

Model Coherency: Its Structure, Roots, Evolution, & Potential

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Prefatory Note

THIS ARTICLE IS BASED UPON a plenary presentation delivered on 23 February 2023 as part of the International Social Role Valorization distance (virtual) conference.¹ It is a lightly edited copy of my talk. I am grateful for the careful reading and feedback on previous versions from Jo Massarelli, Joe Osburn, and Susan Thomas.

Introduction

WOLF WOLFENSBERGER'S LIFE DEMONSTRATES a clear commitment to working to make positive change in the lives of societally devalued people, and to inviting, encouraging, and mentoring others to participate in this work. I propose that one of his 'big ideas,' namely, the construct of Model Coherency, is crucially important for contemporary human services of all kinds and around the globe, as one proven way to increase the capacity and potential of such services to make the 'good things of life' more available to societally devalued people, particularly those in heightened vulnerability.

Simply put, Model Coherency calls for "the right servers ... using the right ... methods, in the right settings ... to do the right thing for the right recipients ... grouped in the right way."²

In a human service world too often dominated by incoherent models which largely fail to address people's real needs, and often even create harm

as well as further needs, the construct of Model Coherency offers a valid approach, consistent with Social Role Valorization (SRV), and which encompasses comprehensive strategies that can be put into practice in a variety of human service fields. "It was in order to restore the clarity of service focus that the construct of model coherency was born."³

Furthermore, I propose that it would be enormously beneficial for those of us studying, disseminating, and applying Dr. Wolfensberger's body of work to commit to a deep examination of his last formulation of Model Coherency, including its use for service design as well as for evaluation of services. Studying Model Coherency can provide new insights about SRV and PASSING.⁴ Its overarching framework provides a rich foundation for understanding and applying his core ideas on service, which brings us to the heart of my topic.

Wolfensberger's focus on identifying and then addressing real and fundamental needs with potent action speaks to what he came to call Model Coherency: all the parts of a service, whether a formal or informal service, should fit together, and this harmony increases the capacity for potently addressing the pressing needs of service recipients.

Wolfensberger described a model coherent service as having a kind of beauty, because it displays three characteristics: wholeness, harmony,

and radiance.⁵ This is not just a side note, a nice sounding idea, but rather it speaks directly to the robust framework of Model Coherency, which is whole, harmonious, and radiant or clear. This characterization also provides a glimpse into his way of thinking about service, human nature, and the world we live in.⁶

As we look at the trajectory of Wolfensberger's work and of his publications, we can better appreciate that Model Coherency represents a lifetime of thinking about how to construct relevant and potent service models. It is telling that his last writing project before his death in 2011 was to revise a manuscript on Model Coherency. After a significant amount of editing and then proofing by Susan Thomas and Ray Lemay, this manuscript became a three-volume book published in 2021 by Valor Press. This is indeed a comprehensive text, useful for studying Model Coherency and essential for applying the construct for evaluation or for design.

Why is this topic of Model Coherency important? For many reasons, including that all services are based on some kind of model; an essential question is whether that model is coherent or not. A service based on an incoherent model may at best be ineffective, and at worst will fuel the processes of societal devaluation and thus is likely to bring about and to exacerbate wounding in the lives of vulnerable people. A more coherent model of service, however, is both relevant and potent in terms of identifying and addressing people's real needs and provides a framework to guide the efforts of servers, whether paid or unpaid.

Model Coherency therefore is valuable both for a deeper understanding and application of SRV and PASSING; and to vulnerable people receiving services, insofar as model coherent programs are potentially more role valorizing⁷ and more resistant to deterioration. And a deep understanding of SRV and PASSING is crucial for those learning about and using Model Coherency: understanding Model Coherency will deepen our comprehension and use of SRV and PASSING; and vice

versa, knowledge of SRV and PASSING will help us to better appreciate and use Model Coherency.

Model Coherency is conceptually rich and eminently practical at the same time.⁸ While complex and abstract,⁹ the essence of this concept can be readily grasped:

a very colloquial way of putting it is to say that: the right servers should be using the right materials, methods, and language, in the right settings, in order to do the right thing for the right recipients, who are grouped in the right way.¹⁰

Structure of the Model Coherency Construct

AS NOTED BY Susan Thomas and Joe Osburn:

A shorthand way of phrasing the concept of model coherency is that it asks several questions: (1) who are the people, and what are the service assumptions about them; (2) what do they need, and what are the service assumptions about these; (3) what content is relevant to address that need; and (4) what are the best processes for addressing that need in a way that is most potent, effective, and image-enhancing.¹¹

We can draw upon multiple ways of learning about the most complete formulation of Model Coherency, primarily in Wolfensberger's three volume text, but also secondarily in related texts such as the PASSING book and the SRV monograph, and thirdly in materials developed by students of Wolfensberger, such as articles, training materials, and so on.

Components of the Model Coherency Construct

TO BEGIN WITH a basic review, we can examine the concepts of relevance and of potency.

Is a service measure **relevant** to what the people served truly need? "Relevance means that the content addresses a major or significant need of the people to whom the content is addressed."¹² In

PASSING workshops, this is one of the fundamental questions that teams spend lots of discussion time on; most specifically, when conciliating R231 ‘Service Address of Recipient Needs.’ Relevance perhaps speaks to one of the “aha” moments we so often see in SRV and PASSING trainings, when a participant glimpses an approach that gets to the heart of what another person actually needs, and recognizes that it is something within reach, something we can actually work toward.

Is a service using the most **potent** means available to address these needs? “Potency means that whatever processes are employed should be the most effective and efficient means for addressing a party’s needs, so that one makes the best use of the time of recipients, rather than either addressing the need in a fashion which is not particularly pointed or effective, or outright wasting their time.”¹³ In the PASSING book, we can point to R232 ‘Intensity of Activities and Efficiency of Time Use,’ among other ratings.

With relevance and potency in mind, we turn to the specific elements that actually make up a service model,¹⁴ namely assumptions, recipients, content, and processes.

“Assumptions are the underlying premises, beliefs, and ideologies (whether conscious or unconscious) on which the model is based.”¹⁵ We may remember learning about assumptions, for instance, when studying the developmental model in SRV, as well as the theme of Model Coherency in an SRV workshop or as described in more recent editions of the SRV monograph.

