

Freedom, Inclusion and Sufficiency – another look at what really matters

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FEBRUARY 2009



At CDRA we have spent some time thinking through what it is that really matters to us – and found three key values that describe what it is we seek in the outcomes of our efforts, as well as what guides those same efforts. We share some initial thoughts on these – some lines of arguments, some random associations – and the observation that when we take these seemingly intangible values and try to apply them to our organisational life, our decision making and our practice ... we find that they are a whole lot more concrete and offer a great deal more direction than any of us might have imagined.

'Freedom' is an old favourite of philosophers, activists, and entrepreneurs across the political spectrum. While generally considered a good thing, it does come with baggage. Sometimes it is invoked as a means of protecting privilege – an entitlement for some against the rights of many ("I made all of my money through my own effort and hard work, who are you to tell me it should be taxed?"). It can be used as a shield against accusations of unkindness, selfishness and social inappropriateness ("I can say what I like; it's my right to free speech"). It is invoked in the treacherous debates between the security of tradition and the demands of modernity ("I am entitled to practise my tradition"). It is true that freedom without responsibility to others becomes whimsical irresponsibility.

Yet the essential freedoms of modernity – freedom of expression, freedom of association, freedom of movement, freedom of worship and freedom of choice around sexuality, reproduction and lifestyle – are also intrinsic to the development agenda. When we talk of building capacity, of rights-based approaches, of expanding organisation, we are – implicitly or explicitly – invoking freedom's entitlements.

Looked at more essentially, freedom is a fundamental element in the development of human beings and their organisations and communities. What is the struggle for

independence - in adolescents, in organisations, even in whole communities and nations - if not a struggle for freedom? A drive for greater autonomy and self-determination. Freedom to determine the quality and conditions of one's own life, free from control and exploitation.

Closer to home, in CDRA's field of organisation and developmental practice, freedom lives as an essential and tangible quality. To work out of a practice, a discipline requires both accountability to that discipline as well as the freedom to act with some autonomy; freedom to exercise professional judgement and discretion.

Working with groups of people, we see that to organise at all demands a degree of freedom and self determination. And then of course, organising as an activity all too often is about expanding that same freedom and self-determination further still. When we work with others – be it at extending or improving organisation –we are helping to expand freedom, and its accompanying responsibility.



With many organisations that are struggling with old patterns and destructive cultures, the predominant feeling is one of fear. And the quality that is sought – as antidote and as means of transformation – is freedom. Looked at in this way, we might characterise work with the organisational invisible (call it culture change, deep democracy, diversity and identity work or shifting group dynamics) as work towards greater freedom of expression. This work helps diminish the fear, powerlessness and invisibility that hold whole groups of people captive.

'Inclusion' offers another lens into the aspirations of our work. While freedom curtailed holds us captive in organisational and community life (leading to struggles for independence), practising inclusion creates belonging, a sense of community and shared purpose. It is in community that our initiative and free action can find its best expression, grounded in

relationship with others. Through inclusion, we work from independence, into interdependence with one another.

Inclusion (enhanced by freedom) is a value and quality that goes beyond the more conventional, and homogenising, ones of equality and solidarity. Indeed the primary cause of modern conflicts and misery is the exclusion of many by the few (from land, rights, political participation, economic and cultural opportunity). Inclusion speaks of embracing all, something more deeply human than the more legalistic notion of equality or the political notion of solidarity – yet it does not exclude these either.

Very practically, we can use the value of inclusion to ask – 'Are those with whom our work is concerned included in its processes?' The slogan of the disability movement –

‘Nothing about us, without us’ – is a powerful reminder to all of us who seek change, to ensure that our ends are comprehensively and credibly reflected in our means.

Striving for inclusion also helps to slow things down. The breathless freedom of new ideas and initiative risks excluding those whose attention is elsewhere and those whose priorities may differ. The check of inclusion encourages us to pause, ensure we are all on board, and also keeps us open to other ideas, alternatives, to as-yet unformed possibilities emerging out of a space that is kept open, for just a little bit longer.

Aspiring to inclusion is also a practical way of keeping diversity alive in the initiatives that we pursue. And here, we see diversity as far more than structural check-list, or formulaic representivity. It is also more than a shallow eclecticism that pays lip-service to the inclusion of any idea or experience. Rather, welcoming diversity is the start of practising inclusion. In including as many as possible, we open the possibility for all involved to be transformed by one another, and so for whole community (intact, with integrity) to emerge. And to emerge continuously.



Finally, the notion of ‘**sufficiency**’ offers us yet another route into the values that shape our work. What motivates anyone to do the work they do? Materialist views of the world, whether concerned with the seeming opposites of wealth creation or wealth distribution, suggest that what matters is material well-being. There is no question that a minimum of wealth is needed to put food on the table, to shelter oneself and one’s family and to pursue a life.

However, rarely do we find that people regard this as enough, as sufficient. While the aspirational values of freedom and inclusion give us guidance on some of the other qualities that human beings seek, ‘sufficiency’ offers a counterpoint, a limit to excess, be it material excess or excess of other qualities.

‘Sufficiency’ offers a limit. Enough. An end point to striving, to ambition, to control, to consumption and to aspiration itself.

In our world, it is easy to talk of poverty reduction, of basic needs, of minimum requirements. As if poverty is both the symptom of the problem and its cause. Much of our implicit thinking suggests that if we could only solve the problems of ‘the poor’ (or help them solve them for themselves), all would be well. But poverty is just one part of far greater dynamic. While there is great subtlety and detail in analyses of the current world economic crisis and near collapse of the financial sector, there seems to be general agreement that greed and excess were major drivers. ‘Self-sufficiency’ may be a fine value to aspire to, but so too is sufficiency.

The environmental crises of our times – climate change, the quest for alternatives to fossil fuels, and the ongoing preoccupation of planners and urban theorists with what

to do, how to provide even basic environmental services in a rapidly urbanising world – are also very much rooted in excess. As opinion turns and environmental concerns enter the mainstream of public thinking and public policy, so the notion of sufficiency becomes ever more useful in our thinking through our actions, both big and small.

What if we occasionally assessed our actions and interventions against the measure – ‘Was this enough?’ Enough money, enough time, enough taken, enough care, enough thought? Not an extractive or accumulative view that pursues surplus and choice for its own sake. But also not a blunt redistributive view that works from a place of scarcity and minimums. Rather, an approach that seeks to work with sufficiency: one that is adequate to the economic, political and environmental times and to the needs and aspirations of each situation encountered. An approach that is simultaneously inclusive and respectful of freedom.

These three values offer to us a means by which we can check on our work and the decisions that we make. Is what we do (inside of CDRA and in our work in the world) maximising freedom? And where does it contribute to diminishing it? Is inclusion being practised? Amongst our own staff? In relation to our colleagues, collaborators, Board members, clients and donors? How can we be constantly expanding inclusion? And where does this quest create dilemmas, interesting points of tension that take our work in exploring power further still?



Finally, how does sufficiency in practice impact on our work? It has financial implications for how we administer the organisation and conduct ourselves within it. It also has implications for practice – how do we work with the time, the people, the resources that we are given? Can we begin to engage with what we have out of a ‘sufficiency consciousness’? And how does this differ from seeing things

purely in terms of problems and deficits?

As we enter fully into the new year, we take these questions and commitments with us, and look forward to seeing what this inquiry reveals.

With thanks to Siobhain Pothier for her sensible editing and wonderfully critical eye.

Photographs from CDRA Biennial Conference 2007

