



A guide for organisations
Simon Anderson and
Julie Brownlie

Getting the measure of kindness

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Overview

In recent years, many organisations have started to use the language of kindness in discussions about values, priorities or ways of working. Increasingly, and perhaps inevitably, that has led to an interest in the measurement of kindness.

This guide is intended for organisations interested in exploring ways of measuring kindness. It is not a 'how to' or 'toolkit' document in the traditional sense, but aims to get organisations thinking about why they might want to measure kindness in the first place, about the potential challenges of doing so, and about the development of measurement strategies that are aligned to their specific context and their understanding and use of the term.

Measuring kindness is difficult, in part because working out what to measure is partly a question of working out what you mean by kindness in the first place. That means there is no single, one-size-fits-all measure of kindness that organisations can drop easily into their key indicator frameworks. So any serious attempt to measure kindness will require organisational commitment, reflexivity and resource.

This guide aims to support organisations in doing that. The first half of the guide explores why you might want to measure kindness in the first place – and why you might not; what organisations mean when they talk about kindness; and how people have approached its measurement in different contexts.

The second half of the guide introduces a framework for measuring 'the virtuous circle of kindness'. It includes examples of questions that organisations may wish to use – or adapt – to measure the preconditions for kindness, perceptions and experiences of kindness, and the outcomes of kindness; and it signposts to further resources which are listed in the annexes to this guide.

The guide has been produced as part of Carnegie UK's Kindness Leadership Network (KiLN). Like other outputs from KiLN, it doesn't provide a blueprint, but rather presents a set of questions that organisations should be asking themselves as they seek to develop an approach to measuring kindness that is situated in their own contexts. These questions are woven throughout the guide, but also included together in one place at the start of the guide, to pull out and use as a reminder as organisations develop and reflect on their approach towards 'getting the measure of kindness'.

Questions for organisations to consider



Why might you want to measure kindness?

Are there any reasons why you might not want to measure kindness?

- Who or what is driving the interest in kindness within your organisation?
- Why do you feel that you need to generate measures kindness? For what specific purposes?
- How might the attempt to quantify kindness be viewed or understood by your key stakeholders?
- How might any scepticism or cynicism towards that be anticipated and engaged with?

What do we actually mean by kindness?

- How is the language of kindness currently being used within your organisation? By whom and towards what ends?
- Is the term being used alongside or in place of other relational concepts?
- Is it being used primarily to refer to an individual trait, a quality of relationships, an organisational value or a tangible set of practices?
- Is there a shared understanding across the organisation and its leadership of what you mean by kindness? How would you know?

How have others approached the measurement of kindness?

- Do any of these broad approaches to the measurement of kindness have particular resonance within your specific organisational context?
- Are you primarily concerned with kindness as a feature of a residential community or neighbourhood, a workplace, or a service-providing environment?
- What attempts have you made to measure related concepts, like compassion, satisfaction or morale? What might be the connections between these and the measurement of kindness?

The preconditions for kindness.

- What are the most relevant preconditions for kindness within your specific organisational context and given the definition or understanding of kindness you are working with? For example, should you be thinking about physical spaces, or about levels of trust and familiarity, or the extent to which 'kind acts' are seen as normalised?
- What indicators do you already have that you could reflect or draw on? For example, from staff or service user feedback mechanisms?



Measuring perceptions and experiences of kindness 'itself'.

- Are you primarily interested in kindness as an individual characteristic or personality trait, as a quality that people experience in the context of routine interactions (e.g. with a receptionist or social worker), as an organisational value or priority, or as a tangible act of help or support?
- To the extent that you are concerned with 'flows' of kindness, are those one way (e.g. from staff members to service users) or potentially two-way (e.g. between members of staff or residents in a neighbourhood)?
- If you are interested in 'kind acts', can you capture those by giving people examples of the types of help and support you are interested in? Or do you also need to capture somehow the 'extra' or unobligated dimension that leads people to experience such acts (sometimes, but not always) as kindness?

The outcomes of kindness.

- If your organisation were to become 'kinder', what outcomes might you expect to see?
- To what extent are those outcomes already being measured (or capable of being measured)?
- What other explanations might there be for any changes observed in those indicators?

The limits and risks of measurement: towards a mixed method approach.

- What opportunities or mechanisms does your organisation have to tell and hear stories of kindness? Equally importantly, how open is your organisation to eliciting and hearing stories of unkindness?
- How are or might those stories be brought together with any quantitative indicators?
- How might qualitative discussion and interpretation of quantitative measures be used to further define both your measurement and understanding of kindness?

Introduction

Governments and organisations are increasingly speaking the language of kindness. That might seem surprising. Kindness has traditionally been seen as an individual virtue or character trait, or as something belonging to a realm – that of relationships – that lies (or should lie) beyond the reach of the state and other forms of collective administration. But recent years have seen a broader ‘relational turn’: a recognition that how we relate to one another – in our communities, workplaces and services – has profound implications for individual and collective wellbeing. That has been accompanied by a growing commitment to the idea that governments and organisations have a central role to play in promoting and enabling relational values and practices.

In that context, kindness is just one a range of relational concepts (including compassion, care, community and solidarity) that have found their way into policy documents, value statements, and organisational strategies and priorities. Unlike some of those other concepts, however, it appears to be one with a broad cultural relevance and appeal – especially in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, during which the practical and emotional significance of small gestures and relationships of help and support has been both self-evident and much discussed.

Carnegie UK has, over the course of the last few years, played a central role in encouraging governments, organisations, communities and individuals to engage with this agenda. Its Kindness Innovation Network (KIN) brought together people from across Scotland with an interest in working out real-life strategies for promoting kindness, and a subsequent initiative, the Kindness Leadership Network (KiLN) has connected senior leaders from across the UK.

A key question that KiLN has been grappling with is this: how would we know if our efforts were working? That’s a core concern for any organisational leader, in relation to any identified priority. And it’s one with accountability dimensions too, especially in the context of the public sector where there is no single measure with the clarity of a profit and loss line to tell you (and others) how the organisation is doing.

This guide is intended for organisations interested in exploring ways of measuring kindness. It is not a ‘how to’ or ‘toolkit’ document in the traditional sense, but aims to get organisations thinking about why they might want to measure kindness in the first place, about the potential challenges of doing so, and about the development of measurement strategies that are aligned to their specific context and their understanding and use of the term.

