s to current austerity measures.

Design methodology approach: The project applied an emancipatory disability research agenda which places both the social and material relations of knowledge in the hands of the disabled participants.

Findings: Under the neo-liberal marketization of public services, the radical nature of the organisation needed to be tempered as different stakeholder groupings required different and not always complementary approaches to be undertaken to maintain legitimacy. Neo-institutional pressures tended to drive the organisation towards conformity with similar more mainstream rivals meaning the radical approach which assisted the formation of the organisation became less observable.

Originality value: This longitudinal study of a radical disability organisation which is undertaken through an emancipatory disability research agenda provides a unique insight into a marginalised and largely disenfranchised group in society. The paper provides a voice for the disabled stakeholders of New Horizon and hence differs from the majority of social research in that interpretations and analysis arise from the knowing subjects of research as opposed to the more traditional non-disabled academic research community.

Social implications: This research provides a unique insight into the systemic challenges faced by a social enterprise attempting to improve the independent living/employment prospects of disabled people. The longitudinal nature of the study illustrates how similar radical social enterprises, policy makers and researchers can understand how normative forces act in opposition to radical agendas.

Article classification: Case study.

Key words: Disability, social enterprise, emancipatory research, neo-institutionalism, organisational legitimacy, radicals.

Introduction.

This paper provides a longitudinal account of a social enterprise, ‘New Horizon’ with the mission of promoting independent living for disabled people with both physical and cognitive impairments. Initially the research commenced in 2000 as an ethnographic study lasting
approximately 24 months. Over the following 15 years contacts were maintained and more recently interviews held with several stakeholders in 2015. This tracking of the organisation allowed a reflexive account to be undertaken through the changing political and economic conditions over this 15-year period. The lifetime of New Horizon commenced under the New Labour project in 1997 and continues through austerity politics today. One common theme through these administrations is a neo-liberal agenda (Wigan 2012). This involves a drive towards the marketisation of public services with all political parties actively promoting partnerships through funding mechanisms across sector boundaries. This drive towards partnerships has economic rationality at its core resulting in cross political agreement that partnerships provide the most efficient means to deliver many public services (Somerville 2011; Hogg and Baines 2011). One significant change for New Horizon has been the move from grants as a means of financial assistance to targeted funding for the delivery of specific programmes under contract conditions (Hogg and Baines 2011). It is the difficulty in meeting measurable targeted outcomes for the provision of independent living which provided many challenges.

The concept of independent living is aimed at facilitating autonomy and self-determination in the everyday lives of disabled people (Brisenden 1986). This was achieved in New Horizon by providing support, advice, guidance, and employment related training. The organisation targeted paid employment as the most appropriate route to improving self-esteem, confidence, and hence independence for disabled clients. The concept of independent living was central to the ideology of New Horizon, A number of senior managers were disabled wheelchair users who had a close affinity with the social constructivist theory of disability developed by the Union of Physically Impaired against Segregation from the mid 1960’s (Barnes, 1997). The host organisation also claimed to operate to the principles of the social model of disability (Oliver 1990). In brief, the social model of disability (SMD) proposes that disability is not causally linked to an individual and their impairment; rather it attempts to move understandings to argue disability is a socially constructed form of oppression caused by disabling attitudes and inappropriate built environments which disable impaired people (ibid).

New Horizon is located in the South of the UK, employed 35 people in 2000, increasing to 50 shortly after 2008, and in 2015 had a workforce of just 15. New Horizon’s funding originated from a number of sources including contracts awarded through local government, partnerships with other agencies delivering training, together with money raised from New Horizon’s own traditional clothing charity shop. Any profits were reinvested to improve the delivery of its mission.

However, during its early years of operation funding was principally reliant on three contracts: local authority partnerships supplied two contracts, the first, ‘into work’ attempted through short IT training courses to move disabled clients directly into paid employment; a second, ‘preparation’ was to provide confidence and routine building training for those not ready to directly enter labour markets; the third ‘education plus’ came from the local educational partnership and delivered training to young adults who had been excluded from mainstream education. New Horizon provided work experience for its clients on the first two work related contracts through a variety of schemes. One provided Information Technology experience in their own offices; other people were offered retail face to face customer service sector experiences through working in their own charity shop; with others being asked to act as collectors of donated items (principally clothing) for the charity shop. The excluded young adults in ‘education plus’ were taught basic literacy and numeracy skills in the offices of New Horizon.
This paper will chart three areas of operations over the past 15 years to analyse the effect that political and economic policy has had on an organisation claiming to be radical by attempting to provide a different approach to the life chances of disabled people. These operations are to do with contracts, internal recruitment practices and the organisation’s relationship to charity. Contracts were and remain the principal source of revenue for the organisation. However, increasingly the contracts have been reduced in size and subjected to open tendering under market conditions which meant the organisation became drawn towards a private sector competitive business model which saw the organisation shrink in size. Originally New Horizon put into practice positive recruitment programmes which resulted in disabled employees holding positions at all levels of the organisational hierarchy from managing director to office cleaner. The paper will review how working in partnership as part of a supply chain has forced the organisation to conform with more traditional approaches to recruitment and selection and how the organisation attempted to move away from traditional approaches to charity and the contradictions it found itself having to accept. After describing the methodological approach used and providing a brief account of New Horizon’s structure, the paper discusses the issue of organisational legitimacy in terms of the theory of neo-institutionalism. There then follows an in depth discussion of New Horizon’s three operational areas – contracts, recruitment and the organisation’s relationships with charities. Finally, after a short account of where New Horizon find themselves today, the paper concludes with an analysis of how they got there, discussed through the prism of neo-institutionalism.

