Santa Clara County's Knowledge Management Champions

Maria Panesi Guerra

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Knowledge Management (KM) as a concept has been around for over twenty years when it was first realized that the knowledge possessed by employees was an asset to the organization. Knowledge Management began to address ways that knowledge could be identified, recorded and shared with other staff in an organization to make it more efficient and to avoid service gaps when employees left the organization. Basically, KM is knowing what the "organization" knows. Organizations wanted a formal conduit to obtain not only the explicit knowledge from these individuals, but also identifying the areas where measurable outcomes are being met, improve customer service, and mentor staff for advancement and increased competency.

As part of this case study, I visited Santa Clara County, which is one of the four counties in the Bay Area that is successfully addressing knowledge-sharing within their organizations. Santa Clara County centralized KM and created a portfolio that focused on Social Purpose, Practice Excellence, Continual Improvement of the Business Process, Workforce Readiness and Integrated Information System as the key areas that align with its mission statement.

It is recommended that Alameda County institutionalize Knowledge Sharing to position the agency in a strategic place to improve service delivery when the agency is experiencing budget shortfalls.

Maria Panesi Guerra, Staff Development Specialist, Alameda County Social Services Agency

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For the past decade Knowledge Management (KM) has gained popularity in the public sector. The Bay Area Social Services Consortium (BASSC) has brought that concept to the attention of Bay Area counties. Due to its importance, Knowledge Management will be the theme at this year's BASSC Summit. Knowledge Management is the recognition that employees' knowledge is an asset for an organization and that this knowledge can be buried or never tapped by the employers and that the employees often take this knowledge with them when they leave a position, either because of retirement, promotion, or change of employer. Knowledge Management includes a number of activities. Knowledge Management is tacit knowledge, which is what the person knows that allows him/her to perform certain tasks or how it influences their decision-making process and their actions. In other words, it is what people know but don't consider it to be knowledge *per se*. KM is also explicit knowledge, which is the kind of knowledge that has been codified and captured in manuals, procedures and rules that is shared with the workforce.[1] Knowledge Management is not only important as a succession planning strategy, but when used effectively it successfully shares the knowledge among all departments, especially in times of recession. Social service agencies need to constantly assess, adapt and implement changes in the way they provide services in order to maintain consistent outcomes with shifting trends in social welfare policy and service delivery. Our population is composed of culturally diverse individuals. Current and future

applicants may be dislocated professionals. At a time when the state is in a financial crisis, this could result in decreased services and possible reduction in workforce. During times of crisis, like the one we now are facing, agencies can benefit from the implementation of Knowledge Sharing (KS) in an organization. KS increases the effectiveness of organizations, when organizations promote and support a culture of creativity, innovation and collaboration.

One county in the Bay Area that is in the forefront of KM is Santa Clara County. Santa Clara County is integrating the efforts of all parties involved to best serve its clients in this time of scarcity. Alameda and Santa Clara Counties are similar in the size of their workforce, both employ about 2,400 employees and both have an equally cultural and ethnically diverse population, therefore the kinds of successful processes employed in Santa Clara County might also generate positive outcomes in Alameda County.

Background

Santa Clara County has been working on several evidence-informed practices for the past decade. This was reinforced with the arrival of the Agency Director, Will Lightbourne, who believed in gradually shifting the agency's culture to a Knowledge Management environment. One critical step taken was centralizing the Knowledge Management initiative in the Development and Operational Planning Department under the direction of Gina Sessions. This division is responsible for providing agency-wide leadership and direction for the Knowledge Management initiative. In setting the agency's direction, Ms. Sessions developed a senior Knowledge Manage-

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[1] BASSC at Twenty: Selected Works of the Bay Area Social Services Consortium; 1987-2007, Nov. 2007

ment portfolio that describes the alignment of the agencies KM activities with the agency's mission. The areas of focus in the portfolio are:

1 **Social Purpose**   Opportunities to increase the social, political and economic probability of achieving the mission of the agency are effectively identified and leveraged and ensure the organizational and departmental activities embody the diversity of the communities served.

2 **Practice Excellence**   The design and adoption of services promotes use of the best or most promising practices to meet the needs of individuals served.

3 **Continual Improvement of the Business Process**   All levels of staff understand the value of continual learning and improvement and are engaged in promoting a service culture through advancement of the agency mission.

4 **Talent Management/Workforce Readiness**   Organizational structure supports and enhances the development of areas of knowledge that are of strategic importance that are aligned with organizational objectives.

