Seven Shifts in Person Centered Work
Exploring Innovation in Individualized Supports
Workshop Handouts

Imagine
A World that Works for Everyone
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Seven Shifts in Person-Centered Work Overview

As one of the originators of Person-Centered Planning, I have had the privilege over the past forty years of introducing person-centered values and tools to a wide variety of people, organizations, and communities throughout the world. I have had the opportunity to journey with thousands of people, their families, support staff, and the organizations that support them in virtually every type of service setting. Additionally, through all forty years, I have been personally involved with about ten different young people each and every year transitioning from high school or a traditional segregated setting to a more inclusive life in a local community. My connection with these young people helps me understand what matters most as everyone shifts focus away from incapacity and disability to the ability and capacity in people to cultivate the assets in their neighborhoods and create greater access to individualized supports and flexibility in the use of funds.

As a result of person-centered planning, I have witnessed dramatic transformative change in the lives of so very many people. Without exception, every change has been linked directly to organizational innovation and civic engagement. Old mindsets become open minds, authoritarian divisions become generative partnerships, and real membership in the community is the result. All the partners on the journey—passionate parents, extended family members, noble service allies, relentless leaders and administrators, generous community members, and resourceful direct support professionals—care and act and create social spaces and supports that work better for everyone involved.

Unfortunately, the jargon of person-centered planning has become pervasive and its meaning watered down. Now huge gaps yawn between the words we use and the actions we (don’t!) take. I have observed so-called person-centered planning efforts that make little impact. No organizational change. No supports for people to have valued roles in their communities. Worst of all, raised expectations dashed by the lack of care, concern, and capacity to support the journey. The urgent need now is to support real innovation in our work and to commit to the challenges of changing from system-centered to person-centered work.

This I know for sure: If we intend person-centered planning to work for people and their families and all partners, then we will invest in learning that advances social innovation. We won’t just change the way we talk and think about our work. Both as individuals and as organizations, we will study and learn how to direct our attention away from system-centered practices and toward the spaces needed for person-centered work.

John O’Brien and I have explored many transformational stories in the book Pathfinders: People with Developmental Disabilities and Their Allies Building Communities That Work Better for Everybody (2015). We use the Five Valued Experiences Star
to clarify our understanding of inclusion. The personal stories and organizations that best embody person-centered work use the star to clarify ideals, re-direct attention, and shape organizational culture. The Seven Shifts of Person-Centered Work describe frameworks that strengthen the conditions for deep change. Attention to these shifts increases the likelihood that people with disabilities and their allies live lives of meaning and purpose in their communities.

Another distinction: To assess the impact of our work, we focus on “working on” innovation instead of just “working in” the system to improve it. Working on innovation, we reveal, test, and reshape standard rules and practices to better implement the ideals which all of us are really striving for. Efforts to transform a large system toward a person-centered culture fall flat without innovations within the system that enable us to build belonging into local neighborhoods. The transformation happens in the lives of people and organizations as we “work on” that system through local communities and build new partnerships.

The challenge of “working on” the system to generate more individualized supports keeps us focused on co-creating more opportunities for people with disabilities to:

- be in control of the individualized supports they need to live a life they value.
- belong and contribute to community life.
- live in typical housing with people they choose.
- hold individual, paid jobs in community businesses.

These are the challenges put forth in The Home and Community Based Services (HCBS) 2014 Final Rule (the 2014 CMS Rule). Therefore, as our collective will grows to implement the spirit of this rule, so also does our need to turn toward social innovation. This is the path that redirects attention from system-centered habits to person-centered work.

The Seven Shifts pathways build on the seven core processes of a social change model called “Theory U.” As described by Otto Scharmer, Theory U offers a clear, relational approach to social innovation that provides guidance for realizing the five valued experiences through individualized supports.

Not only does Theory U provide a model for collective activism, it also reminds us that outward success depends on inward and personal coherence. As we move through the seven shifts for creating opportunities, we also strengthen and harvest inner wisdom. Scharmer summarizes the inner vitality of humans in terms of the open mind, the open heart, and the open will. Open mind is the capacity to suspend habits of judgment, to see with fresh eyes. Open heart is the capacity to empathize and to look at a situation through another’s eyes. Open will is the capacity to let go of the old and let come the new.
The Seven Shifts remind us that the most effective individualized supports are crafted when:
• small groups of passionate people work hard to:
  • discover the capacities in people,
  • cultivate relationships in the community,
  • imagine what more is possible,
  • crystalize new ideas and support arrangements,
  • increase flexibility in service dollars, and
  • deepen and expand commitment to social innovation.
Critical to innovation is the commitment of organizational leaders to create and protect the time, attention, and relationship building of change agents who activate the change we need.

The Seven Shifts of Person-Centered Work

1. Make Space for the New: From command and control to co-creation
Stop downloading: Commit to co-initiate

2. Discover Capacities: From deficiencies to capacities
See with fresh eyes: Redirect

3. Cultivate Community: From ariel scans to community co-creation
Sense from the field: Let go

4. Activate Possibility: From absencing to presencing
Connect to source: Let come

5. Crystalize Valued Social Roles: From bonding toward bridging
Crystalize vision and intention: Enact

6. Prototype Social Innovation: From system centered to citizen centered
Prototype by linking head, heart, and hand; embody

7. Expand Valued Experiences: From isolation to inclusion
Perform by operating from the whole


For an in-depth discussion of “working on” vs “working in” the system, see John O’Brien: “Person-Centered Planning and the Quest for System Change,” Chapter 4, In 21st Century Issues for Individuals with Severe Disabili- ties: Ensuring Quality Services and Supports in Challenging Times, Martin Agran, Fredda Brown, Carolyn Hughes, Carol Quirk and Diane Ryndak, eds. 2013.


Seven Shifts in Person-Centered Work

1. Make space for the new
2. Discover Capacities
3. Cultivate Community
4. Activate Possibility
5. Crystallize Valued Social Roles
6. Prototype Social Innovation
7. Expand Valued Experiences

Creating Opportunities

Inner Work
- Open mind: suspend old habits of judgment
- Open heart: see with the eyes of the heart
- Open will: let go of the old and let come the new

Command + control → Co-creation
Inclusion → Isolation
Deficiencies → Capacities
Person-centered → System-centered
Aerial scan → Community co-creation
Bridging → Bonding
Absencing → Presencing

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The Five Valued Experiences of Inclusion

This graphic star symbolizes the aspiration of inclusion that guides our scan for best practices in person centered work. Each opportunity to make the valued experiences real leads to deeper questions and further exploration. Organizations and networks that commit to innovation create spaces in which all citizens have better life chances. The organizations that best embody person centered work use some variation of this star to define ideals and consequently shape organizational culture.

Belonging… in a diverse variety of relationships and memberships.

Being Respected… as whole persons whose history, capacities and futures are worthy of attention and whose gifts engage them in valued social roles.

Sharing Ordinary Places… and activities with other citizens, neighbors, classmates, and co-workers.

Contributing… by discovering, developing, and giving their gifts and investing their capacities and energy in pursuits that make a positive difference to other people.

Choosing…. what they want in everyday situations in ways that reflect their highest purpose.

This material, The Valued Experiences and Accomplishments Fold Out Poster by John O’Brien, is available from Inclusion Press: http://www.inclusion.com/cdroms.html