Wolfensberger categorizes assumptions as falling into multiple types, namely:

- about the governing forces of reality
- about human nature
- about the causes and natures of human problems
- about human needs, and
- about what works to address problems and what an ideal world would look like.¹⁶

For example, assumptions about human nature might be that all people, including those with impairments, have enormous potential for growth, or have gifts and capacities to share, and actually want to share them; or that each person is a solo bearer of rights that are to be honored no matter what, even above the needs of other people, and that those rights do not come with any requisite obligations.

Assumptions related to addressing problems might be that the main problem is intellectual impairment which has biological and neurological roots and therefore requires clinical therapies; or that the more pressing problem stems from social devaluation, negative perception, and negative treatment, so that changing negative perceptions and the dynamics of devaluation is the goal, with valued roles as the primary means of opening the door to the good things of life available in a particular community.

Assumptions influence the model or models of a service; more specifically, assumptions can increase or decrease the coherency of a model. An assumption that reflects for example one of the historical deviancy roles (such as menace or sub-human) is likely to decrease the coherency of a model derived from such an assumption, in that the model is less likely to address real needs and is also not likely to be role-valorizing. Coherent models based on explicit and valid assumptions are more likely to be of high quality.¹⁷

Assumptions are held by individuals, of course, with varying degrees of explication or consciousness,¹⁸ though can also be shared by multiple people, such as the servers in a human service program.¹⁹

Let me briefly draw attention to five points regarding assumptions, though this is not an exhaustive list:

1. The assumptions undergirding a model should be true and valid, as far as we can tell within the limits of our human knowledge and capacities.

2. Furthermore, we are invited to identify and hold assumptions which fundamentally have moral goodness.²⁰
3. The most important assumptions are about the people served.²¹
4. It is useful to determine the likely corollaries, and to anticipate the likely implications, of core assumptions.
5. The assumptions of a program ideally will be held widely: by key leaders, by many or most servers, by administrators, by board members, and so on.²²

In summary, identifying or recognizing assumptions can be incredibly clarifying, and will help us to make sense of what we are seeing in services, whether a program is based on a coherent model built on clear and valid assumptions, or an incoherent model that is a jumbled mess of assumptions or that acts on skewed and stereotypical assumptions about people.

The next component is recipients. Who is served by the program (relevant to Model Coherency evaluation) or who are the intended recipients of a program (relevant to Model Coherency design)?²³ This component may start out as quite broad (such as in a design process, “this model will serve adults over the age of 70”) and then get progressively narrowed down (“adults over 70 who are poor, who are at risk of losing their homes, who are living in this particular geographic region,” and so on).

Related to this component, the theory of Social Role Valorization notes that we are to pay attention to the destructive patterns and processes of societal devaluation, negative perception followed by negative treatment, the most common wounds, and heightened vulnerability.²⁴

Wolfensberger pointed out that the roles ascribed to societally devalued people can drive the service model **and** the staff model.²⁵ If you see a person or class of people as less than human, in the deviancy role of subhuman, then the service model may become one of neglect, custody or de-

struction, and the staff model become caretaker or even deathmaker.²⁶

Another relevant question is, who are the actual beneficiaries of a service? Who are the real recipients in that sense: Paid staff? Administrators? Families, including even absent or disconnected families? Society? This is one of the Model Coherency questions that many PASSING teams consider at some point in a workshop, even if not explicitly in the language of Model Coherency.

This element of service recipients brings us to the identity and needs of the person(s) served, which grounds the next two pieces: content and process.

We turn then to content. “Content refers to what the service model actually delivers, i.e., what does it convey to recipients.”²⁷ What is the program actually providing or delivering? What is the program actually doing for people? And is that content relevant to recipients’ needs, particularly the most pressing needs, especially image and competency needs, or is the content driven instead by primarily non-programmatic considerations?

And finally, process. “Process refers to the means by which the content is conveyed.”²⁸ Process speaks to potency, power, intensity. Process elements include the following five categories: setting, servers, methods and technologies, language, and groupings. Are these five processes and process elements known to be effective? Do they come close to culturally valued analogues? Do they minimize harm or at least do no (further) harm?²⁹

Wolfensberger cautions against the common problem of conflating content with process. For example: education or sheltered workshop is a process, not a content; instead, learning would be the content.³⁰

We can see also that some service models are intended to directly provide content (a residential program and home for example) while other models instead arrange for the provision of content without actually providing it (an adoption agency tries to find families who will then provide home, for instance).³¹ This distinction is impor-

tant insofar as, in terms of our example, an adoption agency and an adoptive family will use different processes.

When we know what we are doing and for whom—the content and recipients—we want to make sure that we also have all the right processes in place.

In addition to the overall coherency of a model, we can consider the degree of fit or congruency among the different elements of a model.³² Let me offer a few considerations.

To what degree does the content match the most pressing needs of recipients? For example, are we helping school-age young people to learn; are we providing home to someone who is homeless? This question of matching content and needs speaks to relevance.

Note that relevance is not necessarily all or nothing but can be understood as existing on a continuum. We see this reflected in R231 'Service Address of Recipient Needs' in the PASSING tool, which, as with all the ratings, is assessed along a continuum, that is, the multiple rating levels from 1 to 5.

To what degree does any one service process fit the identity and needs of one recipient of a grouping, or of all recipients, e.g., is this the right setting or the right techniques or the right language for this particular person served or group of people; or is it at least as close as possible to the right setting or technique or language?

To what degree are the processes congruent with the content, the *how* with the *what*? A process that does not come close to the culturally valued analog(ues) may not match the content, e.g., the method of fake or make work for adults, or of teenagers hanging out in the school cafeteria all day instead of going to class to learn or only taking non-academic classes unlike their age peers—such processes do not match the content or the culturally valued analogues.

To what degree are the process elements congruent with each other? For instance, the setting may not fit with the servers, perhaps because of

lack of competency among servers, being put in irrelevant server roles by the model, and so on. Consider young people with intellectual impairments who need to, want to, and can learn, who are in a school setting with age-appropriate classroom materials, but the servers have no pedagogical training whatsoever and do not know how to take advantage of the environment and classroom materials, or who may be placed into a role that is incongruent with the environment, for example, if the servers are told that their job is to keep students quietly sitting in the classrooms, or to hand out prescription drugs on a daily regimen to students.

