

MANAGING IN A CHANGING ENVIRONMENT OR AS THE TUNE CHANGES YOU LEARN A NEW DANCE

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

I began my BASSC project focused on developing a better understanding of the characteristics of a high-performing finance department. As the Director, at that time, of Alameda County Social Services Agency's Administration and Finance Department this was a logical choice. However, due to an unanticipated change in my management responsibilities, I decided to shift my focus to managing in a changing environment. In reality, a change in my management responsibility is an understatement; I was placed in charge of a department that was in the midst of dramatically changing the way in which it managed the business of helping individuals move from welfare to work. I have come to appreciate that managing in a changing environment is a skill that must be mastered by all managers. In the new environment of public service in which substantive federal and state policy changes will happen in short timeframes, managers must be ready to let go of functions and roles and retool themselves as much as they must be willing and able to retool the programs they oversee. Specifically, my new assignment as the director of my agency's largest department - the Workforce and Benefits Administration - forced me to focus on implementing changes resulting from the passage of Senate Bill (SB) 1104.

Alameda County is facing a number of challenges in the implementation of SB 1104. As part of my case study, I surveyed eight other Bay Area coun-

ties to assess if they also faced similar trials and tribulations. Counties surveyed included Solano, Santa Cruz, San Mateo, Santa Clara, San Francisco, Sonoma, Monterey, and Marin.

Even though none of these counties faces a similar situation as Alameda County. By and large most counties have developed the capacity to conduct Assessment and Job Clubs in-house. They have contractual relationships for mental health and alcohol and drug services. All of these relationships include on-site assessment staff that can refer clients to other providers for more intensive services. Concerns or needs for improvement are minor. Most staff reported to be satisfied with reporting mechanisms and their workers' ability to integrate client information into their Welfare-To-Work (WTW) Plan. Most reported that they had to implement very few changes, if any, to comply with SB 1104.

Additionally, there were a number of reported practices that seemed to make sense in any setting. For example, one county reported that they conduct an annual survey of all their employment counselors. These surveys provide feedback that is used to make system adjustments and to improve operations and services to their clients. Another county reported that they hold a monthly providers meeting staffed by their mid-level managers to address client coordination issues. This is in addition to any meetings that might be held with the department heads and executives to address policy issues.

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RECOMMENDATIONS

Hard times often require bold action. While there is the concern that my department is undertaking too much change too soon, the system in Alameda County is not working as well as in other surveyed counties. My sense is that a comprehensive retooling needs to be taken immediately. Accordingly, my recommendations are as follows:

- Bring job club and assessment back in-house.
- Restructure how mental health and alcohol and drug services are provided for CalWORKs clients in collaboration with the Behavioral Health Care Services Department, Health Care Services Agency.
- Develop and implement strategies to reduce infrastructure and administrative overhead.

CONCLUSION

One half of the solution is knowing what the problems are. The other half is doing something about

it. While most of the recommendations offered here in the employment services component of our CalWORKs program are complex and will take some time to implement, SB 1104 provided the impetus for making these changes now.

We have notified our local partners that change is forthcoming, and have put community-based organizations on notice as well. We are also requiring our public sector partners, including the Behavioral Health Care Services Department, to change. They have agreed to work with us during this transition period in a way that will require them to change the way they do business as well. Transition plans are being developed and formal communications are being prepared for the Board of Supervisors. I would expect that plans will be developed and adjusted as we work through the process. However, at the end of this period, I am confident that Alameda County will have increased its capacity to move CalWORKs clients towards employment and self-sufficiency.

MANAGING IN A CHANGING ENVIRONMENT, OR AS THE TUNE CHANGES YOU LEARN A NEW DANCE

Yolanda Baldovinos

INTRODUCTION

I started out to do my BASSC case study on the characteristics of a finance department in Santa Clara County. I thought that a close and personal review of another county's Finance Department would better prepare me to implement improvements in my home county.

