

Positive Stories: An Exploratory Analysis of the Implementation of Positive Behaviour Support in the Western Australian Disability Sector

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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Acknowledgements

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1. Background to Positive Behaviour Support

Positive Behaviour Support (PBS) is a scientific, evidence-based and best practice approach to systemic change for supporting people with disability through improving their quality of life. It builds on and integrates many previous initiatives in the disability field. PBS is particularly effective in dealing with complex, “challenging” or “concerning” behaviours. PBS adopts a person-centred lens in meeting people’s needs through systemic change, mindset shifts and the collaboration of stakeholders. In addressing complex behaviours, PBS challenges the assumption that the person with disability needs to change and opens up new opportunities for services to respond in innovative ways. PBS proposes that designing flexible and supportive environments and quality services will result in: i) improved opportunities and outcomes, ii) reduced incidents of behaviour that challenge and, consequently, iii) reduced reliance on restrictive practices. There is much evidence in the disability literature that supports PBS as an effective approach to addressing complex needs and improving the quality of life of people when effectively implemented.

2. Research Purpose

The purpose of this research project was to explore the conditions that support and/or impede the service level implementation of PBS in Western Australian disability sector organisations (DSOs). Service outcomes rather than service user outcomes were the focus of the study. As PBS is essentially about transformation change, special attention was paid to how service culture and operational practices co-influence each other to create real change in how service users are supported.

3. Research Approach

The research explored the implementation of PBS by disability sector organisations (DSOs) and the organisational and service level capacities that impact on the implementation process. Eighteen DSOs (14 metropolitan and 4 regional) volunteered to be involved in the project. This participation is an indication of the sector interest in PBS and, more generally, the desire to look at new approaches to improving the lives of people with disability who sometimes experience challenging behaviour. Two research approaches were employed to investigate PBS implementation. One was a detailed qualitative study using extensive interview material with staff from various levels of the 18 DSOs including staff from CEO/executive level, behaviour support consultants and direct service provision staff. The other was a configurational analysis of DSO performance using the interview data and the Quality Management Framework reports. The two approaches resulted in complementary findings that confirmed the importance of top-down aspects of culture change such as leadership commitment

and resourcing (such as training) and bottom-up aspects of culture change such as stakeholder engagement, supportive work environments and the routinisation of innovative practices. The key findings are summarised in sections 4, 5 and 6 below.

4. Successful Implementation of PBS

Figure 1 identifies the key factors found across both the qualitative and comparative studies involved in the successful implementation of PBS.