In summary regarding our overall point about fit: a coherent model demonstrates congruency on several planes: recipient to content, content to process, recipient to process, and process to process.³³ Or put more simply, do we see a fit in and among *who*, *what*, and *how*? Again, keep in mind that these congruences are not necessarily all or nothing but can be assessed as to degree of fit. This degree is part of what a Model Coherency assessment process identifies and what a Model Coherency design process aims to achieve.

Keeping in mind the components of assumptions, recipients, content, and process, let's return to the construct of Model Coherency in general.

The ideal service model—i.e., the one with the greatest model coherency—would be derived from the real, primary, and urgent needs of the people to be served, and all of its process components would match harmoniously with each other and the content so as to facilitate effective address of those needs.³⁴

Note the reference to all (which is wholeness) and to harmony and to ideal (which we might see as radiance or clarity)—the three characteristics representing the beauty of Model Coherency, as noted earlier.

We can use Wolfensberger's formulation to identify examples of model coherent and model

incoherent services, or perhaps more precisely service models that are more coherent, and service models that are less coherent or more incoherent.³⁵ Some models, such as the developmental model or more accurately developmental models (plural), or certain forms of medical models, fit the criteria of coherency in theory if not always in practice.³⁶ On the other hand, models such as burden of charity or sub-human predominantly lack coherency, perhaps because of a significant mismatch with real needs or with the culturally valued analogues, or incorporation of invalid assumptions, or all the above. Another lack of coherency may stem from combining the features of multiple, disparate models, such as sub-human with menace or a medical model with an educational (developmental) model, which can lead to irrelevant content and/or lack of culturally valued analogues.³⁷

The paragraph above raises a point which calls for further analysis and clarification. A model may (appear to) be logical and consistent in deriving content and processes from assumptions and carefully applied to a particular group or class of people, yet be based on invalid or false assumptions, for instance, about what the people served truly need.³⁸ Could we call that a coherent model? Based on the three-volume text and the most recent formulation of SRV, I would argue that it might be more practical for those teaching or applying Model Coherency to differentiate models that are coherent and role valorizing **from** models that are based on invalid assumptions yet are consistent in building on these false assumptions to define content and processes.³⁹

*A key thesis of the model coherency construct is that **coherent models correctly derived from valid assumptions will tend to yield high quality service**—indeed, that they constitute the essence of service quality. Conversely, incoherent models not only deliver suboptimal services, but may even do more harm than good. However, if elements of a model are rigorously derived from its*

*assumptions (and thus well-designed), but the assumptions are **not** valid, then the service being designed may still have a lot of content-process coherency, and process-process coherency, but not a lot of coherency between, for example, content and recipient needs.⁴⁰* (emphases in original)

*The crux of a coherent model is that all the assumptions it is based on are valid, and all of its elements (such as content and processes) are logically derived from, or consistent with, the assumptions, and fit well together. When a model is incoherent, then it contains at least some assumptions that are **not** valid. Unfortunately, an incoherent model may look elegant because it got derived in an utterly logical and consistent fashion, but from assumptions of which one or more is false.⁴¹* (emphasis in original)

Tool Subjects

A SUBSTANTIVE PORTION of the first volume of the 2021 text is dedicated to the topic of tool subjects⁴² which “provide a foundation of concepts, theories and terminology for the discussion and application of model coherency.”⁴³ The following list outlines six tool subjects:

1. The distinction between programmatic and nonprogrammatic considerations, with programmatic considerations stemming from the identity and needs of the people served, and non-programmatic driven by the needs of others, such as the law, funders, politics, etc. We can note that processes (setting, servers, methods and technologies, language, groupings) are so often influenced or shaped by non-programmatic factors.
2. Distinctions between the content and the process of a service, the *what* and the *how*.⁴⁴ Conflating content with process, as noted previously, is likely to reduce the coherency of a model. Keeping the dis-

tinctions clear opens the door to potentially generating potent, image and competency enhancing, as well as role valorizing, processes, e.g., if the content is learning, then we can imagine any number of relevant pedagogical processes—embodied in schools, home schooling, tutoring, independent study, study abroad, and so on.

3. Social Role Valorization theory. The theory of SRV itself is integrally linked by Wolfensberger to Model Coherency. Consider for example how the ‘big ideas’ of SRV can flesh out our understanding of Model Coherency, and aid in both design and assessment. A constructive learning exercise might be to go back to the basic elements of Model Coherency (assumptions, recipients, content, processes) and consider each one of these in relation to the following: valued roles opening the door to the ‘good things of life;’ image enhancement and competency enhancement; the processes of social devaluation; the most common wounds; the ten themes; action implications on the level of the individual, primary social systems, secondary social systems, and society in general. A similar exercise would be to study Model Coherency assessment in relation to the PASSING tool and ratings.
4. Culturally valued analogues (CVAs). This is a rich framework covered in other writings and trainings, so this description is limited to a few points. The CVA describes the valued, embedded, and familiar ways that most typical people meet different needs, and this becomes the standard by which to measure services and models. While we often use the shorthand CVA (singular), it may be helpful to remember that we can often identify multiple CVAs.⁴⁵ Coherent models deliver the CVAs or at least approximate culturally valued analogues.
5. Service purview. An important aspect of the PASSING tool, process, and workshop is to carefully delineate the purview of a service, namely, the scope or limit of influence, authority, and responsibility of a service. This is an essential tool concept in Model Coherency as well. Three relevant criteria include: the culturally valued analogue, recipient needs, and hard mandates, whether internal mandates (such as articles of incorporation for an organization) or external (such as laws).
6. Helping forms. A helping or service form refers to a pattern of means identified as addressing a need. This can refer to structured and formal professional agency services as well as to informal patterns of addressing others’ needs.⁴⁶ A helping or service form may point to a culturally valued analogue itself or to an approximation of a CVA.⁴⁷ In terms of Model Coherency design specifically, part of the process is to sketch out possible service forms which could address a real and pressing need. This process does not initially distinguish whether any one form has a culturally valued analogue. Pruning the list in terms of CVAs can happen later in the design process. As well, a Model Coherency design process involves ranking service forms in terms of closeness to the most **highly valued** analogues, not just typical, as well as in terms of relevance to identified need or needs.

The tool subjects can help us to cut through some of the distractions that are endemic in most services today and around the world, and that plague many service models.

