

**File number:**

11248

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**Title:**

Social Role Valorisation Theory as a Resource to  
'Person Centred Planning'

**Original Source:**

The SRV Journal Vol 4, Number 2, pp. 6-9

**Publication date:**

December 2009

**Publisher information:**

[www.srvip.org](http://www.srvip.org)

**Abstract:**

This article will define what is commonly understood by the term, person centred planning, and identify some of the limitations in the current practice.

It also considers what Social Role Valorisation (SRV) as a theory might offer to practitioners who are working in systems that have adopted 'person centred planning.'

**Keywords:** Social Role Valorisation, Individualisation, Professional

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# **Social Role Valorisation Theory as a Resource to ‘Person Centred Planning’**

Jane Sherwin

Human services regularly look for what appear to be easy-to-apply collections of support strategies. One such family of strategies with much current international interest is person centred planning. This article will define what is commonly understood by the term, and identify some of the limitations in the current practice conducted under the guise of ‘person centred planning’. It will then consider what Social Role Valorisation (SRV) as a theory might offer to those practitioners who are working in systems that have adopted ‘person centred planning’ at a statutory and/or policy level.

It is not the intention of this article to defend or to promote the adoption of ‘person centred planning’. This article does however recognise that there are people who are or might be interested in the theory of SRV (Wolfensberger, 1998; Osburn, 2006) who are working in services that have adopted, at both a policy and a practice level, ‘person centred planning’ as the guiding practice framework.

The literature about, and the practice of, person centred planning reflects a wide interpretation of what person centred planning is. One definition of person centred approaches is that they are:

*ways of commissioning, providing and organising services rooted in listening to what people want, to help them live in their communities as they choose. People are not simply placed in pre-existing services and expected to adjust, rather the service strives to adjust to the person. Person centred approaches look to mainstream services and community resources for assistance and do not limit themselves to what is available within specialist services. (Valuing People – A New Strategy for Learning Disability for the 21st Century. Planning with People. Guidance for Implementation Groups)*

Person centred approaches appear to have arisen out of concern for three key issues for people with disabilities: the dominance of group based responses for people with disabilities, a domination of service-based responses, and the low levels of authority that individuals have over their own lifestyles and support arrangements. Much of the literature refers to the nature of the relationship between server and served and how power is played out within that relationship, the authority of the person or family in decisions about lifestyle and support arrangements, and the goal of ordinary lives, designed and supported in highly individualised ways.

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The ideological underpinnings of person centred approaches include that individuals should be treated as individuals, and that individuals should enjoy better lives. There is some ideology that is not explicit, such as that individuals should have ordinary yet meaningful lives (cf. Wolfensberger, Thomas & Caruso, 1996), and that the role of a service is to support this to happen; that families and the wider personal unpaid network should be involved, including having a lead role; inclusion in mainstream resources; and an emphasis on assets rather than deficits.

An international literature review (van Dam et al, 2008) revealed that it was possible to greatly improve the circumstances of people with disabilities when person centred planning is implemented; however, results are inconsistent, and perversions and misapplications exist within what are purported to be person centred service practices. This can be explained by:

- The extent to which the leadership of an organisation is committed to the intent of person centred approaches. No or low commitment leads to only a superficial adoption;
- An adoption of person centred planning tools, but not an adoption of the underpinning ethics or changes in behaviours. For example, Kendrick's work in this area has highlighted the importance of the ethics underpinning person centred responses, and that this is a continual process not an end point (2007). Kendrick also encourages humility in that perhaps what can be most hoped for is 'somewhat person centred';
- An overemphasis of one aspect of person centred approaches, such as self determination. Ramsey's (2007) work on role based planning highlighted this issue;
- An exclusion of one aspect such as personal social integration and valued social participation. This has led to person centred planning that leads to a service based life, such as people going to or remaining in centre based facilities like day centres;
- An adoption of the language of person centred approaches but not an accompanying change in practice;
- An emphasis on planning and what the individual will do differently but not what the service will do in an adaptive response to the person's needs.

