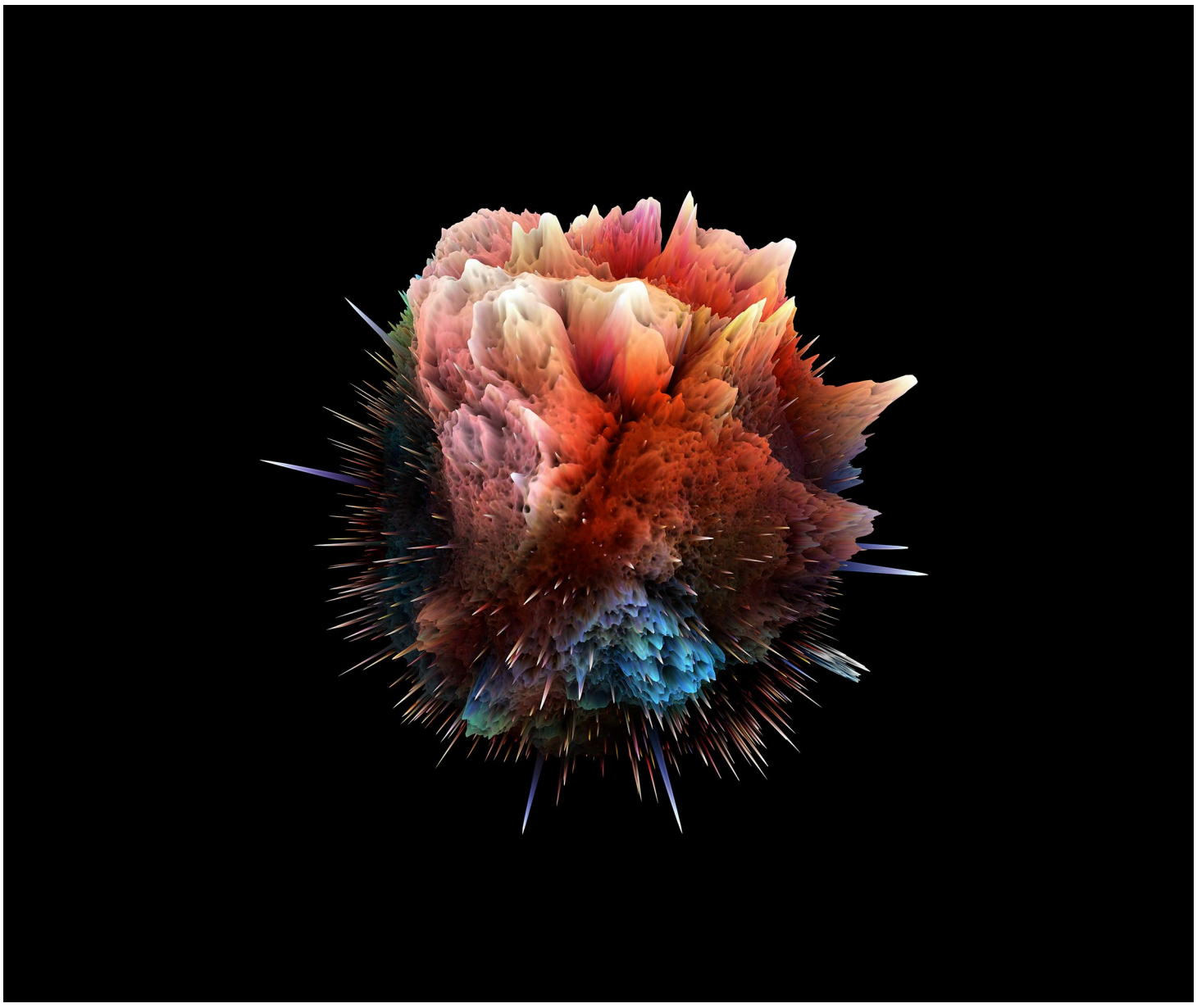
Choreographing New Practices for Social Change

MARCH 2017

by Dr. Sarah Schulman



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Dr. Sarah Schulman

Dr. Sarah Schulman is the Founding Partner of InWithForward, an international social enterprise that re-designs social services from the ground up. In 2014, InWithForward moved to Canada to introduce a design plus social science approach to social change making. In 2017, InWithForward will partner with the J.W. McConnell Family Foundation and the Robert L. Conconi Foundation to embed the approach. From 2009 to 2013, Sarah helped to launch three new solutions with The Australian Centre for Social Innovation, including the award-winning Family by Family. Before moving to Australia, Sarah worked with Participle in London, where she developed a new model for universal youth services. Sarah started her first organization at the age of 10, and ran a successful youth development consultancy agency throughout high school and college. She holds a DPhil in Social Policy from Oxford University, where she was a Rhodes Scholar, and a Masters in Education from Stanford University. She is honoured to be a Metcalf Innovation Fellow, which gives her the opportunity to blend practical project work with thought leadership.

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Contents

BACKGROUND

InWithForward is a small social design organization with a big mission: to redesign the welfare state from the perspective of the people most on the margins. Made up of designers and social scientists, InWithForward embeds itself inside non-profits and government agencies to co-develop programs, platforms, and policies from the ground up.

In 2014, InWithForward partnered with three of British Columbia's large disability service providers (Burnaby Association for Community Living, posAbilities, and Simon Fraser Society for Community Living) to explore the experience of social isolation among adults living with cognitive disabilities. Kudoz was one of a suite of solutions to emerge. As an adult learning platform, Kudoz gives adults with cognitive disabilities the opportunity to choose from an online catalogue of hundreds of enriching experiences hosted by passionate community members.

In 2015, InWithForward partnered with West Neighbourhood House in downtown Toronto, Metcalf Foundation, Ontario Trillium Foundation, and the United Way Toronto and York Region's Innovation Fund, to explore ways to enable more street-involved adults to flourish (i.e. to utilize, develop, and enjoy their distinctly human capacities). Curious Conversations was one of a suite of interventions to emerge. It encompasses a set of questions and a deck of cards that can be used by frontline workers to spark meaningful conversation and action.

Despite these emergent innovations, agencies recognized that without internal capacity to continuously innovate, they might be stuck with incomplete and outdated technology. And they did not want to rely on the InWithForward team; they wanted their own teams. This paper is a reflection of two years of experiments to build organizational capacity to reflect, renew, redesign, and re-enact practice that improves outcomes with and for people.

