

Applying the five dimension to the managers role

The five dimensions have already been described in block one and we have used them to begin analysing a service. In this block we are going to consider how the dimensions can be used to analyse the managers role in ensuring the delivery of a person centred service.

Right Relationship

The dimension of right relationship dominates the thinking around the manager's role in a person centred organisation. Getting the relationships right can be hard work, but this is the key to managing in a person centred way.

The principal responsibility of the manager is to ensure that the people using the service are assisted in a person centred way. The manager has the specific job of ensuring that team members are enabled to relate to the person using the service in the best way possible. However it is of equal importance that the manager be conscious of the nature of their relationships throughout the organisation. Some of the relationships which need to be considered are between the manager and:

- the staff team as a whole,
- the service users
- family members
- their peers
- their supervisor
- people in the community

In a person centred organisation we must work towards all of these relationships being right. This is important. Too often a person centred service considers only the relationship between support staff and people receiving the service without understanding and acknowledging that those relationships do not exist in isolation. By this we mean that if we do not strive for right relationship across the organisation it will be impossible for staff to enter into all aspects of right relationship with people using the service. In practical terms a person who does not know if they are employed next week may have difficulty in functioning authentically with the person.

Authenticity

When we think about our relationships at work and in our personal lives we very often make a distinction about the style or content of those relationships and make clear divisions between them. It seems as if we define those at work as less real or personal and more distant or professional. As soon as we do this it becomes difficult to act authentically within those relationships defined as less real. Often we are told in professional training not to become emotionally involved, to keep our 'real' feelings at a distance.

This makes being authentic hard. The result of trying to act in one way when it is at odds with our real feelings can be that we give out mixed messages. People get confused by us and don't know how to respond.

When we manage people working in a person centred way we are asking them to be real in relationship with those they support, this requires us to be real in our relationships with them. Trying to say what we feel can help reduce mixed messages and aid clarity.

Respect and Equality

Alongside authenticity there must be real respect for all of the people involved across the service. Managers have to really treat people as equal because they are people regardless of their status in the organisation, this can be very difficult in a hierarchical organisation. Respect and equality have to be demonstrated in each relationship. Talking about your manager in a disrespectful way to a service user may be an authentic expression of how you feel but it does not demonstrate respect for the other people involved.

Thoughtfulness

When managers are in authentic and respectful relationships with staff and service users one of the ways in which this is demonstrated is by being thoughtful. When people respect you they listen carefully and are thoughtful about what you say, they consider the issues you raise seriously. Managers can demonstrate this aspect of relationship in all their transactions with staff, service users and families. Listening to the concern expressed by a family member about the safety of a relative and addressing it thoughtfully and seriously will be more productive in building right relationship than dismissing the person as being overprotective. Thoughtfully considering concerns of this nature can lead to an understanding that there is common ground on which to build.

Sticking with people

In this aspect of right relationship the managers job is to ensure that the service sticks with people. It sounds straightforward but in reality can be complex. It is not enough to have a policy statement to refer to about what is or isn't acceptable behaviour or about the advisability of learning from mistakes. Staff need assisted to understand what that means in practice. What do you do if a service user commits an offence, what if they make a decision which goes against the useful and well meaning advice offered by a support worker and their manager? How would you make sure the service sticks with the person and what then if they do the same thing again?

These are the real issues through which someone must be supported. When staff and their managers are engaged in right relationships the questions around actually sticking with people can be properly addressed and discussed. Staff can be allowed to have deep feelings about issues and yet still assist people to make their own decisions.

Keeping people safe

The same issues arise when we think about keeping people safe. Authentic, respectful relationships between staff will assist truthful discussion to take place with service users. Regular team and organisational discussions about large and small matters of safety will help staff to feel able to make autonomous decisions about safety when they are needed. People providing support should feel confident about how to analyse problems and feel that if they are thoughtful, respectful and consider the issue thoroughly then the organisation will trust them to make the right decision.

At the same time managers need to be clear what the rules are e.g. when a decision must be made elsewhere or when the organisation will not support a staff member.

If right relationship is in place then the attitude around safety is one of inquiry and problem solving,, this applies equally to keeping staff safe as well as service users.

Boundaries and privacy

When we discuss person centred services the issues of boundaries and privacy are of real concern for the manager. This new type of service requires blurring of roles and the removal of old boundaries around professionalism, in our enthusiasm for change we must not forget that staff have a right to boundaries and privacy. If we do not recognise the

boundaries of staff we will make it harder for them to recognise the boundaries and need for privacy of service users. This does not mean that they may not be challenged, well operating person centred teams develop the ability to challenge, discuss and question boundaries in a respectful way. Living with difference, uncertainty and lots of discussion are the ways in which right relationship can be demonstrated in this area.

Benefit of the doubt

A manager has a crucial role in ensuring that service users receive the benefit of the doubt from staff. This probably means working hard with support staff to consider the effect of previous experiences and reputations which may have shaped previous responses to the person.

A simple but effective way to work on this is to encourage people to speak well of the person, mentioning events that have taken place or things people say or do from this perspective can immediately help address negative attitudes and begin to change cultures.