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Making Change Happen

on person centred working and
person centred planning.



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March 2006

Introduction and contents

We have written this short document to help organisations think about 'making change happen' so that their services become more person centred. It is intended for:

- those seeking to make the most of the opportunity for change that training has provided, and
- those looking for a way to encourage person centred practice without buying in training for each and every staff member.

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The challenge

The reason for the existence of the term "person-centred" is that the natural tendency of support systems is the opposite - not to see people firstly as individuals. Instead they tend to see people as belonging to groups, based on labels, diagnosis, or some other condition. Huge assumptions are then made, on the basis of this perceived group membership, about what the individual person will be like, or what they need in their life, and everyone's expectations are influenced by how this group is perceived in general. This can occur even in the most innovative organisations, irrespective of written policies and statements, and despite the best intentions of very skilled staff and managers.

Support systems set out to make a real difference to those who are devalued, excluded and disempowered. The desire is for people to have a good life. But gradually everyone learns to settle for smaller changes. Staff may find it easier to help people to cope with their exclusion rather than to find ways for them to become included. Those who are disempowered and devalued may come to internalise the perceptions of others, and to believe that they should expect nothing more.

It is possible to change this situation, but not to find a one-off for-all-time solution. Even the most effective organisations and staff achieve person centred ways of working through ongoing efforts and vigilance. Those who let their guard down find that the organisation's practice drifts and they need to re-establish person-centred practices in an environment where most have come to accept the unsatisfactory situation as 'just the way the world works'.

Ronald A. Heifetz and Marty Linsky talk about 'adaptive' challenges and how they are different from 'technical' issues:

"Every day, people have problems for which they do, in fact, have the necessary know-how and procedures. We call these technical problems. But there is a whole host of problems that are not amenable to authoritative expertise or standard operating procedures...We call these adaptive challenges because they require experiments, new discoveries, and adjustments from numerous places in the organisation or community"

Ronald A. Heifetz and Marty Linsky

Understanding the adaptive nature of the challenge of introducing person centred working is important because it helps us to understand how to make change happen. We know that adaptive changes cannot be achieved by a top down implementation of a new procedure, or just by the introduction of a new tool. We can predict that we need changes in habit, attitude and belief system wide. We expect that it will be necessary to encourage leadership, and even experimentation and improvisation among those involved. We also know that adaptive change is difficult:

"Adaptive change stimulates resistance because it challenges people's habits, beliefs, and values. It asks them to take a loss, experience uncertainty, and even express disloyalty to people and cultures. Because adaptive change forces people to question and perhaps redefine aspects of their identity, it also challenges their sense of competence. ... No wonder people resist."

Ronald A. Heifetz and Marty Linsky

Making change happen

The following pages make some suggestions about encouraging a move towards person centred working.

Group activity

It seems to us that it is vital to remember that system change is generated by people working together on change, not by individual people changing their own practice within the existing system. An analogy might be that a machine's appearance can be changed by repainting the cogs, and it may be made to run more smoothly with some oil, but changing its function may require disassembly, reassembly, new parts, experimentation, creativity, and going back to the drawing board.

An important step in promoting change, perhaps in response to training, is to encourage group activity. What can help to make efforts even more successful is when this brings together:

- people who want change to happen, not simply people who have been given a responsibility for implementing it,
- those with creativity, energy and imagination,
- people from a wide range of stakeholder groups.

Sometimes it is clear that a group, which has been brought together for training on person centred working, can go on to work together on change. This happens most successfully where the group has a leader, for instance their manager, who can respond to this opportunity. An organisation may need only to allow this manager sufficient flexibility in order that he/she can begin to support staff to begin to try new ways of working.

There are other ways to encourage a change towards person centred practices, which include the following:

Having a vision to aim for

It is important to undertake regular work to create and maintain a vision about a better future. It can help to spend time considering the details of how things will work after changes have taken place.

Having values to steer by

A set of values can be established against which progress and direction can be checked. The important work can be to make sure that these are used actively as a tool, not passively as a statement of intent. They might be incorporated into evaluation processes, or discussed at

regular meetings. However, without care, the process of writing a set of values can become a justification for inaction rather than a call for change – people can feel that simply because these values are stated it must follow that work is based on them.

Programmes of work on person centred working and planning usually concentrate initially on establishing these values and on their use as a tool.

Celebrating success

The road through adaptive change can be very long. It is important that time is found to celebrate successes that have taken people in the right direction. However care should be taken. It is possible to have excellent evaluations from people in regard to work that makes matters worse in the long term, or to become so pleased with small successes that we lose sight of the distance we still need to travel.

Redesigning the paperwork

Redesigning the way that information is written about people can be very powerful, or utterly pointless. On the one hand, we know that changing 'deficiency' focussed paperwork to become 'capacity' focussed, is extremely valuable. Lives can change as a result. On the other hand the challenges involved are huge, and can this can only take place as part of the greater adaptive change.

Very many organisations – inspired by the power of person centred planning – decide that change can best be led by the introduction of a new service planning procedure, involving paperwork influenced by person centred planning, but which is designed to fit within the existing structure. We have never seen this succeed.

