

Person Centered Planning: The Ethics of MAPS and PATH

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"You make the path by walking."

I. Introduction: Dilemmas, Definitions, MAPS and PATH

We had great difficulty writing this article. The reason is that although we are honoured to have been asked to team edit an excellent journal with a special issue on Person Centered Planning, we weren't sure we knew exactly what Person Centered Planning really meant. We tried to write about it – and became more and more frustrated. We are comfortable writing about things we know – and we do know a lot about MAPS and PATH¹. Our confusion comes from our history. We developed MAPS and PATH and had been using them for several years, **then** some people started to refer to them as "person centered planning" tools. We resorted to the Random House College Dictionary.

person: a human being

centered: (adjective) to be focused on

planning: (verb) a method of action or procedure, a design, a drawing, a map or diagram for the future

Person Centered Planning - three wonderful words. No jargon. Very straightforward. The planning is centered on the person. Simple and yet profound. For us that means the planning is not for the convenience of services. It is simply to serve the hopes, dreams and visions of the focus person. If the focus is on a whole family or on a team of people in an organization, then the aim is to serve the vision of the team. It is very exciting work.

Thus, person centered planning is a group of methods of action focused on a particular human being or group of human beings (families, organizations) who want to make a design, drawing or map into the future.

We are comfortable with these definitions, as long as readers understand that we created MAPS and PATH as tools to help all of us lead full lives in the community. Others 'labelled' the tools person centered. We just call them MAPS and PATH. We feel we don't know enough to write about Person Centered Planning in general, so we have decided to write about what we know - MAPS and PATH.

The words are really straight forward – and we are comfortable with a meaning of "human being focused planning". We know that there is a constellation of Person Centered Planning tools developed to help people and organizations make real and meaningful change for a person or an organization's life. They include Individual

¹ **MAPS** – (no acronym) – a MAP is a map. Developed by John O'Brien, Marsha Forest, Jack Pearpoint, Judith Snow and David Hasbury. (See **Action for Inclusion** from Inclusion Press, 24 Thome Cres. Toronto, ON Canada M6H 2S5 Web Page: <http://inclusion.com>)

PATH – Planning Alternative Tomorrows with Hope – developed by Jack Pearpoint, John O'Brien and Jack Pearpoint. (See the **PATH** book from Inclusion Press).

Service Design, Lifestyle Planning, Personal Futures Planning, Essential Lifestyle Planning and MAPS and PATH, and likely others we don't know. Our confusion is that with the popularization of the term, it may be overused, abused, get fuzzy and lose its meaning. We hear many things being labeled Person Centered Planning that have little to do with the common sense of being focused on human beings. That confuses us. We are comfortable if people want to label the tools we use as Person Centered, if they really help meet human needs.

II. A Theoretical Construct Under MAPS and PATH...

Together We're Better

Tools like PATH and MAPS are designed to create and work in what we call "**Shared Space**". This concept is based on our collaboration with and the wisdom of John O'Brien.

We are all familiar with the notion of having **Personal Space**, and its opposite - "**Managed Space**". Much less common is the concept and understanding of "**Shared Space**" - an uncommon middle ground between these choices.

In **Personal Space**, MAPS and PATH can be used, but be forewarned, they tend to push the boundaries of individualism and isolation into "**shared space**" and **interdependence**. This may be desirable, but it is in the nature of the tools that they will challenge these personal boundaries.

Similarly, but in the opposite direction, PATH and MAPS can be used in **Managed Space**. Managed Space tends to be bureaucratic, requires dependence and obedience - requires controls. There are places and times when we all need "managed space". However, if and when we try to use person centered planning within Managed Space, (particularly if it is mandated), read the warning label. PATH is designed to function best in "shared space" - between individualism and total control. Therefore, it will (by its nature) tend to erode the system control boundaries, often beyond comfortable bureaucratic limits.

Managed Systems are designed to create a particular kind of stability, and to counter any challenge to that authority/turf. Thus, when a simple PATH challenges the perceived boundaries of a system, the **System** tends to **react** in defense of the total system. This "appears" to be out of all proportion to the "probe" created by the PATH, but the response is NOT to the actual probe. It is to the challenge to the **power** and **authority** of the system. Knowing this in advance is an important safeguard.

