MAPPING THE COMMUNITY-BASED ACTION MODEL FOR PROFESSIONAL SKILLS AND COMPETENCES IN HOUSING MARKET RENEWAL

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Abstract: After two years of being implemented, Housing Market Renewal (HMR) via its Pathfinder organisation has recognised that housing market failure is not only central to the physical development of housing. Rather it is about non-housing intervention factors such as social deprivation, economic and environmental issues that cause housing to be unpopular and deteriorated. The aspirations of local community also need to be investigated as the recent protest by the local residents within the Pathfinder scheme in the North England suggesting a gap between professional intentions and community expectations. The conflict between the aspirations of the local community and the objectives of the HMR Plan suggests that HMR professionals need to highlight issues on skills necessary for community-based actions. This paper aims to look at what building sustainable communities really means for low housing demand in the Pathfinder areas. It leads to the development of community-based action model that recognises additional skills needs for delivering HMR from the Pathfinder organisation perspective. The development of proposed model assists the researcher to answer part of the research questions: *What are the additional skills and competences that need to be acquired by the employees of Pathfinder organisation necessary to deliver Housing Market Renewal?*

Keywords: Community-based action skills and competencies; Professional competences; Housing Market Renewal; Sustainable Communities

1. BACKGROUND TO RESEARCH

This paper is part of the researcher's PhD work with the primary aim to investigate additional skills and competences that need to be acquired by the relevant professionals in the process of delivering Housing Market Renewal (HMR). HMR via its Pathfinder organisation is part of many strategies in Sustainable Communities Plan (2003) with its main task is to tackle low housing demand and in some case abandonment across North and Midlands of England. The related concepts of Sustainable Communities and its relation to the HMR have been reviewed. Some potential research pertaining to the skills and competencies in the process of delivering HMR by the employees of Pathfinder organisation has also been identified. The main research focus emerges and it is centred on two themes: *what are the additional skills and competences that need to be acquired by the employees of Pathfinder organisation in the process of delivering HMR* and; *why do employees of Pathfinder organisation need to acquire these additional skills and competences in the process of delivering HMR.*

2. HMR AND SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES PLAN

Around one million homes in England are affected by low demand and around 440,000 homes are in North West (ODPM, 2003a). Migration from towns and cities has meant

more people living in suburbs and rural locations. Such a trend is unsustainable, as it will force the existing housing market to collapse. The challenge now, is to revitalise the affected towns and cities with people, green spaces, safe streets and good design so that they become places people choose to live. It also needs to create communities that are capable of absorbing social change and renewing themselves where existing housing are recycled and reused to provide a range of goods and services for modern life.

2.1 HMR Pathfinders and the Sustainable Communities Plan

The main policy initiative by which the Sustainable Communities Plan aims to tackle low demand is via nine Housing Market Renewal Pathfinders (Pathfinder) areas in North and Midlands England. In 2003, a large proportion of Government funding is being allocated to the Pathfinder areas: £500 million has been made available for the task in three years. The East Lancashire Pathfinder (Elevate) is one of four Pathfinders in the North West, for instance, comprises seven intervention areas known as Area of Development Frameworks (ADFs), containing approximately 85,000 properties across five local authorities of Blackburn with Darwen, Hyndburn, Burnley, Rossendale and Pendle Borough Councils (Elevate, 2004).

By 2005, the Government expects strategic actions to be in place for all Pathfinder areas, envisaging *large-scale clearance, refurbishment and new build work* to be underway complemented by improvements in local services. In line with the improvements of the physical aspects of housing, the Pathfinder with its partnerships are also being crucial to addressing non-housing requirements of Sustainable Communities, in particular, customer focused public services and a pride in the community and cohesion within it (Audit Commission, 2003).

