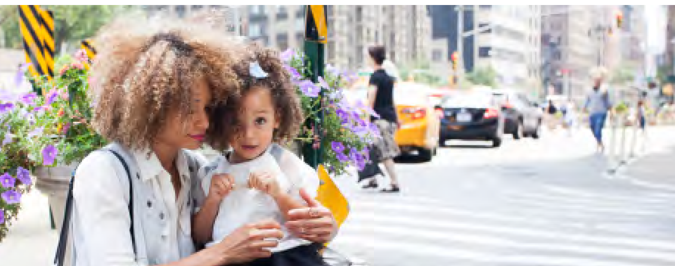
FYSB Family & Youth Services Bureau

Family Violence Prevention & Services Program

Building Mission Effective Survivor-Defined Organizations



Deborah Linnell

With Jill Davies

for Building Comprehensive Solutions

Updated 2017

Building Comprehensive Solutions

A project of the National Resource Center on Domestic Violence

About Building Comprehensive Solutions to Domestic Violence

Founded in 1996, Building Comprehensive Solutions to Domestic Violence (BCS) promotes victim-defined advocacy and responses. Key BCS strategies include collaboration, critical thinking, and advocate-defined information and tools. BCS is a key initiative of the National Resource Center on Domestic Violence in collaboration with Greater Hartford Legal Aid.

AUTHOR BIOS

Deborah Linnell is a long-time advocate for survivors of violence and a consultant on nonprofit organizational capacity building. Her advocacy began in 1981 at the Elizabeth Stone House in Boston. Linnell was instrumental in the development of the Stone House's transitional housing program, one of the first in the Country. The concept and program design received the international United Nation's Innovative Sheltering award in 1989. Co-author of the Stone House publication: *Sheltering Women in Emotional Distress*, she also conceptualized the Stone House's economic development programs. Linnell has consulted on substantive and organizational capacity issues with homeless and domestic violence organizations. She served as the executive director of the Women's Resource Center of Newport & Bristol Counties from 1998 to 2003. She is the lead author of the *Executive Director's Guide: The Guide for Successful Nonprofit Management*. Linnell joined Third Sector New England from 2003 - 2012 to further develop their capacity building programs.   For this BCS resource, she brought together her practice in the domestic violence field and knowledge of organizational capacity building. Deb is currently the Program Officer at the van Beuren Charitable Foundation.

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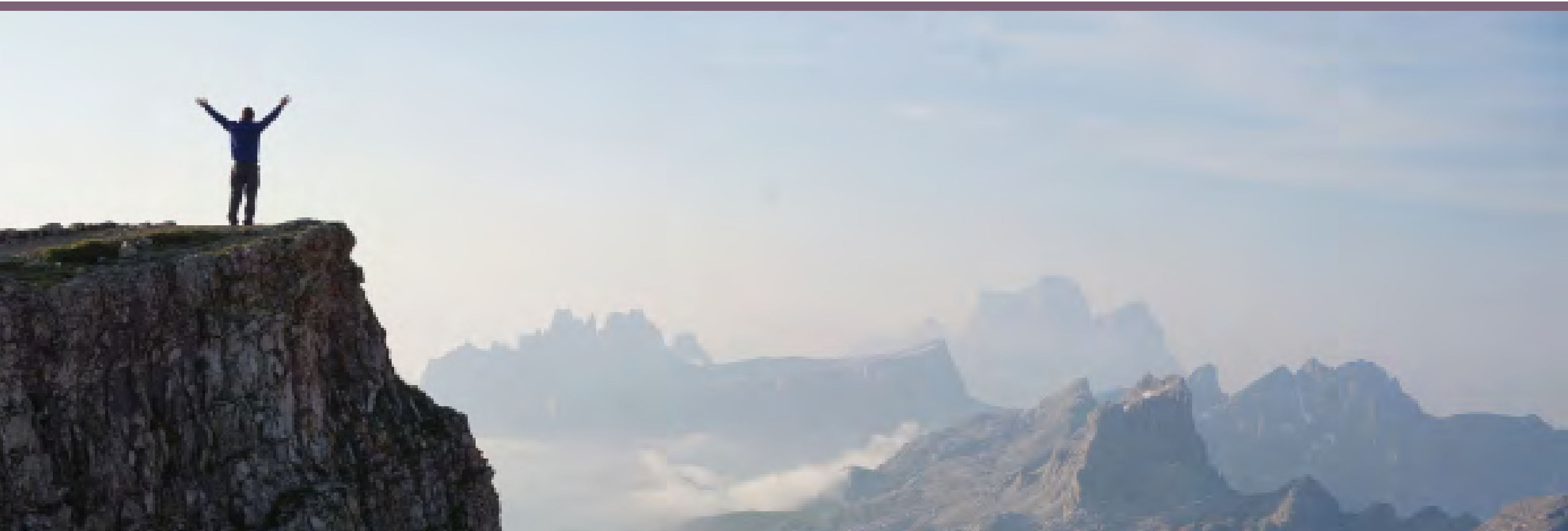
The production of this publication was supported by Grant #90EV0410 from the Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (ACF/DHHS) to the National Resource Center on Domestic Violence (NRCDV). Its contents are solely the responsibility of the NRCDV and do not necessarily represent the official views of ACF/DHHS.



This guide is based in part on the Executive Directors Guide by Deborah Linnell, Zora Radosevich and Jonathan Spack of Third Sector New England and published in 2002 by the United Way of Massachusetts Bay and Merrimack Valley.

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Suggested Citation: Deborah Linnell with Jill Davies, Building Comprehensive Solutions (2016). *Building Mission Effective Survivor-Defined Organizations*. Harrisburg, PA: VAWnet, a project of the National Resource Center on Domestic Violence. Retrieved from: http://www.vawnet.org

Mission Effectiveness

Mission is the purpose of the organization, the reason why it exists. “Mission-effective” means that the organization’s purpose guides everything -- the advocacy, programs, hiring, management, budgeting, priority setting, location, outreach, board governance, fundraising, and communications.

