

# **Building the Foundations for Good Support**

National Federation of  
Voluntary Bodies

*Challenging Times: Ensuring Values*

23 June 2011

John O'Brien

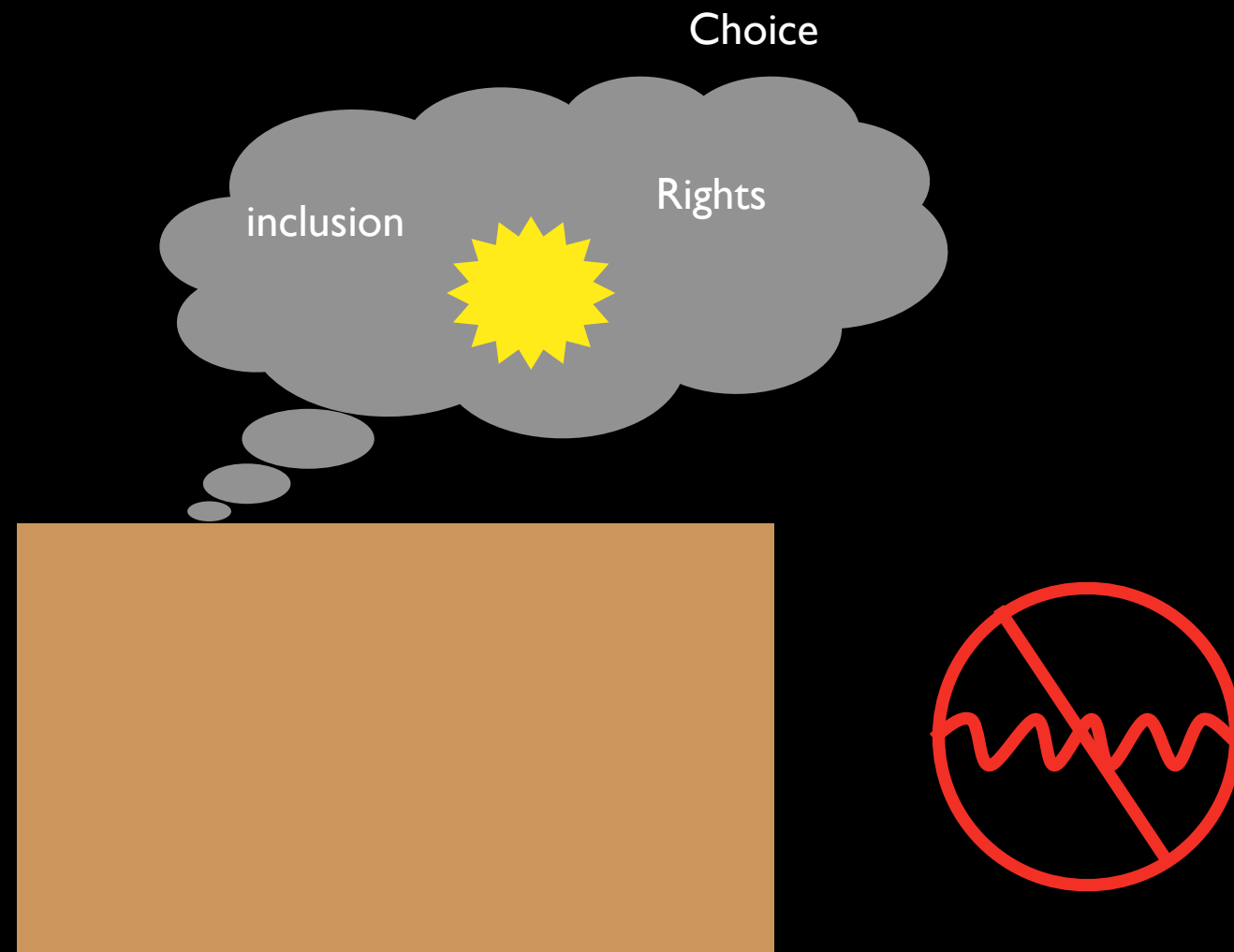
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<http://tinyurl.com/OBrien-books>

