

# What is participation?

*“The idea of citizen participation is a little like eating spinach: no one is against it in principle because it is good for you.”*

*- Sherry R. Arnstein*

Putting citizens and communities at the heart of decision making involves valuing their role in them. Participation is about combining our mutual strengths and capacities so that we can work with one another on an equal basis to achieve positive change.”

A way of working whereby decision-makers and citizens, or service providers and users, work together to create a decision or a service which works for them all. The approach is value-driven and built on the principle that those who are affected by a service are best placed to help design it.

# What are the pros and cons

PROS	CONS
<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Gain a better understanding of needs and aspirations.</li><li>2. Diverse perspectives empower decision-making.</li><li>3. Community engagement increases transparency.</li><li>4. Create a greater sense of community ownership.</li><li>5. You are building a team with shared goals within communities.</li></ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Takes more time and means you have to slow down.</li><li>2. You don't get to make all the decisions or have the power.</li><li>3. May need to recruit or partners to ensure you have skills to help facilitate.</li><li>4. You will need to tackle unconscious or conscious bias.</li><li>5. Our ties, titles and egos will need to be put aside.</li></ol>

# Levels of participation



# What level is appropriate?



The questions here are:

1. What is the goal?
2. How much power will citizen's have or share?
3. Have we involved people from the start?
4. Do we intend to pass over control to citizen's?

# Six principles of good participation

## **Strengths:**

Everybody has strengths and weaknesses.

Everyone has skills, knowledge, experience and other qualities to offer.

Everyone is needed to produce solutions that work.

## **Power:**

It is difficult for either citizens or professionals to challenge how things are done.

All types of power must be shared.

Leadership, support and resources must come from everyone involved.

Unequal power needs to be recognised and addressed.

## **Relationships:**

Good relationships are crucial for working together.

Positive relationships require time, respect and trust.

Everyone needs to feel safe, valued and wanted.

The process must feel fair, open and honest to everyone.

Lessons found by Unlimited Potential in Greater Manchester [Elephants co-production project](#)

# Six principles of good participation

## **Diversity**

Diversity of people is important for high quality thinking.

The process of working together and the language must make sense to everyone involved. Inequalities must be identified and talked about. These might link to age, class, disability, education, race, religion, sex or sexual orientation.

## **Knowledge**

There are different ways of 'knowing things' and all of them are valuable.

First-hand experience is as valuable as professional or academic knowledge.

Knowledge of what does or does not work in the real world must be recognised and valued.

