

Assessing the Implementation of Self Determination

In preparation for August's review of some of the effects and lessons of Dane County's self-determination project, county leaders need to choose the way they want to direct the team's attention. In this memo I will sketch three options as an aid to decision making. These are, of course, more than three possibilities and the design of a fifth and better fitting choice could emerge from reactions to the initial set.

Options

	Question	Method	Example
0	How have people & the supports they get changed since the implementation of self-determination?	Collect before & after data on individuals using standard measures	Conroy & Yuskas (1996)
I	What do implementers identify as notable results, steps, & lessons from the process?	Interview a variety of involved people & generate a story of the results, conditions, & lessons.	Yuskas, Conroy & Elks, (1997) O'Brien (2000)
II	What value do people experience through the supports they receive & how can service providers improve their offerings so that people experience greater value?	Profile the perceived value individuals gain from the assistance they get as the basis for a process of continual improvement	Minnesota Region 10 Quality Assurance Commission (n.d.)
III	How do people experience the conditions of choice & what effects do people identify on the stated values of the project?	Profile individual experiences of the conditions for choice. Identify perceived effects of engagement in the self determination project on the project's stated values.	Sketched below; no applications as yet.

In selecting among these options, it is important to think about 1) how the county intends to manage its contribution to the on-going improvement of service quality; 2) how the county intends to assess and improve its own performance as a system dedicated to self-direction; 3) how the county wants the August event to relate to ongoing quality improvement efforts; 4) how the county wants the August event to contribute to the dissemination of self-determination to other counties and states, and 5) how this effort will fit with the two RWJ evaluations. It is reasonable to think that more than one approach will be necessary.

Option 0 is presently unavailable because it requires a before and after measurement. However it might be a reasonable future investment if the county wants to demonstrate changes in circumstances over time for the people it serves taken as a group. For example, it could provide useful information to stakeholders concerned that the implementation of self-determined services will lead people to loose services or suffer harm or loss of abilities. Many people perceive the reports of such studies as “hard data”, though such data doesn’t necessarily settle deeply held differences of opinion or cause new funds to flow. Because this approach is most credible if done by external researchers using standardized measures, the main cost to the county is money for a research contract and the main cost to people and families is being measured from time to time. Translating the results into action to improve quality requires the county to develop a process for interpreting the data the process reports, and then generating and implementing improvement plans.

Option I, a learning history, harvests what the people most involved in making the turn to self-directed services have learned by constructing a case study of how changes have been made as different stakeholders see them. It can build a better understanding among stakeholders (“So that’s what you thought you were doing!”) and offer guidance for planning next steps within the county. A learning history can make a significant contribution to those planning to implement self-directed services in other places, especially those hungry for ideas about how to make the change. It does not provide information on the effects of self-determination on people and their families. Because it focuses on how changes have happened rather than on an external judgement about results, it could be portrayed as a self-confirming waste of time by critics of the county’s efforts.

Option II, VOICE, focuses directly on the whole life experience of people with disabilities in the context of a system for continual quality improvement in both service providers and the county system. It establishes people with disabilities and those who know them best as the judges of service and system quality. VOICE was developed in a different environment and can’t simply be transplanted. It calls for intensive work both in developing the quality improvement process and in fitting the tools to the local environment. However its authors are local and the work of establishing quality improve-

ment efforts fitted to a self-directed system is ongoing. Using VOICE for August’s work would accelerate its adaptation for use in Dane County.