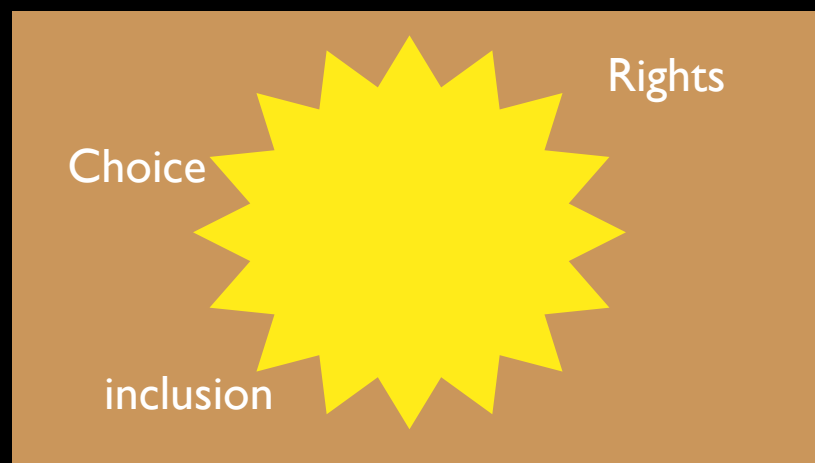
We have important organizational & personal choices to make about the tension between visions that matter to us and current reality. Broadly, there are 3 approaches.



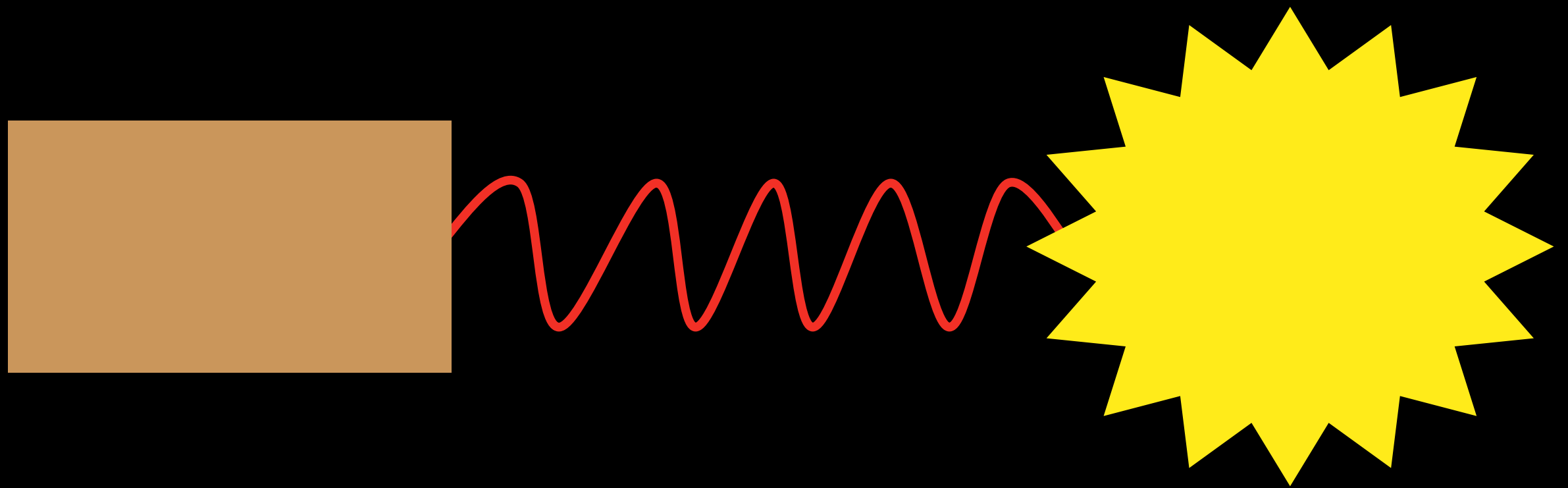
Thanks: Peter Senge



Withdraw ...just go through the motions as usual (talk a lot about the values or talk about how 'unrealistic' they are)



Shrink what we value to fit inside what we can do right now. [Re-label the usual or little changes.]



Recognize & work inside the tension to  
develop our capacity to create more of  
what we want

