Thoughts on fatigue based conditions, deadlines and timelines.

Many projects start with a deadline and a Gantt chart. When we need to do things, we work backwards from when it needs to be done, break up the work into sections and work out how long each section will take. However, for people with fluctuating conditions it can be difficult to foresee how long something can take. The work of creating the Gantt chart, just to redo it several weeks later and readjust all the timeframes can be overwhelming. Add to this the emotional stress of knowing you have to do something by a date, but have no way of knowing whether that is physically possible, then feeling that you have let people down, and on top of the usual work, there is now the rescheduling to be done..... and deadlines, and timelines become a tricky subject for some disabled people.

We tend to create time boxes, and then try to fit our bodies and processes into them. But what can we do when a body simply refuses to fit into a time box? How can we fit these time boxes around the bodies, in order to do as little damage as possible?

I have tried various ideas around dealing with deadlines, and have some more which I have not tried yet but am curious about.

Firstly, if the deadline is a meeting, for example, we could schedule 3 meetings, each 3 days apart. If I am not well enough to attend the first, I may recover in time for the second or third. This approach also takes the pressure and stress off the disabled person, from feeling that they might let someone down. It also safeguards a few free hours for the non disabled participant, which can be a welcome breath in today's world full of busyness.

Another approach is to decide whether you really need a 'deadline' for this project. If the outcome is to be a concert or event, maybe you can schedule that later on, once more of the work is done? Instead of thinking *where do we need to be by next month* we can talk about *where did we get to, and what might be possible going forwards?* In this way we can reflect on what was possible, reflect on whether, actually that was too much, or perhaps too little, for the person doing it, and, vitally *not set any goals* but discuss a few options for what might be possible.

This is going to be difficult for many non disabled people, as the mantra of goal setting and checking against them in a timely fashion is so embedded in our working lives. But we don't have to do it, we can have *aspirations*, we can have *eventual goals* and we can say *if that doesn't happen we can make it something else*. Those things are a fine way to work, and taking the pressure away from goals and focusing on the health and wellbeing of the process can allow us to see new approaches and perspectives as we make things.

(Of course this depends on the individual, some people really need a goal in order to get motivated. It might not work for them, and you would have to negotiate a different practice.)

One way of thinking about this in a group setting, is to work out a comparative timeframe. So for example, one of my months, might be the same as one of your weeks. That's OK, that means you can work on the project for 5 days a month, and I will be full time. Or maybe each of my years, I actually need 15 months to keep up with the deadlines. Adding in a 3 month flex to each year can allow a worker to maintain fair and safe progression without being told they are *behind schedule*. Berating someone for needing to take the time their body takes is not going to make anything happen faster, apart from that person's mental health falling apart.

We can also talk about increasing or decreasing someone's contribution flexibly. SO that if they are unable to work on the project that week, it's not a problem for them to do less, to write less, to take a smaller role. The project flexes and stretches to accommodate what people can give you.

For deadlines like funding bids, we can try to oranise a team to get it over the line, so I might do all the work leading up to it but on the actual day having a few other people ready to log in just in case can be ideal. Then it becomes a team effort and not all resting on whether a disabled person can cope on the deadline day.

For gigs I generally try to manage my health around the things I can't move... so that I can do them. I also have various different patches on my laptop so that I can get it to a more 'default' gig if my brain or body crashes... some versions of the gig are more coplex and demanding than others, so I can choose how much to push myself.

One thing I built into the opera *We Ask These Questions of Everybody* was that each person could give as much or as little as they wanted to on any given day, so there was a lot of improvisation, or alternative parts so people could drop down (or drop out completely) and the work would still happen. We built in some extra layers electronically so if a person needed a flexi day we could just add in something else instead. If we think of performance as something which is diffferent every night according to the performer's need then this becomes more acceptable, rather than a "get out" if someone "fails" to deliver.

These are just a few thoughts about how we might approach time, planning and deadlines when it comes to the work of (some) disabled people who have fluctuating and unpredictable conditions.

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