2.2 Factors Contributing to Low Demand in Pathfinder Areas

Low housing demand appears in number of ways. The government used a broad range of indicators in both private and social sectors to define low demand. According to the DETR (1999), in the social housing sector the following low demand symptoms occur: *a small or non-existent waiting list; tenancy offers are frequently refused; high rate of voids available for letting; high rate of tenancy turnover.* In the private sector, low demand has been concentrated in areas where: *private property value is particularly low and/or falling in absolute terms; high private sector void rate; high turnover of population; significant incidence of long-term private sector voids or abandoned properties; visibly high number of properties for sale or let.* In addition, a set of other possible factors that might contribute to the problem of low demand as collected from the literatures (particularly Nevin et al., 2001 and Leather et al., 2003) are: *Deprived areas and anti social behaviour-* bad image/reputation of area; crime and anti social behaviour; litter and vandalism; physical appearance of housing and surrounding area*; Type and condition of housing-* rooms sizes/layout; density; lack of parking/garden; availability of new houses elsewhere which are more attractive; type of housing*; Location, availability of services and amenities and accessibility-* poor road links/public transport; low quality of school/childcare; limited access to green space; low availability of employment*; Threat of demolition/empty housing.*

Unquestionably, low demand for housing cuts across environmental, social and economic aspects of sustainability (CPRE, 2004). These low demand factors focus not only on the physical aspects of housing but, also other non housing related factors that are essentially important contributing to the low housing demand. These non-housing issues require professionals to diversify their skills and competences in the process of delivering HMR. It is strongly recommended that relevant professionals involved in tackling low demand in the Pathfinder areas, have to address other skills that might be needed especially in meeting the local community needs and aspirations. Skills for community-based action that are not directly related to housing are among many skills that are required necessary to effectively deliver HMR and Sustainable Communities.

2.3 Community-Based Action in the Process of Delivering HMR

The Government has promoted the idea of community strongly (e.g. by making community involvement) a key requirement of urban regeneration programmes, a driver of local government reform and a key feature of its Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal (Brickell, 2000). The author further emphasised that the Government's overall approach to community regeneration is failing because of its inability to engage communities in a dynamic, entrepreneurial and widely inclusively way. *But, firstly, who is the community that the professionals need to get involve and engage with in the process of delivering HMR?* As defined by Poplin (1979) community is "*the place where people maintain their homes, earn their livings, rear their children and carry on most of their life activities*". Long and Hutchins (2003) define community as "*a grouping of up to several thousand households, whose occupants share common experiences and bonds derived from living in the same locality*". Thus, community is persons or people living within the same geographical area, carrying on their social interactions and activities with one or more common ties and shared values. This is the community that needs to be engaged by the professionals in the process of delivering HMR.

Secondly, *why the professionals need to engage with the community in the process of delivering HMR?* Back to the Sustainable Communities Plan (2003), community is a focus of Sustainable Communities: *people continuing to want to live in the same community, both now and in the future* (Long and Hutchins, 2003). Only local people know what the best is for them and can help creating communities they feel proud of and to become much more involved in how local areas are run.

Lastly, *how do professional engage with the local community in the process of delivering HMR?* This new approach no doubt become challenge to the professionals involved in the process of delivering HMR. To be effectively delivering HMR, local community need to be engaged in significant issues such as participatory planning for public space. Within the Pathfinder areas, communities have different ethnic background, faith and culture. Only local community know what their common value is. By allowing local people to be involved and participated in the process of delivering HMR, the conflict between the government objectives and local community' aspirations and interests could be prevented. The key objective is how professionals strengthen the community involvement in the process of delivering HMR. These are the skills that need to be highlighted by the professionals.

3. NATURE AND EXTENT OF THE SKILLS SHORTAGES IN THE PROCESS OF DELIVERING HMR AND WHY THEY EXIST

3.1 Understanding Skills and Competencies

Skills are the ability to demonstrate a system and sequence of behaviour that are functionally related to attaining a performance goal that requires multiples skills from the persons or employees (Boyatzis, 1982). Skills can be assessed by examining the difference between the skills needed by employers and those are currently available in the market. These differences show up as *Skills shortages, Skills gaps* or *Latent skills* (Giles and Campbell, 2003; SSDA 2003).

