



Evaluating Personalised Services

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ABSTRACT

The article describes the Five Dimensions of Person-Centredness, an evaluation tool developed specifically to explore supported living and inclusion-orientated organisations. It explores some of the learning gained from using the evaluation process with four organisations in Scotland, and includes identification of common themes that make the difference when personalising support.

KEYWORDS: PERSONALISING SERVICES; SUPPORTED LIVING; INDIVIDUALLY TAILORED SUPPORT; PERSON-CENTRED APPROACH; EVALUATION; ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURES; RIGHT RELATIONSHIPS

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Introduction

The Five Dimensions Evaluation Process was developed to explore personalised and individual services, and has been used to audit the work of four organisations in Scotland that provide supported living or individually tailored services. Most of these services are targeted at people who require high levels of support, many receiving 24-hour assistance, seven days a week (*Box 1*, overleaf).

Planning the evaluation

Aims

The evaluation is carried out by small teams. Membership of the team reflects a range of experience; some identify as disabled people or as users of services, others are consultants, trainers,

professionals, managers and so on. Our interest in evaluating services of these types grew from a passion to discover why it was that, when some people received high levels of individual support, their service seemed to work well, but for others life might not get any better at all, or might actually get worse. We wanted to find out what some organisations do that really makes a difference.

We are concerned about using phrases like 'supporting living' and person-centredness (Black, 2000), as they have become synonymous either with the separation of housing and support arrangements or with one-to-one support. Both terms are the practical expression of belief systems (Kinsella, 1993; Kendrick, 2001) that should lead to maintenance or improvement in important relationships, valued roles, self-respect, learning, choice and control, and so on (O'Brien, 1989).

Some questions we hoped to answer

Personalised and supported living services are still relatively new. It struck us that whether or not people have one-to-one help, or whether they can move house yet retain their support, might not be the key questions to ask. These are often technical arrangements that can be organised bureaucratically without any connection to a particular belief system or any coherent method or practice, although they are mentioned in the same breath as 'supported living'. We wanted to audit organisations with a view to highlighting the more subtle beliefs and practices that make the difference. Building on learning from the 1990s (Cunningham *et al*, 1998; O'Brien *et al*, 1998) and early evaluations of



Inclusion Glasgow and other small organisations (Duffy, 2005), the Five Dimension Tool was developed.

Rather than prescribing a model or organisational structure, organisations have

tended to advocate a set of values and practices (Klein, 1994). This strong value base has allowed for different models and structures of services to be developed, and has led to much debate in conversations, seminars, forums and study groups we have been part of. We focused on two for the development of the evaluation tool.

First, what typifies a truly useful and potent personalised service beyond the provision of one-one support? Four ideas were proposed by Ritchie (2001): accessibility, uniqueness, bandwidth (meaning that services interact with mainstream services to help them accommodate special needs) and user control. Second, what type of structure and what patterns of organisation are helpful and congruent in promoting the outcomes that these particular values and beliefs have advocated? These questions kept recurring during the evolution of the evaluation process; additional challenges emerged as we gathered information as part of the evaluations.

The first arose when we met more and more people using services who had had little experience of ordinary non-institutional or segregated lifestyles. As Kristiansen and Johansen (2005) and others have pointed out, being satisfied with something that is better than what has gone before, or having activities to do, is not a satisfactory measure of quality of life. Although some people might say they were happier now or had more active lives, this must be considered in relation to the poverty of the person's life experience in the past. The second challenge emerged as we tried to get to know the people who were using these services, as many had additional communication difficulties. For example, a number of the people we met did not use words to communicate, and some had behaviours that affected our ability to communicate with them.

Theory, belief and assumptions

The Five Dimensions is a reflexive and phenomenological process. The belief system that we use is based on process work (Mindell, 1985;

Box 1: THE FIVE DIMENSIONS OF PERSON-CENTREDNESS

Uniqueness and Diversity

- uniqueness of support
- enabling contribution and connection
- aspirations and preferences
- specialised assistance and support
- recognition of wounds
- recognition and meeting difference

Power

- listening and paying attention to
- involvement in decision-making
- negotiation
- control over resources
- rank and status
- role clarity

Right Relationship

- authenticity
- sticking with
- safety and autonomy
- benefit of the doubt
- respect and equality
- boundaries and privacy

Developing, Learning and Growing

- clarity of vision
- creating the space to learn and grow
- information awareness
- application of learning
- learning and training
- reflection

Usefulness and Relevance

- beliefs assumptions and worldview
- the needs identified to work on
- aims and purpose of the service
- structure of support
- overall usefulness



Schupbach, 2006) and complexity theory (Mitleton-Kelly, 2003a). These paradigms makes use of metaphors like fractals and holograms (Mindell, 1988; Capra, 1997) to explain how the patterns that are in the whole organisation will also be repeated at more local level in the representative parts. This means that we can expect, by studying a small part in detail, to construct models of the larger patterns that exist in the organisation. The basic patterns in the organisation will be reflected in the more local patterns of a team.