Understanding system change

It is important to know that if we are successful in establishing person centred ways of working we will be challenging the expectations of society, and as an organisation we will be change leaders. Heifetz and Linsky write that "to lead is to live dangerously."

"The dangers of leadership take many forms. Although each organisation and culture has its preferred ways to restore equilibrium when someone upsets the balance... Regardless of the form, however, the point is the same. When people resist adaptive work, their goal is to shut down those who exercise leadership in order to preserve what they have."

The role of training

Training programmes can be a very valuable part of a programme for change. However it is clear that some organisations fail to make the most of the opportunity that training provides, and others forget that the establishment of person centred working requires change at all levels of an organisation.

What good training can do

Organisations that make the most of training have understood the nature of the challenge they face.

For them, training can be a very effective catalyst for improvements in practice. It can:

- challenge the belief that the current situation is inevitable,
- establish a vision of an alternative,
- help people think about their beliefs,
- highlight helpful practices, and
- help people learn appropriate ways of working.

It can also help participants to begin to plan for the changes that are required in their organisations, and to establish the relationships they will need to allow them to work differently.

Careful planning can make sure that the right people attend and that the organisation (or the bigger change programme) offers useful guidance or encouragement following a programme.

Leaving it all to front line staff

However, if organisations believe that the development of person centred working and planning simply demand that their front line staff learn a set of techniques and procedures, these staff will find their task more difficult. For them to work in a genuinely person centred way may mean they need to behave very differently from their peers and managers. They may need to step out of line – not necessarily working outside the systems that are established to safeguard people, budgets and structures, but quite possibly breaking the unwritten rules and procedures within which others operate. They must become change leaders.

Without the right support, few staff are prepared to put themselves in this situation. It doesn't help that many will believe that system change is 'somebody else's problem', or where they see it as being in the control of senior managers. Often people wait for someone else to take a lead, and general inaction results.

A second difficulty is caused where those inspired by training want to see results quickly. They may have learned some useful techniques and tools on training and choose to use these within the existing system – to the extent that they don't need to step out of line. Where they are skilled workers and the tools they use are powerful (for instance they may use parts of person centred planning), the results can be very good.

If an organisation has misunderstood the challenge it faces, managers may be content with this result. Staff will receive praise and encouragement, feel good about the role they have played, and see real results for those receiving support. If they don't also receive encouragement to become involved in work on more challenging changes, the side effect can be that their wish for greater (more problematic) change is much reduced.

Possible programmes

We (Robert Weetman and Brenda Walker) offer powerful and inspiring programmes of work on person centred working and planning. These take many forms, some of which are listed below. Many organisations consider training to be an obvious choice, but in some situations other programmes can be more effective (or cheaper). Programmes can be combined.

Training

Our training programmes are built around the understanding that the introduction of person centred ways of working, and person centred planning, will require adaptive change.

There is an inherent limit in what can be achieved through a one-off contact with a group of people lasting only a few days. Course participants may leave inspired, educated, thoughtful, or energised. They may have a new vision of what is possible, and new tools at their disposal to help on the journey. However, adaptive change takes time - sometimes years - during which focus can be lost and energy dissipated.

We work with managers, organisations and groups to find ways to prevent this, often offering consultancy advice before and after training takes place without additional cost.

Organisational/team planning

We often facilitate organisational and team planning events. These can establish a vision, allow participants to reflect on the past, help people to work together better, and plan the way ahead.

Large group person centred planning

Methods have been developed for taking more than one focus person/family/group through person centred planning simultaneously. This approach may be useful in moving an organisation's practice forwards, and for the groups because they can share ideas and successes.

Change groups

It is possible, and powerful, to bring groups of people together to think about changing an organisation's practice (to enable it to work in a person centred way). Such a programme would usually include research, training, and mentoring elements, and organisational planning. It can be a useful way to 'roll out' person centred practice. We can work directly with groups, or we can work with group leaders, who in turn recruit and work (in pairs) with change groups.

Change through evaluation

An interesting approach is to involve staff in evaluating their own organisation's practice, and then in delivering change. The most important step in this work is the establishment of a values framework against which practice can be judged – moving debate beyond the common ground of job descriptions, management style, inter-agency working, resources etc.

A development of this approach can be for two or more organisations to work together on an evaluation programme, exchanging staff, ideas and skills.

Training trainers

Organisations can find it very valuable to develop the capacity to provide training to their own staff. If implemented successfully, a programme of work on person centred ways of working can be rewarding for those involved and life changing for those who the organisation supports.

A programme will most commonly include mentoring and co-training element. In effect in-house trainers become change leaders, so the difficulties involved in this, and the skills required, must not be underestimated.

Consultancy to senior managers

We can also provide direct support, mentoring, and consultancy to senior managers involved in leading the adaptive change work necessary to encourage person centred ways of working.

Contact information

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More reading

More reading on person centred planning, inclusion, service quality, social role valorisation, and change is also available via the "Inclusion and Social Justice Articles" web site at www.isja.org.uk .