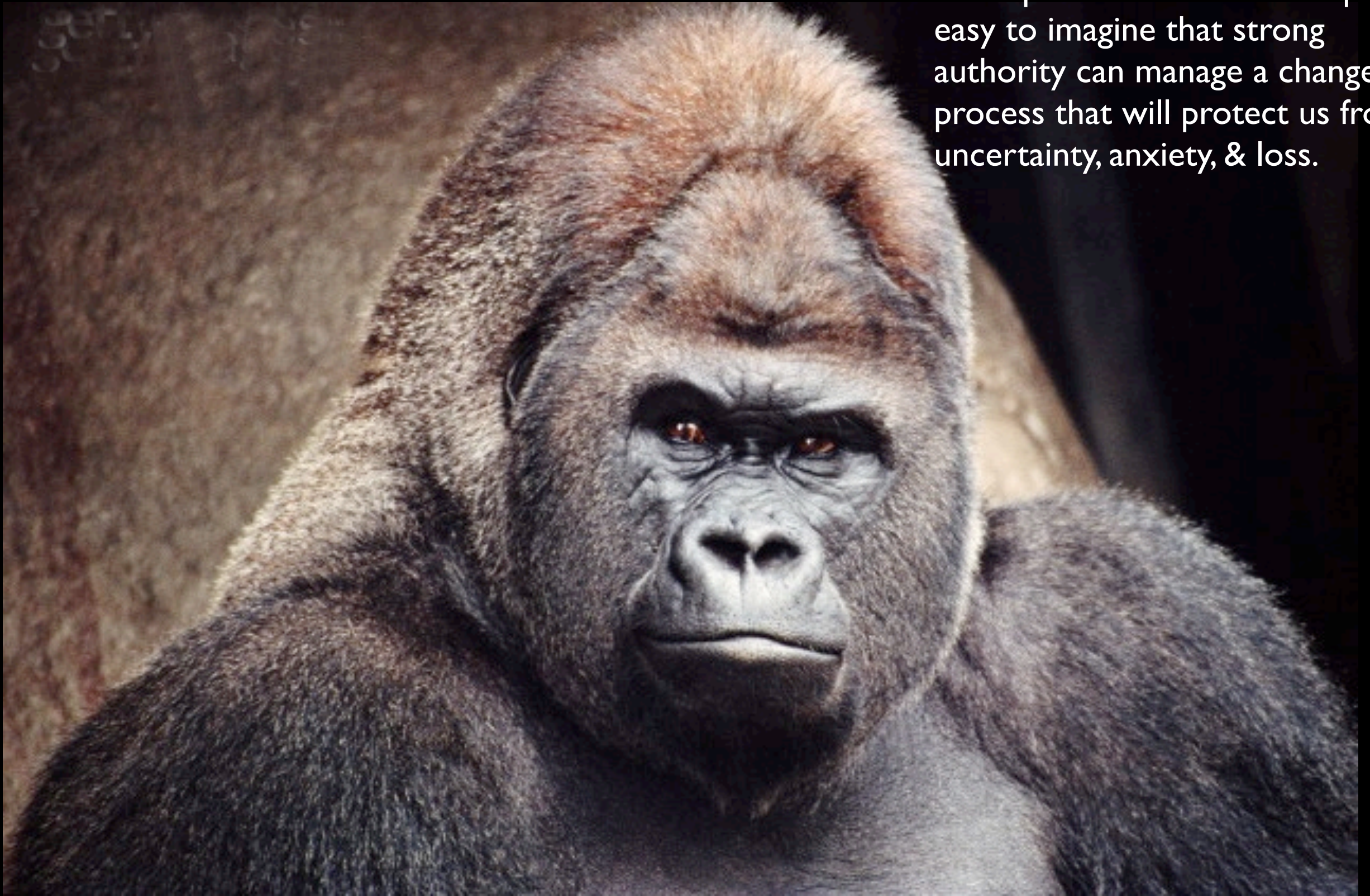
The work we have set for ourselves serves  
ideals of inclusion & justice. These are not  
products to finish & deliver, but qualities to  
better & better approximate.

There are things you can't reach.  
But you can reach out to them,  
and all day long.

—Mary Oliver



We need to question our assumptions about leadership. It's easy to imagine that strong authority can manage a change process that will protect us from uncertainty, anxiety, & loss.



Silverback gorilla authority can often lead to progress when the issue is technical problem solving.

Technical  
problem solving  
[Authority]

problem well defined  
answer known  
implementation clear  
solution can be imposed by  
single organization



Organizations can be viewed (from an odd angle to be sure) as a structure + culture that answers a question. Many human services have adapted themselves so that much of their attention & effort centers on this question.

Each of these means serve worthy goals, but they can become activities the pursuit of which can defend us against the anxiety that comes with learning new ways to do new things that significant shift power + cross new organizational and societal boundaries.

This is the question that centers many organizations that I observe. The delusion is that simply changing the commands to “be person-centered (or person-directed to be even more up to date), inclusive, and responsive to self-directing customers” and tightening the control system will “manage” the change.

**How do we conform to contracts,  
regulations, policies, & meet standards?**

Organizations are designed to provide sufficient defenses against anxiety to allow work to get done. Defenses that have worked well in the past –the impersonal ‘professional authority’ role in relationships with people with disabilities for instance– can impede the learning to relate to equals with differing capacities that is required to honor people’s right to decide. Messing with this familiar hierarchy of roles & boundaries creates a fluid space for discovering new ways to relate but carries risk and uncertainty.

What we need is adaptive learning in collaboration with people with disabilities and their families and allies.



