

**SAN FRANCISCO COUNTY'S HUMAN SERVICES AGENCY'S
INNOVATION OFFICE: COLLABORATION + INNOVATION =
GOVERNMENT TRANSFORMATION**

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In recent years, government agencies have seen the value in creating natural workgroups of managers and frontline employees to work collaboratively in solving problems and improving performance. In January 2014, San Francisco's Human Services Agency (SFA-HSA) established an Innovation Office to provide impartial assistance and guidance to groups of stakeholders with different views, responsibilities, and positions. These efforts are intended to achieve the goals of the partnership while improving service delivery to clients and morale amongst staff. Similar to San Francisco County, Santa Clara County recognizes the importance of collaboration and innovation. Santa Clara County has several current efforts aimed at addressing issues, cultivating communication between management, staff, and labor, while also improving efficiency and service delivery to clients; however, unlike San Francisco, an Innovation Office has not been implemented. Santa Clara can benefit from the knowledge and experiences of SF-HSA's Innovation Office to refine and improve upon existing efforts.

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Can government agencies implement changes that are not only based on policy but also with the intent of improving service delivery by involving clients and employees? In recent years, government agency leaders have seen the value in changing the way government employees and clients work together in order to make a difference.

Santa Clara County's Innovation Efforts: Santa Clara County has taken numerous steps towards becoming innovative in its approaches to county issues and addressing staff and client dissatisfaction with county procedures and processes. Just Culture, which aims for a balance between punitive and blameless culture, has encouraged staff of all levels to openly and appropriately address issues. In addition to the Just Culture training all county staff received in 2015, since 2010, Santa Clara County has partnered with Stanford University to provide leadership development through Center for Leadership and Transformation (CLT). CLT encourages positive culture in order to create ideation and vision from current and up-and-coming county leaders as well as educates on the need to engage staff in order to cultivate organic transitions throughout the county. The objective of Just Culture and CLT is to encourage collaboration and provide staff with the ability to share ideas for improvement within the county. Generated out of CLT, Santa Clara County piloted the Unit Based Team (UBT) Facilitator Project. The UBT conducts small tests of change to improve its work in a meaningful, measurable, and aligned way with the county and department's vision. The UBT Facilitator

Project, piloted between September 2015 and January 2016, prepares county staff to be facilitators with other county departments' staff by assisting them in planning how to achieve their common objectives while maintaining a neutral position. Specific to the Department of Employment and Benefit Services (DEBS) within the Social Services Agency (SSA), Denise Boland, DEBS Director, engaged an outside consultant. The consultant was to work with DEBS managers and supervisors who have successfully assisted in improving office morale and addressing communication, positive feedback, and longstanding issues such as mistrust. Because of increased efforts and awareness, understanding other innovative approaches and outcomes across California counties is of great interest to Santa Clara County.

Innovation Office's Approach: Established in January 2014, San Francisco County Human Services Agency's (SF-HSA) Innovation Office incorporates the human aspect with the business needs of HSA in order to help HSA staff address issues with internal processes and procedures that impact employee morale, productivity, and efficiency, as well as service delivery to clients. The Office's approach to innovation is self-described as a blend of "empathy + experimentation + evaluation." As an in-house consultant, the HSA Innovation Office's approach incorporates both Human-Centered Design and Lean Process Improvement methods. Marc Hébert, Design Anthropologist at HSA's Innovation Office, leads teams of HSA staff by bringing together various levels of staff and guiding them through a process that helps staff develop solutions to issues.

Innovation Office's Process: HSA Innovation Office follows a document titled "Guide to Design Better Experiences, Processes and Systems," which focuses on dividing out the "big problem" into small approachable parts and addressing each part individually. This approach keeps the project from becoming too big to fail, essentially allowing staff the freedom to be

innovative with proposed solutions, and to be unafraid to experiment and possibly fail. This approach contains three major components:

1) *Understand and Test Assumptions*: The first component focuses on clarifying the problem by finding the root cause, by asking why/what is causing the problem as many times as needed.

Thereafter, the brainstorming of solutions for the root causes is completed; feedback is gathered from coworkers and approval is obtained from management.

2) *Create and Test Assumptions*: The second component involves creating a prototype of the solution and presenting it to approximately five diverse users (the naysayers, the enthusiasts, the most critical, etc.), listening to their feedback, observing—rather than explaining—their reactions, and improving the prototype based on their feedback. Present the prototype for feedback again and repeat the process as needed.

3) *Implement and Test Assumptions*: The third component is a small scale pilot project, or experimentation, which enables others to put the prototype developed into use and improve it based on real-life evaluations.