Methodological approach.

This research was based on a 24 month ethnographic study and a long term reflexive study. The ethnographic research commenced in 2000 and was carried out over the next two years. This detailed study was made possible after being invited to join the Board as a non-executive director. This facilitated access to Board and management meetings and the day to day working relationships with a number of operational staff. After the ethnographic study was over, contact was maintained through email, telephone and various social events.

The following methods were used in collecting data for the research:-

The ethnographic study (2000-2002)

- During the ethnographic study, participatory observations were carried out during board meetings, informal discussions with several staff at all levels and discussions outside working hours during leisure events.
- Semi-structured interviews were conducted with staff from all levels of the organisation.
- Documentary data analysis was carried out on board minutes, publicity materials, organisational records, email, and documents from external agencies.

Returning to New Horizon (2003-2015)
Between the years 2003 and 2015 several significant policy changes had been introduced by government. New Horizon had engaged with the impacts of policy and their responses had been put in the public domain through their own website. Hence it was possible to chart the implications of these policy changes on the organisation. Critical reflection was essential in relating changing political environments over the long term and reactions to these changes from the organisation. On returning to the organisation a number of semi-structured interviews were undertaken with senior management.

New Horizon invited the research to be undertaken and all involved gave their informed consent. However, as the organisation concerned is still operating, to ensure no harm or distress is caused to either the organisation or any of its stakeholders, many details have been altered. The events discussed did take place, but much of the surrounding descriptive information including individual and organisational names have been altered to ensure anonymity.

It has been claimed ethnographic research provides better opportunities to afford social change (Davis 2000:193), because it ‘frequently comprises of a detailed study of small groups of people … interacting inside a complex society’, with its principal purpose to reveal social, cultural, and normative interactions (ibid). However, this study varies from most ethnographic research in that it applied an emancipatory approach.

In accordance with emancipatory disability research agendas (Oliver 1992), the social and material relations of knowledge production were placed in the hands of disabled researchers and practitioners. However, this is not to argue that all power relations are now equal. As an academic with training and skills in research, despite also having a disability, the participant voices were inevitably filtered through the lens of the researcher’s analysis thus privileging that interpretation. Nonetheless, the research was guided by the principles of the social model of disability, the research agenda was determined by disabled practitioners; the lead researcher was disabled; with disabled practitioners providing feedback over the interpretations of findings. For some (Oliver 1992; Oliver and Barnes 1997), the majority non-emancipatory traditional research on disability has been flawed and simply reproduces historical oppressive power relations. By undertaking this project designed to give a voice to the disabled participants of the research, the intention is to provide a critical reflection by disabled people which can hopefully inform others in relation to the pressures and power relations any disabled persons’ organisation may face when attempting to influence and achieve social change. To some extent this approach aligns with the call from Dey and Steyaert (2012), for researchers in social enterprise to engage on a more critical trajectory by focusing more on practitioner perspectives (90). This paper adopts such an approach by providing an account of the voices of disabled social enterprise practitioners. However, it is acknowledged here that this paper represents one interpretation of events, there exist others.

Some (for example, Shakespeare and Watson 2002), question whether SMD principals including the lack of any acceptance that impairment can play a part in how an individual understands disability limits the possibilities of the model. Several employees of New Horizon had similar reservations over the reliance of the SMD to offer a comprehensive understanding of disability. There was no accommodation by New Horizon of views which challenged the SMD and consequentially several staff left the organisation for ideological reasons. This aspect of New Horizon is outside the scope of this paper, however, the purpose of indicating such issues is to accept the analysis offered here is restricted and does not and
cannot cover all views and opinions in the organisation. It does though introduce an interesting issue of power relations, even within an organisation fighting for equality and social justice. The more powerful voices cannot accommodate a fundamental challenge to the truth claims made in this case inside the SMD.

The challenges of external normative pressures.

Despite the control of the organisation and the research agenda being informed through social model of disability principles, the organisation was funded primarily through contracts with income dependent on meeting targets determined by funders. In effect, this meant that although internal practices could be controlled by New Horizon, external partners including funders could not. Funders require demonstrable and accountable results from the public money provided. So, although New Horizon could operate internally on principles emerging from the SMD, in practice it was also required to operate in partnership with other much larger and more powerful organisations within a supply chain relationship. Here lay the seeds of conflict. New Horizon required contracts with more powerful organisations who did not necessarily share the values and beliefs embedded in the SMD. The question then becomes an issue of aligning organisational values and beliefs so that there were no significant ideological differences which could negatively disrupt the workings of a partnership relationship. It is not suggested here that all partnership relationships can only succeed if organisations hold complimentary values and beliefs. However, it is suggested such partnerships have a tendency towards homogenisation where consistent standards, approaches, and values create more effective partnerships. As New Horizon was attempting a radical alternative approach to reducing disability which other partners did not follow, it is worth considering from a theoretical perspective the forces which can drive organisations towards homogeneity.