Dench (1997) identified three broad areas of skills need that summarised as *Personal attributes and attitudes:* relate to a person's character and innate; *Personal skills:* relates to an individual's innate abilities that can be developed and built on such as communication, being capable of working with others, taking responsibility, making decisions, negotiating and problem solving and *Technical skills*: relates to basic technical skills, specific technical knowledge that acquired through the educational system and experience. The author further argued that personal skills are important in influencing the effectiveness, which an individual is able to operate in a workplace, as well as being of particular importance in certain occupations. *Good technical skills will be necessary, but not enough to enable people to operate effectively.*

Meanwhile, a competence is defined as an *ability to do, for a task (*Concise Oxford English Dictionary) or an *ability to do something well or effectively* (Collins Cobuild English Dictionary). Boyatzis(1982) described a job competency as *an underlying characteristic of a person* in that it may be a motive, trait, skill, aspect of one's self-image or social role, or a body of knowledge which someone uses. The existence and possession of these characteristics may or may not be known to the person. In this sense, the characteristics may be unconscious aspects of the person (i.e., the person is not aware of them or is unable to articulate or describe them). Conventionally, competence is taken to be a combination of *knowledge, skill* and *awareness* or *attitude* (Dingle, 1995). A competence may recur across many different jobs and organisations and could be classified as 'generic competences' and divided into four broad bands: *Cognitive; Influencing; Managing* and *Personal* (Bethell-fox, 1982) or summarised into five competences areas as: Task competences; Professional competence; Political competence and Ethical competence (Virtanen, 2000).

The Construction Industry Council (2004) has differentiated between skills and competences and concluded as: *a skill is an ability to perform a task and is generally transferable across occupations* whereas *a competence is an ability to perform a technical task that related to a specific occupation.*

3.2 Understanding the Existing Professional Practice
In mapping a community-based action model for professional skills and competences in the process of delivering HMR, the researcher started with the amount of prior experience in the competences and development fields. It has drawn on reviewing an extensive literature of existing models and protocols for describing competences. Although, professional competence is a complex affair which is not easily analyzed and modelled but studying the existing models of professional skills and competences is

essential to understanding current professional practices and how professionals reflect with current skills and competencies needs in the process of delivering HMR and Sustainable Communities. The aim was to seek out coherent elements within different approaches and if possible bring them together in a single model. The researcher also needs to explore the extent to which existing models recognise the important of soft, community-based skills development in addition to technical competences. Some differing views of competence and approaches to professional practice are listed in *table 1* below;

