



I should start by introducing myself. I am Martin Cresswell and I am the Chief Executive of iMPOWER Consulting Ltd. Since taking charge of the business 4 years ago we have tried to redefine the way management consultancy is provided to local government. Therefore the purpose of the story below is to set out the principle that defines our approach to management consultancy. It sets out the core beliefs upon which the company has been built – it sets out what we stand for.

By definition iMPOWER is a Management Consulting Firm.

But this “label” hides the true essence of iMPOWER, the nature of who we are and what we do.

iMPOWER is a business wants to change the way public services are delivered.

I want to improve the lives of at least 10 million people.

I want to make public services fairer, sustainable and relevant to modern society.

- ➔ *By sustainable I mean that services are reshaped to deliver more with less, to be commercially managed, and not be constrained by current delivery models.*
- ➔ *By relevant to a modern society I mean changing the relationship with citizens to enable them to take more responsibility for their own lives and environment, and to define for themselves how to meet their needs.*
- ➔ *By fairer I mean fair for the tax payer by making services as efficient as possible, fair for the citizen by removing the barriers between agencies that deter citizens from accessing services, and that prevents rather than caters for need.*

This narrative is visible in everything we do; the work we do, how we run our projects, how we manage our business, how we recruit, how we innovate.

It's the narrative that makes us who we are, that differentiates us from everyone else.





iMPOWER Narrative

It was about 5 years ago when I began to get disillusioned with myself. I have been lucky to experience a successful local government career, and latterly a successful management consulting career across the public sector. I have built a strong network of professional relationships, many of which I would regard as personal friends, and I had been involved in many important projects across the sector. I was still making improvements in the public sector. So what was wrong?

I started to take a good look at myself, and tried to focus on the moment I was happiest in my career. This process took me back to the moment when I first truly understood the value of local public services. I had been working in local government for about six years, and had followed the traditional corporate route to become a professionally trained accountant. I believed in control, financial accountability, efficiency, no waste, etc, etc. I had implemented large financial systems, standardised processes, audited grant claims, and advised politicians.

It was at this point I gained financial responsibility for the Education department. As usual the budget was overspent, and Councillors were in the process of deciding what budgets/services to cut. One area they were particularly focussing on was the Council's four Outdoor Education centres.

These centres were spread across Shropshire, Staffordshire and North Wales. They did not support the national curriculum directly, and therefore could be perceived as superfluous to core business. But this analytical, corporate view took no account of the true value these facilities provided.

At the time, the west midlands, and in particularly the Black Country encompassed some of the most deprived communities in the UK. Industry was gone, and there was little economic growth. The majority of children never travelled outside their immediate communities during their childhood.

But for 1 week a year during their junior and senior school lives they spent a week at these outdoor Education Centres. They experienced responsibility, living independently, teamwork and relied on other people. They experienced farming, nature, music and the arts, plus sailing, canoeing, and mountaineering.

So my job was to financially examine the impact of closing the centres. I went through the numbers, produced the spreadsheets that modelled demand changes and the budgets, and the cost of closing the centres. But it was at this point I decided to go and visit these centres and to find out what they really did.

I spent 2 hours driving through some of the most beautiful countryside in the UK, ending up at a stone country house at the foot of Snowdon. It was a sunny day, and the snow capped mountain looked magnificent as it reflected in the lake in front of the house. I arrived at the same time as a coach laden with 9 & 10 year old children from 2 junior schools in Tipton.

These children were typical, full of energy and noisy from being confined on a coach for the last 3 hours. Here we go I thought – bedlam unleashed. But no, each child stood virtually silent, just staring at the mountain. They not only had a new and liberating experience but perhaps saw what might be possible for them; new horizons possibly leading to new aspirations.

It was at that moment I understood the profound value of local public services. And at that point I changed my objectives.