5 **Integrated Information System Information**   systems are developed to enhance access to information and knowledge and promote sharing of best practices.
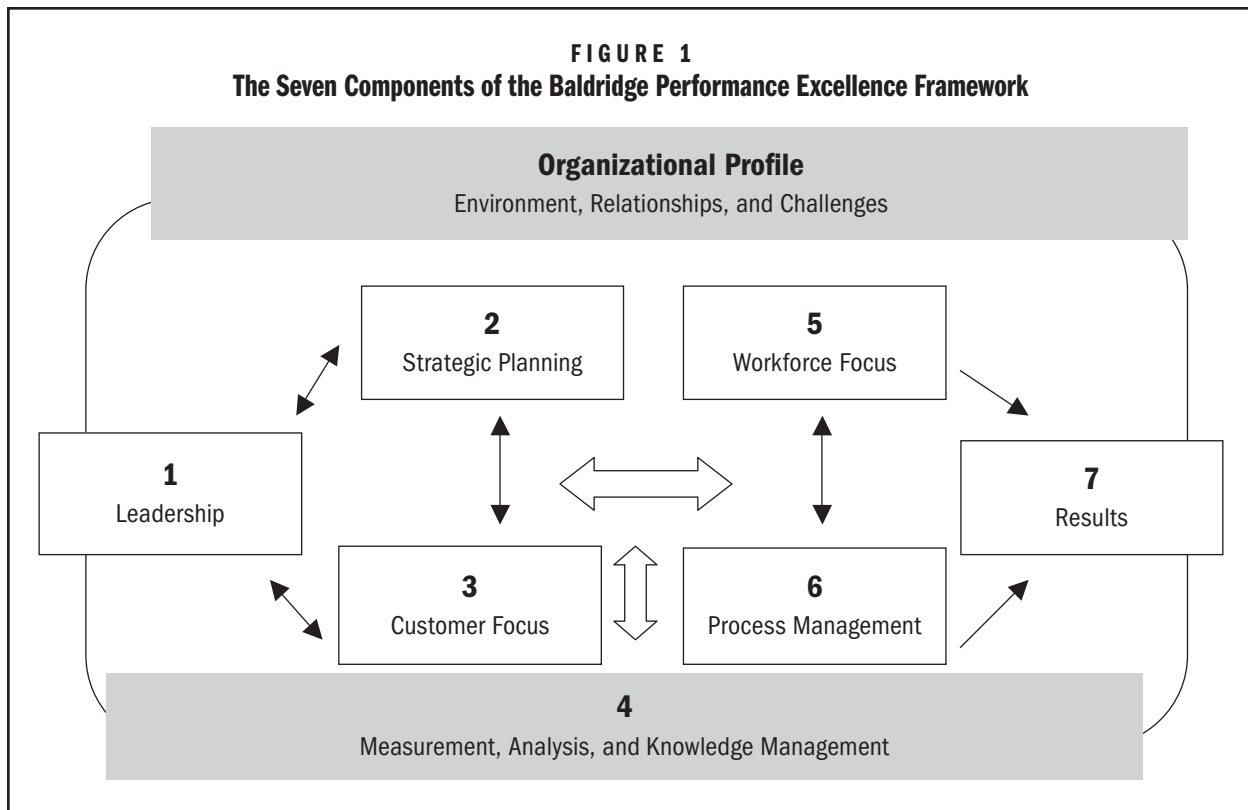
One early activity focused on aligning the supervisory functions with the KM initiative and involved an agency-wide survey of supervisory skill development needs and gaps. In order to create a wish list of desired skill development supports, supervisors from the four different departments—Department of Employment and Benefit Services (DEBS), Department of Aging & Adult Services (DASS), Department of Family and Children Services (DFCS) and Agency Office (AO)–engaged in focus groups. These focus groups led to a set of recommendations that each department tailored to its unique needs. One department, DEBS, launched its own improvement process based on the feedback it received from the focus groups. Due to the size of the agency and the multiple work locations, it was hard to implement a top-down, highly structured KM model. Instead, the

Baldridge Performance Excellence Framework was used to create a framework within which a more organic and developmental approach to KM implementation was designed. This framework supports the development of an organization in which people are automatically sharing information as well as critically thinking and searching for new ideas. This framework embodies the following seven components (see also Figure 1):

1 **Leadership**   is the basis for the success of the model, since it is based on senior executives and managers' personal actions that guide and sustain the organization. As can be seen in the diagram above, these seven components are constantly affecting one another. The information between them is shared making it a living process that adjusts accordingly to the needs of the community and the agency.