INTRODUCTION

"Remember that time when you sat next to me and we practiced calling my mom?" Clarissa asks Linda. "Well, mom and I talk now, and I've been off the streets for a while."

Linda grins. She can count on two hands the number of people who have returned to share hopeful stories of change. More often her updates come from hospitals, or worse, the morgue. Linda's elation comes from knowing Clarissa's life has moved forward, and knowing *she* has moved her own practice forward.

On the day that Clarissa is remembering, Linda didn't see Clarissa as a homeless client and herself as a shelter worker. Linda had been on her feet most of that day, and had sat down with Clarissa for a double-double coffee. They were just two people, listening to each other. Both had experiences with estrangement and family conflict. Both allowed themselves to be vulnerable. They role-played, over and over again, until Clarissa could imagine making the call.

Relationships are the real unit of the welfare state. There is an entire vocabulary to describe the nature of these relationships: professional-patient; worker-client; provider-consumer; manager-customer; coordinator-participant; policymaker-beneficiary, etc. And yet, when the social sector talks of behaviour change and outcomes, it typically refers to only one-half of the dyad: to the patients, clients, consumers, customers, participants, and beneficiaries. They are the usual subjects of theories of change, results-based measurement plans, and key performance indicators.

Over the past two years, we at InWithForward have experimented with ways to shift behaviours and outcomes of the other half of the dyad — the professionals, workers, providers, managers, coordinators, and policymakers. We've learned that the typical instruments for changing professional practice — workshops, trainings, and conferences — are blunt, at best, and counterproductive, at worst.

Why is this? We believe it is from applying the wrong theories. We adopted a simplistic set of assumptions about how practice change happens, framing it as a knowledge and skills challenge when it's actually an identity and collective action opportunity. Rather than build *individual* capability to enact new practice, we argue we first need to build *intergroup* capacity to reinvent practice.

This essay describes how we've come to this conclusion. It tells the story of

"Rather than build *individual* capability to enact new practice, we argue we first need to build *intergroup* capacity to reinvent practice."

six experiments with 400 Canadian social service professionals to shift practice and repurpose the welfare state so that both halves of the dyad flourish. InWithForward facilitated each experiment over two years, from 2014 to 2016. By our estimates, the majority of professionals have *not* yet been able to shift their practices. Uncertainty, pacing, authority, and role definition are a slew of the barriers they have faced.

Linda is one of the anomalies. From these exceptions — professionals like Linda who have choreographed new workplace routines — we have learned it is as much about the stage as it is about the steps. Over the pages that follow, we will explore both the personal and organizational contexts that seem to enable practice change, and introduce you to those professionals who are redefining what it means to shift practice. We will underpin our analysis with literature. We do this not to be overly academic, but to demonstrate how theory can deepen our understanding and power our creativity. Indeed, we want to diversify the knowledge that professionals use to interpret events and generate alternatives. To help us bring to life some of these abstract concepts, we will use the metaphor of a theatre play, likening the professional to an actor appearing on a stage (the workplace), reciting a script (their conversations), using props (physical and digital materials), and taking cues from the cast and crew (colleagues and stakeholders). But first, we will make a case for why it's time for some new plays.

ACT I

SETTING THE SCENE

Linda is an actor in the welfare state. As one of Canada's 102,360 community and social service workers, she tries to plug the holes of the leaky social safety net. For seven hours a day, five days a week, she runs up and down the stairs of the homeless shelter confronting an unrelenting wave of human need. Tim has come in with an open wound that's begging for medical attention; Jody is crying, her purse was stolen in a fight last night; Mark is on edge and in search of his dealer.

The starting premise of our work is that the social safety net too often ensnares rather than enables people; it functions more as a hard cushion, and less as a bouncy trampoline. But, then, that is exactly what the social safety net was designed to do. National health care, pensions, sick leave, housing, and social assistance policies were passed to reduce unemployment and protect people from the harm caused by economic insecurity (Marsh, 1943). These policies were not explicitly designed to promote flourishing: to shape aspirations, to build capabilities, to strengthen informal supports. Quite the opposite, help is rationed based on your lack of capability and deficient informal supports. To qualify for help, an expert must review your case and determine your level of need.

Expert knowledge has reshaped the very notion of help. Help is no longer solely the domain of informal carers — of family, neighbours, churches — but of workers, trained and credentialed to assess, diagnose, case manage, and attenuate risks. Codifying and certifying caring know-how has spawned a crowded institutional landscape: professional bodies to define core competencies; vocational programs to train students in those core competencies; unions to monitor employer-employee relations; accreditors to set practice standards; and licensors to ensure regulatory requirements are met.

T.H. Marshall, writing in 1939, observes the spread of professional organizations among social services, arguing that they have adopted some of the routines of the professions (entry requirements, codes of ethics) without always carrying forward the meaning of the professions. He reminds us that standardization of practice is the antithesis of professional discernment, writing:

> "Standardized labor, in fact, can be treated as a commodity. But with the professions it is otherwise… It is **unique** and **personal**. The professional man is distinguished by the further fact that he does not give only his skill. **He gives himself**. His whole personality enters into his work. He is called upon **to show judgment** and **an understanding of human nature**, as well as **knowledge** of [medicine or law]. The best service can be given only when the practitioner knows his client intimately, his character, his foibles, his background, and his family circumstances. These essential qualities cannot be specified in a contract, they cannot be bought. They can only be given."

