9 Elements of a Person-Centered System: Support for Those Who Implement

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A person-centered system requires a workforce that is dedicated, stable, sufficient in numbers, and skilled. People at all levels of the workforce need to be committed to supporting those who use the services to live lives of their own choosing in the community. To ensure stability, the culture and practices of the organization have to contribute to retention. The person-centered skills and practices that contribute to meeting the vision need to be taught and used.

To be successful in soliciting the desired outcomes from each person and supporting them to achieve those outcomes, a system must also support its workforce. It begins with supporting those who provide day-to-day support and continues through those who manage the system. It also means making sure that the staff that develop plans have the skills and time necessary to accurately represent people's desired outcomes and identify the supports the person needs to realize their desired lifestyle. Skills include understanding the positive balance between what is important to and important for the person. Above all, plans have to be used and seen as useful.

Too many systems fail to provide the support necessary to carry out person-centered practices. First, those who develop system plans may not have the time and skills needed. As a result, the outcomes listed are pre-determined system outcomes rather than individual outcomes and do not adequately reflect the person's desired life. Second, the person (and those closest to the person) are not effectively included in the process. Good, useful plans are developed in partnership with the person's circle of support. Third, system plans are often disconnected from implementation. The action steps that need to effectuate the outcomes are not connected to them. Fourth, those who review and approve plans have not been trained in how to determine if the content supports person-centered outcomes. What is reviewed must align with what is required. Fifth, planning requirements do not coincide with the realization of person centered outcomes. Finally, plans are often seen as irrelevant, or simply as compliance requirements, without utility in helping the person have the life they desired. The planning process becomes an empty ritual that no one looks forward to.

Systems also fail to meet person-centered aspiration because of an acute shortage of direct support professionals. Therefore, striving to recruit and retain adequate direct support professionals is a critical issue. At a 2022 NASDDDS conference, the Human Services Research Institute presented the following strategies to enhance retention:

- ▶ Realistic job previews
- ▶ Match between individual skills and the person's need for support
- ▶ Competent and supportive supervision
- ▶ Organizational culture
- ▶ Respect recognition and career ladders
- ▶ Training and credentialing
- ▶ Pay and benefits
- ▶ Ratio of supervisors to DSPs

A overview of the literature suggests there is more that can be done to increase retention across the workforce. In his 1999 book, Marcus Buckingham (then with Gallup) detailed six questions that most strongly correlate with retention. These findings were so robust, Gallup continues to use them to this day:

1. Do I know what is expected of me at work?
2. Do I have the materials and equipment needed to do my work right?
3. At work, do I have the opportunity to do what I do best every day?
4. In the last seven days, have I received recognition or praise for good work?
5. Does my supervisor, or someone at work, seem to care about me as a person?
6. At work, do my opinions seem to count?

In his more recent work, Buckingham[1] builds on these six (6) questions and states that "...these [eight] 8 precisely worded items, validly predict team performance."

1. I am really enthusiastic about the mission of my company
2. At work, I clearly understand what is expected of me
3. In my team, I am surrounded by people who share my values
4. I have the chance to use my strengths everyday at work
5. My teammates have my back
6. I know I will be recognized for excellent work
7. I have great confidence in my company's future
8. In my work, I am always challenged to grow

If we look at the implications these items have for practice, most are self-evident—people want to work someplace they fit in and feel valued and respected. We also see some of the

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[1] Nine Lies About Work: A Freethinking Leader's Guide to the Real World by Marcus Buckingham, Ashley Goodall HBR Press, 2019

other elements of a person-centered system taking prominence. Once again, vision and mission matter. The match between the people doing the work and those who they are supporting is a strong predictor of retention. Psychological safety is needed in the workplace and many of those who are supported as well as those who provide support benefit from healing environments.

To truly support our workforce and those providing supports, the focus needs to be on creating an atmosphere of shared power—a "power with" environment rather than a "power over" environment. In a "power with" environment, there is a focus on creating a learning culture. In such a culture, people share their learning and are listened to when information is shared. This builds a culture of trust, respect and partnership. Mistakes are viewed as learning opportunities and promote people taking responsibility for their actions rather than covering up their mistakes or blaming others.

A learning culture creates a shift in power as the person using services and supports is viewed as the expert of their life, and the system listening to provide what is needed to support the person to live their desired life. As these outcomes are identified, those providing the support are the experts in the implementation of these outcomes, based on what they have learned from the person. The learning from this interaction is shared with the system to be acted upon to make the outcomes a reality.

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