Roots & Evolution of the Construct

WE CAN TRACE the long-term development and fine-tuning of the construct of Model Coherency from at least the

early 1960s right up to Dr. Wolfensberger's death in 2011.⁴⁸ His focus on making positive change, as well as his intellectual habits, prioritized a continual move toward greater clarity, harmony, integrity—the three aspects of beauty noted earlier. A historical synopsis may provide a bit of context and confidence in the robust construct of Model Coherency as we know it today.

Earlier versions of Model Coherency, such as those incorporated into the PASS⁴⁹ tool or used in conjunction with PASSING, are not as articulated, precise or complete as the current construct. A person who has used or studied previous versions, as valuable as that may be, should not presume automatic or full understanding of Wolfensberger's final formulation of Model Coherency. It will require dedicated study.

Wolfensberger built on existing knowledge in his process of formulating Model Coherency, to develop his own thinking and to make sense of his many experiences in the field. Consider for example that Volume 1 of the 2021 text references materials that date from the years 1781 through to 2010. This work is truly the fruit of research both deep and broad.

In this section, I will point to several 'stepping stones' toward Model Coherency, more to illustrate my larger claim than to offer a fuller explanation of these varied contributions.⁵⁰ Others may want to carry out such further study. Out of respect for historical context, and for Dr. Wolfensberger's teaching on language,⁵¹ I will as much as possible use the language which he used in the time period.

As a good starting point, though perhaps not even the earliest, we can point to at least two formative ideas that contributed to his development of what became Model Coherency, namely, specialization and diversification.

- Specialization. One of Wolfensberger's professors, Lloyd Dunn, proposed in 1959 and in 1961 that the prevalent 'total' institutions for mentally retarded people be replaced by smaller, dispersed, specialized

institutions—based on the different identities and needs of people.⁵²

- Diversification. From 1962-1963, Wolfensberger studied the county service system in Middlesex, England which incorporated dispersed, diversified community services—that is, different services providing different things to different people.

In the 1960s and 1970s, Wolfensberger was thinking about human service models in other fields, such as so-called 'mental health,' and in various geographic locations, including the Scandinavian countries. These two illustrations exemplify one of the benefits of learning from implementation strategies in locations other than one's own.

We can see further development of the concept in the 1968 Nebraska state reform plan which called for a variety of dispersed residential, school, and work options.⁵³

A 1969 article by Wolfensberger discusses the following: useful distinctions between processes and functions, the importance of identifying the intended beneficiaries of a service (reminding us of the recipients component), and service or helping forms.⁵⁴

In the 1973 PASS Field Manual by Wolfensberger and Glenn, we find the construct of service specialization: "the service provides a coherent program in which a number of variables combine harmoniously so as to meet the specific needs of each client at that particular time of his life."⁵⁵ These variables touch on model, server, service recipient, content, and process.⁵⁶ We can trace a move to specialized models as opposed to one omnibus institution. Service specialization will be renamed and, more importantly, reconceptualized as Model Coherency.⁵⁷

In the 3rd edition of PASS (1975), we have an actual Model Coherency rating R113:

The rating of 'Model Coherency' is concerned with whether a number of variables within a program combine harmoniously so as to meet the specific needs of each

*client at that particular time of his life. Another way to draw the issue is to ask: are the right people working with the right clients, who are properly grouped, doing the right thing, using the right methods, and consistently so?*⁵⁸

The above phrasing resonates with the current 2021 formulation.⁵⁹

Other stepping stones include the construct of Model Coherency impact (from 1992-1994), and a Model Coherency rating (from 2008-2010), culminating eventually in the 2021 text available to us today.⁶⁰

Continuity With & in Social Role Valorization & PASSING

EARLIER I POSITED that an understanding of Model Coherency will deepen and broaden our understanding of SRV and PASSING, among other ideas developed by Wolfensberger. Let me sketch a few links, though much more could be said on any one of these points, and I invite further discussion and dissemination. Keep in mind please that these are just sketches, and as such are presented simply, without sufficient detail.

The move from PASS to PASSING simplified the material, intentionally so, and thus the construct of Model Coherency was not incorporated as such into PASSING but rather elements of it can be seen dispersed in multiple ratings.⁶¹

We can identify a link between the ten themes of and for SRV with the various components of Model Coherency,⁶² e.g., in the reality of unconscious assumptions, in the concept of relevance identified in the SRV monograph as part of the action implications, etc.

Wolfensberger noted the possibility or likelihood of the most common wounds arising out of social and societal devaluation in relation to incoherent models. That causal link, of an incoherent model creating and perpetuating wounding, may be worth studying, for teachers of SRV as well as

those putting SRV into practice within particular service organizations.

SRV is a tool subject of Model Coherency, as noted earlier. In addition to being one of the themes of and for SRV, can we think of Model Coherency as also acting as a synthesizing element for SRV, at least to some degree? If so, this might have implications for dissemination, learning, and teaching.

Relatedly, some SRV practitioners may attempt to take one element of SRV or PASSING and enlarge it beyond the intent of its author, perhaps even thus crowding out or ignoring other aspects. In such cases, Model Coherency could provide a necessary corrective, a larger framework to keep all the relevant concepts and the entire theory in harmony. Again, note a link to two of the elements of beauty noted previously, namely, wholeness and harmony.

Potential

THE MODEL COHERENCY CONSTRUCT developed by Wolfensberger has great potential, still largely untapped in my estimation. As noted earlier, my hope is that many more people associated with SRV, PASSING, and Citizen Advocacy will be motivated to learn more about Model Coherency theory, design and assessment, with an eye toward helping to open the door to the available good things of life for societally devalued people.

Accordingly, I will briefly survey this topic of the untapped potential of Model Coherency under two headings: namely, leadership potential within the SRV movement and implementation potential for contemporary human services in multiple fields across the globe.

Potential in the SRV Movement

LEARNING, TEACHING, AND APPLYING the construct of Model Coherency could strengthen the existing SRV movement, helping us to become even better teachers, change agents, and implementers of SRV and related concepts.

Even my incipient study with others of the Model Coherency text has already begun to help me to develop a more integrated understanding of Wolfensberger's SRV work. I have a better sense of the overall structure and connections within the elements of SRV theory (e.g., from roles to expectations, models, and servers); and between SRV and PASSING (e.g., in terms of relevance, potency, models, and culturally valued analogues).