Why might you want to measure kindness?

As noted above, many organisations have started to use the language of kindness in discussions about values, priorities or ways of working. Increasingly, and perhaps inevitably, that has led to an interest in the measurement of kindness.

That is partly an accountability issue. Particularly where public money and staff effort is being channelled into activities intended to promote kindness, leaders need to be able to demonstrate (to their employees, funders, board members, electorates or other stakeholders) that this is money well spent, and that they are walking the walk as well as talking the talk.

Linked to that is a monitoring, evaluation and improvement agenda. If we want to contribute to or create kindness, we need to know what works in doing that. And to know what works, we need to be able to establish what difference our actions have made. That suggests a need for outcome measures that tell us something about how people feel about kindness and how they experience it, in what form and circumstances, and with what frequency.

Are there any reasons why you might not want to measure kindness?

Measuring kindness is difficult, in part because working out what to measure is partly a question of working out what you mean by kindness in the first place – a theme we return to below. That means there is no single, one-size-fits-all measure of kindness that organisations can drop easily into their key indicator frameworks. So any serious attempt to measure kindness will certainly require organisational commitment, reflexivity and resource.

But organisations also need to think carefully about how any quantitative indicators of kindness might be viewed and understood by their stakeholders. Some may

see kindness as too vague or bland a concept to merit inclusion as a priority or key measure, while others may view it as an unwelcome distraction from more pressing questions of justice, equality and fairness.

There are also concerns, which need to be taken seriously, that the attempt to quantify relationships will reinforce rather than challenge systems and ways of working that have become increasingly transactional, instrumental and shorn of opportunities for meaningful interaction – in short, that kindness will become another harmful and distorting metric. Indeed, it may even become a metric which is used unkindly – for instance to criticise those whose practice is not seen as consistent with the organisational conception of what kindness looks like.

These issues are not necessarily intractable – it is possible to show that kindness can complement rather than displace other priorities, and that measurement is not inherently problematic – but they may become so if not anticipated and addressed. One way of doing that is to think carefully about how such measures are developed, to understand their limitations and to deploy them sensitively alongside other forms of knowledge. Complex social phenomena generally require multiple forms of investigation, representation and explanation – including those that are creative, interpretive and qualitative in nature. This need to set a measurement strategy alongside other forms of 'knowing' about kindness is returned to later in the paper.

Some questions for you to consider:

- Who or what is driving the interest in kindness within your organisation?
- Why do you feel that you need to generate measures kindness? For what specific purposes?
- How might the attempt to quantify kindness be viewed or understood by your key stakeholders?
- How might any scepticism or cynicism towards that be anticipated and engaged with?



What do we actually mean by kindness?

It's often said that you can't manage what you can't measure. But it's equally true that you can't measure what you can't define – or at least, that measurement and definition can't be disentangled. Ideally, the first step in measurement would be to clarify the nature of the 'thing' that you are trying to measure. But, often, it plays out the other way around: an indicator is chosen that then comes to represent or define the thing you are interested in. In fact, there is always an ongoing relationship between definition and interpretation, on the one hand, and measurement on the other. To measure, we need to define; but the act of measuring can also reshape our understanding of the thing we are looking at in the first place. This is especially true when we are dealing with a complex, relational concept like kindness – something that exists in the space between people, in what passes between them and how it is understood, rather than as an easily identifiable and countable entity.

As noted elsewhere¹, one of the attractions of the concept of kindness is that it has an intuitive, lay quality. Most people would say that they know what is meant by kindness, that they recognise it when they see it and that they feel its absence keenly. But it is a term that it is more commonly deployed than defined, and the attempt to pin down what people – or organisations – actually mean by it can produce vague, varying and sometimes contradictory positions, not to mention anxiety about disappearing down conceptual rabbit holes.

Let's consider some of the ways in which the term is used. Sometimes it is used to describe an individual character trait ("her kindness was her greatest quality"); on other occasions, a quality experienced in our encounters with one another or with organisations ("the nurse was so kind in the way he dealt with my father"), or a value that emphasises the importance of the relational in our personal and professional lives and in our encounters with services ("we aim to treat all of our service users with kindness and compassion"). But it can also be used to denote a more concrete or tangible set of practices – as consisting in the things that people do for one another (both practically and emotionally) in

response to moments of perceived need, when there is the option to do nothing. That last element can also be taken to indicate that kindness can't be mandated and that, by its very nature, it has an 'extra' quality that allows us to recognise it in the first place and gives it an emotional charge.

There are also other things that may be distinctive (and therefore useful) about kindness, but which may also have implications for how it might be measured. We have suggested for example that:

- Kindness isn't 'grand'. Unlike compassion, it has an everyday quality. While it involves a response to perceived need, it does not necessarily involve suffering. Unlike care, it does not necessarily imply an ongoing relationship or any sense of duty or obligation.
- Kindness is often fleeting, growing out of interactions and encounters that are not necessarily planned or completely prescribed, and may not always be memorable or visible – even to those directly involved.
- Kindness is unstable: not fixed but fluid. What starts out as a spontaneous or unobligated act of kindness can easily tip into something else – duty, reciprocity, expectation and so on.
- Kindness is subjective. We cannot claim kindness for ourselves. Whether an act or a person can be considered kind can only be determined by the recipient.
- Kindness is inherently relational. It is jointly 'constructed' at particular moments, in specific contexts, between individuals. The 'meaning' of that moment or relationship is not self-evident nor even fixed. As such, kindness is not an easily countable 'thing' in any obvious sense.

¹ Anderson, S., & Brownlie, J. (2019) Public Policy and the infrastructure of kindness in Scotland. Dunfermline: Carnegie UK.

You may or may not agree with this particular understanding of kindness. It may make sense or seem useful in your specific organisational context, but it may not. Either way, the process of engaging with it might move you slightly further forward in terms of defining what you mean by kindness, and that is an essential start point. It is important to keep in mind, however, the point made earlier: that seeking to understand what we are trying to measure is something that should happen not only at the start but throughout a process of measurement, especially when you are working with a complex concept like kindness. In trying to measure it, you may find that your understanding of kindness (as it relates to the specific context in which you are working) starts to shift.