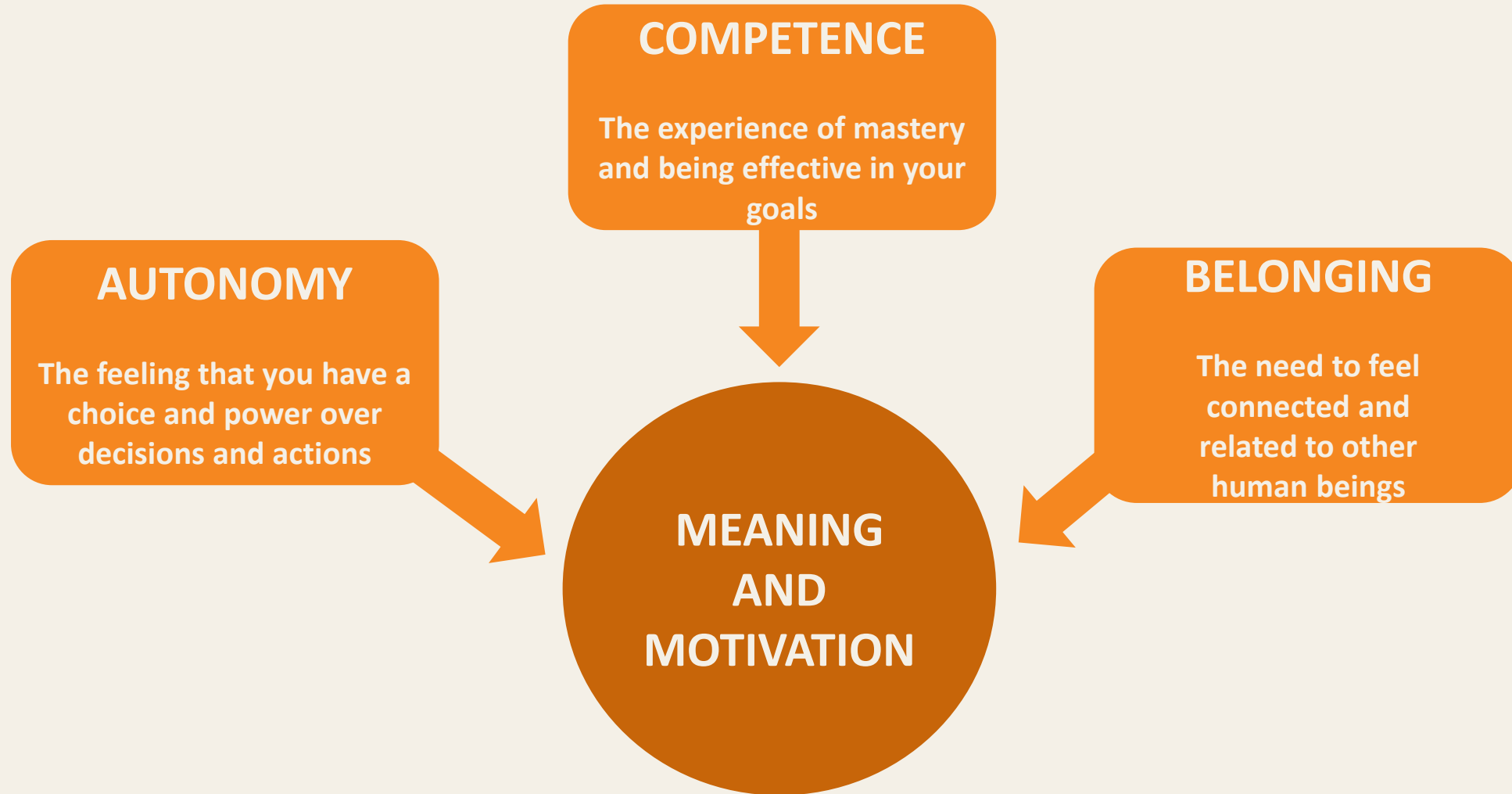
## **Testing**

Finding ways to reduce disadvantage is difficult and complicated.