However, in November 2004, the Director of the Workforce and Benefits Administration Department in Alameda County submitted his two-week's notice and retired. I was appointed to that position effective immediately. I assumed responsibility for several transitions that needed to take place in a matter of months, such as, converting all client files to electronic files, implementing CalWIN, and implementing Senate Bill (SB) 1104. Among the first tasks at hand were labor negotiations that seemed to consume my entire first month.

CHANGING ENVIRONMENT

Managing in a changing environment is a skill that must be mastered by all managers. You must be ready to let go of functions and roles and retool yourself to accept new ones. One of the first things I needed to do was to prioritize what needs were to be addressed immediately and what information I needed to proceed. While learning about the characteristics of an effective/efficient finance department would be an informative case study, the immediacy of my new assignment took me in another direction. Learning about the implications of implementing SB 1104 became a more pertinent

subject matter. My recent appointment provided me with an optimum learning opportunity. Additionally, I was now in a position to implement lessons learned through this course of study in the immediate near future.

I proceeded by requesting permission of the BASSC Bay Area CalWORKs Directors to call on them to gather information for my BASSC case study, and I changed my subject matter to the implementation of SB 1104.

WHAT IS SB 1104?

According to a Department of Public Social Services Administrative Directive, Number 4505, 11/10/04, Senate Bill 1104 amended sections of the Welfare and Institutions Code pertaining to the development of the CalWORKs Welfare-to-Work (WTW) plan, WTW participation requirements and the 18/24-month WTW participation period. It became effective December 1, 2004.

SB 1104 requires universal engagement of all non-exempt CalWORKs participants. These participants are required to sign a WTW plan within 90 days of their determination of eligibility for CalWORKs cash aid unless they participate in a Job Club/Job Search within 30 days of eligibility for cash aid. In those circumstances, the 90 days to complete a WTW plan begins after completion of a Job Club/Job Search. The 90-day period to develop a WTW plan includes time participating in learning disability screenings, medical evaluations, and third-party assessments.

CalWORKs recipients who are working full-time (at least 32/35 hours per week) in unsubsidized employment before going through assessment are not required to sign a WTW plan as long as they remain employed for 32/35 hours or more per week.

All other non-exempt CalWORKs recipients must sign a WTW plan that includes 32/35 hours per week of which at least 20 hours a week must be core activities and the remaining (12/15) hours a week could be non-core activities, with some exceptions. Core activities are: employment; on the job training; work study; vocational training; and community service. Non-core activities include: adult basic education; ESL; GED; and mental health, substance abuse, or domestic violence services. SB 1104 also eliminated the 18/24-month welfare-to-work time clock and the post-18/24-month time limit community service requirements. This means that CalWORKs participants can continue formal education/vocational training as part of their core activities for a longer part or the duration of their 60-month time on aid.

CalWORKs recipients who are on Self Initiated Plans (SIPs) are exempt from the 90-day WTW plan requirements.

ALAMEDA COUNTY CHALLENGES

Our challenge is overcoming structural fragmentation. SB 1104 requires a signed WTW plan for CalWORKs clients within 90 days of eligibility certification. In the past it has taken almost twice this time for clients to sign WTW plans. Information to Employment Counselors' efforts aimed at development and oversight of these WTW plans, are sporadic and at times non-existent. Problematic areas include the timeliness of client assessments and job club participation.

The agency currently contracts for Job Club at 18 sites with nine Community-based Organizations (CBOs) or consortia of CBOs and contracts with Peralta Community College District for assessment. All contracts are performance-based, and most of the contracts are under-spent due to staffing problems and/or no show rates as high as 70%.

In addition, the referral, tracking and reporting mechanisms for mental health and alcohol and drug services are insufficient and not timely. They need to be structured in such a way to inform and support the informational needs of Employment Counselors who complete and oversee the CalWORKs clients' WTW plan compliance. The business flow needs to be restructured so that it better supports clients towards becoming self-sufficient and incorporates the reporting and case management to meet SB 1104 requirements.