Neo-institutionalism and the maintenance of organisational legitimacy.

It is important for the survival potential of any publically funded not-for-profit organisation to maintain legitimacy with their key stakeholders (Euske & Euske 1991; Scott & Meyer 1983). This legitimacy infers a level of trust when turning inputs i.e. public funding into the desired social outcomes the money was intended to deliver. Hence, organisational survival can be dependent on the positive web of interaction with key stakeholders (ibid). The drive to maintain legitimacy is also linked to the impression that quality is delivered by the organisation as some tend to associate social enterprises with lower quality (Hockerts, 2015).

Neo-institutional theory is useful in understanding the ways in which organisations increase their legitimacy with stakeholders by conforming to rules, norms and values through three isomorphic processes, coercive, normative and mimetic (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). Common practises are often developed between partners although they often conform to processes that are used frequently rather than those which are the most efficient (Ineland, 2005). In relation to New Horizon, neo-institutional isomorphic forces would appear on the surface to be a challenge as for any organisation seeking to provide radically different approaches in their delivery of services since these forces may appear to be acting to force conformity rather than accept differences. For example, coercive processes reinforce the rule of law that controls organisational activities (Scott, 2008). Similarly the normative elements, which involve ‘managerial behaviours at the level of taken-for-granted assumptions’
(DiMaggio & Powell, 1983:149), is associated with professionalism and conformity to accepted benchmark standards in any particular field of operations. Finally, mimetic forces drive actions towards copying or mimicking other organisations when outcomes of actions may appear uncertain or unpredictable (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Scott, 2008). Dey and Steyaert (2012) suggest that any drive to normalisation and taken for granted assumptions regarding the relationship between social enterprise and economic instrumentalism is problematic. That is, that predominately private sector business models and practices do not necessarily show a constructive way forward for understanding social enterprise (Dey and Steyaert 2012). This critique appears particularly relevant here. New Horizon attempted to forge new radical approaches to the employment of disabled people. This was required because the historical exclusion of disabled people from labour markets had been previously regarded in terms of a market failure (Hyde 1996). So, it seems somewhat perverse to conclude that being forced towards adopting more market solutions could offer increased employment opportunities, the raison d'être of New Horizon. **There are advantages of looking at New Horizon through a neo-institutional lens since it is equally interested in processual and long term developments especially in relation to issues of power.**

Having reviewed the theoretical forces which drive organisations towards conformity the following section will consider how contracts were managed and the impact the changing political landscape has had on New Horizon.

**New Horizon and contracted services.**

When the organisation first commenced operations they depended on contracts from the adult social services department of local authorities to deliver training programmes. They could apply SMD principles inside the organisation and providing the adult social services department were assured clients were being assisted to live independently then contract requirements were regarded as being fulfilled. However, assisting any individual to improve their independent living abilities is subjective and not easily quantified. Some simply need help in negotiating appropriate housing, others need far more for example dietary and exercise advice and support.

Under the adult social services contract there were no individual targets set for defining and delivering independent living. Hence, time and resources could be allocated by the organisation as they determined appropriate in each individual case. However, this approach has altered significantly as the present and previous Government’s desire to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of the delivery of public services has also included the transfer of private sector management practices into the public sector. This has been referred to as ‘managerialism’, or New Public Management, defined here as the increased use of performance indicators, performance targets and monitoring systems in order to demonstrate efficient returns on public investment (Prideaux 2001). New Horizon is influenced by these changes since funding is dependent upon achieving targets set by their funding agents. Hence, although the organisation held a commitment to promoting the SMD in operations and practice, in reality it also needed to ensure continued funding which meant external targets must be met. Several of New Horizon’s staff had originally worked in the local authority’s offices and had close working relationships with adult social services and equality officers who originally had assisted in developing the concept of the New Horizon venture. During this close working relationship, the ideology of the SMD had been agreed and formed...
part of the rationale and desired outcome for allocating contracts to the newly created
organisation.

However, with the introduction of austerity from 2010 onwards (Gainsbury and Neville
2015), the majority of local authority departments including adult social services came under
severe pressure to reduce costs both in terms of funding of contracts and also through
reducing internal staff numbers. Hence, within the local authority many of the staff who
promoted and understood the concept of New Horizon either left or retired meaning the
continuity of support was also lost. These structural changes in local authority services did
have significant impacts on New Horizon. Along with the reduction in funding, austerity
cuts also meant the unique methodology and approach of New Horizon was also lost, with the
organisation now looking for much smaller contracts, which are again now subject to open
tendering meaning any organisation can now compete on a lowest cost basis. New Horizon
had offered one to one peer support for disabled people who were ‘distant’ from the labour
market, an individualised approach other suppliers need not provide.