A Snapshot of a Mission-Effective Survivor[1] -Defined Advocacy Organization

Everyone listens to survivors of violence. When a survivor walks in the door, there is a good feeling, a smile, a positive vibrant environment that connects with her experience and culture. Each survivor feels heard and respected. Advocates offer resources relevant to each survivor’s decisions and circumstances. Partnerships with survivors are fostered and cherished. Survivor experiences are honored, and their perspectives hold power. There is no us and them.

There are many conversations, and within each, there is focused listening -- to survivors of violence, to each other on staff, to the community. Ideas are shared freely and considered thoroughly, some rejected and some pursued. There is time and space to think. Staff have a flexible mindset and want to try new approaches. There is a commitment to staff development -- all staff, all essential skills, including leadership. It is a good place to work.

Its leaders come from all staff roles within the organization. They are self-reflective, good communicators and deep listeners who foster a healthy organizational culture, participatory decision-making, and a broad encompassing view of the conditions that affect survivors of violence and their communities.

The organization is brave, respected, transparent and valued. Guided by the perspectives of survivors, it strongly defines its role. Yet the organization is also humble and secure enough to question its work, effectiveness and impact and to then evolve. Very little remains static. The organization is built to change. Its people create and manage change internally and externally. Staff are fearless, strategic, and forward thinking. They make each victim safer. They are building comprehensive solutions.

Inter-Related Concepts That Define And Support Mission Effectiveness

Mission statement – describes the purpose of the organization.

“To end family violence by partnering with survivors to create strategies that make all survivors safer.”

This language is aligned with domestic violence program mission statements that talk about prevention, services, and social change. However, a survivor-defined organization’s purpose of “partnering with survivors” would likely shift current work and advocacy in those programs.

1 Many of those who experience violence and their advocates reject the term “victim” in favor of words such as “survivor,” which focus on healing, renewal, and overcoming adversity. To convey the strength and resilience of survivors and speak the truth about the harm of violence, the injuries, the lifelong effects of trauma, the phrase “survivor of violence” will also be used in this paper. The term “victim” will also be used occasionally. When working with survivors, use the terms they use. In other settings, advocates must convey both the harm done by those who use violence and the determination of survivors to overcome it. Accurate, diverse victim narratives must be shared to eliminate the damage, bias and shame of stigma. Language should not send a message that because some survivors have overcome the harm that resources and effective responses are less necessary or that violence is somehow less serious or even tolerable.

Theory of Change – describes what the organization will do to reach certain outcomes.

"If we listen deeply to survivors of violence and relevant stakeholders, we will offer advocacy and resources that make survivors safer."

This theory is a group's shared analysis of how it will accomplish change. When clearly stated it provides a feasible framework for incremental progress. As change occurs, analysis continues, and revisions to the theory push advocacy forward.

Vision – describes the future.

"In ten years, survivors of violence in our region are safer. We work with many different programs and people to ensure that each survivor receives advocacy and resources that are relevant to her/his priorities. There are a range of strategies that reduce violent behavior. We understand the interconnectedness of race and social justice issues, and we are part of these movements."

This is a description of where an organization is headed, and it helps guide what steps are necessary to get there.

Values – the principles that guide the organization's behavior and decision-making.

To support a survivor-defined advocacy environment, an organization's values might include principles such as: Diverse survivor perspectives will be incorporated into program changes. Services and advocacy will be culturally responsive. Human resources will provide the salary and benefits, time off, professional development opportunities and other work environment provisions that support effective advocacy.

Aligning Mission, Vision, and Values

An organization with an aligned survivor-defined mission, vision and set of values is positioned to grow and change in ways that make survivors of violence safer. This central partnership with survivors, the value that all will listen to survivors and that their perspectives will have power, will likely both validate and challenge an organization's programs and advocacy. As an organization moves toward alignment, thorny questions will be raised. It may be difficult to see how to move forward. Uncertainty might raise doubt about the value or feasibility of alignment. And it is not enough to have a well-crafted set of words. The mission, vision, and set of values must be an ever present, consistently consulted guidance point. This work is difficult. The pull on our time, attention and resources is fierce. Interests and priorities may conflict. Alignment of mission, vision, and values is how we keep our focus and stay true advocates for survivors. It is more likely that all in the organization will be committed to change and the principles that should guide it if staff, volunteers, board members and allies are engaged in the process of determining those principles.

Ways To Support Alignment

Create a Shared Vision.

The more the vision is shared, the more aligned people will be with the mission and the work necessary to achieve it. The process used to identify the vision helps ensure it is shared. The goal is to build an organizational

culture with one shared vision – not just one leader's vision or the view of a few. Involving everyone builds confidence and ownership, allowing all staff to know that they are important contributors. Building shared vision also promotes a team approach and has other benefits such as strengthening critical thinking and communication skills. Not everyone is a natural visionary. The process can help staff and board members to see the big picture and can move those who tend to focus on day-to-day details to new ideas and possibilities.