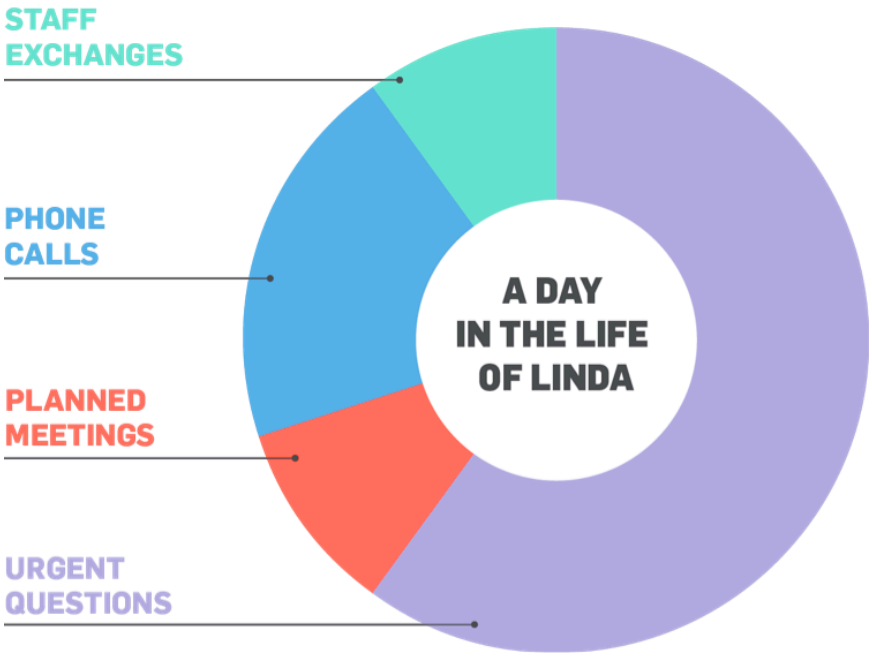
Over the past 80 years, the number of social service occupations has only grown. Service Canada lists 24 occupational types within Unit Group 4212: Community and Social Service Workers. There are aboriginal outreach workers, addictions workers, behavioural aides, child and youth workers, community development workers, community service workers, crisis intervention workers, drop-in centre workers, family service workers, financial assistance workers, group home workers, income maintenance officers, life skills instructors, mental health workers, rehabilitation workers, social services workers, welfare officers, women's shelter supervisors, and youth workers. Add Unit Group 0314: Managers in Social, Community, and Correctional Services into the mix, and there's another 20 occupational types. Each comes with lists of core skills and practice expectations designed to buttress workers' vocational training and hone their professional judgment.

And yet to actually exercise judgment requires a sense of agency, trust, and a good dose of creativity. The consummate professional does not act out of fear of getting something wrong, but out of a commitment to quality work and quality relationships.

Linda, like many of the social service workers we have met, expresses commitment while operating with fear. Unlike the old-timey professions Marshall describes — the doctors, the lawyers, the engineers — social service workers are buried within a hierarchy, with low wages, minimal social status, and limited autonomy. Linda operates within a command and control system where compliance can (inadvertently) trump creativity. She errs on the side of caution, as she does not want to get into trouble. Do something wrong and she might face the wrath of a manager, a disciplinary hearing, or a note in her file. And yet Linda and her colleagues know they are all likely to veer outside of standards, guidelines, and protocols, so their safest assurance is to focus solely on their own work, to ignore each other's practice, and to bank up collegial goodwill. But by looking the other way, their practice can become a kind of insular black box devoid of specific feedback.

It's not surprising, then, that so many workers react with concern when we ask to shadow them and peer into their black box. The very idea that practice can be captured, critiqued, or co-constructed admits to a grey zone out of step with the current black-and-whiteness of their work.

When we finally spend the day with Linda, her day looks like this:



Her average conversations are under two minutes. This is what they sound like:

[Person 1]: Can you put me on the list for laundry?

[Linda]: No, I am sorry, laundry is done for the day

[Person 1]: What the fuck?!?! What a waste of my day!

[Person 2]: Ms., can you get me a towel? Not that one, I need that blue one.

[Person 3]: Hey! Where are the socks? My feet are cold.

[Linda]: Excuse me, you're not supposed to be drinking in here. That's against the rules.

[Person 4]: Don't accuse me of drinking. This is just pure H_2O.

"Practice is replicated, over and over again, with few moments to pause, identify assumptions, or generate alternative responses with the people served."

Linda's daily reality is not abnormal. Our team has now observed over 40 social service workers of all occupational kinds and we have been struck both by how operational the discourse can be, and how repetitive the days are. Practice is replicated, over and over again, with few moments to pause, identify assumptions, or generate alternative responses with the people served. As one worker put it, "It's all the same shit, just a different day." Caught on an overcrowded cliff of human need, the default becomes to take the dependable path and resist novelty or divergence.

ACT II

NEW SETTINGS, SCRIPTS, ROLES, PROPS

Jerry celebrates divergence. Trained as a case manager, he keeps reinventing the standards of practice. Standard one of the *Canadian Standards of Practice for Case Management* handbook says, "Clients who meet the eligibility criteria for case management are identified" (National Case Management Network of Canada, 2009).

Uncomfortable with assuming the role of assessor, Jerry has been exploring how to turn the standard assessment process into a shared meal. Gone are the forms, the desks, the computers, or any props of the formal system. They cook together and get to know each other as dinner companions. Rather than immediately chart out goals, Jerry suggests the person take time to sample the programming on offer and test what's possible. He's been reading theories on the psychological downsides of goals, and is curious whether holding off on goal setting will lead to greater exploration and raise the aspirational bar.

For Jerry, a good social service does more than meet needs and minimize harm. A good social service exercises and elevates people's potential. But Jerry freely admits he doesn't know how to do that. Unlocking potentiality defies a one-size fits all method, and proves stubbornly elusive to expertise. Instead, he describes it as a "humbling" two-way process that must be negotiated each time.

Jerry acts less like a worker in a big system, and more like a craftsman. He names hunches, brainstorms, and tests his ideas with the people he supports. Jerry's supervisor, Sophie, acts less like a manager in a bureaucratic system and more like an activator of informal systems. A portion of her budget comes from fundraised dollars, not grants and contracts. Her mantra is that the more value she creates, the more dollars she can unlock. Since she doesn't view money and staff time as a finite resource, she focuses less on administering down or justifying up, and more on sourcing surprising skills and talents in her team and in the community.

Jerry and Sophie have made the continual reworking of practice part of their routine. They routinely question intents and purposes and creatively make use of whatever resources are on hand. Jerry and Sophie are, by most definitions, social innovators. They introduce "new products, processes, or programs" that "change the basic routines, resource and authority flows or beliefs of the social system" (Westley and Antadze, 2010). And yet, they don't identify themselves as

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social innovators. Jerry doesn't realize that developing and testing ideas with the people he supports is the essence of user-centered design. Sophie doesn't realize that engaging unusual stakeholders is an element of systems design.

Rather than acquire a set of special social innovation competencies, we've seen how Jerry and Sophie embrace something more fundamental: the habit of unlearning and relearning. They don't see working in the social sector as an inherently meaningful thing to do; they have to actively make meaning as they go. Underpinning their work, then, is a developmental mindset: they believe change is possible; they are relentlessly curious; they are both self-critical and system-critical; and they express their criticism by building alternatives. These alternatives are informed by grounded observations, behaviour change theory, and inspiring examples. These alternatives — critical to changing practice — are what we call flourishing practices.