Some questions for you to consider:

- How is the language of kindness currently being used within your organisation? By whom and towards what ends?
- Is the term being used alongside or in place of other relational concepts?
- Is it being used primarily to refer to an individual trait, a quality of relationships, an organisational value or a tangible set of practices?
- Is there a shared understanding across the organisation and its leadership of what you mean by kindness? How would you know?

How have others approached the measurement of kindness?

The argument that how we measure things reveals much about how we understand and define them may be illuminated by consideration of previous attempts to measure kindness, from across different contexts and disciplines.

Until relatively recently, most research on kindness was qualitative in nature. But there have been some attempts to generate quantitative indicators. Much of that work has taken place within the specific disciplinary context of psychology and has been concerned with the measurement of kindness as an individual trait or characteristic.² In other words, it has been used to classify people according to their predisposition towards kindness and self-reported behaviours (or to look at the relationship between such behaviours and subjective wellbeing of the person performing the kindness).

While interesting, such approaches are likely to be of limited use within an organisational context. Not only do they fail to account for how such behaviours are received or interpreted by others, or the extent to which participants may feel a pressure to offer socially-acceptable responses, focusing the unit of analysis on the individual is misguided. Although it would, in principle, be possible to aggregate up from the responses of individuals to the level of the organisation as a whole, the 'kind organisation' is clearly more than the sum of those individual parts and also reflects perceptions of overall 'climate' and how the organisation itself behaves at a structural level.

Perhaps more useful in this context, then, are attempts to measure kindness from within a social or cultural framework.

One particular type of setting – education – has seen a number of attempts to assess broader 'cultures of kindness' in this way. The best example can be found in work conducted in Canada which aimed to create and validate a brief measure of students' perceptions of kindness in school.³ The resulting School Kindness Scale (SKS) is a 5-item measure of school-based kindness which uses a 5-point scale, from 1 (disagree a lot) to 5 (agree a lot). Students were asked about their perceptions of the frequency of kindness in their classroom and school ("Kindness happens regularly

² See, for example, Canter, D., Youngs, D., & Yaneva, M. (2017) 'Towards a measure of kindness: An exploration of a neglected interpersonal trait'. *Personality and Individual Differences*, 106, 15-20.

³ Binfet, J. T., Gadermann, A. M., & SchonertReichl, K. A. (2016) Measuring kindness at school: Psychometric properties of a School Kindness Scale for children and adolescents. *Psychology in the Schools*, 53(2), 111-126.

in my classroom"; "Kindness happens regularly in my school") and whether kindness was encouraged ("The adults in my school model kindness"; "My teacher is kind"; "At my school, I am encouraged to be kind"). Although the school setting is quite specific, the format of the questions could be used in other contexts – for example, by swapping 'organisation' or 'workplace' for school/classroom and, potentially, by asking about managers or leaders instead of teachers.

There have also been a (relatively small) number of attempts to measure perceptions or experiences of kindness in the context of community/population studies.

In 2018, for example, Carnegie UK commissioned the survey organisation, Ipsos MORI, to explore (among related issues) the extent to which communities are seen as kind places and whether members of the public experience kindness from each other and the services they use.⁴ For example, survey participants were asked whether they agreed or disagreed that 'people in this area are generally kind' and whether they had 'helped someone in this area who needed it in the last 12 months'. Other topics included the extent to which they felt they could 'turn to someone in this area for practical help and advice if needed', could 'count on someone in this area to keep an eye on' their home if it was empty, or 'make time to speak with [...] neighbours'; and whether they agreed or disagreed that 'people are treated with kindness' when using services such as the GP surgery, public transport or social care. The results of the exercise were used to draw some tentative conclusions about the place of kindness within communities in general, but also to highlight patterns in response across the four geographic areas covered (Scotland, England, Wales and the island of Ireland) and different social groups.

The Australian Survey of Social Attitudes (AuSSA), in 2011, contained a module of questions aimed at exploring the distribution and motives for kindness in Australia.⁵ Kindness was defined within the survey as 'an everyday act of care for another person, for example, giving directions to someone who looks lost; phoning a family member who is experiencing some difficulties; offering to look after a neighbour's pets while they are away'. Ten items were used to explore attitudes towards kindness: how important it is for people to be kind to one another; frequency of kind acts towards family members, friends, neighbours, work colleagues and strangers; perceptions of self as a kind person and reasons for kindness.

Other general population surveys have included one or two questions on kindness, typically in the broader context of perceptions of community and belonging. In the context of a wider set of questions on neighbourhood strengths, for example, the Scottish Household Survey asks participants about the extent to which they agree that 'this is a neighbourhood where people are kind to each other'. (Participants are also asked about a range of related issues – for example, whether theirs is 'a neighbourhood where most people can be trusted' or 'a neighbourhood where people from different backgrounds get on well together'.⁶)

Against the specific backdrop of COVID-19, the Office for National Statistics used the weekly Opinions and Lifestyle Survey (OPN) to examine perceptions of unity and division in Great Britain.⁷ This exercise included a number of questions that related either directly or indirectly to perceptions of kindness. For example, participants were asked 'how kind or unkind' they thought people in Britain were before the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak and how they think people will be after we have recovered from the outbreak. These were accompanied

⁴ Wallace, J. & Thurman, B. (2018) Quantifying kindness, public engagement and place: Experiences of people in the UK and Ireland. Dunfermline: Carnegie UK.

⁵ See Habibis, D., Hookway, N., & Vreugdenhil, A. (2016) Kindness in Australia: an empirical critique. *Journal Of Sociology*, 67(3), 395-413.

⁶ See Chapter 4 on 'Neighbourhoods and Communities' in, Scottish Government (2019) Scottish Household Survey 2018: annual report. <https://www.gov.scot/publications/scotlands-people-annual-report-results-2018-scottish-household-survey> (Accessed 05 August 2021).

⁷ See, ONS Statistical Bulletin (2020) Coronavirus and the social impacts on Great Britain: 14 May 2020. <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/healthandsocialcare/healthandwellbeing/bulletins/coronavirusandthesocialimpactsongreatbritain/14may2020> (Accessed 05 August 2021).

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by questions relating to experience of informal help and support within communities – e.g. 'Do you think people are doing things to help others more, about the same, or less since the Coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak' and 'In the past seven days how many times have you checked on neighbours who might need help?'

