

# When Recognition Is Severed by Hierarchy

## A project history note on lived experience, participation, and the re-narrowing of a human horizon

There is a particular kind of widening that happens when a person is met at the level of the work itself.

Not managed.

Not tolerated.

Not politely encouraged.

Met.

For someone who has gone a long time without that kind of recognition, this is not a minor event. It can change the whole field of possibility. Energy returns. Language sharpens. The work begins to organise itself more quickly. What had been private, compressed, or uncertain begins to move into public form.

That kind of recognition matters.

It is not merely emotional.

It is developmental.

It can widen a human horizon.

But recognition that arrives through a system carries a risk. The human encounter may be real, but the route to that encounter may still be governed by hierarchy, management, process, institutional caution, and organisational self-protection.

This creates a serious ethical problem.

A person may be met in good faith by another person. Their work may be recognised. Their thinking may influence the atmosphere, method, or sequence of a project. Their contribution may be treated as live enough that grounds are acknowledged, respected, and withdrawal is presented as a meaningful option.

Then, when the person begins to hold the project to account on the ethical implications of that recognition, the route may narrow.

Contact becomes less clear.

Process becomes more guarded.

The language of confusion appears.

Management steps forward.

The original recognition becomes harder to access.

The person is left carrying the cost of what was opened.

That is not a small matter.

It is not simply disappointment.

It is not simply personal rejection.

It is a live example of what can happen when vulnerable participation is invited into a project that is not fully prepared for the ethical demands created by genuine recognition.

This does not require bad intent.

That must be said clearly.

Someone may act in good faith and still become part of a sequence that harms. A worker may recognise something real and still be unable to protect the route through which that recognition occurred. A project lead may respond respectfully and still be located inside a structure that later narrows the matter. A manager may believe they are protecting process while actually protecting hierarchy from accountability.

The question, then, is not only whether individuals meant well.

The deeper question is whether the structure was capable of carrying what good faith opened.

If it was not, then the structure has revealed its limit.

This matters because lived experience is not raw material.

It arrives through people.

When a project invites vulnerable people into participation, it is not merely gathering insight. It is entering relation with lives that may already have been shaped by systems, hierarchy, exclusion, misrecognition, and fragile routes into trust.

To invite that participation is to accept responsibility for what the invitation may open.

A project cannot safely welcome lived experience only while it remains useful, warm, moving, or methodologically convenient. Once authorship, influence, contact routes, consent, withdrawal, and ethical ground become real issues, the project must be able to remain accountable without retreating into managerial protection.

Otherwise the old sequence returns.

The person is invited in.

They offer something real.

The work affects the room.

The project benefits from what has been opened.

Then, when the person asks for the sequence to be named honestly, the route narrows.

That is quiet extraction.

Not necessarily malicious extraction.

Not necessarily planned extraction.

But extraction all the same, if the useful movement is received while the origin, authorship, or ethical ground becomes inconvenient.

This is especially serious when the person involved has already lived through forms of narrowing. A genuine encounter may widen the horizon for the first time in years. It may restore some trust that the world can still contain recognition, mutual understanding, and meaningful public movement.

If that route is then severed through hierarchy, the damage does not simply return the person to neutral.

It can re-narrow the horizon.

The person may become more wary of future contact.

More wary of projects claiming ethical seriousness.

More wary of participation.

More wary of systems that speak of fairness while protecting themselves under pressure.

More wary even of the next genuine human encounter.

That wariness is not paranoia.

It is learned from sequence.

The person was met.

The work moved.

The ethical ground became serious.

Challenge appeared.

Hierarchy entered.

The route narrowed.

The person was left to absorb the consequence.

This is why the matter belongs inside the architecture of the work.

It shows, in live form, why The Narrowed Human Horizon exists.

It shows how widening can occur through recognition, and how re-narrowing can occur when that recognition is not protected by the structure around it.

It also shows why ethical participation cannot be reduced to consent forms, warm conversations, reflective language, or stated commitments to change. Those things matter, but they are not enough.

The real test comes when participation becomes demanding.

When the service user is no longer only providing material, but questioning the ethics of the container.

When authorship matters.

When influence has to be named.

When contact routes have to be honoured.

When withdrawal has meaning.

When accountability is requested from below rather than managed from above.

That is where an ethical project either begins to prove itself, or begins to prove why the work it encountered was needed in the first place.

The point is not that no good happened.

Some good did happen.

Recognition happened.

The work accelerated.

A public project became clearer.

A first physical recogniser helped change the conditions under which the work could move.  
Important material reached public discussion far more quickly than it otherwise might have done.

That should not be denied.

But the later narrowing must not be denied either.

Both are part of the history.

The good faith recognition matters.

The hierarchical narrowing matters.

The work that emerged from both matters.

This is why the event cannot be treated as a private emotional episode.

It is project history.

It records a real sequence: the widening created by recognition, the vulnerability created by that widening, and the re-narrowing that can occur when hierarchy fails to protect what recognition has opened.

For the project, this is not a side issue.

It is evidence.

Evidence that lived experience must be handled with more care than many participatory structures currently understand.

Evidence that ethical language is not enough without ethical sequence.

Evidence that projects inviting vulnerable people into participation must be prepared not only to receive their stories, but to be held accountable by them.

And evidence that the human horizon can be widened by recognition, but narrowed again when recognition is severed by hierarchy.

That is the note.

Not a personal rant.

Not an accusation of universal bad faith.

Not a claim that nothing good happened.

Something more serious:

a record of what happened when a live human horizon opened through recognition, and then met the protective reflex of hierarchy.

The work continues from there.

But it continues with clearer knowledge now.

Recognition can widen.

Hierarchy can sever.

And any project that invites vulnerable participation must understand the difference before it claims to be practising ethical change.