These flourishing practices are aligned to Professor Ann Wilcock's theory on what makes work meaningful. She finds that meaningful work is less about novelty, and more about balance. Balance, in her terms, is the synthesis of "doing, being, and becoming" (1998). The personal and the professional coexist.

Doing is the active part of our work: it's Jerry making dinner with a person; it's Sophie recruiting local artists as mentors. ***Being*** is the less visible part of our work: it's Jerry's internal state of inquiry and Sophie's openness to being wrong. ***Becoming*** is what Wilcock saw as the transformative part of our work, a commitment to growth over stagnation: it's Jerry's and Sophie's readiness to renegotiate their relationships and redefine their purposes.

Using Wilcock's three component parts, we have started to delineate the practices that are part of an occupational shift from social safety nets to trampolines: from people getting by, to people flourishing; from staff showing up, to people feeling fulfilled. We have identified sixteen practices that reconceptualize clients as collaborators, care workers as change makers, and managers as activators.

Table 1

Flourishing Practices

Being	
Curious	• Inquiring why things are the way they are • Imagining possibilities
Vulnerable	• Embracing not knowing • Leaning into discomfort
Reflexive	• Excavating personal values, biases, and needs
Discerning	• Exploring what is good, for whom • Attentive to quality of experience
Generative	• Entertaining multiple ideas • Seeing connections
Doing	
Going to	• Spending time with people in their contexts
Listening	• Bearing witness to people's lives • Seeking to understand their values and motivations
Naming	• Saying assumptions aloud • Reframing pain points
Applying	• Using behaviour change theory to develop hunches • Looking for inspiration
Visualizing	• Painting a picture of what could be
Co-making	• Bringing ideas to life • Inviting others to take part
Testing	• Seeking feedback • Revising and trying again
Stopping	• Admitting failure
Storytelling	• Celebrating exceptions • Sharing the process
Becoming	
Giving	• Offering whole self • Sharing power
Growing	• Finding new parts to self • Unlearning and relearning

"…opening yourself up to reinvention requires *being* curious as to what's not working, discerning about the quality of experiences, vulnerable to admit you don't know the answer, and generative enough to incorporate ideas from elsewhere."

Our sixteen flourishing practices are drawn from observations of people like Sophie and Jerry, and also drawn from our attempts to help services function more like trampolines, which lift people up rather than just buffer their fall. This includes services like Family by Family, in Australia, and Kudoz, in Vancouver. Family by Family is a network of families helping families to thrive and to stay out of the child protection system. Kudoz is an adult learning platform for adults with developmental disabilities, powered by community talents.[1]

At the heart of these new kinds of services are distinct professional roles and repertories of practice. The Kudoz team, for example, is made up of a Learning Coach, an Experience Curator, a Culture Keeper, and a Designer. These roles are shared between three government funded disability service agencies.

Unlike many disability workers, coaches and curators do not provide direct care to individuals with a disability. Instead, they are charged with creating opportunities that have never before existed in the community. To do this, they use new scripts and props, like an online catalogue and app. Were you to shadow a coach or curator, you would find they spend their days out of the office, recruiting families and community members, co-making learning experiences, and testing new features of the platform — all of the *doing* practices.

Implementation becomes an ongoing reinvention process. Rather than building up expertise, it's about building up humility. Indeed, opening yourself up to reinvention requires *being* curious as to what's not working, discerning about the quality of experiences, vulnerable to admit you don't know the answer, and generative enough to incorporate ideas from elsewhere. It also requires a commitment to *becoming* — to growing how you see yourself in relationship to others. That's where the Culture Keeper role comes into play. Janey, who inhabits that role, reflects, "We're constantly needing to act in ways that are unfamiliar to us, that aren't so comfortable and where we don't feel competent. And we're slowly learning that's ok. That's what it feels like when you allow your work to be driven by what you're seeing and hearing on the ground, rather than on what you think you know."

[1] To read more about the services that shape our thinking, download the paper *Seven Mechanisms of Change* at: http://inwithforward.com/projects/in-out.

ACT III

SIX PLAYS

How do we bring about flourishing practices? What are the pathways for continued learning and growth? Whether we call these pathways professional development, lifespan learning, or capacity building, our search is for activities that change how social service professionals think and what they do.

These are the questions we've asked ourselves over the last two years. We increasingly recognize that our ambition to create a different kind of welfare state requires reshaping existing practice as much as it demands setting out new practice. In the past, we developed services like Family by Family outside of systems, starting *tabula rasa* each time. But each time, we would inevitably hit against the system, unable to influence its operational core. So we changed tack. We moved inside of the system, committing to work with its actors to revise their roles, scripts, and props.

There is a decent body of literature examining how to educate system actors. The consensus is that pre-professional learning is easier than continued learning (Houle, 1980). Professionals are a far more heterogeneous lot than students. Where school creates common ground, workplaces are far more varied and unpredictable. Plus, the professional's body of experience can ossify core beliefs and obviate a need for change.

Despite the focus on optimal practice, the ways in which professionals explore this contested terrain remains rather rudimentary. There are seminars, workshops, trainings, and conferences — all of which replicate classroom environments. There is a teacher, or facilitator. There are students, or learners. Information is presented, and then applied in exercises or group activities.

We too have tried these standard forms of one-off learning. We've also tried over-time learning, including workplace coaching, 20% time for workers to experiment with new practice, and full-time apprenticeships. Where workplace coaching unfolded in people's current work contexts, 20% time and full-time apprenticeships unfolded in a new project context. In total, we've experimented with six different learning forms, engaging nearly 400 practitioners in the process.

