

FLEXIBILITY OF FOUNDATIONS (« easier said than done » ?)

Summary :

Some « recommendations » to those who run foundations.

Have a long term vision ; do not « simply disburse funds » and create short term benefits .

Aim at the right targets ie those which are relevant with the time ;

Be prepared to meet new circumstances .

Be flexible and innovative in the way the foundation is run .

Text :

According to Helmut Anheir and Diana Leat

- in the book they have devoted to foundations - :

1 - « Many foundations have devoted decades' worth of financial resources to society's most difficult issues , poverty, education, community revitalisation, but **few have seen lasting success** ;

« Lack of solutions to problems is often related to the lack of knowledge, ideas or political will rather than solely the lack of money » ;

Some creative foundations, they say, are tackling social issues with new constructive ideas and approaches, developing knowledge in an effort to create blueprints for action ;

They create knowledge and cultivate public and political support ... « **with a long-term vision** for sustainable widespread change... **instead of simply disbursing funds to create short-term benefits** ... »

Such a role is possible, the authors argue, because « foundations have a distinctive niche **free from market and political constraints which allows them to take risks and support new ideas.** »

2 – Such stands, they say, entail considerable challenges in the way foundations are run, in terms of organisation and staff...

« **The art of managing change** becomes particularly demanding in the case of operating foundations ... »

They give examples of foundations working on the « **Underlying causes** of poverty and injustice ... » and add, « The founder knew he **couldn't foresee the new problems that would emerge** ...

He gave future Trustees **unlimited powers to take up new challenges** and lay down work that ceased to be vital ... »

3 – They conclude that « Operational flexibility is very important »

- « But even more crucial is the flexibility to learn within the organisation and to change its mindset according to external demand, and turn new ideas into social impact achievements ... »

- The other necessary attitude towards change deals with the external forces or stakeholders that foundations relate to ...

- Positioning a foundation as a social change promoter **requires risk-taking**, deep methodological and strategy, much relevant communication, ... humility and patience.

Françoise Astier – Charles Leopold Mayer Foundation, A contribution to FOUNDATION WORKSHOP 2nd
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