



# PARTICIPLE- CLOSING HOUSE, OPENING DOORS

15 October 2015

*Speech delivered by Hilary Cottam*

It is almost ten years to the day that I started Participle. In 2005 I was incredibly lucky to win a cash prize as Britain's Designer of the Year and with this money and the equally valuable friendship and moral support of many people in this room I started to put together Participle.

I rented the space you are standing in now, brought a team together and wrote our mission Beveridge 4.0. Beveridge 4.0 sets out a vision of a 21st century welfare state- to be grown through a process of deep participation and with a commitment to fostering all people's capabilities at its heart.

To be honest I didn't expect to last a year, but the mission resonated: it drew, and continues to draw, both partners and very talented Participles.

Those first partners were both visionary and brave: they committed significant resource to open innovation projects- a journey for example on our ageing work where we didn't attempt to fix something but went on the genuinely open process of enquiry that led to Circle. And then they committed funding to the solutions we developed together- not to start small pilot projects but investments that gave the new a fighting chance to grow and the opportunities to re-think at the systemic level.

"So is this it?" people often ask when they walk through our doors. They have heard about us and they expect something more- a bigger space, more people. We are small and what we have achieved is a testament to our partners but above all to the enormous talent and energy of Participles.

Over a hundred people have worked with us in some form since we started: learning our methods, contributing to our ideas. It wasn't always easy- working in a start up is bumpy and uncomfortable- particularly at the beginning. And even as we grew up the challenges have remained. You know it is not easy to work for an organisation without core funding, where

you give your all but you never really know how much longer the money or your job will be there for. I feel blessed to have had such incredible colleagues- I feel lucky and privileged to have worked alongside such creative and open people and I want to salute them. It is fantastic to have some key people here this evening. I would like to acknowledge the work of Hugo Manassei who was my business partner for some years and to thank each and every one you. In particular I want to thank and recognise Jennie Winhall, Daniel Dickens, Be Laursen Jones, Tarrant Steele, Emma Southgate and Cath Dillon. Each of you in different ways has shaped this organisation to be what it became.

And together we have done some amazing work:

We have worked with 12,000 people, and supported them to bring about change in their lives;

We have brought new issues like loneliness and the complexity of family challenges to national prominence;

We have seeded new organisations such as the Circles and built teams- like our Life teams which are still in place six or seven years on.

This work is out there and still growing.

We have been at the forefront globally of implementing and measuring the capabilities approach. This work is still young and developing but it has attracted increasing attention- including those study visits from 5 continents- I think we are going to squeeze in one last one next week to people who will be sitting on cardboard boxes.

And as we have worked with our mission, tried things, failed and learnt, we have come to understand that above all it is relationships which are the core capability - the ingredient that makes the difference not just in what we design – the what - but how we deliver. It is this experience, built through practice that has led to the development of Relational Welfare.

Last week I was invited to speak about Relational Welfare at TED Global- I think this is an invitation that demonstrates how far the ideas have grown and travelled. It sounds so simple doesn't it- that our future is about our relationships with one another, not technocratic fixes to organisations. But the implications in terms of culture, funding models and power are profound.

All of us at Participle feel very proud of this work: of these ideas we have grown and spread, the lives we have changed and the systems we have infected.

I think it is important to acknowledge however that whilst more and more people believe in this way of working – it has also become harder. As the demand and the need has grown so the resources have diminished. I have received many, many wonderful letters from former colleagues and collaborators in the past couple of weeks.

Those from Local Authorities have a similar theme. Perhaps I can share the message from Wigan – one of our partners on our Life family work who cannot be here this evening. Donna Hall, the chief executive of Wigan wrote to say “your work has underpinned our whole approach to reform and helped to save us so much particularly in Adults budgets and we are now

embedding the approach in children's services- the programme called the Deal. We would like to thank you on behalf of the people of Wigan". Like many others, the Leader of Wigan has told us that if they had not started this transformation process in 2011 they would not have been able to invest in this system change, changing lives, and saving money.

This is a big challenge: change is needed more than ever but the resource and the thinking space that is needed for transformation is now much harder to find.

The other big challenge which we have talked about before is the lack of social investment or indeed any other form of funding to grow work: to scale, spread and embed new practice.

And yet, despite these very real challenges Participle has given birth to projects and ideas that have changed lives and influenced many.

These new ways of working can change lives – all of us here believe this but they are still at the margins, fragile and need more robust support to grow. I want to ask all of you here this evening to reflect on this and think what you can do to take forward change in these areas, to give oxygen and space to the new.

Now these ideas need to go out into the world to grow. So the time has come to open our doors still wider – to let the work take flight.

So I want you to raise your glass to our partners, to Participles, to ten years of work that have made a difference, touched thousands of lives, been taken up in a myriad of ways, replicated and influenced many.

And I want you to take to your hearts the idea that people, and the relationships between us are the critical resource we have in solving the deep and complex problems of this century – and to look, to really look, for ways to support the growth of our capabilities – yours, mine and others around us – and to foster those relationships.