



# Kindness, emotions and human relationships:

The blind spot in public policy

Julia Unwin, Carnegie Fellow



CHANGING MINDS • CHANGING LIVES



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# Foreword

There is growing recognition of the importance of human connection and relationships for individual and societal wellbeing. Values that were previously considered ‘out-of-scope’ – such as kindness, love and compassion – just might form part of the solution to some of our most intractable social problems. However, talking about kindness doesn’t fit easily within the rational, dispassionate, evidence-based language of public policy. This is a challenge for many of us working within this current tradition.

The Trust was very fortunate that Julia Unwin accepted our invitation to become a Carnegie Fellow to explore the complexities and contradictions of focusing on kindness in public policy and public services. We rarely appoint Carnegie Fellows, who are people of exceptional experience, insight and ability who are given the time, support and space to consider a controversial issue with the Trust. As Julia writes, *“the amplification of emotion in public service is risky indeed.”*

This report adds significantly to previous work by the Carnegie UK Trust and Joseph Rowntree

Foundation that uncovered powerful and sometime surprising examples of where kindness and everyday relationships can affect change and support the wellbeing of individuals and communities. It also runs alongside a number of current Trust-funded and other projects that aim to develop ideas and practical action to explore and encourage kindness in communities and workplaces.

We have found that talking about kindness in this context is profoundly uncomfortable and potentially highly disruptive. Having said that the report is strengthened by a clear consideration of the *“strong arguments against kindness.”* That balance is important. If we are asking others to be open to new and different ideas we must be equally aware of the counter arguments and the benefits we have gained from public policy and public services based on *“the clean, hard lines of a contract.”*

There have been very good reasons for keeping kindness separate from public policy, which are well-articulated in this report. Reasons such as fairness, openness and safety, which can become clouded by

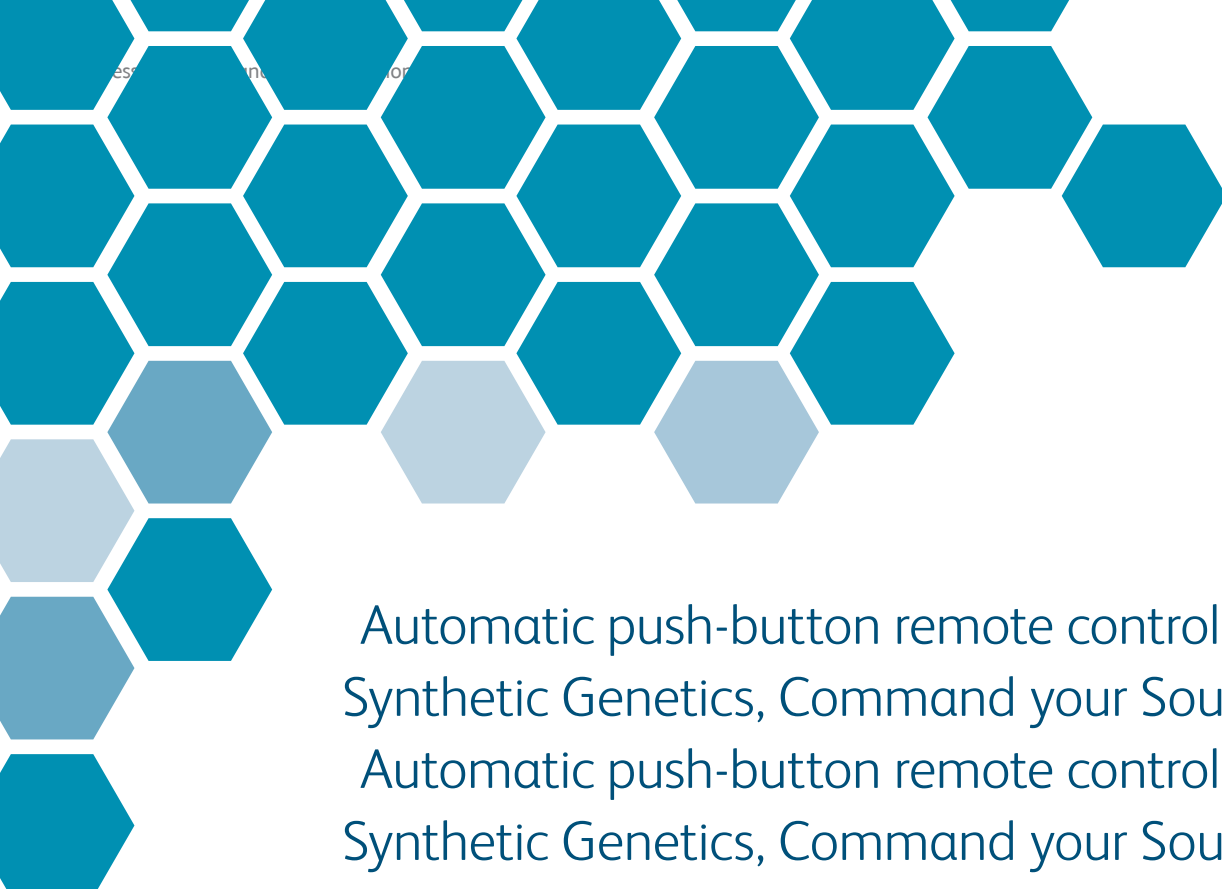
the more personal and discretionary expression of human relationships. But it is our view that the great public policy challenges of our time – rebuilding public trust and confidence, encouraging behaviour change – demand an approach that is far more centred on relationships and human connection.

The report is not “*stuffed full with policy recommendations, tool kits or calls for ‘compassionate impact assessments’.*” But it does contain some powerful and challenging messages for policymakers. Our hope is to build on Julia’s extraordinary and very accessible reflections on this ‘blind spot’ of public policy. There are clear risks to engaging in a discussion on re-designing public

policy to better respond to our need for kindness, emotions and human relationships. However, the clear message from this report is that the risks of not engaging are far higher in terms of reducing trust and failure to deliver effective and responsive services. As Julia concludes, if there is no creative response to the challenge to allow space for kindness in public policy discussions “*the results would be disastrous for us all.*”



**Martyn Evans**  
Chief Executive, Carnegie UK Trust



Automatic push-button remote control,  
Synthetic Genetics, Command your Soul!  
Automatic push-button remote control,  
Synthetic Genetics, Command your Soul!


(The Last Poets, 1971)



# 1. Introduction


Talk about kindness and public policy in the same breath and you get one of several reactions.

There's the slightly embarrassed grimace.




Do we really need to talk about things like this?

There's the dismissive look.




Don't you know we are tackling unprecedented cuts now and you're talking about this?

And there's the barely masked irritation.



Don't tell me that kindness can replace real, important services. That's just sentimental.

And usually there is a strong sense that the person mentioning kindness has unhelpfully interrupted the adult flow of conversation about public policy. About planning targets, and about economic benefit, and value for money. Somebody is bringing a fairy tale to a meeting about Real Things.



That's good. A lot of people being kind will certainly help me balance my budget.

But this is an issue with urgency and import. As artificial intelligence, in all its forms, rapidly changes what we do, and how we do it, the disconnect between people and institutions, and the associated lack of trust, threatens to undermine much that is important in our collective life. As challengers to more established institutions disrupt systems and bring frequently welcome criticism there is a need for all of us to pay careful attention to the way in which emotional literacy and kindness are supported in the public square. Deep divisions in our society, hugely challenged public services, and reported declining trust in institutions, all challenge the ways we work, and the relationships we construct. Unless we find better and more understandable ways of focusing on our shared humanity, we risk a very sterile, and very much less effective, social settlement. And we risk entrenching gross inequalities of power which prevent us achieving our shared goals.

This report argues for a different way of thinking. It is not stuffed full with policy recommendations, toolkits or calls for ‘compassionate impact assessments’. Instead it seeks to explore the big

issues of kindness and emotion in public policy. Why does it matter? What gets in the way? And what are the risks of continuing to ignore and marginalise our emotional intelligence?

### **About my work with Carnegie UK Trust**

In 2017, the Carnegie UK Trust invited me to hold a position as Carnegie Fellow. The Trust only ever has one fellow at a time. This investment allows the fellow to think, read and discuss and so generate discourse around complicated issues. During the past 18 months, I have explored kindness in public policy through a series of roundtables across the UK, speaking at events and writing. I have been honoured to be supported in this way and privileged to meet a wide range of people working around civil society, public services, regulatory bodies and the professions, all of whom gave generously of their time and insight. These meetings and discussions confirmed my view that kindness is an issue for those with power and authority, not just for those working in communities. It convinced me that this is a question of urgency, and it allowed me to think broadly about the obstacles which prevent us genuinely thinking – and behaving – differently.

