

KEY CAPACITIES INVOLVED IN AGENCY TRANSFORMATION TO PERSONALISED LIFE AND SUPPORT OPTIONS

by Dr Michael Kendrick

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GETTING DOWN TO BUSINESS: ACCOMPLISHING PERSON CENTERED OUTCOMES

There is normally a considerable difference between embracing a goal and its eventual achievement. In various sectors we hear

individualised support arrangement in operation, then that could at least be assessed as to whether it exists or not. It could also be distinct from simply having a person centered plan, as it is quite possible to have such a plan but still be embedded in a congregate/fixed

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a great deal about how “person centered” community service agencies now are. At the level of a goal this is undoubtedly a sincere ambition even in the abstract. After all, who would declare themselves to not be “person centered”, or possibly only somewhat person centered? Good intentions aside, there would need to be at least some criteria for what we more precisely mean by such goals if we were to actually know if our aim has been accomplished.

model of service. In other words, if people have a largely autonomous individualised arrangement i.e. one person at a time, then we could reasonably conclude that the person has the bare bones of a personalised arrangement that is tied to only that person.

Of course, the existence of an individualised arrangement is not per se the same as saying that it is necessarily a good arrangement, nor to what degree and in what elements it might be of good quality. However, these

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concerns are a question of the quality of the arrangement, not whether it exists.

Consequently, we could ask of any given community service the interconnected questions of whether such “one person at a time” support arrangements exist for each person and of what quality has been achieved in each instance.

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Community services that have been able to establish individual arrangements that are producing good outcomes for each person could quite responsibly say that what they are now doing is a) personalised and b) having real impacts on the person’s quality of life. Admittedly, doing this for a handful of people is likely to be less impressive than to be able to point to a much greater number of the people served as having these opportunities, but it still establishes a tangible measure of good faith efforts to help people develop a distinct pattern of life that meaningfully benefits them. If one considers that benefiting people “one at a time” is a tangible accomplishment, then it has much to commend it in comparison with agencies simply declaring themselves “person centered” but lacking any credible means for operationalising such an objective.

Though it may not be obvious to some people, creating distinctly individual options built around the specific needs of a given person, requires a different set of capacities and skills than does creating and managing a “set” standardised

service model of service. At its essence, it means being able to generate a suitably “tailor made” support arrangement “from scratch” if need be for each individual supported. Such support arrangements are clearly a quite different “product” and will require the distinct set of capacities needed to create such diverse

personalised outcomes.

For a given agency or community service, this will mean that they will have to transform

themselves if they currently operate conventional models of service in order to generate a quite different “product”. Such a transformation cannot occur if they simply hold onto their current models of service and try to achieve “person centeredness” through some kind of re-branding strategy divorced from actual changes in people’s lives and individual support arrangements. After all, a reliance solely on changing the optics will have limited shelf life if conditions on the ground remain unchanged. While rhetoric will be taken for reality by some, its effects will be largely cosmetic and superficial given that nothing of substance has actually changed.

The key implication is that substantive agency transformations will inescapably be needed if the given agency is to actually routinely produce a quite different set of tangible outcomes for people. Many agencies have assumed quite the opposite and have

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subsequently discovered that there is quite a bit more to creating good individual arrangements than they had originally assumed. Thus, assuming that a “learning curve” will be unavoidable is a prudent initial assumption. Similarly, the kinds of people needed to create a quite different product may

be substantially different in kind than those who have excelled at operating standardised service models. It is not necessarily the case that leadership in one model of service will automatically translate into substantive competency in the next. Consequently, a different team of people may ultimately be needed if a substantively different “product” is ultimately required.

organisation and the people being supported by it, then it is difficult to follow through with good outcomes. This begins with the earning of trust through some form of ethical partnering with the person being supported. Agencies may assume that this kind of conscious relationship building is somehow a “given” simply because the agency means well. However, this underestimates what is involved

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“CORE” CAPACITIES REQUIRED FOR GENERATING AND SUSTAINING SUBSTANTIVELY GOOD INDIVIDUALISED OUTCOMES

It can be helpful to describe what these desired “core capacities” are likely to be when it comes to developing and sustaining reasonably meaningful personalised options for people. In essence, as in all other areas of human accomplishment where some kind of capabilities must be present in people if they are to get results, it should be assumed that person centered proficiency also require specific talents and abilities to be present. What follows is a brief summary of some of these key ingredients that will predict whether a given community agency can transform itself and begin to grow a wide variety of “one person at a time” arrangements. Similarly, what is described are the key capacities that are needed in order to deal with the organisational changes that are required to support personalised ways of operating.