Shared Space is an uncommon space, an underdeveloped space, an unknown space, that we believe needs to be nurtured so we can grow stronger. Teamwork, collaboration, cooperation, interdependence, sharing, are all difficult concepts to actualize in our society. They are concepts that function in Shared Space. Shared Space is where we believe in **we - not me**. We believe we need to create a new place for 'shared space' in our culture, so we can learn to live with one another.

Our Core Concept: Giftedness

Shared Space is the 'sacred space' where gifts and giftedness can be best realized.

Giftedness is the core assumption that every person (without exception) has gifts to contribute to society, and that a healthy society will invest the time and energy to listen to and nurture the gifts in every person to be fully participating citizens.

- Gifts are constrained in Personal Space because a gift is only a gift when it is given, therefore, in isolation giftedness is limited.
- In Managed Space, Giftedness is difficult because in “control” systems we do not want to “give” things away. We want to own, sell, manage, control. Only “certified officials” are empowered to “give”, and only within specified guidelines. Thus, giving of gifts undermines the foundations of control.
- Giftedness as a concept innocently challenges Managed space at its very roots.

III. Understanding MAPS and PATH

MAPS and PATH first and foremost are tools to help restore dreams and ignite hope – and then begin to plan new, constructive futures. For us, MAPS and PATH are not just another way of doing a “service or review” plan, they represent a different way of thinking. They are definitely not more of the same thing.

MAPS and PATH are designed as healing tools – for people and for organizations. They are in fact more spiritual than technical, which is one of the reasons they are difficult to bureaucratize. They must be used with skill and heart – rooted in an ethic of ‘do no harm’. This is not simply a matter of “technique”. It is more of an ‘art’. There are technical competencies that must be mastered, but this is not the difficult part. It is an art, and it requires an alternative view of our role as facilitators - to be able to truly ‘listen’ to people’s dreams and nightmares. Next, those hopes and visions must be shaped into sustainable images. Finally, there is a translation into practical daily routines that move us safely in the direction of the dream. It requires giving over control – from a position perceived as “power over”. The art is in moving to “power with” and “power to”.

We have invested time and energy in developing MAPS and PATH because we think they help to make a difference in the lives of real human beings. We believe that these tools are for all of us. We are all human beings. We believe everyone wants and deserves, simply by virtue of being born human, a chance to live fulfilling lives where our gifts and capacities are recognized and utilized.

All of us, at various times of our lives, are in situations where we cannot manage alone, our abilities are trapped, and only our ‘deficiencies’ are noticed. At such times, we need tools to reach out, to renew, to recommission our ‘mission’, to find the power in our dream, so we can be full, healthy, contributing citizens. That’s where MAPS and PATH fit for us.

The answer to “when” to use MAPS and PATH is ‘when they are needed’. We hear people voicing concerns that MAPS and PATH are being mutilated, mandated, perverted and used incorrectly. It is true. They are. However, the bigger truth is, we have no control over what people do. Thus, our choice is to focus on creating the best tools we can, and providing the most human and thoughtful guidelines and training we can devise in the hope that people using the tools will ‘do no harm’.

We choose to focus our energy on the majority of people with talent and good will who are also searching for tools to create new futures and full lives for themselves and for the people they serve. We know that the key problem in the misuse and abuse of tools is not in the design or regulation of the tools, but is in the spirit of the implementers.

People who want to exert power over others will use any and all tools to enhance their control. The only 'controls' we can or choose to exert are clear ethical guidelines. Thus, if people with power choose to plan 'for' people without having them present, the label on the tool makes no difference, but simply becomes another deceptive shell game to take or sustain power and control. We believe it is not ethical to plan for a person if the person is excluded.

Pre-conditions for MAPS and PATH:

- **Presence is a pre-condition.** Physical presence is the first layer of ethical implementation. Those with the skills to make things happen, must 'do what it takes' and make sure that the 'seldom heard voices' are heard clearly and in full voice. This means no one ever plans alone. It means someone who has difficulty speaking with words has friends and loved ones with them, to ensure that their voice, their ideas, are heard clearly. It does not mean that every whimsical idea becomes a goal.

