

IF CHARITY BEGINS IN THE BOARDROOM, WHERE DOES IT FINISH, AND HOW?

Charity, philanthropy, humanitarianism, or just old-fashioned social conscience - does business have a duty to invest some of its profits to promote the welfare of the less fortunate - and if it does, what's the most effective way to do it?

Business Eye teamed up with Giving Northern Ireland for a Round Table to explore philanthropy, Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and to debate if it is possible - or even desirable - to develop strategies that are good for both corporate donors and their recipients.

Established in 2013, Giving Northern Ireland is a Northern Ireland champion for philanthropy, arguing for a more strategic approach to giving. In 2014 it joined forces with Business Eye and the Institute of Directors to run the Eye on Giving series, where Northern Ireland's business leaders discuss

their personal take on philanthropy and that of their organisations. The Round Table was made up of executives who have contributed to the feature series, Eye on Giving; it was hosted by PwC and chaired by Giving Northern Ireland's Strategic Advisor Sandara Kelso-Robb. Participants included:

Participants



Sandara Kelso-Robb (SKR) - Strategic Advisor, Giving Northern Ireland



Richard Buckley (RB) - Editor of Business Eye



Paul Terrington (PT) - regional Chairman of PwC in Northern Ireland



Esther Haller-Clarke (EHC) - Director of Type AB Consultancy



Peter Lunn (PL) - Lunn's Jewellers.



Gary Mills (GM) - Chairman of Giving Northern Ireland



Peter McVerry (PMcV) - Station Director, U105



Dorcas Crawford (DC) - Senior Partner of Edwards & Company Solicitors



Grainne Walsh (GW) - Head of Consultancy, Stratagem



Leigh Yeaman (LY) - Investment Director, Investec Wealth



Mary Trainor-Nagele (MTN) - Chief Executive Arts and Business Northern Ireland



SKR - Northern Ireland faces some serious challenges: global economic difficulties are beyond our control and, closer to home, the UK government's austerity programme is putting pressure on the block grant and on public spending here in Northern Ireland. These pressures are intensifying and there is a clear message from some quarters that business could - and should - be doing more.

But, is the question one of not knowing what to do, not being asked to do more, not being engaged enough with the community, or does business know what it wants to but doesn't have the time for real engagement?

RB - Eye on Giving has worked very well for us in terms of content for the magazine because obviously we are trying to cover business in every aspect and one thing we had not been doing regularly was looking at the whole issue of philanthropy. We have been delighted to do it and this is a really good way to round it off because round tables, we think work extremely well.

GW - What I want to hear is how small micro businesses such as ourselves can learn from larger organisations in terms of deriving maximum impact in terms of our Corporate Social Responsibility activities.

LY - When I joined Investec, one of the first things that struck me was their approach to corporate citizenship and philanthropy and

I was really quite taken aback at how well it is done and I am interested to hear how other companies interpret it and how it is done outside as well.

MTN - Arts & Business Northern Ireland supports the cultural sector to help strengthen it around their income, but we also work with the private sector in terms of bringing creativity and innovative thinking into business by way of the arts, so we are very much the connector between the two. So I am here really from two perspectives; one in terms of supporting the charity sector and arts charities and really trying to grow that whole culture of cultural philanthropy. But also obviously with the business community that we work with who are very much focused on corporate citizenship and corporate philanthropy.

PT - From a PwC perspective I'm interested in the whole issue of what the purpose of philanthropy is for the company. I actually really hate the whole corporate and social responsibility terminology. It doesn't feel like it reflects how we think about all of this. It is about everything we do coming together in a holistic way to drive towards a clear and given purpose and that includes the things that our people do, too.

GM - Giving Northern Ireland's business model would concentrate on creating a network of high net - worth individuals and our first piece of work was

to commission research into that. That helped us realise just how significant the issue of privacy was for people in Northern Ireland; there are lots of things happening here but you don't always discover what these are unless you are directly involved. Many people aren't prepared to put their heads above the parapet and I want thank all of you for doing that and for contributing to the Eye on Giving articles and putting yourselves out there.

EHC - We work mainly in cultural and tourism strategy and a number of our clients come to us knowing that they want to be engaged in something, but they don't know what, or how to do become involved. They want the anonymity of the organisation name rather than giving as individuals but they also want authenticity in their giving and to know that their giving actually makes a difference. They're anxious to see how donating makes a difference and they want long-term partnerships, so I am interested in how best to facilitate those objectives.

DC - I think we underestimate the 'feel good factor' of giving so it's not entirely selfless, it actually makes you feel great and our staff say they feel great when they get involved in a charity project; so, there's a lot to be gained from engaging with your staff and getting them involved and the best events we've supported are ones where everybody was in on it. So, how can we take that further?



