

RE-WORKING SOCIAL CAPITAL TO SUPPORT ECONOMIC GROWTH

Introduction

The ability for businesses to grow and prosper is not isolated from the community in which they are situated. If it is a healthy community, businesses will thrive. If it is not, businesses will suffer from the ill effects of crime, addictions, homelessness, and other challenges. Further, businesses are very interested in ensuring taxes collected are used efficiently and effectively to support thriving communities – maximizing well-being while minimizing waste or duplication between ministries. By supporting the development of a social policy framework, the business community achieves both goals: addressing social challenges effectively and supporting economic growth in their community.

Background

Social Capital is very loosely defined as an economically based network of relationships within a described society that benefit all members of that society;¹ or, more colloquially, since we're all in this together, let's all work together. And that's the key – how to develop a network of agencies, ministries, services, and business interests that works effectively together for the benefit of all.

When it comes to public policy, a coordinated network operating with economic efficiency is the ideal that businesses and communities hope governments aspire to. The Liberal government of BC put forward a BC Jobs Plan that sought to tie various parts of society together to promote job growth, and to that end, they have made great strides forward. It is a comprehensive strategy that touches on nearly all ministries, outlines various investments, and measures progress against a baseline.

However, silos still exist. Recent experiences in Surrey, as an example, point to schools and childcare spaces have not kept pace with job growth and development. The fast growing city has one part of the puzzle, the school district another, and several ministries (Education, MCFD, Health) have responsibilities for education and childcare. Surrey currently has a deficit of over 12,000 child care spaces (0-12) and, despite the recent \$217M towards capital builds for 5000 spaces, there will still be a sizeable population of children that will see out their school years in portables. Attracting good employees becomes difficult if a community cannot ensure quality childhood experiences for their families.

Another example is homelessness – a complicated source of frustration and despair. According to the Metro Vancouver report on homelessness², the cost per homeless person per year is estimated to be \$55,000 tax payer dollars – spent on homeless shelters, support services and health care costs.

It is clear that the current system of fractured governance that has multiple ministries and agencies working silos, each within their narrow scope of authority, has not been efficient nor effective in slowing down or reducing the growth of the homeless population.... The many agencies involved in addressing homelessness must work together in a system-wide approach to help prevent homelessness... serve the region's 3,000-4,000 homeless population, and expedite the transition out of homelessness for the 10,500 people in the region...³

¹ One such definition is “the institutions, relationships, attitudes, and values that govern interactions among people and contribute to economic and social development.” Christiaan Grootaert and Thierry van Bastelaer. “Social Capital: From Definition to Measurement.” Understanding and Measuring Social Capital. The World Bank. 2002

² Metro Vancouver, Addressing Homelessness in Metro Vancouver, February 24, 2017. P.1.

³ Ibid, P.9

As any business owner who operates near where homeless people gather, it is very difficult to attract new customers to an area that has challenges.

A cost efficient framework to facilitate coordination between ministry departments, stakeholders, business organizations would be helpful to ensure policy alignment and consistency. A policy framework guide decision-making and identify important connections, which would help anticipate needs and avoid crises before they arise.

Early 2013, Alberta's Premier Redford launched a Social Policy Framework, a tool by which the government anticipated would assist in setting priorities in addressing community challenges.⁴ Further, it would "coordinate activities between government departments, ... to ensure policy alignment and consistency."⁵ Their policy outlines core components, tools, and the roles and responsibilities of government, stakeholders, organizations, communities, and businesses to vision then implement a set of harmonized social policies for environment, health, and social services.⁶ This collective action by a diverse set of stakeholders provides the basis for a resilient and thriving community.

If BC were to consider adopting a similar policy, the over-arching purpose of a framework is to describe the quality of life citizens want and how to achieve this within the communities of BC, each with their unique challenges. Social capital is often overlooked as an economic driver, yet evidence exists that "healthy, educated, and trained workers determine how productively other critical factors such as land, labour, and physical capital are used... [and] the potential for each person to contribute to the economy and to economic growth."⁷

BoardVoice, an umbrella association representing non-profit service providers across BC, is concerned that expenditures for services are not coordinated sufficiently to effect desired results. Further, they are engaging business associations to consider how employers would benefit if the homeless were not sleeping on their doorsteps or if family challenges were not impacting a worker's productivity, and perhaps their personal safety and the safety of other co-workers at their workplace. As they state:

We wouldn't think of building a road or planning a new real-estate development without a framework for planning the project. But the concept of planning for social outcomes has been slower to catch on.

In BC, we spend many billions of dollars a year on social interventions and supports – policing, courts, community programs, income assistance, services for people with disabilities or mental health issues, park development, treatment centres, skate parks, new street lights, on and on.

Yet we spend it with no clear idea as to what we're trying to achieve, or how we'll know when we get there.⁸

BoardVoice posits that by uniting levels of government, ministries, organizations, business sectors, and other stakeholders into a network of cooperation and collaboration on a shared vision with measurable outcomes, to harmonize policies and effect cost efficiencies through coordinated implementation strategies, BC's social capital would indeed provide the foundation by which employers and employees can grow within desirable, healthy communities.

⁴ Press release: <https://www.alberta.ca/release.cfm?xID=3373421703E69-E310-8B91-0D86BF0497F467DF>

⁵ Alberta Government. Alberta's Social Policy Framework. February 2013. P.3.

⁶ Alberta Government. Alberta's Social Policy Framework. February 2013.

⁷ McLean, Colin, et al. Making the Case: A Social Policy Framework for British Columbia. SFU School of Public Policy Report with BoardVoice. August 2014. P.73.

⁸ www.boardvoice.ca

The BC Jobs Plan is a strong vision. However, to support its continued success, there is a need to ensure service delivery for all communities, recognizing their unique needs, that keeps pace with and to support job growth and economic success efficiently and effectively. A Social Policy Framework will provide a guide for policy makers and stakeholders alike to ensure cost savings through efficiencies of anticipating needs, strong inter- and extra-ministerial agencies' harmonization, and a measurable outcome of a shared vision.

THE CHAMBER RECOMMENDS

That the provincial government implement a framework to deal with social issues similar to that of the BC Jobs Plan to recognize and achieve efficiencies across ministries and stakeholders.

Submitted by the Surrey Board of Trade

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