I have a growing understanding of the scope and influence of assumptions. I am more able to see continuity in the development of SRV (from Normalization to SRV taught using 7 themes to SRV taught using 10 themes, and from the multiple versions of PASS to the multiple versions of PASSING). I see more clearly ties among some of his big ideas, such as SRV, PASSING, and Citizen Advocacy.

Actualizing this potential will require that more of us study the concept, primarily through the three-volume text, alongside secondary and tertiary sources, as well as in workshops, practicums, real or valid assessments, and so on. This will take time and concerted effort, as well as a dedication of resources. For example, some may be in an organizational position that would enable sponsorship of a Model Coherency design or assessment, or to host a workshop on Model Coherency.

As our understanding of Model Coherency develops within the SRV movement, it will also be helpful to develop training materials and offer multiple teaching and learning events, as happened with Wolfensberger's other published writings on SRV, PASSING, Citizen Advocacy, the sanctity of human life, moral coherency, etc. Indeed, it would be helpful to develop various curricula to study Model Coherency for use in different contexts: within training projects, within and for human service agencies and programs, within colleges and universities, and so on.

As shared understanding develops, it will also be beneficial to write about Model Coherency and to disseminate such writings in many available contexts: peer reviewed journals, newsletters, blogs and online media, podcasts, newsletters, etc.

Any such writing, training, and dissemination efforts should explicitly reference and acknowledge Wolfensberger's vast body of work on the topic, especially but not limited to the 2021 text.⁶³ We do a disservice to learners and students if we do not enable and encourage them to study the original so to speak.

We have made some very, very modest beginnings in the above areas, of curriculum development and of dissemination, but we should prioritize and support efforts in both areas and around the world, wherever SRV is being studied and taught.

Drawing on my experience to date with PASSING, and on the early stages of my exposure to Model Coherency, I am confirmed in my understanding that we should strive as much as possible to use and trust the entire process of assessment and the entire process of design, as laid out in the three-volume text. Pulling out only certain ideas, content or processes will lessen its overall relevance and potency. We are not at a level of comprehension to be making such changes or to be able to foresee the perhaps unintended consequences of making substantive changes in the ways we use the material.⁶⁴ We have seen similar decisions to omit aspects of teaching and applying SRV (e.g., prioritizing imagery over competency, framing SRV only in terms of integration), and in teaching and applying PASSING (e.g., leaving out certain ratings, dropping some of the PASSING guidelines), and I foresee similar misunderstandings when it comes to Model Coherency if we are not thoughtful and conscientious, take our time, work together, give and receive feedback, etc.

As learners, teachers, and practitioners of SRV, we can learn through practice assessments of particular service programs, both formal and informal, especially through and by the process of writing assessment reports. This kind of analysis post-event, with time to refine and hone a team's conclusions, is highly valuable for the learning of team members, team leader, report writer, and

editor, and theoretically for the SRV movement generally, especially to the extent that such reports can be shared beyond the team, even in abbreviated form.⁶⁵ We can also look for and build toward opportunities to conduct real assessments, with verbal and written feedback. At this point, we still have people who studied with Wolfensberger and conducted valid evaluations whom we could learn from.

We can help to design programs to be more in line with Model Coherency. So many service programs inherit models that are incoherent, driven by false assumptions and non-programmatic considerations, and/or combine elements of multiple models in incoherent ways. We can arrange Model Coherency design exercises as a kind of practicum learning. And so on. Compared with using Model Coherency for assessment, we are probably much less experienced and skilled with the use of Model Coherency design, so such an endeavor is likely to take more time, practice, thought, planning, and ideally collaborative work.

In terms of potential for the movement, allow me to focus briefly on the component of assumptions.⁶⁶ In Model Coherency design, learning to develop relevant and potent assumptions in various domains is essential. Doing this as part of a group complicates the process but is necessary, and in the long run, can actually be more fruitful than doing this as an individual. Furthermore, the design process calls on us to recognize and address non-programmatic constraints, even when necessary to accept for the time being conditions which are not ideal but at least acceptable.⁶⁷

As for Model Coherency assessment, identifying (unconscious) assumptions held within an existing program is a skill and exercise already practiced to a certain extent in some PASSING workshops; yet it is a foundational, explicit, and more detailed step in the process of Model Coherency analysis now available to us.

Another practical benefit of using the most recent formulation of Model Coherency is that it cultivates essential leadership skills, for example,

the ability to pinpoint the program content that is more likely to address the identified need or needs of the person or class of people to be served. Too often contemporary services confuse content with process, or adopt existing and predominant models, mistakenly equating these with content (e.g., people need 'self-directed services' or 'self-advocacy' or 'supported employment' or 'customized employment').

Model Coherency highlights the importance of identifying a problem to be addressed, as distinct from needs, and as distinct from people who are identified as having the problem. Making necessary distinctions among needs, problems, and people is indispensable,⁶⁸ if we are to identify real problems, significant problems, and problems that could be addressed by means of a human service, whether formal or informal.⁶⁹

Potential in Human Services

WE TEACH not for its own sake but with a larger goal in mind. We are concerned about people living in heightened vulnerability, and in most cases, this means people who receive some kind of service, or perhaps multiple services.

The Model Coherency construct in general and Model Coherency assessment in particular can help to identify relative strengths as well as drawbacks of a concrete service. "Model coherency is a crucially important construct in human services, in that the programmatic quality of a service—defined as the degree to which it responds to the needs of the people served—is largely determined by the degree of its model coherency."⁷⁰ The construct of Model Coherency and the process of assessment can be used to ascertain whether a service is based on an incoherent model; more fundamentally, assessment can identify specific problems around assumptions, relevance of content, potency of processes, and/or lack of fit in a particular service.

Services to societally devalued people are more likely to be model incoherent. Think today about the services you are familiar with, either through

direct experience or keen observation of your social environment. How many services seem to be working at cross purposes or unable to get out of their own way, how many seem to be operating based on goals that are largely irrelevant or perhaps even hurtful to the people served, how many arrange grouping and activities that all but make it impossible for people to develop valued social roles, how many use written and spoken language that is off-putting and dehumanizing? Too many services seem to prioritize financial growth or keeping funders happy over helping people have greater access to the good things of life. Too many services seem to put service workers in untenable situations, with confusing expectations. At the very least, the construct of Model Coherency can bring clarity and shine light on what is actually going on.