Change in Objectives

My new focus was on how I could keep these centres open, and meet the Council's budget needs. How would I change the attitudes of the people involved – councillors, staff running the centres, and parents. Working with all three groups we identified alternative income streams for the centres when they were not required by schools, we raised the charges to parents to a level that was sustainable but still good value for the service received, and as a consequence made a budget saving of 40% which was acceptable to Councillors.

The point of this story was that I achieved the right outcomes, I co-produced the solution with the services, and moreover, I influenced peoples perspective and behaviour in respect of what was possible. I was genuinely proud of what I had achieved.

So, five years ago when I was reflecting I started to understand the things I enjoyed most about what I had done; and moreover realised that the purpose, approach and value of what I did had been lost. Working for a leading management consulting firm was actually constraining me from doing the right thing. It's fundamental philosophy was that the private sector was good and the public sector bad. Private sector methodologies had to be rebranded for the public sector – Radical Cost Reduction became Public Sector Efficiency. Consultants that knew nothing about local government were deployed on public sector jobs because they were available.

The priority was always selling the next job, minimising the firm's risk, deploying "academic" process and technology based solutions.

I also recognised that this was the dominant culture of the firm, an organisation whose aim was expressed in one statement – "£2 billion in 2 years" – no mention of clients, no mention of staff, no mention of what the firm stood for. It was all about money!

It was time to move on.

Chief Executive of iMPower

Becoming the Chief Executive of iMPower allowed me to break free – to build a different style of management consulting business, one that embraced many of the good technical skills that I had learnt through my career, but that focussed those skills in a different approach that could really make change happen.

What I wanted to build was a business based on people – people are the key to change. People take decisions, people implement and make change happen, and people need to adapt their behaviour to live in a changed environment. We have built a consulting business around the core belief that Adaptive Change will deliver sustainable public services in the future, and that Human Development as a priority over technical development is the only way in which we will develop a sustainable society going forward.

This philosophy of change is embedded in how we work with clients.

*This is why we have implemented the Storyboard for project design rather than project plans – we describe **how** we are going to deliver a project to our team and our client, not what we are going to do. We ensure our client is committed to the approach through understanding how we are going to do things.*





This is why I am passionate that we co-produce work with our clients so that they own the solutions and are emotionally committed to delivering them. Our clients are the stars, not iMPOWER.

This is why we are methodology agnostic – we don't care what we use or where we get it from, as long as it works for our client. Additionally, this is why we keep things simple – clients must understand our solutions at a detailed level if they are to be implemented successfully and sustainably. If we show any sign of intellectual arrogance we have failed.

This approach is diffident, and it works. I am proud of the consistent feedback we get from our clients. "You built on what we are doing, you built credibility on the ground, and reflected back what was really going on". "We could have never done this without you.....you were a pillar of strength, resolve and pragmatism".

We can realise our ambition to change public services.

We are making services more relevant to a modern society. It's no coincidence that iMPOWER quickly became the market leader in supporting the transformation in adult social care, and that personalisation was a key aspect of that transformation, and now we are the only major firm focussed at behavioural change. We are leading the way in looking at how to understand the behavioural norms of citizens, and how to therefore influence them to take more responsibility in meeting their support needs.

We are making services more sustainable by designing new models of delivery. We pioneered the development of social work practices in children's services, where we empowered small groups of social workers to set up social enterprises to deliver care services free of bureaucracy. We are now moving to lead the thinking around the divestment of services to new social enterprises and the voluntary sector.

We are making services fairer. The way we define our projects to deliver maximum value for the client, e.g. our fast track outsourcing proposition, reduces consulting spend. Our outsourcing approach saves money for councils, improves services, and reduces the investment burden. Our work in bridging the health and care boundary is delivering better access and more efficiency into the care continuum.

Looking forward, I believe we can help more Council's reshape local public services on a sustainable basis. We must bring a blend of old and new solutions to produce bespoke solutions for each client. We must be passionate about what we want to achieve with our clients.

We focus on outcomes – we work out how we get the same outcome for less, not how do we cut costs.

iMPOWER wants to make change happen.

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