> Listen to survivors: The process of creating a shared survivor-defined vision requires the integration of diverse survivor perspectives. Build into day-to-day advocacy ways to find out what survivors want and need. Ask and document what they think will make them safer. Try not to limit what you learn from survivors. Ask survivors who seek your services and those who don't. Ask adults and learn also from the children. Ask them to dream, to wish, to tell you what would really help. Be bold. Be broad. Be open to hearing that what is currently offered by the organization may not be what is most needed by victims and their families.
>
> Gather information systematically and document it as you go. This can be done with limited resources. For example, just add one or two questions to the conversations staff are already having with survivors, record the information and have a volunteer compile it – always paying attention to confidentiality issues, of course. Free survey instruments are also available on the Internet that compile information. Use focus groups to both gather information and fine-tune your understanding of what you are hearing from survivors individually.
>
> Think with allies: Find others who are committed to a survivor-defined approach and vision. Discuss programming, ideas, strategies, services, allies, systemic issues, and implementation. Ask questions. To get a broader perspective, think with those outside your region, who work in different structures, or who work with survivor populations you don't regularly reach.
>
> Develop "Theories of Change": Think and talk about how the program will achieve its outcomes, and how the organization will achieve its vision. These theories can be framed as "If this, then that outcome will happen." Examples include: "If we support victims' parenting, then children will be safer; if we work with survivors who stay in their relationship, then they will have more options to increase their power in that relationship and reduce the risks they and their children face." To fuel generative thinking, consider conducting a brainstorming session. Research or ideas from survivors could be presented as a catalyst for thought. Consider inviting or sharing information from others who work with survivors and their families, for example, allies who work with those who use violence or who focus on children, or programs that serve particular populations.

Identify and Use Values

Values are best understood as the statements that will guide day-to-day behaviors within the organization as well as underscore planning, staffing, programming, and other strategic decisions. Advocacy in partnership with survivors is a core value for a survivor-defined organization. Living this value – day in and day out – will shape the work and organizational culture. Values that make it possible for the organization to be survivor-defined should also be named. For example, work environments that foster listening and critical thinking, openness to change, staff diversity, or trauma-informed supervision.

A values discussion can flow from the vision work. Undoing long-held values and norms can be challenging. These are sometimes expressed in "we don't or can't do that…" type statements. Inertia that preserves that

status quo will keep organizations from making the shifts necessary to be survivor-defined. It can help to approach a values exploration as starting from scratch and focusing on the vision for the future. Invite new values. A discussion could begin with questions such as: What values support listening to survivors? What values support working in partnership with survivors? What words would describe how we want to interact with survivors, with each other, with the community?

The values development process is strengthened when it is inclusive and the discussions reflect issues of culture and difference. Having survivors present at these sessions reflects the partnership value and offers the opportunity for authentic exchanges.

Values support alignment with mission and vision if they are institutionalized through human resource and governance practices. These systems can support behavior that is true to adopted values and provide fair accountability when behavior falls short. Widely understood, practiced and reinforced values are at the heart of a mission-effective organization.

Integrate the Mission Statement

Organizations may be survivor-defined and have a particular focus, for example, transitional housing, serving immigrant communities, legal representation, employment, or advocacy for a particular racial or ethnic group or for the LGBTQ community. The mission statements will reflect that focus and, if survivor-defined, will also reference learning from survivors and working in partnership with them. The mission should be clear in all the decisions, actions and outcomes of the organization. It cannot be something that is simply reviewed any time there is a formal strategic planning process.

To keep the mission alive in the daily work, talk about it as decisions are made. Ask how the decision furthers the mission. Ask how it helps the organization learn from and partner with survivors. Take the time to orient new board, staff, and volunteers to the mission and how programs and strategies fulfill it. Include the mission in integral materials, such as the organization's outreach handouts, website, emails, and social media accounts. State or paraphrase the mission in a "foundational" paragraph at the beginning of all proposals. Educate and engage funders and potential funders in the vision and values behind the statement. Post it where program participants will see it. Translate it into multiple languages.

Foster Leaders Who are Learners and Facilitators

Survivor-defined advocacy organizations are strengthened by leaders who continuously learn. Facilitative leaders build strong mechanisms for reflective practice and emphasize communication, critical thinking, transparency, more participatory management, and community engagement. They are a catalyst and a keeper for alignment of mission, vision, and values.

"Leaders" can be any person on staff who steps up to make constructive, positive change on behalf of survivors. They may be formal leaders on boards and in management and those throughout the organization who hold different levels of formal and informal authority.

Mission-Effective Leadership

Leaders of mission-effective survivor-defined programs facilitate listening, learning, critical thinking, communication, and change. They communicate authentically with and on behalf of survivors of violence. They maintain strong administrative and management systems, yet understand the institution serves the mission—it is not the mission. Their facilitative leadership and reflective practice makes it easier for survivors, staff and others to share their expertise, to speak up when there are issues, to take initiative and responsibility, to make decisions, and to work with others to achieve a common goal. This healthy organizational culture generates ideas for individual, programmatic, and systemic advocacy.

These leaders learn constantly and facilitate a cycle of continuous learning. Organizational learning is rooted in the experience of the people for whom the organization exists – survivors of violence, their families, and the community. Learning elucidates patterns and systems, those things contributing to conditions affecting survivors, and the organization's effectiveness. When these patterns and systems are better understood from a group perspective, organizations can create strategies that match the conditions and priorities defined by survivors.

Leaders may be executive directors, but those in other roles can also grow, strengthen and exhibit facilitative leadership qualities. This type of leadership relies more on sharing influence than using hierarchical authority.

Mission Effective Leaders

If a leader is open to growth, change and even transformation, she can lead from a mission-effective perspective. She can come to understand that leadership is not simply about her, but about inter-connectedness within a system in which she plays an important role. Among the many leadership competencies that further a shared mission include the ability to:

- **Facilitate, partner with, and inspire groups of people to move toward achieving a mission.**
- **Learn continuously.** Actively seek and use constructive feedback to enhance leadership skills. Incorporate perspectives from diverse people in different roles.
- **Communicate authentically and effectively with all stakeholders.**
- **Embrace inclusion of diverse people, ideas, and actions.**
- **Reflect, analyze and synthesize historic and current patterns affecting survivors or creating barriers to systems change.** See the inter-relatedness of events and patterns. Facilitate others to reflect, analyze, and synthesize. Examples may include barriers caused by the intersection of race, class and gender bias; political shifts that change funding priorities; disproportionate incarceration of people of color and the impact on survivors living in those communities; economic downturns and survivor access to housing or a living wage.

