

## Think you can't do anything without a grant? Think again.

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by Cassandra O'Neill

Traditional approaches to collaboration can look like this. "We want to work together, and we can only do something if we get a grant. Let's develop a list of things to do if we had a grant and try to find a grant to do them." What if by focusing on this approach, you miss out on all the things that you could do without a grant, with existing resources, things that are sustainable?

What if the idea that you can't do anything without a grant is just a limiting belief? What if you change the question from Question 1 - "What can we only do if we get a grant?", to Question 2 - "What might be some of the things we can do now through exploring new collaborations with organizations and individuals that share a common vision?" The first question can be answered quickly. The second question takes longer, and involves having exploratory conversations and some out of the box thinking. This may take a little longer than making up a wish list of things to buy with grants.

In *Power vs Force* David Hawkins writes:

"The world conventionally assumes that the processing of problems requires starting from the known (the question or conditions) and moving on to the unknown (the answer) in a time sequence following definite steps and logical progression. Nonlinear dynamics moves in the opposite direction: From the unknown (the nondeterministic data of the question) to the known (the answer)! It operates within a different paradigm of causality. The problem is seen as one of definition and access rather than a logical sequence (as in solving a problem by differential equations.)"

When we look at this, and apply it to possible approaches to collaboration we get two different scenarios.

**Scenario A** is the traditional approach.

We get partners together to define a problem, develop a solution that meets the needs defined in the problem, and we seek to move from our definition of the known (the unmet needs, barriers to overcome) to the unknown. Our solution often involves developing new services to be delivered to those defined as "in need" to meet their needs.

One downside of this approach is that all attention is focused on what the partners don't have and can only do with a grant. Additionally, it applies linear thinking to non linear human systems, and ignores what the people who are defined "in need", have as strengths, resources, and assets. It also ignores solutions that involve building resiliency. Meeting others needs often does not build resiliency. Nor does it build resiliency in the agencies that get the grants, as they continue to view themselves as unable to do anything without a grant, the getting of which directs their efforts into unsustainable short term activities.

What is an alternative? How can we try on an approach that moves from the unknown to the known? How can we explore partnering with people and organizations in a new and sustainable way, one that is strengths based, embedded in the dynamic reality of human systems? There are many ways, here is what one might look like:

**Scenario B** reframes the question.

What if the people interested in working together focused first on exploring the unknown - the strengths, resources, peak experiences, and resiliency of the potential partners. Imagine that, you meet with someone that you think may share a common vision and values. You learn from each other, you learn what strengths and resources you each have, and what may be possible by connecting the resources you share -- and directing them towards your shared vision.

Imagine that you hold similar exploratory conversations with many other potential partners. What will you end up with? You won't know, you wait for it to emerge from your explorations. When you've found a critical mass of partners sharing a common vision, jointly exploring the unknown, hidden, and underutilized resources -- something positive may emerge. Some activities, strategies, and system changes that reflect the potential of the partners to do something sustainable towards their shared vision. Will these be the same activities as the list drawn up in Scenario A? No, absolutely not. Will these have a bigger impact in both the short and long term? Probably. If nothing emerges, keep adding new partners for exploration.

Think about what might be possible if you move from the unknown to the known. You focus on the resources we have collectively - and explore how they can be connected in a powerful way. And guess what? If you do this, you may come up with some things you can get grant funding to support – And it will look very different than if you followed Scenario A. When you pursue Scenario B – you end up with a list of activities and strategies built on strengths, that are sustainable by nature, and that can be done with existing resources. There will be things that could support these strategies that you can seek grant funding for. These activities will build the capacity of your collaboration to reach their shared vision -- by building on strengths and creating community resiliency. Want to know more about what this might look like? You can check out the St. Luke's Health Initiative website at [www.slhi.org](http://www.slhi.org) – and download their publication *Health in a New Key*.

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