Building the Foundations for Good Support

National Federation of Voluntary Bodies

Challenging Times: Ensuring Values
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We have important organizational & personal choices to make about the tension between visions that matter to us and current reality. Broadly, there are 3 approaches.

Thanks: Peter Senge
Withdraw ...just go through the motions as usual (talk a lot about the values or talk about how ‘unrealistic’ they are)
Shrink what we value to fit inside what we can do right now. [Re-label the usual or little changes.]
Recognize & work inside the tension to develop our capacity to create more of what we want
There are things you can’t reach. But you can reach out to them, and all day long.

–Mary Oliver
We need to question our assumptions about leadership. It’s easy to imagine that strong authority can manage a change process that will protect us from uncertainty, anxiety, & loss.
Silverback gorilla authority can often lead to progress when the issue is technical problem solving.

Technical problem solving
[Authority]

Silverback gorilla authority can often lead to progress when the issue is technical problem solving.

- Problem well defined
- Answer known
- Implementation clear
- Solution can be imposed by single organization
Organizations can be viewed (from an odd angle to be sure) as a structure + culture that answers a question. Many human services have adapted themselves so that much of their attention & effort centers on this question. Each of these means serve worthy goals, but they can become activities the pursuit of which can defend us against the anxiety that comes with learning new ways to do new things that significantly shift power + cross new organizational and societal boundaries.

This is the question that centers many organizations that I observe. The delusion is that simply changing the commands to “be person-centered (or person-directed to be even more up to date), inclusive, and responsive to self-directing customers” and tightening the control system will “manage” the change.

How do we conform to contracts, regulations, policies, & meet standards?
Organizations are designed to provide sufficient defenses against anxiety to allow work to get done. Defenses that have worked well in the past – the impersonal ‘profesional authority’ role in relationships with people with disabilities for instance – can impede the learning to relate to equals with differing capacities that is required to honor people’s right to decide. Messing with this familiar hierarchy of roles & boundaries creates a fluid space for discovering new ways to relate but carries risk and uncertainty. What we need is adaptive learning in collaboration with people with disabilities and their families and allies.
Technical problem solving

[Authority]

- problem well defined
- answer known
- implementation clear
- solution can be imposed by single organization

Adaptive learning

[Leadership]

- definition must be agreed
- answer must be discovered
- implementation requires learning & loss
- no single authority to impose solution

The silverback gorilla is out of his (always a him) depth here & organizations addicted to certainty will work hard to get back into the blue zone above.

Thanks: Ron Heifetz
If we choose, we can learn to redesign our organizations to answer two different questions.

How does this person show up in community life as a valued friend and contributing citizen?
How can we all show up in more places that attend to, cultivate, & benefit from the gifts of difference?
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<tr>
<th>Incremental change: A technical problem</th>
<th>OR</th>
<th>Transformation: A developmental challenge</th>
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<td>Our services are individualized &amp; person-centered now &amp; most consumers are satisfied.</td>
<td>While we serve most people in an individualized way, there are some who are not served as well as possible &amp; express dissatisfaction; more individualized supports will benefit them and expand what our organization offers.</td>
<td>To provide the level of individualized services that people deserve, we will need to fundamentally redesign the ways we offer &amp; manage support. If we make deep enough change, significant improvement is possible for (almost) everyone we support.</td>
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<td>We know what we need to know in order to improve our person-centered, individualized services.</td>
<td>We will learn what we need to know from experts who will train us in evidence-based techniques &amp; strategies, proven to deliver individualized services &amp; maintain financial stability.</td>
<td>We can only generate relevant knowledge through action focused on the capacities of the people &amp; families we support, our communities, &amp; ourselves. We learn by doing new things with people &amp; reflecting on them.</td>
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<td>Our greatest need is for more funding &amp; greater flexibility in the way we can use funds.</td>
<td>We will benefit from learning more about strategies for improving outcomes &amp; stabilizing costs (e.g. shared living; customized employment; community connecting)</td>
<td>We need to learn how to be an innovation generator, able to create a great variety of responses to changing circumstances at the individual, organizational, &amp; community level.</td>
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<td>We already make good person-centered plans. We could use some techniques for dealing with people who are difficult to plan for (e.g. resistant families or people who don’t speak).</td>
<td>We can improve our approaches to person-centered planning and our ability to implement plans, especially where involving people in the community or dealing with troubling behavior is concerned.</td>
<td>There is a critical opportunity for developmental growth in personal capacity to listen &amp; sense opportunities for creativity. Developing this creativity is essential to inform innovations.</td>
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<td>Our ability to make change depends on OMRDD changing. We can’t change without more money to pay for it.</td>
<td>Our involvement in the Institute puts us in a good position to negotiate with OMRDD for improvement money.</td>
<td>Offering individualized supports for all requires re-purposing the funds we already have. We should fund change with money we already have.</td>
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<td>While it may take hard work, making change is a matter of making a good plan, marketing the change, &amp; controlling implementation by monitoring &amp; correcting. There is a straight line between setting a goal and achieving it.</td>
<td>We will need to discover better ways. Delivering services to the first group of people we plan for will give us the funding &amp; flexibility to try new approaches. We’ll roll the change out to more people as additional funding allows.</td>
<td>Making the vision of individualized supports real means dealing with risk, uncertainty, and loss. Leadership requires the ability to observe, interpret, &amp; intervene in emotionally charged situations &amp; mobilize people with different interests. This calls for more than changes in the organization; it calls for changes in our selves.</td>
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From: www.nysacra.org/nysacra/la/A_Learning_History.pdf a learning history of the first year of work by a multi agency group exploring change by John O'Brien
Our organizations are large & complex means of serving multiple important interests and they usually do what they do well. They are probably a poor fit with changing environmental conditions & especially with the understanding of disability enshrined in the UN Charter. A wise strategy is to use organizational resources (especially the commitment and talents of people with disabilities, their families and allies, and staff) to launch as many small craft as possible and explore the territory that’s inaccessible & dangerous to the big liners that our organizations have become.
RARC is a medium sized organization in New York State (which has developed an exceptionally bureaucratic & massively regulated service system) that despite system barriers has invested significantly in adaptive learning by launching a variety of small boats & expanding on what their expeditions discover.
Each day forces us to totter on planks we hope will become bridges.

—Kevin Hart