

## ESSAY REVIEW

Stirk, S. & Sanderson, H. (2012). *Creating Person-Centred organisations; Strategies and Tools for managing Change in Health, Social Care and the Voluntary Sector*. London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers. ISBN 978-1-8490- 5260-3

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## Introduction

This book aims to define what person-centred practice means in organisations which aspire to deliver personalised services. The target readership is leaders of organisations delivering personalised services, in health or social care. Throughout the book, the authors use phrases such as 'people we support' or 'people supported' to represent people who use health and social care services. The authors support the thesis of person-centred practice by defining what it means and providing tools to enable staff to deliver person-centred support to individuals.

A person-centred organisation has people at its heart – both the people it serves and the people it employs. The differences lie in a relentless focus on what matters to the people the organisation supports and on community contributions. A person-centred organisation extends person-centredness to staff, who are supported to bring their 'whole self' to work and to use their talents and interests to offer the best possible support to people. The culture in a person-centred organisation could be represented as one of trust, in Parliament and in general accountability.

## Person-centered organisations

The early work describing a person-centred organisation described in this volume suggest 8 key elements that are the foundation of a person-centred organisation. These are: visionary leadership, shared values and beliefs, outcomes for individuals, community focus, empowered and valued staff, individual and organisational learning, working together and person-centred practices embedded throughout the organisation.

The point of view presented in the volume is that embedding person-centred practices into organisations is not the outcome: it is developing organisations to develop and deliver a choice and control for the people who are

supported and using all the skills and talents of staff to achieve this. The foundation underpinning person-centred practices is being able to identify what is important to them. The authors clearly define their beliefs. They believe that all people should have the opportunity to live a fulfilled and meaningful life which includes those characteristics set out in Box 1.

Box 1 Characteristics central to living a fulfilled and meaningful life

The power, authority and resources to control our own lives
A sense of belonging and acceptance for who we are
Being treated with dignity and respect
Participating as valued members of our own communities
Having new life opportunities and enriching life experiences
Meaningful and loving personal relationships
The opportunity to express our own cultural and spiritual beliefs
Access to good healthcare
Taking responsibility for what we can all do or to do for ourselves
Caring about and helping those around us

## Writing style

From the emergence of person-centred planning in government policy to today with a focus on personalisation, it was evident that expecting staff to behave in a person-centred way would require a change in the way that they are supported and managed. The authors provide examples of resistance to person-centred practices. Examples include responses such as: 'There are too many

competing pressures on us,' 'We can get away with not being person-centred - no one asked about this'; 'Funding is scarce-we need to focus on money and savings instead' and 'Some staff are trying their best – but (this) does not matter as much to managers. We talk the talk but don't walk the walk.'

All of these ways of resisting person-centred practice are considered from the point of view of the staff working under pressures that can detract from vision and mission. For some leaders, these become so pressing that they lose their sense of mission and people become secondary to regulation or reputation. Organisations that support vulnerable people can face challenges in helping people assert their rights, because that may bring them into conflict with people who do not recognise those rights. Regulators may not be able to see what is happening and unscrupulous providers can 'get away' with not being person-centred. Some organisations value money over outcomes for individuals. Other organisations believe it will cost too much to be person-centred. But experience suggests that investment in training and building internal capacity pays dividends in the long run - for example, savings based on staff retention cutting agencies spend.

The checklists in each chapter describe both the detail of what we expect to see in a person-centred organisation and they also give readers an opportunity to celebrate areas of responsibility that are being delivered well and to think about areas where development might occur. This foundational underpinning of person-centred practices includes being able to separate what is important to someone. Person-centred thinking tools enable staff to deliver person-centred support to individuals. By helping to answer the following questions: how does a person want to live and be supported? How can a person have more choice and control in their life? What is our role in delivering what is important for that person and for how they want to be supported? How are we doing in supporting the person in the way they want to live? How can we work together to keep what is working and change what is not working? How can we keep learning about the person and what we need to do to provide the best support?

Each person-centred thinking tool does two things. It is the basis for actions and it provides further information about what is important to the person as to how they want to be supported. Similarly, using person-centred thinking tools with staff and teams, enables managers to answer these questions: What are the gifts and strengths of each team member and how can we use these to provide the best support to people? What is important to each team member about their work? What does this mean for the way that I work with them? Specifically, what support does each team member need to do their best work? What do I expect from each team member - their core responsibilities? How do we identify a space for them to use their own judgement and be creative? How can we as a team keep learning and recording and acting on what we are learning? How can I get the best fit between team members and their role or the people they support?

## Exercises

The exercises for creating a vision and a mission statement include: creating a vision statement, creating a mission statement, developing a set of values, strategic planning and business planning. Exercises for organisational design include: choosing a design model, design the high-level organisation scope and operating model; questions people are encouraged to consider are: what is our new organisation going to achieve?; considering the design structure, what does the organisation look like?; considering the design business processes; how does the organisation work? The questions to address in job design are what are people doing and what do you want them to do?

## Creating a person-centred culture

The defining characteristics of culture, for many authors, are values and behaviours. Others add more ethereal factors such as symbols and unwritten rules or the history of why things are done in a certain way. "The culture of an organisation is really what its values look like on an hour by hour basis. Knowing what your culture is like now (as is) and what you wanted to look like, is the start of cultural change."

