

# **Guiding Organizational Change**

**A Casebook for the Executive Development  
Program in the Human Services**

**25th Edition**

**2019**

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# PREFACE

This casebook is very unusual. It represents the experiences of county human services managers. It seeks to capture the daily pressures and opportunities to promote innovations and organizational change. The cases reflect the changing economic and political environment in California over a twenty-five year period (1994-2019). It also reflects examples of practice research.

The contributors to this casebook are members of the Bay Area Social Services Consortium (BASSC) founded in 1987 with the assistance of the San Francisco Zellerbach Family Fund. The Consortium represents a policy/research/training partnership between twelve northern California counties surrounding the San Francisco Bay, five university graduate social work education programs, and one foundation. Since 1992, the Consortium has functioned as a Think Tank for its members exploring issues of common concern. The evolution of BASSC is described in Chapter 1. BASSC's current Vision Statement appears as Chapter 3. In nearly all of its meetings and retreats, members have presented case descriptions of either innovative practice or administrative challenges and responses.

This 25th anniversary edition of the casebook features a wide array of BASSC research projects and teaching cases. It marks a milestone of the BASSC EDP and the beginning of a transition as the founders, Stan Weisner and Mike Austin, make way for the next generation of educational leaders. In the process of educating over 750 county staff over 2 ½ decades, the county directors are most grateful for Stan's and Mike's leadership in designing, implementing,

sustaining, and continuously updating the EDP with the assistance of the BASSC Training Coordinator, Andrea DuBrow. Additional gratitude for the program can be found in the keynote address (attached to this Preface) by Ellen Timberlake (Director, Santa Cruz County) at the 25th graduation ceremony in May 2019.

The set of cases reflecting the experiences of top management in the public human services and related research have been compiled for use in preparing senior managers for top management positions. The Consortium members identified as one of their top priorities the development of a cadre of their most promising managers, primarily women and people of color, for a regional talent pool that could be accessed when seeking to fill top management positions in the future. The contributors dedicate this casebook to their future successors; as one county director said, "These are the professionals who will be running our agencies when we all have retired to the golf course."

In addition to thanking the contributors, we want to acknowledge the valuable assistance of all the BASSC Research Assistants. They spent many hours researching topics of interest to the members, transcribing and editing the cases, and assisting each contributor in locating the missing pieces of their stories. We also wish to express our appreciation to our BASSC Staff at the University of California, School of Social Welfare, for serving as general editors of the casebook as well as ongoing facilitators of the rich and rewarding deliberations of the Consortium members.

**Jerry Huber, BASSC Co-Chair  
Director, Solano County Department  
of Health and Social Services**

# Celebrating 25 Years of the BASSC Executive Development Program: The Gift that Keeps on Giving

May 2019 Graduation  
BASSC Executive Development Program

ELLEN TIMBERLAKE

DIRECTOR, SANTA CRUZ COUNTY HUMAN SERVICES DEPARTMENT

## Introduction

TONIGHT – is one of my favorite evenings of the year –  
An opportunity to:

- Celebrate your graduation from the program
- Honor and acknowledge the time and energy you've poured into the program – 3 weeks in the classroom, ½ day exchanges, 15-day internship and written case study – all while maintaining your day job and juggling home and family commitments.
- Thank our amazing university and extension partners and our County BASSC Liaisons– Stan Weiner (Program Director), Andrea DuBrow (Program Coordinator), Mike Austin (Lead faculty adviser), and Jonathan Gill – without you there is no Executive Development Program –if you're a BASSC liaison please stand up – round of applause.
- Acknowledge my fellow directors for their continuing commitment to EDP – year end and year out, you support your staff's participation, you host staff from other counties in completing their internships, and you take time out of your busy schedules to teach modules throughout the year; and
- Welcome you into the EDP Alumni Club – a club with over 750 members, no annual fees, and lots of free perks to look forward to. In a nutshell, the Executive Development Program is indeed *"the gift that keeps on giving."*

As you know, tonight we celebrate, 25th Anniversary of the Executive Development Program.

- Pretty sure that I was asked to say a couple of words on this auspicious occasion of our 25th anniversary because as a proud graduate of the EDP Class of 1995 – Year Two, I may very well be the oldest active member of this esteemed Alumni Club.
- Set the stage– 25 years ago, I left a 10-year career in higher education to become an Analyst for the County of Santa Cruz Human Services Department.
- Truth be told, when I took the job I knew very little about what they did, who they served – it seemed like a world steeped in acronyms, unfamiliar, a bit overwhelming in fact – the only thing at the time that was crystal clear for me is that I wanted to work for this guy named Will Lightbourne – I had an informational interview with him and was inspired by him.
- So, I stepped off the cliff, took the job, and after a year working on a special IHSS assignment, Will asked me if I'd be interested in participating in this newly hatched, BASSC Executive Development Program.
- Eagerly, and without hesitation, I said yes.

## MY BASSC CLASS

- In the second-year class, there were 25 folks representing 7 counties.
- From day one, I felt like a little kid in a candy store – a lottery winner – BASSC was this amazing opportunity to get a crash course in social services – connect the dots – decrease my anxiety, fuel my excitement. I did not know at the time that it would set the stage for 25 years of growth and development.

- I loved most everything single thing about BASSC: the modules, my internship in Contra Costa studying relative caregiver support; and getting to know my fellow classmates – not so much the paper.

In 1996, even if I had a Crystal Ball when I was sitting where you are – there's probably no way I could have seen how the gifts I received from my participation in EDP would impact me personally throughout my career:

- Let me illustrate by sharing 2 examples of my personal favorite modules:
  - State and county budgeting
  - Creating a learning organization.
- 1. **State and county budgeting** – Sally Kippur, San Francisco Director of Administration, taught the budget module in 1996. She was very dynamic – starting from a place of values – emphasizing transparency, stewardship, the budget as the golden key that unlocks our ability to deliver on our mission – she broke it down, made it interesting, explained the power of leveraging – I marched myself back to the department and told Will Lightbourne that we needed to bring her down, we needed to change, be more transparent. At that time, there were 1 maybe 2 people in the department who understood the budget and made decisions – Even our Director, I think, felt at times that the budget was a mystery.

Ever since my BASSC class on budgeting, I've been on a mission to simplify, deepen knowledge within our department. I never would have predicted that the fire Sally Kipper lit under me would translate all these years later – how it would lead me to:

- Tackle 1991 and 2011 Realignment, self-study – reaching out to my BASSC classmate Elliot Robinson, trainings, and others across the region.
- Initiate cross department leveraging/financing study groups with our health and probation partners and creating Technical Assistance opportunities for our community partners.
- Navigate very difficult budget decisions during the great recession with the elimination of over 25% of our workforce – but be able to do it in such a way that no one involuntarily lost their jobs; and ultimately lead me full circle to:
  - Teach the budget module with my good friend Karen Fies. My love for trying to excite folks about finance; to simplify the complex and

ignite the same passion; all of that is a gift from BASSC – from Sally Kipper.

## 2. **Building a robust learning organization /workforce development.**

- BASSC module taught I believe by Mike Austin – the take home point– constantly get better at what you do; be curious; question – why do we do things the way we do? Invest in your staff – they're the single greatest asset you possess in fulfilling our mission.
- When I went to BASSC in 1996 – I would couch our investments as minimal, inconsistent and decentralized. Like many social services agencies, we were in the infancy stage of implementing concepts like workforce development, performance outcomes and learning organizations. Staffing wise – our only two dedicated resources were: 1 personnel officer and 2 staff development trainers
- Fast Forward to today, and I'm very proud to say that **we have over 40 staff working in our Organizational and Community Development arena:** each and every one of them dedicated to developing our workforce and providing them with the tools they need to do their job, be engaged and informed with opportunities to grow, learn, advance, decide, change, and challenge the way things have always be done
  - *Organizational Development Manager – who by the way, I met through BASSC and snatched up from Sonoma*
  - **Robust Staff Development unit**
  - *Planning and Evaluation Division* – Centralized Business Analytics and Reporting Team, Contracts Unit, Quality Improvement Unit
  - *Community Relations and Outreach Team*

In this arena, the gift that BASSC gave me was the VALUE of investing in the workforce and creating a culture where we strive to improve, learn and support. I've been blessed to be in a position over the last 20 years to be able to advocate for, implement, oversee and support, and hire incredibly talented folks who've turned this value into a reality—one that's making a real difference in our outcomes and in the workforce culture.

- In 1996, If I had a second crystal ball – a regional crystal ball, I also couldn't have imagined how these Executive Development program gifts would

ripple out to our respective county departments, our region, our field, and ultimately to those folks in our community who need and rely on our services.

#### GRADUATES

- I don't think any of us imagined that our graduates would multiply from 25 to over 750

#### CASE STUDIES

- Or that as many internships and case studies on topics from A-Z would be conducted, published and on many occasions recommendations from graduates implemented.
- I did some quick math, and just in case studies alone, that represents over 11,250 hours of intentional growth, development, best practice exchange – double that to 22,000 hours when you factor in the time invested by host counties.

#### PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

- One of the goals of this program is to help develop our next generation of leaders – Over the last 25 years, I have no doubt that on this front we have succeeded. You see this in many forms:
  - BASSC alumni promoting within their departments, moving to other counties in the Bay area, (we've stolen some folks), making lateral moves to other program areas or perhaps staying in their current roles and using the skills of BASSC to make positive impacts within their current role.
  - In Santa Cruz County alone, in last 10 years in Santa Cruz alone, approximately 70% of our Senior Managers/Directors have graduated from the EDP program. Those 750 folks would be movers and shakers within their department and across the region.

#### INNOVATION AND COLLABORATION – FORMAL AND INFORMAL

- 750 folks would disperse and come back together again through:

- Phone calls, trouble-shooting . . . product sharing, participation in hiring/interview panels;
- *BASSC committees work* – Children's, Welfare-to-Work, Adult and Aging, Admin and Finance amazing examples of innovation, product and practice development;
- *BASSC research projects* conducted by our talented BASSC team and university partners;
- *Regional Responses to Crises and Opportunities* – coming together to respond to the unexpected – most recently, you see this in our response to the Fire disasters of late – Mutual Aid MOU's, or in our upcoming transformation into Region 1 for our march towards CalSAWs implementation.

So tonight, I wish I could give each one of you a Crystal Ball so you could see how your graduation from the Executive Development Program will be the “Gift that Keeps on Giving” – What I can give you is my own experience and the reassurance of so many other graduates, that you are leaving with a set of skills, perspectives, values and relationships that will carry you to new places – *“Oh the places you will go” if you stay open and cultivate the opportunities*

As you move forward in your career, my best advice to you is to be intentional with these gifts:

- pick the ones that excite you the most and run with them
- give back what you've learned to others
- stay connected to your BASSC classmates
- grab opportunities – take risks.

On behalf of the Directors, congratulations to all our 2018/19 graduates and happy 25th anniversary to the Executive Development Program.



**I.**

**BASSC—**

**PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE**

# Building a Comprehensive Agency-University Partnership: A Case Study of the Bay Area Social Services Consortium<sup>1</sup>

MICHAEL J. AUSTIN, MARIA MARTIN, SHERYL GOLDBERG,  
JILL DUERR BERRICK, BARBARA WEISS,  
AND JULIE KELLEY

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### ABSTRACT

University-community partnerships are receiving increased attention in an era of rapid change and fragmented resources. This case study of a multi-county consortium of social service agencies in collaboration with four graduate social work programs and two foundations represents an innovative approach to building a partnership through the use of a consortium as a mediating structure. With a focus on training, research, policy development, and a think tank, specific implications for developing agency-university partnership are identified. The case is embedded in the expanding literature on university-community collaboration.

**KEYWORDS:** Consortium, collaboration, social services, university-community partnerships, think tank

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### Introduction

As the pace quickens in our society, due in large part to the role of technology, it becomes even more difficult to overcome the fragmentation spawned by increased specialization. People are so busy working in their specialized “vineyards” that it is difficult to find the time to network with those in similar as well as different workplaces. There is a growing recognition that special mechanisms are needed to bridge the gaps created by the fast-paced nature and fragmentation in our society. Different forms of collaboration, partnerships, and consortia are emerging as structures to

connect the shared concerns of similar as well as disparate institutions. These bridges are known as “mediating” structures or institutions; platforms used to bring together two or more sets of collaborators to address shared concerns and interests. One such mediating institution is the Bay Area Social Services Consortium (BASSC), a collaboration established in 1987 between four universities, twelve county social service agencies, and two foundations. An analysis of the evolution and contributions of this Consortium is the focus of this case study.

Shared concerns and the mutuality of self-interests are frequently the cornerstones of partnerships. The “town-gown” distinction between community concerns and university interests is not new. However, as universities have begun to recognize their responsibilities to the society and taxpayers/donors supporting them, there has emerged in the last several decades a new interest in community involvement. This has occurred at the student level with community service projects, at the faculty level with collaborative research and training in community institutions, and at the governing board level with policy and funding decisions influenced by the need to address community issues in neighborhoods surrounding university campuses as well as in the region. Similarly, local governmental agencies, including county departments of social services, have recognized the value of collaborating with universities to recruit future employees, address critical issues through research and evaluation, and solicit faculty expertise in the formulation and implementation of public policies. Recent

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1. This paper is dedicated to the memory of Dean Harry Specht, who had the courage and vision to build partnerships throughout the State of California. His encouragement and leadership, in partnership with Ed Nathan, former Executive Director of the Zellerbach Family Fund, and Richard O’Neil, former Director of the Santa Clara County Social Services Agency and BASSC chair (1992-1996), moved BASSC from an idea to a reality.

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Michael J. Austin is BASSC Staff Director, Maria Martin, BASSC Social Policy Media Coordinator, Sarah Carnochan, BASSC Research Assistant, Sheryl Goldberg, BASSC Research Coordinator, Jill Duerr Berrick, Director, Center for Social Services Research, Barbara Weiss, BASSC Training Coordinator, Julie Kelly, BASSC Research Assistant.



arrivals at the table of university-community collaboration have been local foundations. While foundation resources are always valued commodities in forming and sustaining collaborations, even more important are the ideas and perspectives of foundations executives who bring the concerns of grassroots, community-based organizations to the collaborative process. An analysis of this mix of public, private, and university collaboration is a key dimension of the study of BASSC which grew from 1992 to 1998 from a \$7500 foundation seed grant to a \$1.2 million annual operation and includes the following initiatives: 1) an Executive Think Tank, 2) an Executive Development and Regional Training Program, 3) a Research Response Team, and 4) a Policy Media Program.

### Highlights from the Literature

The BASSC experience can be best understood when it is placed within the context of university-community partnerships. Over the past two decades, there has been increased interest in exploring ways for universities to connect with community issues and for community leaders to maximize the policy, research, and training expertise of universities. While the literature in this area is not large, there is a growing body of research that examines the structures and motivations underlying partnerships between universities and community institutions. Hackney argues that universities have a moral obligation to address the social problems in the communities where they are located, “to set an example of sensitive corporate citizenship” (1986, p. 136). In addition to the moral imperative, Harkavy and Puckett (1994) identify how partnerships with the community serve the following self-interests of universities: 1) advancing knowledge, teaching, and human welfare through community service, 2) generating increased public and private support for universities by giving attention to societal problems, and 3) facilitating faculty and student recruitment by promoting the health and safety of their surrounding community. Others have pointed out that initiatives to address community problems offer the potential for interdisciplinary teaching and research by dealing with real life problems which can be inherently incompatible with the university’s compartmentalized approaches to solutions (Ramaley, 1995). Similarly, research in communities can provide a “reality check” for the ideas and theories investigated by researchers (Young, 1995).

University partnerships have evolved out of a tradition in America of academic service to the community. An early example in the field of social work can be found in the work

of Hull House and the University of Chicago. Hull House residents produced detailed demographic data and descriptions of immigrant neighborhoods, information which was integrated into their advocacy efforts. They worked closely with sociologists at the University of Chicago, who viewed scholarship, teaching, and community service as compatible elements of the university’s mission (Harkavy & Puckett, 1994). Another form of university-community partnerships can be seen in the development of land grant colleges (Morrill Act of 1886) to provide research and consultation services to local agricultural communities (Hackney, 1986). However, for much of this century, universities formed their primary partnerships with business and government, turning away from local problems to focus on national and foreign policy issues (Harkavy & Puckett, 1994). Then, in the 1960’s, foundations and the federal government began to focus again on the problems confronting local communities, especially those located in urban areas, by supporting a number of initiatives to foster partnerships between universities and urban communities. Some of these efforts have been criticized on the grounds that while universities have benefited from using communities as a laboratory for research, the communities gained little, and had no voice in the work that universities were doing (Hackney, 1986).

While there are relatively few successful organizational models of university-community partnerships presented in the literature, Harkavy and Puckett (1991) note that most successful partnerships are tailored to the particular circumstances and needs of individual universities and community organizations. In addition, a few case studies in the literature make it possible to identify some principles and strategies that should be generalizable to a broad range of partnerships, such as studies of the efforts of universities to incorporate community service into their mission statements (Scott & Ludwig, 1995), understanding the challenge of bridging two different cultures represented by the university and the community (Bartelt, 1995), building partnerships between universities and state mental health agencies (Talbot et al, 1991), and partnership development between universities and local public schools (Zetlin & MacLeod, 1995).

Although these case examples and models have emerged in different environments, they all reflect the theme of mutuality as part of a process of developing a set of principles for collaboration. These principles include: 1) the importance of equity among partners, ensuring that each has an equal voice, and that the contributions of all are recognized, 2) the importance of partners identifying their

own self-interest in the collaboration as well as recognizing the goals and objectives of the other organizations involved, 3) the necessity of clarifying the rationale for working in collaboration despite different interests, 4) the importance of leadership to sustain collaborative partnerships and ensure longevity as well as institutionalization (e.g. supporting structures, mediating structures, faculty reward systems, and outside funding), and 5) the importance of full participation of faculty, staff, and community members in building a strong foundation of university community-partnerships.

While the literature includes interesting descriptions of partnerships and their developmental processes, it is in the field of public education that some of the most substantive analysis of partnerships and consortia can be found. There is also a strong parallel between university schools of education with their public school counterparts in the community and university schools of social work with their counterparts in public county social service agencies as well as non-profit community-based social service organizations.

Goodlad (Sirotnik & Goodlad, 1988) has conducted extensive work on university-school partnerships over the past three decades through the National Network for Educational Renewal. From his assessment of successful school-university partnerships, Goodlad has identified the following five relationship-building processes for building and sustaining partnerships:

- **Partnerships** involve equal partners working together toward satisfying mutually beneficial self-interests, as reflected in the following essential characteristics: 1) a moderate degree of dissimilarity between or among partners, 2) the potential for mutual satisfaction of self-interests, and 3) sufficient selflessness on the part of each partner to assure the satisfaction of self-interests by all involved.
- **Communication** in a partnership involves efficient and effective sharing of information and knowledge produced by its members as well as communications coming from other sources.
- **Leadership** involves organizational leaders possessing, endorsing, and communicating a clear, coherent set of fundamental values to which all participants can be committed.
- **Renewal** involves change which requires the ongoing involvement of the significant persons responsible for developing and promoting innovative activities, along with the resources and time needed for the ongoing process of inquiry and organizational change.

- **Accountability** is best understood and acted upon as a system of shared responsibilities carried out by members of the partnership.

These characteristics of mediating structures in the field of public education will be used in the analyzing the BASSC partnership.

## The BASSC Consortium as a Case Study

In its first five years of existence BASSC developed a number of regional training events and task forces on child welfare curriculum issues designed to reengage social work education with the public social services. As a result, a common mission statement on education for public social services was adopted and led to the creation of a statewide consortium—the California Social Work Education Center (CalSWEC)—for the development of new educational programs to meet the needs of publicly supported social services.

Building on the success of these initial collaborative efforts, BASSC members in 1992 began to think about defining their activities in a broader and more formalized way. With the assistance of a staff consultant from the University of California School of Social Welfare, the consortium developed an agenda, over time, related to the three broad areas of training, research, and policy development. The following sections include the description of initiatives in each of these areas and the think tank process used to generate and monitor the initiatives.

## The BASSC Think Tank

The bi-monthly BASSC Think Tank meetings provide a rare opportunity for busy executives to step back from the day-to-day realities of administering programs and to focus not just on how things are, but how they might be. An early outcome of these discussions was the recognition of a shared desire to begin to influence future human services policies and programs in a more coordinated and proactive way.

As a first step, the group agreed to draft a vision statement that would place the county social service agencies' short-term strategic plans into a broader and long-term perspective. This statement was intended to create a picture of what the ideal human services system would look like, in order to provide a forum for county directors, staff, political leaders and citizens to work together to articulate a collective future. After fifteen months of deliberation the vision statement emerged with the core values that: a) social services should be universal and guaranteed, and b)

communities should be supported in the design and development of services that work for them (BASSC, 1994). In essence, services should:

- Be provided to all families in need.
- Provide guaranteed access to a minimal level of care and support.
- Educate consumers to utilize available resources in order to foster self-sufficiency.
- Use a prevention model whereby success is measured on the basis of community health and well-being.
- Work with existing community institutions to develop neighborhood-based services which involve minimal government regulation.
- Reflect a belief in the capacities of individuals and neighborhoods to promote change and a commitment to racial and cultural diversity.

From these core values arose the service principles and assumptions outlined in *Figure 1*. These principles and assumptions constitute the core of the BASSC vision and provide a road map that now serves as a guide for how daily actions can lead to individual and organizational success. In essence, the BASSC “Vision of Human Services—2000,” describes a human services system that is interdisciplinary, neighborhood-based, culturally sensitive, and accountable for contributing in a measurable way to the overall health and welfare of the communities it serves.

Since this vision was articulated, BASSC members have used the Think Tank meetings to identify and address administrative challenges to implementing the vision. Examples of such challenges include fostering community leadership, supporting staff autonomy and creativity, transferring responsibility and authority from the county to local units, developing safeguards to assure accountability in the use of public funds, and designing inter-agency mechanisms to assist local community service centers with job training programs, economic development activities, local taxing authorities, and public education.

Much of the recent focus of BASSC Think Tank meetings has been on the implications of national and state welfare reform proposals and the block-granting of federal funds. As county directors shared their concerns and perceptions, two themes emerged. First, counties were not waiting to see what would happen at the federal and state levels, but were moving forward with their own plans for changing their welfare systems. Second, even though each county’s welfare reform planning process and subsequent actions would be unique and reflect the particular demographics,

economics and politics of that county, the county directors identified perspectives which they held in common:

- The importance of increasing communications with local “stakeholders” (elected officials, service providers, community members, business leaders and so on) about the realities of providing social services in today’s environment with counties being positioned as facilitators rather than drivers of the planning process.
- The need to abandon the traditional isolation associated with managing the enterprise and involve a wider range of community organizations in program planning as well as actively pursuing partnerships with other county departments, private nonprofit agencies and businesses, thereby helping to shift organizational thinking from inward-focused and present-oriented to outward-focused and forward-looking.
- The importance of experimenting with new ways of delivering community and neighborhood services by allocating resources that can potentially increase the efficiency and effectiveness of activities on behalf of clients and communities.

The BASSC Think Tank continues its exploration of these issues, primarily through the analysis and discussion of cross-country comparisons of welfare reform implementation (Carnochan & Austin, 1998).

### **The BASSC Executive Development Program**

As the Think Tank evolved, agency directors began to feel more comfortable sharing some of their most pressing administrative dilemmas. Members found it helpful to address their dilemmas as case presentations. One issue that received unanimous support involved their shared frustration in recruiting experienced and trained women and minorities of color for senior management vacancies. This discussion led to a proposal for a multi-county Executive Development Training Program which would involve the selection of their most promising upper and middle-management staff to participate in the program, the involvement of the directors themselves as part of the teaching faculty, and the use of their cases as teaching tools (BASSC, 1997).

The original goal of the BASSC Executive Development Program was to develop a cadre of leaders who can play key roles in preparing and transforming public agencies into the service system of tomorrow. County agencies require leaders who understand bureaucratic barriers and can get the job done, despite obstacles. Acquiring the critical thinking skills, socialization, and leadership styles of

**FIGURE 1**  
**The Principles and Assumptions of the BASSC Vision**

<b>PRINCIPLES</b>		<b>ASSUMPTIONS</b>	
<b>Resource Distribution</b>		<b>Resource Distribution</b>	
1.	The ideal system will redirect societal resources to those individuals, families and communities most in need of assistance, especially those who have been historically deprived of a fair share of economic and social benefits and opportunities.	1.	Resource allocation can best be accomplished by offering services universally to those in need.
2.	The ideal system will provide a minimal level of health and decency to individuals and families.	2.	Historically, social service programs have been under-funded.
3.	The ideal system will provide all service consumers with equal opportunity to access benefits.	3.	Opportunities for access must include convenient locations and hours, appropriate physical facilities for the elderly and the disabled, access to all services to which one is entitled, access to relevant information, and the provision of services in a manner that is sensitive to language and cultural differences.
<b>Decision Making and Authority</b>		<b>Decision Making and Authority</b>	
4.	Decision making should involve community-based approaches to problem solving.	4.	Individual and family problems are rooted in the well-being of the community overall, and therefore solutions must address both individual and environmental problems. Communities can solve their own problems if they have the resources and assistance to do so.
5.	Local needs must be defined by the community.	5.	Local citizens must have decision-making authority to determine priorities, resource allocation and criteria for success.
6.	The service delivery system should be decentralized and neighborhood-based.	6.	People interact most effectively with systems that are near their place of residence and that reflect the particular characteristics of their living environment.
<b>Service Design and Delivery</b>		<b>Service Design and Delivery</b>	
7.	The ideal service delivery system will take a proactive, prevention-oriented approach to problem-solving	7.	Services should be linked to other major community institutions, in particular, all aspects of economic development.
8.	Services should be comprehensive, and non-categorical.	8.	Services should be responsive to a range of individual and community needs including those of young children, adolescents, young adults, senior citizens and families.
9.	Services should be universal, based on federally-funded family investment policies.	9.	A universal approach avoids stigmatizing recipients and acknowledges the potential of all individuals to contribute to society. Only the federal government possesses sufficient resources to implement investment policies of this magnitude.
10.	Services and service delivery should reflect a deep commitment to racial and cultural diversity.	10.	This commitment is at the core of the principles of equity, access and community participation, and it recognizes the importance of bringing the service delivery system in compliance with the demographic and social realities of the 21st century.

senior managers requires a learning environment where leadership issues and skills can be refined and applied to current organizational realities. The key skills include the ability to organize agencies for change and to assist others in overcoming fear and uncertainty generated by change. The transformational leader has the ability to overcome bureaucratic regulations to create new organizational forms. Such leaders are able to solicit input from all levels of the organization, from client populations, and from resources inside and outside of the agency.

The Executive Development Training Program consists of: 1) three week-long, thirty-hour classroom modules which take place during an academic year, 2) an interagency site visit exchange, and 3) a fifteen-day internship project in a county outside the participant's home country. The three classroom modules are organized by themes and the theme of the first module is leadership in public social services organizations. The module includes sessions on the history of social services, leadership development and self-assessment, client-centered administration, community relations, the administrator as community organizer, and working with community-based organizations.

Between the first and second modules, each participant is assisted in arranging a half-day visit to learn about an interesting or innovative program in another county. The objectives are to: a) strengthen the peer learning relationships formed during the first module, b) reflect upon their learning experience in a memo to their director that describes the observed project or program with implications for the home county, and c) to identify leadership and organizational change issues.

The theme of the second module is managing organizational change with an emphasis on change management, program development, presentation skills, budgeting, and grievance handling. The third module includes an array of management skills such as media relations, management information systems, advocacy and ethics in lobbying, conducting outcome evaluations, managing a diverse workforce, and executive-board relations. As the concluding module for the program, it also includes case presentations, evaluation sessions (participants, faculty, and mentors), and a graduation dinner.

Between modules 2 and 3 is a fifteen-day internship project which provides each participant with an opportunity to: 1) observe administrative practices in other agencies while acquiring new skills under the guidance of a senior manager, 2) build networks and contacts in another county, and 3) develop a case study which describes the learning

experience, identifies implications for their own agencies, and suggests action steps for future implementation.

A unique feature of the program is the involvement, at every level, of the county social service directors. They select the participants from their agencies, provide classroom instruction, assist their participants in selecting internship projects that would be beneficial to the agency as well as the participant, and recruit mentors in their own agencies to oversee internships for participants from other counties. While a detailed evaluation of the program is available (Murtaza, 1998), some of the program successes include peer learning and networking, learning from agency directors as instructors, and learning from the experiences of other counties.

Based on the success of the Executive Development Program, a comprehensive BASSC Bay Area Academy has been developed with Title IV-E funding from the state. This million dollar Academy is designed to support the child welfare and human service training needs of the counties in such areas as supervision, team-based interdisciplinary practice, change management, ethnic-sensitive risk assessment, domestic violence, substance abuse, concurrent planning, and related topics.

### **The BASSC Research Response Team**

With the successful launching of the Executive Development, the BASSC members turned their attention to another important issue, namely the need for timely and relevant agency-based research, which resulted in the development of the BASSC Research Response Team. In 1994, members of BASSC identified the importance of building a research bridge between universities and Bay Area county social and human service agencies. In response, a BASSC Research Response Team (RRT) was launched in 1995 to respond rapidly to the agencies' needs for information about their changing environments. The RRT, financed with \$25,000 per year from each of four large Bay Area counties and a start-up grant from the Zellerbach Family Fund, is staffed by a research coordinator, several graduate research assistants, and two faculty members.

