BEYOND SERVICE INTEGRATION:
NAPA COUNTY'S JOURNEY TO A GALAXY FAR, FAR AWAY
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INTRODUCTION:

Napa County Health and Human Services agency has a well-earned reputation as comprehensive, integrated service delivery system. To many other larger county social service agencies Napa's achievements seem like an impossible pipe dream. Yet what I found in Napa during my internship points the way to a completely new system for the provision of social and health services at the county level. The Napa County effort goes far beyond integration of governmental interventions and collaboration with community-based agencies to a realm which seems almost extra-terrestrial.

THE NAPA FORMULA FOR CHANGE

Public social services in Napa County have undergone a series of integrations and consolidations since 1984. The most recent restructuring, completed in 1993, brought together the county's Human Services and Health Services systems. Much of this work has been described elsewhere (see, for example, the case study by Dan Corsello, Kristie Brandt & Niaz Murtaza in the BASSC Working Papers # 2. 1996). This case study is therefore a snapshot analysis of the change implementation process, a look at a work in progress.
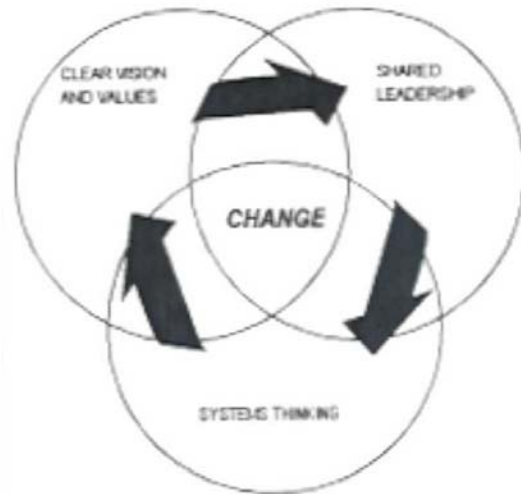
Napa's success revolves around three basic elements which are nurtured and practiced at every level in the county's human service enterprise:

- **Clear, widely shared vision and values;**
- **Shared leadership; and,**
- **Widespread "systems" thinking.**

These principles are closely interrelated and completely integrated into everyday work in Napa (see graphic). One comment that I heard repeatedly was, "If you have agreement on the vision and the values, a lot of other things just fall into place." Napa County's statements of mission, core values, and vision are models that could be emulated in other counties. They offer a large-scale roadmap for all human service activities in the county. But they are not self-implementing: managers at every level in the agency must work to ensure that practice continues to reflect the values and vision.

The leadership begins at the top of the organization with Terry Longoria, Director, and Jim Featherstone, Assistant Director. They each display a pragmatic and inspiring leadership energy which is one of the major ingredients in the county's committment to create a seamless service system. The county is also fortunate to have a former director, Dan Corsello (a kind of Captain

Emeritus of the Starship Napa), who continues to play a major role in planning and advocating for social programs in Napa. But they are not the only people who exercise leadership in the Napa structure. I found staff at every level displaying initiative and practicing advocacy.

I interviewed many of Napa's mid-level managers in all the main program areas. Almost without exception, they were lively, thoughtful, and articulate people who clearly operated from a common vision of where health and human services in Napa County were headed. They talked about integration of services as if it were basic good practice: many seemed to have moved on to grapple with the bigger issue of how to achieve integration within systems and between systems, the "systems" thinking which is the third element in the Napa formula for change.

THE NAPA CASE STUDY

The case study will address each of the basic elements of the Napa formula for change in more detail. In an effort to deal with the inevitable criticism, "That's all very fine in a county of Napa's size but it would never work here," the study will focus on extracting `operating principles' from the Napa experience which have wider relevance.

Clear, widely shared vision and values

One of the major questions which I brought to the Napa internship was: is it possible for a public social service agency to have a decent relationship with its community? The answer to the question is evident in the statement of purpose which clearly commits the Agency to engaging with the community in addressing social problems:

> Our mission is to foster a partnership of consumers, community members, and staff to create *leadership, vision and advocacy* for the evolving health and human service needs of the people of Napa County...

Napa's vision, core values and mission statement are the best I have seen at a county level. They are inspiring, clear, specific, understandable, broadbased, and free of jargon. And they lead to the first operating principle which can be drawn from the Napa County's experience:

Principle 1 . Develop a detailed vision that weaves core values, goals, and best practices into a mission that can be broadly supported:

Public agencies often produce mission and vision statements which are simply a dressing-up of their mandated functions. The statements imply that. behind the new rhetoric, it will be business as usual (or, at least, business as funded by the state and the federal agencies). The Napa mission/vision documents are a refreshing departure from this practice. They make an upfront commitment to work with the community in providing leadership and advocacy on social issues.

One of the drawbacks to the more traditional approach to crafting mission and vision statements, is that it sets public agencies up to become the scapegoats for policy or program failures. If the public entity takes sole responsibility for "solving" major social problems, it inevitably gets the blame when things go wrong. So government is the culprit when the public or politicians

perceive that there are too many people on welfare, that too few recipients get jobs, or that there are too many children in foster care. The only way to avoid this dilemma is to forge collaborative relationships with communities and community-based agencies. Public agencies have adapted to the constant criticisms they receive from all quarters by taking on a "fortress mentality" which makes it difficult for them to reach out to community groups or enlist advocates as allies. Napa's mission and vision materials are exemplary in setting the tone and providing substance for a new kind of public-private effort to solve social problems.