This report brings together all we have learnt together over these 18 months. It also presents new insights from a poll of over 5,000 people across the UK – the biggest source of data about how we experience kindness in communities and from public services ever produced. We hope the combination of evidence and discourse begins to make visible the invisible role that kindness plays in our wellbeing.

I am indebted to Carnegie UK Trust both for providing the fellowship and for the expert guidance and support of Martyn Evans, Jennifer Wallace, Rebekah Menzies, Ben Thurman, Zoe Ferguson and many others working behind the scenes.



## The big challenges facing public policy?

Public policy has always wrestled with the scarcity of funds and the need to do more as demand increases, and this has been particularly acute over the last decade. In the same decade, more attention has been paid to the caring capacity within the community, and the very many ways in which people express their solidarity by supporting others. There has been a heavy practical and rhetorical emphasis on the power of community to respond. But for organisations and services working in and around the public sector, the challenges remain real, and the search for new ways of operating is urgent.

There are three big challenges facing public policy that centre around operation:

### 1. How do we improve outcomes?

The evidence is clear that personal relationships improve care and that human contact and engagement is important both at points of crisis and moments of change. Just as we know that the health outcomes for elderly people in residential care improve when they are physically touched, so we know that young people will respond much better to advice and intervention from those they trust and recognise.

She kept talking at me, but she doesn't understand anything about my life or the estate I come from.

### 2. How do we build trust and confidence?

We know that trust and confidence in public services is essential, and that it is unfavourably contrasted with the hyper-personal, algorithm driven communication of the global giants. And we also know that when people talk about public services disparagingly, it is so often about the tone and style of the engagement, not the content.

What the nurse did was great, but he never bothered to look at me.

### 3. How do we encourage behaviour change?

The big challenges facing public policy are always about behaviour change. How do we get people to exercise more, save more effectively for their retirement, pay their rent on time, put their rubbish out, immunise their children? Encouraging behaviour change is neither linear nor easy. But it is at the heart of so much public policy. It requires empathy and emotional intelligence and yet is frequently framed in ways that are simply not heard.

They keep going on about immunisation, but I've just got too much on my plate and I don't want to face my little girl being even more upset than she is.

**[Everyday help and support is a] spider's web. It is a structure composed of individual but linked threads, combining fragility with considerable flexibility and strength. Equally importantly, it is often almost invisible to the naked eye, until revealed by the angle of the sun, a sharp frost or droplets of mist.**

**(ANDERSON, BROWNLIE,  
& MILNE, 2015)**

Human relationships matter and they matter enormously in times of change and challenge. Work by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation has tracked the everyday acts of kindness that make people's lives so much more than tolerable, and that distinguish one neighbourhood from another (Haslewood, 2016). Building on this work, the Carnegie UK Trust has also shown the importance of encouraging kindness in communities and building relationships (Ferguson, 2016). These relationships have a powerful impact on the wellbeing of individuals and communities. It is the everyday kindness in our communities and in our interactions with services that has such a profound impact on the lives of so many of us.

Kindness matters and it makes a huge difference. Without acts of kindness the 'state' and indeed the 'market' would be incapable of functioning. There are acts of kindness that have achieved the status of civic duty, such as the very many blood donors, freely giving with no knowledge about the recipient. There

are startling examples of individual acts of kindness and generosity, and of course there is the kindness of community – responding to crisis, supporting individuals, resisting intervention, raising funds.

But the reasons we are nervous talking about kindness and the power of emotions are real too. In a world of instant judgement and communication, in which simple answers to complex questions dominate and feed populism, and a world in which an appeal for emotional response can result in gross inequality and very poor judgement, the amplification of emotion in public services is risky indeed.

There are very good and compelling reasons for embracing a cool, measured and data driven approach to public policy.

But this report argues that three huge drivers in public policy – the technological power to manage information, the digital power to manage communication, and the economic force of austerity – have made it ever more important that we look carefully at the role of emotions, and kindness in public policy.

**In order to be bold,  
we have to be disciplined.**

**(GAWANDE, 2016)**

And it concludes that the scale of investment in artificial intelligence – welcome though it is – will be deeply damaging if it is not matched by a similar acknowledgement of emotional intelligence.

## 2. The lexicons of public policy

There are two lexicons in use in public policy. There is the language of metrics, and value added, of growth and resource allocation, of regulation, and of impact. And there is the language of kindness and grief, of loneliness, love and friendship, of the ties that bind, our sense of identity and of belonging.

Native speakers of each of these languages converse separately perfectly well. They make decisions, and frequently get a great many things done. But so many of the challenges of our time require a more bilingual approach. They require us all to develop a fluency in both languages, and an ability to use the two lexicons without embarrassment or apology, and to move between them appropriately.

Both these vocabularies have strengths, but each is deeply dangerous on its own.

Rational speech allows for assessment and evaluation. It can be verified and provides for fact checking. It can be seen as evidence based, using that which can be measured. It is rigorous and readily accounted. And yet it can mask real differences, can be deaf to nuance and individuality. It can ignore what really matters to people, and privilege that which can be counted.

And just as relational speech can have a warmth and a responsiveness that humans need, it can also lead to sentimentality, and the language itself fuels

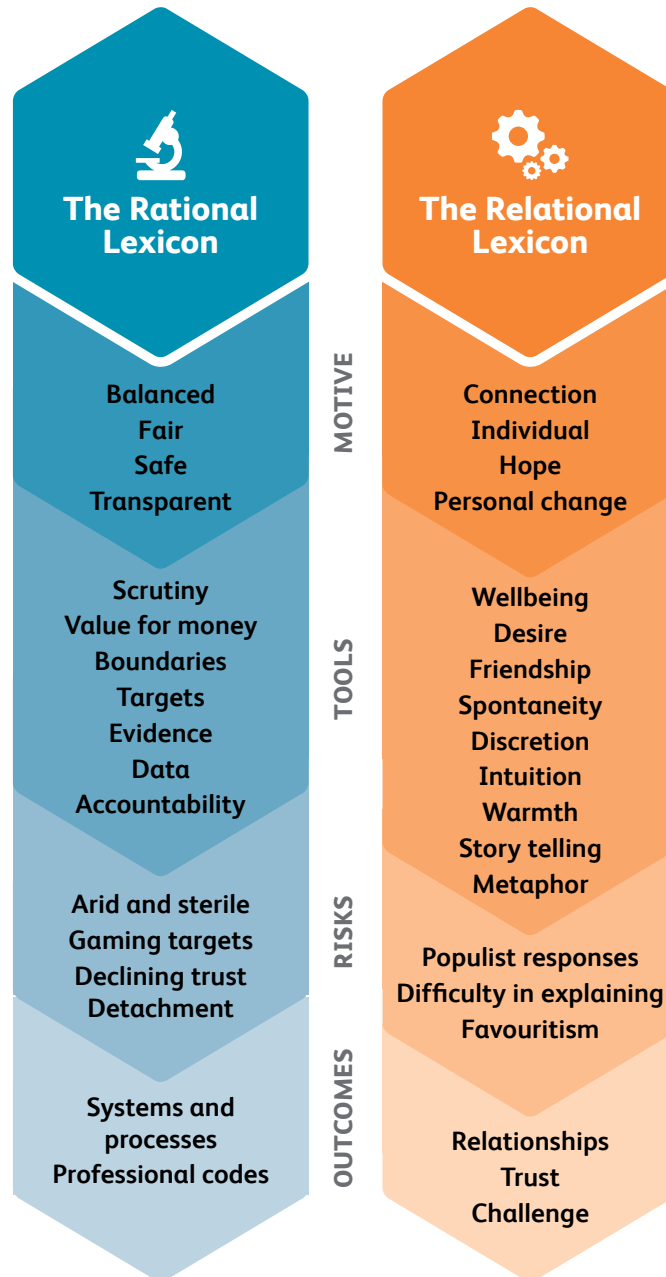
populism, and in the case of public services, pretends to present easy solutions to difficult and complex problems.

