

Cultures in Services and Community

As people with disabilities become more integrated into community the balance between what services can do and what community people can do in their lives shifts. There are certain expectations and rules for service workers which can be identified as a culture which is different from what is expected in community.

These notes, based on the work of John McKnight, Bob Perske and others, contrast the two cultures. Of course they overlap and are not mutually exclusive. It is however useful for service workers who are trying to bridge the two cultures to be aware of the differences.

Services	Community
Orderly management is prized.	There is less order and people object to being managed.
Formality with standardised rules and roles is expected.	Informality with individualised face to face relationships is usual.
Leadership is usually ascribed to people in named positions.	Leadership functions are often shared amongst several people.
Innovation is regarded as suspect.	Creativity is normative.
Respond according to priorities.	Respond quickly.
Democracy is seen as impractical.	People thrive on democracy and neighbourliness.
Perfection is sought with written plans which often fail because of human imperfections in implementation. Reluctance to acknowledge error, ignorance and fallibility.	People's imperfections are more readily acknowledged and people play to their strengths aiming for the next step and at least minimising the worst things.
Often, services require trained, experienced people to make them work. Anyone who falls short is seen as a barrier to a high quality service, to be got rid of. Ablest dominate.	Ordinary people's talents are used optimally, without expecting perfection. All can play a part.
Seeks deficiency.	Seeks capacity.
Focus for clienthood.	Forum for expression of citizenship.
Independence/dependence framework.	Interdependence acknowledged.
Counting and measuring are regarded highly.	People tell stories.
People communicate by reports.	People gossip.
Workers expect resources (such as money) to come down from above.	People solve problems with what they have got.
Humour is often suppressed and tends to be ironic and sardonic. It is often at the expense of those served.	Joy and laughter are freely expressed and unabashed. Humour is often at the expense of those in power.
There is rarely any singing.	Singing together is welcomed as one of the glues that hold people together.
Enthusiasm is regarded with suspicion.	Enthusiasm is welcomed.

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