Table 2

Six Learning Experiments

	One-off Learning	Over-time Learning
Classroom context	*Experiment 1* Webinars and workshops	*Experiment 5* Learning circle
Project context	*Experiment 3* Residencies	*Experiment 2* Apprenticeships and secondments *Experiment 4* 20% time (for 6 months)
Work context		*Experiment 6* Coaching

Experiment 1: Webinars and workshops

Audience: social sector leaders and managers
Size: 15 – 100 people at a time
Timing: 2 – 3 hours

With titles like, "How to get to change," these discrete 2 – 3 hour sessions, held online and in community centres, were geared for organizational leaders and senior managers. Our intent was to inspire: to offer examples of social services and social policies that are enabling people to lead flourishing lives, and to introduce some of the underpinning change practices. A good outcome for us was that participants would leave with their curiosity piqued, and an appetite to invest in deeper and more ongoing forms of learning. Indeed, we hoped the webinars and workshops would be a gateway into the other experiments; they were not. Our pedagogy was half-persuasive, half-Socratic method. We used short films and oversized storybooks to show what could be, and posed open-ended questions to try and spark debate. But beyond polite questioning, there was little two-way exchange.

Experiment 2: Apprenticeships

Audience: social sector managers and frontline staff
Size: 3 people
Timing: 480+ hours (full time over 3 months)

Frustrated by the superficiality of webinars and workshops, we swung in the other direction, seeking out staff of existing social sector agencies to join our team. Our intent was to work alongside three staff to model and rehearse new practices, expectations, and norms. In collaboration with three large disability

service providers in British Columbia, we created a new physical workspace and ran an internal recruitment process to find staff hungry for change. From 11 applications, we selected a manager, a frontline worker, and a local designer. A good outcome was a *flat* design team: individuals, regardless of their pay grade, supporting one another to adopt flourishing practices and raise the profile of fresh ways of working. Our pedagogy was full-time immersion. We created new job descriptions, routines, language, incentives, and celebrations. While an effective approach — two out of three of the apprentices remain with our team today — it is costly and limited in scalability.

Experiment 3: Residencies

Audience: social sector managers and frontline staff
Size: 2 – 10 people
Timing: 40 hours (full time over 1 week)

Recognizing the scalability challenge of apprenticeships, we designed a shorter immersive learning experience. Residencies were one-week field trips for staff of social service agencies and government departments. Two to ten staff joined our team and participated in all of our routines and habits. Just as the best way to pick up phrases of a new language is to visit a foreign country, our hunch was that the best way to pick up elements of our culture was to visit and take part. A good outcome for us was that participants brought home the routines and adapted them to fit their contexts. Our pedagogy was concentrated immersion, with written reflections and peer-to-peer debriefing at the end. We created a guidebook, a dictionary, a brief book with exercises to try, and a website for participants to journal their experiences.

Experiment 4: 20% time

Audience: senior directors, mid-level managers, frontline staff of 1 sector
Size: 30 people
Timing: 192 hours (8 hours/week over 6 months)

Halfway between the intensity of apprenticeships and the concentration of residencies sits 20% time. Modelled after Google's (now outdated) HR policy, 20% time gives staff, at all levels of the hierarchy, one day a week for learning and open experimentation. In partnership with the three large disability service providers in British Columbia, we set out to recruit 30 frontline, mid-level, and senior-level staff to join a six-month trial we called the Fifth Space.

Our intent was to create an interagency container, with a visible brand, in which to enact new practice, or in essence, to institute new and attractive social norms. For six weeks, we drove an RV to twenty of the agencies' sites to meet

frontline workers and introduce 250 of them to the concept. From over 50 applications, we selected 30 participants from each rung of the organizational ladder. Our pedagogy was a mixture of structured learning — lectures, reading, exercises — and unstructured project time.

Participants formed six interagency teams, chose a significant challenge (what we call a pain point) facing a user group, identified assumptions, made and tested solutions. A designer from our team offered coaching and support. To buttress their learning, we created a vast array of materials including PowerPoint slides, story books, brief books, worksheets, original films, and a project website. Our hope was that staff would have enough repeated exposure to flourishing practices to both internalize and spread them within their agencies. We also hoped the solutions they developed would be implemented and start to improve outcomes. These were solutions like Ask a Dude — user-uploaded videos celebrating healthy sexuality among adults with developmental disabilities, and N'Tandem — new methods for matching adults with a disability to friends and roommates.

Experiment 5: Learning Circle

Audience: senior directors, mid-level managers, frontline staff across sectors
Size: 25 people
Timing: 72 hours (3 hours/week over 6 months)

20% time is costly. Working within a single sector and with a government funder, we were able to reallocate underutilized year-end dollars towards an interagency experimentation container. We wondered if we could curate a similar experience, across sectors, on voluntary versus paid time.

The Learning Circle brought together 25 frontline workers, managers, and directors of non-profits, civil servants, and foundation staff. Every other week, for three hours, we convened in a community centre basement for guided learning and project time. Projects focused on practice challenges — from excessive wait times at a mental health service to better ways of engaging stressed out families in a government consultation. On the weeks in between, pairs of participants committed to in-context fieldwork. Our designers helped make materials for pairs to test. The intent was to balance learning and doing: to introduce new routines plus provide a structure for performing those routines. A good outcome for us was that participants continued to perform these routines and engage more colleagues along the way.

Experiment 6: Coaching

Audience: frontline staff and managers
Size: 3 – 8 people at a time
Timing: 12 hours boot camp; 30 hours of 1:1 coaching

With the Learning Circle, we modelled ideal practice in bimonthly group sessions and hoped participants would try out that practice in-between. Still, we reflected: why, if we wanted to bring about in-context practice, wouldn't we just start there? So we did. We developed a 1:1 coaching methodology: a blend of organizational ethnography, motivational coaching, and design support. At the same time we developed a Request for Coaching. Organizations could bid for six weeks of our pro bono coaching time.

Working with five teams across four non-profits, we kicked off coaching with a two-day boot camp and a facilitated peer-to-peer exchange. Each team selected a values-practice gap to close. For example, it could be the gap between self-care (a value) and few staff taking breaks (a practice). Our team shadowed staff in their environments, asked critical questions, and offered social science theory and inspirational examples. We wrote up our observations, made posters and physical props to add to participants' offices, and literally drew pictures of their revised practices. A good outcome for us was that participants saw a positive change from their revised practices, and felt motivated and competent to keep on revising.

ACT IV

PERFORMANCE REVIEWS

"All six experiments tested whether capacity-building interventions can actually shift every day practice."

All six experiments tested whether capacity-building interventions can actually shift every day practice. Although the experiments engaged the early adopters — the professionals motivated to voluntarily sign-up — most of our participants have *not* found ways to integrate new practices within their day-to-day realities.