Formal services—that is, services which are organized and funded—are the most likely to be incoherent and are much more likely to be suffused with unconsciousness, to violate cultural norms, to be under constraints, and to be driven largely by non-programmatic considerations.⁷¹ We might even posit that model **incoherency** is often rewarded, e.g., an existing funded and accredited residential program may subsequently be given financial and other resources to start offering a day program, in likely violation of culturally valued analogues and practices.⁷²

Many if not most services have inherited so to speak an incoherent model or models. Once an incoherent model has been implemented, unless one goes back to square one and repudiates the fundamental assumptions, then all efforts to address problems will likely just exchange one dysfunctionality for another or we will see a compounding of dysfunctionalities.⁷³

A service may be combinations of different, even conflicting, models⁷⁴ or may respond to problems with faulty assumptions and thus faulty models. Incoherency may stem from lack of knowledge about people and needs.⁷⁵ Servers may disagree with one or more assumptions of the model and

thus create or exacerbate incoherency.⁷⁶ Non-programmatic conflicts of interest make application of Model Coherency more difficult.⁷⁷ And so on.

The concepts and skills encompassed in SRV, PASSING, and Model Coherency can facilitate the identification of conflicting models. Strategies rooted in the tool concepts can help to address, minimize or remove incongruent elements. This brings us back to the previous section, namely, the potential for the SRV movement to apply the construct with an eye towards making positive change in the lives of societally devalued people and of their families, and of inviting, encouraging, and mentoring others to participate in this work.

Model Coherency assessment, perhaps in combination with PASSING and drawing on the various tool subjects, including SRV, can be used to help services pause, look, consider, and assess their models. The conduct of Model Coherency training, assessment, and design will require trained, knowledgeable, and experienced people, which will take commitment, time, and resources, and would be facilitated by collaborative efforts among those currently involved with SRV and PASSING.

Model Coherency design offers a comprehensive and practical framework for designing a relevant and potent service model based on clear, true, and moral assumptions. Perhaps even the rare service will be open to designing a more coherent, relevant, and potent model, and will be able to actually implement such a model. Practically speaking, it is likely to be much more difficult and much less fruitful to try to improve an existing model with significant incoherency (or incoherencies) than it would be to design a model from the start.

Conclusion

WE ARE STILL LEARNING about Model Coherency, yet are in a much better position now than even a few years ago to learn. I have suggested getting access to the

three-volume text. Read and study it, ideally with others. Start an informal study group with colleagues and like-minded people. Take advantage of learning opportunities, such as relevant training events on Model Coherency, some of which are beginning to be offered, and of related events such as SRV and PASSING.

Those with deep familiarity with the construct as designed by Wolfensberger and with the requisite pedagogical skills can eventually start to design and implement relevant Model Coherency curriculum, as well as to invite and mentor learners and practitioners.

Write and disseminate, as noted earlier. To write well and clearly about Model Coherency takes time, as well as editing, refinement, and openness to feedback from others knowledgeable about the construct.

Use the design process. Ideally, this will be done in a real way, to actually design a new model that can be implemented, though this frankly is likely a rare situation. Therefore, and secondarily, the design process itself could be used as a teaching tool; for example, the process outlined in volume two could be followed by a group of learners with a facilitator or facilitators as a way of learning about program design.

Use the assessment process, perhaps in conjunction with PASSING, as outlined in volume three. Again, this ideally will be done in a real way, with a program or service open to feedback. I would caution though that this is likely to be more effective if the service to be assessed has a solid understanding of the various tool subjects, especially SRV, and of the construct of Model Coherency itself. An assessment process is a significant investment in time, effort, and financial resources. This should not be undertaken lightly or without regard for the organization's obligations and the people served.

Once such a process is completed and a written report is produced,⁷⁸ the results of the assessment described in the report will be much more valuable to a service that has a solid grasp of SRV, PASSING, Model Coherency, etc. throughout the organization, not just in the director or leadership positions, but at all levels, and that includes the board.⁷⁹ It would also be beneficial for such a service to consider how the results of a report could be implemented, by whom, with what resources, etc., and to commit to a plan ahead of time.

As with design, however, assessment can also be used as a learning practicum. Though likely abbreviated in comparison with a real assessment, and involving learners who are new to the concept, the process can be quite beneficial, particularly if it includes a written report distributed to team members.

Remember that Wolfensberger described a model coherent service as having a kind of beauty, of incorporating wholeness, harmony, and radiance.⁸⁰ We are now in a better position to assess this claim. We may identify the internal integrity of a model as well as its moral and programmatic wholeness.⁸¹ We can understand, conceptualize, and even assess harmony among and between service elements.⁸² "(I)n order to be coherent, all the pieces of a model need to fit harmoniously and aesthetically together."⁸³

We can recognize one of the likely fruits of a coherent model, namely, that the service elements radiate beauty, inspiration, truth, and morality.⁸⁴ Wolfensberger argued that such radiance is likely to come from devoted servers, those who serve freely, and from those who go well beyond the responsibilities of the position or who serve in response to a calling.⁸⁵ His claim and invitation still stand before us today. ☩

SELECT RESOURCE LIST

Cocks, E. (2018). Model Coherency: A concept and process for the evaluation of quality in human services. *The SRV Journal*, 12(2), 55-68.

Hartfiel, S. (2006). Chronic criminal disease: An SRV-based critique of drug addiction services. *The SRV Journal*, 1(2), 7-24.

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Thomas, S. and Osburn, J. (2019). The construct of Model Coherency. Available on modelcoherency.com

Wolfensberger, W. (2013). *A brief introduction to Social Role Valorization: A high-order concept for addressing the plight of societally devalued people, and for structuring human services* (4th expanded ed.). Plantagenet, ON: Valor Press.

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Wolfensberger, W. and Thomas, S. (1995). The problem of trying to incorporate a Model Coherency analysis into a PASSING assessment. *The International Social Role Valorization Journal*, 2(1), 12-15.

Wolfensberger, W. and Thomas, S. (2007). *PASSING. A tool for analyzing service quality according to Social Role Valorization criteria. Ratings manual* (3rd rev. ed.). Syracuse, NY: Training Institute for Human Service Planning, Leadership and Change Agentry (Syracuse University).