The intent when creating New Horizon was to test a hypothesis that an organisation run and
controlled by disabled people ideologically wedded to the SMD could provide an efficient,
radical approach to the persistent exclusion, marginalisation, and discrimination faced by
disabled people (Barnes 1997). To be in a position to even test the hypothesis required
significant local political, financial, and ideological support. All these conditions were met
and the organisation operated and grew from its origins for at least a 12-year period until
austerity and financial cuts meant both political and financial support became significantly
reduced. The organisation in order to survive had to adapt to the new political and economic
reality of austerity and accept that whilst block contracts were a thing of the past, new more
competitive opportunities existed within supply chains providing services to other
organisations and working as partners as opposed to a unique disabled person’s organisation.
They had always operated with other organisations providing services and assisting in
supporting disabled people. However, now having to operate as part of a larger supply chain
presented new challenges to the organisation. A significant aspect of working within supply
chains is being able to standardised systems, processes, and procedures which have a
tendency to produce homogeneity between organisations (DiMaggio and Powell 1983).

New Horizon no longer bids for the larger employment related contracts due to the
bureaucracy and ideological differences it has with other more powerful partners. However,
it does still engage in partnership work albeit as a minor partner often with housing
associations.

The core ideology of the organisation that is assisting in the facilitation of independent living
is still at the heart of operations. However, due to the problematic nature of working inside
large partnerships where the unique methodology and approach of New Horizon becomes of
secondary importance to cost savings, the focus on employment has reduced with housing
becoming a more prominent issue where the values of housing associations appear to be more
aligned with those of New Horizon. This is not to argue that no employment related work is
undertaken. In specific instances New Horizon has been invited to tender for individuals with
specific requirements which other more mainstream service providers have declined to
tender. This move towards individualised ‘one off’ commissions is far removed from the
block contracts originally won by the organisation and offers much less consistency in terms
of clients and income for the organisation. How the organisation generates other income
streams will be considered later during the discussion on the role of charity in New Horizon.
Here the paper moves on to consider another important issue for the organisation which has fundamentally altered. That is, how their radical recruitment and selection process has changed as a result of the pressures to conform to more traditional systems.

**Changing staff recruitment practices in New Horizon.**

To place the recruitment practices during the early years of New Horizon in context it is helpful if an appreciation of how the different approaches to equality in relation to staff recruitment were formulated at that time. Today, equality and diversity frequently appear as a Human Resource concept offering a presumption that diversity management in organisations, by harnessing the skills and talents from the widest pool of applicants, can deliver equality and improve business performance (Torrington et al 2014). However, prior to the mid 1990’s and the movement towards diversity management, equal opportunities policies often guided organizational approaches to reducing and removing sources of structural inequality (Jewson and Mason, 1986). With several staff having moved from the local authority equal opportunities department and with the organization committed to providing equality for disabled people, New Horizon claimed a radical approach to the recruitment of disabled staff. Before looking at the implications of this policy in practice, it is first worth considering the theoretical understandings which helped formulate the recruitment policy.

**Liberal and radical approaches to equality in organisations**

Jewson and Mason (1986) made a distinction between liberal and radical approaches on the basis of means of implementation; the potential for achieving success, and how organisational members perceive the measures. Radical and liberal approaches differ on each aspect. The liberal approach rests on the assumption that if all persons are facilitated to enable free and equal access to compete for employment then equality of opportunity exists. Policies and procedures are thus required which contain no bias and are available to all. The method attempts to eliminate subjective bias, as far as possible, through the application of standardized processes although special treatment can be adopted. For example, individuals can be enabled and encouraged to compete, so long as the decision-making process is seen to be uncontaminated by personal influence. However, this liberal approach has difficulty in embracing the structural sources of social capacities and skills and, hence, the social sources of inequality (Jewson & Mason 1986, 314).

In contrast, the radical approach recognized that there are structural inequalities and disadvantages which cannot be overcome by merely introducing unbiased policies and procedures. Radical approaches argued that what is required to achieve equality is direct intervention in workplace practices. Equality was only achieved when the representation of previously disadvantaged groups amongst the workforce is proportional to their numbers in society. Consequently, the radical approach is driven by the outcome of policies rather than the existence of organisational equality policies and procedures. In other words, the emphasis rests on the delivery of outcomes rather than the perceived fairness of procedures (Jewson & Mason 1986, 315).
Those who supported radical approaches to equality argued that if minorities are not demonstrably represented throughout organisations then it follows that there is, *ipso facto*, discrimination irrespective of how fair any HR equality policies may seem or are claimed to be (Jewson & Mason 1986, 315-317). Radicals propose that ‘ability’ cannot be regarded as a neutral term but instead is defined in relation to the skills and behaviour of the dominant class or elite. So, any liberalisation of policies and procedures will simply result in the reinforcement of the position of that class or elite and hence perpetuate their social advantage. Thus, the emphasis increasingly becomes to recognise the political imperative in decision-making processes and then to challenge dominant ideologies by taking radical steps such as a policy of positive discrimination. Additionally, however, there is an emphasis that the critical evaluation of, for example, prescribed educational, technical, and experiential credentials is always necessary. This aspect was a key concern for New Horizon. For example, if jobs in the organization demanded educational qualifications as an essential element in a person specification then it could by default discriminate against any potential disabled employee who had suffered through a lack of appropriate education which would thereby perpetuate discrimination.