Personal Attributes

Mission-effective leaders are by nature self-reflective. They readily see the assumptions they hold, including areas of bias or prejudice. This allows them to move toward cultural competence. They learn as much as they teach. Comfortable one-on-one or with large groups, they are good communicators and energetic networkers.

From their authenticity comes a particular confidence that allows them to stand with and behind the other leaders in the organization – survivors, board members and staff, all in common purpose.

Other characteristics include:

- Good listener;
- Strategic thinker;
- Secure, yet humble;
- Power sharer, yet powerful when required to be;
- Action taker - for her/his convictions;
- Emotionally intelligent;
- Inviter of support, conversation, feedback required for continuous learning;
- Welcomes and manages change;
- Spirit-filled, s/he has compassion, humor, lightness.

No leader is all of these things at once. There will be required personal growth, shifts in approach and skill building. No one person is ever the "best leader." A mission-effective leader might say: "I will be the best leader I can be, given where I have been and what I am learning now in community with others in this place and time."

Leadership Styles

Leaders tend to have a mix of styles, and practically speaking, will need to use different styles depending on the organization's circumstances. It is important for a leader to know her default leadership style and how it fits into a particular stage in an organization's growth. For instance, "founders" start organizations. Strong managers may then be hired to develop good management norms, such as financial and human resource administration. Domestic violence programs, and other small to mid-sized nonprofits, often hire people who are close to being "mission-effective leaders" but fall into the trap of becoming "heroic leaders" instead. This happens when strong vision leaders think they can help organizations by virtue of their personal strength and attributes. Limited resources can force these leaders to wear too many hats – financial manager, human resource expert, buildings manager -- and even the best become exhausted and burnt out if the responsibilities are not shared.

Leadership Styles Matrix

The Matrix can help a leader identify her/his mix of leadership styles, although one or two are likely to be predominant. No matter the current style, a leader open to growth and change can work to become a mission-effective leader.

Leadership Type	Founder or Charismatic Leader	Heroic	Manager	Authoritarian	Mission- Effective Leader
What drives them?	Mission and people for whom mission is designed to serve "I have a vision."	Mission-focused – but nobody else can do it "Only I can save this organization."	Brings in strong systems "I can bring order to this organization."	Control and compliance "My way or the highway."	Empowerment of others and mission effectiveness "Shared thinking is best."
Vision for organization	Personal	Often shared, but too "stressed" to deeply implement	Typically looks (or should look) to others for longer term vision	Personal (another leader type who may have to look to others for vision, but isn't aware that they actually need to)	Shared – facilitates stakeholders to create a shared vision
Best qualities	Focused on survivors	Highly responsible; usually well-respected	Ability to create sound systems and implement them	Provides authoritative leadership in organization where staff will not take ownership or in a crisis	Ability to facilitate shared vision, delegate power and decision-making
Worst Qualities	Lack of attention to systems and detail; sometimes does not share vision with others	Burns-out and can set a tone of sacrifice for the cause and/or blaming of others in organization for not working as hard	Can lack passion for issue and often lacks larger vision; can think being a good manager is the be all and end all of leadership	Does not let others "own" organization/vision; is not humble; lacks self-awareness	Difficulty being a "boss" when its called for (for example when terminating an employee is necessary)
Management Style	Informal – often shared, but can be chaotic; all function, little form	More formal than founder, often team-based but lacks delegation skills	Good at delegating, but too much form over function	Controls and delegates; staff often fear this kind of leader	Uses inquiry to hear from those who do the work and constituents before proceeding, facilitative
Relationship with board	Informal, often is the leader of a weak board that does not understand its role and responsibilities; board members might be friends of founder	Formal – board typically follows a heroic leader, while having more understanding of governance than the first board under a founder	Boards often have more power with this "second stage" leader – but functions are highly role-defined and structured	Controls – board members may fear speaking their minds fully; but board can be highly functional otherwise	Allows for board/staff interaction – function dictates form; less focus on absolute roles, more function on who/what needed to get the job done with sophisticated communication and rules for engagement

Leadership Type	Founder or Charismatic Leader	Heroic	Manager	Authoritarian	Mission- Effective Leader
Relationship with partner groups	Can be collaborative, but tries to get them to sign on to personal vision – often a weakness for founders	Partners well, but takes on more of the collaborative work than others do	Often focuses too much on detail and does not hold the vision or lead collaborative efforts	Tries to control – often does not check in with partners before making "siloed" decisions; partners sometimes cannot speak their minds and tend to work around this leader	Highly collaborative by design
Compensation	Whatever the organization can afford – often foregoes salary to keep organization afloat	Whatever the organization can afford – may work for less for the "good" of the organization	Within reasonable parameters for the field or area	Highest market rate typically demanded; often not merited	Within a reasonable range of regional market, what organization can afford and within range of other salaries in staff (not paid more than 5 times what lowest paid employee earns)
Best suited for this life cycle stage in DV organization	At its start-up or in starting high profile new programs	Young, struggling organizations – if heroic leaders can grow and change with the organization, they might last for years and become mission-effective leaders	Helping organization set up systems or deputy director position, supporting a founder/ heroic leader to become a facilitative leader; should not be a long-term leader of an organization with visionary victim-defined mission	Not appropriate leadership style for DV programs; reverberates too much with the control tactics of abusers; boards of directors should be wary of bringing this personality type in as a leader	Organizations that wish to build comprehensive solutions to domestic violence
Reward	Mission fulfillment; ideas implemented	Appreciation for hard work; excellence of services/programs	Compliance with systems and smoothly functioning organi-zation; monetary	Followers; being right; monetary	Highly effective non-profit focused on mission and getting to survivor/community identified solutions
Cultural norm	Let's get it done, whatever it takes	Sacrifice for the cause	Systems need to be followed; rules are important; regulatory compliance valued over mission	"My way or the highway." Fear: "If you don't like it here, there's the door."	Have you asked survivors and stakeholders what they think? What patterns and systems help or create challenges to our efforts?
To whom most accountable	Themselves and their vision	Survivors and staff	Board of directors	Themselves, the board of directors, funders and influentials	Survivors, community

Mission Effective Communication

Communication supports a healthy organizational culture – one that transcends an individual leader and furthers the mission. A survivor-defined mission involves a broad spectrum of survivors, staff, board, and other players. The sharing of information, ideas, analysis, and perspective is a powerful tool for change and growth.