1. The Capacity To Establish And Maintain “Right Relationship” With A Very Diverse Range of People

It is axiomatic that if one cannot establish the right kind of relationship between a service

in establishing long-term quality relationships, particularly where authority and power are to be shared. Each person supported will have their own sense of whether they have been treated honorably as their standards for this may be quite different from the next person. Consequently, “right relationship” must be earned repeatedly and thus a negotiation of what is a good or optimal partnership may be an ongoing matter requiring considerable sensitivity, ethical conduct and respectful dialogue.

2. The Capacity To Deeply And Accurately Understand People, Their Aims, Needs In Life And Their True Potentials

While it may be difficult to understand people well, knowing that it should occur if one wants to eventually see good outcomes develop in their life is an important starting point for eventually making meaningful progress. It is very difficult to imagine people’s lives improving if those supporting them lack sufficient understanding of their core needs in life and the potentials that matter or could matter to them. Creating a good arrangement with a given person ultimately requires that they are understood correctly as whatever is created will not bring benefit if it is out of sync with who the person actually is. Given that

much of what constitutes the actual potentials of a given person may often be largely hidden, even from the person, it requires the capacity to continually be alert to what these might be and to gradually mobilise them in ways that bring benefit to the person.

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3. The Capacity To Imagine And Create “Better”

There would be no point in going to a lot of trouble to create new individualised lifestyles and corresponding support arrangements if they did not result in improved outcomes for the person i.e. that life got “better” for the person concerned. However, if “better” cannot be imagined, then it cannot be implemented. “Imagining better” is an ongoing challenge as there is always a strong likelihood that there is a “better” that can be pursued even though at the outset the way forward to achieving “better” can be quite unclear. Making “better” happen is evolutionary and renewable where there is a steadfast commitment to exploring and acting upon what might conceivably be possible in a person’s life.

4. The Capacity To Master The Developmental Challenges Involved In Ongoing Lifestyle Development

The developmental challenges in any given person’s life are numerous and multi sided given the many potential aspects of personhood. When little or no action is taken to develop such potentials in people’s lives, it is common that people’s existence becomes quite stagnant and in service contexts may easily slide into custodial life maintenance priorities, even in nominally individualised arrangements. Consequently, the developmental (as opposed to custodial)

mindset that continues to seek out relevant developmental opportunities in people’s lives is crucial in enabling beneficial things to happen that otherwise would not have.

Obviously, this is highly linked to “imagining better” and might be thought of as the proactive aspect of ongoing “life tasting” and “life building”.

5. The Capacity To Develop And Operationalise Vision And Values That Actually Leads To Quality In People’s Lives

It is clearly necessary to start with “imagining better” but this should not detract from the skill set that is involved in translating vision into workable implementation tasks and then carrying out such tasks competently and reliably. If you like, this is the skillfulness involved in the “doing” of lifestyle building. It also requires considerable creativity, perseverance, negotiation and finesse in execution. All of these traits can be easily overlooked prospectively, but become quite clearly apparent when analysing performance retrospectively, as weakness in execution inevitably leads to unsatisfactory outcomes. Similarly, good results are not possible without good execution no matter what the validity of the original vision.

6. The Capacity To Dismantle Group Models And Their Components And Gradually Replace Them With Individualised Options

It is quite evident in most service systems

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that the majority of the resources needed for more extensive individualisation of support arrangements are already committed in

the “base” or “recurrent budget” of such systems. Consequently, such resources need to be transferred out of their existing uses and be applied to emergent individualised arrangements. This, of course, ultimately requires the eventual dismantling of the original programs that used these monies and that action will have significant impacts with many consequences. Similarly, starting an entirely new arrangement(s) is much more challenging than operating something that is already established and ongoing. Doing both at the same time intensifies both the difficulties and the complexities. Obviously, the skills needed to do this successfully should not be underestimated.

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7. The Capacity To Maintain The Ongoing Productive Management Of The Multi- Party Negotiations Involved In Transformational Change

Agency and program transformations are by their nature both disruptive of what had been the status quo and formative in terms of what eventual pattern comes into being as the replacement. Given that whatever is currently in place will have stakeholder and vested interests, it should be expected that gaining their cooperation with changes of any magnitude is part and parcel of the process. Even if one imposes such changes in order to bypass negotiations with the key parties, there will still nonetheless be consequences as the transformation process can be undermined, blocked, resisted and distorted in countless ways. Hence, having the capacity to anticipate and negotiate one’s way through these complex and interconnected negotiations is key in regards to what is eventually achieved. There are many hazards involved in such processes, so it is prudent to not underestimate what might occur if these

negotiations are handled poorly.