**New Horizon’s pragmatic approach.**

Research into organisations has concluded that in practice confusion over the two approaches is common (Jewson & Mason 1986). In practice, New Horizon whilst championing radical approaches also applied liberal measures when needed. For example, jobs towards the lower end of the organizational hierarchy including assistant trainers, cleaners and some administrative assistants were recruited through a positive discrimination process whereas the more senior roles including finance and administrative managers needed people with appropriate qualifications, experience, and skills. The reasons for adopting two different recruitment strategies inside the one organization can be considered from the perspective of both common sense and the need to provide legitimacy to different stakeholder groupings. New Horizon were able to demonstrate to the wider disability community they did have policies and practices in place which provided different and equal opportunities through their radical recruitment policy. They could legitimately argue practices were in place which increase the percentage of disabled staff employed by the organization which in the year 2000 was 35%, significantly more than the national average. The organization also argued, in a defence against any claims that all the jobs were at the lower levels in the organization, that a liberal approach was essential to recruit a financial and technical manager who were not disabled to ensure organizational finances were correctly controlled and managed. The rationale provided to other disabled stakeholders also argued that as internal structural barriers to progression had been removed the key issue was allowing disabled employees entry into the organization and once there, the barrier free environment would offer the potential to gain skills and qualifications and hence in time, move up the organizational hierarchy.

Looking towards business partners including funders, having senior managers with appropriate qualifications and experience provided the necessary legitimacy to ensure working in partnership with New Horizon would be no riskier than any other comparable organization due to the professional standards and qualifications held by all senior management. Hence, the need to demonstrate that the requirement for qualifications and experience discriminates against the employment of disabled people because they have fewer
opportunities to acquire either, could, on occasion, be overridden. If the choice was between a 
non-disabled person with the necessary skills and experience and a disabled person with no 
skills and experience, then the likely outcome is that the former rather than the latter would 
have been employed. If both disabled and non-disabled applicants had the same human 
capital then under a social model and a radical equality approach, the disabled candidate 
would be privileged in order to increase the proportion of disabled people. This provided a 
much better outcome from the perspective of a radical agenda based on the social 
model. Employing a disabled person who held appropriate qualifications would keep both 
key stakeholder groupings convinced of the legitimacy of the organisation’s practices. In 
New Horizon, then, two different recruitment strategies were operating. One was based on a 
liberal approach which was predominantly applied to non-disabled people and the other was a 
radical approach which was applied only to disabled people. However, this dual approach to 
recruitment practices did cause problems in one partnership.

The local education partnership was one of the three principal contracts won by New 
Horizon. The value of the work was small in comparison to the two much larger local 
authority contracts which contributed approximately 95% of the company income. However, 
whilst the local authority had a much broader definition of outcomes and was more concerned 
with having clients engaged in employment and independent living programmes, the 
educational partnership was much more driven by targeted hard measurable outcomes which 
were dependent on their clients gaining specified qualifications. They also insisted on their 
own quality standards inspections which included a demand that New Horizon provided 
evidence of appropriate teaching qualifications for all its trainers. This could not be met as 
discussed earlier, since under the radical equal opportunities recruitment practices several 
assistant trainers had been employed based on their disabled status rather than academic or 
vocational qualifications. The educational partnership was not convinced by the radical 
equality arguments presented and demanded only trainers with the appropriate qualifications 
could work on the contract. The arrangement with the local educational partnership ended 
after 2 years with New Horizon deciding they would not alter their radical approach to 
recruitment and employment practices and so chose not to bid for the renewal of the contract.

**Losing the radical edge**

Moving forward to the practices in New Horizon more recently, it was found that the 
organization has been forced to abandon its radical recruitment practices. New Horizon still 
claims to offer preferential employment opportunities for disabled people inside the 
organization. The principal difference in current recruitment is that it now requires potential 
employees to already hold relevant qualifications. This is because due to cuts in overall 
staffing numbers, the opportunities for cleaners and administrative staff have declined with 
the remaining jobs appearing to require primarily skilled and qualified people. New Horizon 
still attempts to provide better employment opportunities to disabled people than other 
mainstream employers, what has changed over the years is their initial radical approach has 
moved more towards a diversity model which has removed the positive discrimination 
element in recruitment practices. This again offers evidence that under the pressures to 
compete and become similar to other service providers one radical difference of the 
organisation has been removed.

However, perhaps the most significant issue which has challenged New Horizon since it 
began operations is its relationship to charity. In promoting itself as offering a radical 
alternative approach, the organisation was extremely keen on removing charity from both its
business model and the lives of disabled people. This was largely due to the belief that charity linked disabled people to pity (Campbell 1990), and tended to consider disabled people as unfortunate due to their impairment rather than considering the social and structural barriers which disable impaired people (Oliver 1990). As the disability movement grew out of an opposition towards traditional views of charity and institutional oppression (Barnes 1997; Clifford 2014), which influenced the founders of New Horizon, the following section will consider the origins of the disability movement and especially the contradictions charitable status placed on the organisation.