In a MAP or a PATH, friends and colleagues struggle together with complex realities and make difficult choices. Good facilitators create a 'safe space' which honours the dreams, nightmares, aspirations and talents of the focus person. There is no guarantee of the good life. There is no magic bullet. MAPS and PATH are simply tools to help someone create and plan their own life.

- **Listening is the heart of MAPS and PATH:** We believe that actually listening to one another is foundation for these tools. Through listening (not rebutting and arguing) we gather the best information and resources we can muster, then we make the best decisions we can. There are no magical wands. There is just the 'long haul' hard work that all of us must do to realize fully lived lives in these complex and challenging times.

Good facilitators hold empty containers (questions) in front of people, then wait, and listen to the silence. The tension in this silence creates a safe space for people to fill with their deep yearnings and simple unspoken needs – the stuff of life. As facilitators, we hold the empty space in front of the focus person, and ensure their ideas and wishes are heard. Hearing does not imply agreement, but simply honest, accurate listening to the message. Then the hard work begins – determining what to do.

DANGERS in MAPS and PATH:

We wish that by designing good tools, and using them well, we could guarantee a healthy positive future – for us and for others. Unfortunately, there is no such guarantee. What we can say is that if we do NOT plan well and work hard, the incidence of abuse and trauma will be higher. We can tell you from our own

experience, that 'being on the journey', engaging in the struggle for a meaningful life, is the best guarantee anyone can offer. No one can promise that anyone will reach a specific goal, but we can at least guarantee that the journey will be a fascinating one. As Helen Keller said: "Life is a daring adventure, or nothing at all!" Choose life!

MAPS and PATH are healing tools on a spiritual journey. They are not just another chart or meeting. Skilled facilitators know that 'all of us are at risk'. With humility, they endeavor to enhance the strengths and capacities of every focus person. To do this, facilitators must create a zone of safety. People who cannot create a safe place for a person to unfurl their most delicate and fragile dreams and fears should stay away from this type of work. Hearing people's dreams and hopes is a sacred trust. Without such mutual respect, people will be hurt.

- **Facilitators can harm people.** Shattering dreams is unacceptable. It must not be done! Paradoxically, the art is to balance dreams with doable, positive and possible steps – steps which can and will be implemented by a group of people working together. MAPS and PATH are about creating the links between the dreams we all have (no matter how fragile) and the practical daily steps that begin and sustain us on that life journey. MAPS and PATH do not guarantee we will achieve our dreams; they do help us to live our lives on a journey of hope, accomplishment and wonder. On that journey, there will be disappointment, tragedy and frustration. This is why we need tools so we can stay on a path that has the potential to help us realize our dreams.
- **Commodifying these tools is dangerous.** We shudder when people try to 'commodify' MAPS and PATH into 'managed space' – to meet bureaucratic requirements. MAPS and PATH generate the information which can be 'translated' to accommodate bureaucratic requirements (which are a fact of our lives), but the danger is in commodifying the 'art' of these tools rather than 'translating' the outcome data. The commodification betrays the very different "people first" foundation on which they are constructed.

Antidotes to Dangerous Practices:

- **Accountability:** Critics say that MAPS and PATH are not accountable – because they are not purely responsive to the needs of bureaucratic structures. We disagree. They are profoundly accountable. The stumbling block is "accountable to whom?" Person Centered Planning tools are accountable to the individual, family or team on whom they are focused. Example, if I have a PATH done on me, the ultimate arbiter of whether it is useful (or not) is not a neatly completed document in a file – it is ME! Creative people in systems can translate this real accountability into the type of data required by funders and other structural requirements.
- **Independence vs Interdependence:** Some are concerned that MAPS and PATH are 'individualistic'. We believe they are 'personalized' and promote "interdependence". Substantial portions of the tools look at 'who is in our circle' (our lives)? who do we need to enroll? and what specific actions do we have to

take over time to 'make our dream' happen? All of these rings explore and develop our interdependence rather than our isolation.

IV. Planning and Implementation

Do MAPS and PATH always work? No! A plan is simply that – a direction with a hope that something will happen. There are no guarantees. When person centered planning tools are used **correctly** with the spirit of the heart, they are NEVER about a person in isolation and always about a person (or a family or group) in a context of interdependence. The plan mobilizes that network of people to be part of the implementation. The illusion that the PATH (or any other tool) is done or completed after two hours or a day is a misrepresentation of the essence of the tool.

