

“Disrupting the Exclusive Reliance on Expert Systems to Solve the Problem of Social Exclusion”

~ Dr. Hanns Meissner

For all the efforts to “change the system”, social inclusion for people with developmental disabilities seems out of reach for many. We and many others are aware that systems constructed to serve people with developmental disabilities have not been working well for individuals and their families. This is true across the board in other areas of human endeavor (such as education). We are deeply embedded in a culture that looks exclusively to “experts” to address significant system shortcomings. This is not to say that experts, science, and evidence-based practice do not have utility in making all our lives healthier, safer and more efficient. While recognizing the positive impact these rational practices and disciplines have on our life, they seem to over-reach into areas that are more responsive to relational connection, imagination and the creative act. We are promised by each new administration, from a position of hierarchy and power-over, that they (as opposed as to the previous administration) will come up with solutions to solve system issues. In most instances, the solution is exclusive and separate from the community. Delegation to specialists and service providers is embraced as the way to provide a focus on a “problem” and to relieve the community of what is perceived and experienced as a burden. This arrangement sets up a system that demands people to serve it as opposed to the system acting in-service to people. With each new re-engineering of the system, new shortcomings appear and frustrations continue. The system, in all the transitions, remains in a power-over and fully delegated structure. Given this social contract (i.e., the delegation to systems and their experts), systems remain woefully inadequate to support human needs for relationship, community, contribution and acceptance. The very style or change model that has been used with most support model transitions produces a cycle of change that avoids true transformation by retaining the social arrangement of delegation and separation of difference.

At the very heart of this dilemma, is the assumption that human needs, aspirations and suffering is something that can be fixed if we engineer the system properly. It is believed that a well-designed assessment tool can identify what is needed for an individual to live a life they are satisfied with. The tool will also point us to the right interventions and the right service providers. Once the connection is made, an equilibrium is assumed to follow.

Many are waking up to this fallacy. Especially when we have the expectation that people of difference are inherently citizens of our community and should not be extracted with the purpose in mind to provide them with specialized care and settings. But the cultural norms of separation, delegation and specialized care are deeply embedded in all of our world views (mental model). To break the hold of this mental model (universally held by all stakeholders including individuals and families) demands a learning journey that engages the individual, team, organizational and system levels.

There an emerging change technology that is purposed with breaking the mold of expert driven change methodologies. It is the Learning institute for Social Innovation. The learning institute attempts at creating an environment for deep learning leading to collaborative action and social innovation. It challenges the individual participant to reflect upon the source (and mental model) from which they act. The assumption is that it is necessary to disrupt our automatic responses to exclusively rely on experts, create specialized programs and see life as a problem to be solved. This requires that an individual move out of defining their actions purely from their traditional role perspectives. The learning institute integrates this reflective and learning process to group, team and organizational levels. The learning institute is looking to move the practice away from the prescribed to cycles of imagination, creativity, and innovative prototypes.

The “wicked problems” that we are stuck in and follow us through all the system redesigns call for a different change process. One that examines the source from which we operate from, an opening to different experiences and ways of being. Its asks participants to do their best to shed their traditional role perspectives, let go and be creative with others. The purpose is not to arrive at a conclusion, win the game, but to keep the game going in an emergent and evolutionary fashion.

For a more in-depth presentation of the Learning Institute see: [Expanding Blue Space – The Learning Institute for Social Innovation](#) by Hanns Meissner Inclusion Press 2019.