2 **Strategic Planning**   Examines how your strategic plan is deployed, how it adjusts to changes and measures the outcomes.

3 **Customer Focus**   Is constantly measuring if the organization listens to their customers, community and staff.

4 **Measurement, Analysis, and Knowledge**   Looks at the reviews and reports and utilizes them to improve performance.

5 **Workforce Focus**   Ensures that organization manages, engages and develops the workforce to its fullest potential, assessing their capabilities and capacities.

6 **Process Management**   The process of designing, managing and improving work systems to achieve organizational success and sustainability.

7 **Results**   This research is focus on looking at all the above areas to see how knowledge sharing has proven to be successful for Santa Clara County.[2]

The interaction between the components is not linear. Information between the components is constantly flowing. This sharing of information allows KS to flourish.

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[2] 2009–2010 Health Care Criteria for Performance Excellence

FIGURE 1
The Seven Components of the Baldridge Performance Excellence Framework

Organizational Profile
Environment, Relationships, and Challenges

2 Strategic Planning	**5** Workforce Focus
1 Leadership	**7** Results
3 Customer Focus	**6** Process Management

4
Measurement, Analysis, and Knowledge Management

Santa Clara County management identified certain areas where knowledge sharing was present and informally calls them Knowledge Management Champions. I have selected one KM Champion from each respective area:

Social Purpose/Customer Focus–Workforce Focus

In order for Santa Clara County to serve their growing diverse population effectively and with the support of the agency director, agency executives, managers and supervisors. The Coalition for Effective Services, Council for Cultural Excellence, Board of Supervisors and outside consultants in the late 1990s, the agency formed the Cultural Excellence Committee. This committee was comprised of the following sub-committees: American Indian, African Ancestry, Asian Pacific Islander, El Comité, Gay, Lesbian, Bi-sexual, Transgender and Questioning Committees.

Their focus was on internal as well as external customers. They make sure the needs of the agency employees are addressed and also work in conjunction with the community and other stakeholders to ensure the services provided meet the community needs. The main concern was to create organizational and departmental activities that reflect the diversity of the communities to develop cultural competence. Cultural Competence refers to a set of congruent practice skills, attitudes, policies and structures that come together in a system, agency and among professionals, enabling them to work effectively in cross-cultural situations. In order to share this knowledge with staff across the agency, supervisors were given a Cultural Competence Toolkit Activities Binder. This toolkit was shared with staff regularly during unit meetings. Some of the topics addressed in the kit were: "Working as a Team," "Serving your Internal Customer," "Serving your Client," and "Increasing Cross-Cultural Competency."

Practice Excellence/Measurement, Analysis, and Knowledge

The Department of Employment and Benefit Services (DEBS) has taken an initiative approach to the new Work Participation Rate (WPR) requirement and formed a Steering Committee in 2006. The com-

mittee was comprised of managers and supervisors for both divisions, and their main mission was to improve the Agency's CalWORKs program performance, communications and services. In an effort to ensure staff awareness of the importance of the new WPR, the steering committee launched an interactive WPR road show that described the details of the new regulations as well as common errors/solutions. During the road show, staff from both sides of the department learned about how meeting the WPR was important for the agency, the clients and themselves. Eligibility and Employment Services also understood the urgency of collaborating to ensure that clients are registered properly and how they can make a difference. Staff members were also informed of the most common reasons cases do not meet the WPR. The WPR Steering committee also identified six performance areas that were adversely impacting the WPR rate, including: Exemptions, Orientation/Appraisal, Employment Verification, Partial/Not enough hours, Timed Out/Safety Net and Sanctions. To address these six areas the steering committee created work groups that were led by managers from both Employment and Benefits Services and included line workers and staff from other departments. Some highlights of their work are:

- Redesigning of intake orientations to include a presentation from Employment staff.
- Piloting a re-engagement strategy in which employment staff is present at the redetermination visits of sanction clients.
- Designing a home visit program to meet with sanctioned clients.
- Appointing a centralized staff person to coordinate Welfare to Work exemptions.
- Coordinating a CalWORK Fair to allow Staff and providers to meet and explain their roles within CalWORKs.[3]