While apprenticeships yielded the highest practice adoption rates, they were also the most intensive; they required working with a small number of staff within a wholly new environment. Apprentices joined *our* team, with *our* habits and norms. Coaching, by contrast, unfolded in participants' own settings, within their existing habits and norms. Two out of five of the coached teams have continued with their revised practices, even after our intervention ended. One of the coached individuals left her organization after coaching concluded, feeling the climate wasn't conducive to her newfound learning, and has brought her revised practices to a new workplace.

A more common scenario, though, was staff co-opting the language of change without the means to bring that change to fruition. Indeed, follow-up conversations with a large sample of participants across the six experiments suggest a majority have been unable to perform, let alone make it routine to try out new practices. This finding is consistent with other empirical studies. Researchers have found that even when professionals self-report that a training has been useful, there is inadequate translation to practice (Miller and Mount, 2001). The professionals we've talked to offer up three reasons why there was a mismatch between our capacity-building approaches, and their personal and professional worlds.

"It was just too much," captures the sentiment of those professionals left feeling overwhelmed and daunted. These were people like Rochelle, a mid-level manager, who joined the Fifth Space at the request of her senior director. New to her job, she was still trying to find her fit within the organization and understand what was expected, when we began to move the goalposts. Going out to spend time with people, reading theory, and coming up with new ideas was laborious. Besides, she had a manual that specified her tasks. None of her clients were complaining. They all seemed satisfied with the service she provided. While she knew many of her clients could use more supports, she saw these grander challenges as outside of her control.

"I already do that," was the reaction of those professionals left feeling defensive and undermined. These were professionals like Sean, who came into six-weeks of coaching, with problems and solutions already defined. A recovering alcoholic, Sean was committed to helping more people reach sobriety. Having once been in their shoes, Sean felt he uniquely understood their challenges and knew what was needed. All of the going out, listening, co-making, and testing were unnecessary; he talked to people every day. And, exploring *his* values and biases? That was just offensive. Working in a field devoid of much money or social status, what Sean did hold onto was a perception he was doing a good job. He just was not prepared to peel back his motivations and question what constituted a good job.

"*But that's just not how things work now,"* was the rebuttal of those professionals left feeling powerless to prompt change and frustrated we did not better understand their environment. These were professionals like Nancy, a civil servant participant of the Learning Circle. Impatient with the slow and clunky machinery of government, she eagerly read everything she could about innovations in public management. Keen to debate new approaches, she just couldn't imagine *doing* them. Didn't we understand the approvals that would be required for her to leave her desk and spend time with the older people who were her policy beneficiaries? Didn't we understand there was no political will to reframe policy problems? Nancy simply didn't believe that small-scale experimentation would help her to find internal champions and convert skeptics. The professional risks were too high, and her hierarchical status was too low.

If Rochelle, Sean, and Nancy represent the professionals in the middle of the bell curve — willing to consider change, but mired in the status quo — we also encountered those on the right side of the bell curve. Entrenched in similar social service environments, these professionals were actively investing in change and enacting new practices to disrupt the status quo.

Jeb, like Rochelle, is in a new position and trying to make sense of what's required of him. Yet, he sees this as the ideal time to establish new patterns. Alana, like Sean, is a frontline worker with personal addiction experience, who has committed herself to helping others. Yet, she views addictions as a bit of a mystery and sees the need for ongoing research. Nina, like Nancy, is a mid-level civil servant with a new director critical of innovation methods. Yet, she conceptualizes critique as an opening to make a better argument.

What's different about Jeb, Alana, and Nina and the contexts in which they work? No doubt there are many variables at play, but our follow-up interviews and reflective analysis revealed three types of factors: intrapersonal, interpersonal, and organizational. **Intrapersonal factors** refer to a person's internal context: what's happening in their mind and self. **Interpersonal**

factors refer to a person's relational context: how they are positioned next to others around them. **Organizational factors** refer to the culture in which they and their relationships are steeped.

For Nina, Jeb, and Alana, the intrapersonal, interpersonal, and organizational factors are all in alignment: they are functioning as enablers for flourishing practices. For Rochelle, Sean, and Nancy, the reverse seems to be true. These factors are a barrier for their practice change.

Table 3

Three Types of Factors that Help or Hinder Practice Change

	Barriers to flourishing	Enablers of flourishing
Intrapersonal factors		
Uncertainty tolerance	Low	High
Processing style	Linear	Lateral
Interpersonal factors		
Role conception	Bounded	Fluid
Source of authority	Rules, hierarchy	Abilities, argument
Organizational factors		
Ways of knowing	Numbers and facts	Ethics and experience
Change orientation	Have to change	Want to change

Uncertainty tolerance

Sean likes a plan; he needs to know the destination before he can start on the journey. Jeb is the opposite. He finds emergence more enthralling. Many of the flourishing practices are predicated on *not knowing*. It is an inquiry-led approach. Answers to questions and solutions to problems unfold as you listen, reframe, explore, test, and try. The destination matters less than the journey.

Processing style

Look at Alana's computer and you'll see she rapidly toggles between news, Facebook, academic articles, and emails. She's used to navigating lots of information at once and finds connections between seemingly random bits and bobs. Rochelle is a more methodical thinker, reading one thing at a time, and waiting to build up a complete picture before engaging. In the Fifth Space, Rochelle found that practices that required integrating observations, social science theory, and international examples didn't make sense. Where Rochelle needed more time to sit with all the information, Alana was chomping at the bit, talking a mile a minute. The disparity created a tension, which was unhelpful to

mutual learning. It's not that one style or speed of thinking is *superior* to the other, but, in a time-limited social learning space, both are not so easily accommodated.

Role conception

Jeb has stepped into an unfinished role. He and his manager are in conversation about how Jeb can shape the role by bringing his personality to it. Rochelle, meanwhile, is in a role that has been tightly defined. To adopt some of the *becoming* practices, roles require some flexibility, or at least a margin with which to play. Of course, redefining one role has an effect on others, so role flexibility necessitates a rebalancing of the group.

Source of authority

Power is a relational concept. Nancy, her colleagues, and her supervisor operate under an understanding that authority and legitimacy comes from rules and hierarchical rungs. Nina is also ensconced in a rule-based culture, but the unit she is in operates under an understanding that authority and legitimacy comes from argument and persuasion. Whoever can make the most compelling case gains power. A compelling case *isn't* simply a rational recounting of the facts; it's also an ethical imperative, connecting a course of action to perceived duties and principles. When authority is viewed as dynamic, there is potentially more space to be discerning and generative — two of the flourishing practices.