There are three communication skills that support mission effectiveness:

1) **Understanding mental models** - your assumptions and how they influence your perspective;
2) **Inquiry** to better understand other's perspectives; and
3) **Authenticity** in relationship to others.

Understanding Mental Models

Mental models are deeply ingrained assumptions, images, and pictures that influence how humans interact with the world. A mental model is the brain's way of using past information to organize new information. The problem is that humans easily get stuck in their mental models, and cannot easily leave their minds open to accept information or people at face value. Models are formed about all types of issues, for example, whether a standard of cleanliness is met, proper treatment of animals, what dress and make-up says about a woman, why certain individuals are abusive, or what services are good for survivors of violence.

The sequence of thought processes that informs mental models is sometimes referred to as "the ladder of inference."[2] A person sees something, uses her experience to make a series of judgments, and those judgments become her belief or reinforce her beliefs. This is what is called going up a ladder of inference, which includes the following steps:

1. I hear and see observable data and experiences.
   I hear and see a survivor of violence walking through the door looking for services.
2. I select data from what I observe.
   I notice her appearance, age, clothes, and ethnicity.
3. I add meaning.
   Based on my own experiences and culture, I determine she's a drug addict.
4. I make assumptions based on the meaning I added.
   We won't be able to work with her.
5. I draw conclusions.
   I will need to figure out a way to screen her out.
6. I adopt belief about the world.
   Domestic violence programs can't work with survivors who are actively using drugs.
7. I take action based on my beliefs.
   I screen her out.
   I also resist program changes that would lead us to serve survivors with addiction issues.

2 Senge, Peter, and Art Kleiner, Charlotte Roberts, Richard Ross, George Roth & Bryan Smith. (1994) The Fifth Discipline Fieldbook. New York, NY: Crown Business. See also: https://www.solonline.org/?tool_ladder_of_infer

A ladder of inference is “a common mental pathway of increasing abstraction, often leading to misguided beliefs.”[3] An organizational example might be:

1. The meeting started at 9:00 AM and Sally, our outreach advocate, isn’t here.
2. Sally is always late.
3. We can’t count on Sally; she’s unreliable.
4. Persons from the same background, experience, race/ethnicity as Sally are unreliable.

These kinds of assumptions are barriers to survivor-defined advocacy. For example, an advocate, even before she talks with a survivor, will form a mental model based on the survivor’s appearance and the information the advocate already has. Rather than the survivor’s priorities and perspectives, these assumptions will guide the advocate’s interaction, including what is talked about and what resources are offered.

Walking Down the Ladder of Inference

Mental models influence what you think. What you think drives what you say. Therefore, awareness of assumptions and reflection regarding mental models is central to effective communication.

Mental models are common and add meaning to what we experience. The meaning can be negative as in the Sally example above or positive--for example a survivor calling the hotline means she’s a strong person who is seeking a better life for herself and her children.

There are times when the meaning and model must be changed. Instead of going *up the ladder of inference* to assumptions, you can learn from every day interactions and build newer, more reality-based mental models by walking *down the ladder of inference*. Through reflection and discussion, you can test the data before adding in meaning.

Examples of walking down the ladder:

- Before assuming a survivor’s appearance means she is a drug addict and that you can’t work with her and should screen her out, you slow down, ask her some questions, and explore how you could work with her.
- Rather than assuming a survivor is not serious about getting help when she says she won’t go to support group, you talk with her. You find out the group triggers flashbacks and nightmares. You learn more about what this survivor needs and gain a more accurate model of how violence affects individuals and when responses may be more painful than helpful.
- Working to undo institutionalized racism is a powerful example of working with and shifting mental models. Many people’s mental model is that institutionalized racism does not exist. When they are walked through history and listen to co-workers of color they have the opportunity to see the patterns that are institutionalized racism. Once they see the patterns, they begin to recognize racism where it exists.

Ask before assuming. Listen to and think about the answers you receive. Whether with survivors, co-workers, or the community, informed and accurate mental models support a survivor-defined mission.

Inquiry

“Inquiry” is a communication style that allows you to “unpack” assumed meaning by asking questions, listening, and engaging in reflection and discussion. Here’s an example of unpacking an organization’s mental model that a survivor of violence must ask for services to be empowered:

3 Ibid.

Lena

During an outreach event, a woman asked Juanita (advocate) if she'd call her sister Lena who was so depressed she could not reach out for help. Juanita said yes.

Knowing it was against policy, Juanita went to her supervisor, Sue. Sue was sympathetic but explained this practice was the best way to empower survivors. Juanita didn't give in, argue, or assume what Sue was thinking. Using inquiry, Juanita said, "Can you help me to understand better your assumptions about this?"

Sue explained how insisting survivors call helps us know they want help, that they aren't being coerced by someone, and gives survivors a chance to exert autonomy. Juanita said that made sense in many cases but further inquired, "Have we ever talked as a staff about exceptions to this, for example, people so depressed that, like this woman, they are unable to make the call?"