Santa Clara County maximizes the assistance they provide to their customers by actively working with other community agencies. They partnered

with the food bank and local food markets to supplement monthly groceries with fresh produce to participants who are in a Welfare to Work component. Santa Clara also partnered with De Anza Community Colleges. The CalWORKs administrators created temporary subsidized employment (TSE) where participants obtain paid work experience. TSE programs are generally unnecessary in a healthy economy, since employers are usually more than willing to train new employees at the company's expense.[4] However, TSE is extremely important during a time where the unemployment rate is high in the state. TSE allows participants to gain valuable work experience that will prove beneficial when the economy turns around. In addition, as a result of the welfare regulations issued in February 2008, Santa Clara County partnered with local community colleges, adult education and distance learning to recognize these as viable work activities. They began to investigate distance learning materials as well as service delivery methods and also analyzed the possibility of alternative delivery methods, such as MP3s, CDs, iPods, DVDs, podcasts, interactive video-conferencing, computer technology delivered over the internet or an intranet. The CalWORKs Employment Services (CWES) purchased 200 iPods, and in partnership with Adult Education and Community Colleges, compiled a number of educational and resource materials to create the CalWORKs Distance Learning Library. This library contains course content in various formats that clients are able to check out. The purpose of the library is two-fold: first it; offers clients courses readily available for checkout to supplement their work activity hours and ensure that they will be able to meet their participation requirements; secondly, it fosters education. The use of these iPods play a key role in helping meet the participation rate during the Easter and Spring break.

On January 2, 2009 the CWES implemented an "Appointment Reminder Call Pilot" to remind clients of scheduled appointments. This new service is yet another strategy to engage clients and improve

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[3]Santa Clara County, Employment Services Bureau Annual Report 2008, pp. 9 and 21

[4]Santa Clara County, Employment Services Bureau Annual Report 2008, p. 22

the WPR. The automated system informs clients that they have a scheduled appointment for either: Employment Services Orientation, Assessment Group Testing, or Job Club/Supervised Job Search. Currently calls are made in English and Spanish; Vietnamese will be added in the future.

Finally, DEBS works in conjunction with community-based organizations and the Cultural Excellence Committee to sponsor a series of Cultural Awareness trainings. Some of the most recent training included information on Bhutan, Burma/Myanmar, Iran, Afghanistan, Eritrea and Somalia, and Iraq. The training provided the workers with a better understanding about the customs, cultural and social economic history of the different groups, which help them become more knowledgeable, considered and courteous workforce.

By working together with the community, Santa Clara County has been able to improve its WPR, which is currently at 39% and is the highest in the state.

Continual Improvement of the Business Process/Process Management

Santa Clara County is constantly improving business processes that support increased efficiencies for clerical staff and ensure customers are serviced, accurately, efficiently and in a timely manner. Two years ago, the county started the development of the Clerical Business Process Improvement Effort. A steering committee was formed consisting of a project manager and six work teams. Successes included the relocation of the key mailing and printing functions and reducing the cost of facility rent, postage and paper. The relocation also increased the PONY routes, which resulted in fuel cost savings. The agency has installed a new VoIP technology, which reduced the cost of phone calls between offices. The agency has also installed high-speed printers that allowed them to pre-populate RRR forms enabling them to reduce the monthly packet mailing and printing time from two days to three to four hours. This initial effort has grown into a more comprehensive improvement team called the DEBS–Focused Business Process Improvement Team.

Workforce Readiness/Workforce Focus

As part of the workforce readiness, Santa Clara County has developed the Learning University. The University offers a broad curriculum. Santa Clara County has several systems that support its business processes, and one of them is the Learning Managing System (LMS). This system allows staff to check the catalogue of classes available either through Staff Development or the Learning University. The Learning University started a year ago and is a spin off of the Human Resources Academy that trained supervisors in all HR functions. The Learning University is accessible to all employees who are encouraged to take classes that will enable them to improve their skills to perform their current employment or start building their career path with the agency. Once they select the class, they are allowed to self-register for the specific class. The system tracks the attendance and the kind of classes attended by a specific worker. LMS has the capability of providing online classes or instructor-led classes. The system also makes it easier for supervisors to check their employees' transcripts and monitor if the employees are able to transfer the knowledge acquired to the workplace. Tracking the training attended by the workers allows management to identify if a worker is lacking training. (Another feature of the LMS is another knowledge sharing champion.) Workers have the capability of posting work related articles, best practices and tips on a "Bulletin Board" and the information can be seen agency wide.