The following RRT with guidelines developed by the BASSC members was designed to be: 1) practical and oriented toward improvement and/or expansion of services at the provider level; 2) sensitive and relevant to the community's needs and values; 3) committed to involve agency staff in the design and implementation of studies; 4) carried out in the context of continuous consultation between agency administrators and researchers who would assume ultimate



responsibility for the independent presentation of findings and recommendations; 5) available to build agency capacity by providing technical assistance to agency staff; and 6) timely and completed within six to eight months of an agreed-upon scope of work reflected in a signed contract.

At the beginning of each research study, the BASSC Research Coordinator and one or more faculty members meet with county staff to define the scope of work. Agency administrators and staff persons are central to framing the study design, facilitating the data collection process, and providing feedback to be incorporated into the final report. Graduate student research assistants conduct a literature review on the topic, help create the research instrument, gather and enter data, and transcribe the research findings. The Research Coordinator oversees all phases of the project and prepares and presents the completed study in report form for discussion with the county. The faculty serve as consultants throughout the research project.

In the first three years of operations, a total of ten research projects were completed on the following topics:

- Homeless Needs Assessment – San Mateo County
- General Assistance Client Demographics Study – Contra Costa County
- An Assessment of the Quality of Care in Kin and Non-Kin Foster Homes – Santa Clara County
- A Study of Gay and Lesbian Foster and Adoptive Parenting – Santa Clara County
- Factors Associated With Successful and Unsuccessful Reunification from Foster Care – Alameda County
- Service Use and Service Needs Among Long-Term AFDC Recipients – San Mateo County
- Foster Parent Recruitment, Retention, and Rate Setting – Santa Clara County
- Developing a Public Information and Community Relations Strategy – Contra Costa County
- Managed Care and Child Welfare Reform – Alameda County
- Child Welfare Outcome Evaluation – Contra Costa County

A comprehensive evaluation of the first three years of the BASSC Research Response Team is also available (Dal Santo, 1998). With the successful launching of the Research Response Team, the BASSC members turned their attention to the changing political environment of welfare reform and the need for social policy responses.

## The BASSC Social Policy Media Program

BASSC members were laying the groundwork in their counties for implementing their shared vision for human services, a national welfare reform debate escalated following the 1994 congressional elections. As a result, BASSC members felt an urgent need to inform and educate local and regional constituencies about the realities of welfare reform given all the rhetoric of the time. While the politics of each county varied, the BASSC members sought to “speak with one voice” in educating the public. Members struggled with the competing goals of getting information about welfare out to the public and opinion leaders in a timely way as well as develop the infrastructure to effectively address broader policy issues over the long term.

In 1995, with a small foundation grant, the BASSC Policy Media Project was launched to gather relevant information on poverty and welfare in order to publish a briefing packet targeted to local media representatives, elected officials, and the business community. The contents of the briefing monograph entitled *Social Welfare at a Crossroads: A National, Statewide, and Local Look at Poverty and Public Assistance* (Martin & Austin, 1997) included:

- I. ENDING WELFARE AS WE KNOW IT: The Impact of “Welfare Reform” on the Bay Area
- II. SOCIAL WELFARE PROGRAMS IN THE U.S.
- III. MEDICAID: Health Care Program for the Medically Needy
- IV. SSI: Supplementary Security Income for the Elderly, Blind, and Disabled
- V. FOOD STAMPS: Program to alleviate Hunger and Malnutrition for Low Income Families and Individuals
- VI. JOBS: the Job Opportunities and Basic Skills Program
- VII. AFDC: Aid to Families With Dependent Children
- VIII. FACES OF POVERTY: Personal Stories of Women and Children on Public Assistance
- IX. OUR CHANGING SOCIETY: American Trends and the Social Welfare System
- X. SOCIAL WELFARE BY THE NUMBERS: National, State, and County Data

This educational tool is now being supplemented by a foundation-supported media campaign planning process to educate the public about the implementation of welfare reform. Identifying critical media messages, especially for employers of former welfare recipients and those providing family support services, is the core of such a regional media

campaign. In the context of implementing welfare reform, additional BASSC policy initiatives are under development in the areas of child care, adult services, and the elements of a living wage.

## Conclusion

The agency-university partnership established through the mediating structure of BASSC provides an opportunity for continuing dialogue on issues related to education and training, research, and policy development. Some examples of the outcome of such dialogue can be found in BASSC training monographs (BASSC Academy, 1998) and policy research (Baum & Martin, 1997).

As noted in the introduction, community-university partnerships require commitment to collaboration and on-going nurturing. Using Goodlad's five criteria for effective relationship building (partnership, communication, leadership, renewal, and accountability), it is possible to assess the BASSC efforts to date. With respect to partnership, BASSC members representing universities, agencies, and foundations have demonstrated a unique capacity to work together toward satisfying mutually beneficial self-interests in the three areas of research, training, and policy development. However, it is also important to note that partnerships can reflect precarious relationships, especially when the membership is changing. For example, during the past five years, the deanship has changed in all four participating schools and in the case of one school and one foundation the leadership has changed three times. Fortunately these changes have not significantly disrupted the on-going momentum of the consortium. However, these changes call for increased attention to the process of orienting new members.

Regarding communications, there has been effective and efficient sharing of information and knowledge, usually facilitated by BASSC staff. Since the social service agency directors out-number the deans and foundation directors, the majority of information sharing relates to agency issues. Nevertheless, there is an on-going interest in addressing university curriculum issues along with increased sentiment among the agency directors to see more than one profession participating in the consortium.

On the issue of leadership, the BASSC Chair and members have articulated a clear and coherent set of values to guide and strengthen the Think Tank and related BASSC activities. In addition to shared values, there is a consensus that the elected chair of the consortium should be an agency director based in part, on the fact that they are the largest

group of dues-paying members. There is also agreement that the consortium bylaws should be simple and brief.

With respect to the criteria of renewal, the ongoing involvement of agency directors, deans, and foundation directors has demonstrated BASSC's capacity to engage colleagues in continuous inquiry and a "recharging of personal batteries" needed to manage constant organizational change. It is apparent that the members are finding the think tank approach to be both intellectually stimulating as well as emotionally supportive. The beginnings of an on-going support group can be seen in the informal exchanges between members on topics of a personal as well as professional nature. Again it appears that the group of agency directors are benefiting most from the support group environment given the recent arrivals of the new deans and foundation directors.

And the fifth criteria of accountability can be seen in the mutual support of BASSC members toward one another, in the form of contributed financial and staff resources, clearly demonstrates shared responsibility for the success of BASSC. The levels of accountability vary between those who pay dues (agencies and foundations) and those who do not (universities). One of the deans demonstrates considerable commitment and accountability since the consortium is administratively located in his school. In the final analysis, the consortium works because its members constantly search for ways to make it work.

In addition to meeting Goodlad's (1988) five criteria for effective relationship building, it is useful to identify several lessons learned while building the Bay Area Social Services Consortium:

1. For busy agency, university, and foundation administrators to maintain a clear focus on and commitment to a regional consortium, intensive staff work is needed to assist in meeting agenda framing and follow-up as well as managing projects which evolve out of consortium decision-making.
2. For university faculty and student involvement, there needs to be commitment and freedom to explore new avenues of inquiry with minimal organizational barriers to creativity.
3. For deans and foundation representatives to invest in a social services consortium, they must bring a deep commitment to strengthening public social services.
4. For county social service directors to invest personally and financially in a consortium amidst many other competing priorities, the dialogue must focus

- on the realities of current administrative practice and the needs of public social service personnel.
5. For a consortium to maintain its fiscal viability, counties must be willing to pay annual dues to support the consortium staff of faculty and students.
  6. For a community of local leaders to engage in an ongoing Think Tank, the benefits must exceed the costs in time and money and skillful leadership is needed on the part of the elected consortium chairperson.
  7. For other regions of the country with county administered social service agencies interested in replicating aspects of the BASSC, at least three key people need to surface: 1) a county social service director who is futuristic and effectively networked with other counties; 2) a social work dean with substantial commitment to the public social services; and 3) a faculty member or consultant willing and interested in staffing a consortium (these three also need to be able to secure a small start-up grant from a local foundation to cover expenses until the county participants recognize the value of sharing and commit agency funds as annual dues to maintain the consortium).
  8. A critical ingredient in providing staff for a consortium is the recruitment and deployment of doctoral and master's level students to create research teams, prepare training materials, assist in event planning, and coordinate information exchange. Similarly, experienced clerical and administrative support are needed to facilitate mailings, fiscal arrangements, and managing university policies.
  9. A flexible governance structure is useful in fostering participation through the use of a rotating chairperson and the involvement of county directors in leading ad hoc task forces on various BASSC initiatives. Similarly, the involvement of committed foundation representatives is useful in gaining additional perspectives on policy and practice issues as well as information about sources of financial support.

In conclusion, the regional training, research, and policy programs of BASSC provide a unique forum for the "cross-pollination" of ideas to promote creative solutions to the challenges which confront public social service agencies. BASSC provides a vehicle for county directors, university deans, and foundation representatives to communicate

shared values and advocate for realistic and humane social welfare policies.

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## **CHAPTER 2**

# **BASSC@30**

## **Bay Area Social Services Consortium**

### **COUNTIES**

Alameda  
Contra Costa  
Marin  
Monterey  
Napa  
San Benito  
San Francisco  
San Mateo  
Santa Clara  
Santa Cruz  
Solano  
Sonoma

### **UNIVERSITIES**

California State University, East Bay  
California State University, Monterey Bay  
San Francisco State  
San Jose State  
University of California, Berkeley

### **FOUNDATIONS**

The Zellerbach Family Foundation

Michael J. Austin, PhD  
BASSC Staff Director  
Sarah Carnochan, PhD  
BASSC Research Director

Bay Area Social Services Consortium  
School of Social Welfare  
University of California, Berkeley  
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<http://mackcenter.berkeley.edu>

## **BASSC Mission**

### **An Agency–University–Foundation Partnership**

The Bay Area Social Services Consortium (BASSC) operates as an agency-university-foundation partnership that promotes social service research, training, and policy development. Founded in 1987 in response to interests in public social services shared by county social service agency directors, university deans and directors of social work programs, and local foundations in the San Francisco Bay Area, BASSC has developed the following core purposes and programs:

### **Core Purposes**

- Fostering regional communications and understanding about the changing nature of social services in the public and nonprofit sectors
- Serving as a catalyst for new ideas that have legislative, administrative, public education, and training implications
- Providing a structure for innovative regional programs related to research, training and policy development
- Collaborating to address shared workforce development issues related to pre-service and in-service education

### **Core Programs**

- Bi-monthly meetings and an annual retreat to share ideas, assess legislation, and promote regional collaboration between county agencies, universities, and foundations
- A multi-county program of policy and program research on topics selected by the BASSC members
- A multi-county training program related to Executive Development for middle and senior managers and a Bay Area Academy serving the training needs of line and supervisory staff in child welfare and related fields
- A multi-county policy development program that develops and publishes policy reports for opinion leaders and case studies on promising practices for agency staff.

The leadership that guides and sustains BASSC emerges from the active participation of 12 county social service directors, five university deans and directors of social work programs, two foundation representatives, and the BASSC Staff Director along with BASSC staff located at UC Berkeley in the School of Social Welfare (Mack Center on Nonprofit and Public Sector Management in the Human Services) and UC Berkeley Extension.

## MESSAGE FROM THE BASSC CO-CHAIRS

**Kathy Gallagher**

*Director, Contra Costa County Employment & Human Services Department*

The formation of the Bay Area Social Services Consortium (BASSC) 30 years ago has proven to be nothing less than visionary. Given the monumental changes we have seen in the field of Human Services over the last three decades, the BASSC partnership has played a significant role in promoting social service research, training, and policy development in Northern California and beyond.

In 1987, the BASSC collaboration brought together human services directors from several Bay Area counties as part of an agency-university-foundation partnership to strengthen public sector social services in the region. BASSC emerged out of the history of increased government involvement in the delivery of social services to address the needs of local communities. Evolving from the War on Poverty and amendments to the Social Security Act in the 1960s, human service practitioners assumed an increasingly prominent role in ensuring that service programs were administered in ways that were more integrated, comprehensive, and accessible.

The BASSC partners built a solid foundation in 1987, and set the course for the counties in the San Francisco Bay Area to effectively deliver human service programs. Societal, cultural, economic and political changes have greatly affected how we provide support for our communities. These changes continue to impact our work as we take steps to influence public policy and set strategy for the future. The era of technological advancement has opened new doors, and our Bay Area human services departments are finding new ways to interface with customers. BASSC offers a collaborative means for human services directors

and staff to react to new mandates, changing needs and novel ways to serve our customers.

BASSC began with 12 member counties, our five Bay Area university programs featuring undergraduate and graduate social work education, and the Zellerbach Family Foundation as founding partner. Over the decades, BASSC has created seven policy groups (described elsewhere in this publication) that bring together expert staff from each Bay Area county to further regional goals through a planning and policy framework. BASSC has become a regional entity with an influential voice in the state and around the country.

Given the current political climate and federal and state budget constraints, it is reassuring to know that the founding of BASSC 30 years ago set the stage for county human services to be able to address the extraordinary challenges we face today. The group came together based on principles (as noted in our Mission Statement) that, in my view, have proven to be timeless in keeping our think tank and support group strong and connected human service issues.

We may encounter obstacles along the road before us, but we also see great opportunities to overcome them. The early vision of those who partnered to create BASSC enables us to move steadily along that road in a unified manner. I am certain BASSC will leverage its robust agency-university-foundation partnership to continue engaging in dialogue, educating each other on the basis of sound research and practice experience, and continue to influence public policy in the field of human services.

## Brian Simmons

*Dean Emeritus, California State University – Monterey Bay*

I attended my first BASSC meeting in fall 2001. In the ensuing sixteen years, I have seen many agency directors and many academicians come and go. One of the many remarkable things about BASSC is that despite the relatively frequent turnover, the high level of commitment to thoughtful and innovative policies and practices, informed by both the universities and the counties, has remained absolutely constant. The commitment can be seen in the deliberate and respectful inquiry and debate; the desire for data-driven decision-making; the prioritization of client, community,

and system well-being; and the importance of the stewardship of the taxpayer resources. All long-standing BASSC characteristics kept my interest and engagement at a high level for all these years. The recently re-energized focus on common interests in workforce development shared by universities and counties speaks well for BASSC going forward. Our founders, Ed Nathan, Harry Specht, and Dick O’Neil, would be very pleased to see the results of their efforts thirty years later.

## REFLECTIONS OF A BASSC FOUNDER

### Jim Rydingsword

*San Benito County Health and Human Services Agency*

The Bay Area Welfare Directors were meeting quarterly for lunch during the 1980s and I participated as Director of Contra Costa County Social Services Agency. It was the era of Governor George Deukmejian and President Ronald Reagan. We held ongoing discussions about issues facing social services in California and explored the impact of these issues on our Bay Area counties. Beginning in 1987, there was much discussion about welfare reform that ultimately resulted in the 1988 Welfare Reform legislation developed under the leadership of Senator Patrick Moynihan of New York. Its provisions included new directions for Child Support, Job Opportunities, Family Support Services and the AFDC amendments, and Demonstration Projects.

It was also in 1987 that I met with others at the UC Berkeley Faculty Club for lunch to discuss the needs of counties for more graduate level social workers and the need for a commitment of schools of social work to address this challenge. The conversation was guided by UC Berkeley Dean Harry Specht who called for the public university system in California to make a commitment to educate more social workers for California county human service agencies as well as publicly-supported nonprofits. The conversation

also included Ed Nathan, director of the Zellerbach Family Fund and Dick O’Neill, the director of Santa Clara County Social Services Agency. The vision and passion of Dean Specht was very powerful and helped to promote out-of-the-box thinking. Such thinking took the form of a proposal to seek a Ford Foundation planning grant to develop a statewide strategy to increase the supply of trained social workers in public-supported social service programs. These efforts led to the establishment of the California Social Work Education Center (CalSWEC) in 1990.

The UC Berkeley Faculty Club luncheon planted the seeds for converting the informal quarterly lunch meeting of the Bay Area welfare directors into the formal consortium comprised of county directors, university deans and directors, and foundation representatives. It is the vision that emerged out of this 1987 meeting that we celebrate today with the 30th anniversary of the founding of the Bay Area Social Services Consortium (BASSC).

## A Brief BASSC History (1987-2017)

**Michael J. Austin**

*BASSC Staff Director*

The roots of the Bay Area Social Services Consortium (BASSC) can be traced to people with ideas. For decades, those who have served as directors of county social service agencies throughout the state of California have sought each other out to exchange ideas and find support. In the San Francisco Bay Area, a group of “county welfare directors” met quarterly during the 1970s and 1980s to share ideas over lunch. In 1987, this group formed the Bay Area Social Services Consortium (BASSC) and included Ernie Hiroshi (San Mateo) as the convenor, Helen Knutson (Alameda), Dick O’Neil (Santa Clara), Jim Rydingsword (Contra Costa), Ed Sarsfield (San Francisco), and Yolanda Rinaldo (Marin/Sonoma/Santa Clara) who joined in 1989. Among the many topics they explored was the perceived insufficient curriculum attention to public mental health and child welfare issues in local schools of social work. They welcomed the opportunity to talk with the deans of social work programs. Dean Harry Specht of the UC Berkeley School of Social Welfare with the encouragement of Ed Nathan (Executive Director, Zellerbach Family Fund) seized the moment to begin a dialogue between agency administrators and university educators.

Dean Specht had been instrumental in reshaping the mission of the School of Social Welfare in the early 1980s to reflect a commitment to the public social services. In the mid-1980s, he sought out the “county welfare directors” to assist the School in implementing the new mission and began to participate in the quarterly meetings by hosting them on the UC Berkeley campus. By 1987, he had encouraged Ed Nathan, his long-time colleague with extensive contacts among Bay Area agency directors, to join the discussions. Ed had long sought to promote the improvement of social services through increased attention to service integration between public and nonprofit social service organizations. As a result of the foundation’s involvement, the first BASSC grant of \$7500 from the Zellerbach Family Fund was provided to promote regional training activities and Bart Grossman (Director of Fieldwork at the UC Berkeley School of Social Welfare) became the first part-time staff director of BASSC (1987-1990).

Based on these training activities (child welfare risk assessment, homelessness, HIV infants, etc.), BASSC members became interested in the potential for securing federal

training funds to attract MSW students to the field of child welfare. As a result, the idea for a statewide consortium of schools of social work and county social service agencies took hold. With the help of a social worker (John Lanihan) on the staff of the Ford Foundation (where there was interest in training social workers for implementing the federal 1988 Family Support Act), a Ford Foundation grant provided the seed money sought by the BASSC directors to launch CalSWEC, the California Social Work Education Center at UC Berkeley in 1990. Bart Grossman became its first director. While BASSC continued to provide regional training programs with staff assistance from Susan Laughlin at UC Berkeley Extension.

By 1992, BASSC was searching for a new focus, following its success with regional training events. Harry Specht and Ed Nathan had been successful in convincing Dick O’Neil (Santa Clara) to become the Chair of BASSC. At the same time, Mike Austin had just joined the UC Berkeley faculty as Professor and Chair of the Management and Planning track in the MSW program. He joined Ed, Dick, and Harry in developing a new approach to BASSC, away from quarterly lunch meeting and towards bi-monthly day-long sessions in the form of an Executive Think Tank. BASSC membership grew from the primarily large counties to include the smaller North Bay and South Bay counties along with the deans of other schools of social work that included San Jose State, San Francisco State, California State University–Monterey Bay, and California State University–East Bay.

Many different ideas began to emerge as part of the Think Tank, including the need to recruit more women and minorities into senior management positions. Based on a decision to “grow their own talent,” the BASSC Executive Development Program was launched in 1994 under the leadership and support of Stan Weisner and Barbara Weiss at UC Berkeley Extension. This innovative training program is now twenty four years old with over 600 graduates.

As the Think Tank format continued, other new ideas emerged. Based on a shared concern about the lack of in-house research capabilities in county social service agencies, the BASSC Research Response Team was launched in 1995 within the UC Berkeley Center for Social Services Research under the leadership of Dr. Sheryl Goldberg and Dr. Pamela

Choice. A series of exploratory short-term studies, primarily in the field of child welfare, were staffed by MSW students. This innovative research program is now over twenty years old and currently operates under the leadership of Sarah Carnochan as BASSC Research Director.

By 1996, Will Lightbourne (San Francisco) as BASSC Chair and Maureen Borland (San Mateo) as Vice Chair helped to focus the BASSC Think Tank on the profusion of policy issues leading up to and including the passage of federal welfare reform legislation. The multiple challenges facing the county directors led to a continuous stream of BASSC policy reports. One of the most comprehensive BASSC reports, *Social Welfare at a Crossroads*, was the first BASSC attempt to educate opinion leaders and elected officials involved in the development of California's CalWORKs welfare reform legislation. The flood of staff training challenges associated with implementing welfare reform led to the formation of a BASSC policy group of senior human resources and training managers under the leadership of Maureen Borland and Madelyn Martin (San Mateo County). This group continues to engage in ongoing efforts to transform public social service agencies into learning organizations, including recent efforts to build regional systems to share online training content across counties.

Preceding the BASSC Human Resources Committee was the Bay Area Children's Committee which had been formed in the previous decade as a regional component of the statewide Children's Committee that operated under the auspices of the California Welfare Directors Association (CWDA). By 1998, the leadership of BASSC had expanded its attention to child welfare by launching the new Bay Area Academy with substantial Title IVE funding. After nearly thirty years, the Bay Area Academy training programs have grown substantially under the guidance of BASSC through its Training Advisory Board and the administrative guidance of Fresno State University School of Social Work (Dave Foster, Director and Chris Mathias, Assistant Director). One of the early efforts of the Bay Area Children's Committee, under the leadership of Stuart Oppenheim and Dana Fabella was the preparation of the 2002 report for the Governor's Commission on Child Welfare entitled *Promising Bay Area Practices for the Redesign of Child Welfare Services*.

Based on the 1997 successful launch of the BASSC policy group related to Staff Development and Human

Resources, another BASSC policy group was formed in 1999 under the leadership of Rodger Lum and Linda Kretz (Alameda County) to focus on adult and aging services. The first result of this collaborative effort was the BASSC publication, *Riding the Wave: Charting the Course of Adult and Aging Services into the Next Decade* (2000). The BASSC policy group development continued during the first five years of implementing CalWORKs (1998-2003), with the establishment of the BASSC Welfare-to-Work policy group under the leadership of John Cullen and Wendy Therrian (Contra Costa County).

The arrival of the new millennium in 2000 provided BASSC with an opportunity to look beyond regional, state, and national boundaries in order to explore a more global perspective on public social services. Following the commissioning of reports on the implementation of welfare reform in Great Britain, BASSC began a series of video-conferences with local authority social service directors in England that focused on welfare reform implementation, child welfare services and adult/aging services. While the initial focus was on foster care, the future agenda includes adult/aging services. The national and international reach of BASSC was further enhanced by the launching of its first website which is now supported by the Mack Center on Nonprofit and Public Sector Management in the Human Services established in 2006. Sarah Carnochan joined the Mack Center staff in 2010 and helped develop a parallel consortium of nonprofit agencies that partnered with the counties to deliver social services called the Bay Area Network of Nonprofit Human Service Agencies (BANNHSA).

Given this brief 30 year history, it is clear that BASSC represents a unique partnership of county human service agencies, universities, and local foundations. Over the past three decades, a wide array of county agency directors, university deans and directors and foundation representatives have played a key role in the success of the Bay Area Social Services Consortium. As we celebrate the 30th Anniversary of BASSC, we salute the founding members of this pioneering intermediary organization that brings together the three important sectors of county social service agencies, universities, and foundations. As both a think tank and support group, BASSC has become a dynamic regional partnership that explores and supports collaboration and provides a venue where organizational leaders can share ideas and create innovative programs and practices.



## **BASSC @ 30 HALL OF FAME (1987-2017)**

### **Counties**

**Alameda:** Lori Cox, Yolanda Baldovinos, Chet Hewitt, Rodger Lum, Helen Knudson  
**Contra Costa:** Kathy Gallagher, Joe Valentine, John Cullen, Perfecto Villareal, Jim Rydingsword  
**Marin:** Kari Beuerman, Heather Ravani, Larry Meredith, Nancy Rubin, Thomas Peters  
**Monterey:** Elliott Robinson, Marie Glavin, Dardell McFarlin  
**Napa:** Howard Himes, Randy Snowden, Bruce Hyde, Terry Longoria, Dan Corsello,  
**San Benito:** James Rydingsword, Kathy Flores, Marilyn Coppola, Lee Collins  
**San Francisco:** Trent Rhorer, Will Lightbourne, Brian Cahill, Julia Lopez, Ed Sarsfield  
**San Mateo:** Iliana Rodriguez, Beverly Beasley Johnson, Glen Brooks, Maureen Borland, Ernie Hiroi  
**Santa Clara:** Robert Menicocci, Bruce Wagstaff, Will Lightbourne, Yolanda Lenier Rinaldo, Dick O'Neil  
**Santa Cruz:** Ellen Timberlake, Cecilia Espinola, Will Lightbourne, Susan Mauriello  
**Solano:** Gerald Huber, Ann Edwards, Patrick Duterte, Donald Rowe, Donald Currey  
**Sonoma:** Karen Fies, Jerry Dunn, Jo Weber, Dianne Edwards, Yolanda Lenier Rinaldo, Paul Allen

### **Universities**

**California State University–Monterey Bay:** Brian Simmons  
**California State University–East Bay:** Rose Wong, Holly Vugia, Evaon Wong Kim, Diane Rush Woods, Terry Jones  
**San Francisco State:** Susanna Jones, Eileen Levy, Rita Takahashi, Marv Feit, Michael Reisch, David Shipp, Phyllis Rochelle  
**San Jose State:** Peter Lee, Jack Wall, Alice Hines, Lela Noble, Sylvia Andrews, Simon Dominguez, Ismael (Andy) Dieppa  
**University of California, Berkeley:** Jeffrey Edleson, Lorraine Midanik, James Midgley, Neil Gilbert, Harry Specht

### **Foundations**

**Zellerbach Family Foundation:** Amy Price, Allison Magee, Ellen Walker, Cindy Rambo, Ed Nathan  
**VanLobenSels/RembeRock** Kathy Armstrong, Dan Corsello, Ed Nathan

### **BASSC Staff**

Michael J. Austin, Sarah Carnochan, Bart Grossman



## **BASSC BAY AREA HUMAN RESOURCES COMMITTEE**

The Bay Area Human Resource Committee (BAHRC) was launched in 1997 to respond to the staff development and personnel systems associated with implementing Welfare Reform. It soon became apparent to BAHRC participants that the organizational culture of county agencies/departments had a significant impact on the design and implementation of effective training programs beyond welfare to work programs. The Committee began to explore the literature on learning organizations and consulted with experts as a way of preparing to make recommendations for systemic changes to traditional staff development programs

and practices. Since 1997 BAHRC has continued to focus on the implementation and continuous improvement of BASSC member agencies as learning organizations.

The learning organization principles and practices continue to be the top priority for BAHRC as members continuously share information, explore different ways of resolving common issues, learn from each other and develop innovations in the area of human resources. The current priorities focus on the regional sharing of resources based on adopting and learning to use a common software platform (Storyline).

### **MEMBERS**

Michael Aho  
San Francisco County

Andrea Banks  
Napa County

Marci Castro  
Monterey County

Francine Conner  
Sonoma County

Bart Ellison  
San Francisco County

Nya Flores  
Napa County

Jennifer Kaley  
Santa Cruz County

Luenna Kim  
San Francisco County

Linda Martinez  
Santa Clara County

Irina Mass  
San Francisco County

Maria Panesi Guerra  
Alameda County

Denise Robinson  
Alameda County

Larry Sanchez  
Alameda County

Marie Sanders  
Santa Clara County

Mary Shean  
Alameda County

Clarisa Simon  
San Mateo County

Dawn Sparks  
San Mateo County

Andrew Stewart  
Santa Cruz County

Desi Tafoya  
San Mateo County

Shelly Todd  
Napa County

Katrina Williams  
Santa Clara County

Mickey Williams  
Contra Costa County

Iliana Rodriguez  
San Mateo County  
BASSC Liaison

## BASSC BAY AREA WELFARE TO WORK COMMITTEE

Launched in the midst of Welfare Reform implementation during the late 1990s, the focus of this Think Tank has been on implementing the CalWORKs program. In recent years, the focus has been on subsidized employment, workforce participation rates, workforce development programs, and family stabilization.

In collaboration with the BASSC Research Response Team, numerous reports have been developed including a book on Changing Welfare Services: Case Studies of Local Welfare Reform Programs emerging out of the early years of incentive funding for caseload reduction and innovative practices in Bay Area counties.

