

# Roles Based Planning: A Thoughtful Approach to Social Inclusion and Empowerment

Scott Ramsey

EDITOR'S NOTE: *I encourage readers to look at this article, and the book review which follows (pp. 13-14), together. The article describes a new approach to 'person-centered planning;' the review is of a book written by the article's author on the same topic. Reading both pieces together will provide a more well-rounded, SRV-based introduction to this idea. We welcome your letters and related manuscripts on this article and its claims, and on the contemporary practice of individual planning in human services. For other background resources related to the article and the book review, see for example: Lemay, R. (2001). Good intentions and hard work are not enough. Review of: Levy, P. F., (2001). The Nut Island effect: When good teams go wrong. SRV/VRS: The International Social Role Valorization Journal/La revue internationale de la Valorisation des rôles sociaux, 4(1&2), 94-97; Wolfensberger, W. (1994). Let's hang up "quality of life" as a hopeless term. In D. Goode (Ed.), Quality of life for persons with disabilities: International perspectives and issues, Cambridge, MA: Brookline Books, 285-321; and Wolfensberger, W. (2003). The future of children with significant impairments: What parents fear and want, and what they and others may be able to do about it. Syracuse, NY: Training Institute for Human Service Planning, Leadership & Change Agency (Syracuse University).*

## Introduction

ROLES BASED PLANNING is a new, innovative approach to planning that marries the most beneficial components of person-centered planning to the critical thought base associated with Social Role Valorization (Wolfensberger, 1998) and to field best practices for improving social status, social inclusion and employment outcomes for marginalized populations. Since its inception in 2002, Roles Based Planning has led to some of the best employment and social inclusion outcomes for adults with developmental disabilities in North America.

## History and Methodology

ROLES BASED PLANNING was first conceptualized and implemented in Calgary, Alberta, Canada during the summer of 2002. It began with a retrospective study aimed at determining the impact of person-centered planning processes within the lives of 200 adults with disabilities. The study looked at results of person-centered plans from a six year period ending in 2001. The retrospective study was conducted from February to April 2002, and included the following components: interviewing adults with disabilities and network members about their experiences; before and after comparative analysis of participant and family

satisfaction survey results; quantitative comparison of outcomes against baseline measures in key areas; reviewing the nature of goals established during 300 planning meetings; and obtaining feedback from planning facilitators and direct support personnel.

While many positive impacts associated with person-centered planning were evident within study results, several problematic areas also emerged that appeared to be either inherent within the process itself and/or its underlying assumptions. As such, Roles Based Planning was developed to reinforce the most beneficial elements of person-centered planning while simultaneously addressing its more problematic components.

Prior to turning to the specific pros and cons associated with person-centered planning, it is important to note that the planning facilitation team involved with this study:

- Received their original training directly from the founders of person-centered planning;
- placed strong emphasis upon adhering to the original tenets of planning as they had been taught;
- received supplementary training and consultation with their mentors to ensure they remained on track;
- pursued person-centered planning as a dedicated six-person team whose entire role surrounded planning facilitation; and
- were employed by a large service provider agency, yet remained intentionally separated from the direct service delivery component to minimize the inherent conflict of interest associated with conducting in-house planning.

### ***Study Findings***

On the positive side, the original study results of person-centered planning processes indicated that families and support staff had sig-

nificantly increased their knowledge base about what planning participants (i.e., the adults with disabilities) liked, and were able to translate this added knowledge into expanding opportunities for most people within the community, albeit mostly in the form of leisure pursuits. At the individual level, planning participants reported feeling significantly more respected and empowered to make choices in their lives. And finally, at the organizational level, study participants indicated that person-centered planning had been a strong influencing factor in the closure of agency group homes, sheltered workshops, crew sites and work enclaves in favor of more inclusive alternatives.

On the more problematic side, study results also revealed the following ten areas of concern surrounding the person-centered planning process:

1. Planning participants generally chose what they thought would be the most fun or what was most familiar without considering the potential negative impacts of immediate decisions upon: longer term opportunities, societal perceptions, and/or reinforcement of common negative stereotypes.