Sue answered, "No, not for years." Juanita replied, "I know we all want to do what is best for survivors. Can we talk about this at the next staff meeting? I'd like us all to explore whether this is the best approach when a survivor is too depressed to call. I'd be willing to lead the discussion." Sue agreed. At the meeting, the staff agreed to ask each other questions, listen, and consider what they learned. They concluded the policy was probably too rigid and wanted to continue the discussion later. In the meantime, all agreed that Juanita should call Lena. They also agreed that learning from Lena's experience along with that of other survivors was necessary to inform their policy discussions.

At times, advocates must be firm and relentless to advance the needs of survivors. If not balanced with inquiry, such strong advocacy can keep us from seeing other points of view or taking the time to unpack mental models. This can hamper efforts to be survivor-defined or strategic. Family violence is complex. The organizations in which advocates work and the systems that respond to survivors of violence are layered with competing interests, historical practices, and deeply held mental models. Survivor-defined advocates need to be informed, open to exploring assumptions, and committed to thinking through issues together to gain new insights.

Balancing advocacy and inquiry can help an individual or small group begin to shift an entire organization or system. This balance can be challenging because it pushes against people's hard-held mental models, yet it is a powerful approach with significant outcomes.

Authenticity

Authenticity can be a powerful cultural shift toward a more mission effective organization. In part this means that staff, board members, volunteers and survivors are asked to unpack mental models, test assumptions with each other before jumping to conclusions, and use inquiry to further create shared meaning.

Truth-telling does not mean "blasting away" at others with your version of the truth[4]. Such an approach lacks inquiry and shuts down the opportunity to understand how and why other people might think differently. Neither does truth-telling mean being purposely hurtful – although sometimes people will be hurt when they hear a necessary truth. Think about your motives before you speak. Ask yourself, "Will I speak this truth to push us all to a healthier, more constructive way to do this work together? If this won't be the likely outcome, why will I be so blunt? Is it because of my personal agenda?" Healthy communicators ask themselves and others about what they think, why they hold onto a certain position, and where to find the common ground.

Skills that allow people to unfold their truths and work with the tension and discomfort that truth-telling raises can lead to positive change in the organization. Working through the content that caused the tension can lead to a place of deep learning and even transformation. A survivor-defined mission will flourish in a culture of authenticity and truth-telling regarding survivors' perspectives about services and advocacy.

4 A quote from Erline Belton of the Lycrum Group shared with the author during consulting sessions

Mission-Effective Decision-Making

Survivor-defined organizations support and honor each survivor's decisions about his or her life. Practices and policies that distribute decision-making across the organization and clearly communicate those parameters offer the flexibility and shared staff responsibility that can institutionalize survivor-defined responses. Organizational decision-making raises issues of effectiveness, leadership style, staff skills, efficiency, and authority and power. A list of decisions or types of decisions, who has input or influence, and who makes the final decision is a good place to start. The next step could be to consider questions such as:

- Do staff have the decision-making power they need to support survivor-defined advocacy?
- Who makes decisions in an emergency situation? How are they made?
- How are new staff supervised and when ready, given more autonomy?
- Do staff know which decisions they can make about their work and which require a team, supervisor, executive director, or the board to be involved? For example, there is a set of daily decisions that a fundraiser would make, or the receptionist, or a shelter advocate, yet there will be even routine issues that warrant a supervisor's involvement.
- How are diverse survivors of violence and staff involved in organization-wide important decisions?

The more diversity and inclusion represented in who has influence and power in decision-making, the broader the range of perspectives that will be represented in the decisions being made. Because decision-making is at the heart of power, real inclusion is particularly meaningful.

It may be helpful to work through a decision-making protocol. The steps might include:

- Type of decision
- What information is needed to make a sound decision? How will you get it?
- Who will have input and when? Survivor-defined organizations will include survivor perspectives on issues that will affect advocacy.
- Who will make the final decision?
- What are the deadlines for each step in the process?

Strategic Planning

Planning is important for any organization. Traditional strategic planning is typically conducted every few years and is led by the board of directors and executive director. It usually assesses strengths and weaknesses, gathers information from stakeholders, develops written objectives and activities, and sets implementation timelines and responsibilities. Traditional planning has benefits but may also lead to rigid adherence to accomplishing tasks over time. Organizations with a survivor-defined mission may need to adapt traditional strategic planning to allow for more responsive programming, fundraising, evaluation, priority setting, and budgeting. Survivor-defined organizations will benefit from strategic plans that are dynamic and informed by survivor perspectives. An ongoing process that involves learning, strategic analysis, and planning will help organizations offer what survivors of violence need to be safer. This is a "Strategic Thinking Planning Process."

Strategic thinking is a process of continuous learning and planning. It is survivor-defined when survivors' perspectives and priorities inform decisions. This approach allows for changes in direction, goals, and activities to better meet the evolving priorities of survivors of violence. While formal planning sessions every three or five years are important, the process of ongoing strategic thinking can transform the work and the organization to build comprehensive solutions.

Some elements that support a strategic thinking[5] planning process include:

- The Board adopts an ongoing strategic thinking planning process rooted in a cycle of learning, analysis, planning, and implementation.
- Leaders facilitate a process that meaningfully involves staff, survivors, and other stakeholders.
- The process is structured but fluid enough to adapt when warranted.
- There is regular communication regarding the status of the process and next steps.
- Feasible program-specific evaluation methods identify critical questions, such as: Are we offering options that make survivors of violence safer? Are outcomes valuable to survivors? Is it cost-effective, manageable, and sustainable?
- Critical emerging issues are identified by the board, staff, survivors, and the community.
- Mission, vision, and values guide decision-making and plan implementation.
- Written action plans include indicators (what you will measure) and goals (what you hope to achieve). Plans include flexibility to learn and try things, knowing a few strategies will not succeed. This is seen as a process of discovery not perceived as failure.