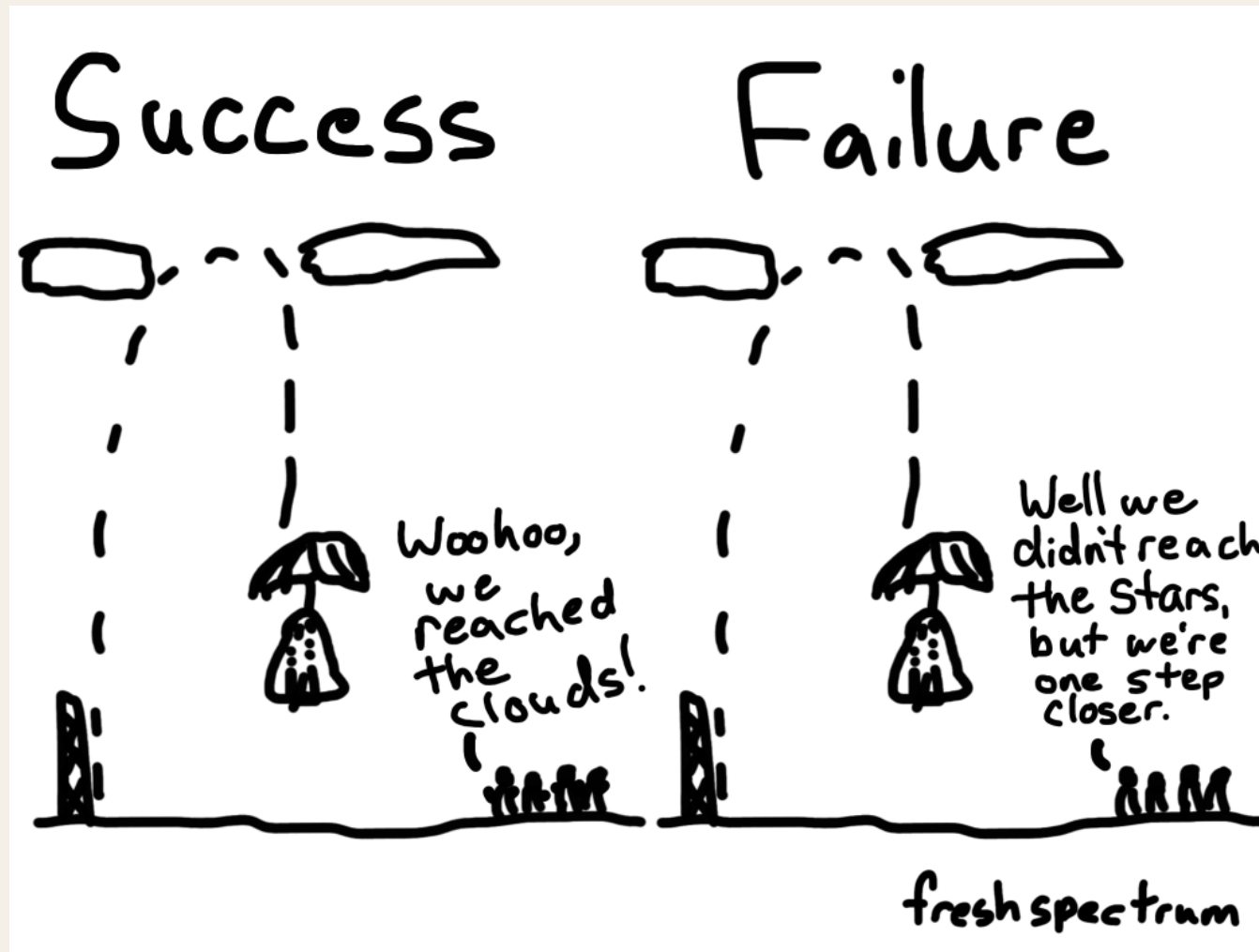
It is important to test new ideas early on and continue to test them.