2. Employment rates plummeted as people chose recreational pursuits over work.

3. Remaining employment roles remained largely devalued, with the majority of roles continuing to involve cleaning, recycling and fast food.

4. Planning participants frequently had not been provided sufficient experience or information upon which to base informed decisions.

5. Planning participants had frequently been manipulated into making specific decisions by support staff and/or network members who possessed an intimate knowledge of how to get them to agree with predetermined options.

6. Plans rarely addressed barriers to supporting people, perhaps for fear of casting anything negative into the planning process, and perhaps also out of the naive assumption that such challenges would disappear if people were really receiving exactly what they wanted.

7. Plan follow through was often not completed, i.e., accountability for plan completion and/or revising plans did not occur naturally within most networks.

8. Many support staff began to use the rationale of 'choice' as justification for continuing questionable support practices, i.e., the word 'choice' became a 'sacred cow.'

9. Despite planning participants' feeling more empowered and having increased physical presence within the community, they really were not becoming any more socially valued or included.

10. Many networks indicated that the person-centered planning process was overly utopian and at times harmful to their son or daughter, reporting that it led them down the proverbial 'garden path' only to be disappointed in the end.

### ***Interpretation of Results***

Based upon noted findings, it became evident that while person-centered planning provided many beneficial outcomes for people with disabilities, it did not fully take into account societal dynamics, manipulating influences upon the person and/or the importance of social contribution, and therefore also resulted in the creation of counterbalancing negative impacts. In other words, the potential for person-centered planning to significantly impact people's lives for the positive was strongly correlated with the extent to which such factors listed above had been, or had not been, taken into consideration. Taken as a whole, the 2002 study results indicated that the benefits and

drawbacks of implementing person-centered planning balanced each other out to such an extent that it succeeded in yielding only marginally positive impacts in the lives of most of the 200 planning participants. On the more positive side, however, study results also indicated the potential for such pitfalls to be overcome by placing greater emphasis upon the importance of social contribution, intentional relationship facilitation, valued roles, disproving negative stereotypes and introducing a more critical thought base into the process.

### ***Additional Anecdotal Observations***

Based upon the preceding findings, a member of the study team consulted with a variety of service provider organizations locally, nationally and internationally to verify if similar patterns surrounding person-centered planning were being observed elsewhere. Anecdotal evidence suggested that not only were similar outcome patterns being observed on a large scale, but that the self-determination paradigm itself had become severely corrupted within the service sector through service provider misapplication of the paradigm. Since person-centered planning is closely aligned with self-determination principles, many felt that corruption of this paradigm was creeping into planning processes, thereby further eroding the types of outcomes being achieved. Comments also suggested that self-determination and person-centered planning had been around long enough for service providers to locate the loop holes, and corrupt the language and tenets of each to the point where they were no longer what they once had been, or set out to achieve. What person-centered planning and self-determination are today was rarely what their founders had set out for them to be in either intent or practice.

Three prevalent trends surrounding self-de-

termination dominated these discussions, including:

1. The tendency to view self-determination as an end unto itself, rather than as a tool or means for helping people to build better lives in the community.

2. The tendency to selectively choose amongst the principles of self-determination; placing emphasis upon only one or a few principles while ignoring the rest. Most commonly, this trend manifested itself in the form of emphasizing the principles of ‘freedom’ and sometimes ‘authority’ while nearly always ignoring the principle of ‘responsibility.’

3. The tendency to equate the words ‘choice’ and ‘self-determination’ as being one and the same, even where such choices had been uninformed, irresponsible and/ or manipulated by others.

In summary, consultations with service provider organizations around person-centered planning indicated that not only had the results of the study been borne out by the experience of other service providers who had attempted to stay true to original planning tenets, but that even more problematically, the self-determination and person-centered planning movements were fast becoming subverted in a manner identical to what had happened to the normalization movement (Flynn and Lemay, 1999; Wolfensberger, 1972) decades before. This should in no way be interpreted as detracting from the many benefits and positive impacts that each of these movements or paradigms have had within the disability sector, but rather as an observation that few good things are capable of surviving much more than a decade within the service provision world before becoming subverted by those who fail to study and/or apply their principles thoughtfully in the lives of real people.