## Enabling risk

The culture around risk is key - the degree to which people are comfortable and encouraged to take risks, tell us a lot about the organisation's culture. A person-centred risk approach can support a move to a better, community-based life for people with learning difficulties, but a change in the culture surrounding risk management is also required to encourage staff to enable people to try new things and develop new skills. An organisation has to foster a culture of positive risk-taking in contrast to the risk-averse culture that often predominates in the health and social care sector. In order for risk management to be effective and to poor individuals, our partnership is to be forged between the people are being supported, their family or unpaid circle of supporters, staff paid by the support provider and any other relevant stakeholders.

The person-centred approach extends to contest the management of risk to staff. Identified risks include workplace stressors and the hazards associated with long working, such as isolation and a greater risk to personal safety. Ownership is crucial. A person-centred risk approach is not enough to guarantee that people would be supported to take positive risks. One must add recognition of the immense cultural shift that is required to acknowledge that people in receipt of services have the right and, importantly, must be supported, to take risks in their lives in recognition and expectation of that they will suffer as part of the overall process: the same setbacks and heartaches that all of us do.

## Leadership

The importance of leadership is addressed throughout the text. If nobody corrects or modifies poor practice and it is tolerated, then the message is clear: person-centred practice is not really important, irrespective of what organisational standards, policies and communications say. Confidence in person-centred practices requires the same expectation and attention as health and safety training and compliance. Being person-centred is not the 'icing on the cake' -it *is* 'the cake'. Creating a person-centred organisation requires people who are skilled in leading, managing and coaching. If we are seeking to create person-centred culture, then such a culture has to be based on trust, empowerment and accountability. Building trust is perhaps the most difficult aspects of leadership and relationship creation. Trust requires leadership. Person-centred leaders are present and mindful in their relationships with others; they believe in the best in people and bring out the best in people. Person-centred leaders show appreciation, in the ways that work for people.

## Staff consultation, team working and supervision

One-to-one sessions or supervision can be experienced by staff as a negative, almost punitive, experience. This person-centred approach on 'one-to-one', focuses on there being opportunities for appreciation and feedback and reflection on progress and learning and an opportunity for shared problem-solving. Consultation with staff to influence local and corporate decision-making and actions is very important, whether with the involvement of trade unions or not. Some things would help the process such as leadership with humility, honesty and integrity, mobility and communication. Person-centred practices enable teams to deliver, at their best, in ways that work for everyone. In a person-centred organisation, each team will look different and work differently according to its purpose and the individuals within the team will share the values of the organisation and will contribute to delivering outcomes for people.

## Measuring and improving quality

Thinking about quality has to start with a purpose. What are we trying to achieve and then how well are we doing? A person-centred approach to measuring quality naturally involves a range of perspectives, starting with the people supported. What does quality mean to an individual? Here, we need clearly to find information about what matters to the person and how best to support them: this is each person's individual definition of their quality of life. Finding ways to fully involve everyone in measuring and developing quality, including people who don't use speech, can be achieved through person-centred reviews and using this information about what is working and not working. In

a person-centred organisation, stories become foundational, in conversations about quality and in terms of actions based on what is learnt to continually improve and develop.

## Person-centred vision and mission

A vision statement captures where an organisation wants to be. It is usually timeless and constant unless the fundamental purpose of the organisation changes. Both the vision statement and the mission statement will reflect the core values of the organisation. The core values are the enduring principles that guide the organisation and are consistent. Even as the wider context changes.

Having a written version, mission and values does not of course mean that they are owned or acted upon by the organisation. A compelling vision and mission and clear values, set the stage for change and development. Without these, people are unable to test out decisions and decide what opportunities to take. People cannot know what they are trying to do in the first place. Person-centred practices provide a different route into exploring these issues, with ways to hear different perspectives about what is working and not working right now and what people want in the future, as well as reflections on what matters to people, staff and the organisation as a whole.

## Conclusion

The concluding chapter summarises the book so well that it alone could be used as the principles of good practice which have been described in more detail earlier. A one page summary is provided in diagrammatic form. The authors have summarised common challenges with arrows indicating the person-centred practices which could be helpful in addressing those issues. This analysis will lead to specific development plans or targets for the readers' organisation. The next step would be to allocate resources through a change management plan as required.

Other very useful sections of this book are in the two appendices which provide self-completion forms to identify progress in organisations analysed according to the practices described earlier. These include: leadership and strategy, creating a person-centred culture and person-centred approach to risk. Other themes include: community focus, supporting planning and review, finance, human resources, marketing, reviewing and improving services.

The second appendix provides guidance on analysing progress for managers. This includes: person-centred thinking tools and approaches, using these tools and approaches to support individuals to have choice and control in their lives as well as creating a person-centred culture within teams.

In summary, the text does what it promises in the title and back cover: guiding organisations to deliver personalised services. The authors have to be acknowledged for their practical approach where they express the importance of avoiding the nightmare of

creating the paperwork in an organisation, but little change. They say: “we must keep coming back to purpose - what are we trying to achieve? The purpose of one page profiles for staff is to share knowledge, to inform action, to ‘match’ to people all tasks and to begin a person-centred team plan. It is not a new work profile on a staff member which is filed - and that’s it. These deep, far reaching changes in culture and practice require leaders at all levels of the organisation who demonstrate the values of the organisation.”

The authors’ experience of directing the international charity United Response whose purpose is: “to work with people to achieve person-centred change and social justice” articulates the voice of the real world of practice heard throughout the text. From the emergence of person-centred planning in government policy to today with a focus on personalisation, it was evident that expecting staff to behave in person-centred methods, would require a change in the way that they are supported and managed. However, over a decade later, person-centred organisations are still very far from the norm. If people working in health and social care use the tools and techniques provided by Stephen Stirk and Helen Sanderson, then they will have a multitude of options to take their organisation forward to become truly person-centred.