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## **Some Reasons Why Spending More Does Not Inexorably Improve Service Quality And Sustainability**

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We exist at a time in our culture's history where we have invested striking amounts of money into human service systems in all aspects of our lives from early education through to old age. These systems have resulted in the creation of multitudes of specific human services, as well as a wide range of bureaucracies, both public and private, to manage them. In many bureaucratic cultures, money is often posed as being something akin to the essential lifeblood of these human services and systems and the guarantor of service quality and sustainability.

This conviction arises from a distinct view that money is the active and fundamental enabling agent of good human service outcomes, at least in comparison to other possible drivers. It is not normally the case that this claim is actually embedded in empiricism, as this conviction owes more to ideology than to demonstrable studies that uphold this conclusion. This overstating of the role of money becomes more obvious when the issue is examined more closely, particularly in relation to the role of suitably-talented people in guiding how money is spent.

It might well be that if money were spent in a different way, then some benefits could be expected. However, if what is being provided is inherently flawed, then investing more money into what is already inadequate will simply make that shortcoming a more expensive one. Money – even in abundant supply – can neither overcome flawed practice nor guarantee good sound practice. Good practice, rather than simply spending more money, is a crucial and active ingredient in helping people to obtain better lives.

In addition money rarely motivates people to do the right thing. The suggestion that people will become more virtuous, if they are induced to do so with the offer of additional money, is inconsistent with what can be routinely seen in everyday instances in both life and formal human services. The commitment to seeking out and doing the right thing towards others arises not from payment, but rather from the values and ethics of the individual and the organisations involved. If this were not so, then any individual's motivations and commitments could simply be purchased. Conceivably, the higher the price offered, the more virtuous the candidate.

Increasing money payments to people does not equate with acquiring good character, because good character cannot be bought. Clearly, many people would be deeply offended at the suggestion that the only reason they do the right thing is that someone is paying them to do it. Similarly, paying someone more will not invariably result in a proportionate increase in virtuous conduct. In fact, many people will point out how corrupting money can be for those people whose values and ethics are already weak. Equally, many of the most motivated and accomplished of individuals and organisations have achieved their excellence using what are essentially normative budgets. In fact, impressive quality on a sustained basis may be present in any number of comparatively poorly-funded but otherwise effective human services.

The capacities of people play a fundamental role in improving service quality and ensuring long-term beneficial outcomes for people who use human services. If people lack crucial and needed capacities, adding more people, or paying people more money, will not overcome this deficit; simply spending more money on people, who cannot perform, is simply a way to squander money rather than to gain a benefit. The hoped-for results can only come from suitably-equipped people, so relying on people who are not achieving results will predictably disappoint.

Money does not solve problems; people do. If people cannot do this effectively on behalf of the people they support, then no amount of money will change this. Thus, the emphasis should be on equipping people to do better and to make money available in support of this. By offering options to positively develop the capacities of people, the quality and sustainability of their efforts will most certainly be strengthened.

It is a fundamental axiom that the crucial question is whether one is spending money on the right things, not whether one is simply spending money. The way money is spent is only as good as the wisdom of those who authorise its use. If the spender is incompetent, cannot distinguish quality and value and is easily seduced by quick fixes and sham, then the old phrase that 'a fool and his money shall soon be parted' is quite apt. On the other hand, if the spender is wise in terms of seeing what people really need in their lives and is proficient in obtaining these, then one might have more realistic expectations of beneficial outcomes. It all revolves around the care and attention that is given to defining what are 'the right things'. Money alone cannot do this. However, money in the hands of judicious and competent people can bear fruit. It is important to see that this distinction is a profound one.

There are times when money may actually complicate rather than advance matters. Adding money indiscriminately to a given situation may bring various kinds of unhelpful pressures and distractions as opposed to somehow being a benign influence. For instance, additional funding money has to be managed. When money and its speedy management get people's best energies, then it is quite possible that attention could be drawn away from the valid centrality on the people who are being served. In this regard, money ought not to be thought of as always being beneficial, because the spending of money may mean pressures for a rush to action and decision. It may also give rise to many other agendas that could serve to compete with a 'people-first' agenda.

Money, therefore, has to be viewed simply as a resource rather than a panacea. Money is an inanimate resource and has no vitality or moral meaning in its own right. These elements are only brought into force through the qualities of the people that mobilise the available money. If these qualities are lacking, then money in itself cannot overcome this shortcoming. To imbue money with powers that rightfully belong to people is to render it an implausible panacea. However, in the hands of the right people money can be a great force for good.