Ways of knowing

Sean's organization prizes consistency. Leaders make and rationalize their decisions based on policies, procedures, and evidence verified by external experts. As long as employees do not contradict this certified knowledge base, they can add their own personal know-how. That means Sean's personal experience with addiction is validated if it aligns with his organization's stated harm reduction policy. Alana's organization, on the other hand, taps into a wider knowledge base. When making decisions they cite empirical facts, and also empathic knowledge (patterns from first-hand experiences) and ethical knowledge (judgments about what is right versus wrong). Flourishing practices require the practitioner to draw on these multiple ways of knowing.

Change orientation

Rochelle's organization is ready for change. But change is construed as a *must:* there is no other choice. Jeb's organization also talks a lot about change and they conceptualize it as the desirable path forward. Both organizations have urgency — but one comes from a place of insecurity and the other comes from a place of security. Our hypothesis is that more anxious organizational climates can keep individuals guarded and more sensitive to criticism, both of which are barriers to flourishing practice.

ACT V

MISSING BACKDROP?

Our six experiments to instill flourishing practices all played out against a similar backdrop. But, the barriers that professionals like Rochelle, Sean, and Nancy faced in implementation all hint at a similar oversight: we zeroed in on personal capabilities, applying an individual behaviour change lens, not a social behaviour change lens. Most of the teaching artifacts we created introduced concepts, methods, and theories. They tried to increase knowledge, shift attitudes, and inspire personal action, instead of focusing on the ways our narratives interrelate. They were not designed to help professionals reconcile their sense of self in relation to others.

We neglected to address practice as an outgrowth of both personal and professional identity — the stories we hold about who we are and where we fit into the world. These stories are inherently social: they are produced through our interaction with others. Looking back, it's clear we didn't see Sean's discomfort with self-critique as a struggle between his experiential way of knowing the world and his organization's empirical way of knowing the world. Nor did we root Rochelle or Nancy's pushback within a broader organizational climate of insecurity and anxiety.

Mark Johnson and Carl May, in their systematic review of the evidence on professional behaviour change, argue that an individual behaviour change lens is limiting.

> "This is because complex interventions in complex settings tend to be implemented through collective action that takes place when people work together, rather than as a result of individual behavioural processes" (2015, p.2).

Collective behaviour is not simply the sum of individual behaviours; shifting individual behaviours will not tip the collective.

Carl May, with collaborator Tracy Finch, propose an alternative behaviour change process, called Normalization Process Theory (2009). Originally developed to explain how health care interventions are embedded in health care settings, the theory says behaviour change occurs when there is coherence, cognitive participation, collective action, and reflexive monitoring. For both practitioners and organizations to adopt flourishing practices, we believe these

four components require alignment to intrapersonal, interpersonal, and organizational factors.

Coherence means that the practice — say, the practice of going to spend time with clients in their contexts — holds together. This means there must be both an individual and communal set of ideas about its meaning and usefulness. Not only do people need to know the purpose, objectives, and benefits of a new practice, they also need to know how it compares to current practice and fits within their professional frames. And yet, our learning processes focused mostly on understanding the lives of people served, not on understanding the lives of professionals. Only experiment #6, Coaching, started with observing the work lives of professionals.

Cognitive participation describes what has to unfold for a practice to become second nature. First, actors have to take initiative and enrol in the practice — for instance, naming assumptions aloud. For the practice to continue, actors must buy into its personal and professional value. If the dominant belief is there is no place for assumptions, only facts, that is a hard practice to continue. Although five of our six experiments (except for webinars and workshops) were designed to enable people to initiate new practice, none of the experiments were expressly about legitimizing those practices. Yes, we promoted the practices within our artificial learning space, but we did little to validate the practices within professionals' every day spaces.

Collective action is all about the relationships between actors. Bringing a practice to fruition requires changing encounters between people, affecting the distribution of work, and the balance of skills among an entire cast of actors. A new practice must shift how actors interpret each other's intentions and actions, and shift types and quantities of work. In each of our experiments, we promoted collective action — but among the wrong acting company. For example, in the Fifth Space and Learning Circle, professionals forged new interagency alliances and recalibrated their workflows. But these alliances were temporary. Participants were rehearsing in a context that bore little resemblance to the contexts to which they would return. Our sixth experiment, Coaching, was more successful at bridging the gap between rehearsal and real world. It was the only experiment to take place in the professionals' real worlds. And yet, we singled out the lead actor rather than the supporting crew.

Reflexive monitoring is the process by which individuals and groups judge the value and outcomes of their beliefs, behaviours, and actions. It is what the collective decides ought to be. What ought to be is codified in explicit standards and protocols, but is also reproduced via water cooler talk and peer approval. Given that many of the flourishing practices can lead to vulnerability, our gut reaction may be to dismiss or reject them. We need to establish a new emotional barometer with which to gauge new practices. We also have to reconcile our

revised appraisal process with professional norms. While there is a belief that professionals must know the answers, flourishing practices are premised on *not* always knowing. Answers are developed in collaboration with colleagues and users. Rather than acknowledging the rubs and approaching these tensions as a therapist might, we gave little time or space for such existential explorations. All six of our experiments perhaps overemphasized the "doing" practices and underemphasized the "being" and "becoming" practices.

Ultimately, our professional identities must embrace belonging to multiple groups, and the emotional significance that carries. Nearly all of the professionals who experienced an implementation gap described it in terms of feelings — feeling overwhelmed, feeling defensive, feeling frustrated, feeling misunderstood. And yet addressing feelings of relatedness and disconnection are not part of most typical professional education or capacity-building formats. The focus on knowledge, motivation, and efficacy puts the attention on the *skill,* rather than on the *relational and moral self*. We, as facilitators, cannot simply be teachers. We must also delve into our messy moral selves and take something more akin to a pastoral care approach.

ACT VI

ENTRIES AND EXITS

We launched six experiments to build staff capacity because we wanted to make it normal for social services to regularly reinvent their routines. We did not want innovative solutions like Kudoz to be one-hit wonders. No one solution will ever be sufficient for root and branch change. Indeed, transforming the welfare state requires ongoing reflexivity and reformation. This is the essence of the 16 flourishing practices we believe underpin the shift from safety nets to trampolines.

"If we really wanted to embed a professional repertoire predicated on continual renewal, we would build capacity differently."