Table 1: Understanding the existing models of professional competences

The UK occupational standards models (Cheetham and Chivers, 1996)	Competences are recognised in the form of job-specific that required through '*functional analysis*' process of: *Key purpose*; *Key role* (the level below 'key purpose'); *Units of competences*; *Elements of competence*- encompassing of 'performance criteria' describes the characteristics of competent performance and 'range statements' specifies the range of situations or contexts in which the competence should be displayed. *Behaviour or personal competence* (particularly in the area of management) is important in professional roles to effective performance. *Ethics and values* are increasing important especially within the care sector.
The job competence model (Mansfield and Mathews, 1985),	Competence comprises of three basic components: *Tasks* – consist of skills which are used in a routine way to achieve define outcomes; *Task management* – involves the use of skills that may be needed when a number of tasks are required to be performed together in a particular way; *The role/job environment* – consists of those skills which are needed to cope with a particular working environment (e.g. working with others – fellow team members, customers, clients, etc.) or those needed to cope with highly critical situations.
Behavioural/personal competence models (Boyatzis, 1982; Klemp, 1980 and Schroder, 1989)	A number of American researchers, especially within the management areas, have focused heavily on *behaviours*. *Personal competence* may be a better predictor of capability (i.e. potential to perform in future posts) than *functional competence*, which attests primarily to competence within a candidate's current post. However, there is no guarantee that a person who apparently has the right mix of personal competencies will be able to 'put it all together' and deliver the desired outcomes
The reflective practitioner approach (Schon, 1983)	Schon (1983), has offered a new epistemology of professional practice based on '*knowing-in-action*'(a form of acquired tacit knowledge) and '*reflection*' (the ability to learn through and within practice). He argues that reflection (both 'reflection-in-action' and 'reflection-about-action') is vital part of the process.
Meta-competencies (Reynolds and Snell, 1988; Hall, 1986 and Nordhaug, 1990)	Reynolds and Snell (1988) identify '*meta-qualities*', (creativity, mental agility and balanced learning skill). Hall (1986), uses the term '*meta-skills*' which are defined as 'skills in acquiring other skills'. Nordhaug (1990) offers as examples: *communication, problem-solving and analytical capacities.*
Core skills (Cheetham and Chivers, 1996)	They are generic and be fundamental to effective performance in all (or most) occupations. The units consist of: *Communication*; *Application to Number* (numeracy); *Information Technology*; *Personal Skills* – working with others; and *Personal Skills* – improving own learning and performance
Ethics and values (Eraut et al, 1994)	The authors identify four overlapping sets of values and they are: *Legal values* (operating within the law and other mandatory systems); *Professional values* (relationships with clients and other professionals); *Organisational values* (relationships with colleagues, staff, customers and general public) and *Personal values* (individual beliefs and behaviours)
Professional competence model (Cheetham & Chivers, 1996;1998)	Influenced by the existing models, four core competences identified: *Knowledge/cognitive competence*- defined as 'the possession of appropriate work-related knowledge and the ability to put this to effective use'; *Functional competence*- defined as 'the ability to perform a range of work-based tasks effectively to produce specific outcomes'; *Personnel or behaviour competence*- defined as '*the ability to adopt appropriate, observable behaviours in work-related situations; Values/ethical competence*- defined as '*the possession of appropriate personal and professional values and the ability to make sound judgements based upon these in work-related situations'*
Model of professional framework for RICS (Kennie and Green (2001)	Four components of competence which combines: *Knowledge Competence*- defined as 'the possession of appropriate technical and/or business knowledge'; *Cognitive/Problem Solving Competence*- defined as 'the ability to solve using high level thinking skills technical and/or business related problems effectively to produce specific outcomes'; *Business Competence*- defined as '*the ability to understand the wider business context within which the candidate is practising and to manage client expectations in a pro-active manner'*; *Ethical/Personal Behavioural* (which is core to the previous three areas) Competence- defined as *the possession of appropriate personal and professional values and behaviours and the ability to make sound judgements when confronted with ethical dilemmas'*

Studying on the existing models as described above concludes that each of the models approaches has its own strength and weakness within the context of their own professions. However, for the purpose of this paper, the researcher intends to study the significant of the existing models cooperate with the demand of skills and competencies in the process of delivering HMR. The researcher also needs to overview to what extent the current capacity of professional skills and competences meeting the community needs and aspirations for creating Sustainable Communities. Understanding the existing models of professional competences also leads the researcher to identify shortcomings skills that need to be acquired necessary to deliver HMR and achieve Sustainable Communities. This can be realised by reviewing an extensive literature on skills needs for delivering Sustainable Communities and in particular HMR.

3.3 Skills Needs in the Process of Delivering HMR

Professional skills are significantly important in achieving the objectives of HMR as well as Sustainable Communities. In the researcher's view, the concept of HMR requires an active engagement from all participants involved in the delivery process and plays an essential role in making local communities attractive, safe places to live and work. This approach requires additional professional skills and new ways of working for participants involved. But *why do professionals need a new approach in delivering HMR?* Local residents or community are very clear about what they want from their communities but somehow or rather, in many places a current approach fails to deliver what people want. The latest protest by the local residents on the scale of the highland clearance and compulsory purchase of thousand unfit houses within the East Lancashire Pathfinder area have been claimed as creating forced migration and preventing the creation of Sustainable Communities (Clover, 2004). The local residents want actions that encourage people to continue to live and work in the pathfinder areas and not to be forced to move elsewhere. The conflict between the aspirations of the local community and the HMR Pathfinder suggests that the relevant professionals involved need a new approach apart from their technical expertise in dealing with local people. Understanding exactly what people want from their own communities requires skills. Meanwhile, studied by CPRE (2004) in East Lancashire and Merseyside Pathfinder areas reveals that housing market failure is not only central to low demand problems. Rather, it is about non-housing interventions factors such as social deprivation and bad image that cause residential environment to decline. These non-physical aspects of housing within the social, economic and environmental context are essentially important in tackling low and empty houses. Thus in the process of delivering HMR, the professionals need to acquire not only the core, harder and technical skills, but also other skills that are more *generic, softer, people and community-based skills*.

