

Organizations: Why do we always seem to end up with new (and even innovative) forms of the status quo? What actually is the problem here?

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Setting the scene

- What am I trying to do?
- Why do this?
- Getting on the front foot and in at the start in all this
- Working against an often invisible stable conservatism

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To begin: taking a step back as it were to look at the problem of inclusivity

A project might begin with how to make a workplace more inclusive

So what actually is the problem here? And the motive for, and intent or agenda of the project? **Intent and agenda vary depending on how the problem is viewed. For example:**

- the workplace is not inclusive – based on what? and how do you know?
- it is currently not inclusive of certain groups (who has determined this – and what groups matter, based on what)
- it needs to be inclusive (of what and why)
- it needs to show it is inclusive (why and how, to whom)

What **is** the problem matters?

- For example: If the problem is that we must be seen to be inclusive then how to do that (be seen) is the problem - not the idea of inclusive at all – that is a given (e.g. a govt policy or an organizational target)
- Or worse the premises are not declared or thought through

WPR type of thinking....

- This type of questioning is an example of problematization or "what is the problem" type of thinking (see Bacchi 2012).
- What sits in those words "more", "inclusive" "more inclusive"?
- Is inclusive enabling people to join in what is or is it more than that?
- Is the problem that inclusive has been subverted to other agendas (being seen to be inclusive, targets, awards)?
- Does any thing change by being inclusive?

Answers to these questions affect what we focus on and how we view "solutions" or outcomes.

Bacchi 2012 WPR

The "WPR" approach is a resource, or tool, intended to facilitate critical interrogation of public policies. It starts from the premise that what one proposes to do about something reveals what one thinks is problematic (needs to change). Following this thinking, policies and policy proposals contain implicit representations of what is considered to be the "problem" ("problem representations"). For example, if forms of training are recommended to improve women's status and promotion opportunities, the implication is that their lack of training is the "problem," responsible for "holding them back." The task in a "WPR" analysis is to read policies with an eye to discerning how the "problem" is represented within them and to subject this problem representation to critical scrutiny. (p. 21)

Since then, this type of thinking has also been applied to practices not just policy.

Bacchi, C. (2012). Introducing the 'What's the Problem Represented to be?' approach. *Engaging with Carol Bacchi: Strategic interventions and exchanges*, 21-24.

Why does this matter?

It matters as it might help to explain why things seem to stay the same and/or we get new forms/versions of old problems arising.

If we begin with a particular view of inclusivity (**and we all do**) + what it means + why we are interested in it + why it matters

then

this will shape how we see what the problem is + how it might be addressed + and how and who gets to be heard and who is not + what can and can not be done + whose agendas are being served.

Why does this matter (con.)

Recognising this helps challenge taken-for-granted simplistic solutions that superficially might seem to address the problem – e.g. better communication or better involvement in decision making (for inclusive workplaces) – **these may or may not address the problem – depends what the problem is and if it really is the problem**

For example the problem of “how to be more inclusive”

What is sitting in the words “more” + “inclusive” and therefore “more inclusive”.

For example is inclusive enabling people to join in what is (staus quo).
Or is it more than that?

Is the problem that inclusive has been subverted to other agendas (being seen to be inclusive, targets, metrics, awards)?

If we reduce inclusivity to targets/metrics (this becomes a given and the starting point) and best practices are developed in measuring those metrics and thereby solving the problem of being an inclusive workplace!

Example from the real – why being included was not enough

What is the example?

Struggling with what the inclusivity related problem in an underserved community really was (taken from Cheek and Costa (in press 2024)).

Consider the following dialogue that occurred between 2 scholars about the report of a study about the inclusion of people from that underserved community to give feedback about a health-related scale and tool the researchers and their managers wanted to use in a study.

Avoiding being stuck in the grooves of the given.

- It is in the experimental moment of not knowing what to do next that we might push through the grooves of the given and the self-evident toward the new and different in our work and lives. (St Pierre 2015 p.92).
- This includes the initial premises on to which inclusivity is attached. For “what one proposes to do about something reveals what one thinks is problematic (needs to change) (Bacchi 2009, p. 263, 2012).

Where to from here? Ways of working against stable conservatism.

- Some other starting points:
 1. Suspend your judgements.
 2. Expose and explore your assumptions about what a problem is represented to be.
 3. Think about how what you know and what that knowing is based on.
 4. Work from *within* categories of existing thought of often taken-for-granted understandings of for example inclusivity, effectiveness, participation, consultation in order to reveal their internal contradictions and shortcomings, and demonstrate their unrecognised possibilities

Where to from here? Ways of working against stable conservatism.(con)

- Be aspirational: Look more at ourselves, and our ideas in order to create slippage and see such spillage as “a productive act, one that creates movement and vibrations with new possibilities for becoming differently” (Guyotte and Kuntz 2018 p 256). Could things be different, and if so how?
- Introduce a healthy uncertainty into our thinking. Accept that *not* knowing what to do next is OK and can enable us to “push through the grooves of the given and the self-evident toward the new and different in our work and lives”(St Pierre 2015)
- Ask yourself how can I use not knowing in new and different ways rather cutting and pasting ideas and issues (and all the assumptions within those ideas and issues) for what needs to be done to set things “right” (another cut and paste).

Where to from here? Ways of working against stable conservatism.(con)

- Explore how can we do this while enmeshed in speeded up work and research where productivity and quality are conflated? An era of the quick fix with maximum return for minimum effort and where, to quote Honore’s (2005) insightful observation made decades ago, “slowing down to reflect, analyse or consult can seem indulgent or weak, especially in moments of crisis (2013 2005)”
- Replace survival with hope in our thinking – put the focus on what might be not only on navigating what is.

And of course:



Take the MOL course. A course that espouses all the ideas I have talked about and with which I am very proud to be associated. Here ´s to the next 20 years!