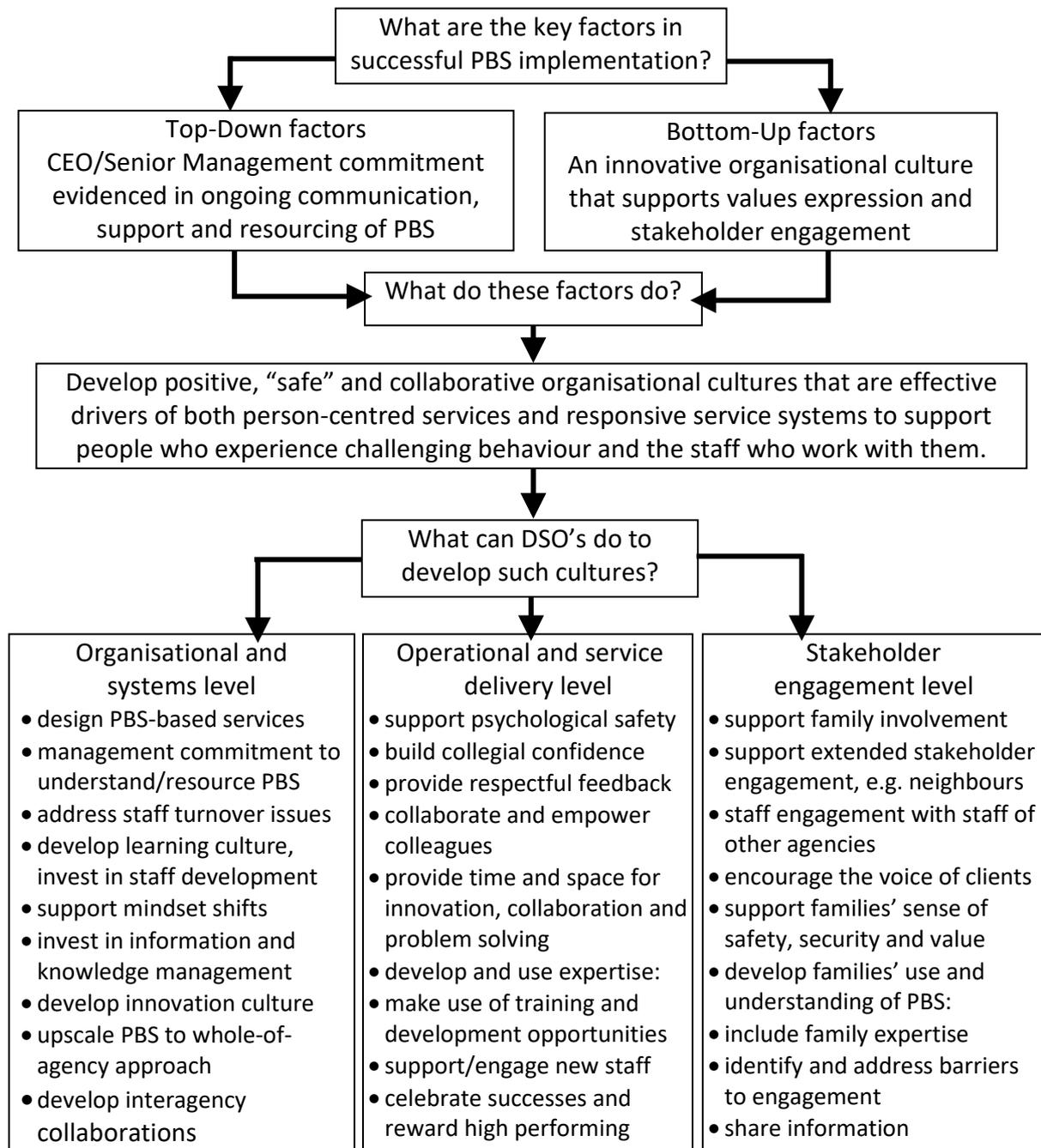


Figure 5: Key organisational factors involved in successful PBS implementation

These factors, which can be generalised into top-down factors and bottom-up factors, combine to support the development of positive, safe and creative organisational cultures that drive values-based approaches to service design and delivery. The building of these cultures depends on a multilevel approach to organisational change which includes management levels, operational levels, and the inclusion of other stakeholders.

5. Enablers of PBS implementation

A number of enablers for systemic change that supports PBS implementation were identified and these include:

Applying PBS across the whole organisation

The main purpose of PBS is to improve quality of life and it has been most frequently applied in addressing challenging behaviours. Its application is intended to assist a whole-of-system shift in values, capacities and behaviours and therefore it is best implemented across all organisational units. Some DSOs considered PBS fitted well with its core values and ethical commitments and viewed it as a support for long-term planning and general goal setting across all services resulting in broad application. Other DSOs viewed PBS as a project under trial for a specific period and/or relevant to only certain groups of services resulting in piecemeal and sporadic application of PBS practices.

Focusing on organisational, group and individual level change

While all participant DSOs had made strong efforts and gained progress in implementing some core elements of PBS, these efforts tended to focus on the individual level of eliminating restrictive practices rather than a consideration of the opportunities afforded by PBS as a universal approach to human well-being and quality of life. Much PBS activity by DSOs has focused on strategies targeting individuals who display behaviours of concern. Whilst the benefit of this can be found in the use of individualised support plans and reduction in restrictive practices for individual service users, opportunities for introducing systemic changes in areas such as service design and organisational culture change were overlooked. Neglecting the areas of systemic application of PBS will result in very partial implementation and compromise the potential for long-term benefits of PBS.

Supporting self-initiated change and internalising core values

Evidence was found that in work environments that rely on compliance rather than self-initiated change, there was a tendency to move from more obvious, visible restrictive practices to less obvious and visible psychosocial (power and control) restrictive practices. Organisational cultures that support the internalisation of core values, such as those embodied in the PBS-based approach, were more likely to

generate values-based solutions that open opportunities and reduce reliance on both visible and invisible restrictive practices for dealing with challenging behaviours.