Elements that support a survivor-defined strategic thinking planning process include:

- Feasible processes to continuously gather information from diverse survivors about their perspectives and priorities and the effectiveness of current programs.
- A method to use that information to improve programs and advocacy.
- A broad view of safety that includes no violence, ability to meet basic human needs, and social and emotional well-being.[6]
- A commitment to identify and advocate for systemic issues.

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5 From a comparison of strategic planning to strategic thinking originally developed by Deborah Linnell for the *Executive Director's Guide* (2002), United Way of Massachusetts Bay, available at www.TSNE.org

6 Davies, Jill & Lyon, Eleanor. (2014). Domestic Violence Advocacy: Complex Lives/Difficult Choices, 2nd edition. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Tools for Strategic Thinking (Continuous Planning)[7]

A mission-effective management approach provides a framework for strategic thinking. Actions and decisions reinforce the survivor-defined mission, staff think strategically, and the organization's structures and systems ensure stability and progress.

Three tools to support strategic thinking include:

- Development of strategic thinkers
- Learning loops
- Program development and retooling

Development of Strategic Thinkers

Staff and leaders who think strategically are committed to continuous skill-building and learning. This commitment can be fostered through individual human resources functions such as supervision, evaluation, and professional development and through organizational systems, training, and processes.

Tips for Developing Strategic Thinking:

- Train and engage staff to become stewards of the mission, vision, and values of the organization. Similarly, orient and educate the board of directors.
- Model and teach "reflective practice" -- the use of formal and informal assessment, research and evaluation techniques. Ask, "What do we need to know more about?"
- Coach staff to see beyond individual roles, to understand the whole system of the organization and its field of work.
- Coach staff to actively plan for the future. Regularly ask, "If we are being called upon to do some things differently in order to achieve our mission, what will it take and what will tomorrow look like?" Teach staff to focus on concrete issues, set ambitious short-term benchmarks and learn quickly from the results.
- Teach staff to identify, ask, and answer critical questions about the development and implementation of program activities, including indicators of success. Discuss systems, the community, and domestic violence, including the history, social trends, and political context. Seize opportunities to institutionalize the exploration and analysis of ideas, such as in supervision or staff meetings. Create space for reflective conversation.
- Encourage teams and individuals to think creatively and explore new ways to meet survivor priorities. If possible, budget for modest experiments and grassroots innovations. Promote the most successful efforts throughout the whole system.

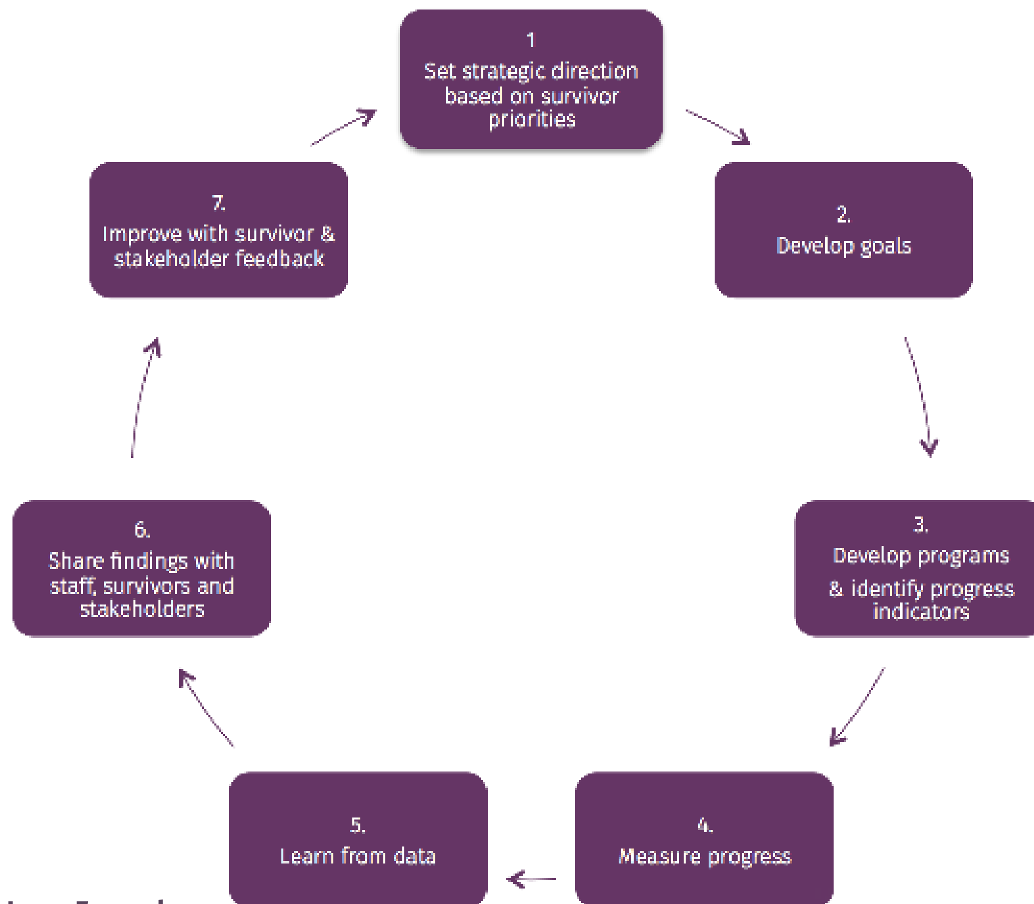
7 This piece was drawn from a discussion with Dakota Butterfield, colleagues in the Boston-based COMMONGROUND Project of the mid-1990s, and the work of Peter Senge and colleagues in The Fifth Discipline.

Learning Loops

Learning Loops – or “everyday evaluation” – are a defined learning, planning, implementation, and evaluation cycle. They can be used for a key program and for the whole organization.