ENDNOTES

1 This online conference, following upon seven on-the-ground international conferences as well as countless workshops, classes, and presentations by many different people all around the world, provide evidence of Wolfensberger's leadership development efforts and devotion to bringing about positive transformation in the circumstances and lives of societally devalued people. His ideas, teaching and writing give testimony of his steadfastness toward vulnerable people and their families. Conferences: Ottawa, ON (1994), Boston, MA (1999), Calgary, AB (2003), Ottawa, ON (2007), Canberra, ACT (2011), Providence, RI (2015), Winnipeg, MB (2018).

2 Wolfensberger, W. (1998). A brief introduction to Social Role Valorization: A high-order concept for addressing the plight of societally devalued people, and for structuring human services (3rd revised ed.). Syracuse, NY: Training Institute for Human Service Planning, Leadership and Change Agentry (Syracuse University), p. 116.

3 Wolfensberger, W. (2021). Model Coherency: The key to human service quality (Vols. 1-3). Rockland ON: Valor Press. Volume 1, p. 128. Subsequent references to this text will be to volume and page numbers.

4 Wolfensberger, W. and Thomas, S. (2007). PASSING. A tool for analyzing service quality according to Social Role Valorization criteria. Ratings manual (3rd rev. ed.). Syracuse, NY: Training Institute for Human Service Planning, Leadership and Change Agentry (Syracuse University).

5 Volume 1, p. 270.

6 Wolfensberger's perception of the beauty of Model Coherency draws upon the writings of medieval thinkers, particularly Thomas Aquinas, and illustrates his broad and deep study, beyond just human service-related topics. He was indeed a student of human services, but also of history, philosophy, theology, literature, and more; and we see these studies reflected in his development and honing of the Model Coherency construct.

7 A service model could theoretically be coherent without being role-valorizing; for example, a hospital based on a medical model could have a high degree of model coherency but still may not directly support patients to have or maintain societally valued roles, though it could make it more likely for healed patients to return to previously held valued roles.

8 This is one of the markers of Wolfensberger's work. O'Brien, J. (2011). Celebrating the genius of Wolf Wolfensberger. *Research and Practice for Persons with Severe Disabilities*, 36(1-2), 76-79, at 76.

9 Volume 1, p. 2.

10 Wolfensberger, 1998, p. 116.

11 Thomas, S. and Osburn, J. (2019). The construct of model coherency. Available on modelcoherency.com.

12 Wolfensberger, 1998, p. 111.

13 Wolfensberger, 1998, pp. 113-114.

14 A model can be described as an “overarching pattern of arrangements of a service, based on a set of assumptions.” Volume 1, p. 19. “(H)uman service models are composed of assemblages of assumptions, contents, and processes.” Wolfensberger, 1998, p. 116.

15 Wolfensberger, 1998, p. 109.

16 Volume 1, p. 64.

17 Volume 1, p. 62.

18 Osburn, J. and Doody, T. (2018). Wolfensberger's SRV-related service construct of model coherency: A brief overview of its evolution, elements, uses and dissemination. *The SRV Journal*, 12(2), 32-52 at 36.

19 Some assumptions, mindsets, and expectancies may (appear to) be more rooted in empirical realities, while others may (appear to) be rooted in trans-empirical or supra-empirical realities. Volume 1, pp. 63, 76.

20 See Wolfensberger, W. (1980). Our moral responsibilities as providers of human services. *The Bulletin (Publication of the Christian Association for Psychological Studies)*, 6(4), 6-8. The workshop material on moral coherency (sometimes ‘service coherency’) is also broadly relevant to this topic.

21 Wolfensberger, W. (1984). Model Coherency design workshop, Toronto (audio tape).

22 For instance, what is likely to happen when key assumptions held by different servers are in tension or conflict?

23 Volume 1, p. 77.

24 Osburn and Doody, 2018, p. 36.

25 Wolfensberger, 1976, Presentation to mental health committee on service models, audio tape.

26 If the person or class of people are seen in the role of burden of charity, then the service model may be industrial-rehabilitation, and the staff model (or roles) that of disciplinarian, trainer, task master. Wolfensberger, 1976, Presentation to mental health committee on service models, audio tape.

27 Wolfensberger, 1998, p. 109.

28 Wolfensberger, 1998, p. 110.

29 Osburn and Doody, 2018, p. 39.

30 Wolfensberger, 1984, Model Coherency design workshop, audio tape; Wolfensberger, 1976, Presentation to mental health committee on service models, audio tape.

31 Volume 1, p. 163.

32 The following analysis is relevant to studying and teaching Model Coherency, as well as to Model Coherency assessment and to Model Coherency design. Volume 1, pp. 206 ff.

33 Volume 3, pp. 142-144.

34 Wolfensberger, 1998, p. 116.

35 The assumptions, content, and means of a coherent service measure or coherent service model will a) match the identities and needs of the people served and b) match the culturally valued analogue(s) for how similar content is ‘delivered’ to societally valued people. Volume 1, p. 128. For more on the SRV concept of the ‘culturally valued analog,’ see Wolfensberger, 1998, p. 118; Wolfensberger and Thomas, PASSING Ratings Manual, pp. 30-31.

36 For those who are interested: read pages 95-99 of volume 1 of the Model Coherency text for cautions about medical models.

37 Volume 1, pp. 124-126; cf. volume 1, p. 89.

38 Volume 1, p. 122.

39 Volume 1, pp. 95, 122. Admittedly, the 2021 text leaves room for various formulations. At times, the text seems to suggest that for instance a deathmaking, subhuman or eternal child model illustrates coherency; at other times, the text leans more towards describing a model that is built on invalid assumptions and/or which does not address real needs as merely consistent. Readers hopefully appreciate the essential idea.

40 Volume 1, p. 62.

41 Volume 1, p. 218.

42 Volume 1, pp. 23-60.

43 Volume 1, p. 22.

44 There are relatively fewer contents compared with very many processes. Osburn and Doody, 2018, p. 40.

45 We recognize the possibility of variations in the CVA, particularly in non-homogeneous cultures. So, the different ways that people make home for example, or engage in leisure activities, within a culture and society that is not uniform. Note the 2023 conference session by Gary Williams and Tony McLean for instance.

46 Wolfensberger, W. (1986). Model Coherency design workshop, Rhode Island (audio tape).

47 Wolfensberger, 1986, Model Coherency design workshop, audio tape.

48 Tumeinski, M. (2023). The ongoing legacy of Wolf Wolfensberger: ‘But where are moral services to come from?’ In Ray Lemay, Guy Caruso and Susan Thomas (Eds.), *Wolf Wolfensberger—The Influence of the Person and His Ideas Today. A Festschrift* (pp. 297-336). Plantagenet ON: Valor Press.