### *Foundational Conclusions*

Informed by the preceding study results, the following set of conclusions were established which would later provide the foundational building blocks for the creation of Roles Based Planning:

- Planning needed to be rooted in something deeper than an overly simplified notion of choice -- something that would guarantee critical discussion and provide a stabilizing framework or reference point when things went wrong or got messy.
- Planning needed to consider the culture, times and social realities within which people live. In other words, it needed to pay more attention to the challenges, barriers and stereotypes that would be encountered on a day to day basis rather than ignore their existence, plan for a hypothetical person and hope for the best.
- Planning needed to place additional emphasis upon **informed** decision-making by providing people with extensive exposure to options related to their interests, introducing them to new options in comfortable ways and providing them with sound advice.
- Planning needed to actively promote the importance of work over leisure, and present employment as a societal expectation rather than as a choice or right.
- Planning needed to shift focus from filling schedules with activities and keeping people entertained, to addressing factors that would make more of a positive difference in their lives as its foremost priority, i.e., responding to their most pressing needs. This does not mean that leisure has no place in people’s lives, but rather that it receives a far disproportionate amount of attention from human service agencies even when overarching needs -- like having friends in

the community, a means to communicate and employment -- remain unaddressed.

- And finally, planning needed to move beyond being accountable for process only, and hold itself accountable to the higher standard of achieving positive outcomes.

PUT ANOTHER WAY, planning needs to be about more than simply promoting choice and having fun if it is to make a tangible difference in people's lives. Good planning is founded upon each person's interests, dreams and aspirations but also requires consideration of the culture, times, and social realities within which people live. It requires critical discussion and intense debate about societal expectations, the reality of stereotypes and what will make the most positive difference in the life of each person. It requires identifying and planning to surmount the barriers that are sure to be encountered. It requires emphasis upon the importance of social contribution, image and intentional relationship facilitation. It requires providing people with disabilities with the information and experience necessary to make truly 'informed decisions,' including that information which may be difficult to hear.

Based upon such considerations, four additional broad conclusions surrounding field paradigms were also adopted as part of the Roles Based Planning creation process. **First**, radical (mis)application of self-determination principles was likely to result in personal empowerment but usually came at the expense of being devalued and socially excluded by the community. **Second**, radical (mis)application of Social Role Valorization (SRV) principles was likely to result in social valuation and inclusion but usually came at the expense of personal empowerment. **Third**, by marrying the principles of self-determination to those of Social Role Valorization, a win-win situation

could be achieved in which all objectives could be successfully attained, i.e., social valuation, inclusion and empowerment. And **fourth**, when the principles of each paradigm were in conflict, adhering to the principles of informed decision-making would provide the most ethical basis upon which to decide a course of action. By necessity, informed decision-making would also require the presentation of information about anticipated negative ramifications likely to arise from selecting specific options being included as part of the choice process.

### What is Roles Based Planning?

ROLES BASED PLANNING is a thoughtful means of personal planning that:

1. Starts with the dreams and interests of each person;
2. ensures each person has been provided with sufficient information and direct experience to make informed decisions about their future;
3. applies critical thought to how each dream or interest can be pursued in ways that will help each person be seen as a valued, contributing citizen and optimize their opportunities for developing friendships;
4. identifies and attempts to overcome the negative impacts of societal stereotypes upon people with disabilities;
5. identifies and responds to each person's most pressing needs and barriers to success as part of the planning process; and
6. shifts focus from filling time with activities to thoughtfully and thoroughly pursuing valued roles (Wolfensberger, 1998, pp. 25-33, 44-49, 82-95, 106-108) and relationships within the community.

In short, it is intended to help people achieve the good things in life (Wolfensberger,

Thomas & Caruso, 1996) and be seen as valued, contributing citizens.

