
If Person-Centred Planning did not Exist, Valuing People Would Require Its Invention

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Person-centred planning is one important tool in making the culture change necessary to realize the Government's promise in *Valuing People*. Some potential dangers in large scale implementation are identified, a logic for local action is described, the criteria for effective person-centred planning are defined in terms of supporting personal choice, the contribution of person-centred planning to organiza-

tional culture change is identified, the possibility of failure to implement policy change is acknowledged, and the potential benefits of person-centred planning under conditions of policy failure is described.

Keywords: changing organizational culture, implementing *Valuing People*, person-centred planning

Introduction

In their critique of the potential contribution of person-centred planning to the improvement of services in the UK, Mansell & Beadle-Brown (2003) provide a sobering account of current reality, raise an incisive question about the assumption that changes in individual planning methods will lead to changes in service practice, and recommend policy reforms that, they believe, would provide necessary conditions for real change in the lives of people with intellectual disabilities. They remind us that those who take the values of rights, independence, choice and inclusion seriously will have to positively engage a substantial number of people whose current services have not yet found effective ways to support their communication and their social interaction, to decrease their challenging behaviour, to engage them in their daily routines or to overcome their social isolation. In light of the evidence that previous forms of individual planning have had limited impact, they caution anyone who thinks that modifying the way planning is done will straightforwardly improve the quality of service or even much affect staff practice apart from the production of paper-work. They call for a human rights-based entitlement to effective treatment, an assessment-based entitlement to adequate social security funding to pay for needed services, greater and expanded use of direct payments, and performance measures that test outcomes for people rather than characteristics of plans.

Mansell & Beadle-Brown identify two shadows that grow longer as enthusiasm for person-centred planning

increases. I share their concerns. Firstly, the call for circles of support to take an active role in people's lives could mask the social costs of insufficient public expenditure on services for people with intellectual disabilities who currently live with their families, especially the costs to women in families who do the work of care. No one should decrease their political efforts to assure entitlement to sufficient funds. Secondly, production of person-centred plans could become an activity trap, displacing attention and funds from the hard work of assuring that people receive day-to-day competent assistance and from the demanding work of realizing opportunities for inclusion (Lyle O'Brien *et al.* 1997).

I see four things differently from Mansell & Beadle-Brown. I believe: (i) the White Paper does not make simplistic assumptions about person-centred planning; (ii) the values embraced by the White Paper entail the questions raised by person-centred planning; (iii) person-centred planning is one medium for the culture change the White Paper demands; and (iv) people and their allies can use person-centred planning to make improvements even in the absence of positive policies and sufficient resources.

Valuing People does not make simplistic assumptions about the effects of person-centred planning

Far from assuming that changing individual planning procedures will change people's lives, ignoring resource

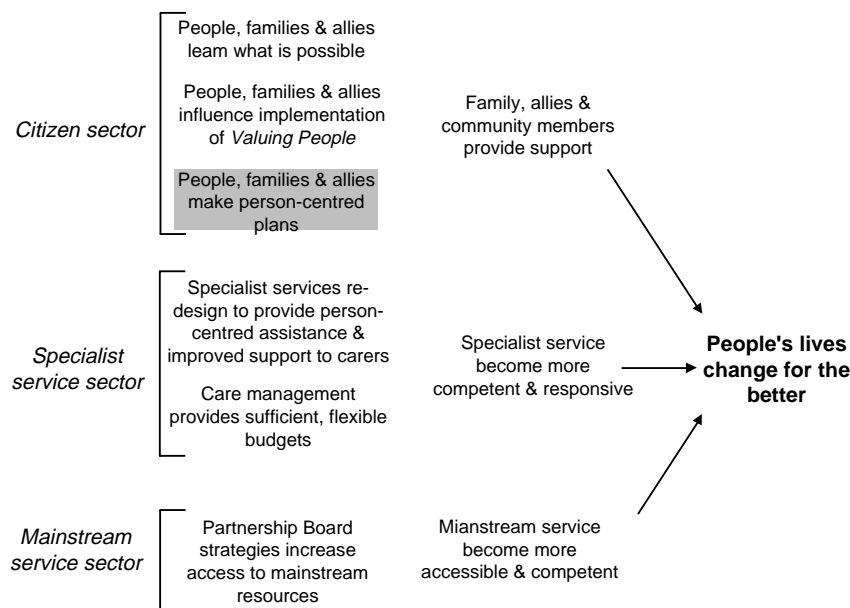


Figure 1 A simplified logic for local action implied in *Valuing People*. In this figure, ‘people’ refers to people with intellectual disabilities or people with learning disabilities in the usage of *Valuing People*.

constraints or failing to address the need to improve services, *Valuing People* defines a context for person-centred planning that is comprehensive, systemic and challenging to current local and national practices. Figure 1 sketches a simplified logic for local action that I derive from the White Paper. This sketch is incomplete in many important details, for instance it omits specific reference to advocacy initiatives and workforce strategies; however, it makes the point that person-centred planning is only one aspect of a multipronged strategy to change the role of specialist and mainstream services. In my reading, *Valuing People* suggests that better lives for people with intellectual disabilities will result from melding the resources from three sectors: the mainstream service sector, which has historically excluded people with intellectual disabilities and cooperated in their congregation in specialized services; the specialist service sector, which has not before *Valuing People* had the explicit mandate to discover and respond to individual choice, promote independence, champion citizenship rights, and assure inclusion; and the citizen sector, which includes not only the support that family members offer but also what other citizens do – as when supervisors and coworkers routinely assist a fellow employee with intellectual disabilities to be successful at work (Mank *et al.* 2000), a contribution that does not require time-travel to a cozy village but does demand skilful performance from supported employment specialists.