Is there an implementation plan – follow-up? Person Centered Planning tools are for 'planning' your life – and have implementation **included in the process**. If there is no implementation plan, then the tool was used inappropriately. The plan is not done because it is posted on the wall, or placed on a chart. It is completed when a person **lives it**. As Judith Snow wisely says, "The first step at the end of a PATH is truly the next step. When will we meet next? Who will we invite? All this must happen soon after the initial planning event. And committed circle members continue that process."

Key safeguards for MAPS and PATH:

- **Integrity Principle: Do it to yourself first.** Perhaps the most significant safety precaution we can offer is the guideline that no person should use any person centered planning tool on anyone else until they have lived through the experience **PERSONALLY**. That does not mean sitting in a group and observing a PATH, or watching a video. It means having had **your own PATH or MAP**, or whatever done **on you** with your family and friends. This takes courage, but people who have done it report that they are better facilitators and listeners. They understand from their heart the incredible vulnerability required for any person to put their hopes and fears out in the open. Therefore, people who have experienced these tools personally are more respectful and are much less likely to do harm. Those who have not experienced these tools personally should **NOT** use them on other people. It is a matter of respect and safety. The best facilitators 'walk the talk' as much as possible.
- **Collaboration Principle: Never do it alone.** Do not facilitate these tools alone because it models the dangerous assumption that we can manage life alone. There is safety in partnership. By the same token, the focus person must never be alone. It isn't safe. And in the rare circumstance that someone is alone, all person centered planning tools worth their salt will identify and begin to deconstruct that loneliness immediately. Collaborate; collaborate; collaborate.
- **Safety Principle: Do No Harm.** There are times when doing 'nothing' is a discerning decision. Better to be humble and nervous about your capacities than to leap into unknown waters and do irreparable damage. This is **NOT** an excuse to never take a risk, but rather to be cautious with other people's lives. Respect them.

There are even times to stop a process mid-stream. Do no harm! Take risks, but choose the time, the place, and a tool that give an excellent chance of success. That is all any of us can do.

The Facilitator: Paradox in Action

Good facilitators struggle to balance many seemingly paradoxical issues.

Learning and Unlearning: Facilitators must constantly learn new things – and unlearn some old ones. The facilitator is a servant to both the process and the person. The facilitator basically holds empty containers and draws the content out of the person and his/her friends, family and colleagues. The plan belongs to the person not the organization or the facilitator. We must learn to hand over power – and unlearn our “control” habits.

Knowledge (vs) Self Knowledge: One must have a wide knowledge base – and a strong knowing sense of self. As a facilitator one must give up preconceived notions of what is good or bad, what is possible or impossible. This requires knowing yourself – your strengths – and your limits so we can distinguish between our personal preferences and those of the person we are serving. The facilitator is not passive but rather pushy in getting the content from the person. This takes practice as we often stand in judgment and thus block the PATH or MAP from truly belonging to the focus person. Dangerous facilitators override another person’s words and images with their own interpretations.

Professional (vs) Personal Integrity: There is no separation between personal and professional integrity. Integrity is integrity. Separate ethics creates schizophrenia and harms people. To minimize this risk, our ethics rule is that facilitators must practice these tools on their own lives before using them on others. This makes us more respectful and less dangerous.

Self-Reflection and Review: We must constantly reflect and review what and how we are doing with these tools. Just because we have learned the process does not mean we are doing our best. There is always room for improvement. Maybe we are over-tired, or perhaps due to personal preferences, we are not the right people to undertake a particular MAP. We must listen to these ‘itchy’ patches and pay attention.



Self-reflection and review are a process of constant improvement – our learning and relearning is always a work in progress.

Can everyone facilitate MAPS and PATH? That is like asking if everyone can do brain surgery. Opening people's hearts and dreams is surgery on the soul. It is delicate work and must be honored with skill, compassion and love. It is also hard work. In exploring your skill set, if you discover this is not your strength, listen, and without beating up on yourself, find others who are skilled in doing this work. We have seen magic happen when MAPS and PATH are used with skill, love, imagination and humility.