Innovation Office's Successes: SF-HSA staff used the Guide to develop and implement improvements to issues that both staff and clients face. One major improvement was the Service Center Improvement Project (SCIP), which brought together HSA staff from varying positions and professional perspectives, ranging from clerks to Deputy Directors. SCIP's primary goals were to improve client satisfaction/experience, reduce clients' lobby and phone wait times, improve employee appreciation, and further develop employee learning, training, and skills. Over the course of six months and many meetings (workshops), the participants developed ninety-six (96) SMART (Specific, Measurable, Actionable, Relevant and Time-bound) plans, of which, 83% were implemented. The outcomes of some of their improvements include:

- Reduced CalWORKs clients' wait times on the phones by 66% and in the lobby by 25%.
- Reduced Medi-Cal clients' wait times in the lobby by 71%.
- Reduced the amount of time it takes to process paperwork by two days.
- Created Kudos Boards in various buildings for staff to publicly show appreciation for coworkers and from clients.

In addition to SCIP and its related SMART plans, the Innovation Office also developed several Rapid Improvement Events (RIEs). RIEs are similar to SMART plans in that they take big, overwhelming issues and cut them down into smaller more approachable issues. RIEs take three to four days with additional project scoping time in advance, this allows for many SCIP-like projects within the week. An example of a successful RIE was the improvement of the “show rate” of CalWORKs clients. Clients screened for eligibility at one building are required to show up for job training at another building. The following efforts resulted in an increase in show rate by 30%: the hiring of a front desk receptionist and a lobby navigator to greet and direct clients, mandatory new staff training to improve clients' experiences, and a newsletter that informs employees at both buildings of the positive impact they are having on clients' lives.

Reception/Perception: By allowing staff to think out of the box and test their theories, they become more vested in working together to find solutions. One key aspect to the Innovation Office's success has been that it will only involve itself with staff or groups that have requested its involvement, thus not imposing itself onto projects. Instead of initiating the change, the office guides staff to encourage and foster innovative thinking. Jason Adamek, a manager in the Department of Aging and Adult Services (DAAS) who participated in both SCIP and an RIE, stated that working with Marc and the Innovation Office has greatly helped him to better understand the culture of his staff and their needs. Prior to working with Marc, the intake

component of DAAS faced challenges, including inefficiency in communication and complicated internal processes, which lead to morale issues with staff and diminished client services. Because of the involvement and direction from the Innovation Office, Jason has taken steps to be more accessible to both his direct reports and line staff by meeting with them as a group and individually. Jason believes that by dividing the issues, as instructed in the 'Guide,' he and his staff are able to more clearly see that the issues can be addressed by streamlining processes and standardizing the way communication occurs internally. Mary Cabarles, an intake worker under Jason, sees the shift in culture and ownership within her department. She credits Marc with helping them identify the root of the department's problems. According to Mary, Marc "labeled things and visually helped us figure out the steps needed to address staffs' concerns. He helped us stay focused and not go on tangents that were unproductive." The value in having an 'outside party' (the Innovation Office) guide staff and management through the process of innovatively addressing issues resonated with others within HSA. Ellen Steinlein, Senior Organizational Development Specialist in the Human Resources Department, mentioned that because the Innovation Office does not really belong to a particular department but rather the entire agency, "there was value in having someone without bias or specific knowledge in a certain area within HSA. Marc is able to question everything and provide innovative suggestions that are outside of the government norm." Another strong supporter of the Innovation Office is David Libunao, CalWORKs Supervisor and SCIP participant. After successfully implementing a few SCIP, SMART plans to address office morale and minor in-house process changes, David noticed that Eligibility Workers (EWs) and Supervisors, who had initially been skeptical, were now volunteering to be part the change occurring and coming up with their own suggestions.

Obstacles: While the Innovation Office has had many successes over the course of two years, these successes are mostly only known to those who participated in an Innovation Office project or have been directly affected by it. The Innovation Office has had difficulty becoming more widespread and accepted throughout the agency. In the government setting, process changes tend to only be addressed when policy or technology changes occur. More times than not, the motto seems to be “if it isn’t broken, don’t fix it.” However, “not broken” does not equal working and much less than working to its optimum potential. Additionally, there is some skepticism of the effectiveness that the Innovation Office can have, which is another obstacle. In order for the Innovation Office to grow and be able to assist more departments within HSA, it needs support and recognition of its value. Susie Smith, Deputy Director of Policy and Planning, directly oversees Marc and the Innovation Office and knows firsthand the importance of having support from other department directors and executives to also champion for the Innovation Office. Expansion of the Innovation Office can only happen if additional resources are budgeted, which rely on other agency leaders seeing value in the Innovation Office. Susie recognizes that better marketing and self-promotion is needed in order for the Innovation Office to become more well-known and more utilized throughout HSA. Susie also believes that the Innovation Office needs the culture shift in management and supervisors in order for it to succeed. In the social services industry, the nature of the work is stressful and has high urgency; therefore, staff tend to work in a reactive setting rather than proactive. Time to be innovative and collaboratively work with others can be viewed as a luxury rather than a necessity. In order for the work the Innovation Office does to be viewed as a “necessity,” it needs to promote its successes to a broader audience. Ellen Steinlein, from Organization Development area in HR, strongly supports the work of the Innovation Office and is working towards involving the Innovation Office at the HR