There is a long history of studies of community, neighbourhoods and 'neighbourliness', which have used surveys to examine how people feel about those around them and the extent to which residents are involved in flows of informal help and support. Kindness may not be explicitly asked about within these studies, but many related issues are, such as frequency of contact, small acts of help and support, formal volunteering, and feelings of trust and belonging. For example, the UK government's Community Life Survey collects information about the way adults (16+) interact with family members and friends, their support networks and the diversity of their friendship groups. It includes questions such as: 'If you were ill and at home on your own, and needed someone to collect a few shopping essentials, how comfortable would you feel asking a neighbour to do this for you?'

While these kinds of community measures have generally been used in national surveys, they may have relevance within organisations which have a local remit or responsibility for a residential community of some kind (e.g. housing associations) or where there is a need to learn more about the circumstances and experiences of particular groups of service users (e.g. refugees or asylum seekers who have been settled in diverse community settings).

Within an organisational context, there have been attempts to measure the closely-related concept of compassion. In healthcare, in particular, the challenges of establishing consistent indicators of compassion have

been extensively discussed (see, for example, Sinclair et al, 2017). One specific example of such an instrument is the Schwartz Center Compassionate Care Scale. This is used to seek the views of patients about the nature of care received and includes measures of whether care providers express sensitivity, caring and compassion; listen attentively; treat individual patients as a person not a disease; communicate results in a timely and sensitive manner; and spend enough time with patients. As such, it provides one possible start point for attempting to measure kindness shown by practitioners to service users. It should be emphasised, however, that (perhaps more than compassion) kindness within organisational settings may be seen as having a wider and more distributed character – existing, for example, as much in the relationships between staff or service users as in the 'flows' from the former to the latter.

In a slightly different context, the Roffey Park Institute has developed a psychometric instrument called the Compassion at Work Index (CWI).⁸ This is aimed at measurement of compassionate attributes exhibited by staff and managers within a specific organisational context. Like much of the work within academic psychology, then, it focuses on individual self-assessment rather than on the views of those who might be on the 'receiving end' of compassion. However, it can also be seen as part of a wider move towards understanding cultures of compassion at work.⁹

Other concepts that may be relevant here include 'positive organisational scholarship'¹⁰ and the attempt to create a discourse of 'decent' or 'good work' that takes account of relational factors such as culture, values, ethics and social and wellbeing policies.¹¹

⁸ Poorkavoos, M. (2016) *Compassionate Leadership: What is it and why do organisations need more of it?* Roffey Park Institute. <https://www.roffeypark.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/Compassionate-Leadership-Booklet.pdf> (Accessed 05 August 2021).

⁹ See, for example, Peters R. (2020) *The role of compassion in the workplace*. CIPD. <https://www.cipd.co.uk/news-views/changing-work-views/future-work/thought-pieces/compassion-workplace> (Accessed 05 August 2021).

¹⁰ See, for example, see Cameron, K. & Spreitzer, G. (2011) *The Oxford Handbook of Positive Organizational Scholarship*. Oxford: OUP.

¹¹ See, for example, Taylor, M. (2017) *Good Work: The Taylor review of modern working practices*. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/627671/good-work-taylor-review-modern-working-practices-rg.pdf (Accessed 05 August 2021).

All of these face similar challenges of articulating what it would mean to secure improvements within organisational settings and to demonstrate that meaningfully through robust measurement. Classic indicators of staff satisfaction are relevant here, such as retention and intention to leave rates, and expressed satisfaction with relationships with peers and managers. Kindness may not be an active framing in such debates, but it is certainly consistent with the concern to promote empathetic, compassionate or supportive relationships within workplaces.



Some questions for you to consider:

- Do any of these broad approaches to the measurement of kindness have particular resonance within your specific organisational context?
- Are you primarily concerned with kindness as a feature of a residential community or neighbourhood, a workplace, or a service-providing environment?
- What attempts have you made to measure related concepts, like compassion, satisfaction or morale? What might be the connections between these and the measurement of kindness?

Some useful distinctions

We have seen, then, that kindness can be defined, understood and measured in a range of different ways. In determining what might be an appropriate measurement approach within your specific organisational framework, a number of distinctions may be worth keeping in mind.

Measures of what people think, feel and do

Kindness can be thought of as having cognitive, affective and behavioural dimensions. In measuring it, then, we may need indicators that relate to what people think, what they feel and what they do (or experience in terms of others' behaviour). These dimensions are impossible

to disentangle entirely – what we think, feel and do are obviously closely related. But it is worth considering at least whether your measurement framework contains indicators that recognise people's perceptions, emotions and practices.

An example of a cognitive measure would be a question asking people to reflect on or assess the characteristics of their community, workplace or service provider – for example, 'this is the type of neighbourhood where people help each other out'. Affective measures ask about feelings or emotions, such as 'the staff made me feel that they were listening to me'. And behavioural measures tap into the things we do for others, or that they do for us – for example, 'I have experienced an act of kindness in the last week'.

In this context, though, it may be worth saying that kindness sometimes lies in the things not done: in the debts forgotten, or the topics not broached, or the physical or emotional space ceded. Capturing all of its possible manifestations through prompt cards and response options (see below) is impossible, which is another reason why a measurement strategy needs to be multi-faceted and reflexive.

Direct and indirect measures of kindness

In designing quantitative indicators such as survey questions, there is an understandable tendency to use the immediate language of the concept you are investigating – for example, to ask questions such as 'how often do you experience kindness?'. That can obviously be a problem if you are exploring a concept that is technical or obscure (like social capital); but it can also be a problem if you are using an everyday term with multiple possible meanings, like kindness.