The cycle might include the following steps:

1. Set a strategic direction based on the priorities and perspectives of survivors of violence.
2. Develop goals that support progress in the strategic direction.
3. Develop programs that meet these goals, and identify indicators of progress.
4. Measure progress toward indicators using program data.
5. Use findings from the data to learn.
6. Share the findings with survivors, all staff, and other stakeholders.
7. Use stakeholder feedback to improve the program, goals, and/or direction.



Learning Loop Example:

1. Survivors and other stakeholders tell the organization that survivors with mental health issues are not being accepted for shelter. The organization sets a strategic direction to shelter survivors dealing with mental health issues and/or the effects of trauma.
2. To support that strategic direction, the organization develops the following goal --increase the number of survivors experiencing mental health/trauma issues who are sheltered.¬
3. Program development includes researching what other organizations have done, talking with survivors who experience mental health/trauma issues, and discussions with mental health/trauma treatment providers. Two programs are developed. Program 1 requires a series of outreach activities. The progress indicators include numbers of people contacted and the number of calls that outreach has generated. Program 2 requires an expedited, trauma-informed intake process. Its progress indicators include time the intake requires, applicant satisfaction with the intake process, and number of survivors who request and receive shelter.
4. Programs 1 and 2 are implemented and progress on indicators is measured. The reasons for rejecting applications for shelter also begin to be tracked.
5. Data shows Program 1 focusing on outreach has not increased calls. Data shows Program 2 instituting trauma-informed intake has led to less time spent on intake, more survivor satisfaction with the process, and more survivors with mental health issues being sheltered.
6. Data from both Programs is discussed with the staff running the programs, the rest of the staff, the board of directors, and a support group for survivors. Feedback includes observation that outreach has been conducted in English in a community with a significant Spanish speaking population. Additionally, there is also concern that the data documenting the reasons for rejecting applications for shelter shows that there are still survivors being turned away because of mental health related issues.
7. The expedited trauma-informed intake Program 2 is continued with one change. To reject an applicant for shelter now requires a discussion with a supervisor or other staff person. Additionally, conversations about shortening the time and content for all intakes is underway. Due to limited resources Program 1, the English only outreach program is ended. A smaller focused outreach to Spanish speakers is launched.

Survivor-Defined Program Development

Program development and retooling improves current work and changes goals and directions based on survivor perspectives and priorities. A strategic thinking planning process results in program development and retooling, and this in turn leads to real change that benefits survivors of violence.

Survivor-defined advocacy poses a simple planning question -- "What do survivors of violence say will make them safer?" The answers will likely lead to changes in services, some quite small, others large. Program shifts can make a dramatic difference in the types of survivors served, the services offered, and the quality of the advocacy. Survivor-defined organizations develop new programs or update current programs as often as the priorities and perspectives of survivors give reason for change. This is not change for change's sake, but improvements for survivor-defined reasons. The amount and timing of program change will be in relation to the resources available to re-tool. Small, incremental change can make things better for survivors of violence.

Elements that Support Program Development and Retooling

- **Integrate survivor-based research or other information into the analysis.**
- **Engage the staff and board in conversations about the work.** While learning about the organization and domestic violence, new ideas and vision are likely to emerge. When leaders facilitate questioning of the status quo as a norm in the organization and encourage people to question and critique current programs and practices, the opportunity for constructive change increases. To be survivor-defined, conversations can be framed by the question "How can we work in partnership with survivors of violence to make them safer?" Such discussions can lead to an organization that thinks strategically about its programs, impact and mission.
- **Create dialogue opportunities with survivors and the community to get and test ideas.** Use feedback to focus a "good idea" into a program purpose and to identify survivor-defined outcomes.
- **Outline the program concept.** Introduce it to survivors and other stakeholders, including funders, policy makers, peers in other agencies, and colleagues, and seek feedback.
- **Research similar programs or goals.** Learn from the experience of others. Identify innovation trends in the field.
- **Agree on goals.** Once goals are established, design the activities that will flow from each goal and lead to hoped-for outcomes, making sure to base the activities on research and feedback from survivors of violence.
- **Identify staff needed to implement the program activities.** Staff roles should be defined clearly, along with the skills and qualifications those staff need to fulfill those roles.
- **Describe the impact of the program on the whole organization.** Include the impact on staff time, equipment usage, office space, supplies, and staff training budgets.
- **Develop a realistic program budget, including personnel and other costs.** Identify and approach funding sources or work to shift resources within the existing budget. If resources are to be shifted, engage with

funders and plan the transition, including strategies to assist staff whose jobs may be affected.

- **Write out the steps and timeline for the program's start-up.**
- **Implement.**
- **Evaluate.** Measure outcomes and indicators. Gather feedback. Talk about whether the program is doing what it set out to do.
- **Improve.**

Retooling Programs – A Few Considerations

Funding: Organizations may do the work that is funded by grants and contracts, even when that work no longer makes sense or is even ineffective. An organization may be reluctant to talk with funders about the need for change for fear it will result in a loss of funding. Think, plan, and talk about this issue with allies. Figure out how to approach funders and convince them to support the retooled work. Try also to find new funders who will support retooled and new programs.

Fear of Change: The organization may have people that do not want to change or learn new ways. Some may think that changing the program is a criticism of their current work. Others may be complacent about their advocacy or even fear change. Leaders that embrace flexibility, strategic risk-taking, and the development of staff who seek change will be better positioned to build victim-defined programs.

Lack of True Inclusion: Inadequate community and survivor involvement in program design and evaluation can result in a program that sounds good but is not based in the reality of victims' lives. Sometimes organizations get so invested in a program that they resist feedback. This can slow or prevent the change needed to make the program more effective for survivors of violence. Listening is a powerful force for change.

Resources for Further Learning

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