

Becoming a Person Centered System

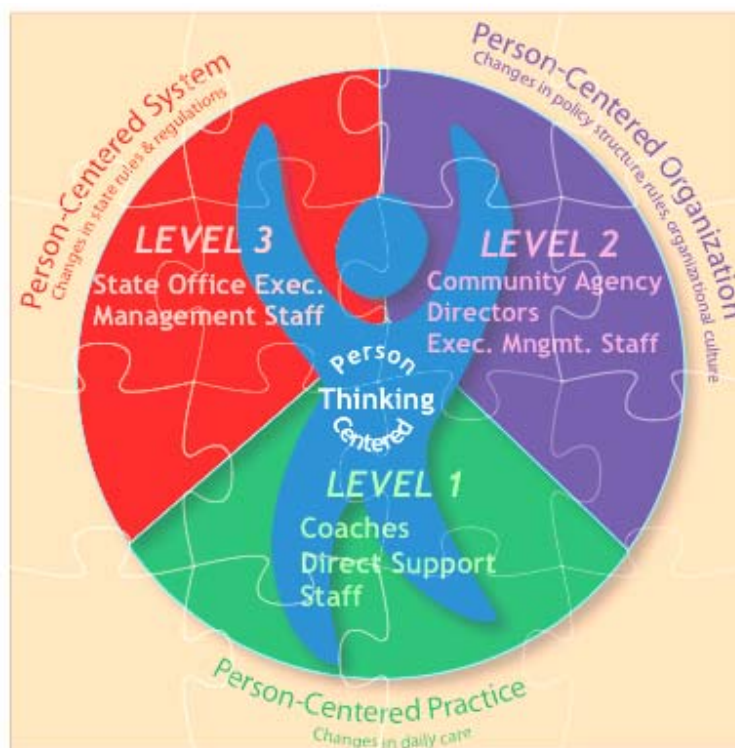
Michael W. Smull, Mary Lou Bourne, & Helen Sanderson

April 2009



This report is the first in a series on a system change collaborative with state developmental disability agencies in Georgia, North Carolina, Oregon, South Dakota, Tennessee, and Virginia.

The National Association of State Directors of Developmental Disabilities Services, Support Development Associates, and Virginia Commonwealth University respectively manage parts of the initiative.



The initiative is funded in part by the Real Choice Systems Change Person-Centered Planning Implementation Grant FY 2007 CFDA 93.779 Building Person-Centered Organizations: Fulfilling the Promise of Person-Centered Planning.

A Brief Overview

A variety of agencies in many different locations have engaged with us in a set of efforts that have evolved over time. At each location the goal has been consistent: to create person centered systems that support person directed services. The learning that has taken place from working toward that goal has changed the approach. What follows is a brief overview of the evolution of the approach and the key lessons learned. Because this is a brief overview, much is left out and will be described in subsequent publications. Some of the central ideas of the effort are:

- Changes in rules and practice should be driven by learning what is and is not working in supporting individuals.
- Using a small set of value-based skills at all levels of the system will drive change throughout the system.
- Using these skills in conjunction with selected quality management and organizational development tools will improve quality of life and increase organizational effectiveness and efficiency.

The Evolution of the Efforts

Training in person centered planning



Training in person centered thinking



Training + the development and support of coaches



Training and coaches + the sustained engagement of organizational leadership



Training, coaches, organizational leadership + sustained engagement of system leadership

Training in Person Centered Planning

For over two decades efforts have been made to make the plan document required by the state more person centered, with equal attention put towards developing skills in person centered planning techniques among those who write plans. While research clearly demonstrates that when good plans are implemented they make a significant difference in quality of life, experience suggests that typical plans fall short and implementation falls shorter.

- Plans (with a few notable exceptions) are seen as little more than annually required compliance documents. They are not seen as blueprints for future actions or a way to focus learning and deepen understanding about the person.
- Plans reflect the thinking that goes into them and the thinking often reflects a focus on issues of health and safety and enhancing functional capacity while excluding what makes the person happy or fulfilled.
- Where what is “important to” the person (happy, fulfilled, satisfied, comforted) is recognized, the description is static, changes little or not at all from year to year, and is rarely the focus of actions.
- The individuals who provide the day-to-day support do not see the plans as relevant or particularly helpful (with the potential exception of orienting new staff).
- Plans do not directly impact how managers lead or use their resources. They do not provide guidance for what is discussed in supervision or team meetings.
- Information from plans is not used at a strategic planning level to inform change.