**Roles Based Planning Underlying Beliefs**

Roles Based Planning is founded upon the following set of underlying beliefs:

- Each person, supported by those closest to them, is capable of dreaming and making important decisions about their future.
- Everyone has the capacity for growth and learning throughout their lifespan (Wolfensberger, 1998, p. 70).
- Service providers bear a heavy obligation to ensure people they support are making informed and non-manipulated decisions.
- Valued roles and friendships within the community provide each person with the best opportunity to achieve the good things in life.
- Any interest can be explored in ways that will optimize opportunities for achieving valued roles and relationships within the community; unfortunately, the opposite is also true.
- The vulnerability of people with disabili-

ties to negative stereotyping, discrimination, and devaluation make it necessary to think deeply upon all issues of support.

- Society is unlikely to adopt the view that people with developmental disabilities have inherent worth on any large scale without efforts to improve the image, skills, societal contributions and types of roles held by people with developmental disabilities.
- Work is a societal expectation, NOT a choice or right.
- Barriers to the success of plans can be addressed positively in empowering ways and must be discussed within the development of any realistic plan.

**How is Roles Based Planning Different From Person-Centered Planning?**

Roles Based Planning differs from person-centered planning in both underlying beliefs and practical considerations surrounding the planning process itself. The following table highlights additional areas where more significant differences exist between the two approaches.

Person-Centered Planning	Roles Based Planning
Facilitator follows lead of person and network.	Facilitator’s role expanded to include challenging networks to apply field best practices and SRV principles when deciding how and where to pursue the person’s dreams and interests.
Prioritizes what person wants/enjoys most as foremost priority.	Prioritizes person’s most pressing needs, i.e., what will have the most impact in improving their quality of life as top priority, e.g., employment, friends, being able to communicate effectively, etc.
Rarely addresses barriers within the planning process.	Considers addressing barriers an essential element of planning but does so in a respectful and empowering way.
Results in completing lists of activities	Moves beyond activities to holistically pursue valued roles -- considers selection of optimal: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Environments -- to set up conditions where people can be seen at their best and maximize potential for facilitating relationships.</li> <li>• Associations/people/contacts -- to enhance image, increase positive role modeling, network, and improve opportunities for the future.</li> </ul>

CONTINUED ...

Person-Centered Planning	Roles Based Planning
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Timing -- to ensure people come into contact with the same people on a regular basis, thereby increasing chances for relationship facilitation.</li> <li>• Activities -- to challenge growth and tear down negative stereotypes, i.e., child, incompetent, nothing-to-offer, drain on society, etc.</li> <li>• Language learning opportunities -- to ensure people are equipped with the language and terminology necessary to be taken seriously within specific roles.</li> <li>• Active and passive learning mechanisms -- to accelerate the learning curve.</li> <li>• Personal image -- to ensure people dress for success and put their best foot forward by creating a positive impression.</li> </ul>
<p>Enjoyment of activities often seen as ends unto themselves.</p>	<p>Goes the extra mile by pursuing enjoyable activities at optimal times, in optimal community locations and with maximum effort to actively facilitate relationships.</p>
<p>Does not directly address issue of societal norms or distinguish between legitimate program roles.</p>	<p>Attempts to mirror societal norms as a means to dispel negative stereotypes, promote commonality and social inclusion. Always considers legitimate program roles to avoid making people appear incompetent.</p>
<p>Does not directly address vulnerability to, or potential reinforcement of, negative stereotypes.</p>	<p>Highly conscious of vulnerability to stereotyping, avoids reinforcing negative stereotypes and attempts to prove them wrong through practical example.</p>
<p>Presents employment as an option or choice.</p>	<p>Presents employment/social contribution as a societal expectation.</p>
<p>Action plans generally project one year into the future.</p>	<p>Action plans project no more than three months into the future to increase flexibility and responsiveness.</p>
<p>Accountable for process only.</p>	<p>Accountable for both process and outcomes.</p>
<p>Rooted in self-determination paradigm.</p>	<p>Marries principles of self-determination to those of Social Role Valorization to improve grounding and promote critical thinking.</p>

***Additional Safeguards***

While remaining cognizant of the manner in which self-determination and person-centered planning have been misapplied and perverted within the human service sector over the past decade, Roles Based Planning proactively attempts to save itself from a similar fate by the following means:

- Ensuring the question of “*What will it take to help each person build a better life in the*

*community?*” remains the central question of the entire planning process. In this manner, and by ensuring facilitators remain highly conscious of the tendency of service providers to transform means into ends, Roles Based Planning attempts to maintain focus where it belongs -- on the individual and helping them to achieve a better life;

- requiring facilitators to complete a 3-or 4-day SRV workshop, PASSING (Wolfens-

berger & Thomas, 1983) training, and Roles Based Planning facilitation training as mandatory training requirements. Planning facilitators are additionally expected to possess strong backgrounds surrounding relationship facilitation, career support, augmentative communication, mediation and negotiation, positive behavior support, community development and self-determination principles. Through the establishment of such rigorous training requirements, Roles Based Planning seeks to avoid the tendency of many to stick to what they know, or to pick and choose amongst principles in favor of considering how all available tools may be best used to each person's benefit; and

- adding the elements of asking critical questions, conducting best practices education and challenging networks as essential elements of the facilitator's role. Through such means, facilitators are expected to expose truth, provide balanced information and ensure that each person has been provided with sufficient direct experience and information upon which to base informed decisions.

DESPITE SUCH additional safeguards, they represent only a stalling action against approaching erosion and subversion within the human service sector. Due to the force and speed with which paradigms and approaches become corrupted within the service provision sector, it would be naïve to assume that any amount of safeguarding will preserve this approach fully from the same fate faced by self-determination and person-centered planning over the long term.

Despite all of this, Roles Based Planning represents a promising development within the current disability sector. Having already pro-

duced vastly superior outcomes to person-centered planning, Roles Based Planning is a tool that will provoke significant positive change in many people's lives over the next decade or two, until such inevitable perversions take sufficient hold.

### ***Roles Based Planning Results***

Based upon a subsequent four years experience since the original 2002 study (during which time Roles Based Planning was implemented with the **same** 200 adults from the original study), the following results were achieved, representing what the planning team believes is some of the best outcomes within North America:

- 65% increase in people pursuing all activities during service hours in a fully inclusive manner -- currently 90%.
- 44% increase in people who have at least one friend in the community -- currently 57% .
- 38% increase in people employed above minimum wage within the community -- currently 73%.
- 36% increase in average hourly wages -- currently \$8.18 CDN/hour.
- Elimination of wage exemptions.
- Enhanced nature of employment roles being obtained -- micro fiche, data entry, certified daycare worker, security, cashier, retail, skilled trades, manufacturing, etc.
- Highest service provider satisfaction ratings ever achieved within the hosting agency from people with disabilities and their family members.

### **Conclusion**

ROLES BASED PLANNING offers a practical alternative to person-centered planning and has



achieved significantly improved outcomes over its predecessor. By marrying the critical thought base of Social Role Valorization to the most beneficial components of person-centered planning and field best practices surrounding relationship facilitation, career support and community inclusion, Roles Based Planning has built upon the work of giants in the field such as Wolf Wolfensberger, John O'Brien, Angela Amado and John McKnight, combined their expertise into a unified approach, and built a stronger, more effective form of planning as a result. Roles Based Planning represents a next evolution in planning and a promising development within the disability sector in terms of helping people with disabilities become more valued and socially included within today's society.

Admittedly, neither the original 2002 study of person-centered planning outcomes, nor the analysis of Roles Based Planning results, identified potential other factors which may also have influenced these results, e.g., different funding levels, differing levels of family or community involvement, experience level of the service workers involved, increased level of experience and knowledge of the planning facilitators, etc. Nonetheless, this does not take away from what is a powerful new planning approach.

Person-centered planning has the potential to significantly increase its positive impacts in the lives of people with disabilities where facilitators have additional training in Social Role Valorization and use this knowledge base to stimulate more critical discussion within the planning process. Such cross-training is rarely seen, as the requirement for facilitators to complete SRV and PASSING (Wolfensberger and Thomas, 1983) training is not built into the process as a safeguarding measure, and in many instances person-centered planning facilitators

view the self-determination paradigm as being completely incompatible with SRV principles. As such, Roles Based Planning may provide just the incentive needed for everyone to take another look at what each paradigm has to offer so that people with disabilities themselves benefit to the maximum extent possible.