### Organisational changes

These two lexicons have always been in existence, but in the last thirty years they have been given much greater power because of the twin impacts of the digital and technological revolution. While it was always recognised that technology would change both what we do and how we do it, there are two particular changes that bear on how organisations and institutions behave, and it is at the confluence of these that issues of kindness, emotion and human relationships can be found.

First there is both the capability and the opportunity of measurement and analysis. The ability to amass data on a grand scale, and then analyse it both quickly and in a wide variety of ways, has brought great benefits to those engaged with public services. It has allowed for the understanding of outcomes, the much clearer interrogation of inputs, and a greater and more reliable assessment of risks, benefits and the inter-relationship between them. This capability has, over the last three decades, been nothing short of revolutionary and it is this capability, linked with the ability to communicate large volumes of information efficiently and

Figure 1: The Two Lexicons of Public Policy



rapidly, that has provided so much of the power to modernise and change organisations.

This technology stream has concentrated and aggregated information and has – at times – been at the root of new systematic approaches, using the power of the algorithm to map more or less routinised decision-making. This technology has brought – and continues to bring – enormous benefits. The capability of data to identify trends, assess quality and evaluate impact is powerful and has made a big difference to the ways in which public services are planned, delivered and then assessed.

But it has a shadow side. The introduction of higher levels of predictability, and a close focus on impact has led in part to the development of a transactional – rather than relational – approach. In turn this has helped to erode the capacity to respond to individuals, to recognise their differences and to engage with the complexity of individuals and their communities.

A capability which has been positively transformative, has also affected the ways in which public policy treats people.

It is this same technology that has enabled rigour which has introduced a second, equally significant, and potent, strand into institutional life. The power of digitally enabled social media and connectivity has democratised voice, removed some protective

layers within and around organisations, and fuelled and enabled a new form of engagement and public scrutiny. It is the power of technology that has enabled people to connect with each other, shine a bright light on poor practice and challenge discriminatory, unkind or unfair decisions. It is this technology that has enabled the development of movements of otherwise frequently isolated people, providing a form of speedy digital connectivity that has enabled them to exert their power. It is this power of communication that has disrupted organisations, and hierarchies, and changed attitudes to work and to the workplace.

But this strand also has its shadow side. Giving a platform for the voices of those normally unheard is positive. But just like every other platform it contains within it great inequalities. Access – and hence power – is never uniform. It makes armchair criticism, frequently by people unaffected by the issues, easy.

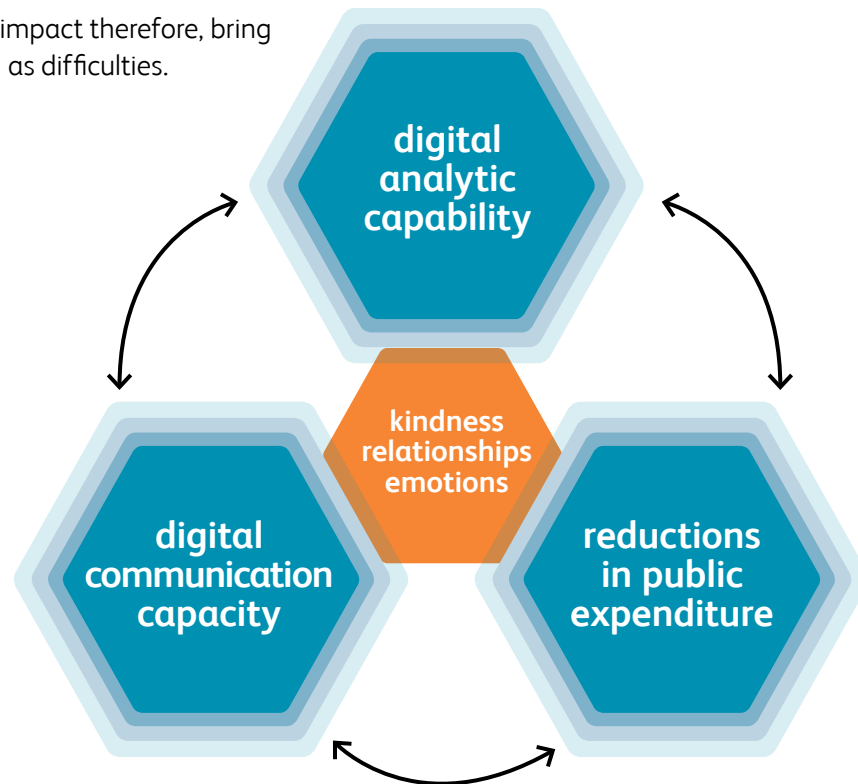
The ability of those criticising public services to complain loudly and vociferously has always existed, and the ability to do this in personally hurtful and damaging ways is nothing new. But it is clear from discussions with public servants at all levels that the amplification provided through social media has also created considerable misery and unhappiness.

(The vitriol and abuse enabled by social media may be a function of its relative infancy, and it is possible that new norms for communicating will develop).

One of the many positive impacts of technology in public serving organisations is that it has allowed for a reduction in hierarchy and greater personal autonomy. The old ‘command and control’ hierarchies had huge weaknesses. But at least they provided the apparent simplicity of clear accountability. The weakening of these structures leaves people working in more appropriately distributed institutions personally exposed when criticism is raised, as inevitably it will be. This is a challenge for leadership, both executive and political. It requires, for example, council leaders to support the actions of the member of staff, without the traditional cover of the Chief Officer.

Both of these strands of impact therefore, bring positive strengths as well as difficulties.

**Figure 2: The Pressures on Kindness in Public Policy**



The combination of these two big institutional changes with the very strong downward pressures on costs across the UK, but even more on England than elsewhere, is the third part of the challenge to kindness. Reductions in public expenditure and a very clear focus on cost reduction have been part of the public-sector landscape for a long time, but they have been particularly evident in the last decade.

The impact of these three major forces has been – together – to raise questions of kindness, of relational care, and of the emotional impact of the way we live together.

### 3. The history of kindness

Any discussion about kindness and its place in modern public policy needs to start by looking at the major changes in the discourses and practices of policy development and management that have taken place in the UK in the last 30 years. It should do so with no sense of nostalgia for a kinder more responsive past.

The task of allocating resource to people in need at any sort of scale has always been hedged by rules, regulations and disputes about penalties and incentives. From the Poor Law onwards, the division between those who gave and those who received has made any sense of solidarity and mutual benefit hard to achieve. The early Charity Organisations Society of Victorian Britain was accused by its critics of harsh and judgemental decision making, a rule-bound approach, and was indeed challenged by the mutual and working men's organisations for the 'coldness' of its charity; and Victorian literature is full of concern about the harshness of decisions deemed to be 'charitable'. The early history of housing associations reflects this, and it is clear that any system of allocation seemingly from 'us' to 'them' will be perceived as demeaning and lacking in human warmth.

There is some evidence that more mutual models – trades union facilities, working men's clubs, mutual funded hospitals and social care – have avoided this, but it is not clear how much those models were able to provide a benefit to people not seen as part of the majority. In other words, while working men's associations, and the friendly societies they produced, were essential in enabling mutual support and assistance, they do not seem to have been able to extend their support outside the group of those able to mutually insure. Did they thrive because of a solidarity which always excluded some?

The early days of the Welfare State are lionised in literature, and the 70th anniversary of the NHS has created its own story about the power and impact of that change. But it is not hard to see challenges to its operation quite early on: *Poor Cow* by Nell Dunn (Dunn, 1967), and the development of the Claimants Unions are just as stinging in their critique about harsh, impersonal services as the Victorian writers. And more recently a succession of authors have written compellingly about the coldness and unresponsiveness of services that treat recipients as somehow lesser (De Waal, 2016) (McGarvey, 2017).

## The political philosophy of caring and kindness

Throughout history people deemed in need have been subject to criticism and judgement. A narrative emerged that described a difference between those needing help and those providing it, and then stressed the need for fairness between those providing and those receiving. The provision of care has always been viewed as something done by one part of the population for another part. This entirely misleading narrative runs through the history of charity and the welfare state and is now expressed by politicians across the political spectrum. This framing of the narrative inevitably shapes the policy response, but it is based on some very clear, and really simple, emotional responses.