A broad range of terminology exists in relations to skills, all with different meanings including attitudes, behaviour and competencies. For this study, the researcher will adopted skills and competencies based around those activities that relevant professionals in HMR might be expected to undertake and consequently the skills that they might need to successfully deliver HMR. The researcher started with reviewing relevant literatures within the Sustainable Communities context to investigate what other skills that might be needed and considered significant in delivering HMR. Some of relevant literatures on skills for Sustainable Communities and HMR are summarised below.

The Egan Review Report suggest that the delivery of sustainable communities and the skills/competences necessary to support delivery have much in common with the way that successful organisation operate and the skills that they display. The Egan Task Group has further concluded and recommended of the growing focus on skills and knowledge in regeneration as a perceived barrier to the delivery of sustainable communities. The Egan Report (2004) also set up the generic skills that considered being essential for delivering Sustainable Communities that is summarised as:

> *Inclusive visioning; Project management Leadership; Breakthrough thinking/brokerage; Team/partnership working within and between teams, based on shared sense of purpose; Making it happen given constraints; Process management/change management; Financial management and appraisal Stakeholder management – including ability to work with local residents and residents/community group; Analysis, decision making, evaluation, learning from mistakes; Communication-including intelligent listening to the community and promotion of development solutions; Conflict resolution; Customer awareness and how to secure feedback*

Studied by the Turner and Townsend Group (2004), underpinned the concern of those related skills needs in Sustainable Communities that can be summarised as;

- *Society has not necessarily been well served by the existing professions operating in the built environment*
- *The professions are either unwilling or unable to engage with communities*
- *Knowledge about 'what works' is, inconsistent and poorly managed*
- *The skills and knowledge relating to strategic planning, project management, urban design, community engagement and partnership working necessary for the development of successful sustainable communities are absent.*

These arguments have in turn been subject to a great deal of criticism, though the focus on skills and knowledge has been broadly welcomed by regeneration professionals as part of a balanced approach to the better delivery of regeneration. Furthermore, the complexity and diversity of responsibilities and providers of skills and knowledge in regeneration cannot be overstated as the real issues for the delivery of sustainable communities concern the interaction of people and partnerships through appropriate and effective processes (Turner and Townsend Group, 2004).

The Learning Curve (ODPM, 2002) has introduced three main elements to a regeneration-learning framework in three different audiences of residents, professionals and civil servants and policy makers. For this study, the researcher summarised only the skills need to be developed by the *professional and practitioners.*

- *Analytical skills - Analysing possibilities, creating opportunities; evaluating alternatives*
- *Interpersonal skills - Strategic leadership; Management of people; Valuing of diversity; Working with partners; Working with the community; Communication; Conflict resolution, consensus building and mediation*
- *Organisational Skills - Project management; Finance and budgeting; Research,*

Research finding by Hartley (2002), emphasised on the concept of community leaderships for local authorities, as part of the culture shift required that aimed to empower individuals, groups and communities and build their capabilities. A number of key skills were seen as important for this and they are:

> *Putting people at their ease; Learning to think about services from a user's perspective; Listening to interests as well as voices; Recognising the different pace and processes of community groups and individuals; Capacity building; Managing conflict and difference; Managing expectations; Influencing skills; Detailed local knowledge; Professional skills; Maintaining a strategic focus and Working constructively with councillors.*

It is no doubt that to be effectively delivered HMR, relevant professionals have to acquire additional skills for community-based action as an addition to their core and technical professional competences. Although the existing models of professional competences (as listed in *Table 1*) do recognise these soft and people-focused skills but they are not clearly stated either these skills are for the employees interacting among themselves within an organisation or for their employees interacting with their customers. These multiple responsibilities and diversified skills are across social, economic and environmental context of Sustainable Communities.