We expect to see built-in assumptions in the day-to-day life of the organisation and also, at a more mythical, less conscious level, in the images and metaphorical life of the teams and their relationships. These assumptions create primary identities within the organisation, typified by sentences that begin with 'we are a such and such an organisation' or 'the people we support need x,y,z'. There is a secondary or emergent process which is unconscious for the organisation, although it can be deduced from study of the patterns of thinking and behaviours we see. These behaviours highlight a self-organising principle that is in operation and which has its origins in the mythical aspect of the organisation or in its imagery.

We understand all process as possible systems nestling within systems, so that for example the development of a team, its understanding of its own identity and behaviour co-evolves (Mitleton-Kelly, 2003b) with that of the wider environment it is within, namely the organisation and local political environment.

Finally, we wanted a process that was consistent with the values of person-centred services, otherwise we would be using an instrument of enquiry that was at odds with what we wanted to measure. We felt that ethically this was not desirable, and it could create a contradictory affect.

The evaluation method

We decided in the four evaluations to focus in depth on a proportion or cross-section of services. We spent significant time getting to know people

and those around them. This allowed us to solve the problem of how to engage and involve the people who use the service in the whole process. We gathered information through semi-structured interviews, group work and just by being with people who use the service. This gave us a privileged position in more ways than one. The learning is then fed back to the parts of the organisation as themes emerge. This is a process of dialogue, although it is kick-started by presentations of themes and graphical analysis by the evaluation team. This helps to provide a larger frame and to increase perspective.

Over a few weeks we strengthen this process of exploring awareness about what and how things are happening. We continue until the limits or edges of what is possible in the organisation are recognised. The interaction between evaluators and the organisation encourages new subjects for discussion and an emerging curiosity. The idea is to sidestep defensiveness by encouraging teams to notice and experience the patterns they are part of, without blame or judgement.

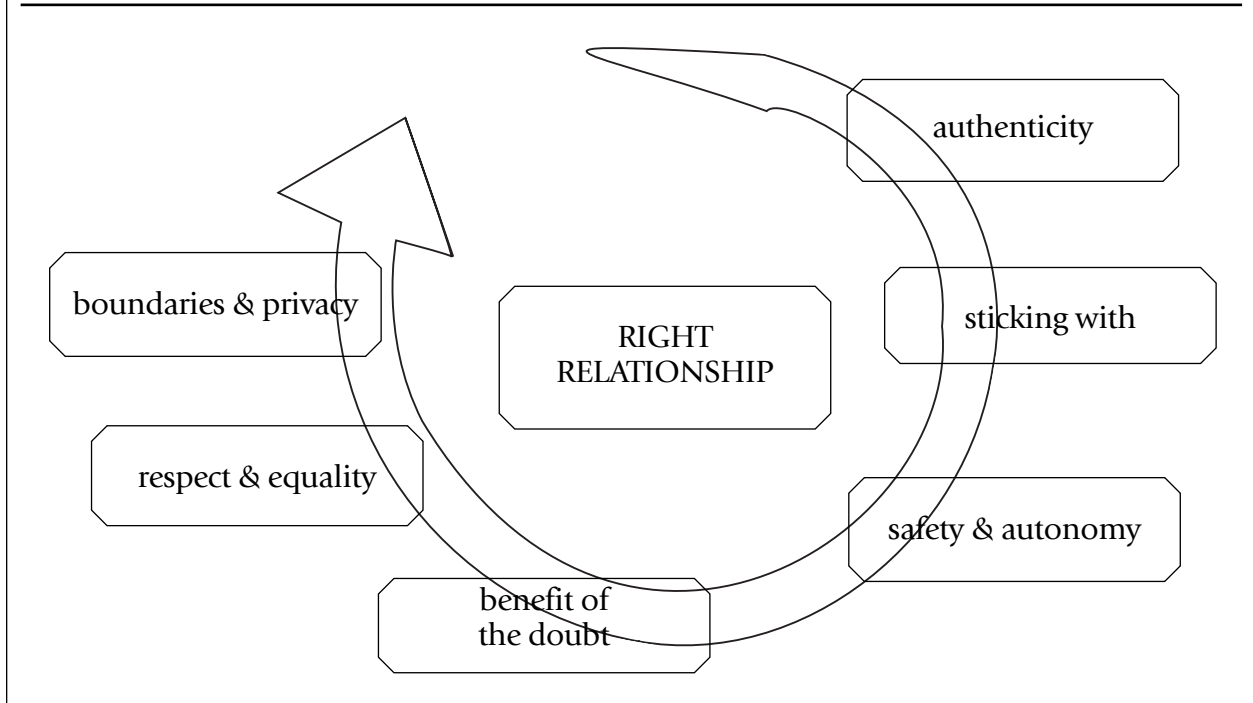
A visual representation was developed depicting communication patterns between the central management of one organisation and the individualised teams for the people they supported. This was used by the organisation to generate metaphors for how they had been communicating and how they could improve in the future. It also provided feedback for them about range of intensity and types of relationship that managers had with each of the individual services.