49 Wolfensberger, W. and Glenn, L. (1975). *Program Analysis of Service Systems (PASS): A method for the quantitative evaluation of human services. Vol. 1. Handbook* (3rd ed.). Toronto: National Institute on Mental Retardation; and Wolfensberger, W. and Glenn, L. (1975). *Program Analysis of Service Systems (PASS): A method for the quantitative evaluation of human services. Vol. 2. Field manual* (3rd ed.). Toronto: National Institute on Mental Retardation.

50 I am indebted to writings by Susan Thomas as well as to audio recordings of Wolfensberger teaching about Model Coherency which I accessed thanks to the archives at the McGoogan Library of the University of Nebraska Medical Center in Omaha, Nebraska (US).

51 Wolfensberger, 1998, pp. 19-20; Wolfensberger, W. (2002). Needed or at least wanted: Sanity in the language wars. *Mental Retardation*, 40, 75-80.

52 Wolfensberger, W. (1999). A contribution to the history of Normalization, with primary emphasis on the establishment of Normalization in North America between 1967-1975. In R.J. Flynn and R. Lemay (Eds.), *A quarter-century of normalization and Social Role Valorization: Evolution and impact*. Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 51-116, at 75-76.

53 Wolfensberger states that the idea of specialization influenced the 1968 plan for mental retardation services. Wolfensberger, 1999, p. 76. As Susan Thomas has noted, Wolfensberger's notebooks and writings show him thinking through and working out his ideas over time. For example, we see in his writing a development of various residential models for mentally retarded people, as an alternative to the monolithic option of a residential institution.

54 Wolfensberger, W. (1969). An attempt to reconceptualize functions of services to the mentally retarded. *The Journal of Mental Subnormality*, 15:29, 71-78 at 75.

55 Wolfensberger, W. and Glenn, L. (1975, reprinted 1978). *Program Analysis of Service Systems (PASS): A method for the quantitative evaluation of human services*. Handbook and field manual (3rd ed.). Toronto, Ontario, Canada: National Institute on Mental Retardation, p. 31.

56 The variables are the following: client characteristics (further broken down into client grouping by cultural norms, and client grouping by age-appropriate behavior); the human management model; manpower identity; program content; program process.

57 Wolfensberger, 1999, pp. 63, 76; Thomas, S. (1999). Historical background and evolution of Normalization-related and Social Role Valorization-related training. In R.J. Flynn and R. Lemay (Eds.), *A quarter-century of normalization and Social Role Valorization: Evolution and impact*. Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press. p. 362.

58 Wolfensberger and Glenn, 1975, reprinted 1978, p. 35.

59 The variables are the same as in the 1973 edition, although program content is additionally described as 'what' and program process as 'how.' See Wolfensberger and Glenn, *Program Analysis of Service Systems (PASS)*, Vol. 1. Handbook (3rd ed.); and Wolfensberger and Glenn, *Program Analysis of Service Systems (PASS)*, Vol. 2. Field manual (3rd ed.).

60 In terms of roots and evolution, a significant step worth contemplating is that Model Coherency assessment was developed first, and Model Coherency design later. Again, this may be a factor, small in scope, that someone may want to explore further. We might hypothesize for example that a benefit of the later design process was that it allowed for a clearer distinction between content and process. Further study is warranted.

61 This reminds us that the construct of Model Coherency is complex and will take time to study and practice. While the construct is not explicit in the PASSING tool, the 2021 three volume text makes it explicit and accessible. Someone may wish to research and write about the recent formulation, pointing out links to the PASSING ratings and processes.

62 Osburn and Doody, 2018, p. 41.

63 See Caruso, G. and Osburn, J. (September 2011). The origins of "best practices" in the principle of Normalization and Social Role Valorization. *Journal of Policy and Practice in Intellectual Disabilities*, 8(3): 191-196.

64 For potential adaptations of assessment processes, see Wolfensberger, W. (1983). Guidelines for evaluators.

65 Sharing the outcomes of such an assessment process, whether through a written Model Coherency assessment report or through a verbal assessment summary, takes a level of maturity with the ideas as well as careful thought and preparation. It can though be one of the best fruits to come out of a Model Coherency evaluation, whether for an organization to make changes or in the greater skills and experience of the team leader, report writer, editor, and team members.

66 Remember the categories of assumptions noted earlier: about the governing forces of reality, about human nature, about the causes and natures of human problems, about human needs, and about what works to address problems and what an ideal world would look like. Volume 1, p. 64. The process of identifying assumptions is a challenge in teaching about Model Coherency as well as in design and in evaluation. As trainers, we can strive to more deeply understand and then teach about assumptions: what they are, why they are important, the various domains of assumptions, how to identify (unconscious) assumptions, and how to identify more valid, relevant, and potent assumptions.

67 Consider for instance the level 3 included in each PASSING rating, which describes a service practice that is neither substantively beneficial nor damaging, and thus the impact on the image or competencies of service recipients is relatively neutral overall.

68 Problems do arise out of needs and needs do arise out of unresolved problems.

69 Wolfensberger, 1986, Model Coherency design workshop, audio tape.

70 Volume 1, p. 1.

71 Wolfensberger, 1986, Model Coherency design workshop, audio tape.

72 Wolfensberger, 1984, Model Coherency design workshop, audio tape.

73 Wolfensberger, W. (1984). Model Coherency design workshop, Toronto (audio tape).

74 Osburn and Doody, 2018, p. 37.

75 Wolfensberger, 1984, Model Coherency design workshop, audio tape.

76 Wolfensberger, 1986, Model Coherency design workshop, audio tape.

77 Cf. volume 1, pp. 1-2.

78 Wolfensberger, W. and Thomas, S. (2007). Rationales for written reports of PASS/PASSING practicum evaluations. Syracuse University Training Institute for Human Service Planning, Leadership and Change Agency.

79 Such knowledge can be gained through training in SRV and in PASSING, through learning about Model Coherency (via training, study, reading, practicums), and so on.

80 See Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* I Q39 A8.

81 Volume 1, p. 270.

82 Volume 1, p. 270.

83 Volume 1, p. 235.

84 Volume 1, p. 270.

85 Volume 1, p. 270.

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