Ideological origins of New Horizon.

It has been powerfully argued that disability politics from the late 1960’s occurred as a resistance movement in opposition to the dominant role charities held in disabled people’s lives (Barnes, 1997; Drake 1994; 1996). It is worth reviewing the relationship between New Horizon and the concept of charity because as an organisation founded on the basis of offering a different approach to disability, how it dealt with the concept of charity became a fundamental ideological issue. Before discussing the organizational response to charity it is first worth considering why charity became such a contentious issue for New Horizon.

In the mid-1960s an influential challenge to the traditional understanding of disability arose from disabled residents who lived in a Cheshire Home. Cheshire Homes are residential institutions which theoretically ‘cared’ for disabled people who were thought unable to care for themselves. In one of these homes, Le Court in Hampshire the residents were attempting to take greater control of their lives. Two medical experts Miller and Gwynne from the Tavistock institute, had been invited into the home to offer advice and suggest how improvements could be made (Miller and Gwynne, 1972). Briefly, the disabled residents were seeking more active participation in the running and decision-making processes which affected their lives. However, the expert medical advice given by Miller and Gwynne argued for the continuity of the existing power relations leaving all significant decision-making in the hands of the non-disabled professional experts. The argument provided suggested this was ultimately the most effective and efficient methods of ongoing support (ibid). Hence, groups of non-disabled medical experts and professionals regarded themselves as better placed to appreciate and limit the life chances of the disabled people. This led to the questioning by many disabled residents of the home of expert medical advice and the disabling attitudes from traditional charities who frequently operated hand-in-glove with the medical profession. The resulting rejection of the status quo provided the genesis of a resistance movement (Oliver 1990), which went on to call itself the Union of the Physically Impaired against Segregation (UPIAS). One of the founding members of UPIAS, Paul Hunt (1966) in his book ‘Stigma’ details the personal experience of disability and laid the foundations for a social model of disability. Hunt argued that disabled people were perceived as ‘unfortunate, useless, different, oppressed and sick’. This was due, Hunt argued, to the central and key role that work played in Western culture. Disabled people were viewed as ‘useless’ because they were considered to be incapable of contributing to economic prosperity (ibid).

This analysis can be seen as the catalyst for the formation of a disability movement which challenged traditional understandings of the causes of disability. Alinsky’s (1971) work which offers a pragmatic set of rules for radicals attempting to forge social change can be
used to consider how the UK disability radicals organised and became a mass political
movement. The residential home housed a number of people facing similar discriminatory
barriers who organise into a movement (UPIAS) and then challenge their social situation. The
symbol they could easily identify as symptomatic of their secondary social status was the
findings of the Miller and Gwynne report which confirmed the status quo was the most
appropriate solution residents could expect. Similar to Alinsky’s proposals for radicals,
(1971), the organised resistant disabled members of UPIAS theorised an alternative
emancipatory approach to remove disability which later became the social model of disability
(Oliver 1990).

For many in the disability movement the role of traditional charities linked to medical
determinism created an antagonism towards particularly large traditional charities for
disabled people as representatives of oppression and discrimination (Campbell 1990; Clifford
2014). For the founders of New Horizon, this historical account of the oppression embedded
in traditional understandings linked to charity held a powerful image and represented many of
the values the organization sought to overthrow. As mentioned earlier, several of the
founders were disabled wheelchair users and had personal experiences of disabling practices
both from the medical and traditional charity sector. However, the organization faced
significant dilemmas from the outset in relation to charitable status. Whilst ideologically the
organization opposed traditional charities and all they stood for, charitable status provides
considerable tax advantages for any organization. Hence, in the early years of operation the
organization had to wrestle with the thorny question of whether they should apply for
charitable status which could leave them open to a charge of ‘selling out’ from other radical
disabled activists and their groups in the wider disability community (Rea 2000).

The charity contradiction.

From 1999 a decision was made at board level that the organisation would apply for
charitable status. The principal reason given was that they could benefit from the
advantageous tax position that charitable status could bring (Chasse 1995, 4). However,
discussions with several Board members had suggested this was a contentious issue which
had not met with unanimous agreement.

The main source of resistance to applying for charitable status came from wheelchair users
and active radical members of the local Disability Alliance group. Their primary objection
lay in the persistence of the historical belief, held by many in the disability movement, that
traditional charities had been and still were responsible for a great deal of the oppression of
disabled people and that they had rarely promoted equal representation or employment
opportunities – a point also raised by Drake (1994, 1996). In effect the argument was driven
by the strong political implications for the organisation’s perceived legitimacy within the
wider disability movement if charitable status were to be secured. However, this view was
not supported by other Board members who expressed a general unease that the organisation
was too heavily dependent on the local authority fixed contracts. They argued that in
addition to the tax advantages, charitable status would allow the organisation to seek some
unconditional funding such as grants from a well-recognised variety of sources in the
charity/NFP sector (Cooté 2001; Gassler 1997). So, from early in the organisation’s life there
already existed a significant tension between the political desire to maintain legitimacy with
external stakeholders not least the wider disability movement and the demands of economic
rationality. Put another way, the normative and mimetic forces on the organisation forced
them towards a contradictory ideological position; they wanted to be seen opposing the values of dependency and oppression epitomised in charity, but charity also offered the potential for improved organisational independence and survival through increasing divergent funding streams.

