



THE DITCHLEY FOUNDATION

From words and pictures to impact: how can think tanks, convenors, socially responsible companies and other not for profit organisations have more impact on the world?

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Chair: The Rt Hon. Douglas Alexander

Today's world is hyper connected but there is more talking than listening. We are all awash with articles, videos, TED talks, infographics, blogs and other forms of content competing for our attention. This is magnified for those leading countries and companies who are targeted by the many people who want to influence them. How do we cut through the noise? What can we do to coordinate rather than just compete? What do people want to know? What do they need to know and how can we get them to pay attention to it? Are there more direct routes to impact rather than just influence? Is impact greater from influence on systems or from specific initiatives? How effective are campaigns?

These are not academic questions: billions of dollars of government and philanthropic funds are poured into efforts to influence policy on a range of international or social issues, or to deliver direct impact through action or the provision of services or infrastructure. Very few people still believe that the answer to greater efficiency is the centralisation of resources and control, for example in government a reversion to the kind of model where people and businesses are taxed and the funds used to set up large ministries that deliver services. Most people see a better solution as the creation of eco-systems and public private partnerships but these are difficult to sustain and coordinate and often even harder to measure in terms of success. At worst they can deliver a morass in which the needs and identity of the individual citizen is lost.

Frustrated by the complexity and slowness of government delivery of change, an increasing number of organisations and socially responsible companies and individuals are looking to deliver more immediate change by direct action or through technology. But in societies that are complex systems of systems, these initiatives can often have unwanted effects. Quick results on one problem can often lead to worsening of another. Single issue campaigners can suffer from tunnel vision.

How can we share knowledge more efficiently so that a market in ideas and action works better?

The Ditchley Foundation is staging a conference to address how organisations that want to change the world for the better can collectively have more impact.