Supporting the understanding and application of PBS principles

Supporting a well-developed understanding and application of PBS principles aids collaboration and innovation among staff and other stakeholders. We found that successful innovations to reduce restrictive practices and improve opportunities were frequently associated with more comprehensive understandings of the various aspects of PBS. For example, staff who understood the central importance of considering situational factors in PBS were able to shift from individual service user attributions of cause to develop innovative solutions to complex behavioural issues that took account of contextual factors.

Supporting innovation and psychological safety

Strong evidence was found that, when supportive and inclusive work climates are in place, innovative practices and solutions to complex issues are voiced and acted on. Inclusive and supportive workplace practices include such things as staff involvement in decision making, opportunity for exercising choice, developing innovative solutions to removing restrictive practices and introducing system-level changes that include other stakeholders. PBS requires innovative collaboration for its successful implementation and this, in turn, raises the issues of psychological safety which was a recurring theme among staff. Where there was a culture of openness and support, staff felt confidence in speaking out and suggesting new ideas. Where staff who did not feel confident in speaking up because, for example, of perceived lack of supervisor support, or they felt unsafe to do so, their responses to challenging behaviours reinforced a sense of isolation, lack of trust and a reliance on traditional status quo practices in dealing with challenging behaviours.

Staff development and a culture of learning

Staff training and development opportunities are an important element in the building up the learning capacities of an organisation. Providing the time, space and resources for staff to attend training sessions and be actively involved in developing training programs and materials is vital for successful implementation of new initiatives like PBS. This includes opportunities for both formal and informal or “on the job” training. Training should also support the bottom-up development of learning cultures through, for example, i) creating spaces for discussing and evaluating new ideas; ii) providing support for team-based learning experiments to adopt and routinise new values-based initiatives; and iii) senior management attendance at training sessions and their expressed commitment for core organisational values, purposes and service quality expectations and how these relate to the values and practices inherent in PBS-based approaches to service design and delivery.

Challenges and opportunities for senior management.

Figure 2 below presents the PBS implementation cycle for senior management. The “opportunity cycle” (right hand cycle) shows the PBS change journey as a multidimensional process of transformation in culture that impacts on all organisational departments, services and operations. The “status quo” cycle (left hand cycle) shows PBS as a useful technique and time-limited project for managing individual service users’ behaviours of concern. How PBS is perceived and resourced will have direct implications for the degree of fidelity in its implementation.