### MEMBERS

Sherry Alderman  
Sonoma County

Emily Balli  
Santa Cruz County

Tracey Belton  
San Benito County

Rebecca Darnell  
Contra Costa County

Andrea Ford  
Alameda County

Lynn Perez  
Napa County

Rafaela Perez  
Santa Clara County

Angela Shing  
Solano County

Noelle Simmons  
San Francisco County

Angela Struckmann  
Marin County

Wendy Therrian  
Contra Costa County

Jennifer Valencia  
San Mateo County

Barbara Verba  
Monterey County

Lorraine Wilson  
Marin County

Elliott Robinson  
Monterey County  
BASSC Liaison

## **BASSC BAY AREA ADULT AND AGING COMMITTEE**

The BASSC Bay Area Adult and Aging Committee launched in 1999 focuses its Think Tank discussions on policies and values related to improving adult and aging services. The core values include fostering consumer choice and independence, integrating service systems, and promoting cost benefits within a flexible service system to support consumer independence. Its first major BASSC report, *Riding the Wave* (2000) provided a foundation for exploring current policy issues. Over the past several years, the

focus of discussion has been on the policy issues related to In-Home Supportive Services (IHSS). IHSS and long-term care (LTC) policies and programs for low-income noninstitutionalized LTC populations.

In collaboration with the BASSC Research Response Team, several reports were developed related to elder abuse prevention (2002), risk assessment in adult protective services (2009), and long-term care policy (2010).

### **MEMBERS**

Kris Brown  
Napa County

Joyce Goodwin  
Solano County

Diana Jimenez  
Monterey County

Diane Kaljian  
Sonoma County

Lisa Mancini  
San Mateo County

Mike McConnell  
Santa Cruz County

Randy Morris  
Alameda County

Jill Nielsen  
San Francisco County

Lee Pullen  
Marin County

James Ramoni  
Santa Clara County

Victoria Tolbert  
Contra Costa County

Howard Himes  
Napa County  
BASSC Liaison

## BASSC BAY AREA REGIONAL CHILDREN'S SERVICES COMMITTEE

Since 1990, the Bay Area Regional Children's Services Committee has been meeting as a regional subcommittee of the County Welfare Directors Association Children's Services Committee and a committee of the Bay Area Social Services Consortium to share program expertise and contribute to the development and implementation of Child Welfare Services policies and programs to improve the lives of vulnerable children throughout the Bay Area and California.

Over the past 2+ decades, discussions of the Bay Area Committee included the challenges facing foster family agency programs, Inter-county Protocol for the coordination of services to families who migrate throughout our region, and collaboration with the BASSC Research Response Team to improve Child Welfare practices. This collaboration included the study of the education of foster

youth (2001), promising Bay Area child welfare practices (2002), and the Child Welfare and the Courts Project (2002). Subsequent collaboration involved the publication (2008) of structured literature reviews (disproportionality, risk assessment, family assessment, child/youth well-being assessment, measuring outcomes, parent education programs, substance abuse treatment programs), national performance indicators project (2013) (preventing the recurrence of maltreatment, achieving timely reunification, preventing re-entry to foster care, achieving timely adoption, achieving exits to permanency for children in long term care, achieving placement stability, using performance measures to manage child welfare outcomes), and the case record data-mining project (2017).

### MEMBERS

Maria Corona  
San Benito County

Aaron Crutison  
Solano County

Sylvia Deporto  
San Francisco County

Rebecca Feiner  
Napa County

Nick Honey  
Sonoma County

Francesca LeRúe  
Santa Clara County

Michelle Love  
Alameda County

Kathy Marsh  
Contra Costa County

Lori Medina  
Monterey County

Joan Miller  
Santa Cruz County

Deborah Moss  
Marin County

Lori Cox  
Alameda County  
BASSC Liaison

## **BASSC BAY AREA ADMINISTRATION AND FINANCE COMMITTEE**

### **Mission**

Launched in 2014 under the leadership of Daniel Kaplan (SF Human Services Department), colleagues in the area of finance and administration were invited to form a Think Tank of issues shared by the counties. Using centrally-located bi-monthly meetings members have the opportunity to raise issues of common concern as well as present concerns to invite peer consultation and advice.

The following are among the topics that helped to launch the committee and continue to provide a framework for discussion:

- The IHSS MOU
- ACA Financial Challenges
- Forecasting Methodologies
- Administrative Revenue Simulation Methodologies
- Benefits/Risks of the IV-E Waiver
- Realignment Revenue Management/Forecasting
- Information Technology Strategic Planning
- The Roles of Finance in CCP, IHSS Negotiations and other groups/functions
- Revenue Leveraging/Maximization Strategies
- MediCAL Administrative Budget Methodology

### **MEMBERS**

Jacinta Arteaga  
San Mateo County

Daniel Crick  
Santa Clara County

Becky Cromer  
Monterey County

Emilia Gabriele  
Contra Costa County

Rose Hardcastle  
Napa County

Gayle Hermann  
Alameda County

Joseph Huang  
San Francisco County

Girlie Jarumay  
Solano County

Daniel Kaplan  
San Francisco County

Tess Lapira  
Solano County

Cynthia Larca  
San Benito County

Maureen Lewis  
Marin County

Melissa Mairose  
Monterey County

Robert Manchia  
San Mateo County

Mike Roetzer  
Contra Costa County

Sharen Smithcamp  
Santa Cruz County

Carl Vanden Heuvel  
Sonoma County

Julia Wyman  
Santa Clara County

Trent Rhorer  
San Francisco County  
BASSC Liaison

## BASSC BAY AREA RESEARCH, PLANNING AND EVALUATION COMMITTEE

Launched in 2012 under the leadership of Dan Kelly (SF) and Jim Cunniff (Alameda), this BASSC think tank and support group engages in bi-monthly meetings to explore areas of common interest. One of the most valuable aspects of these meetings is the check-in, hearing from other counties about what they are involved in, getting new ideas, asking questions, and sharing information. The range of

topics in the early days of the committee included: 1) Performance based contracting and the use of longitudinal data sets (CW), 2) Public Housing and the use of vouchers for homeless families coming into the child welfare system, 3) Supportin leadership changes related to different divisions in the department (CW, CalWORKS, Adult/Aging).

### MEMBERS

Anissa Basoco-Villarreal  
Alameda County

Ben Bunyi  
Napa County

Oscar Chavez  
Sonoma County

David Dubrowski  
Santa Cruz County

Randolph Hudson  
Contra Costa County

Dan Kelly  
San Francisco County

Bridgette Lery  
San Francisco County

Devorah Levine  
Contra Costa County

George Malachowski  
Sonoma County

Robbie Matheson  
Solano County

Madeline Noya  
Santa Cruz County

Karl Porter  
Napa County

Ana Rasquiza  
Marin County

Gina Sessions  
Santa Clara County

Catherine Vu  
Santa Clara County

Trent Rhorer  
San Francisco County  
BASSC Liaison

## **BASSC BAY AREA ACADEMY TRAINING ADVISORY BOARD (TAB)**

The Bay Area Academy offers training courses, conferences, coaching, implementation support, technical assistance and consultation services to public child welfare and adult services in the greater San Francisco Bay Area social service

community. Funded through state and local partnerships, the Bay Area Academy promotes safety, permanency, well being and whole person care in public social services.

Michelle Love Alameda	Chelsea Stoner Napa	Olisha Hodges San Mateo
Robin Lockett Alameda	Becky Feiner Napa	Linda Martinez Santa Clara
Larry Sanchez Alameda	Maria Sabeh Napa	Francesca LeRúe Santa Clara
Mary Shean Alameda	Julieanna Avera San Benito	Marie Sanders Santa Clara
Svetlana Lesova Alameda	Maria Corona San Benito	Mary Bergman Santa Cruz
Vicky Quinto Contra Costa	Shyloh Stearns San Benito	Andrew Stewart Santa Cruz
Kathy Marsh Contra Costa	Jackie Credico San Benito	Aaron Crutison Solano
Marcy Williamson Contra Costa	Brad Dawson San Benito	Debbie Powell Solano
Bree Marchman Marin	Sylvia Deporto San Francisco	Rhonda Smith Solano
Maria Affinito Marin	Melissa Connelly San Francisco	Nick Honey Sonoma
Deborah Moss Marin	Penny Kumta San Francisco	Francine Conner Sonoma
Lori Medina Monterey	Loc Nguyen San Mateo	Jo McKay Sonoma
Alice White Monterey	Donna Wocher San Mateo	Kathy Gallagher and Howard Himes BASSC Liaisons

## BASSC RESEARCH RESPONSE TEAM

The BASSC Research Response Team, housed in the Center for Social Services Research at the University of California School of Social Welfare was established in 1995 to respond rapidly to the emerging research needs of Bay Area county social service agencies for current information about their changing environments. Exploratory research projects are undertaken in close collaboration with agency administrators and program staff and include structured literature reviews, large scale surveys, case studies and case record data-mining. Research projects completed over the past several decades are listed below.

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## BASSC POLICY ANALYSIS AND ORGANIZATIONAL IMPLEMENTATION PROGRAM

Over the past 25 years (1992-2017), BASSC has completed a number of policy development and organizational implementation reports. These documents have been useful in assisting county directors in identifying and acting upon various policy and implementation initiatives.

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| <p>2017 Adult Offender Community Reentry: Policies, Plans, and Programs</p> <p>2017 Low-income Fatherhood: A Review of the Literature with Implications for Practice</p> <p>2017 Exploring Innovation in Public Human Service Organizations: A Cross Case Analysis</p> <p>2017 Service User Involvement in UK Social Service Agencies and Social Work Education – <i>Journal on Social Work Education</i>, 53(1)</p> <p>2017 The managerial and relational dimensions of public-nonprofit human service contracting – <i>Journal of Strategic Contracting and Negotiation</i></p> <p>2017 Supporting Evidence-informed Practice in Human Service Organizations: An Exploratory Study of Link Officers – <i>Human Service Organizations</i>, 41(1)</p> <p>2017 The Multi-dimensional Nature of Evidence-informed Practice in County Human Service Agencies – <i>Human Service Organizations</i>, 41(1)</p> <p>2015 Organizational and individual determinants of practitioner evidence use in public human service Organizations – <i>Human Service Organizations</i>, 39(4)</p> <p>2015 Redefining the Bureaucratic Encounter between Service Providers and service users: Evidence from the Norwegian HUSK Projects – <i>Journal of Evidence-based Social Work</i>, 12(1)</p> <p>2014 The Organizational Context of Research-minded Practitioners: Challenges and Opportunities – <i>Research on Social Work Practice</i>, 25(4)</p> <p>2012 Boundary-crossing careers of senior human service administrators: A cross-case analysis – <i>Administration in Social Work</i>, 36(2)</p> | <p>2011 Reducing Child Poverty by Promoting Child Well-being: Identifying Best Practices in a Time of Great Need – <i>Children and Youth Services Review</i>, 33(10)</p> <p>2010 Coming Back Home: The Reintegration of Formerly Incarcerated Youth with Service Implications – <i>Children and Youth Services Review</i>, 32(10)</p> <p>2008 The Culturally Responsive Social Service Agency: The Application of an Evolving Definition to a Case study – <i>Administration in Social Work</i>, 32(3)</p> <p>2008 Strategies for Transforming Human Service Organizations into Learning Organizations: Evidence-based Practice and the Transfer of Learning – <i>Journal of Evidence-based Social Work</i>, 5(3/4)</p> <p>2004 <i>Changing Welfare Services: Case Studies of Local Welfare Reform Programs</i> (Haworth Press)</p> <p>Implementing Welfare Reform and Guiding Organizational Change</p> <p>Overview of Innovative Programs and Practice</p> <p>Connections Shuttle: Transportation for CalWORKs Participants</p> <p>The Guaranteed Ride Home Program: Transportation Services for Welfare-to-Work Participants</p> <p>Training Exempt Providers to Build High-Quality Child Care</p> <p>Integrating Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services into a County Welfare-to-Work Program</p> <p>Combining Business with Rehabilitation in a Public Work Center for Disabled and Low-Income Participants</p> <p>The Family Loan Program as a Public-Private Partnership</p> <p>The Adopt-a-Family Program: Building Networks of Support</p> <p>Utilizing Hotline Services to Sustain Employment</p> <p>Hiring TANF Recipients to Work in a County Human Services Agency</p> <p>Promoting Self-Sufficiency through Individual Development Accounts (IDAs)</p> |
|---|--|

Fostering Neighborhood Involvement in Workforce Development		Crossover Services between Child Welfare and Welfare-to-Work Programs
Neighborhood Self-Sufficiency Centers	2003	The Implications of Managed Care and Welfare Reform for the Integration of Health and Welfare Services – <i>Journal of Health and Social Policy</i> , 18(2)
A Community Partnership Approach To Serving the Homeless		
Wraparound Services for Homeless TANF Families Recovering from Substance Abuse	2001	A Comparative Analysis of Prop 10 Strategic Plans Developed by Ten Bay Area Counties
Building a Coalition of Non-Profit Agencies to Collaborate with a County Health and Human Services Agency	2001	Step by Step: Building the Infrastructure for Transforming Public Social Service Agencies into Learning Organizations
Collaborative Partnerships Between a Human Services Agency and Local Community Colleges	2001	Aging Out of Foster Care: What Do We Know about Helping to Emancipate Youth and the Independent Living Programs in the Bay Area
Introducing Organizational Development (OD) Practices in a County Human Services Agency	1999	Overview of Affordable Housing Issues in Relationship to Welfare Reform
Preparing Human Service Workers to Implement Welfare Reform: Establishing the Family Development Credential in a Human Services Agency	1999	Overview of Transportation Issues in Relationship to Welfare Reform
Merging a Workforce Investment Board and a Department of Social Services into a County Department of Employment and Human Services	1999	Overview of Issues Related to Ups and Downs in the Business Cycle Affecting Current and Former Welfare Recipients
Blending Multiple Funding Streams into County Welfare-to-Work Programs		

## BASSC EXECUTIVE DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM IN THE HUMAN SERVICES

The Executive Development Program in the Human Services, completing its 24th year in 2017 with over 700 graduates, is a successful collaboration between the Bay Area Social Service Consortium (BASSC), the UC Berkeley School of Social Welfare, and UC Berkeley Extension. It is designed to meet the challenges of a changing organizational environment and develop strategies to better serve client and community needs. Upper level managers from Bay Area Social Services Departments are selected by top management to participate in this innovative training program that received the “Best Program in the Professions Award” by the University Continuing Education Association in 1999.

The Executive Development Program is presented in three one-week modules over the academic year. The major issues covered include:

### MODULE ONE

#### On Leadership and Organizational Context

- Client-Centered Administration
- Historical and Policy Overview of Human Services
- Legislative Issues and Political Context
- Working with CBOs and Unions
- Peer Learning, Coaching and Support
- Leadership Development

### MODULE TWO

#### On Core Knowledge and Skills

- Presentation Skills (workshop)
- Creating a Learning Organization
- Public Relations
- Personnel Issues
- Information Technology
- State and County Budgeting Process

### MODULE THREE

#### On the Integration of Learning and Practice

- Case Presentations
- Strategic Planning
- Serving Diverse Populations
- Community Organization and Outreach
- Thinking Like a Senior Manager
- Critical Issues on the Horizon

A 15 day internship project and case study—which stimulates collaborative exchanges of information and creative learning opportunities across participating counties—is scheduled between Modules Two and Three. The case studies are published each year as a Participants’ Casebook.

Funding is provided by the individual counties as well as federal Title IVe grant funds through the California Social Work Education Consortium (CalSWEC) that supports participants working in the area of child welfare.

Andrea DuBrow MSW, MPH serves as the Program Coordinator, and Stan Weisner, Ph.D. as Program Director. Professor Michael Austin serves as the lead faculty advisor and teaches in the program along with other UC Berkeley School of Social Welfare faculty, Bay Area Social Service Department Directors, and outside consultants.

## EXECUTIVE DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM GRADUATES

### ALAMEDA

#### 1994-1995

Carol Collins  
Chris Czapla  
Barbara Hedani-Morishita  
Jill L'Esperance  
Mario Solis

#### 1995-1996

Patti Castro  
Gana Eason  
Rita Hayes  
Linda Kretz  
Elliott Robinson

#### 1996-1997

Tom Clancy  
Marilyn Ghiorso  
Will Johnson  
Joyce Richardson  
Erika Shore  
John Tran

#### 1997-1998

Emmie Hill  
Brendan Leung  
Patsy Pinkney Phillips  
Kenneth Shaw, Jr.  
Stewart Smith  
Laura Valdivia

#### 1998-1999

Melissa Lim Brodowski  
Pauline Keogh  
Sylvia Myles  
Kris Perry  
Joe Rodrigues  
Mark Woo

#### 1999-2000

Lynn Brooks  
Sherri Brooks  
Neola Brown  
Tamarra Brown  
Frank A. Robertson  
Susan Schorr  
Glenn Wallace

### 2000-2001

Don Edwards  
Dorothy Galloway  
Amada Robles  
Rosemary Salters

### 2001-2002

Diana D. Cruz  
Carl Pascuals  
Renee D. Sims  
Augustus Yiu

### 2002-2003

Dorothy Hicks  
Ada Lillie  
Sandy Stier

### 2003-2004

Hannia Casaw  
Jim Damian  
Teri Donnelly  
Robin Lockett  
Mary Packard Miller

### 2004-2005

Yolanda Baldovinos  
Saundra Barnes  
Dora Fisher  
Jon Pettigrew

### 2005-2006

Irene Chavez  
Andrea Ford  
Victoria Tolbert

### 2006-2007

Lisa Lahowe  
Connie Linas  
Marsha Rice  
Cynthia (Cindy) Rinker  
Lea Spencer

### 2007-2008

Faith Battles  
Rhonda Boykin  
Lorena Briseno  
Millicent Miles  
Amy Thompson

### 2008-2009

Jim Cunniff  
Maria Panesi Guerra  
Michelle Love  
Julia Martinez  
Marcella Velasquez

### 2009-2010

Paul Kim  
Randy Morris  
Lula Parker  
Fina Perez  
Denise Robinson

### 2010-2011

Rosa Beaver  
Renaye Johnson  
Robyn Scott  
Huong Tran

### 2011-2012

Antionette Burns  
Dana Castillo  
Sonya Frost Fenceroy  
Shress Moten  
Tracy Murray  
Beverly Warren

### 2012-2013

LaTrelle Martin  
LaTonya Phillips  
Jennifer Uldricks  
Elizabeth Verduzco

### 2013-2014

Kathy Chen  
Saundra Pearson  
Laura Schroeder

### 2014-2015

Joanne Cattaneo  
Kouichoy Saechao  
Detra Teal

### 2015-2016

Lauren Baranco  
Regina Dean  
Michelle Key  
Vivien Xia

### CONTRA COSTA

#### 1994-1995

Stefanie Guynn  
John Lee  
Ralph McGee  
Bill Weidinger

#### 1995-1996

Sharon Bacon  
Shirley Kalinowski  
Bob Sessler

#### 1996-1997

Charles Couch  
Jewel Mansapit  
Christina Moore-Linville  
Ken O'Day

#### 1997-1998

Christine Gallagher  
Steve Peavler  
Pamela Phillips  
Lois Rutten

#### 1998-1999

Pat Herrera  
Jennifer Jody Rellar  
Joe Stoddard  
Paul Ward

#### 1999-2000

Debi Moss  
Beverly Wright  
John Zimmerman

#### 2000-2001

Carl Dudley  
Lori Larks  
Eloise Sotelo  
Tonya Spencer

#### 2001-2002

Dennis Bozanich  
Paul Buddenhagen  
Denise Carey  
Donna Thoreson

#### 2002-2003

Karen Bridges



Mitchell Martinez  
Toni Nestore

#### **2003-2004**

Neely McElroy  
Vincent Odusanya  
Patricia Perkins

#### **2004-2005**

Ralph Alvarado  
Valerie Chatman  
Kathy Marsh

#### **2005-2006**

Hollidayle Hertweck  
Denise Reynolds  
Valerie Stewart

#### **2006-2007**

Christine Craver  
Eric Cho  
Peggy Henderson  
Nhang Luong  
James Paulsen  
Patricia Wyrick  
Ralph L. White

#### **2007-2008**

Dan Abrami  
Stephen Baiter  
Sena Perrier-Morris  
Amy Rogers  
Ron Stewart

#### **2008-2009**

Terrie Adams  
Jagit Bhambra  
Scott Danielson  
Magdalene Gabel

#### **2009-2010**

Donlon William Adamich  
Patricia Crain  
Joan Miller  
Matthew Welch

#### **2010-2011**

Richard Bell  
David Eisenlohr  
Roxane Foster  
Eric Pormento  
Jan Watson

#### **2011-2012**

Rebecca Darnell  
Renee Giometti  
Anna Pineda-Martinez  
Anne Struthers

#### **2012-2013**

Rosalyn Guillory  
Lawrence Jones  
Ken Kinard  
Kristina Miller  
Joanne Sanchez-Rosa  
Rhonda Smith

#### **2013-2014**

Barbie Guardino  
Lori Juarez  
Christina Reich  
Leilani Scharff-Lunch  
Kelli Zenn

#### **2014-2015**

Susan Bain  
Nancy Hager  
Lindsay Kennedy  
Cecilia A. C. Merchan  
Michael A. Roark  
Hannah Slade

#### **2015-2016**

Kenya Campbell  
Blanca Hanley  
Jennifer Klein  
Natasha Paddock

#### **MARIN**

#### **2001-2002**

Elinor J. Marcelous  
Heather Ravani

#### **2003-2004**

Marty Graff  
Paula Robertson

#### **2004-2005**

Alva Ackley

#### **2005-2006**

Chua Chao

#### **2007-2008**

Julie Lenhardt

Lee Pullen

#### **2008-2009**

Kari Beuerman  
Racy Ming

#### **2009-2010**

Carlos O. González

#### **2010-2011**

Ana Bagtas

#### **2011-2012**

Lupe Reyna-Coffin  
Paula Glodowski-Valla  
James Villella

#### **2012-2013**

Andrea Bizzell  
Angela Struckmann

#### **2013-2014**

La Valda Marshall

#### **2014-2015**

Mark Vanderscoff

#### **2015-2016**

Bree Marchman  
Therese Prior

#### **MONTEREY**

#### **1997-1998**

Helen Shaw  
Robert Taniguchi

#### **1998-1999**

Sue Appel  
Henry Espinosa

#### **1999-2000**

Priscilla McPherson  
Barbara Verba

#### **2000-2001**

Cindy Cassinelli  
Anne Herendeen

#### **2001-2002**

Mary Goblirsch  
Cheryl A. Pirozzoli

#### **2002-2003**

Christine Lerable  
Kim Petty

#### **2003-2004**

Susan Reid

#### **2004-2005**

Diana Jimenez

#### **2005-2006**

Margaret Huffman  
Sam Trevino

#### **2006-2007**

Ron Mortenson  
Marilyn Remark

#### **2007-2008**

Rosemarie DeFranco  
Margarita Zarraga

#### **2013-2014**

Marcie Castro  
Emily Nicholl

#### **2014-2015**

Jerry Kulper  
Lauren Miller

#### **2015-2016**

Melissa A. Mairose  
Virginia Pierce

#### **NAPA**

#### **1994-1995**

Joan Luzney  
Teresa Zimny

#### **1996-1997**

Denise Traina

#### **1997-1998**

Nancy Forrest  
Roger Humble

#### **2003-2004**

Rebecca Feiner  
Darlene Washburn

#### **2010-2011**

Kris K. Brown

#### **2013-2014**

Ben Guerrieri  
Sarah Hayes  
Akon Walker



**2014-2015**

Kristin James-Bowe  
Jennifer Marcelli  
Alli Muller  
Adriana Navarro

**2015-2016**

Andrea Banks  
Rocío Canchola-Parra  
Jennifer Swift

**SAN FRANCISCO****1994-1995**

Jimmy Gilyard  
Dolores Heaven  
Wanda Jung  
Leo O'Farrell  
Liz Strand

**1995-1996**

Jim Buick  
Mary Counihan  
Johnny Jefferson  
Sylvia Segovia  
Rosana Soriano

**1996-1997**

Michele Antoinette Byrd  
Tom Conrow  
Maggie Donahue  
Julie Murray Brenman

**1997-1998**

Tracy Harrison Burris  
Peter Dahlin  
Ralph Escoriaza  
Christiane Medina  
Kim Stepney  
John Tsutakawa

**1998-1999**

Helene Cohen  
Liz Crudo  
Gladys Escoriaza  
Magaly Fernandez  
Ellen Jane Gould  
Sophia Isom

**1999-2000**

Eugene Freeman  
Dariush Kayhan

Daniel Kim  
Jana Rickerson  
Megan Rosenberg

**2000-2001**

Janice Anderson-Santos  
Susan Arding  
Teresa Kirson  
Aregawie Yosef

**2001-2002**

Diana Christensen  
Maria Gonzales  
James Whelly

**2002-2003**

Bill Beiersdorfer  
Deborah Goldstein  
Leo Levenson  
Tony Lugo  
Cindy Ward

**2003-2004**

Ylonda Calloway  
Larry Chatmon  
Christiane Medina  
John Murray  
Jeanne Zarka

**2004-2005**

Nancy Bliss  
Derek Chu  
Joyce Crum  
Kimberly O'Young  
Florence Hays

**2005-2006**

Mary Adrian  
Stephanie Coram  
Robert Hays  
Edward (Ron) Patton  
Leo Saucedo  
Mario Navarro-Sunol

**2006-2007**

Jose Mejia  
Ana Osegueda  
Noel Panelo  
Brian Reems  
Scott Walton  
Hugh Wang

**2007-2008**

Denise Cheung  
Bart Ellison  
Renee Grevenberg  
Brenda McGregor  
Helga Zimmerer

**2008-2009**

Taninha Ferreira  
Ronda Johnson  
Edlyn Kloefkorn  
N. Michelle Lewis  
Ria I. Mercado

**2009-2010**

Michelle Berry  
Josef Bruckback  
Heather KL Davis  
Candace Gray  
Penny Kumta  
Kean Tan

**2010-2011**

Terri Austin  
Gregory Kats  
Luenna Kim  
Angela Ramos  
Patricia Rudden  
Nicolas P. Stathakos

**2011-2012**

Eileen Cavan  
Margarita Gallo  
Christina Iwasaki  
Patricia Torres  
Carrie Wong

**2012-2013**

Shane Balanon  
Susie Lau  
Bernadette Santos  
Bertina Tan  
Tiana Wertheim

**2013-2014**

Viktoriya Dostal  
Jonelle Fournet-Collazos  
Elizabeth Harris  
Jill Nielsen  
Edgardo Pagaduan

**2014-2015**

Jason Adamek  
James Choi  
Veronica Moran-Diaz  
Celia Pedroza  
Debra Solomon

**2015-2016**

Emily Gerth Gibbs  
juliet Halverson  
Rebecca Needens  
Sandra Teixeira

**SAN MATEO****1994-1995**

Paula Lee Hekimian  
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Madelyn Martin  
Becky Thurston

**1995-1996**

Susan Brooks  
Jamie Buckmaster  
Judith Davila  
Betsy ZoBell

**1996-1997**

Elsa Dawson  
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Phil Naylor  
Theresa Rude

**1997-1998**

Roberta Deis  
Robert Schwab

**1998-1999**

Linda Holman  
Jeanette Ward  
Donna Woche

**1999-2000**

Gary Beasley  
Michael Katrichak  
Micky Leung  
Patrick Morrissey

**2000-2001**

Aaron Crutison  
Jennie Loft  
Debra Samples

Selina Toy

**2001-2002**

Ursula Bischoff  
Kristin Cornuelle  
Beverly Dekker-Davidson  
Dennis Myers

**2002-2003**

Barbara Joos  
Toan S. Le  
Jerry Lindner  
Laura Martell  
James V. Miller

**2003-2004**

Elaine Azzopardi  
Lorena Gonzalez  
Richard Holman  
Robert Machia

**2004-2005**

Ellen Bucci  
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Fred Slone  
Clarisa Simon Soriano  
Shannon Speak

**2005-2006**

Pali Basi  
Amy Kaiser  
Matthew Radisch  
Jenell Thompson

**2006-2007**

Clara Boyden  
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Stefan Luesse  
Lorna Strachan  
Arcel Vasquez  
Amy Yun

**2007-2008**

Lenita Ellis  
Marnita Garcia-Fulle  
Marissa King  
Pravin Patel  
Margaret Wong

**2008-2009**

Sofia Gomez  
Amanda Kim

Eduardo Kiryzun  
Kenneth Kong  
Karyn McElroy

**2009-2010**

Amabel Baxley  
Susan Naylor  
Carlos Smith

**2010-2011**

Doris V. Hinton  
Jennifer Rogers  
Desi A. Tafoya

**2011-2012**

Bill Harven  
Kimberly Pearson  
Sherri Rosenberg  
Mark Skubik

**2012-2013**

Rex Andrea  
Natasha Bourbonnais  
Edwin Chan

**2013-2014**

John Fong  
Freda Cobb  
Sonya Morrison  
Deborah Patten  
Michele Tom

**2014-2015**

Mieke Bryant  
Tammy Chan  
Darla Nicholson  
Nancy Rodriguez

**2015-2016**

Ayse Dogan  
Almera E. Milanes

**SANTA CLARA**

**1994-1995**

Raul Aldana  
Celia Anderson  
Noemi Baiza  
Sheila Jorden  
Gil Villagran  
Zonia Sandoval Waldon

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Mary Chaboya  
Sharon Gilson  
Betty Malks  
Margie Martinez  
Frances Munroe

**1996-1997**

Joe Andrade  
Susan Chestnut  
Patrick Garcia  
Lorraine Gonzales Moore  
Jim Ramoni  
Gwen Westphal