level more frequently. Together, they can work with HR's data, such as employee surveys, and the Innovation Office's process methods to not only address current issues or concerns staff have, but also to promote the work the Innovation Office does with all new incoming employees. Another obstacle that affects the ability to obtain support from other department directors and executives is the lack of measurable data. As a way to track the Innovation Office efforts, Marc maintains a tally of all interventions that the Innovation Office has been a part; since its inception 130 improvements have been created. Aside from the tally, there is no other data to document the success rate of the processes the Innovation Office has helped develop. Many of the successful improvements cannot be statistically measured such as an improvement in morale due to the implementation of kudos boards, birthday cake celebrations, or team-building functions. Without supporting data, it can be difficult to persuade others to champion for the Innovation Office and the previously mentioned improvements may be viewed as just social activities, rather than actual morale improvement processes that benefit the efficiency of staff and services to clients.

Lessons Learned: In addition to its many successes, the Innovation Office has also had disappointments, or innovatively termed "lessons learned." Among the most common challenges are time constraints that many of the staff had to overcome while taking part in projects with the Innovations Office. Marc acknowledged in his blog that during their tenure with SCIP, "non-managers expressed being burned out and supervisors, in particular, were not given time off to work on SCIP." In order for others to recognize the importance of the work that is produced from participating in Innovation Office projects, the time to do this important work must be granted. Both Marc and David mentioned SCIP volunteers did not feel as if they received the support they needed from their supervisors and/or managers and co-workers. It is evident that better messaging to supervisors and managers is needed in order for them to allow

time for their staff to participate in Innovation Office projects. After managers were given the opportunity to experience first-hand what the non-managers were experiencing, it became evident that the initial push-back was mainly due to managers not having a full understanding of what the process entailed. It is important for middle managers in every participating department to be invited to provide their feedback before, during, and after the pilot. Another lesson learned was the need for buy-in. Interwoven with the lack of support from supervisors and managers is their lack of buy-in. As mentioned in the blog, “urgency can crowd out priorities.” Without the needed buy-in, managers believe the urgency of “actual” work takes precedence over work with the Innovation Office. Additionally, participants also need support from their co-workers. Surveys conducted during and after SCIP revealed that SCIP participants felt they ended up doing a lot of the work and were not supported enough by their peers. Marc realizes that participants need to be provided with “better capacity, structure, and support to employees when championing them to make stuff better for clients, coworkers, and themselves.”

Recommendations for Santa Clara County: There are currently several active efforts in Santa Clara County to improve collaboration amongst staff of all levels and increase joint inter-departmental processes. Prior to implementing an Innovation Office in SSA, it is recommended that: 1) SSA continues with the implementation UBTs and the utilization of UBT facilitators. UBTs and UBT facilitators will provide SSA the assistance with communication between the various stakeholders while also maintaining defined measurable metrics. 2) Departments with mutual clients (e.g. SSA and Mental Health or SSA and Juvenile Probation) continue to work together and utilize UBTs in order to allow workgroups comprised of interdepartmental staff to collaborate on processes and develop solutions for problems that mutually affect them and their clients. 3) SSA expands the consultant work that DEBS has been involved with to front line staff.

Expanding the use of an external consultant would offer SSA the advantage of first piloting these efforts without having to fully invest in the creation and funding of a full-time staff member. The expansion to front line staff would empower staff of all levels to feel involved. They can then take ownership in changes implemented and recommendations for improvement within SSA. All three recommendations must include measurable outcomes, or follow-ups, to the implemented projects and improvements. First, there needs to be “before vs. after” data. For example, if the measure is for productivity or process improvement, data can be obtained via tracking of work (i.e. applications processed timely, referrals offered to clients, etc.). Most work can be systematically tracked which would not add any additional workload to staff other than the production of data reports. Another measurement tool is survey results, which can be used for the measurement of staff morale, work satisfaction, and client satisfaction. Survey results can illustrate issues or concerns that cannot be measured through numerical data. Secondly, it is also important to determine the success of the “improvement” based on longevity. Surveys or data reports would need to be utilized to determine the initial success as well as if the improvement continues six months, one year, or more after implementation. Since SSA has an in-house data department, additional costs incurred because of the production of the reports may result in the need for one additional staff due to the higher demand of reports. However, this requires taking current staff workloads into account and the actual increase in time to produce and maintain the additional reports. Santa Clara County’s current efforts have recently obtained increased priority and are headed in the right direction to developing truly innovative processes that will enhance services for clients and bridge the gap between SSA departments and staff.

Acknowledgements:

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to Marc Hébert for his willingness to share his knowledge, expertise, and genuine excitement regarding the HSA Innovation Office in San Francisco and to Susie Smith, David Libunao, Ellen Steinlein, Mary Cabarles, and Jason Adamek for taking the time to share their perspective and experiences with the Innovation Office. Lastly, I want to express my appreciation to Denise Boland, DEBS Director, Janette Anastacio, Assistant DEBS Director, and Margareta Hodzic, Application and Decision Support Manager, for their leadership, support and allowing me the opportunity to participate in BASSC.