9 Elements of a Person-Centered System: Positive Pressure and Alignment

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It is an adage in the change literature that "change only occurs when there is pressure." John Kotter[1] refers to the pressure for change 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.

> Change only occurs when the pressure for change exceeds the resistance to change.

Compliance pressure occurs when a change in practice is required and has a deadline for implementation. **Positive pressure** exists 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 done *to* people rather than *with* them.
- Perception of more work
- Threats to competency by being asked to develop and demonstrate new skill sets to do the same job.
- Lack of trust in those imposing change

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[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

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

Compliance pressure creates an obligation and a 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, and 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 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 positive change results), 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 token in nature rather than specifically planned for and addressed. 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 and 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.

Efforts at creating positive pressure for change should be built upon the idea of alignment. Alignment is present when the efforts are focused on moving toward the vision in a way that maximizes effectiveness and efficiency. By "effectiveness," we mean we want to know how well it helps us move toward our vision. By "efficiency," we mean we want to know if it uses the fewest resources possible.

- Does policy and practice reflect the assumptions that are underneath the vision and support the vision?
- Does the implementation of policy and practice reflect the intent of moving toward the vision?
- Do those who oversee implementation look at the efficiency of the approaches and processes?
- Do we have an understanding of how effective the implementation has been?
- Do the varied practices work well together?

An example of the benefit of looking at assumptions, how they manifest in current practice, and what might change when they're considered follows:

	Move Away From: Identify and Fix What's Wrong	Move Towards: Build On Existing and Future Capabilities
Underlying Assumption	Dependence on the system (System is the expert, and the expert knows best)	Enhance/promote/endorse the capacity of the family and the community to support people with disabilities (people, their families/and loved ones are the experts)
Intake	Identify a comprehensive list of performance deficits to identify needs	Identify the person's capabilities and interests and emphasize what they can do, and areas where support is necessary
Assessment	System must be informed of and involved in all aspects of the person's life; comprehensive list of needs identified	System only goes where it is invited, does not "barge in" to all aspects of life; customized list of desired support areas is identified

Planning	Only health and safety matter; priority is to ensure health, minimize risk and ameliorate deficits (to MAKE someone independent)	Interests, comfort, and satisfaction AND health and safety each matter equally; intentionally plan based on a person's interests for balance to exist (both/and, order matters)
Quality Management	Service delivery focus, regardless of impact; licensure designed to identify what is wrong with an agency; priority is compliance, with minimum standards as the indicator of being successful	Results oriented; shared responsibility across the system; focus on the relationships; licensure and monitoring roles are seen as technical advisors and verifiers
Financial Responsiveness	The system is capable of "rescuing" the family or the individual through categorical services. Funds are constant as long as requirements are met whether the person wants/needs the service or not	The system will collaborate with the person, their family, and their community to find creative ways to promote the person's desired outcomes by utilizing a variety of resources

Does policy and practice meet the intent? Does it have the desired outcome?

For example, self-direction, as a funded way of developing services, meets its intent when reviewed from the perspective of the individual. People exercise choice and control at an individual level to access their communities and pursue purpose and meaning in their lives. However, as a systems-change effort, self-direction falls short. Complex processes for participation, onerous requirements for hiring, supervising, and paying staff, and funding available are but a few of the challenges.

Development and implementation of person-centered service plans offer illustration of the responsibility of our systems to use a person's "desired life" as a measuring stick. Outcomes that are person-centered describe how life should look (including services and supports needed) from the person's perspective. When the plan for implementing these outcomes does not truly reflect life as the person sees it, the system should use that as an opportunity for improvement.

Looking at efficiency

In his book the _Path of Least Resistance_, Robert Fritz says "if you want change you need to make the old way harder and the new way easier." You also need to make a new way efficient, to use the least amount of time or funding possible without diminishing quality. Any practice that has been in place multiple years will benefit from structured review for both effectiveness and efficiency.

In seeking efficiency, leaders must keep in mind that it is about being efficient in moving toward the vision. It is not about being efficient in maintaining the old way of doing work.

Do the practices work well?

A system is made up of parts working together. We have looked at how the parts of the system work together from an individual standpoint, starting when people are first interested in services until they begin to receive them. We must also look at the parts of the system interacting together through the lens of effectiveness and efficiency. When we think of effectiveness and efficiency at the system level, alignment is key. Alignment requires us to look for processes and practice that result in:

- Duplication of effort
- Lack of focus on the vision, or its underlying assumptions
- Conflicting policies or practices

These may be seen in quality management approaches, plan development, reporting and monitoring, and requirements for those providing supports. As we move toward a person-centered system, are we identifying what requirements are no longer needed, instead of just adding to the requirements currently in place? When we act on effectiveness and efficiency, it supports a move beyond compliance pressure to the positive pressure that is needed.

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