This is further exacerbated due to high caseloads for both the Employment Counselor who maintains and manages the WTW plan and the Eligibility Technician III, who maintains the eligibility district responsibility for CalWORKs clients. In January 2005, their caseloads were 172 and over 450, respectively. District caseloads were even higher for other programs, such as Medi-Cal at over 800. All district caseloads are extremely high. In part, this is the result of three years of budget reductions. During this time, the Social Services Agency has cut over \$84 million of its half a billion dollar budget and eliminated approximately 500 positions or 20% of its workforce. In the last reduction in force (RIF), Employment Counselors took a big hit. Some workers are still waiting to be called back to work off the recall lists.

I believe it is also as a result of how the department is structured. Alameda County has the fourth lowest

caseload, 31 per month, among the largest eleven counties in the state. Some of the other counties have caseloads that are 30% higher and one is 100% or twice as high as Alameda County. This imposes a system requirement to prioritize staff allocation in the front end of the system. Caseload for the district work is 200-300% higher than most other counties, and, in one case, 400% higher.

Additionally, a few years ago, Alameda established the Benefit Center, a facility that houses all district workers and currently over 100,000 client files for the whole system. It requires core personnel to manage the inflow of client information, maintain hard files, and facilitate the transport and movement of those files as needed by workers throughout the system. Every dollar of allocation spent in infrastructure is not available to be spent on case carrying personnel.

Currently, the Social Services Agency is in the process of moving all client paper files to electronic files, using technology that is neither new nor expensive. In addition, the lease to the Benefit Center is due to expire in August 2005. Alameda County either renews the lease and continues to maintain its operating structure or not renew the \$3.4 million annual lease and use that funding to address funding gaps or fund case carrying workers. Imaging client files will provide the opportunity to transition personnel from paper processing to client service.

These circumstances raise a number of questions. In an effort to be inclusive with our community partners, did functions get spread too thin without the prerequisite management information systems to ensure a cohesive system that supports the coordination of services? Should Assessment and Job Club services be brought back in-house to be pro-

vided by county personnel? The Alameda County Social Services Agency had, at one time, operated an award winning Job Club program. Can it be done again? Would colleagues in the Health Care Services partner to restructure services that they have been vested in for a number of years in order to provide CalWORKs clients' the services they need as well as provide the Employment Counselors the information they need to manage their caseload in a manner that meets regulatory requirements under SB 1104? Are we attempting to restructure too much too fast?

Failure to restructure will result in the likelihood that CalWORKs clients will not receive services they need to help them towards employment and self-sufficiency. In addition, Alameda County is likely to face penalties and sanctions for failure to comply with regulatory requirements in the future.

OTHER COUNTY EXPERIENCE

I surveyed eight other counties to assess if they were also faced with similar trials and tribulations. The counties I surveyed included Solano, Santa Cruz, San Mateo, Santa Clara, San Francisco, Sonoma, Monterey, and Marin.

Not one of these counties faces a similar situation as Alameda County. By and large they all have maintained their Assessment and Job Clubs in-house. With the exception of one county that contracts with the Office of Education for job club, job search, and job readiness activities. They do have contractual relationships for mental health and alcohol and drug services. All of these relationships include on-site assessment staff that can refer clients to other providers for more extensive services. One expressed a concern that when they needed to add providers to their provider pool the

process for executing a new contract was somewhat cumbersome. But this only happened sporadically. Most reported being satisfied with reporting mechanisms and their workers' ability to integrate the information into their WTW plans and their monitoring. One said they were working at improving the process, and one admitted that their mental health and alcohol and drug service reporting could be better.