Technical  
problem solving  
[Authority]

problem well defined  
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solution can be imposed by  
single organization

Adaptive learning  
[Leadership]

The silverback gorilla is out of his  
(always a him) depth here &  
organizations addicted to certainty  
will work hard to get back into the  
blue zone above.

definition must be agreed  
answer must be discovered  
implementation requires learning  
& loss  
no single authority to impose  
solution

Thanks: Ron Heifetz





If we choose, we can learn to redesign our organizations to answer two different questions.

How does this person show up in community life as a valued friend and contributing citizen?





A photograph of a rustic wooden plank bridge crossing a small stream in a forest. The bridge is made of several weathered wooden planks laid across rocks. The surrounding area is lush with green moss and foliage. The text is overlaid in white, centered on the bridge.

How can we all show up in  
more places that attend to,  
cultivate, & benefit from the  
gifts of difference?



Incremental change: A technical problem		OR	Transformation: A developmental challenge	
Our services are individualized & person-centered now & most consumers are satisfied.	-----	While we serve most people in an individualized way, there are some who are not served as well as possible & express dissatisfaction; more individualized supports will benefit them and expand what our organization offers.	----	To provide the level of individualized services that people deserve, we will need to fundamentally redesign the ways we offer & manage support. If we make deep enough change, significant improvement is possible for (almost) everyone we support.
We know what we need to know in order to improve our person-centered, individualized services.	-----	We will learn what we need to know from experts who will train us in evidence-based techniques & strategies, proven to deliver individualized services & maintain financial stability.	----	We can only generate relevant knowledge through action focused on the capacities of the people & families we support, our communities, & ourselves. We learn by doing new things with people & reflecting on them.
Our greatest need is for more funding & greater flexibility in the way we can use funds.	-----	We will benefit from learning more about strategies for improving outcomes & stabilizing costs (e.g. shared living; customized employment; community connecting)	----	We need to learn how to be an innovation generator, able to create a great variety of responses to changing circumstances at the individual, organizational, & community level.
We already make good person-centered plans. We could use some techniques for dealing with people who are difficult to plan for (e.g. resistant families or people who don't speak).	-----	We can improve our approaches to person-centered planning and our ability to implement plans, especially where involving people in the community or dealing with troubling behavior is concerned.	----	There is a critical opportunity for developmental growth in personal capacity to listen & sense opportunities for creativity. Developing this creativity is essential to inform innovations.
Our ability to make change depends on OMRDD changing. We can't change without more money to pay for it.	-----	Our involvement in the Institute puts us in a good position to negotiate with OMRDD for improvement money.	----	Offering individualized supports for all requires re-purposing the funds we already have. We should fund change with money we already have.
While it may take hard work, making change is a matter of making a good plan, marketing the change, & controlling implementation by monitoring & correcting. There is a straight line between setting a goal and achieving it.	-----	We will need to discover better ways. Delivering services to the first group of people we plan for will give us the funding & flexibility to try new approaches. We'll roll the change out to more people as additional funding allows.	----	Making the vision of individualized supports real means dealing with risk, uncertainty, and loss. Leadership requires the ability to observe, interpret, & intervene in emotionally charged situations & mobilize people with different interests. This calls for more than changes in the organization; it calls for changes in our selves.

From: [www.nysacra.org/nysacra/li/A\\_Learning\\_History.pdf](http://www.nysacra.org/nysacra/li/A_Learning_History.pdf) a learning history of the first year of work by a multi agency group exploring change by John O'Brien





Our organizations are large & complex means of serving multiple important interests and they usually do what they do well. They are probably a poor fit with changing environmental conditions & especially with the understanding of disability enshrined in the UN Charter. A wise strategy is to use organizational resources (especially the commitment and talents of people with disabilities, their families and allies, and staff) to launch as many small craft as possible and explore the territory that's inaccessible & dangerous to the big liners that our organizations have become.



# KEYS TO LIFE



## Creating Customized Homes for People with Disabilities Using Individualized Supports

Stories of options created by Rensselaer ARC that enable people with severe disabilities to live in their own homes

Beth Mount, Ph.D. | Sandy VanEck, M.S.

RARC is a medium sized organization in New York State (which has developed an exceptionally bureaucratic & massively regulated service system) that despite system barriers has invested significantly in adaptive learning by launching a variety of small boats & expanding on what their expeditions discover.

Available Fall 2011  
from  
[www.inclusion.com](http://www.inclusion.com)



A photograph of a rustic wooden plank bridge crossing a small stream in a forest. The bridge is made of several weathered wooden planks laid across a rocky stream bed. The water is flowing over the rocks, creating a small waterfall effect. The surrounding area is lush with green moss and vegetation, and the background shows more rocks and trees.

Each day forces us  
to totter on planks we hope  
will become bridges.

—Kevin Hart