

Usefulness

The dimension of usefulness asks us to consider three elements: Is the support focused on the things that are relevant for the person? is it coherent in the way it is organised? and is it provided at the right intensity?

We would like to consider here the qualities and skills that a person-centred manager would need in order to do a reasonable job in developing or maintaining a service's usefulness. Here are some of the issues.

Analysing support.

Many of the people who have the label of learning disability actually do need help to learn and the support they get will often require a detailed focus and imaginative intervention. However we must also ensure that we widen our view and focus on the whole person, this means we must keep checking for other support needs too. Sometimes it may be easier to see people in terms of their most obvious challenges and not see the interrelationship and interdependence of wider support issues.

For example, if someone is very bored or feels let down they may not be at all interested in learning how to cook a meal. Even though this support may be relevant in terms of long term goals for increasing independence. People do not fit into systems and the support needs someone has will alter day by day. As manager you have to think about how the support you co-ordinator or influence is able to recognise changes and facilitate the flexibility that might be needed.

Seeing the wider support needs of people can mean facing some difficult and challenging support issues. For instance it may be that once you begin supporting someone you discover that the type of support they need is actually about having sex and not about learning how to get a job, what do you do? Consider also the challenges that are thrown up when someone clearly needs support to stay in their own home, have no one else to assist them but it appears not to be your remit as a day service provider. What skills do support staff need to deal with these dilemmas and how can they be managed?

Questioning whether or not what we are doing is good enough.

Getting to the truth about the relevance of the work our services do demands an openness to and an understanding of what is actually happening as well as hearing what people tell us is happening. We need to find ways to notice all the subtle communication which takes place through actions and behaviours as well as words and with which people signify they are happy or unhappy with what the service does.

Many organisations today will have mission statements, brochures, position statements, service philosophy statements etc...and, of course, a set of standards. This is one way in which we could measure "what it is that the service says it does". We could presume that what was written was also what the service believed it did. In addition we could ask various people in the organisation – "*what is it that you are here for*"?

But what about thinking about what people need. What do people need and are we providing a service relevant to those needs. How do we discover this?
Consider the statement

"people want what they know and not always what they want?"

What people say they need may actually be exactly what they know the service can do, this might be for a number of reasons e.g. they don't know what else to ask for or because they will then be entitled to the service. For example – A driver taking their car to a tyre fitter while suspecting that the tyres need replacing will define their need in terms of the service that is available. They may say. I need the tyres replacing. A more thorough diagnosis by a different service may say to the customer.. actually what you need is to change your driving style... or have your suspension fixed...

People will often claim to be happy with what they are receiving for many different reasons but if it is not relevant, as described in block one text then it is not really a true measure. The manager has to go beyond a simple satisfaction survey to reach a more detailed understanding of the relevance of the service.