An illustration of the evaluation method

Each of the five dimensions we investigate has constituent parts, so that in total there are 29 different levels that we measure and explore. For example, the dimension of Right Relationship (*Figure 1*, overleaf) has six aspects and was created following reflection on our own personal experience of managing supported living services, coupled with a range of ideas and writings by



Figure 1: RIGHT RELATIONSHIPS



Michael Kendrick (2000, 2001). We consider that the best relationships can be characterised by these sub-dimensions. They are studied at the level of the individual person, at the team level and in the field of the wider organisation. If we are looking at how Right Relationship functions at the level of the person who receives the service, then we investigate authenticity of behaviour in the relationship. We are then interested in how people stick with each other when things are difficult, or whether new challenges appear in how the person behaves. Indebted to the pioneering work of Michael Smull and Susie Burke Harrison (1992), we explore the balance between keeping the person safe and ensuring that they have a level of autonomy of action, using the concept of essential lifestyle planning (Smull, 1998). We also look at how people are given the benefit of the doubt, or how they might be stereotyped or labelled, and investigate aspects of respect and equality – how personal boundaries are handled so that the right

relationship for the support the person requires is maintained.

All the dimensions repeat on different levels: support for the individual, team working, whole organisation and the wider environment.

Our learning about the organisations we evaluated – the emerging themes

We observed that there was a correlation between success in personalising care and certain organisational features. These are identified below.

Personalisation must happen throughout the organisations, not just at the point of delivery of the service

Although it appears obvious, delivery of personalised services really does require a degree of personalisation throughout the organisation. What we mean by this is that the sense of the personal must be carried in the structure and patterns of the organisation, not just in the relationship with those



being supported. When this doesn't happen, there is massive incongruity between how the people who receive the service are being treated and how staff members are experiencing power, relationships, etc. This can lead to dissonance and discomfort, which can then affect the relationships and atmosphere in the organisation. This has a negative effect on the quality of the support. For example, if a worker perceives that the person receiving support is treated uniquely and that there is tailoring of support, then they too should be able to expect something like that to happen for them. Additionally, if the worker is encouraged to see the positive qualities and strengths of the person they support, then they would expect their manager to see their strengths and treat them in a similar way.

Limits to organisational size are important

The leaders of the organisation should know the people they serve, and be on personal terms with the staff and other stakeholders (family, clinicians and so on.) This naturally leads to a limit in the size of the organisation. We came across two examples of how growth can happen while keeping to this principle. One organisation grew into three, keeping the same shape and structure, but forming three separate organisations, each providing support to about 40 individuals. Another organisation approached the same problem differently, by splitting its operations into two geographical areas, but retained the same board of trustees.

Flexible, transparent and personalised financing needs to be in place so that the money and resources are also personal

This has also been identified by Duffy (2005) and is at the heart of the in Control idea, too. In order to be personal and to maximise the possibilities for truly individualised responses, the team around the person (and/or the person with their family) need to have control of, or at least a sense of, what is available to them to use. The closer the control and the greater the transparency, the more creativity is possible.

The quality of relationship between the main supporters and the person who receives the service is crucial

Again, this seems like a very obvious statement, yet it requires rediscovery, time and time again. It means, for example, that staff should be matched carefully to work with an individual person, and not everyone is suited to work with everyone else; the impact of careful and thorough recruitment and matching must not be under-estimated and produces remarkable results (Fitzpatrick, 2006). We also learned that when workers and others take time out to reflect on their relationships and their impact, qualitative changes were the result. The use of person-centred planning processes like essential lifestyle planning and MAP also help to put relationship into relief and increase awareness about what is working and what is not.

Regular revisiting and strengthening of the value base is needed to combat the dominant beliefs and views in society

The prevailing myths in society (Wolfensberger, 1998), and social problems (Smale *et al*, 2000) faced by many labelled groups, mean that constant reiteration of beliefs and renewal of what it means to be truly personal throughout the organisation are required. It seems an essential requirement to be vigilant and not take what is happening for granted in any way, even when things appear to be going well and are obviously working.