It can be useful, then, to include questions that are less linguistically direct but which usefully, if indirectly, unpack the concept – for example, 'in the last week, how often has a friend, work colleague, neighbour or acquaintance done any of the following things for you...?':

But this kind of indirect measurement of kindness has two important implications. First of all, as implied earlier, you need to have worked out what you mean by the term or you will not be able to determine what indirect measures are appropriate. Secondly, 'unpacking' the concept in this way is likely to yield more useful data, but will also make it more complicated and time-consuming to collect. That said, kindness is a complex idea: while single item measures may seem appealing in practical terms, they are less likely to be revealing of meaningful and useful insights. A related and potentially useful debate here is that about how to research the idea of trust.¹²

Measuring the preconditions for and outcomes of kindness, as well as 'the thing itself'

There is another sense in which indirect measures may be helpful. Complex social phenomena involving emotion (like kindness but also belonging, fear or trust) can sometimes be understood best through a focus not only on 'the thing itself' but on the preconditions that lead to it and the consequences that flow from it (or 'the things it makes happen'). We know, for example, that people are more likely to engage in small acts and relationships of kindness when they feel some degree of connection or familiarity with those around them. The extent to which they feel such a connection can be asked about. We also know that small acts and relationships of kindness can contribute to a sense of mutual trust and belonging. If your goal is to understand deeply the climate or culture of kindness – what leads to kindness and results from it – rather than simply to generate a single item performance indicator, those kinds of outcomes should also be captured and explored.

The concept of 'theory of change' may be useful here. A theory of change is a description of why a particular way of working will be effective, showing how change happens in the short, medium and long term to achieve the intended impact. To the extent that your organisation is interested in encouraging or facilitating kindness, developing a theory of change may help you to clarify your assumptions about what leads to or inhibits

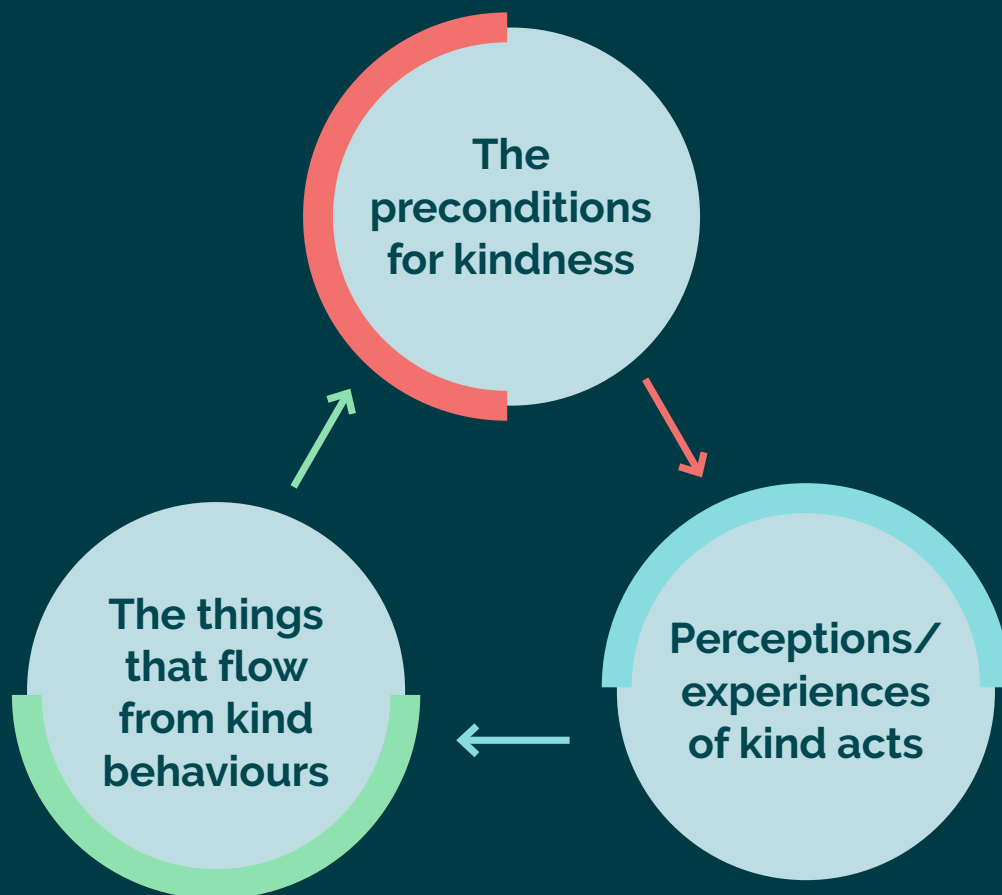
kindness and the actions you can take to shape those conditions. For example, you may conclude that kindness is inhibited by specific organisational rules or practices that make it difficult for staff to use discretion and identify a theory of change premised on alterations to those; or you may decide that the issue is more cultural than structural and that the answer is to promote an organisational narrative around the importance of kindness.

Again, the distinction being proposed here is somewhat artificial: there are virtuous circles associated with kindness which mean that some of the things that flow from it (such as strengthened relationships and trust) reinforce the conditions that produce it. However, there is much to be said for a measurement framework that involves an implicit theory of change (as noted above): if we create these conditions, then this will happen and these outcomes will follow. Such an approach allows you to move from seeing kindness simply as an atmospheric variable (like air temperature), over which you can exert no influence, to something that potentially becomes a meaningful focus for intervention. In itself, that may help to make the case for reference to kindness within organisational strategies and priorities. As noted earlier, though, there are risks here: that something interpersonal and spontaneous comes to be counted, captured and governed in a way that is seen to undermine its very value.

¹² See Brownlie, J. & Howson, A. (eds.) (2012) *Researching Trust and Health: Routledge Studies in Health and Social Welfare*. London: Routledge.

Measuring the virtuous circle of kindness

In summary, then, an adequate measurement framework for kindness needs to include measures of what people think, feel and actually do, and to deploy indirect as well as direct measures. Above all, however, it should be capable of collecting evidence about preconditions and potential outcomes, as well as 'the thing itself'. The question of what might that look like in practice is explored in the following sections. The emphasis here is largely on how these issues might be explored via survey research, though there may also be scope to repurpose existing indicators (derived, for example, from KPIs or other monitoring data).



For example

- Permissive narratives
- Space and time to notice need
- Discretion to act
- Individuals feeling they could turn to/trust others

For example

- What individuals experience or do directly
- Perceptions of how others are treated/wider environment

For example

- Feelings of belonging, trust, shared values
- Number/strength of relationships
- Other organisational outcomes including staff retention, morale


The preconditions for kindness

The preconditions for kindness within organisational and community settings have been explored both through qualitative academic research¹³ and projects orientated towards policy and practice.¹⁴

This body of work suggests, for example, that acts and relationships of kindness are more likely to develop when people have opportunities to become aware of the needs of others. Those opportunities are greater when people have access to shared physical and social space and the time to interact with, become familiar with and acknowledge each other – whether in the context of community life or service provision.

