Red/Blue Rules – An introduction

Why would I use this tool?

Often we notice barriers to effective delivery of services. These can be presented as "unchangeable", with work arounds put in place, or new innovations stifled. The red rules blue rules tool helps you to look at these systematically and be able to logically challenge and remove or adapt those rules which are creating the barriers.

The tool helps you to:

1. Understand the impact of governance around current ways of working
2. Understand limits and opportunities for change
3. Understand actions and energy required to effect change

The 'Red and Blue Rules Tool' is a way of approaching change differently. It aims to help identify how to understand the rules which underpin our way of working. It breaks our approaches, models, and practice into two broad categories:

Red Rules: Fixed constraints (eg laws, safety regulations)

We are all familiar with red lines, a limit beyond which we cannot go, often articulated as 'This is my red line'. In health and care, people, teams and systems all have red lines that limit the change which is possible. It is useful, therefore, to think about these as red rules, rules we cannot change, such as laws.

Blue Rules: Flexible practices (eg habits, routines)

What we do as health and care professionals often emerges out of routine and habit, rather than from policy or rules. We call these self-imposed rules, blue rules, rules that are simply how we currently do things, i.e. custom and practice.

How it shapes our thinking:

Once we start to break down why we do things the way we do, we can understand our system differently. Understanding what a red rule (fixed) and a blue rule (fluid) is means

we can judge what can and can't be changed. This way of understanding our system gives us the insight required to make effective change.

How to Use the Tool

1. Bring together a workshop of people impacted by ineffective delivery

1. Facilitate the group to think about where they experience frustrations and unnceccarry or partilarly problematic barriers.

2. If helpful, you can then map out processes where there are the greatest frustrations

3. Label each barrier as a Red Rule or Blue Rule.

4. Map these on the Red/Blue spectrum (see Fig. 1).

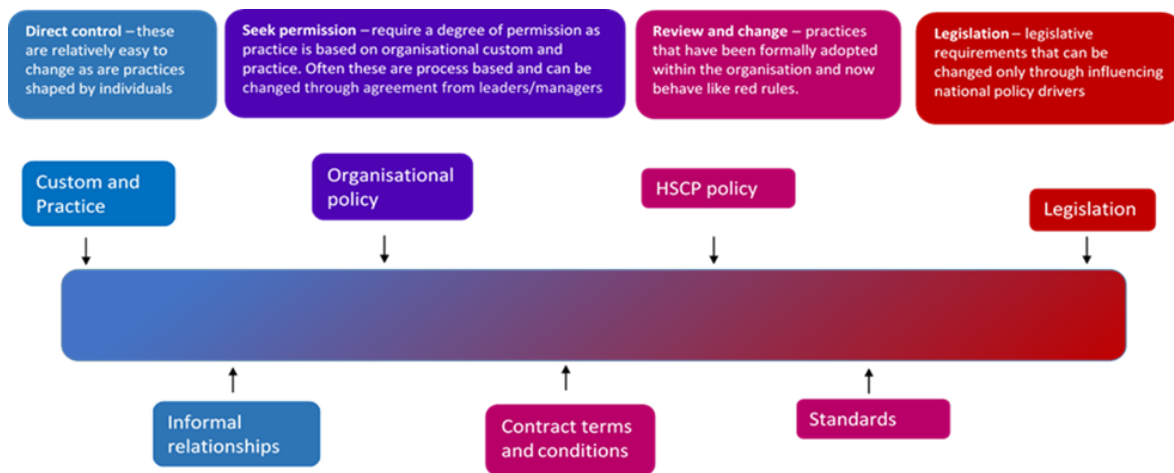5. Use the map to identify where change is possible and where more effort is needed.

This tool is most effective when a group of staff involved in change comes together and reviews the 'rules' of their current system. This means looking at why a way of working has emerged, or where a change idea has not become business as usual.

Participants are asked to review current practices, processes or systems they want to change by understanding what factors are keeping them locked into current ways of working. Assigning a red or a blue label to different tasks, processes, etc.

This approach helps participants to visualise what is and isn't changeable for people, teams and systems, which they believe would work better. Participants then map what are the enabling and disabling rules wherever along the spectrum they best fit. This creates insights for where to focus our change energies to be most effective.

What You'll Gain

- Clarity on which barriers are changeable.

- Insight into where leadership action is needed.

- Strategies for reframing change ideas when red rules apply.

Direct control – these are relatively easy to change as are practices shaped by individuals

Seek permission – require a degree of permission as practice is based on organisational custom and practice. Often these are process based and can be changed through agreement from leaders/managers

Review and change – practices that have been formally adopted within the organisation and now behave like red rules.

Legislation – legislative requirements that can be changed only through influencing national policy drivers

Custom and Practice

Organisational policy

HSCP policy

Legislation

Informal relationships

Contract terms and conditions

Standards

(fig 1)

What is the output from using this tool?

Using this spectrum (Fig. 1) helps people to understand better the 'rules' of their current and preferred practice and their ability to implement change.

- Where barriers to change sit more towards the blue end, they have a greater ability to effect change.
- Where barriers are more towards the red side, change is still possible but requires greater evidence gathering and energy to make the change happen – legislation can be changed but requires a lot of evidence and energy.

The tool can:

1) Help staff realise that often barriers to change are in fact towards the blue end of the spectrum and therefore have a greater chance of implementation. In other words, it shows where barriers are less embedded and where change activity will emerge from changing the mindset of 'we have always done it that way'. *(eg often things such as referral requirements fall into this category)*

2) Show where actions of leaders and managers are required to unblock change. When barriers sit in areas such as policy and practice guides, these can be changed where it is clear that this will result in improvements within practice and the operation of the local system. *(eg This can often be seen in aspects such as thresholds for assistance or flexibility around spend – on what, rather than how much)*

3) Where change really is limited or prohibited by red rules, inform the limits to change that can be made – it may be that some part of the desired change can be implemented, but not all. Or it can help to reframe the change idea and

identify a different way to achieve the same or similar outcome. *(eg this can be things such as safety or governance requirements, so the reframing helps to identify other ways to achieve the same level of assurance)*