This article uses the language of person centred approaches, rather than person centred planning, so that the reader appreciates that this article is about more than an application of planning tools.

If one decides that one will or must work within person centred approaches, then one might draw on SRV in the following ways. A depthful understanding of SRV allows those who are working in a context of person centred approaches to:

- See the societal forces for social devaluation, with expressions of social devaluation played out in the service system;
- See the limits of non-personalised, service based responses to people with a devalued status. This includes seeing the negative impacts on how people are perceived, on their status and reputation, and on their levels of competence;
- Understand the distinction between programmatic and non-programmatic matters. Significant financial and human resources have been dedicated to teaching the use of planning tools, with policies developed regarding the use of the tools, without appreciating that these are non-programmatic matters. In an optimal sense, non-programmatic matters should facilitate programmatic matters, yet the planning tools, the planning meetings and the documentation are treated as if they are the main game rather than the support act;
- Stand in the shoes of people with devalued status when understanding the impact of service responses and when developing individualised responses, thus avoiding becoming caught up with non-programmatic constraints in the first instance;
- Draw on a model coherency framework in constructing individualised support arrangements (Wolfensberger, 1998, pp. 111-118; Wolfensberger, 2009). This theme for SRV distinguishes between the service content and service processes, thus allowing for a systematic way to develop relevant and potent responses to people's needs;
- Be conscious of past wounds, since they will influence what a person's fundamental and urgent needs might be. Many planning tools use questions like 'what is important **to** the individual?' and 'what is important **for** the individual?,' which are a good start. However an unconsciousness of the impacts of wounds like rejection, discontinuities and distantiation may mean that needs arising from these experiences could remain unnoticed. Worse, what might be focussed on are the behaviours that might arise as a result of these wounds, resulting in behaviour management programs rather than responses to the wounds and their impacts themselves;
- Not only be alert to 'focussing on the individual', which is one of the mantras of person centred responses, but also be alert to focussing on the universal and specific needs of the person;

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- Be conscious of the heightened vulnerability of many people with a devalued status, which assists in putting self determination in perspective, as identified by Ramsey (2007). While SRV helps us to recognise needs around autonomy and rights, it does not over-emphasise this need at the expense of other needs;
- Guide those developing the support arrangements to consider the culturally valued analogue (Wolfensberger & Thomas, 2007, pp. 30-31), that is, to consider how sets of needs are normatively met, and what roles are likely to provide the person with access to the good things in life;
- Invite interpersonal identification between the person with a devalued status and those involved in the person's life;
- Promote valued roles as both a goal and a means. Being perceived as having valued roles brings benefits to one's status and sense of worth and purpose;
- Attend to the importance of developing competencies, which is consistent with human needs to learn and grow, and puts an individual in a better position to be in more valued roles and be perceived more positively;
- Attend to those channels that convey messages about the status, worth, and belonging of individuals, such as through where people spend time, with whom and doing what, as well as personal appearances and how people are spoken to and about;
- Be able to discern both the optimal qualities and experiences in those who provide support (paid and unpaid), and how the status of those people flows onto the people with a devalued status.

By and large, the service system is designed to be non-person centred, and much unconsciousness leads us to continue to provide people with a service dominated, service based, group based and disempowered life. The ideology underpinning person centred approaches could be helpful motivators to want to change these things. Therefore this ideology could also be helpful motivators for people to want to apply SRV in the lives of individuals.

It is the theory of SRV that will bring a rigour to the analyses and to the design of support arrangements. This article is not suggesting that the person centred planning tools be ignored, as they could be helpful bridges between the theory of SRV and its application. A caution though is that a superficial adoption of the tools, in the absence of a depthful understanding of what socially valued roles can bring to someone's life, can lead to a life that is 'more of the same, with a few more choices'.

Without a theory like SRV as a resource to person centred approaches, it is likely that superficial responses and even neglect will result, and be done in the name of person centred approaches.

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### THE CITATION FOR THIS COLUMN IS

Sherwin, J. (2009). Social Role Valorisation theory as a resource to 'person centred planning.' *The SRV Journal*, 4(2), 6-9.

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