Training in person centered plan writing, by itself, results in better paper, not better lives

The problems do not lie in the quality of the people in the system but in the system itself. There is no “value deficit” among those who write the plans nor in the inherent qualities of the persons who are expected to implement them. The gaps occur within the systems in which both work.

Training in Person Centered Thinking

Increasing the effectiveness of the training in person centered planning does not result in the desired effect. What is needed is not just a way for a small percentage of people working in the system to learn how to write plans, but rather a way for all who

Training
introduces skills
– it does not
result in the use
of the skills

work in the system to acquire the necessary skills and values, and engage in the behaviors needed for implementation. By deconstructing essential lifestyle planning combined with key problem solving and management tools, we designed a training around a relatively small set of skills that are needed to implement good plans. These skills can be taught in two-day trainings to large groups (classes of 40).

While this turned out to be an important piece of the solution, it was not the entire solution. Training, no matter how good, is the classic “rock in the pond.”

The rock, tossed in the pond makes waves. And the bigger the rock, the bigger the waves. But no matter how big the rock, the pond eventually goes still again. The people attending the training go back to settings with the same culture and the same demands. Under the typical pressures most of those who participate in the training quickly revert to the problem solving/coping behaviors that they used before the training regardless of how well or badly these behaviors work for them. They rarely have the influence or support necessary to question or change what is viewed as acceptable within their organization, unless the organization is quite small.



This is not to say that training should be ignored. Every paid person in the system should have person centered thinking skills training (and it should be routinely offered to those who use the services and their families). Systems should view this in the same way they view training in issues of health and safety such as First Aide or CPR.

Training + Coaches

The immediate goal is to have the person centered thinking skills used in everyday work. That is, to create person centered practices in all aspects of the work. The most effective way to meet this goal is to have designated people who are supported in-

- Demonstrating the use of the skills,
- Helping others learn the skills and practice them, and
- Reinforcing their use until they become habit.

In our efforts we have referred to these people as person centered thinking coaches¹. They are typically front line managers, service coordinators, and interested professionals. Coaches receive 1 day of additional training in how to coach. For coaches to be effective over time we have also found that they need ongoing support.

¹ We are using the term coach in the limited sense of someone who assists others in acquiring and using a set of skills. Coaches help those they coach take the skills from training to habit.

Coaches implement the skills but must have ongoing support

This has resulted in meetings with coaches every six to eight weeks where they share what they have learned and are supported in transferring their skills to habits. When coaches begin their work they find that there are immediate changes that they can make to improve the lives of the people receiving services and to improve the effectiveness of those who are paid to support them. These early successes create enthusiasm for the work and a willingness to continue to improve and apply the skills. The changes that they make are referred to as "level 1" changes - the changes that can be made without permission from senior management that don't require a change in organizational practices or structures. But without the support of senior management coaches run out of level 1 changes and see the need for changes in practices and structures that they cannot make. Without the support of senior management, coaches run out of the changes that they can make on their own. Seeing the need for change without anyone acting on it creates cynicism and damages trust.

Training and Coaches + Consistent Support from Leadership

In the course of applying person centered thinking skills, coaches learn what is working and not working in the organization. Senior management needs to hear what coaches have learned and then act on the learning. The learning must come to the leadership in structured ways so that the learning

- Is unfiltered, does not pass through several layers before coming to senior management.
- Presents both what is working and what is not working
- Is actively listened to - not just heard.
- Is analyzed using quality management tools.
- Results in actions that create more level 1 opportunities, which are used to increase the quality of life of the people who use the services.

The degree of engagement from leadership is the strongest predictor of success

Not surprisingly, the strongest predictor of success in this effort is the degree to which leadership engages in the effort.

Effective support from the organization's leadership requires that 100% of senior management participate in the two day person centered thinking training, actively participate in the discovery of what is working and not working in their organization, and share the responsibility for determining what success would look like in these efforts. Leadership defines the objectives that it wants to achieve from these efforts and how they will know if they are achieving them.