There is no failure. If things don't work out as expected, make time to learn from this and change what you do.

# What motivates participation?

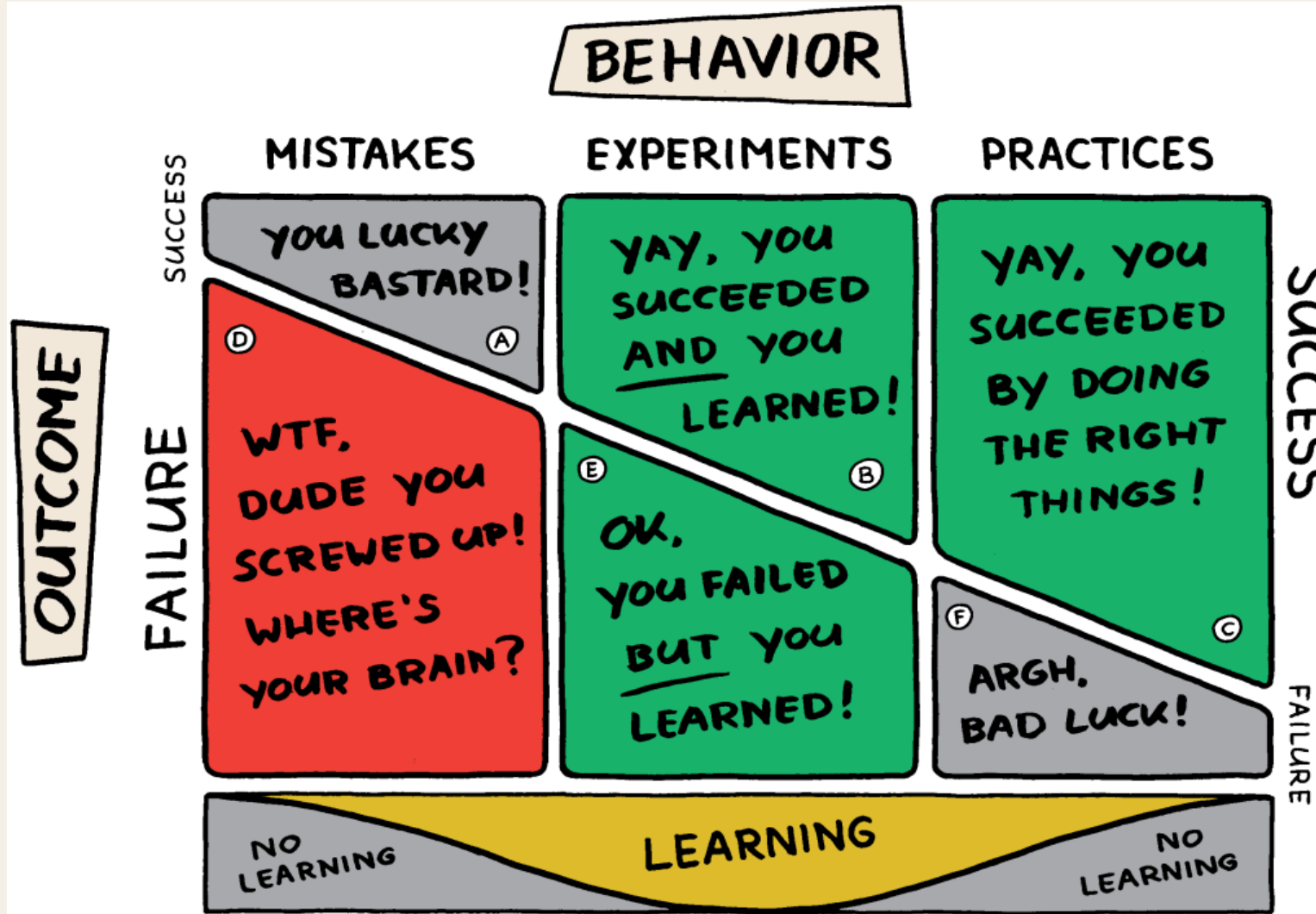


# What will make us good at it?





# Progress not perfect



Celebration Grid

# Participation is the thing

- Agency
- Ownership
- Community
- Belonging



# Participatory Project Management

## Contexts

- Within our organisations – staff, volunteers
- With partners and networks
- With communities and those we serve

## Principles

Cycles of Reflection, adaptation,  
Building in genuine choices and agency – coming from a place  
of curiosity, authentic enquiry and willingness to act

Q: A fixed state or is there a time and a place?

# Participatory Budgeting

## What?

“Local People deciding how to allocate part of a public budget.” It is a way for citizens to have a direct say in how public funds are used to address local needs.

## Why?

More equitable public spending, greater transparency and accountability, increased public participation

## Who?

Everyone! BUT...especially those left out of traditional methods of public engagement, such as people on low-income, people without formal citizenship, and young people

UK example - PB in Scotland

*How can we use in our work?*

# Participatory Grantmaking – Lani Evans

## What?

Participatory grantmaking cedes decision making power about funding—including the strategy and criteria behind those decisions—to the very communities that funders aim to serve'

## Why?

Nothing about us without us - empowers the people who benefit from the funding.

Shifts the power.

## Who?

Mainly grantmakers, trusts and foundations.

BUT – some FLF members have made grants with their grants!

\*Credit to Hannah Paterson's Grassroots Grantmaking report (to follow)

# Using PGM

## Types of PGM

- Open Collective Model
- Representative Participation Models
- Open Collective Model
- Direct Transfers
- Community Board Models
- Crowdfunding

## Opportunities and challenges for us in using PGM

- Open and transparent, attractive to some funders, walking the talk re involvement and handing over control
- Cost, length of time, administration – all can be opps or challenges depending on the model and the system you currently use

# When in doubt, just remember...

## Within Your Own Practice

- There is already good practice out there, you aren't the first to do this. Don't feel like you're on your own figuring this stuff out; talk to people.
- Don't let perfect be the enemy of done but strive to make your work as good at decentralising power and decisions as it can possibly be.
- Surround yourself with people who can challenge and support you. If you only talk to people who say yes, or that you are doing a good enough job then talk to some different people.
- You will need to trust others and build trust in yourself – you don't automatically have this just because you've got the cheque book. It's important to recognise what you are asking for people. Are you taking their time, wisdom, energy, are you taking them away from their work or family to do something for you? They do not owe you that. Be aware what people are giving up to ultimately help you. What can you do to make this possible - for example how can you provide payment, training, child care etc?
- Feedback is the breakfast of champions – seek it, welcome it, and act on it.
- Surround yourself with critical friends who can support you to do more and be better, who can remind you why you are doing this when you get bogged down in the bureaucracy.
- Get comfortable with conflict. It's not a bad thing, differences in opinion and challenge can strengthen the solutions.
- Have a strong facilitator – train people up or bring in an expert. The Facilitator's Guide to Participatory Decision-making by Lenny Lind and Sam Kaner might help.

Credit again to Hannah Paterson 😊

**Important:** Tension/balance between

- Don't let perfect be the enemy of good – just take some small steps

VS

- The need to take care of people – this is people's lives, not an organisational experiment