PMcV - One of the things that struck me whenever we initially started to look at it, was that we wanted to try to work with and connect with as many different audiences as possible. We were confident that whole area of giving and CSR was something that would give us a positive connection with our listeners and a positive connection with our clients. Many of them have a budget that they want to spend and others are coming to us to say well, what can you do to help us in a contra or 'benefit in kind' type initiative.

PL - I have a real interest in this whole subject, so when Gary approached me about joining the Board of Giving Northern Ireland I thought it was something I'd like to become involved in. I was a founder and director of SOS Bus, and in our own business where we employ around 85 - 90 people on our various sites, mainly in Queen's Arcade, I have a passion for this.

But I have to say that our giving has been severely impacted by the recession so our aspirations have been difficult to deliver through difficult times. But this is not going to last for ever and better times will come back but I know there are impacts on charities today because there is not the same amount to give away.

The final point I would make is that we are terrific in Northern Ireland, we are very generous - but we are not as organised as we might be. So I think that is where Giving Northern Ireland comes in and it has a huge role to play to help us along that journey.

Eye on Round Table



SKR - So... if there's an appetite for Corporates to give, a need in the voluntary sector for donations or pro bono support, what are the barriers that keep them apart? What's stopping that engagement from being more strategic, more planned and of more benefit to both?

EHC - One of the most common errors is that the communication between both parties only begins when there is a need or a want and I think that is fundamentally wrong. Often they miss the point that nurturing long-term relationships between business and the voluntary sector makes the need more obvious, the appropriate support more apparent and that cements real long-term partnerships.

MTN - That is one of the challenges that I hear, particularly from the cultural sector and there is a real frustration at the minute with the need to address this; they haven't got the people or the capacity to properly grow strategic relationships and they get really frustrated by that.

GM - Is there a role for professional advisers in putting those two sides together?

LY - I think there is. Any of the events we have been involved are very centred on knowing your client and knowing your contacts and bringing those together. The real value of doing that is that putting them in touch with one another cements culture, people and relationships.

GW - There are challenges for business too. It's difficult from a corporate perspective if you are being asked to demonstrate return on investment on financial or pro bono support, particularly if the organisation you're engaging with can't quite deliver on expectations, because that haven't the resources or the capacity.

Coming back to what you said about purpose: it has to be led, it has to be more strategic than just the whim or the personal interest of a couple of key people in the organisation. Support needs to be integrated into the business model; that's essential but it means investing time and being comfortable with that time investment. That's challenging, very challenging, particularly in a small businesses.

DC - Time investment is a genuine challenge, especially in the current economic climate where margins are tight and you don't have spare people. Ten years ago we maybe had an extra junior solicitor or we had an extra secretary, or people who had extra time. But now everybody's working absolutely nose to the grindstone.

LY - It's definitely easier within an organisation where the ethos and culture accept that philanthropy is genuinely part of their business and not just a tick box exercise. That's a culture where no one feels guilty for giving up your time during working hours to go and do something

for the community good. We actually have a department whose job is organisational development, to reinforce the culture and to oversee the different projects throughout the group are taking place.

DC - Does that mean that there's actually a case for an organisation that would act like a consultant and come in and help, maybe do some of the research or background work? Is there a place for some kind of facilitation by another organisation to interact with small companies that really want to raise funds or make some sort of community or cultural contribution, but who says, "...we're really stretched, could somebody come in and help us?"

SKR - One of the areas we are looking at in Giving Northern Ireland is the services that we can provide in terms of our expertise and intelligence. We have already generated over £250,000 for the sector and we haven't taken any fees or any commission on that because of the financial support we have had from the Atlantic Philanthropies and from the Lloyds Bank Foundation for NI.

As Giving NI has been building up services, I've been speaking to quite a few Corporates about how they can engage and 14 months ago I talked to PwC about setting up a Partners' Giving Circle.

So, could new philanthropy models like that be rolled out throughout the Corporate Sector in NI?

PT - Yes, it was interesting looking at how we could come together to create a Giving Circle. Our business people work in many different locations across the UK so there is a question of logistics in how to create a Giving Circle that can meet regularly. We have four dinners a year and pretty well everyone shows up so there is potential to have a successful giving circle.

During these dinners, the partners talk about the things they are involved with in charitable terms outside the firm.

We have been pretty good at raising money and at identifying causes that we would like to support. But we have been less effective in distributing the money and that is something we needed to address. We have actually dubbed ourselves 'the non-giving circle' so this is an area where I thought Giving Northern Ireland could help in an advisory role.

Sandra came along and talked to us about engaging with the issues rather than distributing the money. One of our challenges was to actually engage with a cause and build up a group consensus of the sort of help and support that we can deliver. Giving Northern Ireland has been a great benefit in explaining how to achieve this so the benefits of consultation has been terrific.

So, maybe the solution lies in identifying the issues or cause, building the long-term relationships that define the nature of the support and then engaging with organisations like Giving Northern Ireland to help manage the delivery.

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