In this instance the economic argument triumphed as New Horizon applied for and was granted charitable status. The political decision was taken to face any potential criticism and questions from other disabled people’s organisations by arguing solely on the basis of using the existing charity system to gain essential economic benefits which would provide the funds to allow the organisation to show how different approaches to disability could produce more equitable outcomes. In some respects, the approach could mirror one of tactical mimicry as identified by Dey and Teasdale (2015). New Horizon did not wish to be regarded as a charity but needed to mimic traditional charities as it made applications for funding from both government and other sources of funding more likely to succeed. This is due to charitable status providing a level of confidence that any funds would be given to a reputable and trustworthy organisation which could face legal sanction if any funds were misappropriated. Hence the organisation needed to accept the isomorphic pressures to become more like other similar organisations which provided legitimacy for some stakeholders whilst introducing a significant level of unease with more radical disabled stakeholders fearful of the ‘selling out’ charge. This does leave a residual question of how the founding disabled radical activists rationalise their situation within the organisation.

Meyerson and Scully (1995), theorised the concept of the tempered radical which can be applied to members of New Horizon. A tempered radical is an organisational member who identifies with and is committed to their organisation and with the causes and communities it supports. However, they can find themselves fundamentally at odds with the direction of the organisation but feel inclined to seek moderation with organisational members closer to the centre of establishing values and beliefs. Traditional charities were viewed by radicals as reproducers of inequality systematically if unintentionally, although the economic arguments to achieve charitable status meant the tempered radicals whilst maintaining their own personal values and beliefs could remain inside the organisation albeit with considerable reservations over the strategy of gaining charitable status. However, tempered radicals must speak to several constituencies, which can lead to them being regarded as too radical by one, and too conservative by another (ibid: 590). So, on the one hand the claims New Horizon made in terms of forging new understandings over the causes of and methods of reducing and removing discrimination could appear radical to more traditional charities and funding agents; whereas on the other, applying for and achieving charitable status could appear reactionary with claims of ‘selling out’ (Rea 2000) by the more radical disability community. The ideological tensions caused by the concept of charity were a difficult unresolved issue stemming from the genesis of the organisation and as will be discussed below, still exert contradictory feelings within the organisation today.

Charity, the Gordian knot of New Horizon.

The discussion so far has considered the ideological aspect of how gaining charitable status presented contradictory problems which appeared alien to the values and beliefs of the organisation. Economically appearing similar to other more traditional charities for disabled people would offer at least the appearance to many external stakeholders of a legitimate organisation trading for charitable purposes. The power associated with traditional charity
working to help assist disabled people was also a dominant rationale for the organisation opening its own charitable retail clothing shop. The intention of this venture was twofold: to increase the public profile of the organisation, and also to provide retail sector experience for disabled people. The retail shop was intended to act as a ‘stepping stone’, where disabled people with no previous work experience could gain training and be able to demonstrate to other employer’s skills and a successful work profile. However, the retail charity shop did not operate as planned and was closed recently. Effectively it operated as a quasi-sheltered workshop because of the lack of external retail job opportunities for the disabled staff to move into.

The difficulty the organisation faced had been replicated earlier by many other charities involved in the provision of sheltered workshops (Visier 1998). That was, sheltered workshops or environments were intended as places where disabled people with little or no working experience could gain skills and training which could then enable them to move into open employment. However, as with successive attempts since World War II to alter the employment opportunities for disabled people, all such attempts have met with little if any measurable success (Hyde 1996). One charge which could be laid at the door of New Horizon is perhaps over optimism. Although internally the organisation could operate to the principle of the SMD, to be in a position to prepare people for working inside open employment would also require other employers to accept that employing disabled people would not negatively impact their efficiency and productivity especially during times of economic uncertainty (Elliott 2016). Hence for New Horizon, the challenge was and remains one of altering historically persistent beliefs held by employers over the ability of disabled people to work efficiently and effectively. Such negative attitudes have appeared a perennial issue with unemployment levels amongst disabled people significantly higher than other demographic groups (Hyde 1996), a situation which still exists. Government statistics state in relation to the general population, disabled people are underrepresented in employment by over 30 percentage points (ODI 2014). However, as contracted services from local authorities, which were New Horizon’s principal sources of funding have significantly shrunk due to austerity measures (Gainsbury & Neville 2015), New Horizon has found itself forced to look towards more traditional charitable sources of revenue, a situation which still rests uneasily in the organisation. Currently two distinct strategies exist in relation to charity, the first is individual appeals, the second corporate sponsors. New Horizon used local events such as sponsored busks to make the general public and, more importantly, other disability groups and activists aware of their fund raising strategy. This could be viewed as a means of minimising criticism from this important stakeholder group. The buskers were disabled which allowed the organisation to showcase the talents and abilities of disabled people which acted to counter any claims in relation to ‘selling out’ to charity. This is because the fund raising was undertaken by disabled people for the benefit of others facing similar barriers and discrimination. However, the potentially more profitable fund raising was through corporate sponsorships which New Horizon actively sought.