Beware: We feel it is unfair at best and obscene at worst to ask others to dream and to be vulnerable, while we remain aloof - hiding behind the mask of so called professionalism. A brilliant professional is one who has explored the depths of her own soul and who knows the boundaries necessary to allow others to share their pain and joy without intruding or invading that space. We tell people, "Beware of facilitators who advise you what to do, but whose own lives are a gigantic mess and can't ask for help themselves."

For us, the heart of Person Centered Planning is, "facilitator - know thyself". This is no mean feat in a culture that spends billions to convince us all to think it is cool to be young, white, bright, straight and thin.

Good Facilitation Personal Check List:

Good facilitators are basically good listeners who see their role as creatively helping the person(s) design his/her life, as she/he desires. That's what Person Centered Planning is really all about.

Here are a few guiding questions for facilitators to ask themselves:

- Have you yourself experienced being the focus of a MAP or a PATH?
- Do you have a mentor, guide, therapist, circle you see regularly to check out your own life?
- Do you read and study continuously in group dynamics, organizational change, healing, health, etc? Do you read outside your own field to increase your scope?
- Do you think you have been trained and certified because you took a 3-day course on MAPS or PATH? If so, return to # 1.
- Do you alphabetize processes like PCP? Please don't. The initialized version trivializes a deep issue. We don't want people reporting that they were PCP'd upon.
- Do you work alone, or do you have partners with whom to share experiences and reflect on your learning?

V. Using MAPS and PATH

- **Which People?** MAPS and PATH are for all people. They are not about disability. They are about focusing on human beings to help design and develop plans for their future. If we see people as "clients" or "consumers", or if we assert power over people, we are not doing MAPS or PATH. These tools are for human beings – not clients or consumers. This is full of paradox because it is

simultaneously a very simple concept and enormously difficult to implement. It requires us to challenge and refocus values that we 'learned wrong' and must 'relearn'. This is hard but necessary work.

- **Creative Links:** The artist, the architect, the musician, the poet, the writer - all have much to teach us about Person Centered Planning. We see this Human Centered approach incorporating the passion, commitment and courage of the arts. Person Centered Planning is about uncovering what is already there, what is deep within each and every one of us. A sculptor sees a piece of art in the raw stone or wood. An architect envisions a building when overseeing a naked piece of earth. A musician hears a score in the breeze and in her head. So too the artist of Person Centered Planning sees the full human being through the layers of societal rules and norms, which have often corroded and encased the human spirit.

It is the job of the facilitator to be like the architect or sculptor who uncovers the person already there, with a soul yearning to be whatever her gifts reveal. Society teaches us well to "cover up" our realness. Too often, we turn to find our true selves only when we are on the verge of collapse, depression or addiction.

- **Nourishing Human Growth:** People with disabilities have often been buried under a ton of labels and phrases that mask who they are. The more oppressed and vulnerable the "human being" the more talented and sensitive our artist facilitator needs to be. We know from research in both physical and mental health that there are universal needs we all have to grow into human beings. First we need food and shelter, then come the needs to love and to be loved, to have friends, and to belong.

In working to uncover the person hiding behind the mask of fear, insecurity and anxiety, the facilitator must be a person who has dealt with life herself and who is not afraid of facing whatsoever emerges from the person's heart.

Person centered planning is, in essence, listening and sharing vulnerability. It is about sharing life, sharing power, giving up control, encouraging interdependence, and getting to what really matters to makes someone's life not perfect, but meaningful. It is about nourishing the humanity and gifts in every one of us.

Can this be done? Yes.

Let's put Person Centered Planning in the paradigm of art. Let's give it the color, passion, power, emotion, magic, skill and talent it deserves.

Let's start with a blank sheet of paper as our metaphor – radiant with the patient capacity to record any dream. Let's assist people in creating and designing their own beautiful futures. Let's work together to do this as we become warriors for peace. Peace and justice will not come by us wishing it. It will come with the blood, sweat and tears that real change always entails. Let's join together to build a new society. Let's start in our own backyards with our own friends and networks of support.

It really comes down to very simple things that require our life long commitment...

"Piglet sidled up to Pooh from behind.

'Pooh!' he whispered.

'Yes, Piglet?'

'Nothing,' said Piglet, taking Pooh's paw. 'I just wanted to be sure of you.'

" I will not drag you along; I will not leave you alone; I will stand by you and have my hand there for you to hold when you need to."

Winnie the Pooh