

Pressure

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This is the second in a series of blogs on what is required to have a person-centered system. In my last post, [9 Pillars of a Person-Centered System](#), I discussed the nine components that work together to develop and sustain person-centered systems. Future posts will examine each pillar in detail. Here we look at an underlying requirement for change: Pressure.

It is an adage in the change literature that change only occurs when there is pressure. John Kotter¹ refers to the pressure needed as a sense of urgency. This sense of urgency needs to be greater than the inertia that comes from comfort with the status quo. And the sense of urgency needs to be greater than the resistance that arises when elements of the change are not seen as desirable. In our work to support transformational change in services for people who use long-term services and supports (LTSS), we have found that it is helpful to think of pressure as falling into two broad categories: compliance pressure and positive pressure.

Compliance pressure occurs when a change in practice is required and has a deadline for implementation. **Positive pressure** is present when there is agreement that the change in practice is desirable and those who are impacted endorse the change. When both are present, change is likely to be successful and be completed by the deadline.

Some opposition to change is nearly always present. Among the most common reasons for resistance in our experience are: change being done *to* people rather than *with* them; threats to competency; and a lack of trust in those imposing change. In supporting transformational change in LTSS, we need to add to this list the challenge of a change in assumptions/core values. Positive pressure requires that those whose work is impacted agree that we want a system that:

- Practices power *with* rather than power *over*
- Supports people in living everyday lives in their communities
- Includes opportunities for employment and other valued roles
- Seeks to build and sustain reciprocal relationships

¹ John Kotter is a recognized thought leader in change management. He is a professor emeritus in the Harvard School of Business and author of 20 books on change and leadership.

- Helps people in having positive control over the lives that they have chosen

Compliance pressure creates the sense of urgency for people to work on the change now, but it requires positive pressure where people see the value and beneficial impact of the desired change—which results in buy-in.

For those who do not want the change, do not think the change is needed, or don't think the change is feasible, compliance pressure is coercive. Failure to comply has adverse consequences. The more substantive the change, the more the change is unwelcome, and the greater the resistance. Those affected seek the least change possible. Efforts are made to interpret new requirements as being satisfied by what is already being done. What is expected must be clear if it is to survive the inevitable "pushback" from those who want less change. The outcomes that will result from the change need to be seen as required. Compliance pressure remains a critical component of change. However, compliance pressure by itself often results in meeting the "letter" of the change but not the "spirit".

For LTSS, underneath the compliance requirements is a change in thinking, a change in assumptions. Without the changes in thinking, the changes in practice will not meet their promise. Those who are responsible for developing the rules and creating the policies can fall into the trap of thinking that changing the requirements is sufficient. Compliance pressure is insufficient. There is a need to understand what is replacing the "old" assumptions and a need for "buy-in" to the new. The buy in is built on optimistic discontent. Leaders must help people see what is not working in the lives of people how it can be changed to improve lives and how that re improvement requires a change in thinking. The implications for policy and practice must be explored and the learning acted on. Efforts to generate buy-in (e.g., stories that demonstrate that positive change occurred), considered together with seeing additional change from acting on the learning, creates positive pressure. The necessity of positive pressure is often not recognized and efforts to create it are not done or are token. Positive pressure can be developed using the discontent with what exists—the present state—coupled with a perception that movement toward what could be—the desired state—is both possible and desirable.

When all the basic ingredients for change are present, when motivation sees opportunity, change happens. Where the need for change is felt, a productive way forward is clear, and when the outcomes are perceived as worth the effort, change happens.

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