Kindness is also more likely in contexts in which people believe that their motives for and responses to supportive acts will not be misconstrued, distorted or exploited. This is obviously linked to questions of trust and belonging. Within community contexts, that might relate to perceptions and feelings about one's neighbours or 'people round here' more generally; within organisational settings, to members of staff providing a service, to immediate colleagues or managers.


What kinds of measures might allow those preconditions to be assessed? Some examples relating to community settings (framed as attitude statements) are sketched out below, with a longer list contained in Annex 2.

- 
- 'I know my neighbours by name'
 - 'I often speak to people I don't know'
 - 'There are places here to sit and chat'
 - 'This is the kind of community in which people talk to/help one another'
 - 'You can trust people round here'
 - 'If I needed help, there are people who would be there for me'
 - 'If I wanted company or to socialise, there are people I can call on'
 - 'I feel I belong in my immediate neighbourhood'

Within organisational settings, statements addressing the preconditions for kindness (between staff or between staff and service users) might include the following:

- 
- 'I can go out of my way to help people without having to clear it with my manager'
 - 'I have time to listen and respond to people's needs'
 - 'The staff here listen to/care about what matters to me'
 - 'If I was experiencing problems, I feel I could turn to my manager/colleagues for help'
 - 'This is a supportive environment'
 - 'There are comfortable physical spaces here where you can sit and talk without being overheard'
 - 'This is an organisation which uses the language of kindness'
 - 'This is an organisation where kindness is encouraged/recognised'

Some questions for you to consider:

- 
- What are the most relevant preconditions for kindness within your specific organisational context and given the definition or understanding of kindness you are working with? For example, should you be thinking about physical spaces, or about levels of trust and familiarity, or the extent to which 'kind acts' are seen as normalised?
 - What indicators do you already have that you could reflect or draw on? For example, from staff or service user feedback mechanisms?

¹³ Anderson, S., Brownlie, J. & Milne, E.J. (2015) *The Liveable Lives Study: Understanding Everyday Help and Support*. York: Joseph Rowntree Foundation; Brownlie, J. & Anderson, S. (2017) 'Thinking Sociologically About Kindness: Puncturing the Blase in the Ordinary City', *Sociology*, 51(6), 1222–1238.

¹⁴ Ferguson, Z. & Thurman, B. (2019) *The Practice of Kindness: Learning from KIN and North Ayrshire*. Dunfermline: Carnegie UK.

Measuring perceptions and experiences of kindness 'itself'

What does kindness actually look like in practice? What is the thing that we recognise as kindness and how might it be quantified? While kindness can obviously take many forms, it is perhaps most obviously recognised in practical acts (e.g. lifts given, children looked after, shopping bought, etc.) and in emotional support, both in moments of crisis and of a mundane variety (e.g. a simple 'how are you?'). As noted elsewhere though,¹⁵ that distinction is not to suggest that practical acts do not have important emotional features and consequences in their own right. Nor that instances

of kindness are necessarily obvious and memorable for those involved: indeed, questions may need to be framed in ways that help to surface or capture relatively fleeting or mundane events.

One approach is, therefore, to provide prompts relating to the types of acts that might involve kindness. Some government surveys do something similar in relation to the concept of 'informal volunteering' – typically in connection with activities undertaken by the survey participant over the previous year.

The Community Life Survey,¹⁶ for example, asks:



In the last 12 months, that is, since [DATE ONE YEAR AGO], have you done any of these things, unpaid, for someone who was not a relative? Please select all that apply.

1. Keeping in touch with someone who has difficulty getting out and about (visiting in person, telephoning or e-mailing)
2. Doing shopping, collecting pension or paying bills
3. Cooking, cleaning, laundry, gardening or other routine household jobs
4. Decorating, or doing any kind of home or car repairs
5. Babysitting or caring for children
6. Sitting with or providing personal care (e.g. washing, dressing) for someone who is sick or frail
7. Looking after a property or a pet for someone who is away
8. Giving advice
9. Writing letters or filling in forms
10. Representing someone (for example talking to a council department or to a doctor)
11. Transporting or escorting someone (for example to a hospital or on an outing)
12. Anything else

The Scottish Household Survey contains a similar question, albeit with a slightly different list of activities (see Annex 2).


¹⁵ Brownlie & Anderson (2017) 'Thinking Sociologically About Kindness'.

¹⁶ Community Life Survey Technical Report 2019/20. London: DCMS. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/962599/Community_Life_Online_and_Paper_Survey_Technical_Report_-_2019-20_V2.pdf (Accessed 09 August 2021).

One of the difficulties with this approach is that it is quite demanding, as it involves a long list of items, but is also unlikely to be exhaustive, as there are likely to be other kinds of actions (like lending money or simply asking how someone is or as noted earlier, things not done) which may be experienced as kindness but are not included here. It is also, of course, framed in terms of the things participants have done for other people, rather than the other way round. This is potentially problematic, given the subjective character of kindness identified earlier.

An alternative approach would be to ask survey participants in general terms about 'everyday help and support' involving people outside their immediate family and household and to include a shorter list of illustrative activities.


For example, a question could be framed along the following lines:



In the past week, have you given any everyday help or support to anyone outside your close family or household – for example, by supporting someone emotionally, or offering practical help like childcare, shopping or a lift?

It is also important to think here about the things we do for others and the things they do for us. As we noted earlier, many existing attempts to measure kindness (particularly within psychology) focus on the former. There are a number of reasons for also trying to measure flows on supportive behaviours in the other direction – that is, by others towards the person answering the question. One is the subjective dimension referred to earlier: we may claim kindness for ourselves but be less likely to recognise it in the behaviour of others. Asking about flows in both directions may shed some light on that potential disjunction. But it also matters because

of research evidence that people who feel able to offer help and support to others are also more likely to be able to ask for or accept kindness when they need it.¹⁷ Both sides of this dynamic can be explored relatively easily, simply by reversing the direction of the question, as in the following example.



And, again in the past week, has anyone outside your close family or household given any everyday help or support of that kind to you?