In every other month meetings, the organization's leaders listen to what coaches are doing and what they have learned. They listen for the level 1 changes that have been made and develop strategies to share that learning so that the same changes can be made across the organization. They look for what Kotter (Kotter, 1996) refers to as "short term wins" and celebrate them. They listen for the level 2 changes that are needed and develop action plans to make those changes. Level 2 changes are changes to organizational practices, policies, or structures that result in more opportunities to make level 1 changes. Finally they listen for the changes needed that are beyond their authority and that require actions from the larger system leadership.

During these meetings, and through additional training, leaders are supported in making person centered practices pervasive across the organization. Leaders begin to recognize that these same skills, used by front line employees to improve the interactions with people supported, can also be used by managers to improve interactions with their own employees. Through training in "positive and productive meetings" they learn how to save significant amounts of time and achieve better outcomes in their meetings. Support in applying the skills in day-to-day work results in person centered practices with their employees during supervision, performance evaluations, employee satisfaction efforts, and at the earliest point of hiring and orientation. Support in specific application of the skills used to support individuals, results in person centered teams. All of these increase the effectiveness of the teams while reducing turnover. Learning quality management tools such as satisfaction surveys, affinity diagrams, and process mapping reduce inefficiencies in practices.² These tools are methods for sorting through significant amounts of information in a visual way that helps the group to understand their current status. They involve people directly in the assessment of the current situation, and help to build partnership by acquiring a respect for the viewpoints of others. Over time all of this builds a healthy organizational culture, one characterized by accountability, partnership, and learning.

Training, Coaches, Organizational Leaders + System Leaders

Organizational leadership without system leadership has change limitations that are similar to those of coaches without organizational leaders. As organizational leaders listen to what is and is not working in the services and supports received by people, the need for change is identified. Organizational leaders find that while there are many changes that they can make, some of what is not working reflects the need for system change. Changes are needed in the system rules, practices, and structures.

² We have found that most organizations need to take a step back and look at how efficient and effective their core processes are. Using activities like "process mapping" we help the organization layout an effort such as how someone goes from being referred to receiving services in a way where you can see - who does what; in what sequence; how long each action takes; where decisions are made; and how would you measure effectiveness. This supports organizations in making changes that increase the effectiveness and efficiency of the process and in measuring the how well the changes work.

Experience has shown that the active and consistent participation of system managers creates a “learning journey” for the manager. By participating in the same discovery process along with organizational leaders and coaches, the system managers’ understanding of the nature of the changes needed deepens. As a result of their direct participation in the discovery, their sense of urgency increases, and the likelihood that the changes made will have unintended consequences decreases. The changes that are referred to as level 3 changes include changes in rules, practices, or structures that impact multiple organizations across the full system. Making these changes results in level 2 change that in turn creates more opportunities to increase quality of life for those who use the services - more level 1 changes.

Together we have learned that changes are also needed in relationships across organizations. What stands in the way of positive change is not only the rules but also the absence of partnerships. Most systems have an undercurrent of “us versus them” in their culture. Consistent participation in the change process of those who manage the service coordination efforts and the state system managers begins to bridge this gap in partnership. The message that “we all need to change” rather than “you need to change” is a powerful one. We must all see ourselves as change targets before we can become change agents. The representatives from all system partners need to be the same people across time, they must attend consistently. They must be actively engaged in listening, in discovering, in sharing, and in problem solving. This puts them on the same learning journey as the leadership of the organization and helps them to advocate for change based on the learning that arises from supporting individuals. It also gives them a vivid and personal way to see the consequences of decisions and the consequences that arise from lack of decisions (as well as the unintended consequences).