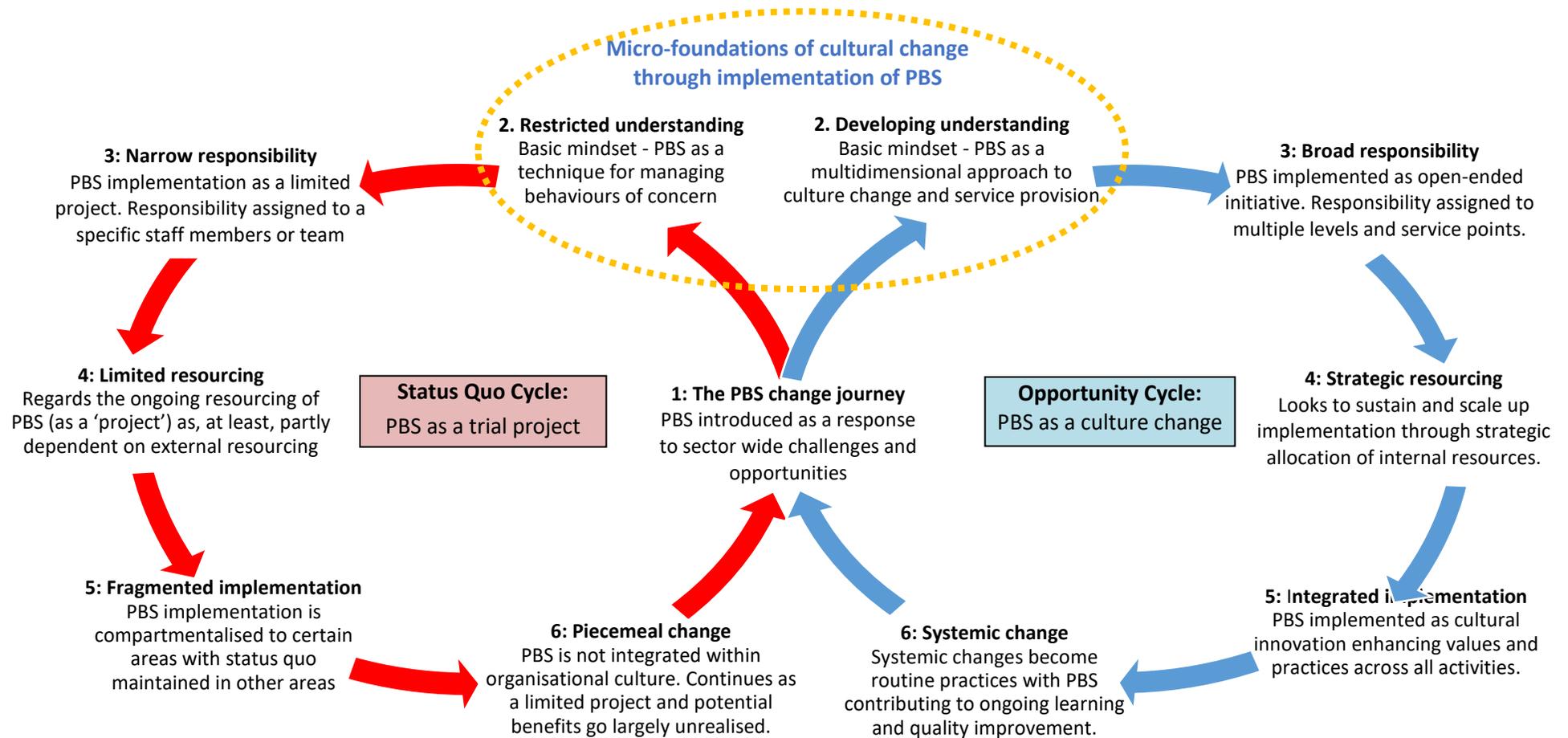


Figure 2: PBS Implementation cycle: Challenges and opportunities for senior management

Challenges and opportunities for operational staff:

Figure 3 presents the PBS implementation cycle for operational staff. When behaviours of concern are encountered services responses will depend on the prevailing service culture practices. The “opportunity cycle” (the right hand cycle) presents a culture that develops when the mindset is one of PBS as a values-based culture change program. The “status quo” cycle (the left hand cycle) presents a prevailing culture where PBS is a technique for reactively managing individual level behaviours of concern.