- The **fear** of being in need oneself. This allows for an emotional distancing, and a self-protective response that treats anyone in need of any sort of help as automatically ‘other’ and ‘different’.
- **Disgust** at any sort of vulnerability. This emotion has a close cousin in pity and disdain: the way in which kindness is shown can be dismissive of individuality, and specifically can treat the recipient of the service as somehow lesser.
- **Anxiety** about the impact of social need on the rest of society. This is expressed in newspaper headlines about the ‘obesity epidemic’, the ‘crisis in social care’ and most notably the stigmatising of people who are either tenants or in receipt of social security payments – all of who are

routinely represented as drains on society and therefore, by definition, threatening to the wider society who are expected to pay.

## The shadow side of kindness – kindness and rights

Kindness can seem like an unquestionable good, but it is frequently associated with a patronising and pitying approach and – for very good reasons – resisted strongly by those on the receiving end. It can seem sentimental and, critically, to undermine a culture of rights and entitlement. There is fundraising material for example, which seeks to appeal to emotions of compassion and empathy without allowing any sense of agency, or humanity, to those so depicted. There are descriptions of older people, people with disabilities and abused children that derive their power and impact by triggering a sense of pity. This in turn is experienced as condescending. But it is also built on a premise of passivity and lack of agency, seeing people who use services as entirely objects, passive recipients of support without the ability to make their own choices and decisions. It also makes them seem different, and denies our common humanity.

Talk of kindness risks further entrenching these attitudes. There is a lazy narrative that equates kindness with a reduced demand on the state, and the replacement of entitlement and rights with a reliance on random acts of quixotic generosity.



But if kindness is seen as part of a wider sense of affiliation and solidarity it inevitably challenges these attitudes. Empathy and genuine closeness are more likely to build shared understanding, as well as fostering a sense of mutuality. The community assertion of rights, as seen in recent protests in Glasgow to enable ‘asylum seekers’ to remain (McIlkenny, 2018), are more likely to be seen where there is a shared understanding.

## Do people experience kindness?

During my discussions, people have commented that we cannot quantify kindness. Kindness, they say, is a subjective experience and hence not one given to hard, objective measurement. This argument feels logical – the rational world of measurement cannot meet the emotional world of subjective experience.

But this argument ignores the fact that public policy analyses, and is informed by, many examples of quantitative measurement of subjective experience. Official statistics measure not just the reported crime rate but also the perception of crime in a neighbourhood, the latter having a stronger correlation with individual wellbeing. We measure life satisfaction and put great weight on programmes that have proven impact on participants’ satisfaction with their own lives, despite the fact that objectively we value different things. We measure subjective views on the quality of work, of neighbourhoods, of public services, as well as the objective ‘truth’ about these aspects of our lives.





So it is not that we cannot measure kindness. It is that we choose not to measure kindness as an official measure of how we are doing as a society. In parallel to the work I have been doing, the team at Carnegie UK Trust worked with Ipsos MORI to measure kindness across the UK (Wallace, 2018). The findings are at times reassuring and at times counterintuitive.

Reassuringly, people across the UK experience great kindness in their communities and reciprocate this in their behaviours, with more than two-thirds reporting experiencing or showing kindness in their communities. But fewer feel strongly about this, especially in England (see table 1).





Disaggregating the data for different groups provides more insight into kindness in communities. As one would anticipate, a higher proportion of women than men and those living in rural areas than urban areas report giving and receiving kindness. In England (the only jurisdiction where ethnicity data was available) black and minority ethnic people are less likely to experience kindness in their neighbourhood, with a gap of 18 percentage points on strongly agreeing that ‘if my home was empty, I could count on someone in this area to keep an eye on it.’

Kindness in communities has a social gradient, but not the one many expect. While it is common to refer to communities experiencing poverty as being kind places, the data goes against the stereotype, showing that those from higher social grades tend to experience more kindness in their communities.

**Table 1: Percentage in each jurisdiction strongly agreeing with statements about kindness in communities**

% strongly agreeing that ...	 England	 N Ireland	 Scotland	 Wales
People in this area are kind	36%	49%	52%	44%
I have helped someone in this area who needed it in the last 12 months	37%	43%	64%	49%
I make time to speak to my neighbours	43%	51%	59%	53%
If my home was empty, I could count on someone in this area to keep an eye on it	51%	61%	72%	63%
I could turn to someone in this area for practical help if I needed it	41%	49%	60%	54%
I could turn to someone in this area for emotional support if I needed it	27%	38%	47%	41%
Base size: All	1253	1032	1050	1011

**Table 2: Percentage in each jurisdiction strongly agreeing that they experience kindness when using key public services**

% of those with direct or close experience strongly agreeing that people are treated with kindness when using...	 England	 N Ireland	 Scotland	 Wales
GP surgeries	39%	48%	54%	42%
Public libraries	27%	26%	42%	29%
Social care services	18%	26%	30%	23%
Police services	21%	23%	35%	22%
Public transport	17%	27%	30%	17%
Base size: All respondents, excluding those saying 'don't know' at each individual category				

The research also explores experiences of kindness in five key public services (GPs, public libraries, social care, police and public transport). Again, overall a high number of those coming into contact with key public services report experiencing kindness (over 80% for all services in all areas). But the numbers strongly agreeing are far lower and more variable (see table 2).

Ethnicity (data available for England only) is a factor in experiences of kindness for some public services (GP services and public libraries) but not in others (social care and police). There was no variation at all for women in England and Northern Ireland and no pattern in the variability in Scotland and Wales. In general, older people are more likely to report experiencing kindness when using public services.

There is a variable relationship between social grade and strong experiences of kindness from public services. There is no social gradient for GP services and public libraries, but those from lower social grades (C2DE) in Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales are more likely to report strong experiences of kindness when using public transport. Social care and police services only exhibit a social gradient in Scotland, where again those from lower social grades (C2DE) are more likely to report strong experiences of kindness.

This new knowledge helps us avoid simplistic understandings of kindness in communities and with public services.

## 4. Emotions in public policy

It is not surprising that attitudes are so shaped by emotions. Public policy and politics are all about emotions.

- It's about our vulnerability and how we are supported at times of greatest need.
- It's about our homes, our security and the people we love.
- It's about the places we live.

Public policy is therefore always engaged with emotional responses – with the passions, desires and feelings of people. It's concerned with providing homes, boosting economies, educating children, caring for the sick, dealing with crises. It engages with intimacy and the very private, with those we love, and those we don't, with the relationships we have with others, and the ways we respond. It requires trust and sharing – and all of that is about emotions.

### What have emotions got to do with public policy?

- ✔ People feel passionately about the places they come from and where they live. Place gives a sense of identity and belonging, and whether the emotion is one of pride or shame, there are emotions closely associated with place. The history of places, the accent and language, the stories that are told – these directly influence the direction of places, and the extent to which people feel a sense of agency and control in their place.
- ✔ For most of us our homes are the sites of our security. They enable us to face a hostile world, and the loss of a home through eviction, evacuation after a flood, or because of war, has a significant impact on mental health and wellbeing. Safety is a pre-requisite for growth and flourishing. Homes are also the most intimate spaces, and the invasion or destruction of the safety of a home – through domestic violence, child abuse, or burglary – is quite properly seen as emotionally devastating.
- ✔ Half a million older people live in residential care homes. For many other older people this is a dreaded destination, and one they will work hard to avoid. Moving into a care home is recognised as an extremely distressing transition. It comes about because of the recognition of vulnerability, frequently coincides with the death of a life partner, often involves moving from the family home, at the same time as becoming used to loss of other sorts – of capability and capacity, of freedom, and of individual autonomy.

## “Public policy is about relationships.”

And yet when we design public policy, evaluate its impact, think about improving it, the lexicon used is the lexicon of the rational. This matters because it risks a policy that achieves an objective but misses the point – one that does not achieve outcomes and is neither trusted nor valued.

### Reasons not to be kind

These are strong arguments against kindness. Paul Bloom in *Against Empathy* (Bloom, 2013) argues compellingly that this messiness has no place in public policy. Indeed, the efficient modern state should be an accountable entity, run on the basis of clear rules and principles in which entitlement is clear and can be guaranteed. It is only this sort of state, he argues, that allows for the dignity of citizens, not affected by the capriciousness of individual, inevitably flawed, decision making, but instead built on a clear, quantifiable, and therefore always challengeable, set of approaches. It is only this cool and level-headed approach that can protect us against the array of discriminatory approaches, the favouritism and the inbuilt bias of our imperfect instincts.

It is precisely the role of the state, he argues, to rise above the challenges and complexity of individual preferences, of warmth and human engagement and to instead be structured through a clear and transparent framework of rights and responsibilities. Passion, preference and intuition are, he argues, the

material for personal relationships, but once there is contact of any sort between the state and the citizen it needs to be the clean, hard lines of a contract, not the muddled set of expectations of the average relationship.