**1997-1998**

Maria Elena Delgado  
Jorge Gonzalez  
Nellie Jorge  
Jim Lockwood

**1998-1999**

Lisle Smith Cohen  
Lynette Harrison  
Les Lindop  
Fernando Valcarcel

**1999-2000**

John Bordman  
Judy Bushey  
Debra Dake  
Prabhkar Isaac  
Quyen Nguyen

**2000-2001**

Julie Aragon  
Michael Bobadilla  
Diana Kalcic  
Connie Vega

**2001-2002**

Cynthia Burnett  
Mary Cardenas  
Ellen Edelstein  
Victoria Fedor-Thurman  
Lydia Mendoza  
Nhat Nguyen

**2002-2003**

Tracy Bowers  
Patty Carrillo  
Deborah Hinton-Kondo

Jeff Lewis  
Jan Panell  
Roger Sanchez

**2003-2004**

Laura Cunningham  
Mary Grimm  
Stanley Lee  
Frank Motta  
Katherine Sanchez

**2004-2005**

Agustin Gomez  
Phaivanh Khowong  
Beth McGhee  
Jonathan Weinberg

**2005-2006**

Dana McQuary  
Yvonne Moore  
Adesh Siddhu  
Gerardo Silva  
Daniel Vo

**2006-2007**

Cindie Ambar  
Sunny Burgan  
Wendy Kinnear-Rausch  
Valerie Smith  
Rafaela Perez

**2007-2008**

Felipa Carrillo  
Barbara Herlihy  
Terri Possley  
Roxanne Stephens  
Miday Tovar

**2008-2009**

Nicole Huff  
Renee Paquier  
Robert Sacasa  
Cilla Shaffar  
Emily Tjhin

**2009-2010**

Guillermo Caceres  
Meheret Sellassie  
Kathleen Stahr

**2010-2011**

Martha Huettl

Sylvia Jefferson  
Mark Lapid  
Don Long  
Verónica Q. Moreno  
Carlotta Royal  
Patricia Sun

#### **2011-2012**

Leon Bassett Jr.  
Jennifer Hubbs  
Rosario Portillo

#### **2012-2013**

Gilbert Murillo  
Marie Sanders

#### **2013-2014**

Leslie Griffith  
Kingston Lum  
Welmin Militante  
Larry Merkur  
Lily Vasquez  
Irina Zhuravleva

#### **2014-2015**

Minerva Beltran-Gonzalez  
Arturo Garcia  
Deepka Jackie Howe  
Martha Jacquez  
Ana Labrador

#### **2015-2016**

Delfina Morris  
Byron Myers  
Idelle Villarreal-Pickering  
Katrina Williams

#### **SANTA CRUZ**

##### **1994-1995**

Judy Schwartz

##### **1995-1996**

Ellen Timberlake

##### **1996-1997**

Francie Newfield

##### **1997-1998**

Cheryl Bentley  
Mark Holguin

#### **1998-1999**

Gary McNeil  
Maryanne Rehberg

#### **1999-2000**

Melissa Delgadillo  
Claudine Wildman

#### **2000-2001**

Trevor Davis  
Susan Gilchrist

#### **2001-2002**

Rick Allemandi  
Angelica F. Glass

#### **2002-2003**

Kelli Kopeck

#### **2003-2004**

Nancy Virostko

#### **2004-2005**

Melissa King

#### **2005-2006**

Gail Goudreau  
Cathy Groh  
Gidget Ramirez

#### **2006-2007**

Terri German  
Julia Sheehan  
Abby Wexler

#### **2007-2008**

Kathryn Maurer  
Nancy Williams

#### **2008-2009**

James Dyer  
Raven Harris

#### **2009-2010**

David Brown  
Sherra Clinton

#### **2010-2011**

Emily Balli  
Mary Greenham

#### **2011-2012**

Karina Aragon  
Stephanie Vikati

#### **2012-2013**

Sandy Skezas

#### **2013-2014**

Sharon Fox

#### **2014-2015**

Micki Coca Buss  
Leslie Goodfriend  
Kimberly Petersen  
Andrew Stewart

#### **2015-2016**

Alfredo Ramirez

#### **SOLANO**

##### **2004-2005**

Jacquelyn Butcher-Rankin

##### **2011-2012**

Natasha Hamilton  
Brandi Moore

##### **2015-2016**

Kelley Curtis  
Joyce A. Goodwin

#### **SONOMA**

##### **1994-1995**

Katherine Kennedy

##### **1995-1996**

Margaret Ahern  
Mary Ann Swanson

##### **1998-1999**

Karen Fies  
Diane Kaljian  
Debbie Kelly  
Maureen Lewis

##### **1999-2000**

Marion Deeds  
Ray Leonard  
Roy Redlich

##### **2000-2001**

Sherry Alderman  
Mimi Rudin

##### **2001-2002**

Linda Clifford  
Nick Honey

Kim Seamans

##### **2002-2003**

Diane Madrigal  
Van Guildler  
Alfredo Perez  
Al Redwine

##### **2003-2004**

Tara Smith

##### **2004-2005**

Bob Harper  
James Washington  
Kathy Young

##### **2005-2006**

Frederick Jones  
Carol Rex

##### **2006-2007**

Meg Easter-Dawson  
Stacy Perkins  
Tracy Repp

##### **2007-2008**

Mignon Evans  
Gary Fontenot

##### **2008-2009**

Katie Greaves  
Tamara Larimore  
Elden McFarland

##### **2009-2010**

Karen Price

##### **2010-2011**

Peter Barrett  
Francine Conner  
Paul Dunaway  
Debra Van Vleck

##### **2011-2012**

Kathleen Alves  
Janelle Aman  
Hope Hamby  
Kiergan Pegg

##### **2012-2013**

Patricia Andrews  
Kathy Halloran  
George Malachowski  
Stephanie Sheridan

**2013-2014**

Oscar Chavez  
Steven Czegus  
Kishore Jayaswal  
Rebecca West  
Leslie Winters

**2014-2015**

Angie Dillon-Shore  
Eric H. Glentzer  
Jennifer Kaley  
Felisa Pinson

**2015-2016**

Cindy Becerra  
Donna Broadbent  
Cyndia Cole  
John Daugherty  
Julie Sabbag-Maskey

## HUMAN SERVICES VISION

# 2020

### A TOOL FOR THOUGHT LEADERS AS CATALYSTS FOR CHANGE

#### THE EVER-CHANGING CONTEXT:

##### Trends Past and Future

- Complexity of managing with fluid public funding
- Use of technology to manage and improve organizational operations
- Need for interaction between human services, health and behavioral health services, and criminal justice services
- Changes in community-agency relations and increased need for inter-agency collaboration
- Need to strengthen agency-university partnership

#### THE EVOLVING PROCESS:

- Improving the human condition by making the transition from “Doing more with less” to “Doing more differently”

#### COMMUNITY INITIATIVES

- Promoting community well-being and impact assessment with a focus on child and family well-being as well as adult and aging well-being
- Creating a more holistic and integrated safety net to support self-sufficiency in our geographic pockets of poverty in an effort to reduce poverty across the life span

- Redefining the relationship with community non-profit partner agencies, especially related to service experimentation
- Expanding service integration across sectors (public education, criminal justice, behavioral health, and health care)
- Assessing the impact of the built environment in order to reduce the impact of child poverty (safety, access to healthy food, school supports, etc)

#### PRACTICE INITIATIVES

- Using measures of service outcomes to promote evidence-informed practice and the ongoing development of learning organizations
- Incorporating the health determinants of social well-being into current social service practices
- Increasing the role of client voice at all levels of organizational decision-making including the use of participatory action research
- Integrating university faculty into agency operations and strengthening fieldwork education and applied research in support of inter-disciplinary and evidence-informed practice
- Using technology (e-learning and dashboards) to expand staff knowledge and skills as a way of serving as local human service policy experts

# The Evolving BASSC Vision Statements

MICHAEL J. AUSTIN

In addition to tracing its roots to 1987 when the Bay Area Welfare Directors formed the Bay Area Social Services Consortium (BASSC), the network evolved into a dues-paying partnership between county social service directors, university deans and directors, and foundation representatives. Beginning in 1992, BASSC became a think tank and support group that launched shared projects in the areas of research, training, and policy implementation. One of the first activities involved the development of a vision statement that reflected a shared view of how human services might be reconfigured eight years later in the year 2000. This exercise featured a multi-meeting process that encouraged the participants to engage in visionary thinking using provocative, energizing, and futuristic language. Given the responsibilities of BASSC participants to provide leadership in their respective organizations, the brief vision statement was developed for use in

executive team discussions, community presentations, faculty meetings, and the BASSC Executive Development Program designed to prepare future leaders. The vision statement represented a regional approach to thinking about the future and, for many counties, it complemented their own county strategic plans. The vision statement also provided BASSC members with the opportunity to frame meeting discussions through the use of annual regional goal setting that could be linked to implementing the current vision statement over time.

### BASSC Vision: Human Services in 2000

One of the major goals of vision statement development is to step back from the daily pressures of service delivery and policy implementation to take into account the ever-changing context of delivering human services. The reflective process allows for a continuous reaffirmation of a focus on poverty and housing amidst changing client demographics. In addition to the ongoing focus on service users, a similar emphasis includes addressing staffing demands related to diversity, turnover, and organizational restructuring. Beyond the internal focus on organizational life, there is a parallel interest in the ongoing building and maintaining of inter-organizational relationships (across

public sector departments, nonprofit partners, and university partners) based on the shared recognition that “it still takes a village” to meet the needs of vulnerable populations. In addition, all of these daily concerns are compounded by the constant demand to manage expanding and contracting funding sources.

As illustrated in *Figure 1*, the first vision statement featured the articulation of core values that inform both current and future service provision. There was considerable interest in the ideas of building system of neighborhood-based community services to support families in need as well as educate them to access available services and thereby empower them gain self-sufficiency. There was also an early recognition of the importance of evaluating service outcomes while also investing in prevention-oriented services.

This recognition also reflected a strong interest in developing family-focused neighborhood community service centers that honored diversity, engaged in community problem-solving, featured the use of flexible government funding, identified pathways to employment and career development (especially connecting the regional economic marketplace with the human service marketplace of services), and promoted the use of inter-disciplinary service provision for all ages. Prospects for service evaluation included such factors as: impact of changing neighborhoods, breadth and depth of culturally competent services, balancing temporary with long-term family supports, the expanding nature of inter-disciplinary practice, the role of advocacy by public sector organizations, and the linkages between the needs of both low-income and middle-class families.

### BASSC Vision for the 21st Century:

#### SUPPORTING LOW INCOME WORKERS

Based on the first BASSC vision statement (1993), the second vision statement (1999) focused on the new millennium of the 21st century related to supporting low-income

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**FIGURE 1**  
**Human Services 2000: An Evolving Vision Statement (adopted in 1993)**

- I. Building a community service system that serves all families in need where neighborhood-based constituencies are both service users and owners of the services by:**
  - Serving all people who do not have an intact or strong personal support system (nuclear or extended family to help meet basic needs for survival and growth)
  - Educate consumers to utilize available service supports and empowers them by fostering self-sufficiency
  - Prevention-oriented system where outcomes are measured on the basis of community health and social supports, not by the impact of services on individuals
- II. Specially designed family-focused neighborhood community center**
  - People are valued for their individuality and diversity
  - Use of a community approach to problem-solving, not just individually focused
  - Use of “behind the scenes” universal non-categorical government programs that maximize the accumulation of social and financial resources to preserve families
  - All services reflect a commitment to racial and cultural diversity
  - Substantial commitment to the promotion of employment and economic self-sufficiency, along with the provision of role models for working people and youth
  - Comprehensive array of inter-disciplinary services for children, families, adults, and senior citizens.
- III. Core values**
  - Collaborative community approach to meeting the needs of individuals and families
    - Professionals and service consumers work together as partners in managing the family-focused neighborhood center
    - Connecting the regional economic marketplace (employment) with the human service marketplace (housing, food, medical care, etc.)
  - Use of tangible outcomes for neighborhood betterment using the following assessment criteria:
    - Community response to changing neighborhood demographics
    - Degree of involvement of extended families in service programs that utilize culturally competent practice
    - Degree to which temporary family supports are complemented by long-term supports,
    - Extent to which professionals work together in inter-disciplinary practice
    - Degree to which neighborhood service systems include advocacy for the total community
    - Extent to which the needs of middle-income families are integrated with those of low-income families.

workers. It featured a set of eight principles designed to guide the development of future practice and policies in the midst of implementing welfare reform that focused more on caseload reduction than addressing broader social problems like poverty. These principles reflected more of a societal focus and featured such macro issues as: 1) targeting economic investments in low-income communities, 2) increasing attention to public-private partnerships that focused on creating healthy families and communities, 3) identifying employment opportunities that contribute to the development of a resilient workforce where skill development keeps pace with the rapidly changing economy, and 4) targeting public policies that increase the income and assets of low

income families by addressing the inequities of the private market.

As illustrated in *Figure 2*, the second vision statement moved beyond the macro focus and called for employment assistance in moving families out of poverty (child care, transportation, housing, and health care). This focus included the implementation of values that featured social inclusiveness, community development, and social investment. This vision called for a new definition of social service practice that reflected a blend of the current responsibilities of assessment, counseling, referral, advocacy, and program development with a new social activism based on an understanding of the work-related values and skills of entry-level employees. In a similar manner, practitioners at the



**FIGURE 2**  
**Supporting Low Income Workers in the 21st Century:**  
**An Evolving BASSC Vision Statement (adopted in 1999)**

**Social Development Approach:** Social development focuses on enhancing the capacity of the needy to participate in the economy by targeting investments in specific communities and individuals.

**Building Community and Fostering a Civil Society:** A civil society recognizes the importance of private, voluntary associations, as well as the ability of government to organize broad initiatives, mobilize resources, and build infrastructure. Social service agencies in a civil society therefore need to work as partners for change in multiple collaborations in order to create healthy families and communities.

**Developing a Career Resilient Workforce:** Social service agencies have an important role to play in supporting workers and employers in order to ensure that skill development keeps pace with the rapidly changing economy.

**Supporting the Family:** Social service agencies must seek to help working families to move out of poverty through family-centered investment policies that provide support for child care, transportation, housing, and health care.

**Family-Focused, Neighborhood-Based Human Service Systems:** Human service systems should be based on values of social inclusiveness, community development, and social investment.

**Changing Professional Roles:** In order to support workforce development and empower families, agency staff need to blend the current responsibilities of assessment, counseling, referral, advocacy, and program development with a new social activism based on an understanding of the work-related values and skills of entry-level employees.

**Social Service Agencies as Catalysts for Private Action:** Social service agencies need to expand their roles as catalysts for change in order to ensure that communities do not abandon the neediest families.

**Promoting New Public Policy Directions:** The unfinished business of welfare reform will require new, more targeted public policies to increase the income and assets of low income families and address the inequities of the private market for those who are working to support their families (e.g. earned income tax credit, child or family allowances, and asset development or micro-investment programs).

administrative and leadership levels of social service organizations needed to expand their roles as catalysts for change in order to ensure that communities did not abandon the neediest families.

### **BASSC Vision for 2015:**

#### **TRANSFORMING HUMAN SERVICES SYSTEMS INTO LEARNING ORGANIZATION NETWORKS**

In order to take into account the ongoing complexities of service delivery, the third vision statement (2007) envisioned possible changes in 2015 related to transforming human services systems into networks of learning organizations. It was envisioned that this could be accomplished by revisiting the agency commitments, their enduring values, and current trends impacting the agencies. The commitments included the previously stated service values of self-sufficiency and protections for children and adults, the promotion of healthy environments, and serving as advocates for change in the public and nonprofit sectors. Learning organization networks were defined as capable of promoting knowledge management by gathering information to enhance problem-solving, experimenting, learning

from the past, learning from promising practices, and transferring knowledge through investments in training programs. The enduring values included the commitment to ongoing organizational assessment and renewal, strengthening communities through partnerships, engaging in evidence-informed decision-making and policy development, and empowering those being served who are capable of significant change. And finally, the impact of current trends included the substantial change in the relationship between agencies and community interests (advocacy organizations, businesses, universities, and other human service organizations) and the increased accountability for government funds along with the increased use of technology.

As illustrated in *Figure 3*, the previously noted commitments, values, and trends continued to provide a foundation for identifying a set of three principles for transforming human service agencies into learning organizations. These principles included: 1) making *community-oriented client-centered services* a top priority in order to integrate services and increase client involvement, 2) creating a *supportive organizational culture* to enable staff to focus on client-centered services related to increased involvement in agency

decision-making, collaboration, and teamwork in support of evidence-informed practice, and 3) restructuring agency operations to promote *knowledge sharing and management* in collaboration with universities.

### Reflecting upon Works-in-Progress

Each of the four vision statements crafted over a twenty-five year period sought to capture the highlights of discussions carried out by BASSC members seeking to project their thinking into the future. The emerging themes reflect the impact of major pieces of national legislation (Welfare Reform in 1996 and Health Care Reform in 2010) as well as the major changes in the national economy (boom of the 1990s and bust of the Great Recession in 2010). The themes also reflect the impact of emerging technology on communications, public perceptions, and changing federal government priorities. Other emerging themes are more internal to human service organizations in the form of expanding and contracting funding resources, changing priorities of locally elected officials (county boards of supervisors), and the demand for organizational efficiencies emerging from organizational restructuring and job redesign.

In the midst of all this change, each vision statement seeks to define a future state that can address current challenges. While some statements are more visionary than others, they all reflect the considered views and experiences of senior organizational leaders struggling to make sense of current realities while also searching for new directions. This is why all the vision statements represent “works-in-progress”. While the development of Vision Statements in the future will call for new leadership, the rationale for developing these statements include the following:

The value premise for periodically developing a BASSC Vision statement includes:

- thinking about the future using provocative, energizing, and futuristic language,

- developing brief and accessible vision statements for public presentations (Executive Team discussions, Community Presentations, Faculty meetings, BASSC EDP, etc.

- distinguishing the difference between a county strategic plan and a regional BASSC Vision Statement while building upon past vision statements

### BASSC Vision 2025:

#### STRENGTHENED SERVICE DELIVERY PRACTICES AND COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

The most recently developed BASSC vision statement (2018) returns to a focus on service delivery issues while

significantly expanding a vision of the agency-university partnership as well as the values and principles that guide practice. For example, the service philosophy influenced, in part, by the 2010 Affordable Care Act relates to access to health care and the integration of behavioral health perspectives into social services helps to redefine the process of care; namely, from “whole person care” (health and behavioral health) to “whole family care” (health and social services) to “whole system care” (all aspects of the human services including housing, education, etc.). Each of these elements should become fully defined and operational by 2015. Similarly, the language of service delivery could be redefined within the context of continuing care; namely, moving from the previous service goals of self-sufficiency in welfare to work services and child safety in child welfare services to a major focus on prevention related to sliding into poverty or experiencing child abuse and neglect. Looking across the spectrum of public social services, a new set of core practice principles will be reflected in all service sectors, drawing upon the earlier work on core practice principles in child welfare.

Building upon the service principles are a set of organizational processes that will guide the management of social service agencies. These principles include: 1) balancing the pressure to standardize accountability measures with a growing interest in data-informed service outcomes based on the increased use of technology, 2) increased use of technology, 3) increased attention to enhancing flexibility in the relationships between state-level administrative and legislative leadership and local county policy implementation, 4) creating healthy and thriving workplace cultures that feature the incentives needed to promote staff retention, and 5) new mechanisms for amplifying the voices of service users inside the organization and in the community.

As illustrated in *Figure 4*, the second key element of the 2025 vision statement relates to the partnerships inherent in an intermediary organization like BASSC as it seeks to strengthen the relationships between universities, agencies, and foundations. This three-way partnership features a shared commitment to strengthening the investment in workforce development where staff core competencies are linked to university education competencies that reflect new models for funding and supporting both pre-service and in-service training and education. The shared investment also includes agency-university collaboration in promoting practice-informed curriculum redesign and research in order to prepare future leaders and life-long learners. Similar efforts will be apparent on campus and in the agency with regard

**FIGURE 3**  
**Transforming Human Services Systems into Learning Organization Networks:**  
**An Evolving BASSC Vision Statement for 2015 (adopted in 2007)**

**AGENCY CONTEXT**

**Agency Commitments**

- Improve the health and safety of children, the self-sufficiency of families, and protection of vulnerable adults and the aged in our communities
- Improve our ability to assist people in their efforts to make life better for themselves and their children
- Assist communities to increase their capacity to support families, children and adults in order to enable communities to provide a healthy environment in which their residents can prosper;
- Serve as a catalyst for change in the governmental and non-profit sectors
- Strive to become learning organizations to promote knowledge management by gathering information and problem-solving, experimenting, learning from the past, learning from promising practices, and transferring knowledge.

**Agency Enduring Values**

- People are capable of significant change when treated with respect and involved in defining their own hopes, dreams and goals;
- Communities can be strengthened through partnership efforts with public and private entities and the shared commitment to measure outcomes over time;
- Public and private agencies are committed to organizational self-assessment and renewal in order to better meet client and community goals
- Social policies and practices are informed by disseminating and utilizing administrative data and evidence from the research community.

**Current Trends that Impact the Agency**

- **Substantial change in community-agency relations** (based on changing client demographics, increased need for inter-agency collaboration, increased demand for outreach and prevention services, increased involvement of nonprofit partners in service delivery, and the increased impact of advocacy organizations)

- **Increasing accountability for public funds** (due to increased competitive and categorical funding, demand for revenue blending and leveraging, demand for documenting performance outcomes, and to engage in community planning to address changing client needs);
- **Increasing use of technology to manage and improve organizational operations** (based on the increased demand for identifying and using promising practices, the need to retain the workforce and engage in succession planning, the challenges associated with managing the transition of an organizational culture from reactive to more proactive, and the need to assist with capacity building among nonprofit partners)
- **Increasing need to strengthen agency-university partnership related to workforce development and applied research** (based on the need to link program evaluation expertise with the increased demand for service outcome measurement, to monitor and improve the transfer of learning outcomes of pre-service student learning and in-service staff development programs, the need to strengthen the role of agency-based field instruction, and to promote knowledge management related to disseminating and utilizing evidence to inform practice).
- **Increasing interaction with the business community** (based on the need to promote workforce development for welfare-to-work participants as well as children aging out of foster care).
- **Increasing interaction between human services, health and mental services, and criminal justice services** (based on the need to develop a seamless, integrated network of services that reflect the values and commitments of human service agencies).

**continued >**

to learning and engaging in inter-professional practice. The BASSC research program will serve as one of the primary resources for promoting the development of agency-based knowledge-sharing systems that support evidence-informed practice as well as practice-informed research.

### Reflecting upon Works-in-Progress

Each of the four vision statements crafted over a twenty-five year period sought to capture the highlights of discussions carried out by BASSC members seeking to project their thinking into the future. The emerging themes reflect the impact of major pieces of national legislation (Welfare Reform in 1996 and Health Care Reform in 2010) as well as the major changes in the national economy (boom of the 1990s and bust of the Great Recession in 2010). The themes

FIGURE 3 (continued)

## GUIDING PRINCIPLES

**Principle #1:** Make *community-oriented client-centered services* a top priority in order to:

- Integrate services across programs using comprehensive screening and evaluation tools;
- Involve clients across generations in developing multi-disciplinary service plans that strengthen families
- Create mechanisms for consumer input, complaints, and feedback.

**Principle #2:** Create a *supportive organizational culture* to enable staff to focus on client-centered services related to:

- Promoting more participation in agency decision-making
- Promoting team functioning across service programs
- Increasing collaboration with community nonprofit partners
- Engaging in evidence-informed practice.

**Principle #3:** Restructure agency operations to promote *knowledge sharing and management* in collaboration with universities by:

- *Maximizing IT resources:*
  - track evidence and integrate it into programs and operations (knowledge management);
  - utilize technology and information to increase effectiveness and improve outcomes (continual quality improvement); and

- incorporate research generated by practice and informed by client and community outcome improvements into in-service and pre-service curricula (evidence-informed practitioners).

- *Improving planning processes:*

- develop mechanisms for communicating and educating communities, partners and public officials
- engage in service planning with other county departments including community-based agencies
- enhance financial claiming mechanisms to maximize funding
- establish research priorities to improve practice and service outcomes, including the use of agency-university proposals to foundations.

- *Improving training processes:*

- develop systems for leadership and career development for agency managers and staff
- incorporate evidence-informed practice principles into pre-service and in-service curricula
- evaluate outcomes by capturing the changing nature of practice in infuse pre-service and in-service training programs (especially community-oriented client-centered practice).

also reflect the impact of emerging technology on communications, public perceptions, and changing federal government priorities. Other emerging themes are more internal to human service organizations in the form of expanding and contracting funding resources, changing priorities of locally elected officials (county boards of supervisors), and the demand for organizational efficiencies emerging from organizational restructuring and job redesign.

In the midst of all this change, each vision statement seeks to define a future state that can address current challenges. While some statements are more visionary than others, they all reflect the considered views and experiences of senior organizational leaders struggling to make sense of current realities while also searching for new directions. This is why all the vision statements represent “works-in-progress”. While the development of Vision Statements in the future will call for new leadership, the rationale for developing these statements include the following:

The value premise for periodically developing a BASSC Vision statement includes:

- thinking about the future using provocative, energizing, and *futuristic language*,

- developing *brief and accessible* vision statements for public presentations (Executive Team discussions, Community Presentations, Faculty meetings, BASSC EDP, etc.
- distinguishing the difference between a county strategic plan and a *regional BASSC Vision Statement* while building upon past vision statements
- defining annual regional goals that are linked to implementing the BASSC 2025 Vision over time

A second value premise is to take into account the ever-changing context of delivering human services by:

- reaffirming our *focus on poverty* and housing amidst changing client demographics
- addressing *staffing demands* related to diversity, turnover, and organizational restructuring
- promoting *inter-organizational relationship building/maintenance* (across public sector departments, non-profit partners, and university partners) – “It still takes a village”
- managing both expanding and contracting *funding sources*.

**FIGURE 4**  
**BASSC Vision 2025: Strengthened Service Delivery Practices**

**SERVICE PRINCIPLES**

- Shifting *service philosophy* from “whole person care” to “whole family care” to “whole system care”
- Redefining the *language of service delivery* for continuing care (moving from self-sufficiency or safety to creating access and resources with a focus on prevention and school-linked services)
- Continuing the search for *new ways* to address poverty, housing insecurity, and homelessness
- Integrating *core practice principles* into all forms of current practice

**ORGANIZATIONAL PROCESSES**

- Balancing *standardization* (accountability measures) with flexibility (innovative practice)
- Increasing the *use of technology* in service delivery to improve data-informed outcomes
- Increasing the attention given to *engaging the state* (both executive and legislative)
- Addressing the link between *staff retention and healthy/thriving workplaces*
- Amplifying the voices of *service users* and the larger community

**STRENGTHENED AGENCY-UNIVERSITY-FOUNDATION PARTNERSHIPS**

- Addressing shared *workforce development issues* (linkage between pre-service education and in-service training), linking agency staff competencies to university educational competencies and developing *new models of funding* educational programs
- Promoting practice-informed *curriculum redesign and research* in order to prepare future leaders and life-long learners engaged in *inter-professional practice*
- Using BASSC research to build agency-based *knowledge-sharing systems to support evidence-informed practice and practice-informed research*
- Collaborating and learning from other regional consortia in California SACHS, CASSIE, etc.)



## **II.**

# **ORGANIZATIONAL ENHANCEMENT AND CHANGE**



# Developing a Public Information and Community Relations Strategy in a County Social Service Agency

SHERYL GOLDBERG, JOHN CULLEN, AND MICHAEL J. AUSTIN

## Introduction

When public social service agencies develop a public relations function to improve their communications and relationships with the community, they face several challenges. When dealing with the media, for instance, social service agencies encounter the following obstacles: (1) Fear of and reluctance to use the media (Brawley, 1995); (2) Concern about violating client confidentiality (Jones, 1991); (3) A lack of credibility as a result of the public's perception that social service workers do not know what they are doing (Brawley, 1995); and (4) Public antagonism toward the clients and the services of government-run social service agencies, including the journalists working for the various media (Brawley, 1995).

This is a case study of the efforts of a county social service agency in California to address its capacity to disseminate and gather information relevant to its mission and the needs of the community. It describes a feasibility study of the need for a formal public information capacity to strengthen its relations with and visibility in the community. The goal of the feasibility study was to find a way to provide public education about the department's programs and services and obtain public input regarding the department's various activities and objectives. In the next section, a brief review of the literature places this case study in a larger context.

## Background

The goal of public relations is to provide education and information to the public in order to promote positive awareness and reduce negative perceptions (Osborn & Hoffman, 1971). Effective communications to specific target groups or publics is based upon an evolving relationship between an institution and its publics (Bernays, 1986). As the role of public relations in social service agencies has increased in recent years, public information offices have been established to serve as a centralized contact point for two-way communications between an agency and its various

audiences. The goals of such public information offices is to bring the agency to the attention of the public and to generate community understanding and support by: (1) supporting/advocating the development of programs to address the needs of special client populations, such as recruiting foster parents (Levy, 1956); (2) improving the image of the social service agencies and their clients by featuring successful programs and participants (Osborn & Hoffman, 1971); and/or (3) providing information to the public that will benefit the public, such as public service announcements, community service programming, local television, radio stations, or weekly newspaper columns (Brawley, 1995).