As noted earlier, kindness can be seen as having an 'extra' or unobligated character¹⁸ – in other words, we recognise or experience the behaviour of others as kindness when we feel that someone is acting out of choice rather than a sense of duty or obligation linked, for example, to their professional or family role. That element is missing from both the approaches outlined above, although could potentially be incorporated in the following way: 'In the past week, have you given any everyday help or support to anyone outside your close family or household, even though you didn't need to'. Within an organisational or service setting, the element of 'going the extra mile' is also a common marker of kindness and might be captured by reference to staff or colleagues doing something that 'they weren't required to do as part of their job'.

¹⁷ See Anderson, Brownlie & Milne (2015) The Liveable Lives Study.

¹⁸ See Anderson & Brownlie (2019) Public policy and the infrastructure of kindness in Scotland.

Finally, there is scope here both for measures of direct experience of kindness (the things we do for others and others do for us) and for perceptions of what happens around us. Just as crime surveys ask people not only about their own experiences of victimisation but about perceptions of crime in their local area, attempts to measure 'the thing' of kindness can include perceptions of the broader frequency of prosocial behaviour. For example, 'this is the type of area where people help each other out'.

So some of the measures identified in the earlier section are also potential outcome indicators. But there may also be others that relate to the overall 'health', effectiveness or functioning of a community, organisation or workplace. While there may not always be a direct causal relationship between kindness and these ultimate outcomes (or at least one that can be definitively demonstrated), it would generally be difficult to conceive of such outcomes in a context in which kindness was not present.

Some questions for you to consider:



- Are you primarily interested in kindness as an individual characteristic or personality trait, as a quality that people experience in the context of routine interactions (e.g. with a receptionist or social worker), as an organisational value or priority, or as a tangible act of help or support?
- To the extent that you are concerned with 'flows' of kindness, are those one way (e.g. from staff members to service users) or potentially two-way (e.g. between members of staff or residents in a neighbourhood)?
- If you are interested in 'kind acts', can you capture those by giving people examples of the types of help and support you are interested in? Or do you also need to capture somehow the 'extra' or unobligated dimension that leads people to experience such acts (sometimes, but not always) as kindness?

The outcomes of kindness

Empirical evidence (and indeed 'lived' experience) suggests that kindness often – though not always – creates positive outcomes for the individuals directly involved and for wider communities and organisations. As indicated earlier, these can create virtuous circles insofar as they help to reinforce the preconditions which make kindness likely or possible in the first place.

Within a community setting, for example, these might include measures of belonging, or intention to remain. Within a workplace, there might be parallel indicators of commitment to the organisation, overall job satisfaction and staff turnover. And within service delivery settings, one might expect to see higher levels of service user satisfaction (particularly in terms of the relational aspects of the service provided) and improved outcomes on measures relating to the ultimate goals of the service (whether those relate to health, family function or offending behaviour). While these may not be obvious measures of kindness, they still have an important place within the development of an overall measurement framework for kindness.

Some questions for you to consider:



- If your organisation were to become 'kinder', what outcomes might you expect to see?
- To what extent are those outcomes already being measured (or capable of being measured)?
- What other explanations might there be for any changes observed in those indicators?

The limits and risks of measurement: towards a mixed method approach

We rarely (if ever) develop a full understanding of complex human phenomena simply by measuring them. At the outset of this paper, we rehearsed some of the reasons why organisations might wish to measure kindness and, in the subsequent sections, began to sketch out how that might be done. But we would not wish to suggest that measurement in itself is enough. Only certain kinds of questions can ever be answered with numbers – questions like, who, how many, how often and so on. Other types of questions relating to the nuance, complexity and meaning of human behaviour need different, more qualitative approaches. To return to the idea of an implicit theory of change embedded in any organisational approach to kindness, measurement can help us to know (and to show) that our actions have made a difference, but understanding why such change is necessary and how it might be experienced and achieved will always require broader forms of knowledge. Moreover, those other forms of knowledge – and particularly those which draw on narratives and life stories – will be necessary to avoid the risk that the act of measurement is seen as robbing this complex, enriching and important aspect of our social lives of its essential value.



Some questions for you to consider:

- What opportunities or mechanisms does your organisation have to tell and hear stories of kindness? Equally importantly, how open is your organisation to eliciting and hearing stories of unkindness?
- How are or might those stories be brought together with any quantitative indicators?
- How might qualitative discussion and interpretation of quantitative measures be used to further define both your measurement and understanding of kindness?

Annex 1: Further reading

On kindness

Perhaps the largest body of academic research focused specifically on kindness lies within psychology (and, specifically, the sub-discipline of positive psychology). However, this is generally concerned with kindness as an individual trait¹⁹ and/or with its implications for the subjective wellbeing of those performing 'kind acts'. As such, it is likely to have less relevance within community and organisational contexts.

An accessible intellectual history of kindness can be found by Adam Phillips and Barbara Taylor²⁰ while the authors (Simon Anderson and Julie Brownlie) have considered what a sociological account of the concept might involve.²¹

Other work by Anderson and Brownlie²² and that conducted by Carnegie UK²³ explores kindness as a potential focus for policy and practice.

Survey methods

Although it may be possible to establish some indicators by repurposing existing information (e.g. staff retention rates or service user feedback), for most organisations, an adequate measurement framework is likely to involve the development of survey questions. Some examples of the types of questions that might be asked are included in Annex 2. However, good survey research is not simply a matter of asking the right questions: it is equally important to ask them of the right people. To put it another way, a survey is only ever as good as the representativeness of its sample. Approaches based on so-called availability or convenience samples (such as questionnaires left in waiting areas or circulated via Facebook or Twitter) may generate some useful information, but will not allow you to generalise with confidence to your wider population of interest. In fact, such exercises often attract responses predominantly from those with strong feelings about the survey topic – for instance, those who have experienced particular kindness or unkindness.

There are, of course, lots of useful resources out there that focus on the principles and practice of survey research. For example, if you are just getting started, this blog provides a short and accessible introduction to questions of sampling:

- Masters, A.B. (2020) An Introduction to Survey Research: What are the different methods of sampling? <https://medium.com/swlh/an-introduction-to-survey-research-ba9e9fb9ca57> (Accessed 05 August 2021). For a fuller account of the survey process as a whole (including questions of both design and implementation), you might want to refer to the following books:
- Groves, R.M., Fowler Jr, F.J., Couper, M.P., Lepkowski, J.M., Singer, E., & Tourangeau, R. (2009) Survey

¹⁹ See, for example, Canter, Youngs & Yaneva (2017) 'Towards a measure of kindness'.