This approach is central to any rights-based approach to services and to public policy. It is based on an important understanding of the equality of all humans, and the need for people to be treated with dignity and respect. For many of us who have experienced apparent kindness as quixotic, frequently patronising and condescending, it is an important assertion of rights. What is more, it allows for a form of universalism and a shared set of expectations. If bureaucracy is designed to reduce the discriminatory effects of discretion – and it is – then a more equitable, more rules-based approach does theoretically prevent favouritism. It provides protection for the provider and the recipient and it allows decisions to be challenged and contested.

This argument is both compelling and important. It cannot be simply dismissed. But given what we know about the human need for kindness, and the emotions that animate and motivate us, whatever the nature of our relationship to public services, it needs to be challenged. To assume a clean and tidy approach to decision making ignores the messiness of human emotions. To imply that consistency guarantees the fairest response ignores both the massive inequalities of voice and agency, and also the hugely different experiences people have. And what is more, it ignores the professed preference of everyone receiving any public service: for their

individuality to be acknowledged, to be met with warmth and to be treated with kindness.

But Paul Bloom does illuminate why we find this subject so challenging and so difficult. It speaks to our vulnerability as individuals, and our culture – both professionally and more generally – finds that hard to talk about. We reach for the rational lexicon because that enables us to avoid thinking about our human needs.

Of course, individual kindness is superficially quite a comfortable subject. From our childhood we have been schooled to be kind. It's a benign term and seen as entirely positive. It is only when we start to look beyond this, to the kindness of organisations, that the unease creeps in.

To understand these different perspectives better, it is helpful to consider the different levels of kindness, which have been identified through the work of Simon Anderson and Julie Brownlie (Anderson, Brownlie, & Milne, 2015) (Brownlie & Anderson, 2018).

- **Random** acts of kindness can brighten the day. They ease out paths through life and are undoubtedly relevant and important to wellbeing. They have the sanction of the state and cause no disruption.

- **Relational** acts of kindness are found in many one-to-one relationships. The carer who 'goes the extra mile', the nurse who is particularly gentle and thoughtful, the shop keeper who extends warmth and friendship to particular customers. Each of these are important parts of our social glue and connectivity, which at times of frailty – indeed at all times – are highly valued. They receive blessing and support from institutions, usually, but they are often performed by people acting courageously at the limits of their autonomy, bringing their full humanity to work without being instructed or enabled to do so.
- **Radical** kindness demands institutional change. It requires a difference in the ways in which things are run and managed. It challenges long established norms and has the potential to be highly disruptive. But it can also hold the key to improving relationships fundamentally, and so improve the services, activities and engagement that is central to all of our lives.

That's why it is hard to talk about kindness in public policy. Talking about kindness between friends is easy. Nobody seriously wants to be unkind. At the same time, nobody goes into public service – as a volunteer supporter, budget manager, job centre adviser, senior leader, policy wonk – with the intention of being unkind. But it is hard to discuss, and we will all find ways to deflect and avoid it.

- ✓ The embarrassed shrug and averted gaze, as if this is not really the stuff of public policy.
- ✓ Or the affirming nod, that yes, we all want to be kind and we are, that rotten unkind apples need rooting out.
- ✓ And this is occasionally followed by a desire to get people to be kinder to their neighbours and to help out a little.
- ✓ And frequently noisy agreement that front line staff need to be kinder.

In other words, questions of kindness are seen as referring to them, not to us. They are seen as challenges for the front line, or for the 'new front line' in the community, but never for the designers, evaluators, auditors and managers of public services. Questions of kindness and empathy and demands for better behaviour are made of the most hard-pressed and least well rewarded people in public service – the care workers, cleaning assistants and school dinner ladies. They need to be asked of those making crucial allocative decisions, those designing new frameworks and policies and those assessing their impact.

The picture is complex and challenging. Intention and motivation are not contested, and yet discussions across the country describe services and

neighbourhoods that fail to meet people's needs, in which people feel they are reduced to a number, and in which, increasingly, people report that they don't feel that they receive care in the way they would wish. People report a sense of distance from decision makers, and a strong feeling that they are not in control (Unwin, 2018).

Yet, there are good and compelling reasons why kindness is not a feature of public policy. Indeed, there are good and compelling reasons for arguing that kindness in public policy is problematic – and profoundly uncomfortable.

### 1. Public policy needs to be **fair**.

There needs to be clarity and certainty about entitlement and any approach that requires discretion and autonomy may well undermine that. A rules-based approach can – it is argued – guarantee fairness and allow for comparison.

#### In practice...

A local authority CEO told us of a dilemma: a family were to be evicted for non-payment of rent. The costs of eviction, and damage to the family, far out-weighed the sum owed. But an intervention to forgive the debt would be very unfair on the next family on the waiting list for scarce housing.

*This matters because...*

## 2. Public policy needs to be **open** to scrutiny and challenge.

The decisions made by people and institutions will quite properly be challenged and scrutinised. This has always been so, but the age of social media puts a particular premium on decision making that can be scrutinised and understood.

### In practice...

A GP receptionist has known the family of the patient well. She knows that if they're asking for a home visit they will not be doing so without good cause. She encourages the GP to pop in on her way home. The neighbours see this and are outraged that their calls to the local surgery do not merit the same discretionary help. They raise it with the practice committee and on social media, and the receptionist is reprimanded. A binding protocol is created to make sure this doesn't happen again.

*This matters because...*

## 3. Public services need to be **safe**, both for those who use them and for those who provide them.

A system of rules-based regulation has developed over decades to ensure that there is certainty about behaviour and about boundaries.

### In practice...

A care worker in a residential home becomes particularly close to one of the residents. He visits her sometimes out of hours, makes sure to bring in recordings of her favourite music, and a couple of times had a drink in the local pub with her adult son who was distressed after visiting his mother. Through him, he got to know the whole family and when the resident died he was honoured to be invited not just to the funeral, but also to the wake afterwards, and to be recognised in a very small way in the will. One of the sisters felt that he had overstepped the mark, had ingratiated himself with the family, and had put undue pressure on the resident. She complained that he had manipulated his way into the family and taken advantage of his position. He was disciplined and advised to observe boundaries more carefully.

*This matters because...*



#### 4. Public services need to be **professional**.

This requires some detachment and a proper sense of distance to ensure that decisions are made in a cool- and level-headed way, based on the experience and training of the provider.

##### In practice...

A teacher is particularly attached to one of the children in her class. She recognises the latent talent and disputes the view from the rest of the staffroom that the boy is 'just trouble'. She recognises the huge domestic pressures the boy faces, but is keen to encourage his creativity and his passion for modern art. She shares books with him and does everything she can to encourage him to take part in school trips, even when there is little school money available, and none from home. She is accused by other children, and their parents, of favouritism and the school intervenes. The judgement is that she has behaved in a non-professional way.

*And finally, this matters because...*

#### 5. Public services need to offer **good value for money**.

This requires paying close attention to the evidence and ensuring that waste is minimised. And this is important for public trust and confidence. Whatever your views about austerity and public expenditure limits, value for money will always be an important and worthy goal.

##### In practice...

A contract for the provision of volunteer time for very vulnerable people with learning disabilities is up for review. The commissioning authority is concerned to extract best value for money, and there is feeling that the voluntary organisation recruiting and supporting the volunteers has become a bit sloppy. In particular the commissioners are challenged to prove that the price charged is genuinely competitive. They decide to test the market, by putting the contract out to annual open tender. The voluntary organisation loses volunteers, their links and friendships are broken, and continuity is lost.

But of course, public services currently do all they can to meet these requirements, and yet the services are not experienced as sufficiently kind or personal. The management of services is frequently very unfair, with better, more humanised services being available to those with both the ability and the privilege to fight for them. People who are themselves from professional backgrounds seem to receive better services, from people with whom they identify. Safety is by no means guaranteed, and scrutiny is partial.

## Where does kindness fit?

### Scientific management

**“How can we hold complex public services to account and still retain our humanity?”**

One useful lens through which to look at the history of emotions and kindness in public policy, is in changing attitudes to managerialism.