The challenge facing social service agencies is to foster and improve relationships with their different stakeholders, especially local taxpayers (Ayres, 1993). Stakeholders can be differentiated into the following categories: (1) the clients who want to know what services are available and how they might benefit from them (McIntyre, et al., 1991); (2) interest and/or concern of the larger community who want to be assured that their taxes or philanthropic funds are being used wisely, along with cost-effective outcomes; (3) the detractors who are philosophically opposed to the notion of providing public services and often need to see how the

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The authors acknowledge the important contributions to this case study of **Lynn Yaney**, Public Information Officer of the Contra Costa County Social Service Department. In addition, the following research assistants participated in the study: **Jennifer Davis**, **Spencer Bolles**, **Emily Bruce**, and Communications Consultant, **Bobbi Fisher**.

cost-effective utilization of resources prevents fraud and abuse so that their lack of support might be reduced from active antagonism to at least passivity (Osborn & Hoffman, 1971); and (4) policy-makers and opinion-makers who require specific public relations strategies in order to educate and inform such bodies as City Councils, Boards of Supervisors, and state legislatures (Levy, 1956)

There may be different public relations goals for each of these target audiences and therefore messages need to be tailored to particular audiences (Brawley, 1995). Since good news does not generally leak out of the agency, systematic ways need to be established to ensure that stories about agency successes are routinely available to the media (Jones, 1991).

In addition to disseminating information about programs and services, social services agencies need to be able to monitor services and operations by gathering input from clients or from the community at-large (Thomas & Penchansky, 1984). Consumer surveys have become increasingly popular as tools to help agencies monitor the quality of care and service (James, 1994; Press, Ganey, & Malone, 1992; Inganzo, 1992; Kritchevsky & Simmons, 1991; Berwick, 1989; Gold & Wooldridge, 1995). In addition, public forums, focus groups, suggestion boxes, comment cards, and selected interviews are other methods for gathering the opinions of clients and consumers.

## Methods

The case study utilizes qualitative methods including in-depth interviews and focus groups with four different populations: (1) public information officials located in different parts of the country, (2) senior staff in the social service agency, (3) representatives of local community-based organizations, and (4) local opinion leaders. A total of eight public information officials representing public, private, and non-profit organizations throughout the country were identified and interviewed based on their reputation for operating a model public relations program. The model public information programs included a diverse group of agencies. A health maintenance organization was selected because the health care and social services have recently received a great deal of public and political scrutiny in relationship to health care reform and welfare reform. A community foundation was selected because foundations work closely with the community and providers and often have a well-developed public relations capacity. In addition, state social service and human services departments were selected that resembled California's state supervised, county-administered programs. One

state program was selected based on substantial national media attention to addressing welfare reform legislation and one California county department with a model public information program. The purpose of the interview questions to model programs participants were: (1) to define the public information office and its background and history; (2) to determine the organizational structure and context within which public education and public input is officiated; (3) to obtain a more detailed description of the office itself; and (4) to determine the organization's audiences and publics and to ascertain which methods of communication are used to target each audience.

Four county employees including senior managers were interviewed to assess how the agency and other county departments currently engage in disseminating public information and their vision for expanding its public information efforts. The purpose of the questions was: (1) to delineate background information concerning the division management and division objectives for public information; (2) to determine the structure and function of public information within the division and the agency; (3) to investigate communications internal and external the division and to discuss how a proposed Office of Community Relations could facilitate communications for the agency; and (4) to describe the agency's audiences and key media relations functions and resources.

A focus group was conducted with representatives of eight community-based organizations which worked closely with the social service agency. The goal was to identify different ways that the agency could improve its ability to gather public input. The focus group included representatives from the following types of organizations: food banks, housing agencies, child abuse prevention agencies, advocacy organizations, counseling agencies, parent education services, senior services, and neighborhood community organizing. The purpose of the focus group was to obtain the following information: the public relations functions as practiced within the eight participating agencies; their perceptions of the strengths and areas for improvement of the social service agency's public information function; and perceptions of the merits of a proposed Office of Community Relations within the social services agency.

Finally, a select number of opinion leaders in the county were interviewed to gain their perceptions of the agency. These participants included representatives of the County Board of Supervisors, the Grand Jury, the Area Agency on Aging, and a staff person for the Department responsible for administering two key advisory committees.

## Findings

The findings from interviews and focus groups reflect the perceptions of: (1) staff representatives of existing public information offices in a variety of organizations; (2) senior managers; (3) representatives of community-based organizations; and (4) selected opinion leaders.

The findings from the *representatives of public relations programs* in the public, nonprofit, and private sectors provide an array of approaches to organizing public information offices (Figure 1). Media relations constitute the primary feature of all the public information programs surveyed, followed by developing/disseminating publications, coordinating a speaker's bureau, coordinating with legislative offices, conducting public education and charitable campaigns, and responding to public inquiries. The most frequently cited public information methods of model programs used in media relations are: (a) press releases, (b) editorial page, (c) newsletters, (d) media campaigns; (e) broadcast interviews, (f) feature newspaper articles, (g) public service announcements, (h) advertising campaigns, (i) distribution of publications, (j) special events, (k) presentations, (l) Internet and World Wide Web resources, and (m) legislative advocacy. Staff of public information offices often come to their positions with extensive media and communications training.

While few offices among those surveyed have a formal communications plan with evaluation procedures, all respondents identified their communication goals which included providing accurate information, promoting a positive view of the organization; and describing efforts to utilize funds effectively. These goals are frequently met by targeting specific messages to specific audiences.

Very few of the respondents from public information offices have public input responsibilities but provide staff at the program level with assistance in designing consumer satisfaction surveys, conducting focus groups, and working with advisory boards (Figure 2). In response to questions about the future role of public information offices, these respondents identified the increased need for the publication of fact sheets, the development of issue-specific public information campaigns, increased communication and collaboration among social service agencies, and the importance of developing and maintaining strong communication links to professional groups and providers.

*Senior county staff* emphasized the need to improve the quantity and quality of information currently shared with community-based organizations and other county departments. Some of their concerns identified included

communicating changes to programs and policies, providing referral information about shared clients, and increasing the department's visibility at community events. Senior staff noted that messages about programs and services need to be conveyed in a coordinated, strategic manner which build upon current practices and expand medial relations strategies.

In addition to external communications, senior staff called for increased internal communications. Current gaps exist in communication between bureaus and among line staff and managers. While this need is considered important, there is also resistance among employees to having their workload increased by requirements to attend more meetings or read more announcements/mailings. Therefore, a public information office should have responsibility for coordinating internal communications, including establishing a Speaker's Bureau and administering an ombudsperson program. Staff will need to be educated about the role and function of a proposed public information office by utilizing training resources at county and state levels as well as the opportunity for service staff to educate the public information staff about the agency's various programs.

*Community-based organizations* focused their attention on the process of obtaining public input. Several respondents noted the difficulty of involving the community in decision-making when there is a bias against being associated with the county social services agency. Suggestions for fostering community participation included annual or bi-annual community needs assessments, service evaluation surveys, and input from advisory groups.

The major concerns of the five opinion leaders were the need to address the negative public perceptions of the social services through effective media relations. They noted that the public needs to see "success stories" about consumers, profiles of individuals and organizations serving the community, the impact of state and federal legislation on the community, information about client demographics and service outcomes, and descriptions of current social service programs. The opinion leaders shared a perception that a public information office should: (a) serve as a centralized media contact (distributing flyers, television news, feature stories, etc.); (b) coordinate internal and external communications; (c) track legislation; (d) serve as the primary office responsible for community relations (conduct needs assessments and utilize input from advisory boards); (e) reflect a capacity to communicate with non-English speaking and ethnic communities; and (f) participate on the department-wide decision-making team.

**FIGURE 1**  
**Description of Public Information Dissemination Utilized by Model Programs**

<i>Media Relations</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• This is often the primary function of the public information offices.</li> <li>• Protocol for media calls is referral to the public information officer in order to: a) ensure that calls are promptly returned, b) safeguard client confidentiality issues, c) guarantee that a consistent message is communicated, d) ensure that media response reflects an agency-wide perspective and an understanding of policy nuances, and e) monitor all media inquiries and contacts.</li> <li>• Methods for contacting the media include the issuing of press releases, holding press conferences and producing and distributing public service announcements.</li> <li>• A proactive stance toward the media involves building good rapport and relationships with reports and helps ensure consistent and balanced media coverage.</li> </ul>
<i>Internal and External Publications</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Widely circulated internal publications are often in the form of newsletters.</li> <li>• External publications include brochures, pamphlets, flyers, posters and billboards.</li> <li>• All publications reflecting agency-wide issues are usually approved by the public information office.</li> <li>• Most frequent publications often relate to specific public educational campaign.</li> </ul>
<i>Speaker's Bureau Coordinated by Public Information Office</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Coordinate speaking engagements sponsored by a variety of community groups.</li> <li>• Maintain a list of speakers, usually consisting of employees who have technical expertise in specific program areas.</li> <li>• Designate spokespersons for each division who are prepared to provide information with minimum briefing.</li> <li>• Foster successful public speaking events which address topical issues and open up a dialogue with the audience (e.g., responses to crisis situations or impact of new federal or state legislation).</li> </ul>
<i>Public Inquiry</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Public information offices will respond to calls from the public on a variety of programmatic and policy issues.</li> <li>• A separate office usually handles the bulk of these calls, since many calls often require referral to program staff.</li> </ul>
<i>Public Education</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Educate the organization's clientele and various publics through the media, special events and other free information.</li> <li>• Education campaigns are developed in conjunction with specific divisions but strategy and coordination is provided by the public information office.</li> <li>• Messages are focused on public education--particularly messages aimed at prevention or notification about changes in programs and policies.</li> <li>• Within larger organizations, education is a function of a separate education office.</li> </ul>
<i>Legislative Briefing</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• This function serves to increase awareness of legislation among management and staff and assists the organization in working toward desired policy changes.</li> <li>• Legislative advocacy is usually a function of the management team or a separate legislative office; however, communication legislative information to the public and within the organization is the responsibility of the public information office.</li> <li>• Legislative tracking and lobbying is usually handled by other offices in collaboration with the public information office when it comes to issuing press releases, drafting and distributing reports, or conducting briefings.</li> </ul>

The following themes emerged from the interviews and focus group data representing all who participated in the feasibility study:

- Public relations are of great value to the agency and community.

- The way to increase public awareness of social services agencies is through the provision of clear, consistent information about the agency, its programs, services, and clientele as a way to clarify the role of social services within the larger community.



**FIGURE 2**  
**Description of Public Input Methods Utilized by Model Programs**

<i>Questionnaires</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• While surveys and questionnaires are often used, rarely is the public information office responsible for administering them.</li> <li>• Program managers are usually responsible for the content of questionnaires and if there is a research or quality control department, this is the location for instrument design and administration.</li> <li>• Some survey items are identified by scanning the media and by listening to advisory group members, staff, and clients.</li> </ul>
<i>Focus Groups</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Viewed as a non-traditional and helpful approach to getting input.</li> <li>• Sometimes focus group training and coordination are provided by the public information office.</li> <li>• Some programs utilize focus groups only when organizational programmatic changes are being considered, often as an option to a survey.</li> <li>• Alternatives to focus groups are public meetings with the program's advisory and policy committees.</li> </ul>
<i>Advisory Groups</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Advisory groups are often viewed as part of a public input structure (e.g., priority setting for funding decisions and/or giving advice).</li> <li>• Sometimes advisory groups are used to help manage negative media attention by using an advocacy database with the names and telephone numbers of program supporters.</li> </ul>
<i>Toll Free Numbers</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sometimes 800 numbers are used for particular programs; however they are not always a useful approach to obtaining public input.</li> </ul>
<i>Office Tours</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Office tours for public officials and other citizen groups can be an excellent way of providing information for generating feedback.</li> </ul>

- Public relations needs to include community relations and outreach functions, especially collaboration between public and private agencies in order to involve a cross section of the community and ensure the availability of services to those most in need.
- A critical function of public information offices is to centralize media relations and foster strong relationships with reporters through a proactive approach to the media.
- Effective external communications are based on effective internal communications and when they are most connected, they both suffer.
- There is value in the participation of the public information officer in formulating agency policy and making decisions. Also, the public information officer was

seen as an implementor of policy and a communicator of decisions.

- Formal evaluation of the effectiveness of public information is needed on an on-going basis.
- The methods used by public information offices ought to include: (a) determining and evaluating the agency's audiences (e.g., the general public and the internal audiences); (b) helping to shape relevant messages to communicate (e.g., welfare reform, human interest stories); (c) use of multiple methods to communicate these messages (e.g., publications, presentations, etc.); (d) use of multiple media relations tools (e.g., public service announcements, press releases); and (e) ongoing use of public input methods (e.g., surveys and focus groups).

## Recommendations

Based upon these major themes, the following steps were identified to develop an effective public information program: (1) establish a formal public information function, (2) strengthen internal communication, (3) develop external communications infrastructure and strategy, (4) expand community relationships, and (5) implement communication strategies. The five broad steps include ten specific recommendations as noted in *Figure 3*.

The recommendations build upon a number of internal and external communication activities already in place. Internally, there is strong management support for the development of an Office of Community Relations (OCR) as reflected in the earmarking of funds and resources for a communications program. Based on these recommendations, a staff person with considerable marketing and media expertise, as well as ties to the political and social service communities has been hired. Externally, there are currently in place numerous supports including access to a legislative liaison, strong local media outlets, and partnerships with community-based organizations to foster public education.

In expanding its communications and community relations efforts, the department also faces a number of internal and external challenges. Internally, the lack of a formal communications function has resulted in fragmented efforts which are not necessarily focused around the central mission of the organization. There is a lack of consensus among mid-level managers in terms of the need for a formal communications program. There is also concern that such a function may increase the “turf wars” which have increased due to recent funding cutbacks and restructuring efforts. Among employees, there is some anxiety that the proposed OCR will, at worst, identify additional eligible individuals who cannot be served due to lack of resources and, at best, only serve to increase the workloads of current staff.

External challenges to an expansion of communications and community relations are present on both national and local levels, especially the erosion of public trust in government institutions and the public’s negative perception of social service programs. The current uneven coordination with other government agencies and community-based organizations provides another challenge to fostering structured communications. Exacerbating these external challenges are the demographics of the county, with its multiple languages, diverse ethnic perspectives, and geographic areas marking disparate preferences and points of view.

While not all of these challenges can be addressed via effective communications and community relations efforts,

the absence of a strong, purposeful communications program is likely to prevent the agency from achieving its stated goals and objectives. The recommendations reflect the primary objectives that need to be accomplished in order for the agency to remain a strong and viable force in the community by targeting messages and receiving input from different audiences (*Figure 4*).

## Next Steps

The feasibility study recommendations were adopted immediately as part of a work plan to establish a new Office of Public Information. No sooner was the ink dry on the report than an experienced professional from the field of advertising was hired full-time and soon thereafter an administrative assistant was hired. Reporting to the agency director, the new Public Information Officer (PIO) engaged in the start-up phase which included reviewing all existing agency publications and establishing standardized formats related to logo, color, photography, paper quality, clarity of messages, and typeface. The PIO collaborated with staff on several advertising campaigns related to the need for temporary beds for abused/neglected infants and the need for more child care providers. Building on prior relationships, the PIO also engaged in extensive outreach to the media by pitching story ideas about agency services (e.g., adoptions) and policy changes (e.g., welfare reform). Given the strong anti-press perceptions among staff due to a history of being misquoted, considerable effort was devoted to preparing/training staff to deal more effectively with the media. One of the goals was to raise the status of reporters in the eyes of staff and this required extensive listening and educating. As a result, new forms were developed for receiving and routing calls from the press along with follow-up evaluation forms. With the new system in place, an average of three news articles and publications are released each month.

The feasibility study was also used extensively in in-service training to educate staff on the role and importance of a public information office. With the support of staff liaisons to the public information office involved with staff training on public presentation skills, a Speaker’s Bureau was launched and expanded to include representatives in 15 local Chambers of Commerce. This “Chamber Corp” includes a group of specially-trained staff who are members of local chapters of the Chamber of Commerce and make presentations on new developments related to welfare reform and other program changes. At the same time, an internal monthly staff newsletter, called FYI, was developed

**FIGURE 3**  
**Recommended Steps for Establishing a Public Information Program**  
**in a County Social Service Agency**

*Step 1: Establish a Formal Public Information Function Within the Social Service Agency.*

The development of a centralized, coordinated public information function within a new Office of Community Relations (OCR) will require trained personnel to ensure that the agency's public information goals are met and the development of a community-oriented advisory group to advise and monitor the work of the Office of Community Relations.

- Recommendation 1: Assemble a multidisciplinary advisory committee to advise the OCR on its purposes, plans, and activities.
- Recommendation 2: Establish the Office of Community Relations with Public Information Manager, Publications Specialist, and Community Relations Officer.

*Step 2: Strengthen Internal Communications Infrastructure and Understanding of Public Information Function*

Staff understanding and awareness of the activities of other programs within the Department will contribute to cooperative working alliances between divisions and strengthen the common sense of mission among staff.

- Recommendation 3: Educate staff at all levels regarding the necessity for and benefits of a structured public information function.
- Recommendation 4: Improve the internal communications structure both horizontally and vertically.
- Recommendation 5: Work toward developing a sense of employee pride and commitment to the Department.

*Step 3: Develop External Communications Infrastructure and Strategy.*

Research and planning will be needed to produce and ensure the consistent transmission of written, electronic, and oral communications as well as ensure that the communication vehicles match the needs of target audiences.

- Recommendation 6: Research and develop public input structures.
- Recommendation 7: Research and develop public education structures.
- Recommendation 8: Develop key messages and ensure their consistency via a coordinated information dissemination strategy.

*Step 4: Expand Relationships In the Community.*

There is a need to intensify communications efforts within the community, especially with community-based organizations, in order to promote opportunities for networking and two-way communications.

- Recommendation 9: Create strong relationships with community-based organizations, private funding sources, local policy makers and elected officials, the media, and the public at-large.

*Step 5: Implement Communications Strategies.*

Successful implementation depends on a coordinated, targeted strategy to achieve multiple objectives with an economy of effort.

- Recommendation 10: Utilize a variety of public information methods, including accessing media outlets, sponsoring of public events, attendance at community events, hosting forums and town hall meetings, producing publications, and airing CCTV programming, and maintaining a comprehensive Internet web-site.



to increase the flow of information about changes in agency services and organizational processes. Increased attention was given to staff recognition by developing and presenting a new Director's Award for developing innovative practices. Like the feasibility study, new publications are also used as part of staff training, especially with regard to orienting new employees.

The start-up activities were launched with the full support of the agency director who displayed a strong commitment to disseminating high quality and readable information, internally and externally, even if it cost more money than had been expended in the past. The director was also interested in experimenting with new and innovative approaches. He consistently recognized the extra staff effort to launch and utilize a new public information system. With the same concern for high quality communications among staff and with the community, the director acknowledged the importance of improving the work environment by authorizing the hanging of pictures of people reflecting the Department's mission on office walls, hallways, and conference room walls as well as installing more welcoming furniture and carpeting. These indirect forms of communication were seen as equal in importance to direct written communications. Staff support was also communicated from the Director's Office with the launching of a new OZ Fund whereby middle and senior managers have access to \$25,000 to address immediate staff or organizational needs. The array of fundable projects includes funds for new equipment, redecorated office space, employee recognition, and/or staff retreats.

All these examples of start-up took place during the first two years of operating a public information office. The next phase of activity includes efforts to develop and disseminate a new client newsletter, called Opportunity Knocking. Similarly, there will be further expansion of agency booths at community festivals, expanded use of a new video on client rights and responsibilities, and expanded participation in "transportation kiosks" located at public facilities and shopping centers.

The success and impact of activities to date can be measured in several different ways. Internally, there is increased staff awareness of the public information function as evidenced by increased involvement in the monthly newsletter, in the Speaker's Bureau, and in appreciation for the multiple approaches to staff recognition. Externally, there is positive feedback from the elected officials and business community about the way that the agency is assertively telling its story in the community, the receipt of state and national

awards for several different public education campaigns (see Attachment 1 for "Kids Like Maria"), the increased staff use of the PIO for developing brochures and related publications, and the increased interest by other county departments for securing the expertise of the PIO.

Two major areas of unfinished business are on the agenda for future action. First, a system needs to be developed to monitor and evaluate the impact of the public information office internally and externally. Collecting and analyzing staff and community feedback will require the investment in evaluation research capacity either inside or outside the agency. Planning and implementing this component of public information processing will most likely require substantial staff creativity and effort. A second area of unfinished business relates to some recommendations emerging from the feasibility study, namely the capacity to regularly collect and analyze feedback and input from the community. The study highlighted such mechanisms as surveys, focus groups, hotlines, and advisory groups. Keeping tabs on the pulse of the community involves considerable community organizing and evaluating skills. For example, simply analyzing the input from existing agency advisory groups, charged by the agency to provide advice and feedback, requires significant staff effort. Similarly, dealing with some of the negative community perceptions of the publications produced by the public information office ("why are they spending money on fancy annual reports and brochures that should go to poor people?") will require skillful public relations in its own right. Clearly the costs associated with the work of a public information office will need to be evaluated in terms of benefits/outcomes/impact as well as explained to those with the questions about the allocation of scarce resources.

## Conclusion

This case description of a feasibility study and its early implementation covers a four year period, from the time the agency director requested the study based on the support of several senior managers to the completion of the first two years of operating a new public information office. From the perspective of agency management, this case study of innovative practice provides several important lessons for current and future administrators:

- 1 Whether or not the agency is a public or non-profit community agency providing social services, a public information function is an important element in the process of communicating how tax dollars or

**FIGURE 4**  
**Summary of an Audience Grid**

AUDIENCE	GOAL	SAMPLE MESSAGE	POSSIBLE VEHICLE
The media	Expand positive coverage.	"We've got good stories."	Monthly communications via media newsletter and/or pitch letters.
Program Managers	Support managers in their job functions.	"We are here to make your job easier; we won't increase your workload with more paper."	Training in the following areas: media and public speaking, employee education, etc.
Line Staff	Demonstrate how employees are valued.	"You are valued because ...."	Employee recognition ceremonies.
Community-Based Organizations	Clarify roles of the agency vis-a-vis community-based organizations.	"Here's what we can (and can't) do for you."	Regular meetings with community-based organizations for networking, brainstorming and sharing.
Professional Community	Increase visibility of the agency and awareness of its services.	"This is who we are and what we do."	Informational letter publicizing the activities and services of the agency.
Advisory Groups	Improve the information-sharing process.	"We want your ideas to make things better."	Regularly scheduled advisory group meetings.
Clients	Help clients become self-sufficient.	"We provide only temporary assistance."	Special events featuring successful clients (e.g., graduation ceremonies)
Advocacy Groups	Minimize attacks on the agency.	"Here are all the things that we are doing ..."	Meetings and community forums focused on policy and service delivery issues.
Taxpayers and General Public	Counter negative public image of social services.	"Family supports are an essential element of a just society."	Media coverage profiling successful programs and their contribution to the community.
Government Representatives and Policy makers	Enact supportive legislation.	"We are using funds responsibly and have the facts and figures to show for it."	Testifying at hearings (especially involving successful clients).
Grant makers, Funders, Donors, Foundations	Increase funding.	"We are developing innovative programs that are sustainable."	Meetings with program officers with materials which profile successful programs.
Business, Private Industry Councils	Develop partnerships.	"You are investing in your community by hiring graduates from our programs."	Fact sheets listing demographics and outcome statistics.

philanthropic dollars are being spent as well as a focal point for collecting information relevant to service delivery.

- 2 Planning for the introduction of a new organizational function like public information benefits greatly from the use of a feasibility study which documents best practices, internal and external local perceptions of need, and reflects the continuous monitoring and guidance of senior management.
- 3 When there is limited in-house expertise, it is important to search outside for talent with the capacity to understand and appreciate the work of the agency. Such experience and expertise is needed to help the

agency tell its story while at the same time "turning up the volume on the voices from the community" so that feedback and input can be understood and addressed.

- 4 The guiding vision of an agency director regarding the centrality of effective internal and external communications is critical in order to overcoming obstacles to implementation and finding the funds to develop a successful public information office.
- 5 In most social service agencies, considerable effort is needed to educate and assist staff in gaining an understanding and appreciation of the importance of BOTH delivering high quality services AND regularly sharing with the community information about what is working and what is not working and WHY.

These are some of the lessons which can be gleaned from this case study. Given the different experiences of the reader, it is assumed that many other lessons can be derived from this example of innovative management practice in a public social service agency. It is increasingly clear that public relations will have an expanded role within the changing organizational structure of social service agencies. The rationale for this projection is based on some of the following realities: (a) a political climate that is unsympathetic to large-scale social service programs; (b) an enhanced need for accountability in the administration and allocation of public funds; (c) the need for quick access to accurate and up-to-date information; (d) an increasingly competitive environment for public funds, and (e) a growing emphasis on collaboration between public agencies and community-based organizations.

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## ATTACHMENT A

**WHAT WORKS**

*Contra Costa's foster and adoption outreach program  
wins awards, increases placements.*

## Finding Homes for "Kids Like Maria..."

By Danna Fabella

*A little girl, abused and neglected by her parents, is provided protection by Children's Services and placed in a foster home. Time passes, but for this child, family reunification fails and she is placed for adoption. All too often, this scenario plays out in counties throughout California.*

**L**ast year, the Children's Services division of Contra Costa County's Social Service Department received more than 19,000 calls reporting the suspected mistreatment of children. Approximately 5,900 reports alleged physical abuse; 2,800 sexual abuse; 8,100 neglect; 2,000 abandonment; 600 emotional abuse; and 40 reports alleged child exploitation.

Currently, we have more than 2,200 children in foster care. These children live with relatives, in group homes or in one of the 420 county foster care homes, which we license and supervise.

The county serves an ethnically diverse 883,000 residents. Our population is 69.7 percent Caucasian, 11.4 percent Hispanic, 9.1 percent African-American, 9.2 percent Asian/Pacific Islanders and 6 percent American In-



**Kids like  
Maria  
need  
families.**

*Interested in  
Adoption or  
becoming a  
Foster Parent?*

Call  
**313-7788**

CONTRA COSTA COUNTY  
SOCIAL  
SERVICE  
DEPARTMENT

Twenty-three county libraries  
distributed bookmarks promoting the  
foster-adoption campaign.  
Courtesy of Contra Costa County

dian. Although our median household income exceeds \$70,000, we have areas of great wealth and abject poverty.

### Meeting Special Needs

Children's Services has an ongoing need for families who can take in children who have a variety of special needs. This includes infants who were born drug addicted, young children who have been so neglected that they are clingy and need much attention, and teenagers with a history of abuse and neglect who need strong parental figures to guide them into adulthood.

We also need emergency and short-term care providers for no more than 90 days after a child is removed from the home. This gives us time to prepare court orders either for Family Maintenance or Family Reunification or for a child's placement with a family who is willing to adopt him or her if reunification is not possible.

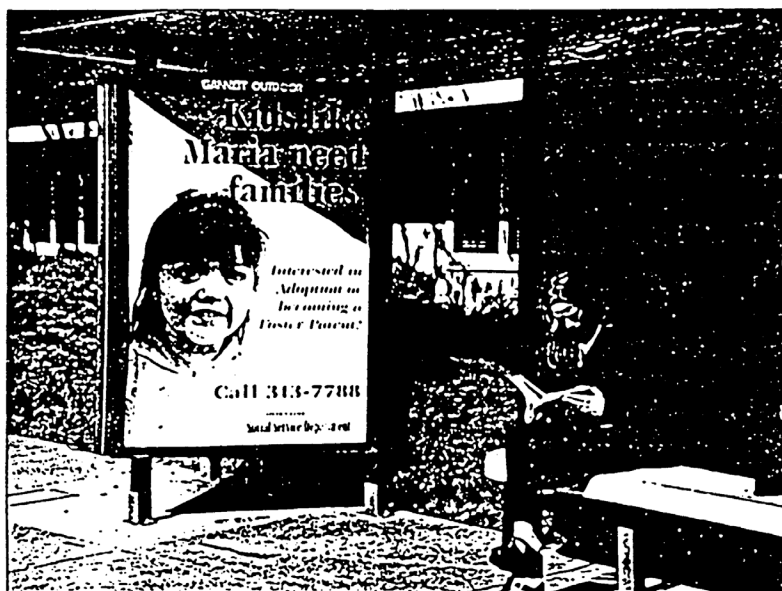
### Reaching Out

Our approach has evolved to include long-term permanency planning, right from the moment the child is removed from his or her biological parents. This Concurrent Planning Program (Foster-Adopt) ensures that while we are working with the biological family toward reunification, we have in place a back-up plan for permanency.

Finding homes for foster and adoptive children who have been abused, neglected or abandoned by their natural parents is a common problem for counties across the nation. To this end, our department created a spe-



## WHAT WORKS



In the first five days after they were posted, advertisements in bus shelters brought in 74 calls from people interested in adopting or foster parenting. All photos by Lynn Yaney, public information officer, Social Service Department, Contra Costa County

cial committee to develop strategies for recruiting not only foster parents but also individuals who are willing to adopt a child if reunification does not occur.

