**Excessive Systems and Structures in Youth Development Frustrate Positive Youth Work Outcomes**

With almost twenty years’ experience in youth development at many levels, my tolerance to cope with complexity and the excessive systems and structures often developed by technocrats with little-to-no experience is ever diminishing.

After decades of having to be creative, innovative, and flexible in serving our very heterogeneous clients, we are still faced with archaic inexperienced academics and technocrats who have not taken the time to become ‘experientially knowledgeable’. We do not expect that every technocrat will be educated in youth development, but we do expect that the knowledge and experience of those directly involved in the work at varying levels will be substantially consulted. In an era of the pursuit for effectiveness and efficiency, we must acknowledge that those at the ground are also those at the foundation and as a result, they are the ones that hold all these systems up.



And when we fail to do this we often add more burdens of frustration and apathy unto already disadvantaged groups of workers and organizations.

As soon an organization or group is formed we have the urge to (especially if that group is populated with individuals that are either professionally or preferably talk more than they work people), saddle it with excessive architecture and talk shop structures which stifle the vibrancy and creativity and momentum out of the movement. Youth development like many other genres in social development is still heavily populated with old mindsets and archaic principles and perspectives ( Yes the Functionalists still reign). These individuals seek to maintain the status quo by frustrating the ingenuity and passion of the innovative newcomers who are also usually those laden with experience to bring change. So, although the word innovativeness is heralded in youth development circles due its inherent presence in young people, as a process it generally isn’t as popular.

This way of development leaves the passionate and vibrant youth workers and organizations restless and vulnerable to becoming easily disconnected from formal structures and processes.

This has further resulted in disheartening from the popular practice of insulated technocrats and academics and is further compounded by obvious but unwilling acceptance of the very real differences in the developed and developing worldviews and experiences. Yet many of the chief consultants that lead funded development initiatives in youth development globally are often from developed world contexts, who never seem to go to learn or is ever willing to accept that the lessons learned under the pressures of development could be lessons to share with our developed world partners. Often after the formalization of efforts by local, regional, or international groups takes place, the passion of the human element tends to be stripped away and replaced with rhetoric and static discourse.

Youth workers like the young people they serve are dynamic and vibrant and so are unable to consistently participate in such mundane often impactless efforts. And while there is a need for systems and structures and architecture, there has to be a greater emphasis on action and achievement and maintaining the sense of value and connectedness of all participating in such processes. At no point should the social value of getting things done wain in priority to an establishment. Action must be kept alive and the initial momentum of vibrancy and passion must always outshine bureaucracy, especially in youth development when both the practice and youth clients and agenda are already an underclass underserved.

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***August 2018***