The perceived erosion of ‘kindness’ in present-day policy and service provision can be seen as possible unintended consequences of the ‘new public management’ and ‘public audit’ techniques of public accountability introduced by successive governments across many policy fields since the early 1970s. The development of public audit has been comprehensively tracked by Michael Power and others (Power, 1999). As part of a response to both fiscal challenges, and apparent scepticism about the efficacy of existing approaches, the second half of the last century saw an increased focus on measurement, efficiency and effectiveness. Most particularly in the series of Rayner reviews in 1981-2, public administration witnessed the importation of disciplines from the private sector, and the mantra of economy, efficiency and effectiveness.

Equally, environment policy and health and safety, has seen the introduction of more systematic standardising concepts and techniques such as ‘risk assessment’, ‘evidence-based-policy’, and ‘sound science’. These new concepts brought great benefits in terms of managing, justifying and implementing

complex and large-scale social interventions. They also enabled the sort of accountability that a modern democracy is likely to demand. But they have been experienced too often, both by staff and by those who use services, as opaque, and frequently irrelevant.

### Professionalism

**“How do we manage the tension between impartiality and consistency, and intuition and empathy?”**

Most professional codes stress detachment. They ensure that individual preferences, personal likings and empathy don’t cloud the making of significant judgements. They try to prevent favouritism, strongly advocate for equal treatment and will normally impose quite rigid concepts of ‘boundaries’ to ensure that the provider keeps their distance. Indeed, our daily discourse assumes automatically that professional relationships are not characterised by warmth or impulse. These codes serve a number of discrete and important purposes. They protect the practitioner from the sheer pressure of over-engagement and the personal consequences of that. In that way they provide much needed protection.

While the recent iteration of the Nursing and Midwifery Code explicitly states that the first duty is to treat people with kindness, respect and compassion (Nursing & Midwifery Council, 2015), the recently revised Code of Conduct for doctors (General Medical Council, 2013) stresses

making the care of the patient the first concern alongside ensuring skill, maintaining partnerships and prioritising safety. Others, such as the Code of Professional Conduct and Practice for teachers (CDET, 2017), foreground integrity, objectivity and competence.

These carefully crafted, valuable and important codes reveal the challenges inherent in any examination of the power of emotions and the value of kindness. They demonstrate very clearly the tensions and trade-offs between the warmth of a shared experience, and the values of intuition and empathy, with the absolute requirement for impartiality and consistency.

### Scrutiny

**“Can we reconcile an appetite for greater kindness and intuition with high levels of public scrutiny?”**

Public interest in policy and its implications is high, and the development of social media as a tool for holding decision makers to account has brought great benefits. Decisions made in private are exposed and challenged in ways that were not possible before. At the same time there is a growing demand for a particular form of accountability, and those making decisions about peoples' lives are rightly held to a high standard of scrutiny. A highly politicised environment in many parts of the UK, along with extreme pressure on costs, makes any departure from a rules-bound approach risky.

### Who needs to be kind?

The discourse on kindness rightly starts at the community level, urging neighbourliness and identifying the amazing and generous work that takes place in so many neighbourhoods. It frequently refers to the providers of care – the care assistant, midwife, teaching assistant. It is supported by evidence of the community advocates and champions, the informal supporters and the networks of care and support. It refers to the mobilisation of communities that is such an important part of the structure of support: the dementia friends, youth mentors, circles of support and many others. All of these are expressions of solidarity. All of these mean that we know about our fellow citizens. All of these have the potential to share knowledge across boundaries. There is great power in these relationships, but those who hold power also need to address the question of empathy and kindness.

This community-based discourse doesn't address the craft of policy making, the way in which power is exercised, and the way in which all service to the public needs to engage emotional intelligence as well as rationality. It doesn't include the architects and urban planners who need to understand the human, the interactive and the relational. It doesn't cover those who are engaged in gathering much needed resources – rent collection, debt management, revenue generation. It doesn't respond to those who are managing huge complexity and planning for a future they cannot possibly understand. It doesn't address the

economic planners and developers, trying to make fragile and volatile regional and local economies work more effectively and more inclusively. It doesn't speak to those whose jobs require them to protect vulnerable people, and therefore take coercive and unpopular action. It doesn't help those who are creating regulations, in the face of mass public scrutiny.

Kindness matters for those developing, managing and assessing public services. But there seems to be little distinction between the ability to be kind in any sector – public, private or voluntary. The dispersal of services across sectors has not resulted in some highly personalised services in one sector and a high volume of impersonal services in others. Indeed there are examples of humanity, emotional intelligence and indeed great kindness, in large and small services, across all sectors.

If kindness matters, and the evidence suggests that it does, we need to take much more seriously the way in which the human comes into our public policy. And we need to make some tough decisions about how that is balanced with other important public policy goals of fairness, openness, professional boundaries, and risk management.

In the course of this work I identify two different levels at which we make kindness difficult.

Figure 3: What we know about these levels

### Macro-economic and political environment



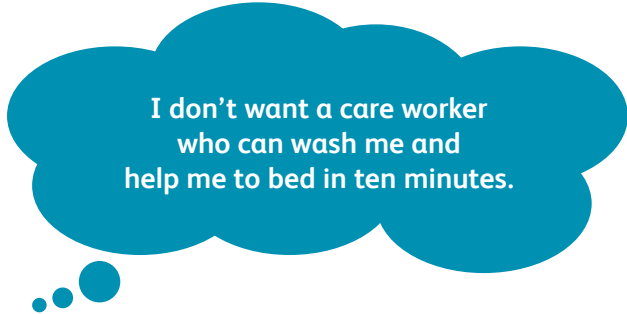
### Processes and culture

Every part of public service and policy takes place in the context of much larger and more distant decisions, and resources. They also take place in a wider environment which is in turn fuelled by sentiment and emotion. The operating environment itself is rooted in the two lexicons, even though it is the rational that is formally acknowledged. The relational lexicon, however, plays a major (if unrecognised) role in attitudes to poverty, vulnerability and need. It is just as significant in decisions about public expenditure even though reading the Chancellor's budget statements, or a local authority finance report, might suggest that only the rational – and the quantifiable – has had an impact. In other words, politics and economics and questions of public finance are also deeply rooted in the emotional.

Equally, organisations and institutions are not rational bodies. They develop over years, frequently decades and more, and their cultures and processes are the accretion of different experiences, different sets of values and different leadership. These processes are therefore rarely solely rational and logical. They too are informed by both lexicons, and yet again, the relational, emotional voice may be silenced or not given profile. This means that organisational culture is frequently hard to define, and this can be seen in the multiplicity of processes, which then shape attitudes to relationships. But this is rarely surfaced in the rule books, schedules of delegations, and process maps of the organisations with power.

## Kindness in leadership – organisational productivity and effectiveness

One of the challenges facing the whole of the UK – in all sectors – is loosely known as the productivity conundrum, namely the falling level of productivity. Measurements of productivity typically rate speed of activity, and the ratio between inputs and outputs. One reason for falling levels of productivity seems to be that in a service dominated industry speed of turnaround is not a sensible metric, and this is obviously true in public services. New metrics of satisfaction and attention are more useful and require a focus on the relational, and the kind.



**I don't want a care worker  
who can wash me and  
help me to bed in ten minutes.**

But they also require that those behaviours are valued and rewarded. This requires fluency in both lexicons, particularly for leaders and decision makers. Campaigns such as Stonewall's campaigns in the workplace (Stonewall, n.d.), and those encouraging a more positive and aware approach to mental illness (Mental Health Foundation, n.d.) have been accepted with enthusiasm by organisations in all sectors. There is a growing acceptance of the fact that staff who can 'be themselves at work' will make a bigger contribution, and that engagement is an

essential driver for organisational success (MacLeod & Clarke, 2009). This has introduced a degree of emotional fluency into many workplaces in a way that would have been simply unimaginable a decade ago.

Most analyses of this progress recognise the need for authentic and convincing leadership, and the alignment of reward with the desired behaviour. And most critiques make it clear that the organisations where this is not the case – and, for example, rewards in the form of promotion and recognition remain only with those conforming to some imagined organisational norm – are the ones who lose the benefits of a more engaged way of working.

So too with kindness. Leadership really matters. Kindness is not sentimental, and nor does it result in sloppy behaviour. Kindness requires a real focus on relationships and that can be truly challenging and demanding. Staff connecting with those they support in deeply human ways will require more support, and more recognition. It is clear from many of those we talked to that a very harsh operating environment, with little room for support and sympathy, will result in staff following a rigid rule book, and resisting any connection. People who feel that too much is demanded of them, with too little explanation, and too little resource, will not find exhortations to be kind helpful. Whereas those who understand organisational limits but feel genuinely supported to operate in a more human and connected way, will make a different and much more valuable contribution.