This committee includes all levels of staff in our organization: the assistant director, a division manager for children's services, two casework supervisors, the foster parent recruiter and our public information officer. Because we need creative outreach programs to support the changes in children's welfare, our task is to find solutions that work.

*Finding homes for foster and adoptive children who have been abused, neglected or abandoned by their natural parents is a common problem for counties across the nation.*

#### Campaign Launch

The "Kids like Maria..." campaign was a new approach for us. For the first time, Children's Services used commercial advertising and marketing techniques. An

outdoor advertising company that contracts with our county has an agreement to provide free bus shelter advertising space to county departments who want to create public service messages.

*We achieved a 40 percent increase in adoption placements. Applications by potential new foster parents have tripled. For the first time in two years, foster parent licensing has increased—by 9 percent.*

This advertising space gave us an opportunity to reach out to prospective foster and adoptive families in a new way. Our public information officer designed the four-foot-by-six-foot posters and arranged to have them printed. These posters featured a Hispanic child (actually the daughter of one of our employees) and the headline, "Kids like Maria need families." Five bus shelters were selected in the central part of the county to launch the campaign in January 1997.

Our public information officer notified the largest newspaper in Contra Costa County that these bus shelter posters were being installed and that our campaign had

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## WHAT WORKS

"MARIA" - FROM PAGE 15

begun. The paper published a feature story with photographs, and within five days, Children's Services had received 74 phone calls from people wanting to know more about foster parenting and adoption opportunities.

### Billboards and Bookmarks

In February, taking advantage of the commitment many private businesses have to non-profit and charitable projects, we contacted the outdoor advertising company again and asked about its public service policies regarding the donation of more advertising space. In response, Children's Services was given five billboards that measured 10 feet-five inches by 22 feet-eight inches, and the "Kids like Maria..." campaign expanded.

These boards featured Maria and four other ethnically diverse children, two African-Americans, a Caucasian and an East Indian. The headline read, "Kids like these need families like yours." The billboards were featured in west and east Contra Costa County, where the majority of at-risk families and children reside.

In March, we expanded our "Kids like Maria..." campaign to include 23 county libraries. The four-foot-by-six-foot bus shelter posters were reprinted and installed on the wall of each library. Additionally, we created bookmarks featuring the five children from the billboard. Librarians inserted them into books as they were being checked out.

California Assembly Bill 2129 provides funds to recruit foster and adoptive parents. These funds are used for training and recruitment efforts, such as the printing of the posters for bus shelters, billboards and libraries, which cost \$1,680. The bus shelter and billboard space were provided at no charge. All campaign concepts, designs and artwork were created in-house by our public information officer with input from Children's Services staff.

We printed 50,000 bookmarks at a cost



An outdoor advertising company donated five billboards to further the Children's Services' outreach program.

*For the first time, Children's Services used commercial advertising and marketing techniques.*

of \$1,600. Again, the models were the children of Social Service Department staff. We had their pictures in our files from a previous project, so we incurred no new photography fees. The total "Kids like Maria..." campaign cost was \$3,280.

### Adoptions Up 40 Percent

And the results? Prior to the "Kids like Maria..." campaign, the department averaged between 12 and 15 people attending initial Foster-Adopt orientations. During the campaign, that number increased to between 20 and 30 people. We achieved a 40 percent increase in adoption placements. Applications by potential new foster parents have tripled.

For the first time in two years, foster parent licensing has increased—by 9 percent.

Our department received a positive Grand Jury report recognizing our efforts to place children needing permanent homes. In addition, our "Kids like Maria..." campaign won a California State Association of Counties 1997 Challenge Award for Excellence, a First Place from the California Association of Public Information Officials (CAPIO) honoring Excellence in Communication for 1998 in Special Events and Campaigns, and a 1998 National Association of Counties (NACo) Achievement Award.

We continue to receive several calls a week resulting from the library bookmarks. These bookmarks are also used as

handouts at the Social Service Department booths at various county festivals and community forums throughout the year. The local newspaper is now running feature stories on adoption, foster parenting and the availability of children who need safe, loving homes.

Foster and adoptive home recruitment must be an on-going endeavor, not a one-time effort. Strategies must combine broad-scale education and information dissemination, as well as targeted, specific child recruitment. In combination, these efforts will result in more families opening their hearts to children in need, to "Kids like Maria...". ■

*Danna Fabella is assistant director, Children's Services, Contra Costa County Social Service Department.*

# The Impact of the Great Recession on County Human Service Organizations: A Cross-Case Analysis\*

GENEVIEVE GRAAF, EVELYN HENGEVELD-BIDMON,  
SARAH CARNOCHAN, PETER RADU, AND MICHAEL J. AUSTIN

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## ABSTRACT

This exploratory qualitative study examines the experiences of eleven county human-service agencies as they worked through the budget reduction process during the Great Recession (2008–2013). The principles and values that guided decisions are identified retrospectively through an analysis of 46 individual interviews with members of the senior management in each organization. The findings include decision-making strategies that include the engagement of stakeholders as well as the tactics employed for balancing the budget. The study informants reflect upon the success of their actions and upon the environmental and organizational factors that facilitated and constrained managerial decision making. The study concludes with implications for practice and future research.

**KEYWORDS:** Cutback management; human service management; innovation; organizational communications; organizational planning; technology adoption

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In the fall of 2008, Lehman Brothers, a global financial services firm, filed for bankruptcy, marking the beginning of a global financial crisis that disrupted the U.S. economy and global markets. Individuals and families across the nation were losing their jobs and their homes, and were turning to county human service organizations (HSOs) for help. Applications for public assistance programs increased substantially, and the need to process and determine eligibility for an unprecedented number of applicants stretched

organizational resources. The circumstances surrounding the budget reductions for human services from 2008 to 2012 were unprecedented with many fearing a repeat of the Great Depression of the 1930s. When searching for prior experiences with substantial budgetary cutback strategies for social services, the major examples of budget reductions were in response to a change in federal legislation during the Reagan era in the 1980s. While these reductions to social welfare budgets created serious challenges, they occurred during a time of relative economic expansion in the United States.

In order to inform current managerial practice and to lay groundwork for further empirical examination of the Great Recession, this qualitative empirical study captures and describes the principles and factors that guided HSO leaders in reducing budgets while expanding public social services. This analysis begins with a description of the environmental conditions leading up to and surrounding the HSO budget reductions in California during the Great Recession and reviews the literature on cutback management in public organizations during the late 1970s and 80s. Within the context of qualitative research methods and their limitations, key findings describe how organizational leaders engaged with stakeholders to capture shifting organizational priorities and use these formalized priorities, agency data, and financial modeling to reduce the HSO's reliance on county funds and maximize their federal funding through the use of innovative organizational and programmatic restructuring and increased partnerships. The decisions of organizational leaders and managers were often shaped by the size and structure of the organization and by the nature of relationships with the elected board

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\*Published in:  
HUMAN SERVICE ORGANIZATIONS:  
MANAGEMENT, LEADERSHIP & GOVERNANCE  
2016, VOL. 40, NO. 2, 152–169  
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/23303131.2015.1124820>  
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of supervisors, the offices of the county administrator and the relationships with labor unions. The discussion reflects on current and historical differences in environmental resources and stressors that may contribute to variations in cutback approaches. The article concludes with implications for further research and practice principles for addressing significant budget reductions.

## The Great Recession

The 2008 collapse of the financial markets led to negative growth in the U.S. gross domestic product in 2008 and 2009, and the national unemployment rate jumped to over 9% (Center of Budget and Policy Priorities, 2014). The federal budget, already with a deficit of over one trillion dollars, took a battering during this time as income tax revenues fell drastically and expenditures increased for unemployment claims, food stamps, and other safety net programs (Ruffing & Friedman, 2013). Substantial decreases in income tax and sales tax revenues, combined with increasing enrollment in state-subsidized safety net programs, decimated state budgets. The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA), a federal economic recovery package intended to shore up the consumer market, funneled substantial assistance to state budgets, mostly in the form of increased Medicaid funding and a "State Fiscal Stabilization Fund" (Oliff, Mai, & Palacios, 2012).

In California, unemployment reached an all-time high of almost 12% in 2009 (California Budget Project, 2009), and there were successive multimillion- or billion-dollar annual deficits, including a 15 billion dollar budget shortfall in 2013. The state was forced to reduce services in public health, cut funding for the children's health insurance program, and reduce services supporting HIV/AIDS patients. California eliminated all funding for the state's domestic violence shelter program as well as maternal, child, and adolescent health programs. Aid to disabled and elderly populations was capped or reduced, childcare subsidies were reduced, and the state eliminated cost-of-living adjustments for cash assistance programs. The state also cut its public workforce significantly, forcing furloughs and pay cuts for state employees (Johnson, Oliff, & Williams, 2011).

California social services are administered through the counties, and county human-service agencies are responsible for child welfare and foster care functions, employment services, adult and aging services and for eligibility determination for all forms of economic assistance, including Medicaid, general assistance, and food stamps. Many counties supplement human-service funding with county

general fund dollars that are generated through county property taxes. When the housing bubble burst, property values plummeted, and property tax revenues dropped drastically in 2008 and 2009. Owing to major reductions in state allocations and to shrinking county general funds, counties faced budget reductions ranging from 15% to 30%, resulting in the elimination of hundreds of millions of dollars from their operations. Administrators and managers were being forced to address the reduction or elimination of state allocations for safety net programs. In the context of significant budget reductions and increased demand for services, the choices made by county human-service-agency leaders shaped the services available in their counties during the financial crisis.

## Literature highlights

Beginning with economic stagnation in the 1970s and the ensuing reductions in domestic spending during the 1980s Reagan administration, "cutback management" became a familiar term among government administrators as scholars began to examine the phenomenon. Early scholarship on the subject was largely theoretical as illustrated by Levine's (1978, 1979) theoretical framework for understanding public-sector retrenchment related to legislative and judicial program funding mandates and to the realities of term limits and turnover of legislators (Levine, Rubin, & Wolo-hojian, 1982). Levine posited that the causes for organizational decline can be classified into four quadrants, "divided along two dimensions: (a) whether they are primarily the result of conditions located either internal or external to the organization, or (b) whether they are principally a product of political or economic/technical condition" (Levine, 1978, p. 318). In addition, political considerations dominated the specific decisions of managers (Edwards & Mitchell, 1987; Jick & Murray, 1982; Levine, 1978) and the process for allocating cuts within an organization (Bigelow & Stone, 1995; Levine et al., 1982; Murray & Jick, 1985; Reisch & Taylor, 1983). Given the unique constraints of this environment, cutback-management scholars have offered a range of suggestions for successfully navigating public retrenchment. These are illustrated in *Figure 1*.

Pandey (2010) points out that the structure and processes of public organizations affect the strategies and tactics that can be accessed when dealing with budget reductions. For example, public organizations can expect and rely on a steady flow of resources that allow them to function in a relatively stable operational environment. However, in a public organization, leaders are limited regarding what actions can

be taken to increase resources. In addition, Pandey (2010) notes that the goals of public organizations are often appealing and well-supported by employees and the public because they are designed to serve community needs. As a result, the organization has less input in setting goals and “compromises among competing interests in the political arena filter down” to goals that are multiple, conflicting, and vague (p. 566).

Overall, however, empirical investigation into public sector cutback management remains limited, with only a handful of studies on the topic being published since the topic’s “zenith” in the first half of the 1980s (Bozeman, 2010, p. 558). To encourage more contemporary thinking about the nature of cutback management in public organizations, Bozeman (2010) notes that research into public-sector cutback management largely fails to examine the effects of budget reduction on organizational structure and design. These studies tend to focus more on strategies for dealing with decline than on examining cutback processes within the context of organizational recovery. Bozeman points to the need to examine public cutback processes in the context of long-term strategic management, in which organizations can expect to deal with decline but also plan for recovery or expansion (p. 560).

This study seeks to respond to Bozeman’s critique of the literature by examining modern strategies for addressing budget reductions, the impact of such strategies on organizational structure and programmatic design and the relationship between organizational and environmental features and managerial strategies. The current study provides an empirical examination of modern public-sector cutback management and was designed to inform current and future HSO managers by addressing the following research questions:

1. What contextual factors influenced decision making by organizational leaders and managers?
2. What principles guided organizational leaders in the process?
3. What strategies were used for decision making?
4. What tactics were utilized to reduce the budget?
5. What were the most critical lessons reported by leaders and managers?

## Methodology

This qualitative study examines the cutback strategies of 11 California county human-service agencies located in the San Francisco Bay Area. A qualitative approach was used as a means of capturing detailed, in-depth descriptions of

### FIGURE 1 Lessons Learned from the 1980s for Navigating the Retrenchment of Public Programs.\*

#### I. Revisiting organizational mission

- create a mission-based strategic plan that both informs cutback implementation and allows for adaptive shifts to new funding sources (Austin, 1984; Behn, 1980, 1988).
- engage in mission redesign, in order to:
  - prioritize essential services (Flynn, 1991; Goplerud, Walfish, & Apsey, 1983; Goplerud, Walfish, & Broskowski, 1985; Jerrell & Larsen, 1984; Partnership for Public Service, 2011)
  - guide where to make cuts (Nakamoto & Altaffer, 1992)
  - identify ways to compete for limited resources (Goplerud, Walfish, & Apsey, 1983)
  - build relationships with influential people, through an influential board member, or directly oneself (Goplerud, Walfish, & Apsey, 1983; Goplerud, Walfish, & Broskowski, 1985; Packard et al., 2007; Pawlak, Jeter, & Fink, 1983).

#### II. Engaging governance structures

- develop relationships with key policy makers and constituencies (Austin, 1984; Behn, 1988); engaging in innovation (Behn, 1988; Biller, 1980; Glassberg, 1978; Levine, 1978)

#### III. Engaging in systematic decision-making

- engage in the difficult process of systematically prioritizing which services to cut and which to spare (Austin, 1984; Behn, 1980, 1988; Levine, Rubin, & Wohojian, 1982)
- create incentives and rewards for successful downsizing (Behn, 1988; Biller, 1980; Levine, 1979; Levine, Rubin, & Wohojian, 1982)
- focus attention to either long-term or systematic planning (Goplerud, Walfish, & Broskowski, 1985; Jerrell & Larsen, 1984, 1985; Murray and Jick, 1985).

\*Bigelow & Stone, 1995; Levine, Rubin, & Wolohojian, 1982; Murray & Jick, 1985; Reisch & Taylor, 1983

the budget-reduction experiences of county HSO leaders and staff related to the interorganizational and intraorganizational challenges emerging from the Great Recession. During the economic stagnation between 2008 and 2013, all bay area HSOs experienced substantial reductions in their annual funding from federal and state sources. Many of these counties, with politically liberal voters and elected boards of supervisors, heavily supplemented human-services

funding with county general-fund dollars generated through county property taxes. When property values in the bay area plummeted in 2008 and 2009, property tax revenues dropped dramatically (California County Annual Report, 2014), increasing the severity of budget reductions faced by county HSOs.

### *County demographic characteristics*

The 11 county HSOs differ in population size and include one small rural county with fewer than 300,000 residents, three medium-sized suburban counties with between 300,000 and 700,000 residents, and seven large urban counties with between 700,000 and 2,000,000 residents. Counties also range in physical size, from less than 47 square miles to over 3200 square miles. Though all 11 counties are considered to be metro areas by the U.S. Census Bureau, the population density across the counties varies widely, from 17,000 people per square mile to 127 people per square mile. Income level and distribution in these counties also varies greatly; between 2008 and 2012, median household income ranged from \$60,000 to \$91,000, while persons living below poverty level ranged from 7.5% to slightly more than 16% (U.S. Census Bureau State and County Quick Facts, 2014).

### *Organizational characteristics*

The size of county HSOs also varies with the size of the county. Three agencies in the sample have fewer than 800 employees, four have between 800 and 1,500 staff, and four agencies have over 1,500 full-time staff. Three of the 11 county organizations are integrated health and human service agencies, providing public health and behavioral health services in addition to public assistance, child welfare, employment services, and senior services.

### *Sampling/data collection*

Participating HSOs provided a diverse organizational sample in terms of organizational structure and size, budget size and required reductions, and staffing resources. The diversity of these characteristics provided leaders with different levels of flexibility or resources to influence budgetary decision making.

Qualitative interviews were conducted with three to six executive team leaders in each participating HSO. All interviews were conducted by the second author over the course of 4 months. Purposive sampling was used to identify the participants by asking each HSO director to participate in an interview and to identify other informants in his or her organization that could provide insight into the budget reduction process and experience. High-level leaders

in organizations were selected because of their comprehensive understanding of all the factors that went into the decision making and the budget-reduction process. Front line or middle-management staff had less access to the various factors that contributed to making decisions, designing implementation strategies, and the technical fiscal tactics used to address budget reductions.

A total of 46 interviews lasting 60–75 minutes were conducted in 11 counties, and all but two of the interviews were recorded and transcribed. Two individuals declined to be recorded, but detailed notes were taken. The interview guide was semistructured to elicit the experiences and observations of expert informants. Interview topics were drafted by the research team and were reviewed, revised, and finalized in collaboration with participating HSO directors to ensure coverage of key subjects that included (1) planning and implementation issues (e.g., scope of reductions, implementation processes, organizational priorities, mission and guiding values, resources) and (2) organizational strategies (e.g., innovative strategies, structural changes, programmatic or service delivery change and changes to the use of technology and staffing).

### *Data analysis*

The analytical approach involved multiple inductive-coding cycles to create holistic single-case studies for each county HSO (Saldana, 2013; Yin, 2003). The case studies were then analyzed in a multicase-study approach (Stake, 2006). Creation and comparison of individual cases, joined by several characteristics, lends external validity to findings observed across multiple cases. Though important findings in one case may be context bound, the emergence of similar findings across cases can begin to confirm that the observation is credible (Stake, 2006). Credibility increases when the analysis is conducted by a single analyst, with input from the research team, in combination with supporting evidence across cases.

All coding schemes were developed and applied by the first author using descriptive and focused coding that was validated through discussions with the primary interviewer, agency directors, and other members of the research team (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2013; Saldaña, 2013). Pre-coding and first- and second-cycle coding were carried out manually, while third- and fourth-cycle coding was conducted in Dedoose, a qualitative data analysis software platform. During the fourth coding cycle, organizations and all coded excerpts from those organizations were tagged with descriptors cataloguing the organizational characteristics—for example, organizational size (small, fewer than

800 employees; medium, 800–1,500 employees; and large, over 1,500 employees); union involvement (high, moderate, minimal); range of support from elected boards of supervisors; and type of agency (either only human services or integrated health and human services). These descriptors were created and applied because they emerged in the first two cycles of coding as important recurrent themes in the data, were discussed in a variety of contexts and with a wide array of impacts on organizational processes.

Following the fourth and final coding cycle, Dedoose was used to validate theme recurrence within and across cases, confirming the frequency of the themes discussed by informants and verifying the key concepts described in the findings. Once coding and analysis were complete, findings were presented to the HSO directors to gauge accuracy and to explore the implications of the findings. In this group, several executive directors (EDs) had participated in interviews and a few were new to the position or to the organization. Feedback from this group was collected and recorded and highlights from the discussion were incorporated into the final reporting of the data.

### Limitations

There are limitations to this exploratory study with respect to sampling strategy, timing of data collection, and interview design. The county sample is relatively small and may represent issues unique to HSOs in the San Francisco Bay Area. The sample of interviewees was selected by agency directors and only includes senior staff. As a result, dissenting views and the perspectives of line staff and middle managers are not represented. Respondent recall limitations may have affected the validity of findings, since interviews were conducted in 2013 regarding experiences beginning in 2008. However, the retrospective design enabled respondents to assess the relative success or failure of the strategies and tactics used, which allows researchers to examine strategies and tactics in the context of organizational regrowth. Finally, although the semistructured interview format promoted depth and detail in responses, it may have contributed to missing data. Unless an interview question directly addressed a particular topic, it may or may not have been deemed relevant by the respondent and may thus have been omitted.

### Major findings

The presentation of the findings begins with a review of (a) organizational and environmental factors affecting the cutback decisions of managers; (b) the principles used to guide organizational decision making in response to budget cuts;

(c) the strategies used for making those decisions; and 4) the organizational changes that were implemented in an effort to balance the budget. The final section of findings describes what respondents reported as lessons learned by noting the strategies that they perceived to be more and less effective.

### Organization structural and contextual factors

Inductive analysis of transcripts identified several common organizational, structural, and contextual factors that were either described by participants as assets to the organization throughout the recession or as liabilities that impaired functioning during cutbacks. This section lays out these factors and the following sections describe related managerial decision-making processes.

### Support of county governance

Several respondents stated that the support of elected county boards of supervisors and/or their appointed county administrative officer (CAO) played an important role in their successful response to the recession by supporting the implementation of new, experimental solutions. Some informants described their boards as “hands-off” by trusting HSO leaders to make good decisions and supporting those decisions. *“I could count on one hand the number of times the board has given us input on how we allocate money among programs. And so that left us quite a bit of strategic room to work.”* Other organizations pointed to the priority that human services was given in board of supervisor or CAO budgetary decisions. *“And the other thing that’s unique about us is, even in times of budget cuts where everyone needs to share the pain, that our services are still prioritized in the political structure of services. So when the Board of Supervisors are deliberating on our budget, . . . they do reallocate money (and) we tended to benefit from that.”*

In contrast, some organizations report strained relations with their CAO or board of supervisors, where trust is minimal. *“I’ve learned a lot, you know, to be careful about how much trust you have with your CAO.”* Some respondents also indicated that the board did not prioritize human services in the county budget. *“I think that one of the disappointing things was that we really did not have too much support from the Board of Supervisors. They weren’t negative, but they were not inclined to provide any county General Fund support. So we were really on our own in terms of handling the financial impacts.”* Finally, a board of supervisors was less supportive if they did not fully understand the complexities of federal drawdowns and other peculiarities of social-service financing. *“I mean we’ve been telling the Board and the county administrator for 5 years and they did not believe us . . .”*



### *Collaborative employee unions*

Several study participants also described their union relationships as collaborative and productive. *"We have a pretty good relationship with our labor unions. Our human resource department at the county spends a lot of time on that. So we don't have quite the struggles that some of our surrounding counties probably have."* Collaborative labor unions explicitly supported managerial decisions by communicating with their members. *"I have to say, the union stood with me when we did the presentations to the staff on why we have to change."* They also participated willingly in the budget-reduction planning processes. *"When we came up with a plan, you know, I sat down with the union again—outside of the county process—and I said 'These are what I'm restoring. You tell me if you want me to do something different and I'll consider it.' And they were happy with the strategy that we came up with."* Some unions were even described as partners in the cutback process. *"But they are emphasizing partnership and they want to be at the table helping with the planning. They don't want to be perceived as a barrier. So they have in fact joined us at the table, if you will, on some of the planning meetings."*

Conversely, organizations with more-contentious unions describe tedious processes for implementing change. *"The unions are very impatient here . . . They filed several (grievance) charges and that means things come to a grinding halt."* HSOs reported working through cutbacks with highly contentious unions by addressing questions about every organizational or process change suggested. *"So you can never assume you're going to change this little part of this process and it will fly. Everything is meet and confer, everything."* The implementation of more-efficient processes to better meet the increased need triggered by the Great Recession was hindered by unions supporting minimal productivity standards. *"There is still that mindset of, 'I can only do this amount of work, because that is what I've always done for the last 25 years.'"* Finally, in particularly conflicted HSOs, respondents indicated that labor unions created additional strife between employee groups. *"The other piece is that our strong union started [to complain about] the training supervisors [who were supposedly] out to get people, and that they were not supporting people and so it was almost like they were the scapegoats."*

### *Organizational or county size*

Respondents from small-county agencies noted that their small size advantaged their cutback-management process because established relationships in the community could

be easily activated to promote shared decision making. Smaller HSOs were more agile and could start, stop, or change a program more quickly due to smaller staff sizes and caseloads. On the other hand, small counties or organizations had more-limited infrastructure and could not as easily absorb overhead costs of nonessential services. Consolidated HSOs, with integrated health and human services, were able to use the budgets of larger departments to help cushion the fiscal blow to the departments being hit hard by cutbacks. However, large-county HSOs were less agile and reported difficulty in managing internal communications regarding change. *"We were a very large agency. And to be honest, one of the things I struggle with—even now—is trying to break down the silos, because everyone has become very focused on their department. So I have a staff of 2200 employees . . . So, you know, trying to manage information was difficult."* These larger HSOs also noted that successful cross-departmental collaboration was difficult and rare.

### *Integrated versus nonintegrated HSOs*

HSOs that administered both public-health services and social services were better able to manage the budget-reduction process. Their wider array of services created more options for reconfiguring services and staffing to maximize the drawdown of federal funding. For example, two integrated HSOs transformed their public-health clinics into Federally Qualified Health Centers (FQHCs), which tripled the reimbursement rates for some of the services routinely provided at these clinics. *"Long story short, this migration saved us a ton of money because the [County] Community Clinic, the FQHC that received the OB-GYN services, could bill for the federal rate—which is about three times the rate that the county was able to bill."* One of these agencies also integrated mental-health services into their health services as a means of compensating for a lack of funding for mental health in their county. Integrated HSOs also had more programs and departments to work with when searching for additional resources. *"This is obviously helpful to be a consolidated agency like ours. It meant that if one division had a windfall increase in an allocation, they would say 'Before we hire new staff, that allocation increase goes on the table and if we can prevent laying off staff in another program, then that's what we do.' And we were able to do that because we have discretionary county dollar in all of our divisions."* Nonintegrated HSOs lacked the financial and infrastructure insulation that administering both health and human services provided.

## Guiding principles

*"You know, I think that . . . the agency and most of its programs made it through okay. I think our relationships with our CBO community held okay. . . . So we went through a series of years with big cuts and we kind of held it all together. So I guess that's the good news of what we did and we followed our guiding principle in that sense."*

More than half of the county HSOs created a formally articulated set of guiding principles. The remaining organizations used a set of informally developed values and priorities to guide their decision making without articulating them in writing. Most of these principles were mission-related values regarding client-serving programs (e.g., preserving children and family services and prioritizing the welfare of children in the community) and certain administrative values (e.g., complying with federal and state mandates, preserving direct-service staff positions, maintaining in-house and contracted-service capacity and quality, and increasing efficiency to address record-setting demand for services) to support the implementation of agreed-upon organizational changes. See *Table 1* for a summary of guiding principles.

Formal guidelines were more often used in large-county HSOs when reporting to their supportive board of supervisors, the CAO, and union leadership. These guidelines were also used to communicate decision-making processes to all levels of the organization. One respondent described the motivation for creating the document as preemptive: *"We wanted to have them in place before there was a lot of wrangling going on around the table."*

## Decision-making strategies

The organizations participating in this study used an array of strategies to help redefine priorities. In most organizations, program- and staff-performance data, combined with information about which programs were funded by county general-fund dollars, were used to inform the development of new priorities. In particular, integrated HSOs with high levels of union activity and unsupportive boards of supervisors or CAOs placed more emphasis on reducing county-funded-line items in the budget because they were required to address the county-fund portion of their budget more aggressively.

Most of the HSOs used financial models and time studies to create and test various budget-reduction scenarios before making final programmatic or organizational structural changes. Many organizations used their current

strategic plan to inform the process of reprioritizing services. Engaging critical stakeholders (e.g., staff, unions, clients, funders, community partners, and community leaders) was a common strategy for decision making. This involved discussions with stakeholders about service reduction or elimination and incorporating their input into organizational actions. Multiple communication strategies were used with internal staff to engage them in decision making, and HSO leaders paid careful attention to consistent and clear messaging to staff about the budget-reduction process.

Board-supported HSOs more often reported an explicit focus on staff engagement and creating and executing a clear communication strategy. One midsize organization, with a very supportive board of supervisors, invested considerable time and resources into educating employees about social-service budgeting to make sure that they could contribute meaningfully to decision making. *"So we had to inform, educate and then we could begin to really discuss."* In this organization, when staff suggestions were not used, leadership attempted to *"get word back (as to) why this didn't work or why it wouldn't work exactly"* to the staff who contributed ideas. *"Just so people knew that we were listening."* Such attention to detail took a great deal of agency resources in staff time and energy, but leaders in this agency felt it was an important priority. *"[We were] was just trying to maintain a sense of sensitivity to the fact that—whether someone was laid off or bumped—people were afraid. And they deserved a lot of respect and some care during that difficult time because there are lots of things that you can say, and you must say, and you should say."*

In many other organizations, while some efforts were made to engage midlevel- and direct-service staff (as well as union leaders) in the decision-making process, management frequently did not display a capacity to communicate effectively with staff. Many respondents reported that their staff provided feedback that communication related to budget reductions was insufficient, and staff members were critical of top-down decisions made without their input or that of community stakeholders. See *Table 2* for a summary of decision-making strategies.

## Budget-balancing strategies

New priorities inspired a range of strategies and tactics used by the participating organizations to balance their annually shrinking budgets during the recession years. Every HSO used solutions related to organizational re-structuring, internal and community partnerships, staffing strategies, and fiscal management. Most HSOs also addressed the increased workload created by the budget-balancing

strategies and the increase in service demand triggered by the economic downturn.

Restructuring the organization was the most common strategy for reducing agency budgets while attempting to maintain service capacity and quality. HSOs eliminated or reduced organizational infrastructure (e.g., client-transportation services, training or planning positions or entire departments, and administrative support for direct-service staff) and client-serving programs. Most organizations seized the opportunity to reformulate programs in a more efficient or consolidated manner. Some examples of program reforms include moving from scheduled to drop-in appointments, conducting group intakes for entitlement programs or using call centers to work with clients on the phone rather than in-person.