4. COMMMUNITY-BASED ACTION MODEL FOR PROFESSIONAL SKILLS AND COMPETENCES IN THE PROCESS OF DELIVERING HMR

The Community-based Action model as illustrated in *figure 1* is based on the arguments developed in section two and three above. The model falls into two headings:

- *Type A Skills*: comprise of softer, generic skills, people-based (additional potential skills need to be acquired by the professionals in the process of delivering HMR.
- *Type B Skills*: comprises of harder, technical and core professionals competences

In mapping this model, the researcher is only focusing on type *A Skills.* As a nature of this research, the researcher will not challenge type *B Skills*. The identified number of potential type *A skills* will be grouped and clustered around under the same themes. Each of the identified skills that might be needed in the process of delivering HMR is clasified into the main themes: Society, Economy and Environment.
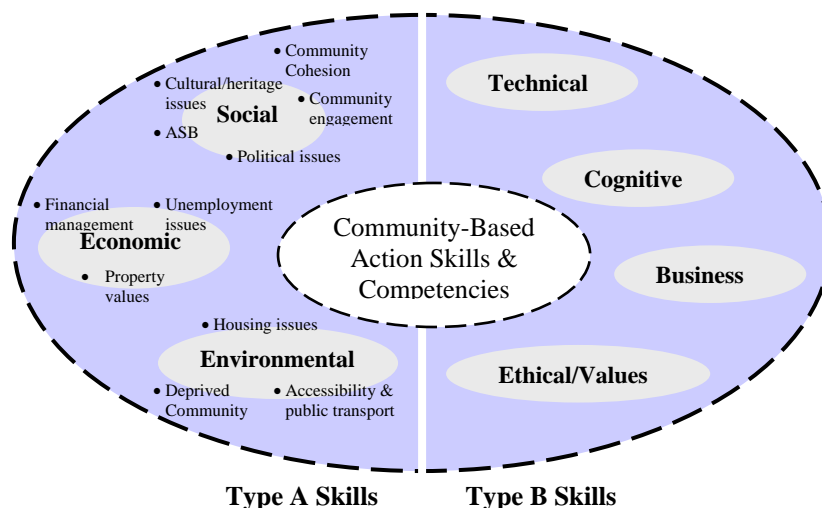

Type A Skills   **Type B Skills**

Figure 1. Mapping the Community-based action model for professional skills and competences in the process of delivering Housing Market Renewal

The model is developed to assist the researcher in identifying additional skills and competencies that might be needed by the profesionals in the process of delivering HMR within the three dimensions of Sustainable Communities. The researcher also uses the model as her research framework for data collection purpose. However, a number of potential skills for type *A Skills* has yet to be finalised as the researcher is, at the time of writing this paper, still in the process of collecting data at the Elevate East Lancashire Pathfinder organisation.

5. CONCLUSIONS

Delivering HMR and Sustainable Communities require not only the technical part of the professional skills and competences but also a broad range of generic skills, behaviour and knowledge. Apart from these so call as generic skills, this paper only focuses on skills and competencies for community engagement within three dimensions of society, environment and economy context of Sustainable Communities. These shortcomings skills are required for the relevant professionals in the process of delivering HMR. The professional practitioners do recognise these people-based skills but they are not clearly defined either those skills are for their employees interacting among themselves within an organisation or for their employees interacting with the customers/clients. The challenge of mapping the community-based action model for professional skills and competences is how the professionals could integrate additional skills that are required in socially, economically and environmentally manner for effectively delivering HMR as well as Sustainable Communities.

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