If we really wanted to embed a professional repertoire predicated on continual renewal, we would build capacity differently. We would start with the premise that a person's capacity to think and act differently is less about them as an individual, and more about their relationships within a context. In the case of social services, this is a context bogged down with resource scarcity, regulatory labyrinths, and political jockeying. That means instead of up-skilling individuals outside of their non-profit and governmental environments, we would first understand how practice is collectively performed. We would observe before intervening.

Practice can metaphorically be seen as an intricate and complex performance — there are lead and supporting actors, scripts, props, settings, an audience, and a behind-the-scenes crew. Take Linda, who was introduced at the beginning of this paper. Her setting is a busy shelter; her script is made up of two-minute conversations; her props include a clipboard for laundry sign-ups; her audience is street-involved adults; her crew includes colleagues, managers, and funders. Putting on an entirely new performance required more than teaching Linda new lines. She had to not only commit to heart new dialogue, but also recalibrate her interactions with the crew, the audience, and the setting. She went from the laundry room to Tim Horton's; from a clipboard to prompt cards and two double-doubles.

Not all performances receive positive reviews. What characterizes a good from a lackluster performance is its degree of believability, of authenticity, of raw honesty. A good performance doesn't feel so much like the people on stage are playing a part, but rather, inhabiting a part. Indeed, a good performance is no longer a performance; it's real ownership.

"After two years of trial and error, it now seems obvious that the artificialness and temporality of much capacity-building practice is no match for the emotional depth required to bring about flourishing practice."

Almost forty years ago, renowned French philosopher Jean-François Lyotard spoke of human service work losing its humanness (1984). Where professionals were "previously associated with emotional engagement, judgment, discretion, and sensitivity to the needs of others," Lyotard noted that professionals were now being asked to distance themselves from their formal roles, and to surrender to a litany of rules, standards, protocols, and guidelines.

How, in the midst of all the rules and protocols, do we bring together our professional and personal selves? How do we resist internal compartmentalization and disconnection from our values, our ethics, and the sources of our criticality and creativity? How also do we overcome social silos? With over 44 different social service occupations clamouring for their cues on stage, how do we claim meaningful (versus incidental) roles?

After two years of trial and error, it now seems obvious that the artificialness and temporality of much capacity-building practice is no match for the emotional depth required to bring about flourishing practice. Meaning and reconnection will not come from PowerPoint presentations, toolkits, worksheets, and brief books. Our most effective capacity-building practices were workplace coaching and apprenticeships. Both were about resetting roles and redefining professionals' relationships to their work. What's needed, then, is less a training approach and more an approach predicated on identity and integration; on honouring tension and emotion; on editing the story of who we are and who we could be.

This is not another self-development approach. This is not about finding oneself through yoga, meditation, or wilderness walks — though such activities can no doubt be cathartic — this is about creating new kinds of workplace conversations: finding ongoing ways to give and get feedback from one another, to raise questions, to share ideas, to celebrate positive deviancy, to retell stories.

As capacity builders, then, we would do well to draw more on the work of narrative therapists. Narrative therapists help people move towards their preferred developments and re-author the stories they tell themselves. Their starting premise is that people are interpretive human beings. What shapes and guides our behaviour are the ways in which we make sense of events and expectations. Unlike rote-based learning theory, which still forms the basis of much teaching, narrative theory brings our underlying feelings and beliefs into full view. Making meaning, versus acquiring skills, is the central developmental task.

What if capacity builders, then, took a fuller approach to teaching and learning? Rather than focus on workshops and trainings, what if social services looked at the entire staff journey: at how they recruit, hire, induct, monitor, promote, and assess performance? Capacity building wouldn't be relegated to formal professional development moments, but would be stitched into every

part of the organization's Human Resourcing function. Indeed, were Human Resources truly about embracing humanness, we might reimagine the props (the job descriptions, hiring questions, contracts, handbooks) and the scripts (how managers, colleagues, and clients interact). Instead of only up-skilling people for a job, we might help them embrace a richer and less rigid occupational identity.

"Organizations and their training providers can start by shadowing the frontline, mid-level, and senior management experience."

Organizations and their training providers can start by shadowing the frontline, mid-level, and senior management experience. How do staff talk about their occupational identities? How do they see themselves in relation to others? What are their passions? What are their nagging questions? Taking a step back to really re-engage with staff as full people is the first step to creating a learning environment conducive to growth and change.

This is no easy task. Government funders, licensors, accreditors, and unions each have a vested interest. The cacophony of rules, standards, protocols, guidelines, and best practices are, in many ways, constructed to protect against humanness, against our fallibility, against our vulnerability. So we would need to carve out a space where multiple organizations might share the risk of a new human resourcing approach, and build a new (modest) stage for practice. Such a space would require some degree of permanence. Unlike a temporary project space, there must be time to really slow down and embed alternative routines.

Professionals looking to try some of these alternative routines might start by framing their weeks in terms of a question to actively explore versus a set of tasks to deliver. For Linda, one of her questions was: how might I pause the constant busyness and stop problem-solving long enough to listen? Out of that question came a willingness to try a new script (a 30-minute conversation), a new setting (the coffee shop), and a new prop (a deck of cards). Each week can bring a new question, and a new experiment with tweaked actors, scripts, props, and settings. At the end of the week, take ten minutes to jot down the story of a significant moment. A significant moment need not be positive — it might be significant for its confusion or ambiguity. Try keeping these significant moments in a Google document or as scraps of paper thrown into a jar. Once a month, at a staff meeting, read the stories aloud, sort them by importance, and open up a discussion about what change matters, to whom. Over time, a shared vocabulary about practice change just might emerge.

Over the next two years, InWithForward will begin to prototype a permanent space for these kinds of alternative routines to live. This will be a space sitting between and governed by multiple social service agencies, dedicated to continuous research and development, where we hope to be able to establish a new normal. In this new normal, Linda's black box might

become even more transparent. Jerry and Sophie might no longer be the exceptions. Alana, Jeb, and Nina might perform as the lead role modellers. Sean, Rochelle, and Nancy might spend increasing amounts of time, through regular rotations and field trips, getting acclimatized to its distinct habits. Without the rush to adopt and adapt the habits to their one and only context, they might, over time, become actors in this shared context. And unlike the prior classroom or project settings, on this shared stage, they just might feel seen, heard, and whole.

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