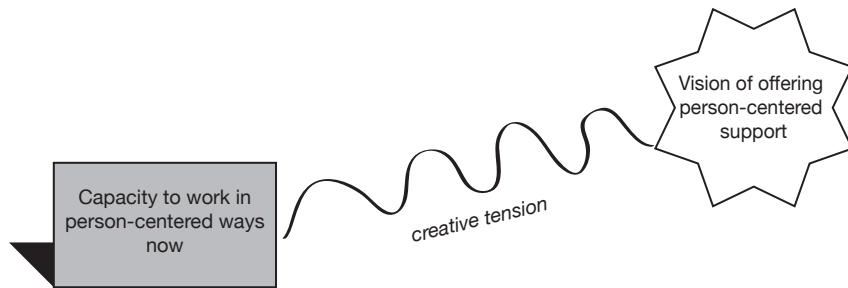# Reviewing Organization Capacity for Person-Centered Work

John O'Brien

Organizational learning happens when we embrace the tension that arises when there is a gap between what we deeply want to create and the current reality we experience (Senge, 2006).

When what we want to create is especially important to us, there is a tendency to collapse the tension by either defining current reality as already realizing the vision ("We're now delivering person-centered supports, or at least as much as is possible for people like this with the funding we have.") or by defining the vision entirely in terms of current reality ("Person-centered support means the way we do things now, with maybe a few improvements we could make if we got more funding.".) This offers short-term relief at the price of short-circuiting learning.

This inventory provides an opportunity for people committed to learning to offer person-centered supports to make three wide-angle snapshots of current organizational reality. Each snapshot is taken from a different perspective and each shows a broad view of where we are now:

- How free is our organization to negotiate and implement support agreements that respond precisely to individual purposes and preferences?
- How much of our work directly supports people to invest their capacities and time in performing valued social roles in community settings?
- What capacities does our organization now have to assist people to self-define and self-direct their supports?

Some people with disabilities and their allies are living in ways that deepen our understanding of what it means to work in a person-centered way. A deeper understanding means greater tension with approaches to service that are designed, funded, and regulated to congregate, supervise and treat groups of people with developmental disabilities, approaches that remain common in most agencies with a history of growth in a service-driven environment.

In preparing for this review, consider what you know about the relevant capacities of the parts of the organization you know. The aim is not to capture the details of each person's life but to look at organizational capacities as they typically show up in the lives of people who rely on particular programs. You don't have to find exact numbers of participants (rounding to 10's will be ok) or exact amounts of money, rounding to $10,000's will be ok).

Organizational Freedom to Negotiate Support Agreements

Supports are person-centered to the extent that they can provide assistance that responds specifically to an individual's purposes and preferences. **Purposes** move people toward what is meaningful for them: what experiences will develop and express their signature strengths and personal gifts. **Preferences** express what works in assisting a person: what assistance is provided, when, how, and by whom.

Program design strongly affects an organization's freedom to negotiate individual support agreements, which in turn strongly influences its capacity to work in a person-centered way. In thinking about the degrees of freedom that different parts of the organization have to negotiate individualized supports, consider the dimensions outlined on the table below.

Program Element	More Constrained	More Free
What benefits are expected by funders & regulators	Professionally defined treatment; supervision; primary focus on health, safety, protection. Enforced by oversight of compliance with complex regulations.	Assistance to live a life of distinction as a contributing community member. Necessary provision for health & protection & risk management negotiated based on what is important to & for individuals.
Role expectations of family members or guardians	Responsibility delegated to organization; may monitor performance and identify problems that the organization is expected to solve	Negotiated, shared responsibility, including active continuing investment in providing support
How funding flows	System purchase of placements in a group setting	Purchase through individual budgets
Real estate	Based in buildings held as an asset by organization	Based in community settings and in homes where people hold tenancy or ownership.
How people & staff are grouped & scheduled	Staff time primarily allocated to assist groups (including intensive staffing to deal with difficult behavior or extraordinary physical need in a group).	Individualized schedules. People may form groups by choice (e.g. choose a roommate to make available funds go farther)
How staff are selected, allocated, trained & managed	Staff assigned to programs & groups, allocated, trained, & managed by the organization	Staff recruited by or on behalf of person. Person or allies have the option to select, train, & supervise staff.
Culture, norms & history	Program developed to meet the perceived needs of the developmentally disabled as a group, or a subgroup of the population	Supports are individually designed & delivered based on collaborative planning, active resource development
Relationship to community	Good things come when people actively participate in program activities, which may include a variety of community experiences.	Good things come when people take valued roles in community life outside the boundaries of human services & get the assistance they require to succeed.