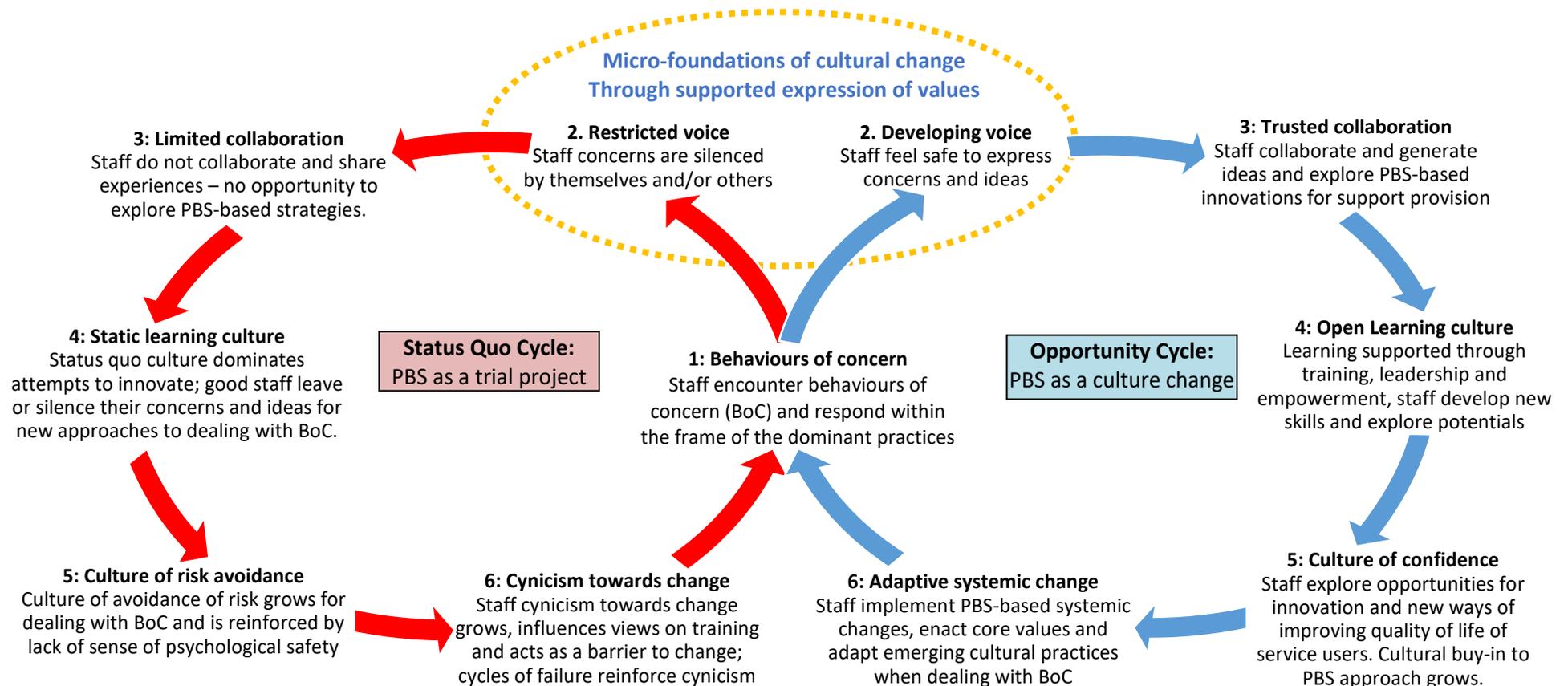


Figure 3: PBS Implementation cycle: Challenges and opportunities for operational staff

Challenges and opportunities for families, carers and other stakeholders:

Figure 4 presents the PBS implementation cycle for families and carers. When behaviours of concern occur and families require support services and these will respond from a prevailing service culture perspective. The “opportunity cycle” (the right hand cycle) presents a culture that supports engagement with families and other stakeholders and family members feel safe to express concerns and ideas for new options. The “status quo” cycle (the left hand cycle) presents a prevailing culture where families are not fully included and where PBS is seen as a temporary technique for managing individuals and their behaviours.