Most stated that they had to implement very few changes, if any, to comply with SB 1104. In one case, a county reported that they used to do group orientations and now they provide one-to-one orientations. They find that this personalized method engages the client earlier in the process. In all cases they have been able to comply with completion of the WTW plan within the 45 days. In another case, a county reported that they have had to change their client flow between the eligibility worker and employment services worker. With the employment services worker assuming more responsibility for ensuring that the client is engaged immediately. Two counties reported being able to complete their WTW plan within five to seven days.

One county reported experiencing a side benefit. SB 1104 forced their support analyst staff to become more knowledgeable and analytical about their client flow process. One county described that they are piloting client workshops at three different sites prior to selecting one to use system wide. They are also working towards streamlining their system and ensuring consistency from office to office.

There were a number of reported practices that seemed to make sense in any setting. One county reported that it conducts an annual survey of all its employment counselors. These surveys provide feedback that is used to make system adjustments

and improve operations and services to their clients. Another county reported that it holds a monthly providers meeting staffed by its mid-level managers to address client coordination issues. This is in addition to any meetings that might be held with the department heads and executives to address policy issues.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Hard times must require bold actions. While there is the concern that there can be too much change too soon, when a system is not working well, action needs to be taken immediately. My recommendations are as follows:

- Bring Job Club and Assessment back in-house.
 - Do not renew the FY 04/05 CBO contracts for those services as constituted today.
 - Restructure services that are to be provided by our community partners.
 - Rehire agency staff demoted or separated in last year's reduction in force to provide Job Club and Assessment at the three Self-Sufficiency Centers (SSCs).
 - In order to meet the 90-day timeframe:
 - Schedule the WTW orientation immediately upon approval for aid and complete the assessment testing at orientation.
 - Start Job Club two days after orientation except when the client needs to arrange childcare or requires a learning disabilities or behavioral health evaluation prior to Job Club.
 - Require clients not employed full-time during Job Club to complete the assessment process and sign a WTW plan to start either the work experience component or vocational training and education.

- Develop and implement the first of the annual surveys for employment counselors input to be used as a quality improvement tool.
 - Establish monthly meeting with all provider groups to ensure service coordination.
- Restructure how mental health and alcohol and drug services are provided for CalWORKs clients in collaboration with the Behavioral Health Care Services Department, Health Care Services Agency.
- Establish a collaboration with Behavioral Health Services.
 - Issue two Request for Proposals, one for mental health services and one for alcohol and drug abuse services, to define the scope of services to be purchased and establish a restricted pool of providers for the provision of services to CalWORKs clients that ensures linguistic, culturally, and geographic appropriate services to assist clients towards employment and self-sufficiency.
 - Strengthen internal capacity to directly manage alcohol and drug service contracts.
 - Establish baseline agreements on how the mental health services will be coordinated in collaboration with Behavioral Health Care Services.
 - Ensure that all clients currently in care continue to receive services and, if needed, establish a smooth transition to a new system.
 - Design and implement a web-based reporting and tracking mechanism for all mental health, alcohol and drug services that will provide employment counselor with real time utilization information on their assigned CalWORKs clients.
- Develop and implement strategies to reduce infrastructure and administrative overhead.

- Close the Benefit Center.
- Image all client files and correspondence.
- Transition personnel no longer needed, due to client file imaging, to eligibility and employment positions.

CONCLUSION

One half of the solution is knowing what the problems are. The other half is doing something about it. While most of the recommendations are needed in our employment services business process and are complex and long overdue, SB 1104 provided the necessary impetus to help facilitate this change.

Local partners have been notified that change is forthcoming. CBOs have been put on notice. The Behavioral Health Care Services Department has agreed to work with us during this transition. Transition plans are being developed, and informal communications are being prepared for the Board of Supervisors. I expect that plans will be developed and adjusted as we work through the process. However, we will keep focused on our goal of moving our CalWORKs clients towards employment and self-sufficiency.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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I would also like to extend my appreciation to Chet Hewit and the Agency Executive Team who encouraged and supported my participation in BASSC. My thanks go Hannah Waller and the BASSC staff, directors and guest lecturers who jointly provided a

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