project change

FREE PRACTICAL TOOL · NO. 11

11

Five myths about lived experience

A short myth-buster for teams trying to involve experiential knowledge well.

Lived experience work gets harder when we load two words with a suitcase full of assumptions. Here are five worth unpacking.

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MYTHS 1 TO 3

Start by clearing away the easy mistakes.

MYTH 1

One person can represent everyone with that experience.

Reality: lived experience is diverse. One person's perspective is valuable precisely because it is theirs. Build enough breadth that nobody has to perform the impossible job of speaking for a whole community.

MYTH 2

Lived experience means telling your story.

Reality: story can be one way to contribute, but lived experience also produces analysis, pattern recognition, ideas, critique and practical expertise. Personal disclosure is not an entry fee.

MYTH 3

Professional expertise and lived experience are competing.

Reality: they answer different questions. Better decisions come from bringing experiential knowledge, practice knowledge and wider evidence together.

MYTHS 4 AND 5

The labels do not make the practice good.

MYTH 4

If people are involved, it must be co-design.

Reality: involvement ranges from information and consultation through to shared design and decision-making. Use the right word for the influence people actually have.

MYTH 5

Participation is automatically empowering.

Reality: participation can be inaccessible, extractive or powerless. Good intentions do not cancel bad conditions. Purpose, access, payment, influence and feedback still matter.

> **Lived experience becomes useful organisational knowledge when people have meaningful ways to contribute it and meaningful routes for it to affect decisions.**

DISCUSS

Which myth shows up most often in our organisation?