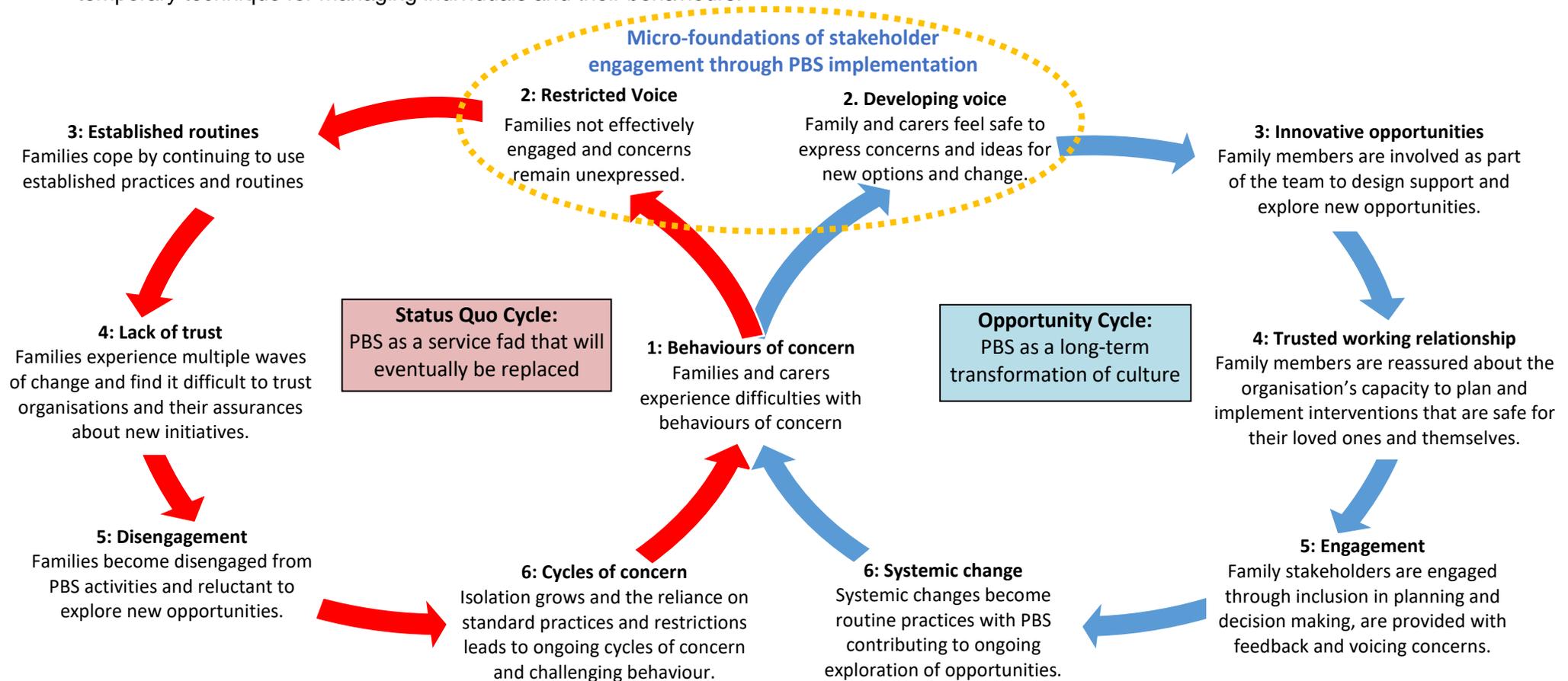


Figure 4: PBS Implementation cycle: Challenges and opportunities for family and carer stakeholders

6. PBS implementation Cycles

It is a well-known finding in organisational change research that change initiatives often fail. In this study we identified a number of basic steps in PBS implementation pathways that either support or hinder the change process. These pathways, or “implementation cycles”, are applied to three different stakeholders - CEOs/senior executives, staff members and family members/carers (See figures 2, 3, and 4). These cycles provide clear and practical explanations for the ways that different factors such as core values, PBS knowledge, organisational culture, information use, innovation, psychological safety and stakeholder engagement interact to support or hinder PBS implementation. When implementation is successful the cycles show how organisational factors interact to change cultures and practices and so result in new opportunities for services users and the elimination of restrictive practices. Alternatively, when implementation is not successful the cycles show what barriers come into play and how they interact to hinder the implementation of the PBS initiative.

Conclusion

The successful implementation of PBS in a disability service organisation is dependent on two key factors. These are: i) top-down senior leadership commitment to set the direction for, and enactment of, organisational and service goals and the subsequent allocation of resources and ii) the bottom-up creation and maintenance of service cultures that support innovative solutions to complex issues and engagement with key stakeholders. As the implementation cycle figures indicate above, PBS implementation and culture change are interdependent and iterative processes. From the PBS side, there are a number of key factors that are required for PBS to be a driver of cultural change in DSOs. These include: i) an understanding that PBS is primarily a values-based approach for universal intervention to improve people’s quality of life, ii) the capacity of services to innovate when faced with opportunities and challenges, and iii) the long-term perspective on developing person-centred and values-based service cultures.

This research has found that DSOs are achieving good results in implementing PBS at the individual level where the person-centred focus of PBS is most clearly seen in such activities as developing personal plans and supporting individuals who display challenging behaviours. However, the targeted and universal levels of PBS implementation have not received as much attention and the beneficial outcomes these more systemic applications aim for are not likely to emerge without that investment. The whole-of-system organisational application of PBS will be an important and ongoing task for DSOs into the future and further evaluations would be needed to examine how DSOs perform in this regard.