All HSOs looked for solutions to their fiscal challenges by creating new partnerships, capitalizing on existing ones, or adjusting contracts with partners. Every organization developed internal partnerships, within their own agency or with other county departments such as probation or behavioral health. Partnerships with other county divisions were utilized, for example, to transfer programs from the HSO budget to the budget of another department, ensuring service continuity. Partnerships within the HSO also helped to balance the budget, including interdivision transfer of funds to sustain a struggling division. Many organizations also reduced or eliminated contracts with community-based partners as a way to reduce their budgets. However, an equal number of agencies expanded or added contracts in order to maintain services at a lower cost. Smaller, integrated HSOs with low-to-moderate union activity and supportive boards were more likely to increase contracts for outsourcing services, whereas large agencies with high union activity and less supportive boards were more likely to reduce contracts. Finally, several organizations worked actively with community or county partners to identify duplication of services in the community and to coordinate service provision through the use of a single service provider.

The third-most-frequently-mentioned—budget-balancing strategy involved rigorous fiscal stewardship, such as reducing or eliminating unnecessary spending and increasing accountability for staff and community contractors. Nearly every respondent also focused attention on maximizing the drawdown of federal or state funds. More than half of these HSOs, especially those reporting minimal union activity and supportive boards or CAOs, also looked for additional ways to increase revenue; for example, two counties invested in staff to help clients on county-funded

**TABLE 1**  
**Guiding Principles**

Theme	Number of organizations
<b>Use of mission-related values:</b>	
Preserve quality or capacity of programs	10
Preserve programs	8
Preserve child welfare	7
Mandates	6
Preserve staff	5
Preserve contracts	2
<b>Use of organizational priorities:</b>	
Efficiency	11
Planning ahead	9
Equal distribution of cuts	8
<b>Use of administrative values:</b>	
Staff morale	10
Communication	8
Empowering staff	4
Evaluation	3
<b>Use of a formal document</b>	6

general assistance to apply for and obtain federal disability benefits, enabling the HSO to claim federal reimbursement for the general-assistance benefits paid to these clients and increasing the monthly income of clients. Every HSO eliminated vacant positions and/or shifted staff from poorly funded programs to better-funded programs. Most organizations also resorted to staff layoffs; however, with limited exceptions, layoffs were minimal as administrators capitalized on vacancies and staff attrition. Almost half of the participating organizations implemented hiring freezes as a means of controlling staff costs, and several used voluntary or incentivized retirement to avoid layoffs. A few organizations recruited volunteers to supplement the workforce or to provide ancillary services, in some cases using newly retired staff as volunteers. The increased demand for efficiency and productivity led a few small and midsize organizations to increase performance expectations for staff. For example, poorly performing staff were more quickly identified and moved out of the organization through disciplinary processes. *"I think basically we've discovered—we just can't afford to have deadweight, or, you know, people not pulling their*



*weight, and making important, significant mistakes. And so we don't tolerate that anymore."*

The remaining staff in every agency was left with a significantly increased workload. Organizational leaders were aware of this problem and, through direct supervision or agency-wide communications, attempted to help staff prioritize their workload and identify tasks that could be left incomplete. Most of these organizations later brought in temporary or contracted employees to help the organization catch up on the backlog of work left undone during these times. Two organizations used overtime contributions from current employees to help catch up on backlogged work. See *Table 3* for a summary of budget-balancing strategies.

### ***Lessons learned***

As budgets began to be restored, respondents reflected on lessons learned to incorporate into their regrowth. As one agency director reflected, *"Change comes out of something we've blown up . . . Once it's blown up . . . you have to pick up the pieces again . . . and build in a different way [by] throw[ing] away pieces that, you know, maybe the only reason you had them was because you have had them for 30 years."*

### ***What worked***

The innovative solutions and increased partnerships that arose from the economic crisis were seen as successes. Most study participants agreed that the budget crisis spawned innovation and shifted focus from temporary fixes to sustained organizational changes. HSOs reporting supportive boards engaged in innovative approaches over four times more often than agencies reporting unsupportive boards or those not commenting on levels of board support. The majority of innovations involved creative financial strategies (e.g., revising accounting methods, using more-accurate methods to project salary savings, finding new ways to increase revenue, or transferring funds between programs based on funding availability). One organization developed "Budget Projects" through which each division in the organization was challenged to increase revenue or decrease expenses in order to close their budget gaps.

Another common innovative practice was the formation of new partnerships with community organizations, or the reconfiguration of existing partnerships, as a means of maintaining service quality with reduced funds—especially among HSOs with supportive boards; for example, one county partnered with local foundations to continue to provide services in the community that the HSO no longer had the resources to provide. In another county, a mutually beneficial partnership between the water agency and the

**TABLE 2**  
**Decision-Making Strategies**

Theme	Number of organizations
<b>Create and codify new priorities</b>	10
<b>Use financial models/time studies</b>	9
<b>Use agency data</b>	9
<b>Consider county dollars</b>	8
<b>Engage in strategic planning</b>	8
<b>Primary decisions made by top leadership</b>	8
<b>Gather input from stakeholders:</b>	11
Community input	11
Staff input	10
Labor union input	8

youth employment training program, facilitated by a member of the board of supervisors, gained great support from the community and positive response from the participants. *"So I had never met these folks at the Water Agency before, and one of our former Board of Supervisors members, who had been retired, introduced me to the water agency folks—and said, you know, HSO has kids that need to go to work. Water Agency, you have work that needs to be done. This is a marriage made in heaven."*

The use of information technologies was also a critical aspect of surviving the impact of the recession. As one executive director observed, *"Technology has really saved us, because despite all the losses, [we went from] about 650 employees today . . . down to about 400 employees and today we are probably up to about 450 [and] we are serving more clients today than we have in our history."* Several study participants noted that the data provided by their information technologies were critical to decision-making and monitoring processes. For example, in one organization, the leadership team invested in mobile workplace technologies that allowed direct service staff, working primarily in the field, to enter case data in their car, at home, or on site with clients. Staff saved travel time because they did not have to start or end the day at the office, and the agency saved money on mileage reimbursement, increased staff efficiency, and facilities costs (close to one million dollars annually). Several other agencies used customer-oriented, computer-based technologies to streamline the intake and application process in benefits-eligibility offices. Clients were able to access many functions

within the organization's lobby through kiosks, private phones, computer stations, electronic reader boards, phone systems with IVR, and document-scanning stations.

Programs were creatively redesigned to enable consumers to receive similar levels of services with fewer agency resources. For example, several participating organizations restructured their eligibility-determination process from a case-based process (in which the intake worker follows a case from file opening to closure) to a task-based process (in which clients can be served by any case worker, at any phase of their case). Some organizations developed new communication strategies for reaching out to the community or to their staff, such as investing resources in a media team to manage internal and external communication through video production and YouTube. Finally, a few organizations innovated through the use of volunteers, including recruiting volunteers to provide services to the aging population in the community and asking recent HSO retirees to implement a leadership-development program for their middle managers. Another county erected a "triage tent" in the parking lot to address lobby overcrowding and enlisted the help of volunteers by recruiting individuals waiting in line for services.

### *What did not work*

The majority of respondents referred to regrets about the ways in which communication, particularly with internal staff, was handled during this time. Another agency leader commented, *"If I had to do that all over again, I would have been more transparent."* Some HSO staff reported feeling that they should have provided more opportunity for employees to participate in decision making or that they should have explained more clearly the rationale for certain decisions.

In many organizations, staff had limited understanding of complex social-service-funding mechanisms, and this affected the extent to which program-level staff could contribute to decision making. An interviewee responded, *"I'm guessing . . . the deeper you go, the less staff know about what was cut . . . Why does MediCal never get cut? Well you know because there are no [county] general funds in MediCal."* The lack of adequate staff engagement in meaningful or productive discussions around budget reductions also highlighted the need to better educate program-level staff about county social-service financing. Similarly, the lack of understanding of social-service finances contributed to the lack of support from their boards of supervisors.

Almost half of the respondents expressed regret about issues related to fiscal stewardship. This was especially true

for agencies that also reported medium- to high-levels of union involvement. A few agencies returned state or federal funding because they did not allocate their resources appropriately to generate the matching funds. Others were not able to maximize their federal or state drawdowns, in part due to the board of supervisors requiring them to cut staff positions that generated state or federal revenue.

Almost all study participants discussed the importance of anticipatory planning and forecasting, even in the midst of the recession, as a means of better positioning the organization for recovery. As one deputy director reflected, *"It just didn't seem like we had enough time and I think in retrospect . . . it is important to really know exactly what the immediate impact is, what the midterm impact might be, and the long term—and for everybody to be aware of that."* Many respondents disclosed a variety of ways in which a lack of foresight about the consequences of short-term solutions devastated their organization—for example, a voluntary employee-separation-incentive package, which encouraged knowledgeable staff to leave the organization at a time when skilled and experienced staff was needed. Some organizations referred to this experience as "brain drain." Organizations could not replace the lost experience and expertise quickly enough, and some programs and processes temporarily declined in quality.

Increased turnover was cited by several organizations as an ongoing additional challenge during the recession years, and the drastically reduced workforce became a bigger problem when county HSOs needed supplemental staff to launch the enrollment phase of the Affordable Care Act (ACA) that emerged at the end of the recession. Another budget-reduction stressor experienced in most organizations related to "bumping" (e.g., the right of a senior employee to displace a newer employee, when the senior employee's position is eliminated). Employees were often bumped into positions for which they had no experience or expertise, increasing the need for staff training at a time when HSOs had limited resources for such activities. Bumping processes also led to an increase in staff turnover, when senior staff members were unsuccessful in new roles or newer staff resigned to avoid being bumped.

A few organizations were early adopters, planned ahead, and implemented time-saving technologies before the recession. In other organizations, respondents expressed regret over delaying investment in such technologies before the crisis hit. Another respondent noted, *"When you're cutting a lot of staff and you're cutting a lot of budget, that's probably not the best time to look at new technology."* New

technology required extensive staff training and new policies and procedures to support staff that experienced difficulty learning to use the new systems. A few respondents also reported disappointment that some of the technologies adopted did not deliver the projected efficiencies.

The implementation of new technologies during these recession years was especially difficult because many county HSOs had substantially reduced supports for technology such as IT specialists and trainers. Respondents in almost half of the organizations expressed regret over having eliminated critical planning, evaluation, and/or staff-development positions. One agency director recounted, *"It probably was easier to hire back direct staff later than indirect service staff, probably easier to justify getting them through your local Board of Supervisors than it is to get your infrastructure staff back."* Respondents in other organizations that were careful to preserve infrastructure positions stated that they did so intentionally, recognizing that such positions would be more difficult to restore.

## Discussion

### *Reflecting on previous cutback research*

The findings from this exploratory study suggest that county HSOs charged with budget cuts face many of the challenges outlined in much of the original research into public-sector retrenchment in the 1980s. Goplerud, Wal-fish, and Broskowski (1985) note that leaders' actions may diverge from the values and strategies they espouse. Levine's insights highlight the challenges, asserted to be unique to public managers (Pandey, 2010), which may account for this disparity. Environmental constraints fundamentally shape public management practice, including complying with legislative and judicial program mandates and responding to political actors (Levine, 1978, 1979; Levine et al., 1982). The strategies identified by the participants as poor choices were influenced by a range of environmental factors, related to their public nature, which forced or encouraged the organization to implement a particular strategy. Most participating organizations disclosed that communication efforts were hampered by constant changes in budget decisions made by the state and by the board of supervisors and the county administrator's office. In addition, county political dynamics often inhibited open communication with the community and with organizational staff. In one instance, an HSO leader was explicitly told not to share critical information with staff or the public until after an important election. When deciding what and where to cut, careful consideration of future repercussions was hindered by the

**TABLE 3**  
**Budget Balancing Strategies**

Theme	Number of organizations
<b>Structural solutions:</b>	
Eliminate programs	11
Reduce infrastructure	10
Reformulate programs	10
<b>Partnership solutions:</b>	
Create new internal partnerships	11
Reduce contracts	8
Expand contracts/outsource	8
Reduce duplicate services	7
<b>Financial solutions:</b>	
Increase fiscal stewardship	10
Maximize drawdowns	8
Increase revenue	8
Utilize ARRA funds	5
<b>Staffing solutions:</b>	
Eliminate vacant positions	10
Shift staff between programs	8
Lay off staff	7
Freeze hiring	5
Use volunteers	3
Increase accountability	2
<b>Workload solutions:</b>	
Prioritize workload	7
Hire temporary staff	6
Expand use of overtime	2

uncertainty of legislated funding mechanisms and changing political priorities, exacerbated by unsupportive boards of supervisors or CAO offices. HSOs with less structural flexibility and in more-contentious environments appeared to be hampered in efforts to shore up staff morale by political agendas, civil service union regulations, and workloads required by legislative mandates.

Many other themes in this study echo key findings from the 1980s retrenchment research highlighted in *Figure 1*. Public-sector-human-service organizations still focus heavily on the social-services mission and honoring commitments to public employees. However, modern HSO leaders are able to access additional technological resources

unavailable to organizations during the 1970s and 80s. In the Great Recession, these technologies helped create efficiencies, aided in decision making and managing customer and staff communications, but also came with unanticipated complications and required more organizational resources than expected. An important study finding, rarely noted in previous research or theoretical frameworks, is the impact of complex social-service–funding mechanisms on staff participation in organizational decision making. Direct-service staff, midlevel staff, and members of boards of supervisors were often unfamiliar with the intricacies of social-service financing, creating challenges for human-service administrators who sought to include employees in decision making and to work collaboratively with elected officials.

### *Structural and environmental contexts*

The apparent impact of public environmental context on HSO decision making lends further support for Pandey's (2010) theory, which argues that strategies for reducing budgets are distinctively affected by organizational structures and processes unique to public organizations. The level of support for human services from the county board of supervisors or CAO, the nature of employee union activity, and the size and structure of the HSO may have a significant impact on the extent to which leaders can access strategies that advantageously position the organization for regrowth or expansion. Supportive boards and CAOs increased the ability of leaders to develop innovative revenue-generating solutions, to create new internal and external partnerships that expanded services with little or no increase in costs, and to engage in collaborative planning with their own staff and other organizations. The hands-off relationships that these boards developed over time with their HSO leadership, which implicitly communicated respect and trust, may provide a model of leadership that HSO managers channel to empower their own staff to find new ways to generate revenue or reduce program costs. Further, empowering boards and collaborative unions may have allowed these HSO leaders to innovate with their staff, plan ahead more carefully, and create new partnerships by minimizing approval processes and reducing barriers to change.

More county funding, often associated with more supportive boards of supervisors, also provided a resource cushion that enabled more-extensive planning processes, including taking the time to create formal guidelines for budget reductions and engage and educate staff on budget matters so they could participate in decision making. One respondent pointed out that the effort to fully engage staff in the cutback process was time consuming and laborious:

*"There was a lot of work and a lot of effort that went behind the communication in regards [sic] to what was happening."* This particular agency, which appears to have put forth the most effort into engaging staff, is also an organization that entered the recession with a healthy reserve fund—which was used to supplement the agency budget in the first years of cutbacks.

It is also interesting that agencies with contentious labor unions more frequently reported feeling that they had not been as fiscally wise as they could have been. Examples include regret over leaving federal money on the table or a sense that leadership was *"borrowing from Peter to pay Paul."* Organizations with higher levels of union conflict struggled more with implementing new technologies, executing strategies aimed at fiscal stewardship, and outsourcing existing services. A few respondents stated that their highly involved unions tended to slow down change processes by asking to meet and confer over each small adjustment to their roles or processes. This dynamic may have influenced the decisions to avoid further outsourcing of additional services and delay implementation of new technologies, as there may simply not have been time for the intensive process of seeking approval for such organizational changes from union representatives. As a result, these organizations may have had to look elsewhere for second-best solutions.

Agency size and structure also affected the amount of flexibility an organization had with respect to redesigning programs and staffing structures, engaging staff and communicating change processes. Not only did smaller organizations seem to have an easier time managing staff communication and engagement in the budget-reduction process, but it was also easier for them to implement programmatic and staffing changes using "ramp-up" time that was shorter and less complicated. Smaller, integrated HSOs were also more agile and programmatically diverse and could, thus, buffer the effects of cutbacks more easily. Senior staff in all three integrated HSOs also felt well supported by their board of supervisors, indicating that such solutions were also more easily achieved by agencies allowed autonomy by their board of supervisors.

### *Further research*

The cutback-management experiences of these 11 HSOs suggest new variables to incorporate into existing cutback-management–theoretical frameworks, which may expand the applicability of these models and deepen the knowledge derived from them. These contextual factors can also contribute to beginning theories regarding public-organizational-cutback strategies for optimal organizational



regrowth. To further discern optimal and predictable organization processes during retrenchment it is important to examine the following research questions: (a) How does the tension between the values of leaders and their ability to actually execute related actions inform decision making and impact long-range strategic approaches to budget reductions? (b) To what extent does organizational size and structure influence the actions and relationships of leaders? (c) How does the quality of the relationship between organizational leaders and their labor unions and board of supervisors or CAOs influence decision making during fiscal crises? and (d) What can managers do to mitigate the effects of these variables and enhance the weight of organizational values in their decision making and reduction process?

Respondents in all participating organizations reported concerns about technology adoption and communication strategies. Information technology was a key asset for most organizations but also a source of stress and frustration. Future research needs to identify the advantages and limitations of the use of information technologies in HSOs, the role of technology in preparing for and surviving retrenchment, and the specific ways that information technologies can enhance intraorganizational communications. Relevant organizational communication frameworks from other disciplines may shed light on the communication struggles experienced by these declining HSOs. However further research should focus particular attention on the specific external and intraorganizational communication needs characterizing the human services, where staff engage heavily in emotion-based work. Guidelines that address the appropriate content, timing, and media for communications with staff at each level of the organization would be a useful product of research in this area.

### *Practice implications*

At the time of the interviews in the spring of 2013, many organizations were beginning to expand and rebuild. One agency leader remarked, *"It feels like we are coming out of a war, and we are looking at the limbs we lost, and we now need to redesign the organization to be in a more stable position."* For some respondents, down-sized organizations became the new reality that required collective adjustment. One participant described the new normal: *"We have seen our high, but I believe that that's government everywhere."* The shift in managerial perceptions highlights the need to transform how scholars and executives view this topic. In his 2010 essay regarding cutback-management scholarship, Barry Bozeman suggests reinvigorating the subject of cutback administration by "focusing not on strategies for

mitigating decline but rather on the role of decline in organizational life cycles and its implications for devising resilient, long-term managerial strategies" (p. 561).

Further support for Bozeman's perspective emerged from leaders' reports that their organizations became stronger and more efficient due to the drastic changes made during the Great Recession. One director noted, *"I think that in many ways the creativity happened after we got leaner. It wasn't how we got leaner—but we got leaner and then we got better."* Another respondent stated, *"I feel like the Phoenix rising."* These statements suggest that, perhaps like a wildfire, the recession budget reductions served to burn off debris, providing ideal growing conditions to kick-start regeneration and allowing organizations to emerge in a new form. The stories of these HSOs underscore the accuracy of Bozeman's observations by offering a long view of organizational decline in which reductions are normative, periodic, and serve to streamline and strengthen organizations. For this reason, the experiences and strategies emerging from the Great Recession point to two types of practice implications: (1) tactics to employ when the organization is thriving in order to prepare for the next round of budget challenges and (2) tactics to employ when faced with the need to reduce budgets.

### *Tactics to prepare*

In addition to maintaining positive and collaborative relationships with key stakeholders (e.g., elected officials, the board of supervisors, other county departments, labor unions, and partner organizations in the community), it is increasingly important to educate staff at all levels (and the board of supervisors) about the nature of social-service funding mechanisms. At the same time, HSOs would benefit from installing capacity-building technologies and developing a robust volunteer base in their community to help maintain service standards, especially when fiscal resources are less constrained. Finally, the ongoing challenge to create and find innovative approaches to budget and service efficiencies needs to become a normative management practice. As one respondent said, *"I once had someone tell me that there is such a thing as having too much money because . . . it makes you sort of lazy in the sense that you don't have to look for other ways of doing things."*

### *Tactics for budget reduction*

The impact of the Great Recession on these HSOs points to the benefits of continuing to advance an organization's strategic plan and taking the time to think through potential repercussions when faced with a financial crisis. As one

director noted, “We started that [strategic planning] when the downturn was at its height, because I always think that’s a good time to plan. Because you’re not going to stay in the mess forever, but you need to be ready for when things are better.” Maintaining a focus on collaborative strategic planning will help organizations to identify and direct limited resources to organizational priorities and to position the organization for expansion when economic challenges lessen. As the same respondent pointed out, “A lot of what’s in that strategic plan didn’t cost money.” Strategic plans built in collaboration with partner organizations and other community stakeholders are a robust way of maintaining engagement with these stakeholders and enhancing opportunities to expand key partnerships in order to preserve the community safety net.

This study also highlights the need for specific tactics related to staffing changes during a fiscal crisis. Seeking to save money by incenting the early retirements of senior staff may, in the long run, cost more money when experience and expertise are replaced by those with fewer capabilities. When impossible to avoid, organizations should take action to mitigate negative repercussions of bumping by matching staff with appropriate open positions. Further, organizations should minimize reductions to organizational infrastructure, because these positions can be critical to support decision making and are difficult to restore once eliminated. HSOs that avoid these practices during difficult times, and capitalize on economic stability to continuously prepare for leaner times, will thrive, not just survive, in the face of environmental adversity.

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# Expanding the Financial Literacy of Program Managers in Public Human Service Organizations

JOSUÉ MELÉNDEZ RODRÍGUEZ AND MICHAEL J. AUSTIN

## Introduction

The effects of the Great Recession of 2008 to 2013 on public human service organizations in the Bay Area were substantial (Graaf, Hengeveld-Bidmon, Carnochan, Radu, Austin, 2014). Child welfare services, domestic violence programs, programs helping the elderly and disabled, welfare to work services, and other social service programs were negatively impacted by the Great Recession (Graaf et al., 2014). The 11 county social service agencies included in the Graff et al. (2014) study reacted to this in different ways. For example, some reduced the actual number of staff members, others temporarily furloughed public employees, and still others reduced the number of hours worked by each staff member in order to keep all or most employees. Some counties increased partnerships with communities and developed innovative ways to continue providing services at reduced costs, while others eliminated services and programs; many counties engaged in some combination of efforts to maintain or cut programming and staff that they believed best fit the unique needs of their diverse counties (Graaf et al., 2014).

These decisions were made with varying degrees of transparency and program managers participation; some counties engaged with their staff in transparent practices, while others expressed some regret about not sufficiently engaging staff in the decision-making process (Graaf et al., 2014). Due to the nature of their work, their routine interactions with clients, program managers typically have a greater understanding of community needs than do finance managers, making their involvement in the decision-making process helpful in ensuring that changes to programs and services are made in ways that maximize services the community needs (D. Kaplan, G. Hermann, T. Blue, personal communication, August 21, 2015; R. Manchia, personal communication, April 27, 2015). Among other findings, Graaf et al. (2014) identified the need for program staff, specifically program managers, to learn more about the

financial management processes operating in their agencies and programs in order to expand their financial literacy and substantially contribute to those decision-making processes.

Since each county agency and programs within each agency operate with different policies and procedures, this exploratory analysis focuses on identifying concepts that are shared across counties. After interviews with CFOs from human service agencies in the Bay Area, the shared concepts were grouped within two main themes: cost allocations and funding sources. These are basic concepts that will be elaborated in this essay with the intention of identifying a “broad introductory framework (that is) empowering (and provides) clear beginnings” in order to facilitate discussions between program managers and finance managers that can result in increased financial literacy for an increased ability to engage in financial decision-making (J. Wyman, personal communication, August 25, 2015).

## Literature Review

The Great Recession took a toll on human services, increasing need and reducing funding (County Welfare Directors Association of California & California State Association of Counties, 2009; Graaf et al., 2014; Johnson, Oliff, & Williams, 2011a, 2011b, 2012). The recession created difficult-to-manage realities for human service agencies, the impact of which will be felt for years to come (Graaf et al.; Johnson, Oliff, & Williams, 2011b; Johnson, Oliff, & Williams, 2012). This reality has been explored in several fairly recent studies, but specifics about engaging program managers in the process of managing finances in order to maximize services during difficult financial times has not received much attention.

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**FIGURE 1**  
**Content Priorities for Financial Literacy Training**

Rank	Topic	Main Points/Questions
1	Drawdown and Match	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>What are “drawdown” and “match”?</li> <li>What services drawdown higher percentages of state and/or federal monies? What services require lower matches?</li> <li>Which staff positions generate revenue?</li> </ul>
2	County Dollar	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Where does the county dollar come from?</li> <li>What affects the amount of the county dollar?</li> <li>How does it operate in relation to federal and state dollars?</li> <li>What are the political implications of managing county funds?</li> </ul>
3	Financial Modeling and Time Studies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>What is financial modeling?</li> <li>What role do time studies play in creating and managing budgets?</li> <li>How are costs allocated, and what are the implications of allocations?</li> </ul>
4	Allocations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>What are allocations, and how are they made?</li> <li>How are allocations used in claims?</li> <li>What is the impact of overspending and underspending?</li> <li>Which allocations are distributed during the fiscal year and how?</li> <li>What is closeout, and how does that process work?</li> <li>How does this all affect the county’s planning?</li> </ul>
5	Budgeting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>How do organizations build budgets, and project costs and savings?</li> <li>How do they hold themselves accountable?</li> </ul>
6	Realignment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>What is realignment?</li> <li>What programs do 1991 and 2011 realignments affect?</li> <li>How much of a county’s budget is represented by realignment?</li> <li>What affects the amount of realignment funds a county will receive each year, and how does this relate to the need for services?</li> </ul>

Discussions about the survival of human service organizations during times of financial difficulties can be found in the literature over the past three decades. Hodges (1982) noted the need for financial coordination among various organizational departments that may sometimes work against each other. Others have discussed planning for and avoiding financial difficulties by providing financial training for social workers (Hackshaw & Robertshaw, 1988) and creating and implementing strategic plans that account for financial complexities (Dvetanovic, 1990). Mordock (1989) discussed ways in which human service organization can manage financial difficulties, describing structural, political and other strategies that can be employed to better meet financial obligations. Ezel (2001) focused on

helping administrators in human service organizations better understand and manage finances, with more specific discussions about financial management practices.

Other related literature emphasizes leadership and communications skills needed by administrators to effectively engage direct service providers (Sims-Vanzant, 2007; Busch, 2006). While there is an extensive literature on financial management in nonprofit organizations (Jean-Francois, E., 2014; RAND Health & RAND Education, 2012), there is far less attention to financial management in public sector human service organizations and even less focused on engaging program managers in that process. A notable exception, Schmidt & Austin (2004), discuss making efficient use of multiple funding sources in order to

**FIGURE 2**  
**Table of Contents for Existing Training**

Section	Title
1	Federal Funding
2	State Budget
3	Realignment
4	Assistance Claims
5	Time Studies
6	County Expense Claims
7	Advance Planning Document
8	Budgeting

(Haynes, 2014)

maximize client services at a county human service agency. More recent literature on financial literacy focuses on the process of helping clients/consumers develop personal budgeting skills, with far less attention to the financial management of public human service programs (Kindle, 2013).

## Methods

Based on a recent study of the impact of the Great Recession on county human service organizations (Graaf et al., 2014), a follow-up exploratory analysis was designed to document the financial decision-making processes in four counties (a subset of the 11 counties) in order to identify key concepts or practices for use in a regional training tool for program managers at public human service organizations. The data were gathered primarily through interviews with Chief Financial Officers. The topics of these interviews are noted in their priority rankings and related questions in *Figure 1*.

A current and comprehensive financial management training manual used in public human service programs for finance managers was also reviewed (Haynes, 2014). The major content areas covered in the existing cross-county training manual are noted in *Figure 2*. Since there appear to be no other comprehensive training materials related to local financial management issues in public human service organizations, it became clear that a basic primer for current staff and future trainees would be useful.