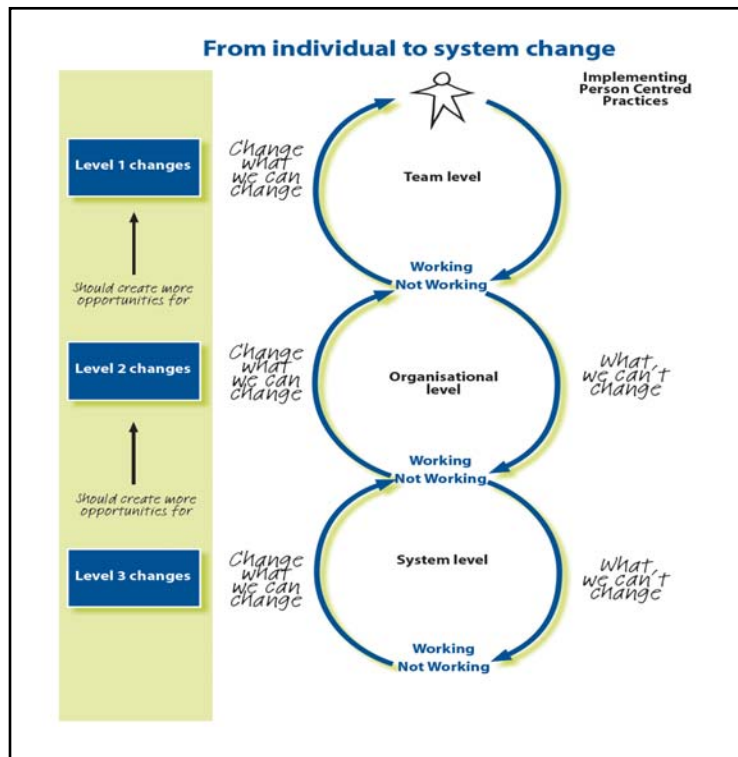
Another Way to Look at the Effort: Making change at all levels in the system by listening.

At its core, this effort reflects the belief that changes should be driven by the learning that occurs from supporting individuals. The effort is constructed so that *listening to the learning* happens in structured settings where the need for change and the effects of changes made are clear. The simplest way to look at the effort is represented in the diagram below. Those who work directly with the people who use the services are supported in applying the tools. They change what they can change. Those changes that improve the lives of the people who use services are referred to as level 1 changes.

The learning of those who apply the skills is collected, organized, and presented to a leadership group that includes both the organization’s senior managers and the system senior managers. The leadership group listens to what the coaches have learned and looks for those things that should be celebrated and shared and for those things that need to change. The changes made by leadership within their

organizations, which also create opportunities for more level 1 changes, are referred to as level 2 changes.

Level 3 changes occur when system leaders, through their active participation in leadership groups, act upon and resolve the issues, system-wide policies, rules, and/or structures that create obstacles and/or inefficiencies. Where the system managers can make changes that support person centered practices for multiple organizations, these changes are referred to as level 3 changes.



The Critical Role of System Managers

Any effort to have a person-centered system requires that the system leaders and managers actively engage in and apply the same person centered thinking and quality management skills in their work that the organization managers are applying. System leaders and managers must act not only on the issues raised in the leadership

The system manager who is a careful listener learns where the inefficiencies are in the system, where parts of the system are not working well together

meetings but also on the implications of the learning. System managers have to engage in a careful and ongoing review of how the pieces of the system work together. The skills used in supporting individuals, and in facilitating change within individual agencies need to be applied to the system issues as well. Person centered practices are as needed and effective within a state disability program agency as they are within a service provider.

The work that the disability program agency carries out must include building partnerships among all of the key managers of the system, especially between those that fund, regulate, inspect and develop policy. Without partnerships, the inefficiencies increase. Change efforts slowdown and often stop if those who monitor and review service quality are looking only at what is "important for" and not the balance between "important to" and "important for." If the required documentation does not support recording learning then

organizations doing the best work begin to keep two sets of documentation while they barely have time to do one well. The state disability program agency must create opportunities for its policy partners as well as its monitoring and oversight partners, to participate in the learning and see the benefits of this change.

In Summary

Representatives from all parts the system, and from all 3 levels (direct support, organizational leaders, and system leaders) must be consistently present and acting on what they hear. Coaches bring learning about the people who use services to “the table.” If the learning from coaches is not listened to and acted on by the organization, the coaches hit a “change wall” and become discouraged. Organizational leadership hears what the coaches are saying and looks for what needs to be -

- Celebrated
- Shared
- Changed

Having leaders from the full system consistently present over time provides a picture of what can and cannot be changed at the organizational level, builds partnership, and creates a sense of urgency for needed changes in policies, practices, and structures which, in turn, impact the ability of the full system to implement person centered practices.

A Cautionary Note

This is a brief over view of an evolving effort. Because it is brief it is incomplete. Much detail is omitted and the reader is encouraged to contact the authors if they have an urgent need to know more. For those with a less urgent need, more detail about the model will be developed and shared over the next year. This is also an evolving effort. Much has been learned but there continue to be areas where more learning is needed. We have learned a great deal about what is needed and what works for organizational change. We are still learning about what is needed and works for system change.