Effectively New Horizon adopted the ‘gaze of Janus’ in relation to its charitable fund raising. They appealed to and were needed to accommodate two very different stakeholder groupings. The local disability community required a strategy whereby disabled people could be shown to be in charge of both being capable of raising funds and then distributing monies to improve the lives of other disabled stakeholders, which could be argued met and delivered organisational mission. On the other hand, corporate understandings of charity could still be regarded as representative of the worst excesses of traditional charity. This is because profit maximising corporates would be seeking the most efficient and productive employees and
they would not necessarily be able to demonstrate employment practices which delivered equality for disabled people. However, if the organisation is to continue trading then funds from corporates could be vital. Gaining funding from corporates although not ideal or even desirable was regarded as necessary because without funding organisational survival was in doubt. Clearly if survival itself was under threat, this could mean the radical approach taken by New Horizon would be lost with more traditional understandings taking their place.

Austerity presented New Horizon with a paradox. Survival in the face of lost local authority contracts meant they at least needed to appear and mimic other more traditional charity approaches which the organisation originally intended to consign to the dustbin of history. However, it was not only the reduction in funding from local authority contracts which forced mimicry of more traditional charities. Government policy towards disabled people’s organisations also required closer assimilation with the traditional charity sector.

Back to the future? Disabled people’s organisations and partnerships.

It is not simply the case that pressures on New Horizon have appeared solely as a response to the marketization of public services, government policy towards disabled people’s organisations has also taken a significant change of direction with the introduction of the Office for Disability Issues (ODI). This is now an office within the Department for Work and Pensions (ODI 2014). Consistent with other policy initiatives (Somerville 2011), the ODI actively seeks partnerships with a wide variety of disabled people’s user led organisations (DPULO), which includes many traditional charities. However, New Horizon is not a DPULO, it is a social enterprise run by disabled people who have the skills and expertise needed to operate a small business attempting to achieve social change. Again, the normative pressures this time from central government for social enterprises such as New Horizon to become closer to the model demanded i.e. similar to traditional charities acts to marginalise the radical basis of the social enterprise.

It would be incorrect to suggest New Horizon is an organisation which has lost direction and optimism in its mission. However, in relation to charity it has found moving away from the more traditional charity model a difficult proposition. Whilst it could defend its application to apply for charitable status as simply a means of gaining preferential tax status, working alongside traditional charities within a government promoted DPULO scheme is a far more difficult proposition if local disability groups and activists are to be convinced of the ongoing legitimacy of the organisation.

Conclusions.

New Horizon attempted to engage in a radical approach to independent living through providing greater employment opportunities for disabled people. They are a social enterprise to challenge previous approaches which frequently used market mechanisms and had failed (Hyde 1996). This point is relevant as many pressures which act on social enterprises appear to suggest market solutions offer the most beneficial outcomes for the sector (Dey and Steyaert 2012).

Undoubtedly austerity caused significant financial pressures to find alternative income streams, but other factors also contributed to the problems faced. There was a loss of political support from local authority contract commissioning staff as several key allies
became redundant in the face of government cuts. These cuts also forced the commissioning of employment services towards lowest cost competitive tendering which opened up competition to much larger private sector organisations. In the face of such severe pressures the organisation was forced to move away from one of its cornerstone priorities, employment, and towards other sources of revenue as smaller players in supply chain arrangements. However, such a move also brought ideological problems. For example, working inside a contracted partnership meant eventually conforming to a diversity approach to recruitment and selection (Torrington et al 2014), as opposed to radical equal opportunities (Jewson and Mason 1986). Other pressures additionally challenged the radical approach previously taken.

New Horizon, based on understandings forged from the creation of the disability movement, ideologically rejected charity as an oppressive force which had served to benefit charitable institutions rather than disabled recipients of those institutions. However, due to the tax advantages and the requirement for any donations to charity only to be available to registered charities, the organisation was compelled to register and become a charity. This became more important in recent years when they adopted a strategy of approaching corporates for financial support. Such normalising tendencies, which reinforce reactionary understandings of charity as opposed to radically alternative ones, can also be seen in government policy. The DPULO initiatives require small social enterprises to work alongside the much more powerful traditional charities and other large organisations in order to formulate and advise government policy. In effect, the drive towards normalised conformity presents a challenge to any radical social enterprise struggling to maintain its radical edge.

The question this paper set out to answer is where have all the radicals gone? Clearly some have left due to staffing cuts whereas others still remain, albeit perhaps not as vocal about their radicalism as before. Meyerson and Scully (1995) discussed how radicals inside an organisation may hold views and opinions which appear at odds with the organisation’s stated values and beliefs. This is not the case in New Horizon. Radical views still exist throughout although it is now the case that the tempered radicalism is observed not as an internal organisational phenomenon, but rather as something geared towards external partners. In other words, the radicals are still there, they simply maintain legitimacy with their stakeholders by imitating other successful players as they engage in tactical mimicry (Dey and Teesdale 2015), in a struggle for legitimacy which can ultimately determine organisational survival.

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