Shared leadership

In larger hierarchical organizations, leadership is vested in a few people near the top of the pyramid who are expected to bring everyone else on board with the agency's mission. This "top down" model of leadership is ineffective in times of sweeping change, such as federal welfare reform. In these circumstances, the leadership function needs to be dispersed throughout the organization and, wherever possible, pushed down to the frontline workers in the agency. Staff at all levels need to see themselves as agents of change, as people responsible for carrying out the mission and exemplifying the core values. Napa's Health and Human Service Agency had a very impressive system of shared leadership.

Principle 2. Encourage middle managers to be independent-minded problem solvers:

Almost all the Napa County managers I talked with were very actively engaged in the thinking and planning that is required to create a truly integrated service delivery system. They were able to discuss the pros and cons of restructuring in a balanced way, they reflected a shared set of underlying values, and were clearly energized by the challenge of the Agency's mission. I saw very little evidence of "burnout". the corrosive cynicism that is so strong

in many public agencies. Managers were not afraid to make decisions and act on matters that were within their control.

Principle 3. Keep working at integration of programs and service delivery:

This principle is based on one of Aaron Wildavsky's major insights from the book Implementation (Pressman and Wildavsky, University of California Press, 1979) that the hard part of implementing change is getting collaborators to honor their agreements to work together. In a small county like Napa, the arguments for integration are compelling but developing working relationships across various professional disciplines is a continual struggle. It's where the rubber meets the road while the unmentionable hits the fan.

There are always elements of professional resistance and rivalry to be addressed in the integration process. The agency leadership in Napa were sympathetic to these concerns but also tough-minded in creating a structure that calls for significant cross-disciplinary work.

Driven by their vision of the greater good of the organization, top managers insisted that staff would work together despite professional differences. (The graphic is a cautionary sign that was symbolically present in Napa County offices). In Napa it was not unusual to find mental health workers and social workers in the same units; or a public health nurse supervising Medi-Cal eligibility workers; or a men tal health counselor supervising drug and alcohol counselors.

Public Health staff, for example, played a very central role in the Napa County agency redesign. Practically, they provide broad services which are not provided by anyone else: immunizations, response to communicable diseases. Conceptually, they are professionals who have a major committment to broad-based preventive efforts, a committment which many other human service workers cannot make. Napa has adopted the Touchpoints approach to public health (based on the work of Harvard professor, Terry Brazelton) which incorporates guiding principles, such as: Recognize what you bring to the interaction; Look for opportunities to support mastery; and, Value passion wherever you find it.

Widespread "systems" thinking

One of the paradoxes of working in large systems is that they have a negative effect on our ability to think about the broader system. The most common bureaucratic survival mechanism is to define your job in the narrowest terms possible and then resist any efforts to expand your role. In Napa, almost every manager I met had an expansive view of their role and some were eager to extend their responsibilities. This is what I call systems thinking.

Principle 4. There is no halfway house on the road to integration:

The most advanced systems thinking that I observed in Napa came from Dan Corsello. the former Director. His role for most of the time since his retirement three years ago has been that of a freelance advocate/community organizer/facilitator/ political trouble-maker: He saw this role as a clear extension of his public social service career. In fact, his charge was to expand and strengthen the role of Community-based organizations and encourage collaboration between them, something he could not have achieved as Director of the public agency.

This task is a lot more difficult than it might seem on the surface. (Dan says it is "..like trying to herd cats.") He spent eighteen months facilitating a monthly meeting of community providers known as the Napa Valley Non-profit Coalition. His goals were to get them to begin integrating their work on behalf of Napa's most needy residents and to help them enlarge and exercise their political power. This effort has been most successful. The Coalition is now an independent organization with its own governance structure. And Dan is no longer needed as a facilitator but has been appointed Executive Director of the new entity.

Clearly Dan Corsello is a most unique individual with a very unique role in the Napa County human service enterprise. But he brings a passion, persistence, and a willingness to wield political power for social justice and social programs that could emulated in other counties. The social safety net usually has large holes at the county level and this situation is likely to worsen under Welfare Reform. Counties may need to create a role similar to Dan Corsello's in Napa to identify and mend to holes in the safety net.

CONCLUSION

Napa County Health and Human Services Agency offers a hopeful prospect to all who labor in the fields of human services. However, it is not all roses in the Napa enterprise. One of the Agency's current struggles is how to complete the integration of the Public Assistance program into the broader organizational context, a struggle which is all the more urgent in the context of welfare reform. Napa County has worked long and hard to reach the level of integration that is visible in their daily operations. They have attended to the fundamentals of organizational change: vision and values; leadership; and a systems approach. The Agency leadership views change as an organic, developmental process where slippages will occur from time to time. But the commitment to change is fueled by a passion that is widely shared in the public, nonprofit, and private sectors in Napa. And that, more than anything else, is what maintains Napa's stellar momentum.