²⁰ Phillips, A. & Taylor, B. (2009) *On Kindness*. London: Penguin.

²¹ Brownlie & Anderson (2017) 'Thinking Sociologically About Kindness'.

²² Anderson, Brownlie & Milne (2015) *The Liveable Lives Study*; Anderson & Brownlie (2019) *Public policy and the infrastructure of kindness in Scotland*.

²³ Unwin, J. (2018) *Kindness, emotions and human relationships: The blind spot in public policy*. Dunfermline: Carnegie UK; Ferguson & Thurman (2019) *The Practice of Kindness*; Thurman, B. (2020) *The courage to be kind: Reflecting on the role of kindness in the healthcare response to COVID-19*. Dunfermline: Carnegie UK.

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Methodology (2nd edition). New York: John Wiley & Sons.

- Fowler Jr, F.J. (2009) Survey Research Methods (Applied Social Research Methods). Thousand Oaks: SAGE.

Or you might wish to consider an online course, such as the following:

- Coursera. 'Survey Data Collection and Analytics Specialization'.
<https://www.coursera.org/specializations/data-collection> (Accessed 05 August 2021).

Theory of change, evaluation and monitoring

If you are starting to think about kindness in the context of a theory of change approach to monitoring and evaluation (and the development of an appropriate measurement framework), a couple of good places to start are with Better Evaluation and ActKnowledge:

- 'Describe the Theory of Change' in Manager's Guide to Evaluation. Better Evaluation.
<https://www.betterevaluation.org/en/node/5280> (Accessed 05 August 2021).
- Taplin, D.H. & Clark, H. (2012) Theory of Change Basics: A primer on theory of change. New York: ActKnowledge. https://www.theoryofchange.org/wp-content/uploads/toco_library/pdf/ToCBasics.pdf (Accessed 05 August 2021).

Annex 2: Where to find examples of survey measures relating to kindness

Numerous examples of attempts to measure kindness (and related concepts) can be found online. Some useful start points are listed below.

Kindness as an individual trait

Perhaps the best example of an attempt to develop a survey measure kindness as an interpersonal trait can be found in the previously cited 'Towards a measure of kindness', which also summarises and builds on existing psychological literature in this area.

- Canter, D., Youngs, D., & Yaneva, M. (2017) 'Towards a measure of kindness: An exploration of a neglected interpersonal trait'. *Personality and Individual Differences*, 106, 15-20.

Cultures of kindness within organisational settings

There are a number of examples of attempts to measure kindness in educational settings, including the development of a 'School Kindness Scale' and a similar attempt to produce a survey instrument for Ben's Bells 'Kind Campus' programme.

- Binfet, J. T., Gadermann, A. M., & SchonertReichl, K. A. (2016) Measuring kindness at school: Psychometric properties of a School Kindness Scale for children and adolescents. *Psychology in the Schools*, 53(2), 111-126.
- Van Dop, M.B. (2015) Measuring Kindness: The Development of a Survey Instrument for Ben's Bells 'Kind Campus' Program. The University of Arizona. <https://repository.arizona.edu/handle/10150/578976> (Accessed 05 August 2021).

An overview of approaches to measuring and assessing organisational culture more generally – albeit somewhat dated and in the specific context of the NHS – can be found in:

- Mannion, R., Konteh, F., Jung, T. et al. (2008) Measuring and Assessing Organisational Culture in the NHS (OC1). Report to the National Institute for Health Research Service Delivery and Organisation Programme.

While this does not address kindness specifically, it does include as an appendix an extensive list of tools and instruments aimed at capturing diverse aspects of organisational culture.

Kindness within community settings

The questionnaire developed by Ipsos MORI for Carnegie UK can be found in an appendix to the following report:

- Wallace, J. & Thurman, B. (2018) Quantifying kindness, public engagement and place: Experiences of people in the UK and Ireland. Dunfermline: Carnegie UK. <https://www.carnegieuktrust.org.uk/publications/quantifying-kindness-public-engagement-and-place> (Accessed 09 August 2021).

The questionnaire for the Australian Survey of Social Attitudes can be downloaded at the following link (the questions on kindness are found in Section E).

- Evans, A. (2017) Australian Survey of Social Attitudes, 2011. <https://dataverse.ada.edu.au/file.xhtml?fileId=302&version=1.1> (Accessed 09 August 2021).

The ONS measures of kindness during the COVID-19 pandemic are included in the Opinions and Lifestyle Survey (OPN) release in August 2020:

- ONS (2020) Unity and Division in Great Britain: 24 April to 28 June 2020. <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/wellbeing/bulletins/unityanddivisioningreatbritain/24aprilto28june2020> (Accessed 09 August 2021).

The full questionnaire used for the Scottish Household Survey in 2019 is available online, which contains questions about neighbourhood kindness (page 151) and 'informal volunteering' (page 193):

- Scottish Household Survey; 2019 Questionnaire. <https://www.gov.scot/binaries/content/documents/govscot/publications/statistics/2019/08/scottish-household-survey-questionnaire/documents/questionnaires/scottish-household-survey-2019-questionnaire/scottish-household-survey-2019-questionnaire/govscot%3Adocument/Scottish%2BHousehold%2BSurvey%2B2019%2BQuestionnaire%2B%2528Updated%2529.pdf> (Accessed 09 August 2021).

The Community Life Survey also includes questions on 'informal volunteering' which can be found on page 88 of the following document:

- Community Life Survey Technical Report 2019/20. London: DCMS. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/962599/Community_Life_Online_and_Paper_Survey_Technical_Report_-_2019-20_V2.pdf (Accessed 09 August 2021).

Getting the measure of kindness

Carnegie UK

Andrew Carnegie House
Pittencrieff Street
Dunfermline
Fife, Scotland
KY12 8AW

T +44 (0)1383 721445

www.carnegieuk.org.uk

Carnegie United Kingdom Trust
Registered Charity No: SC 012799 operating in the UK
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