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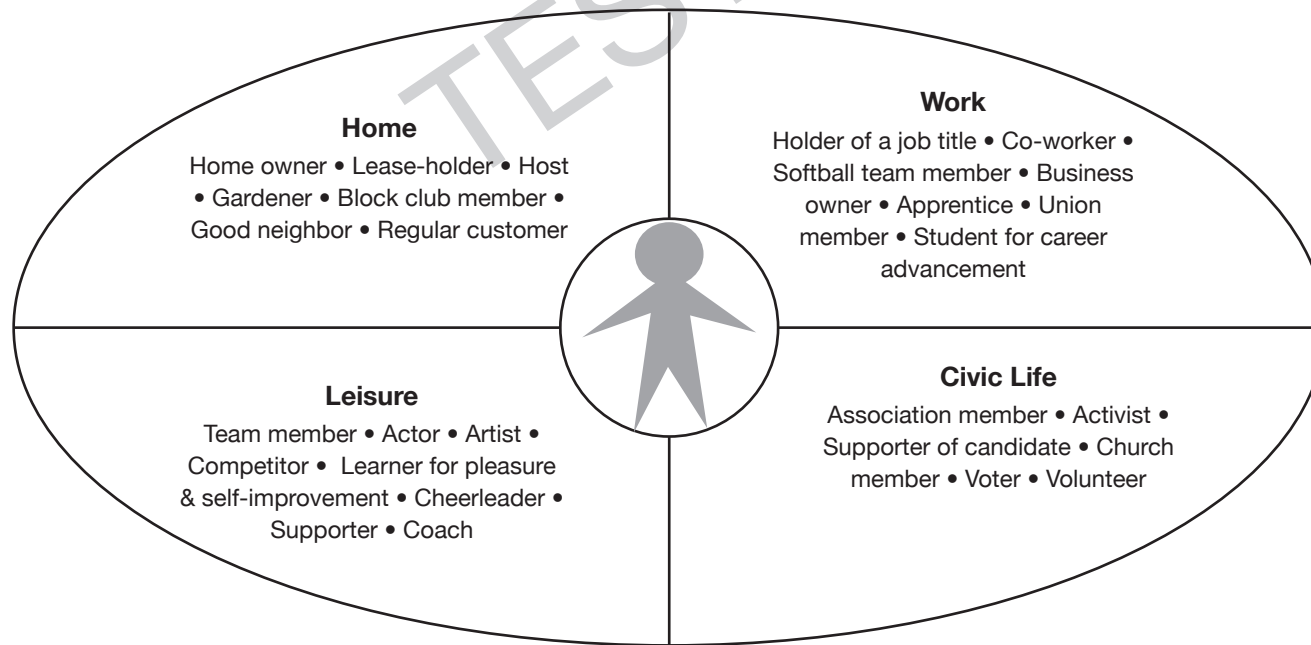| Level of Constraint	Program or Sub-Program	Principle Sources of Constraint	Number of People Currently Enrolled	Amount of Current Expenditure
Minimal Program design does not hinder negotiation of support agreements. The program is designed to individualize supports.				
Moderate Program design accommodates personalizing some important aspects of support. In other aspects, personalization requires considerable effort.				
High Even minor adjustments to individual purposes & preferences require considerable effort to achieve & sustain				

Support For Valued Social Roles in Community Settings

The concept of social role provides a way to name people's interdependencies. Roles identify the ways that people belong to each other, participate in exchanges with each other, and expect reciprocal responsibility from each other. They identify the contexts in which people learn skills and perform skillfully and the areas of life where people can experience satisfaction and earn status.

The roles available to people with developmental disabilities are strongly influenced by expectations. Some people find themselves receiving services in settings organized around their assignment to a full time client role with no expectation that they will act as contributing citizens or enjoy the range of opportunities open to people outside services. The yield of effective person centered work can be measured by the extent and variety of valued social roles people occupy, especially roles that promote positive recognition by and mutually satisfying relationships with other citizens outside the boundaries of human services.

The diagram suggests just a few of the social roles that are possible for people who receive intensive assistance when supports are planned and implemented in a person-centered way.

Home
Home owner • Lease-holder • Host • Gardener • Block club member • Good neighbor • Regular customer

Work
Holder of a job title • Co-worker • Softball team member • Business owner • Apprentice • Union member • Student for career advancement

Leisure
Team member • Actor • Artist • Competitor • Learner for pleasure & self-improvement • Cheerleader • Supporter • Coach

Civic Life
Association member • Activist • Supporter of candidate • Church member • Voter • Volunteer

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Support for Valued Social Roles	Program or Sub-Program	Typical Valued Roles	Number of People Currently Enrolled	Amount of Current Expenditure
Within the scope of this program, people spend most of their time in performance of valued social roles that promote positive recognition by and mutually satisfying relationships with other citizens outside the boundaries of human services.				
Within the scope of this program, people spend most of their time in performance of valued social roles within the boundaries defined by developmental disability services and civic initiatives aimed at people with developmental disabilities.				
There are significant limits on the time that people spend in performance of valued social roles.				

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Assisting People to Self-Define & Self-Direct Supports

As better assistance to self-define and self-direct support becomes available, more people will be able to competently do so.

The table on the next page identifies some of the capacities available in some communities. Think about your organization as a whole and identify those capacities that are reliably available now, those that are present but need building, and those that need development.

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Capacity	Reliable Strength	Build	Needs Development
Plan with people in ways that disclose purpose –what gives meaning for this person; this person's signature strengths; this person's gifts– & builds confidence to search outside the boundaries of human services for opportunities to contribute & develop.			
Negotiating partnership with joint responsibility among person, family & other allies, & organization			
Assist in gathering & sustaining a circle of support that actively contribute to the person's wellbeing.			
Develop support plans based on what is important to & important for the person, what works for the person, what the most powerful and freeing forms of assistance are.			
Assist as necessary in recruiting staff who will be a good match & an effective support			
Assist as necessary in training & managing staff			
Assist in mobilizing system resources to promote flexibility			
Assist in mobilizing other local resources (housing assistance, income support, healthcare, etc.) for individuals			
Assist people to find jobs in ways that encourage employer & co-worker support			
Follow discovery method to customize employment when required			
Offer opportunities for people, families, & allies to understand positive possibilities & adopt a capacity view			
Link people with professionals with individually relevant skills who are willing & able to practice in the context of their contribution to the person's overall wellbeing.			
Actively assist direct support workers to find meaning in their work by performing in highly competent & reliable ways			
Assist or link people with relevant assistance to manage their support funds			
Individualize allocations within existing program budgets to give people the capacity to self-define or self-direct			
Build or take an active role in local initiatives & alliances that will multiply community resources			
Build the local workforce			