## References

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**ROLES BASED PLANNING: A THOUGHTFUL APPROACH TO SOCIAL INCLUSION AND EMPOWERMENT.** By SCOTT RAMSEY. Developmental Disabilities Resource Centre of Calgary, Calgary, Alberta, Canada, 55 pages, 2005. Available for \$20 + GST, S&H, from 4831 Richardson Way SW, Calgary, Alberta T3E 7B7, Canada.

**Reviewed by  
Wolf Wolfensberger & Susan Thomas**

THIS MONOGRAPH sketches a roles-based personal planning process in contrast to all sorts of other individualized planning approaches, including so-called person-centered planning. While it flirts with some contemporary crazes, it is one of the few works of its kind that is systematic in sketching out some of the problems and misuses of the rights orientation, the self-determination ideology, the community inclusion movement, etc. Its approach presupposes an understanding of Social Role Valorization (SRV) by the planning participants, and then gives a large number of very useful tips on how to go about role planning.

The emphasis on social roles and what it would take to attain desired roles is to be commended, as this is certainly different from what many kinds of personal futures planning produce.

The book implies, perhaps unintentionally, that this roles-based planning approach is meant for adults. But of course SRV is just as applicable to children and young people, and to the aged, even though the way such a planning meeting would be conducted, how much weight would be given to a child's input, etc., would presumably differ from that with an adult.

Somewhere, it would be helpful if it were

acknowledged that while it is important to recognize, take note of, and possibly record (e.g., on a chart) the role or roles that a person badly wants, those participating in the planning should take account of what can be deemed feasible (as the SRV implementation steps emphasize), and what is and is not good for the person and for others. This will sometimes mean that roles desired by a person simply cannot be pursued, and maybe should not be pursued, and that instead, maybe an alternative role, or a role that captures only some of what is desired by the unfeasible/not-good-for-the-person role, ought to be crafted or pursued.

We have found the graphics produced during some personal planning meetings to be often very clever, but not necessarily very helpful to people who did not participate in the meetings. Therefore, we suggest that they be printed with a note that these are samples of what a roles-planning group might produce after discussion about a specific individual, but that participants do not *have* to produce such a graph, and that putting things in words rather than pictures can sometimes be more powerful -- or at least acceptable, as long as everyone participating in the meeting can *understand* whatever is produced.

However, one shortcoming of the approach taken in this monograph -- the same as apparently in all other more recent individual planning ones -- is that it does not take into account that such planning needs to be an organically evolving process that is iterated over time as either progress is made with the person planned for, or as no progress occurs, or new obstacles appear. We do not recall having seen that problem adequately addressed in the literature on individual planning. We have always emphasized that the things that need to be

identified and worked toward on behalf of a person are the most obvious *immediate next steps*. Going beyond this may provide motivation to all concerned, but contributes little if anything to what should be done in the short run -- after which the entire scenario may change. Then when either these steps are attained, or fail to be attained, a new round of brainstorming and problem-solving is needed because the situation is likely to have changed considerably.

What also seems missing from this monograph are some of the practical steps and implementations spelled out in Wolfensberger's 1998 monograph entitled *A Brief Introduction to Social Role Valorization: A High-Order Concept For Addressing the Plight of Societally Devalued People, and For Structuring Human Services* (pp. 82-102), and also taught in even yet more updated form in the 3-or 4-day SRV workshops that use the 10-theme formulation of the theory. (EDITOR'S NOTE: See training calendar on page 64 of this Journal.) Among

other things, that approach makes it clear that there are image and competency sub-goals, but the competency sub-goals in particular seem to have been severely slighted in this monograph. When efforts are made to develop all sorts of positive roles without paying adequate attention to prerequisite competencies, we suspect that a dead end will eventually be reached, and that people will become disillusioned with the approach, and perhaps even declare SRV a failure.

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