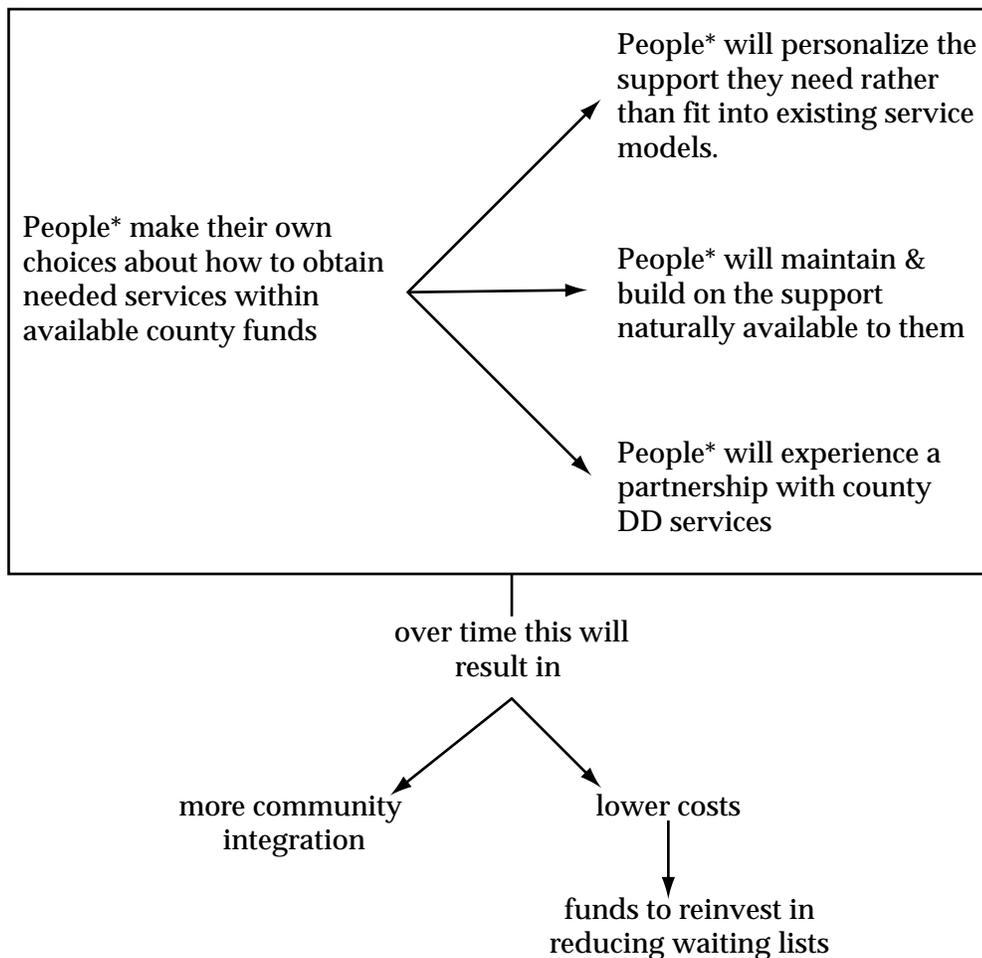
Option III, investigating conditions for choice, focuses narrowly on the role of the county system in operating a self-directed services system. This option makes the experience of a sample of people who have been most involved with self-directed services the measure of the county’s efforts to offer or support the emergence of a set of conditions for choice which were derived from discussions with Wisconsin citizens interested in self-determination, one of which happened in a dimly lit Chinese restaurant (see below for a summary of the current set of conditions). It also tests the logic of the county’s design for self-directed services by inquiring about the effects people and those who know them well perceive that self-direction has on their sense of partnership with the county, their personalization of supports, and their use of naturally available supports. If selected this approach will have its first use in August, so it will offer the team the chance to be testers of an early draft. Should it prove useful, this approach might be a part of the county’s ongoing quality improvement efforts.

	Potential Impact		
	Service Provider Quality	County System Quality	Dissemination of Self-Determination
Option 0	moderate indirect	moderate	some, given positive results
Option I	low	moderate by guiding planning	high
Option II	high	high	low to moderate
Option III	low	high	moderate to high

On balance, it seems to me that VOICE makes the most sense for August’s work, if the county has an interest in adapting it for local use. Both VOICE and an inquiry into the conditions for choice will require considerable effort to gather people as informants about the systems performance, however VOICE makes this investment go farther by using it as the first iteration of a continuing process. VOICE has already been refined through several tests, albeit for use in Minnesota. An inquiry into the conditions for choice is, at the moment, vaporware. There is ample time to draft a guide for team members, but the team would be testing a tool for the first time. I don’t have the information to make even a tentative judgement about how the other two counties would see using VOICE.