Under this logic, the overall adequacy of specialist service budgets is undecidable until access to mainstream services is established, although the number of people living with ageing carers offers one good reason to think substantially greater investment is necessary. Moreover, until a significant number of individuals act to test the accessibility and competence of local mainstream services, and effective feedback from their experience has had time to improve those mainstream services, the White Paper’s assumption that use of mainstream services and benefits will adequately make up a significant amount of the shortfall in specialist budgets cannot be judged. Finally, the balance of costs to carers is difficult to determine until a locality learns how to implement to White Paper’s logic for a reasonable number of people. Parenthetically, if I were responsible for investing scarce research talent, I would put highest priority on studying people’s use of mainstream services and their effects on people’s and carers’ quality of life, high priority on studying the way specialist services redesign themselves and their influence on people’s and carers’ quality of life, and a much lower priority on looking for evidence about the effectiveness of person-centred planning. If mainstream and specialist services reform to include people in community life and respond to their choices, person-centred planning will be at far less risk of becoming an activity trap.

The values promulgated by *Valuing People* entail some form of person-centred planning

By putting choice squarely at its centre, *Valuing People* demands a disciplined and systematic approach to consulting people about the way they want to live and the way they want to be assisted. As the White Paper does not entitle people to the resources necessary to live and be assisted as they want on demand, people with intellectual disabilities will have as much choice as possible only if they and their allies develop ways to negotiate for a fair share of available mainstream and specialist resources, and think and act creatively to deal with scarcities and to implement meaningful steps towards their goals.

Defined in terms of its results, an effective person-centred planning process achieves five things. Firstly, the process aligns the person and the person's allies around a common understanding of what is desirable for the person now and in the future. Secondly, participants clearly specify informed choices about how the person wants to live and how the person wants to be supported as a valued community member. Thirdly, participants generate creative solutions to overcome at least some of the constraints and barriers to accomplishing what is desirable. Fourthly, participants define locally relevant strategies to negotiate for required mainstream and specialist resources. Fifthly, participants learn by making occasions to update and revise their shared understanding.

It is possible to fail to achieve these results. Failures may reflect inability to adequately assist a person's participation or communication, or inability to overcome such profound isolation that no one –family or staff or citizen– feels care and has developed personal knowledge that warrants at least a tentative statement of what is desirable for this unique person. Failures may arise from unwillingness or inability to seek knowledge about what is possible for a person or lack of skill in doing what is possible. Failures may reflect intractable conflicts or delay or defeat in negotiation for required resources. Failures may result from sloppiness in implementing and updating plans.

Done well, person-centred planning is no stranger to failure. Rather, it creates a container that allows people to face inability, uncertainty, defeat, disappointment and break downs in follow-through in a way that allows discovery of the next steps towards a desirable future.

Only one source of failure is culpable: placing people outside the possibility that others can have, or can come to

have, sufficient care for them and knowledge of them to join them in defining and working towards what would be desirable for them. It would be deeply unfortunate if anyone read the data on people's difficulties in communication or people's social isolation adduced by Mansell & Beadle-Brown to define the daunting scope of the task of implementing person-centred planning as if it excused putting anyone beyond the possibility of caring relationship or meaningful life on the grounds of presumed inability to reciprocate. This reading would be false to the lifetime project of Mansell and colleagues, who have created significant improvements in the lives of many people whom others have been too ready to abandon because of severe challenging behaviour or profound intellectual disability.

Person-centred planning is one medium for creating positive change

If the values of rights, independence, choice and inclusion are to guide practice, people must discuss them and figure out how to frame opportunities worth seeking and problems worth solving in their terms. A restricted view of people's impairments can lead to the assumption that no change is required because a person has as much choice or inclusion or independence as is possible. Under these complacent circumstances, person-centred planning is a waste of time. It becomes a medium for service change only when staff and managers use what they learn through participation in person-centred planning to make the link between their current practice and their guiding principles problematic.

