TRANSCRIPT: SOCIAL RESPONSE CYCLE RESOURCE

SECTION ONE EXPLORE POWER, AUTHORITY AND SOCIAL JUSTICE

First, we’ll consider Social enterprise

In the Introduction, you may remember that I introduced the term “social entrepreneur”.  As I understand the term, a social entrepreneur employs organisational and/or business principles for social rather than financial objectives, in order to improve social and environmental well-being. It may seem that being a social entrepreneur is like a square hole and being a psychotherapist or a counsellor is a round peg. They don’t fit together. I would agree that there are new skills that need to be learned. But there is also a certain amount of overlap. We will consider later on that the Social Response Cycle, involves observation, response and assessment. Similarly, as counsellors and therapists we observe, assess, make an offering, assess again, dare to make another offering, perhaps make a mistake and continue to observe and re-evaluate.

You may prefer a different term from social enterprise, but I am using it here to make a distinction from the generic terms social action and social advocacy. Social action tends to focus on working for strategic/policy change and social advocacy aims to defend the rights of those who are marginalised. In this module, I am using the term social entrepreneur to mean someone who sets up an activity, which is an attempt to find a solution to a problem, and which will be of practical use in frontline therapeutic or counselling contexts. In this resource, when I mention social action projects, I use social action to refer to therapeutically framed social action enterprise, rather than strategic/policy campaign work.

We’ll now move on to Personal attributes and skills of a social entrepreneur

You may choose to be a social entrepreneur where no financial resources are needed. (The international project, mentioned in the Introduction, called Colleagues across Borders has no financial resources at all, whereas another project, Mothertongue multi-ethnic counselling service (Mothertongue) a service I ran for 18 years and which I reflect on later, received very helpful funding.) Frequently though, financial resources – even small amounts - are needed to put a social action project into practice. We’ll consider the personal attitudes, anxieties and behaviours associated with money later on.

As you work through this section, you may want to write a list of other personal characteristics and skills that are also useful in the role of social entrepreneur.

In your list you may identify some characteristics and skills you already have. There may be others which you might be prepared to develop. Perhaps you will find you can develop skills you never dreamed were possible for you.

One of the areas for development can occur around the autonomy/authority continuum. As counsellors and therapists, we are trained in models of therapy which prize individual autonomy and independence, even when we are working with therapeutic groups. However, the collective approach – not just at client level, but also at organisational level - is frequently required by socially focused projects. Organisational needs can differ from individual client needs. We may, therefore, have to let go of some of our autonomy as practitioners. This can pose a challenge. But as with any therapeutically orientated endeavour, we need to be prepared to take an honest audit of ourselves and to assess how much we are prepared to give up as well as to gain by embarking on a new project.

We don’t have time to address every personal motivation here. But I am proposing that we take a moment to think about one aspect of personal motivation/characteristics necessary to undertake therapeutically framed projects which respond to issues of social justice.

The next aspect to consider is Power, authority and social justice

I have found Steve Karpman’s (1968) Drama triangle, which you can view on the webpage below, useful in helping me to take an honest evaluation of my position in response to social justice issues. I am talking specifically about my relationships with power and authority. I find the three positions on the triangle are relevant when exploring dynamics in helping relationships between individuals and within service-focused projects and groups.

As the diagram shows, the three corners of the triangle are occupied by the roles of Persecutor (P), Victim (V) or Rescuer (R).  It is almost inevitable that those who are drawn to working with people who are vulnerable and who experience social injustices, will, at some stage, be drawn to the Rescuer position. However, the Persecutor role, will pull anyone towards it who is unaware of and/or who discounts their own authority and power. This can happen at the individual or group level and in my experience, it is almost inevitable unless we commit to regularly assessing ourselves and asking for honest feedback. Getting caught up in the Drama Triangle is a very damaging dynamic and it is one of the ways in which projects can become ineffective. Large amounts of energy can be absorbed by managing destructive dynamics.

Next, you’ll be able to view a case study as an example of how this can happen, even within a small project.