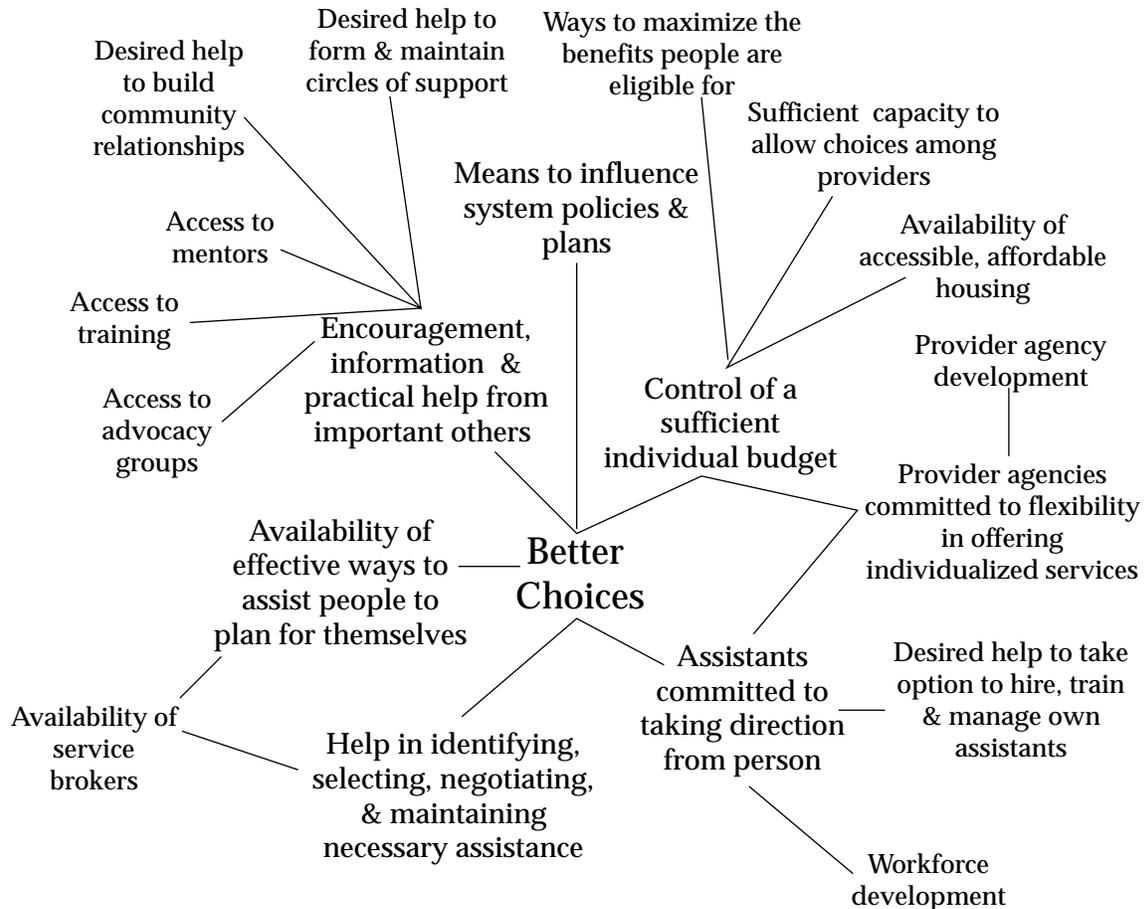
Conditions for Choice

Forging a Partnership (Dane County, 1998) sets out a logic for self directed services the first part of which is summarized in the causal diagram below. (There may be other documents that would make a better source, but if so I don't have them. Before inquiring with a team, work with county leaders would produce an acceptable account of the logic for the team's use.) If people make their own choices about how to obtain needed services, then they will experience a stronger partnership with the service system, build on the supports naturally available to them, and personalize the supports they need. Over time, self-directed services will result in people being better integrated into their communities and able to get the services they need at lower overall cost. Because most people engaged in self-directed services have probably not been involved long enough for the second generation changes to take effect, this inquiry will focus inside the box (heresy!), asking people for their perception of their partnership with the county and the ways in which they have personalized their supports and built up their use of naturally available supports.



*People includes individuals with disabilities and others who speak with and for them: legal guardians and friends.

The team would also gather information on the ways people experience the conditions for choice outlined in the following network diagram. Some of these conditions are the county’s primary responsibility, others can be influenced by county investments.



The unit of inquiry would be the same as that proposed by VOICE, i.e. the person and those most involved with the person whether guardians, family, friends, or involved staff.

References

- Conroy, J. and Yuskas, A. (1996). *Independent evaluation of the Monadnock Self-determination Project*. Ardmore, PA.: The Center for Outcome Analysis.
- Minnesota Region 10 Quality Assurance Commission (n.d.) *VOICE: Value of individual choices and experiences*.
- O’Brien, J. (2000). *Learning about community support for families of children with disabilities: A learning history of the Local Liaison Project*. Lansing MI: The Arc of Michigan.
- Yuskas, A., Conroy, J., & Elks, M. (1997) *A qualitative analysis of systems change in the Monadnock Self-determination project*. Ardmore, PA.: The Center for Outcome Analysis.