Leadership and management based on emotional intelligence will understand the huge pressures that staff in public services are facing. They will appreciate, and articulate, the emotional toll of reduced resources and demanding policy. They will be able to speak in ways that can be heard, and most crucially they will also be able to demonstrate the depths of their own humanity.

None of this is new. Management text books have for several decades extolled the importance of engagement and deep relationality. But in a public policy context it needs underscoring because the need to shift the mindset and enable more human facing policies and practice is imperative.

### **Emotional intelligence in the workplace**

It is not that long ago that workplaces were viewed as temples of rationality – places unlike the chaos of family life where cool heads could make rational decisions and operate with order. And yet this view was always misleading. The workplace has always been a highly emotional place, powered by ambition, envy, fear and so on. Temperament has been acknowledged and calibrated through all sorts of psychometric profiling.

**It was only after it all went horribly wrong that we realised that all the key decision makers were incredibly optimistic people and they didn't really like thinking about the downside. In fact they tried not to spend too much time with those they called the 'prophets of doom'.**

But it is still rare to see an open acceptance of the role that emotions play in all sorts of decision making. Instead of opening a difficult board meeting by acknowledging the state of mind – both optimistic and pessimistic – of those making decisions, we tend to try to put a number on risk, quantifying the gut instinct which is such an important part of any risk appraisal. Good leadership is often – rightly – associated with a positive outlook and a willingness to describe hope and opportunity. Yet individual experience has often encompassed pain and sadness in ways that are also informative and part of complex decision making. The public policy environment is littered with examples of failed projects led by people who indulged their own optimism and ignored the more cautious voices, just as it is full of schemes that never took off because pessimism won the day. Diversity in emotional stance is as important as any other form of diversity, and the tyranny of dominant emotion is as damaging as groupthink and yet much less frequently acknowledged.

## Emotional intelligence in statecraft and policy making

Kindness is messy. By encouraging intuition and responsiveness it can be unfair and can simply strengthen stereotyped views. It can entrench unfair discrimination. It can make favouritism and special treatment acceptable. It can be terribly wasteful and is very challenging for already highly stretched staff who need to be supported by rules that protect them. But fundamentally it risks being unfair and being seen to be unfair.

But it also has the potential to recast the relationship between the citizen and the state for our contemporary times. It can build solidarity and so build trust in institutions and governments. A new social contract, recognising the power and capability of the individual will respect the differences between citizens as well as their shared and common interests. The prize for this shift in power, and investment in human relationships could be great: a much more engaged and responsive approach to the biggest challenges we face, and the capacity to respond to the difficulties and opportunities that we cannot yet imagine. Across the UK – in Scotland Wales and Northern Ireland (Wallace, 2018) – a deliberate focus on the importance of wellbeing indicates the rise of a new – and more bi-lingual approach to statecraft. One that recognises the interdependencies within the population, and the new and emerging role of the relational state.

The Scottish Government in 2018 adopted kindness as one of its core values in its 2018 National

Performance Framework (Scottish Government, 2018). This is not an easy value to adopt. Its role in the framework means that it needs to do more than 'send a message'. It establishes kindness as one of the things for which government, and public services, intend to be known for, and is something which all Scotland's citizens can expect. As a piece of statecraft this is ground breaking and significant. And it has well recognised implications in a number of directions but specifically:

- Measuring and auditing for kindness
- Policy design for kindness
- Regulating for kindness

The challenge is to ensure that the great potential of this commitment does drive the higher levels of trust, and engagement, that those designing the framework intend.



## 5. So why be kind?

### Diversity demands personalising and kindness

Kindness matters not because it is a nice extra, but because our population is now so different and has such different needs and desires that an attempt to homogenise is bound to fail. In a public policy context this diversity is important for a number of reasons.

- Many services – care, housing, policing, environmental health, social care, healthcare, libraries – are now expected to meet the needs and desires of at least four generations, and – depending upon measurement – often five. The difference in expectations between the generations at the very least suggests that an offering that is both uniform and universal may not be what is needed.
- For very similar reasons – due to the advances of medical science – our population contains more people with a wider range of disabilities and long-term medical conditions than ever before.
- We now know far more about the differences between places – the different attitudes to institutions, the different economic circumstances, the different opportunities – and we know that history and place are closely entwined.

- Differences in ethnicity, nationality, faith and culture present both different opportunities, and challenges to public policy.
- And of course, there are differences in family formation, in the relationships within families, and in the web of love and friendship that supports most of us most of the time.

None of these differences are new. We've become very used to adapting and shifting in response to changing expectations. But our different identities have found a new expression through social media, just at the same time that our data capability gives us ever greater ability to fine-tune and make bespoke the services and activities provided. The differences between us are highlighted, and rightly so, but this also creates new obligations for understanding and for focus. It provides great opportunities for ensuring that there is understanding and cultural alignment and recognition – but with this too comes risks.

**“ Personalising – for very good reasons – has its limits even if the personal preferences and outcomes are clear. ”**

## Behaviour change demands emotional intelligence and kindness

Some of the biggest challenges facing public policy are now about behaviour. Public policy wants to promote healthy habits, improved recycling, safer driving, using less water. In order to encourage change, there needs to be a clear and genuine understanding of motivation. For this to have any credibility, and chance of success, it also needs to display a deep understanding of emotional intelligence and the factors that make change possible.

Work done by Sir John Elvidge for the Carnegie UK Trust (Elvidge, 2014) introduced the important concept of the Enabling State, namely the state with the expressed function of enabling citizens to achieve higher levels of wellbeing. This highly influential work drew attention to the important association between state intent and citizens' demands, and the many ways in which they interact.

Albert Bandura, the pioneering social psychologist described this process as self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997). In seeking to understand what it is that makes it possible for any of us to change our habits and our behaviours, he developed the theoretical underpinning that is central to a conception of a more human, more personalised approach. Most recently summarised by Richard Wilson in *Good and bad help* (Wilson, Cornwell, Flanagan, Nielsen, & Khan, 2018), there are a number of component parts in any successful change:

- Belief that change is possible
- Having a role model who shows that change is possible
- Measurable and visible steps
- Intrinsic rewards from the change

For public policy practitioners with an interest in behaviour change – the biggest challenge facing public policy – this requires a willingness to tangle with the complexity of emotional responses, and an understanding of the deeply human, and frequently untidy, motivations that make us the people we are.

### **Emotions in a family:** Childhood obesity

Tackling the growing levels of obesity among young children is a public health priority across the four nations of the UK. There have been well funded public health campaigns with celebrity engagement and good scientific evidence, all accompanied by the constant drumbeat of panic mixed with barely disguised disgust for those who struggle with their weight. What is (largely) missing is the understanding of the emotional drivers, the ways in which parents show their love for their children, the culture of eating, hospitality and family. What is overlooked are the emotional reasons, the desire for satiety, and the pressures on hard pressed caring families.

### **Emotions in a place:** The Challenge of Regeneration

The regeneration of neighbourhoods and communities require a deep empathy for the place, and an understanding of the emotional drivers within the place. It demands a close connection with the history and culture of the place, the connections and shared stories, the language and the complex web of links between people. It demands just as accurate an understanding of the social connections as it demands of the road network. And yet too frequently the rational lexicon dominates, the stories go unheard, and the connections are overlooked.

Places harbour emotions, and attitudes to places shape them. History, heritage and the stories people tell have a powerful impact on how places thrive, or don't. Economic structural and development plans are frequently silent on this. They are written in the language of the rational not the relational. And yet individual experience, and research, show all too clearly the long-term impact of emotions and feelings in a place.

The programme of work on Social Haunting illustrates this powerfully (*Working with Social Haunting*, n.d.). This work, led by Dr Geoff Bright at Manchester Metropolitan University, uses a range of media to understand the way in which the history of oppression and of resistance shapes the experience

of places today. Using drama, music and storytelling, this powerful programme of work illuminates just how significant the role of emotion is in the understanding of place and its dimensions.

The sounds and smells of home are powerfully evocative and so too are the stories that are told and the songs that are sung. This work shows clearly how fluency in the relational lexicon is central to any plans for economic and social regeneration.