Integrated Information System/ Process Management

Santa Clara County is in the initial phase of implementing a Data Warehouse system. This is an information knowledge system, since it will collect data from the systems available in all four departments and provide real-time reports, giving access to the employees to see what kind of services a family is receiving. Supervisors will be able to monitor their workers caseload more accurately. Upper management will be able to see the different trends occurring and deploy staff to the needed programs. The first phase of the

implementation of the data warehouse was with In Home Support Services and is the system that has been successfully working. The complete implementation of the project will take approximate two to three years. Besides providing clear and user-friendly reports, the system also allows management to look into the future and perform a Flex Analysis of trends and projections.

Recommendations

Institutionalize Knowledge Sharing   Sharing knowledge will position the agency in an advantaged strategic position to deal with any upcoming fund reductions and increased caseloads. Therefore, in the next three months a Steering Committee should be formed to identify the areas where knowledge sharing is occurring or not occurring. The Steering Committee should include program managers, supervisors and line staff from all departments in Social Services. The Steering Committee should hold meetings with supervisors to capture best practices as well as use management reports and utilize the Social Services Integrated Reporting System (SSIRS) that is currently in its implementation phase. In six months, the Steering Committee should start a campaign recognizing the best practices and sharing them with the rest of the agency through meet and greet, e-mails and/or articles in the BUZZ.

Revive the Diversity Action Council (DAC)   This council was founded with the purpose of promoting participation of all SSA employees in policy development with respect to issues related to diversity. This includes researching, developing, articulating and advocating in areas related to maintaining a positive diverse workplace and to organizing training programs related to diversity and cultural competence that will serve to educate SSA in general. This council was in existence in the early 2000s with the following group members: African American Advisory and Advocacy Board, African Americans for Diversity, Filipino-American Association; Asian Pacific Islanders, Gay and Lesbian Affinity Group, Multi-cultural and Diversity Steering Committee, Spanish Speaking Advocacy and Advisory Council, and Social Ser-

vices Multicultural Committee. The re-institutionalizing of DAC will help the agency provide better services to its diverse community while addressing diversity issues within the workforce. Expanding its knowledge on the diverse cultures present in the community will make it easier to serve them properly. There needs to be a full realization that there is a new diverse group of displaced employees that are requesting assistance and understanding their needs and their expectations will also make it more possible to meet their needs effectively. The Training and Consulting Team could oversee the coordination and scheduling of different cultural trainings by the partnering CBOs. Learning about the different groups is also critical for Employment Services. The more staff knows about them, the better they will be prepared to remove barriers to self-sufficiency.

Increasing the Work Participation Rate (WPR)   All SSA staff plays a key role in meeting the WPR. To gain staff support and commitment, upper management should host a series of town hall meetings in the next month in which employees are informed of the key role they play and implications for staff and the agency if the federal WPR requirements (50% for single families and 90% for two parent families) are not met. In an effort to reduce the WPR, Economic Benefits and Employment Services needs to work to provide WTW orientations to new CalWORKs applicants and also be present during RRRs to assist participants in curing their sanctions. One last recommendation for increasing the WPR is the purchase of iPods, MP3s, laptops or similar devises that will allow participants to comply with their required hours of participation at their convenience. The weak economy and the raising unemployment rates present a challenge to job placement and retention. These electronic devices will provide an option for participants to meet their participation rates by attending training and obtaining skills that will help them find employment once the economy turns around. Some clients are familiar with the technology, and the iPods or laptop will give them the freedom to complete the required participation at any time during the day. There will be an initial high cost for the purchase

of the devices and also the installation of programs, which can be developed in cooperation and conjunction with community colleges. Although the initial cost might be high, it will be more cost-effective to invest in the purchase of the new technology now than to suffer from the sanction penalty year after year into the future.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Gina Sessions, Director of Development and Operational Planning for Santa Clara County, for her time, energy, and especially for sharing her knowledge with me. I want extend my thanks to her staff that gratefully shared their time with me: Dana McQuary, Policy and Planning Manager; Nicole Huff, Policy and Planning Manager; Marlene Vidal, Application Decision Support Manager; Adesh Sidhu, Director of Applications and Business Intelligence; Mary Shamouel, Chief Information Officer; Quang Vo, Senior IT Project Manager; Denise Boland, Employment Services Bureau Administrator; and Heather Ashley, Executive Assistant to Gina Sessions, for graciously coordinating all my visits, and Frank Motta for his hospitality.

Special thanks to my former Program Manager, Augustus (Gus) Yiu, for his constant support and encouragement to participate in the BASSC program.