8. The Capacity To Manage Steady Forward Movement On The Schedule Of Implementation Of Individual Options In The Face Of Limitations

General Colin Powell when Director of the Joint Chiefs of Staff of the US forces once said “no battle plan survives contact with the enemy”. Hence, over scripting an agency transformation process is unwise, as once the process begins one has no choice but to manage whatever arises. Favorable conditions for such exercises are rarely something that can be routinely expected. Consequently, the prudent assumption ought to be that many

challenges will have to be met and one will be constrained by limitations of all kinds. Even so, it is often possible to move forward nonetheless and those who act as if this is so will eventually find ways to manage these limitations. In other words, if one cannot manage the difficulties inherent in the process, it is inevitable that there will be little forward movement. Ideal conditions are not normally a “given”, so any success gained will come about only through working at the difficulties until they are resolved and this can be reliably assumed to be a taxing challenge much of the time.

9. The Capacity To Build Incrementally From Small Beginnings Towards The Entrenchment Of Quality Gains

As has been indicated earlier, the challenge of establishing and sustaining individual arrangements “one person at a time” is only part of what needs to get done. The other crucial fundamental is to ensure that the life opportunities and the support arrangements generated for a given person are substantial

and worthy in terms of the quality of life they make possible. Typically, any quality results from a gradual building from small beginnings in life and lifestyle to enduring conditions that hopefully enable the person to thrive. It is this personal flourishing that is most important and it needs

to be in sync with who the person is and what most suits them in life. Personal fulfillment is possible in many aspects of people's lives and it is important to pursue that which makes the most meaningful differences in people's lives. This is full of qualitative challenges that, if addressed with some measure of integrity, skill and wisdom can be life changing in many beneficial ways. If you like, this kind of "life building" is the point of the whole exercise.

10. The Capacity To Provide, Support And Mobilise Personal Leadership From Multiple Persons

It is extremely unlikely that any advancement in a given person's life will take place unless there are repeated attempts to provide leadership and initiative. Life building is not a single act but rather repeated acts building on one another

to shape life opportunities and circumstances that are more to a person's liking. These kinds of desirable outcomes are not gained through passivity but instead are advanced through ongoing proactive conduct, often on the part of many people as opposed to just a few. This combined effort at taking the lead over time summates into "results on the ground" and even these results can be built upon again and again such that the person advances in life. None of this happens by accident, as it is driven by intentional efforts aimed at meaningfully engaging the person's life

potentials, purposes and needs. This pattern of incessant initiative can be learned and mastered as a crucial capacity, but none of that will occur unless there is the recognition of the centrality of personal and collective leadership

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in enabling a good life to be gradually built and sustained.

11. On the Feasibility Of Intentional Capacity Building

It is not necessarily the case that many people would have the confidence to implement the capacities outlined. But they can be developed and strengthened. So, it is good to remember that people can learn and grow in any of their capacities providing there is sufficient investment in the task. Equally, some people start with a greater degree of capacity and obviously will have many advantages. Nonetheless, it is what is done to strengthen and improve personal capacities as to whether needed capacities eventually are in place. Intentional capacity building is, in itself, a

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form of crucial or core leadership and will be inseparable from whether the eventual outcomes are to our liking.

"**Capacity building** or development is the process by which individuals, groups, organizations, institutions and societies increase their abilities to: perform core functions, solve problems, define and achieve objectives; and understand and deal with their development needs in a broad context and in a sustainable manner." www.iiep.unesco.org/fileadmin/user_upload/Research.../chapter3.pdf

12. The Necessity of Creating Proactive Leadership

The inherent nature of leadership is the causing of things to happen that otherwise would not have been mobilised. This creating of outcomes that would not have otherwise occurred is the essence of “life building” and could not occur without willful agency by one or more parties. Without this key ingredient of taking up the challenges of leadership, we could not expect that anyone’s life would advance. So, if advancements are expected, then leadership must be generated and the people that would do this must be supported in this exacting challenge. All progress comes at some kind of price and leadership is no exception.

Conclusion

It is not possible to build a new set of capacities and expect that such efforts will not come at some cost. After all, everything must be earned and paid for in life unless one is cheating. Capacity building along the lines suggested here are not optional nor are they lacking in their own demands. Nonetheless, they are achievable and have real consequences. So, for those who believe that good outcomes can somehow come about by cutting corners in terms of investing in what is crucial and definitive, all that can be said is that this is unlikely to bear fruit in the course of time. Getting something for nothing has never proven itself as the eventual outcome and is always inferior

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