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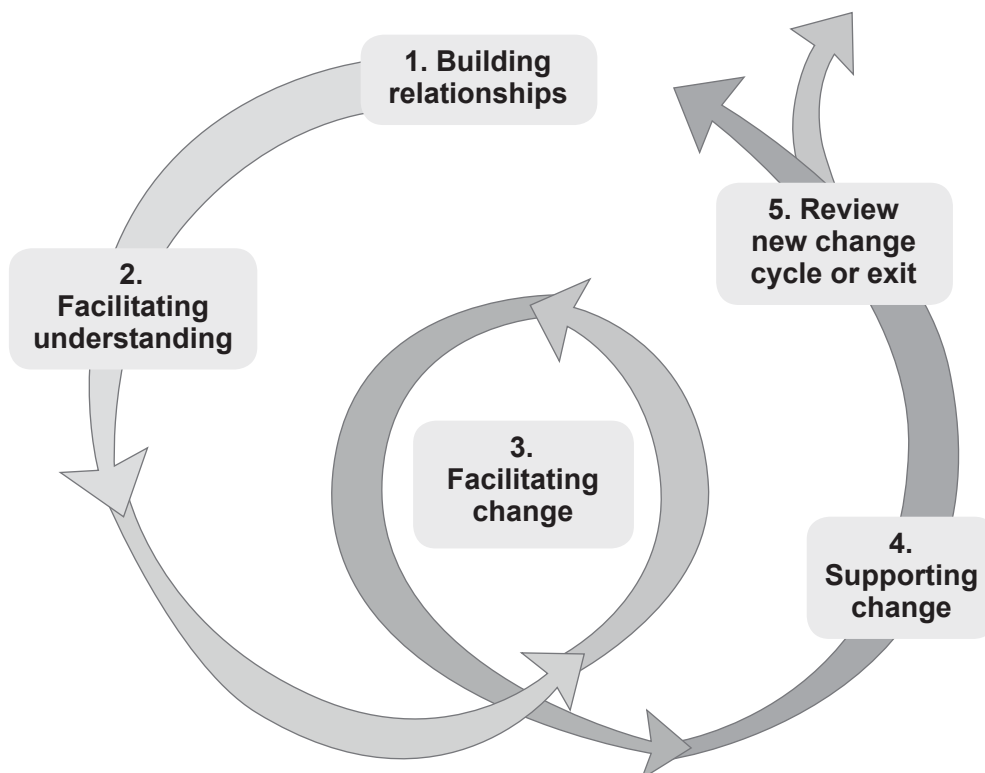
The Five Elements of a Developmental Approach

Another way to find focus for practice learning is to explore the Five Elements of a Developmental Approach and to see where your practice needs more learning attention. These threads are typical of most developmental field practices:

1. Building relationships – developing trust and clarity
2. Gaining understanding – enabling people to surface and understand their reality
3. Facilitating change – enabling shifts and breakthroughs
4. Supporting change – practical implementation
5. Reviewing change – assessing progress and looking ahead.

We begin by building relationships. But these threads usually happen concurrently, although at certain steps in an intervention there may be more emphasis on one or another. As soon as we start building relationships with the people we may work with, we start to gain some understanding of what is happening. This relationship-building continues all through the process.

Share and discuss these threads with colleagues and then work with the questions for each, exploring and assessing your own practice.





See Barefoot Guide 1, Chapter 3, for an exploration of power and relationships.

“Change begins and ends with relationship...”



1. Building relationships

Change begins and ends with relationship and the need to establish, firstly, the warm human conditions of trust to enable honesty and good co-operation. Without this the people we work with will be closed to us and we will find ourselves unable to work effectively. Secondly, there is a need for openness and transparency, so that what people think, feel and want are sufficiently clear to be able to proceed.

Often the real work that needs to happen is at a relationship level. Power lives in relationships – so if there is the abuse of power, or if power needs to be more equalised then the key work that needs to happen is at a relationship level.

The questions to ask are:

- How do we build relationships with the people we work with, so that they trust and understand us?
- How are we affecting their relationships with themselves and with others?

2. Gaining understanding

Understanding what it is that we are really working with is a primary challenge. Behind what we think is happening often lie deeper issues. These must be surfaced and understood, not only by the practitioner, but more importantly, by people we are working with so that they may see for themselves more clearly what matters. Then they can more easily see and lead their own change process.

Helping people to see themselves and their situation more clearly enables them to achieve acceptance of what kind of change they may need to face and what may need to be done.

Interestingly, the processes of building relationships and of gaining understanding not only prepare the way for facilitating change but often produce immediate changes – especially where the problems are about relationships, lack of clarity and misunderstandings. The questions to ask are:

- How are we contributing to people understanding their situation for themselves?
- How are we helping them to continue to learn about themselves?
- What kind of change conditions exist?
- How does this help us understand our real work?

3. Facilitating change

Being stuck, rigidity, clinging to the old, refusing to relinquish past perceptions and hurts, difficult relationships, inappropriate structures, cultures, strategies and ways of seeing the world – all must be loosened, opened, so that new life may emerge. Some of these may be resolved through learning in better ways, which we call Action Learning.

But sometimes the stuck feeling, or crisis, first requires unlearning. The old ways of relating and seeing must be let go of to make space for the new, thus creating the conditions for visioning a new future. The questions to ask are:

- What role do we play in helping people to change themselves, their relationships or the conditions in which they live or work?
- How are we helping them to unlearn what needs to be unlearned and to learn what needs to be learned?

4. Supporting and grounding change

After having committed to change and starting to implement it, people may easily slip back into old patterns and habits. Change needs to be grounded: the new situation must be given roots to stabilise and new structures to hold onto. New skills and capacities may need to be developed to enable the new plans to be activated and implemented. Leaders may need mentoring and progress may need to be reviewed and consolidated. The questions to ask are:

- How are we assisting people to turn their intentions and plans into actions and achievements?
- Is there sustainability?



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5. Reviewing

In leading or facilitating change we need to pause regularly to review the process, reflecting on how things are going, monitoring progress to make sure things are on a positive track. This should be happening continuously, but then at key points there may be deeper reviews to decide whether to move into another cycle of change or to exit. Empowering people to be reflective builds independence and sustainability for the future, enabling them to understand change processes for themselves. The questions to ask are:

- Are we building in sufficient time and space for people to reflect on and learn from experience?
- Are the review processes we support of good quality?
- Are we empowering others to facilitate their own reflection and learning processes?

What does this mean for learning?

Once you have worked through the Five Elements of a Developmental Approach, you can add a sixth step: 'What does this mean for learning?' Exploring these five elements in your practice is itself a learning process, but will also point you to the aspects of your practice that need attention. This could be to strengthen, improve or even to transform different aspects. Useful questions to ask now could be:



What should we do more of?

What should we do less of?

What should we start doing?

What should we stop doing?