Awareness of the feedback loops between dimensions helps

When there was an understanding of the organisation as a system with feedback loops between the dimensions and levels, the ability of everyone to change in the organisation was strengthened. For example, we discovered that the uniqueness of responses and interventions that a person experienced was affected by the quality of relationships in the team around them, which in turn was also affected by awareness of power and the use of power in the organisation (see *Figure 2*,



below). This was noticeable in several of the personalised services we studied. We learned that in teams where ‘right relationships’ were happening, team members were more likely to advocate and feel strong enough (and backed up enough) to challenge others within and outwith the organisation. This in turn led to a demand for more unique and individual responses from the team and on behalf of the person who was supported. This in turn drew attention to issues of power, which in turn drew attention to the quality of relationships, forming a powerful multi-levelled feedback loop.

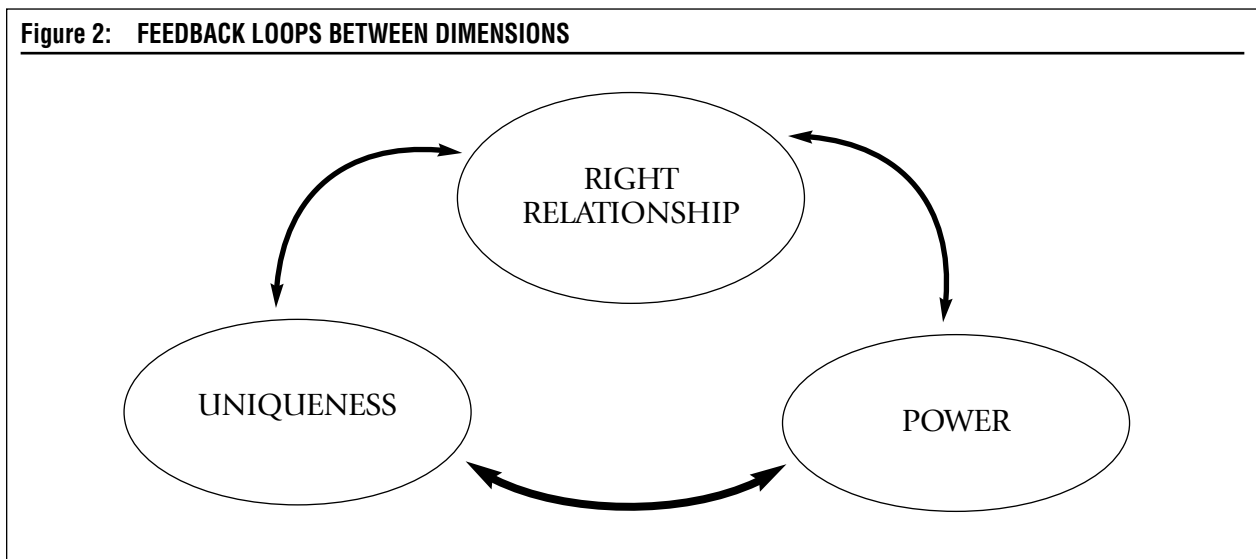
Conclusions about the evaluation process

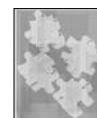
The feedback from the organisations we evaluated suggests that the Five Dimensions process can bring useful insights into how good support is being delivered. When we used evaluators in the team who had a wide range of personal experiences of services (as service users, advocates, workers, managers and family members), we realised that we could identify more clearly feedback loops that were otherwise missing. When we presented information in ways that excited curiosity about entrenched patterns and processes, without blame or judgement, we sensed more openness on the part of the organisations.

Spending time with people and gaining a sense of their day-to-day lives, and processing the information through the prism of the Five Dimensions, have led to useful insights (like the six points above) about what makes a positive or negative difference in the lives of the people who receive support.

A significant learning for us is how necessary it is to establish a ‘right relationship’ between us, as the evaluators, and the members of the organisation evaluated. A good relationship is essential, but it must also suit the type of enquiry we are engaged in. We learned that how we enquire into the work of the organisation and the lives of the people supported must be congruent with what we are hoping to measure and find.

The Five Dimensions can assist organisations that are interested in how to increase coherency between values and practice. They do so by offering a better understanding of the patterns in operation at different levels. The willingness of all four organisations to enter into this process of discovery has been inspiring. All four providers were very interested in how the person-centred ethos they wanted to see at the point of delivery of the service also played out throughout the whole of the organisation. This interest in itself may be a significant finding as, through this openness in





how the whole organisation does what it says it does, the quality of the personalised service improves.

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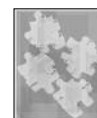
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