### **Can the algorithm kill our instinct for kindness?**

The biggest development of our decade is the rise of artificial intelligence (AI) or machine learning – in all its manifestations – and the question of what it is doing to our humanity.

The development of powerful data capture and analysis, the construction of more or less predictive algorithms, and the ability to automate some of our daily transactions brings huge benefits to the shapers of public policy. It allows us to capture outcomes in a way that had previously been considered far too complex, and to make evidenced assumptions about the impact of various sorts of interventions. Equally it can enable analysis of whole populations, their interdependencies and gives us the ability to tune public policy for particular needs.

It should be able to liberate us in so many ways.

However, as with all developments, there are risks, and the risks lie in what it does to our deep human connections.

- There is a risk that we will fail to influence the development of AI and machine learning in ways that enable it to strengthen human relationships.

**“Do we have the skill and the willingness to capture and use information about emotions, about love, about networks of support?”**

- There is a risk that we will allow technologically driven AI to make our public policy ever more formulaic, algorithmically governed, and, in pursuit of the apparent cleanliness of data and rational thinking, we will lose the emotional intelligence which is the only thing that will deliver the policy gains we so urgently need.

**“Do we have the skill to know when, and how, to override the algorithm? And will we know how to defend that in the public square?”**

- There is a risk that the predictive ability of AI will erode further our capacity for solidarity.

**“Why should I contribute to insurance against a disease I’m highly unlikely to get?”**

The technologies in this area are developing at pace and scale, and are attracting major investment. They have already transformed our experiences of banking, communications and retail, and are rightly offered as a solution to many of the most intractable problems of public policy.

But the scale of investment needs to be balanced with similar investment and understanding of the power of emotional intelligence.

This means:

- Rewarding and recognising emotional intelligence in public services.
- Fostering and developing ways of measuring emotional intelligence in people, in services and in programmes.
- Legitimising and using the relational lexicon.

## How does this relate to kindness?

Thinking about kindness contributes to an analysis that is far from comfortable. It calls on us to focus on the relationships not the transactions. It requires us to focus on the reality of people's lives, not just the data. It demands that we interrogate information using all our capabilities – not just our rational ones. It means that we have to put ourselves in the shoes of our fellow citizens, understanding motivations, desire and choices. This challenges the core of our approach to policy making, the nature of evidence and our professional boundaries.

*But it has never been more urgent.*

The biggest development of our decade is the rise of AI and the question of what it could do to our humanity. A steely focus on the importance of kindness in public policy will enable us to enter the next decade with clarity about individual autonomy, the power of affiliation, and the needs of a more connected, more interdependent society. Failing this test will generate greater inequality, further social distance and the very real risk that responding to human misery will be the very high cost our grandchildren have to pay.

## 6. Closing reflections

This is an important moment in time. After ten years of austerity and a challenging public policy environment there is a widespread recognition that public policy work needs to change. We know that technology – in automation, machine learning and associated data power – brings great opportunity. We also know that many parts of the country and many communities feel disenfranchised and unheard. And we know that demands on public services must increase. The old essential verities are tired and not fit for our modern purpose.

And there are risks ahead. As our society becomes more transactional, and we communicate with our smart phones at least as much as we do with real people, it is tempting to see a technological response. But we are all frail and complex people, and our actions and responses are shaped by our emotions – our history, our expectations, our sense of power – as much as they are by a rational assessment of the issue. And at times of vulnerability and weakness, just the time at which most of us experience public services, our need for a kind, human and emotionally astute response is always greatest. A tap of a smart phone may be sufficient if you are buying a ticket or ordering groceries, but it is unlikely to be sufficient if you are reporting a crime, worried about a child, or uncertain what to do next.

But there are also major opportunities. That same technology can be liberating and insightful. It

can help us understand complex problems and identify and evaluate means of intervention. The power of data can be used to enhance all of our experience, and free us from dull and unrewarding work. But it needs to be shaped and managed by those who understand the human condition and are emotionally literate. It needs to be shaped around the needs of people – and those needs are for empathy, solidarity and an understanding of full humanity.

### Building a movement for change

There are powerful drivers for change. But a movement for change needs to engage a range of different actors, and to understand their different emotional drivers and motivations.

### The trouble makers

The troublesome complainers are the bane of every organisation's life. Frequently irritating, often absorbing vast amounts of organisational time and energy, they are nevertheless the single best source of management information available to those within institutions. Paying careful attention to those who challenge and complain will raise questions about emotional fluency and will provide vital feedback. And of course, the irritation provoked will also provide evidence. Complainers are often right.

The temptation to deal with complaints through a complex architecture may muffle their sound, and may well hide what is going on.

People, dissatisfied with alternatives, drive change and help to shift power.

**Every society honors its live conformists, and its dead troublemakers.**

MIGNON MCLAUGHLIN

## The risk takers

Many acts of kindness are done by those working at the edge of the rules, or indeed outside them. And many are done by the people most vulnerable to a rules-based culture. The risk takers – at any level within or outside an organisation – can identify the rules that get in the way, can apply their humanity to those rules, and emotionally literate organisations can then reward and protect them.

**It's better to beg for forgiveness than to ask for permission.**

ENGLISH PROVERB

## The communicators

The relational lexicon includes story telling. It is not afraid of anecdote and knows that how you describe something is often as important as what you say. And in any movement for change, the way in which the story is told will rely on the story telling skills of the communicator – wherever they are. But communication is also about the art of listening and listening acutely both to what is said and what is not said.

**The art of communication is the language of leadership.**

JAMES HUMES

## The protectors

At a time of change, protectors are often those who are able to give voice and context to that which we hold dear. Frequently seen as looking backwards and safeguarding the past, the true protectors are those who recognise what we are in danger of losing. Particularly in the face of technological change, there is an important space for those people – sometimes in churches and faith communities, sometimes in broader civil society and in politics – to make the case for the human, and the importance of our shared humanity. But there is always a risk that their views are dismissed as mere nostalgia.

Norman Kirk, the former Prime Minister of New Zealand, is famous for saying that people don't want much – just...

**“ someone to love, somewhere to live, somewhere to work and something to hope for. ”**

As we try to build a new approach to public policy, his words are true of people working at every level in public service and in the community. It is our shared humanity that makes the opportunity ahead both so critical, and so important.

## Call and response

Kindness is disruptive. That may seem a surprising thing to say. Kindness is often associated with an avoidance of conflict. But kindness comes from solidarity, and solidarity, in the modern world, demands a significant shift of power. Solidarity manifests itself in many ways.

From Dementia Friends, to volunteer mentors, mental health champions, peer advocates and campaigns to reduce loneliness. From the Big Lunch, to Near Neighbours, to asset-based community development, many thousands of people are demonstrating with kindness and care, and in so doing have asserted a new form of solidarity.

But it's not just about being nice. In doing this work they have learned about the lives of their

fellow citizens, formed deep human connections, and become advocates for a fairer world. These schemes break down the barriers between us. They ensure that the loneliness of disability, the grief of sudden illness and bereavement, the challenge of adolescence do not remain secret and hidden. These approaches allow the community to show they care. And they show that we all have the power to respond. At a time of deep divisions, in the development of a host of different schemes and initiatives, involving large swathes of the population, connections are being made, solidarity is being shown.

So, the compassion that drives these initiatives is also building knowledge, deepening understanding, and demanding a major shift in power. The solidarity of Dementia Friends or the arguments of peer advocates are every day contributing to a groundswell of demand – for action, intervention and a different way of being.

This call needs to be met with a response. And the response needs to be substantive and real. Public policy cannot continue to applaud the efforts of individuals and communities without recognising that these same efforts demand action that is different, and a new approach to power.

That's why kindness is so disruptive.

It changes the relationships between people, and inevitably demands a change in the relationships between people and institutions and organisations.



If public policy does not respond creatively and urgently to this challenge, it will rapidly dissipate trust and fail to deliver. The results would be disastrous for us all.

Kindness changes things – and action on kindness in communities must be met by a new contract, fit for the twenty-first century. This contract will recognise that we are at our best when we recognise the importance of emotions and deep

human connections. It will protect and enhance the instinct for kindness, making sure that decisions, interventions, design, planning and leadership are rooted in an understanding of how we feel. A contract that recognises that public services are always about relationships and emotions. A contract that is written in the two lexicons of public service and helps us all to be more bi-lingual. A contract that will build trust in public services, encourage engagement and make social change possible.



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risk  
professionalism



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