The widespread awareness training called for in *Planning with People* (Department of Health 2002), and the inclusion of people with intellectual disabilities and family members as both participants and teachers in training sessions create occasions for growing numbers of people to encounter the White Paper's values in the context of individual action. As the *Accessible Guide* to the Department of Health's Guidance on person-centred planning puts it, the defining ideas of person-centred planning are three: 'listening to and learning from what people want from their lives; helping people to think about what they want now and in the future; and family and friends working together with the person to make this happen (p. 3). This understanding of person-centred planning will generate dissonance in many of the settings investigated by the researchers cited by Mansell & Beadle-Brown. Principle begins to guide action when people exercise the discipline to hold and investigate the dissonance. 'She cannot comprehend choice; it's nonsense to talk about

listening to what she wants from her life', becomes questionable in the face of the White Paper's claim that choice meaningfully applies to everyone. Then, people who care about her can choose to ask, 'How might we assist her to understand options and how can we increase our confidence that we are receiving her signals accurately?' This may lead to the creation of new roles, such as that of the Communication Ally (Shevin 2002). Of course, person-centred planning meetings are only sites for building commitment and inventing and updating strategies to assist the person to exercise choice day by day. Meetings only matter when they serve positive changes in the circumstances of daily life.

Choice might be significantly increased within the confines of existing specialist service boundaries. However, in its call for non-discrimination and inclusion, *Valuing People* sets an even higher standard by calling on people with intellectual disabilities and their allies and specialist assistants to establish new patterns of participation in community life and mainstream. Thus, person-centred planning focuses attention on what needs to happen within specialist services and in mainstream services to assist people to cross boundaries into community life. If Mansell & Beadle-Brown's reading of research on the modest level of many people's engagement in daily routines within specialist settings makes them skeptical of people's chances for inclusion in community life, their quarrel seems to be more with the White Paper's values than with person-centred planning.

Valuing People's four principles generate potential contradictions that people need to talk about and explore in action in order to find their way. Consider the relationship between the objective of significantly increasing the number of people with intellectual disabilities in open employment and the value of choice. To respect both the value of inclusion and the value of choice, people and their allies need opportunities to decide whether they want to join those who open new pathways into open employment. Not everyone wants to increase their uncertainties about success at work, about maintaining or easily restoring necessary benefits, and about finding employers ready to make required accommodations. Experience shows that given the opportunity to explore ways the local economy might satisfy individual job interests and to consider the trade-offs between the uncertainties and the benefits of open employment through skilful person-centred planning, the demand for competent employment support grows (O'Bryan 2002). If this demand is met by services that are able to collaborate effectively with people with intellectual disabilities and their employers and coworkers, their learning will influence the deliberations of

others and the numbers who decide to seek employment will grow at an increased rate.

Person-centred planning can lead to benefits even without successful large-scale change

Valuing people calls for significant change in the use of mainstream and specialist resources. Local Partnership Boards hold responsibility for implementing strategies that will give people with intellectual disabilities access to local mainstream resources that can effectively respond to them and re-orientate specialist services. These changes call for strong management over the years it will take to establish reliable new patterns of resource use. The effectiveness of person-centred planning will be considerably enriched by the success of strategies to make mainstream resources accessible and specialist services more responsive and competent, but no one who wants to look for ways to improve their life or the life of someone they care about need wait for these strategies to take effect.

Social psychologist Karl Weick (Weick 2000) considers the importance of emergent change: the results of repeated, shared and sustained experiments by individuals and small groups who learn by using whatever resources their environment makes available to improve their situation. Done well, person-centred planning meets Weick's specifications for creating emergent change: (i) it facilitates respectful interaction and trust; (ii) it provides direction by raising the question, 'What matters to this person, now and in the future?'; (iii) it animates people so that they try new things and increase their chances of discovering new opportunities and resources; and (iv) it creates opportunities for updating and encourages close attention to what is actually happening.

Even when those responsible for leading the implementation of *Valuing People* succeed in managing the large-scale changes that will materially improve the environment in which people with intellectual disabilities live and make plans, they and the people who care about them will continue to compose their lives according to the rhythms of emergent change.

Too much optimism?

Implementation of *Valuing People* could fail. Its bold and comprehensive programme of changes could prove too much for overstretched local mainstream and specialist services to manage. Its assumptions could prove wrong: mainstream services may turn out to be unable to learn how to treat people with substantial intellectual disabilities

as well as they treat any other citizen, or this level of response may prove inadequate to people's needs; specialist services may be unable to rise to the task of responding competently to more than a very narrow range of choices; citizens may be too preoccupied to establish relationships with people with disabilities; community life may be too thin to offer real opportunities. Time spent in person-centred planning could be wasted.

The possibility of failure, and the likelihood of great variation in the quality of what people with intellectual disabilities will experience because of *Valuing People*, makes the systematic observations and critical thinking of Mansell & Beadle-Brown very important. Their description of current reality should build commitment to far deeper change than can be achieved with new paperwork requirements. Continued questioning of results in everyday life should inform the process of change.

The probability of failure increases if cynicism or pessimism leads people to hold back either their commitment to action or their interest in reflecting on results. There is neither need nor justification to look at person-centred planning through rose-coloured glasses. There is good reason to look with clear eyes at the possibilities for a significantly greater measure of choice and inclusion and to make an energetic commitment to the hard work of making those possibilities real at whatever scale the local and national environment can support. Person-centred planning has a modest but important role to play in steering those changes, so it deserves both committed action and careful scrutiny.

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