## Findings

Based on this data gathering process, two major themes emerged: cost allocation methodologies and multiple funding sources. The theme of cost allocation methodologies

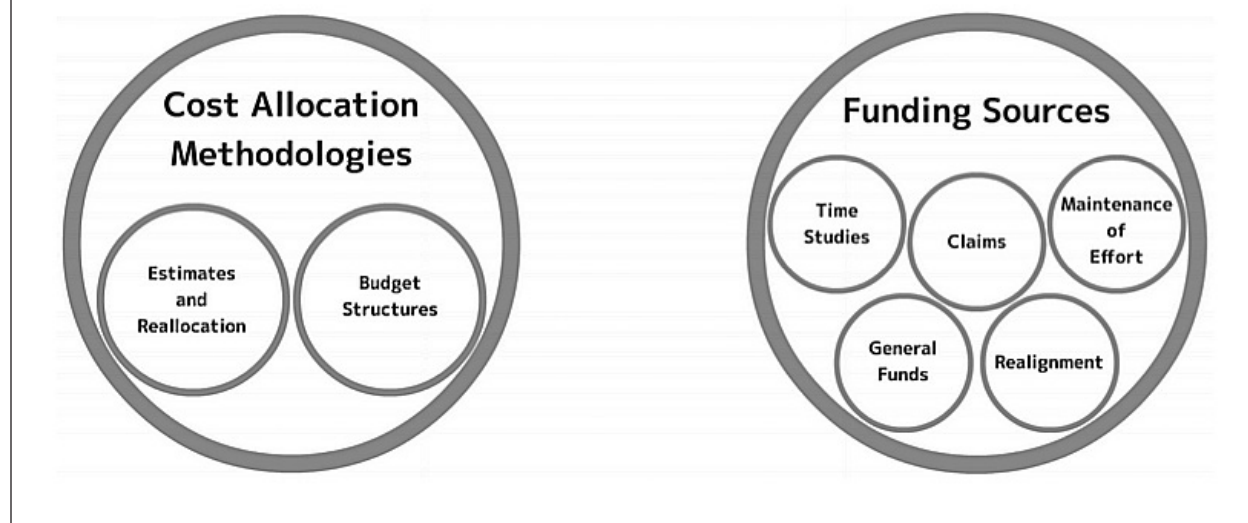
includes the topics of funding estimates and reallocation as well as budget structures. The theme of multiple funding sources includes the topics of time studies, claims, maintenance of effort, general funds, and realignment. The components of these two themes are highlighted in *Figure 3*.

Understanding these themes at a basic level can help program managers in all counties build on their capacity to anticipate program expansion and contraction, as well as prepare them to better engage in financial decision-making. Finance managers can then work with program managers to develop county- and program-specific financial literacy through formal and informal training processes (J. Wyman, personal communication, August 25, 2015). These can take the form of one-on-one trainings when program managers are first hired (J. Huang, personal communication, August 21, 2015) and explanations of processes as they occur (G. Hermann, personal communication, August 21, 2015). This can be an empowering experience, allowing finance managers to move away from being viewed as “controllers” of finances who place restrictions on what services program managers can offer and instead filling the role of “enablers” who works with program managers to facilitate the delivery of services needed by their specific communities (G. Hermann, personal communication, August 21, 2015). Program managers can break free of the constraints they may feel when considering how to run programs within the financial restrictions placed on them, instead feeling empowered to think unconventionally and explore new possibilities for service delivery (D. Kaplan, personal communication, August 21, 2015; R. Manchia, personal communication, April 27, 2015). They can then dialogue with finance managers to figure out how to make their ideas work, moving beyond an interaction that simply communicates an approval or denial from the finance managers to the program managers, but taking the time to make sure both parties understand the need for services and funding implications (D. Kaplan, G. Hermann, & T. Blue, personal communication, August 21, 2015; R. Manchia, personal communication, April 27, 2015).

## COST ALLOCATION METHODOLOGIES

Cost allocation is a planning process for distributing the revenues received by a human service agency (often involving millions of dollars) for the annual delivery of services. The planning of an annual budget involves the extensive estimation of future revenues since the array of needed services that are eligible for reimbursement or matching funds can only be estimated. The estimates are also affected by changes in local, state or federal policies as well as administrative guidelines (e.g. All County Letters from the state) on

**FIGURE 3**  
**Financial Literacy Concepts Needed to Anticipate Program Expansion and Contraction**



how funds can be used. In essence, considerable experience and expertise are needed to project the expenditure of hundreds of millions of dollars over the course of a year. Since most of the agency's expenditures are only reimbursed after they have been expended, counties do not know how much money will be received until they know how much money they have spent (e.g. imagine trying to plan your household budget without knowing how much money you will receive in a given year, which purchases will be reimbursed or not, and how the "rules" might change regarding how you can receive and spend money). This complex process can be best understood by focusing on: a) estimates and reallocation and b) budget structures.

**Estimates and reallocation.** The projections of revenues and expenses often represent "educated" estimates based on the previous year in addition to any new information related to new regulations or changes in community needs as well as projected new costs associated with new facilities and/or programs. Counties often use budget projection models to simulate future expenditures and revenues. Given the need for continuous revisions, this is an ongoing process due to changing conditions. For example, new programs developed after budget estimates have already been made may require the reallocation of funds in order to support startup costs of a new program. A similar reallocation process may be needed when new funding restrictions are introduced (e.g. changes in federal or state regulations) that were not known when the budgets were developed.

**Budget structures.** All counties, and even different departments/programs within counties, develop budgets in slightly different ways. These differences affect the manner in which financial decisions impact not only a program's budget but also the effectiveness of its services. For example, some counties fund office assistants within specific service programs while other counties fund them through their overall general administration budget. As a result, reallocating work hours of office assistants may impact the budget of programs in some counties but not in others. It is important for program managers and finance managers to be in continuous communications in order to more fully understand the implications of financial decisions related to the management of human resources as well as the management of direct service funds and other areas of the organization.

#### **DIVERSE FUNDING SOURCES**

Funding sources are often directly impacted by the rules and regulations located in federal, state, and county social and administrative policies. The largest sources of state and federal funding involve the use of times studies and claiming processes needed to justify cost reimbursements. Other significant sources of funding include county general funds, state realignment funds, and maintenance of effort funding.

**Times studies.** Time studies are used to document the time allocated by staff to different work activities and are used to document the reimbursement claims for costs incurred in the delivery of services. Since this process is managed differently in each county, program managers need to consult

### EXAMPLE 1 Time Studies in Napa County Department of Health and Human Services

The agency's use of funds is based on the use of time. For example, general case management codes will drawdown less money than health-related case management codes, so whenever possible, it makes fiscal sense to use health codes to account for one's time. This is only possible in some situations, because the use of certain codes requires staff to possess certain credentials (e.g., a person with a bachelor's degree in nursing may be eligible to use the health code while someone with a bachelor's degree in social work may not). Whether it is appropriate to use certain codes also depends on the specific services provided to the client, requiring fiscal managers to engage with program managers to truly understand how time is being spent.

(C. Haynes, personal communication, March 17, 2015)

with their finance managers to increase their understanding of how the time studies need to be completed in order to maximize the generation of revenues. For example, there are different claim codes for the same activity that can be used by staff with different credentials in order to claim additional funds as noted in *Example 1*.

**Claims processes.** While cost allocation processes help develop budget plans to guide future spending and time studies establish guidelines for allocating the funding, the claims process represents specific justifications for securing the revenues. As a result of the claims process, the county is able to receive the actual funds needed to cover most or all of the cost associated with the delivery of services. Some services have higher claims potentials than others, potentially generating 50%, 75%, or even 100% funding.

Program managers who understand how different services generate different levels of funding are more equipped to participate in financial decision-making processes related to the expansion or contraction of services. It is also important to know that some claim codes may allow the county to access more state and federal money. Since there are numerous factors to take into account when determining which codes can be used, program managers need to be in continuous communications with their finance managers when seeking to maximize the claims process for expanding or reducing services as noted in *Example 2*.

### EXAMPLE 2 Claims Process in San Mateo County Human Services Agency

To maximize the amount of money a county can receive through the claims process, it is important to understand the relationship between (a) county general funds and (b) state and federal funds. For some programs, state and/or federal matching funds are capped. Because of this, it makes fiscal sense to stop spending county general funds on those programs once the county receives the maximum allowed state and/or federal funds. For other programs, the state and/or federal match is uncapped. It makes fiscal sense to fund those uncapped programs as much as possible in order to collect as much state and/or federal money as possible. In order to ensure the agency provides services the community needs in a way that allows the agency to maximize the state and federal funds it can receive, it is necessary for fiscal and program managers to work together when making claims-related decisions.

(R. Manchia, personal communication, April 27, 2015)

**General funds.** The term "county general funds" refers to money that comes directly from the county budget that is supported primarily by local taxes. These funds are not usually tied to a specific program/service and may allow for more discretionary use. County funds are often used to: (1) fund programs that are not eligible for state or federal funding and (2) provide the required "matching" funds needed to "draw down" state and/or federal funding. The amount of general funds available in each county varies based on numerous factors (e.g. size of the county, local economy and tax base, the role of publicly-elected officials, and the role of advocacy groups and their impact on those officials) as illustrated in *Example 3*.

**Maintenance of effort funds.** Maintenance of Effort (MOE) can be thought of as matching or deductible funds for programs. The state can spend uncapped funds for services that are covered by an MOE. For example, CalWorks and In-Home Support Services funding are based on the county's contribution of an initial amount that varies between various programs/services and between counties. The county can use general funds and realignment funds, discussed below, to cover the "deductible" for those services. Counties seek to maximize these MOE-related funds because the cost to the county does not change regardless of how many clients are served. As a result, there is generally less budgetary



**EXAMPLE 3**  
**General Funds in San Francisco City & County**  
**Department of Human Services**

General funds are often the focus of county-level decision-making. During a recession, as available general funds are reduced, administrators must determine which programs and services should be eliminated, continued, or expanded. Understanding the way general funds leverage state and federal funds is crucial. Programs that rely primarily on state and federal funds may impact the county budget only minimally. For example, in the CalFresh program, administrative expenses are covered 15% with general funds and 85% with state and federal funds, and CalFresh benefits provided to clients have no general fund share. This means a relatively small general fund investment in CalFresh leverages a relatively large benefit. Other categories of cost may have a significantly higher share of general funds or, in some cases, be 100% paid for with general funds. When building a reduction plan for general funds, decision makers have to be aware of the amount of leveraged state and federal money, and ultimately, the amount of client benefit they will be giving up in order to remain financially viable.

*(D. Kaplan, personal communication, March 5, 2015)*

**EXAMPLE 5**  
**Realignment Funds in Sonoma County**  
**Human Services**

In this agency, realignment funds account for over 33 percent of the budget, totaling approximately \$70,000,000. Realignment funds, like county general funds, allow a great deal of flexibility. As such, programs that receive more realignment funds than others may have greater flexibility when it comes to defining services. For those programs, times studies and claims may not be as important, so it is necessary for the staff members who manage those programs to be well-versed with the functioning of realignment funds. Because of the differences in agency structures across counties, the impact of realignment funds may vary. However, there are some programs that are the same regardless of county, such as CalFresh and MediCal.

*(C. Vanden Heuvel, personal communication, April 28, 2015)*

**EXAMPLE 4**  
**Maintenance of Effort Funds in Monterey County**  
**Social Services Department**

With regard to the CalWorks and In-Home Support Services (IHSS) programs, the county is responsible for a set amount of money, which can be thought of as a deductible, for both programs. CalWorks, for example, required a county payment of \$9,000,000 while IHSS required a county payment of \$1,800,000. Even if the county were to spend \$40,000,000 on CalWorks and \$10,000,000 on IHSS, their costs remain the same. The state then covers all other costs with no cap. It makes sense for the county to maximize their use of these programs, because their costs remain the same regardless of the amount of services provided or number of clients served.

*(W. Russell, personal communication, April 30, 2015)*

concern with services covered by MOEs in contrast to funding related to services covered by claims as noted in *Example 4*.

**Realignment funds.** The term “realignment funds” refers to the decisions by the State of California in 1991 and 2011 to transfer state tax-generated funds to the counties to address local priorities [insert refs]. The amount of state funding available for each county varies according to its population size and local tax base. Since realignment funds come from tax dollars, the state’s economic climate significantly impacts the amount of money available (the better the economy, the more taxes being collected, the more realignment funds available). This has an inverse relationship with the need for social services, as social services are in higher demand when the economy is doing poorly. Since the use of realignment funds vary across counties in terms of how service programs are affected, it becomes increasingly important for program managers to consult with finance managers to increase their understanding of the role of these funds throughout the organization as illustrated in *Example 5*.

### Practice Implications

Expanding financial literacy is necessary if program managers and finance managers are going to work together to maximize client services while remaining financially viable. Ensuring program managers understand the concepts noted in this essay is only a first step toward true financial literacy, with additional initial and on-going county- and program-specific trainings being a necessary component of these



**FIGURE 4**  
**Questions for Consideration of Practice Implications**

Programs and Services	Administration and Organization
What does developing this financial decision-making capacity have to do with meeting changing community needs?	How centralized or decentralized is financial decision-making in your specific county, and what are the implications of this structure?
How can one engage in effective communication across disciplines?	What is the role of the agency director in promoting financial literature?
How significant are county funds in all decisions related to programs and services?	How well prepared is your county for unanticipated declines in realignment funds?

efforts. Each county's financial managers can determine the best method for expanding on a foundational cross-county training based on the findings of this study as discussed below. Each county's financial and program managers must also learn how to work with each other to meet common goals, focusing on the issue of organizational communication, also discussed below.

When considering practice implications, there are a number of relevant questions that should be given consideration. These may not be addressed in this study, but have been noted as significant factors when trying to move toward a more collaborative relationship between the different staff groups in county human service agencies. These questions are presented in *Figure 4*, categorized by two main themes: Programs and Services, and Administration and Organization.

#### STAFF DEVELOPMENT

A cross-county training program based on the findings in this exploratory analysis could focus on basic agency finance topics that include cost allocation methodologies and diverse funding sources. It is important for this training to emphasize the need to develop county-specific knowledge about each topic covered, because there are many differences in how finances are managed between counties.

A second step in developing financial literacy could include focusing on topics that are the same for all programs in the county and reviewing "big picture" concepts specific to the county. Finance managers from each county share more detailed information in a variety of formats, including county-specific training similar to the primer described above. The second step could also include the general knowledge needed to understand county-wide decisions related to program expansion and contraction. By making county

finance managers available to program managers to discuss any questions, it is also possible to keep program managers updated on ever-changing human service financing.

These steps provide finance managers with different ways of educating program managers by using a training manual, group presentations, and one-on-one or small group meetings to discuss program specifics.

#### ORGANIZATIONAL COMMUNICATION

With regard to organizational communications, a full understanding of the implications of program expansion and contraction requires both finance and program knowledge. Decisions to reduce and add services need to be aligned with budgeting processes and calls for the capacities to speak "finance language" and "program language". This "bilingual" capacity is need for program managers to understand how the agency maintains financial viability in order to run programs and finance managers to understand the importance of responding to changing community needs. Additionally, any prejudicial perceptions that finance and program staff may have about each other need to be addressed in order to move toward a more collaborative relationship. In essence, the staff charged with managing finances and the staff charged with managing programs need to engage in ongoing constructive dialogue in order to promote effective organizational communications.

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# Change Communication in Public Sector Cutback Management\*

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### ABSTRACT

Budget cuts in public sector organizations create additional strain for employees, often contributing to uncertainty, rumors, and low morale. This study examines the dynamics of communicating about organizational changes in public human service organizations during the cutbacks of the Great Recession from 2008 to 2013. Drawing from in-depth interviews of 45 senior managers in eleven San Francisco Bay Area county public human service agencies, the findings focus on perceived employee responses to change, specific change communication strategies utilized, and how these were shaped by internal and external factors. The study concludes with implications for future practice and research during significant budget reductions in public human service organizations.

**KEYWORDS:** Cutback management; Retrenchment; Human service organization; Public sector; Organizational communication

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### Introduction

The 2008 collapse of Lehman Brothers, one of the largest investment banks in the world, marked the beginning of the Great Recession in the United States in which millions lost their homes to foreclosure and unemployment increased to over 9% nationwide (Center of Budget and Policy Priorities 2014). These economic conditions significantly increased the need for social services as individuals and families turned to state and county agencies to apply

for unemployment benefits, Medicaid, food stamps and other financial assistance. As the public need for services expanded during the Great Recession, the budgets for public human services were contracting within the context of declining state and county tax revenues (Ruffing and Friedman 2013).

While making swift and critical decisions about how to reduce the agency budget, senior managers in public human service organizations (HSOs) were also managing the stress, fears and anxieties of their overworked staff members. The present study examines the specific dynamics of organizational communication in HSOs during the Great Recession. Drawing from in-depth interviews with over 45 senior managers across eleven Bay Area HSOs, this analysis focuses on identifying employee responses to change, the messages conveyed to staff, how they were delivered, the factors that shaped this process, and extent to which managers felt their efforts were more or less effective. After a review of relevant literature and the methods used in the study, findings are presented and the analysis concludes with implications for future research as well as recommendations for managing organizational change communication during cutbacks in public HSOs.

### Background

#### CUTBACK MANAGEMENT IN PUBLIC ORGANIZATIONS

Budget reductions in public organizations put additional strain on employees (Ingraham and Barrilleaux 1983). As cutbacks lead to uncertainty, increased workloads, and diminished benefits, the staff's organizational commitment and trust in management decreases and physical and

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\*Published in:  
PUBLIC ORGANIZATION REVIEW  
<https://doi.org/10.1007/s11115-018-0408-8>  
# Springer Science+Business Media, LLC, part of Springer Nature 2018

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emotional stress increases (Brockner 1990; Holzer 1986; Levine 1984; Lodge and Hood 2012). These cutbacks can also jeopardize the stability of an organization, as employees may resort to behaviors such as withdrawal, hostility or aggression as a means of reducing anxiety, and talented employees may leave the organization to reduce job insecurity and stress (Behn 1980; Brockner 1990; Greenhalgh and McKersie 1980; Levine 1984; Brockner 1990; Levine 1984). Such losses disrupt workflows and networks critical to organizational learning and development (Fisher and White 2000; Shah 2000).

Allowing departments and line staff to participate in decisions about reallocating reduced funds according to their perceived needs and program expertise is one way to ease staff resistance to cuts (Dunsire et al. 1989). The process can help to demystify the budget reduction decision process, provide more clarity about the organization's future, and diffuse rumors and tensions flowing through informal communication networks (Ingraham and Barrilleaux 1983; Levine 1984). However, other scholars note that involving staff members in cutback decisions can lead to competitive, territorial or protective behaviors designed to preserve their programs, staff and resources (Holzer 1986; Levine 1979, 1984).

Effective organizational communications can also play a key role in maintaining staff morale and facilitate the management of change (Aggerholm and Thomsen 2016; Allen et al. 2007; Hameed et al. 2017; O'Brien 2002; Ryan et al. 2008). Though previous research on public sector cutback management focuses on various aspects of shared decision-making, it pays little attention to specific strategies for communicating change during times of budget retrenchment. Given that organizational change is accomplished primarily through communication (Witherspoon and Wohlert, 1996), it is important to understand the explicit methods used to communicate needed changes, evaluate the usefulness of these strategies, and how these methods are impacted by the high degree of community visibility of public organizations (Bozeman and Bretschneider 1994).

#### **A FRAMEWORK FOR UNDERSTANDING CHANGE COMMUNICATION IN PUBLIC RETRENCHMENT**

Public sector change management scholars examine the relationship between specific communication approaches and employee psychological distress and uncertainty, or their acceptance of proposed changes (Allen et al. 2007; Frahm and Brown 2007; Hameed et al. 2017; Ryan et al. 2008). Others focus on the impacts of organizational leadership and structure upon communication and employee readiness

for change (Battilana et al. 2010; van der Voet 2014; van der Voet et al. 2016; Zorn et al. 2000). Since government-funded agencies often have less autonomy (than the privacy associated with nonprofits) to decide what and when important information is shared with staff and the local community (Pandey 2010), leaders of public organization use unique methods to manage the constraints of "publicness" in communicating and managing change (Aggerholm and Thomsen 2016; Leitch and Davenport 2003; Liu and Horsley 2007; van der Voet 2014; van der Voet et al. 2016; Waterhouse and Lewis 2004).

In order to develop a framework for assessing communication strategies in public cutback management, it is important to identify the different layers of influence involved in managing communication in public organizational change processes. As illustrated in *Figure 1*, the inner circle represents the employee response to change, while the next circle signifies the communication strategies and approaches used to manage change. The middle circle represents the internal organizational factors that may shape how messages are received or delivered, surrounded by a circle illustrating the external organizational environment that constrains or facilitates communication practices throughout the budget reduction process. The outer circle represents the greater national context of the Great Recession which triggered the need for rapid retrenchment.

**Employees** Employee responses to communication of proposed plans and processes is critical to successful implementation of changes (Bartunek et al. 2006; Herold et al. 2007; Kuipers et al. 2014). Studies have conceptualized employee response as a willingness or commitment to change (van der Voet 2014; van der Voet et al. 2016) or a readiness for change (Hameed et al. 2017). Both of these signal an employee's positive regard for proposed changes and an intention to engage in change efforts. Among many employees, trepidation in the face of change stems from uncertainty related to their inability to accurately predict the impact and results of the change process (Allen et al. 2007).

When individuals lack critical organizational knowledge (such as the motivation for change), it is difficult for them to envision the future direction and sustainability of the organization or the future structure and functions of various departments and hierarchies (Bordia et al. 2004a). It is not surprising, then, that staff may worry about the future security of their employment with the organization. For staff members, the inability to foresee or control their circumstances can lead to negative psychological consequences (Bordia et al. 2004b), such as anxiety (DiFonzo

**FIGURE 1**  
**Public Organization Change Communications Framework**



and Bordia 2002), strain (Spector 2002), and lower performance (Greenberger et al. 1989).

**Communication Strategies** The psychological discomfort engendered in organizational change for employees due to lack of certainty—which can contribute to employee ambivalence or resistance to change—can be reduced by the use of several communication strategies. For example, Armenakis et al. (2000) propose the following five-part model for clear explanations accompanying messaging about change: 1) noting the gap between the current state of the organization and the desired future state, 2) specifying the changes needed to close the gap and how this is accomplished, 3) reflecting the confidence of the organizational leadership in the capacities of the employees to make needed changes, 4) describing the level of internal and external organizational support needed to implement the proposed changes, and 5) describing how the proposed changes will benefit the organization, those it serves, and the individual employees.

This top down change communication model is built for instrumental approaches to change management, where

change is planned and employees are the targets of change. This communication strategy involves senior leadership identifying directions for change, planning and directing the implementation of that change, and utilizing middle management as conduits for information and coordinators of change at the employee level (Ryan et al. 2008). In this context, the perceived quality of the information being shared (timely, credible), the source of the information (direct supervisor), and the level of trust employees have in the sources of information is critical to employee acceptance of change (Allen et al. 2007; Bordia et al. 2004a; van der Voet et al. 2016). However, this top-down approach to managing the communications about change can be problematic because organizational change is not a linear and uniform process (McNulty and Ferlie 2002) and implementation timing varies across middle managers (Kanter et al. 2003) which contributes to opportunities for message distortion (Ryan et al. 2008).

An alternative approach to managing and communicating change involves supervisors and their front-line staff collaboratively determining the course of change through



the use of the Participation in Decision Making (PDM) process (Bordia et al. 2004a; Kuipers et al. 2014). In this approach, employee participation may be voluntary or mandatory, formal or informal, and may take place through direct involvement or committee representation, and staff may contribute to a wide range of decision topics including working conditions, work and task design, or organizational strategy (Black and Gregersen 1997). PDM can increase staff acceptance of change by creating opportunities for employees to make significant contributions to the process (Hameed et al. 2017; O'Brien 2002), reducing uncertainty and related anxiety (Allen et al. 2007; Bordia et al. 2004a) and increasing trust in leadership (Robinson 1996).

**Organizational Environment** Change management in public organizations has also been examined in the context of organizational factors such as structure and leadership styles (Battilana et al. 2010; van der Voet 2014; van der Voet et al. 2016). For example, public organizations that are highly bureaucratic—rigid hierarchies of decision making, highly formalized processes and procedures—are more likely to engage in planned change processes than emergent processes (ongoing and evolutionary change) (Burnes 1996; Coram and Burnes 2001). In public organizations, higher levels of formalization and centralization are also negatively associated with transformational leadership approaches (van der Voet et al. 2016). The transformational qualities of public leaders have been positively linked with employee commitment to change, via engaged communication and employee participation in decision-making (van der Voet et al. 2016). Transformational leadership actively encourages staff acceptance of change “by articulating a vision, fostering the acceptance of group goals, and providing individualized support, effective leaders change the basic values, beliefs, and attitudes of followers so that they are willing to perform beyond the minimum levels specified by the organization” (Podsakoff et al. 1996, p. 260). In less bureaucratic organizations, the success of emergent change processes are strongly related to the transformational abilities of leadership (van der Voet 2014).

**External environment** Leaders in public organizations operate in complex and highly visible environments (Bozeman and Pandey 2004; Pandey 2010) and fluctuations in the economic, regulatory, technological, or consumer aspects of these environments often lead to the need for organizational changes (Kuipers et al. 2014). Since these organizations are accountable in terms of public oversight, funding, and mandates, it is important to take into account factors in

the external environment when examining communication processes related to organizational change (Graaf et al. 2015; Kuipers et al. 2014; Pandey 2010). Politics, legal constraints, intense media scrutiny, and shared authority with federal or state entities create communication dilemmas that are different from those in the for-profit sector (Liu and Horsley 2007). To manage the tension resulting from these competing concerns, and to encourage creative contributions from community partners, Leitch and Davenport (2003) found that public organizations tend to provide strategically ambiguous information and responses when dealing with the multiple demands of their stakeholders.

### THE CURRENT STUDY

While classic organizational decline literature identifies some of the stressors that budget reductions and the accompanying changes can create for all employees (Ingraham and Barrilleaux 1983), there has been insufficient attention to: 1) the role that communication can play in managing such stress or 2) how communication within a change environment is affected by the singular constraints or needs embedded in public sector management. Only a few case studies focus specifically on communication strategies in changing organizational contexts and even fewer are related to funding reductions (Kuipers et al. 2014). The current study aims to fill this gap by examining the change communication processes of eleven public HSOs in the context of significant budget reductions. The conceptual framework illustrated in Fig. 1 is used to organize the findings from multiple informants in several public organizations related to the following:

1. Employee responses to organizational changes in public HSOs in response to the Great Recession
2. Specific communication strategies and tactics used by leadership throughout the budget cutback process, and leaders' subjective appraisal of those approaches
3. Specific organizational factors that influence how change messages were delivered and received
4. Factors in the external environments of the organization that facilitated or constrained internal change communication processes

### STUDY DESIGN AND METHODS

This qualitative study of communication strategies employed during organizational retrenchment included interviews with senior organizational managers in eleven California county human service agencies located in and around the San Francisco Bay Area. The goal of the study



was to understand 1) how agency leaders perceived employee responses to change and communication tactics, 2) specific communication strategies used to engage staff and guide them through significant organizational transformations, and 3) how organizational and environmental factors shaped these strategies.

### **SAMPLE CHARACTERISTICS**

The HSOs participating in this study serve counties varying in geographic size (47 to 3200 mile<sup>2</sup>), population size (300,000 to approximately 2 million) and population density (127 people per square mile to 17,000 people per square mile). The median household income in these counties ranged from \$60,000 to \$91,000 with poverty levels between 7.5% and over 16% (US Census Bureau State & County Quick Facts, 2014). With regard to the number of full-time staff (FTE), three HSOs in the sample were small (<800 FTE), four were mid-sized (800 to 1500 FTE), and four were large (>1500 FTE). Three of the eleven HSOs in the sample are 'super agencies' that manage health services (public and behavioral health) and public social services (e.g. public assistance and employment, child welfare, and adult/aging services). Interview participants occupied senior management positions that included executive directors, deputy directors and division or department heads who were in charge of services related to child welfare, benefits and employment, and adult and aging services.

### **SAMPLING/DATA COLLECTION**

Semi-structured interviews were used to gather data from a purposive sample of three to six senior managers in each participating agency. Each HSO executive director was interviewed and asked to identify other informants in his or her organization who could provide insight into the communication practices employed throughout the budget reduction process. A total of forty-six interviews of 60 to 75 min were conducted, and forty-four of these were recorded and transcribed (two individuals declined the recording but detailed notes were taken). Interview questions focused on how organizations approached cutback decisions, how needed changes were communicated to staff, and the messages used in the process of budget reductions. Respondents were also asked to identify the successes and lessons learned from these processes.

### **DATA ANALYSIS**

After the interviews were completed and transcribed, transcripts from the same organization were coded consecutively. The first round of coding used broad codes (e.g. 'communication challenges'), followed by a second round

applying sub-codes specific to each organization (Saldaña, 2013). First and second round themes were combined to create a single case study for each county HSO (Yin, 2003), and all eleven case studies provided the foundation for a cross-case analysis that focused exclusively on communications within each organization (Stake, 2006). Preliminary cross-case themes were identified by the primary analyst and shared with the interviewer and study participants for feedback (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2013). Feedback was incorporated into a formal coding scheme that focused on identifying organizational communication practices, messaging goals and content, factors shaping communication, and the respondents' evaluation of the effectiveness of the strategies used (Saldana, 2013). This scheme was applied through a third and fourth round of analysis in Dedoose, a cloud-based qualitative analysis software (Dedoose Version 6.1.18, [www.dedoose.com](http://www.dedoose.com)). After the final codes and sub-codes were applied, Dedoose was used again to analyze the data across cases and within each case to validate theme recurrence.

### **LIMITATIONS**

This study has a few limitations related to the sampling strategy, timing of data collection and interview design. The sample of counties is relatively small and may represent themes unique to HSOs in the San Francisco Bay Area. This poses some external validity constraints when evaluating the study findings. The purposive sampling method for selecting interviewees adds to these limitations, since most interviewees were identified by agency directors and are director-level managers who were most closely involved in budget decisions. As such, potentially opposing views and the perspectives of line staff and middle managers are not represented.

The internal validity of findings may also be affected by the limitations of respondent recall abilities since the study questions posed in 2013 required recall from as far back as 2008. Despite this limitation, the retrospective design enabled respondents to assess the relative success or failure of communication strategies and messages from a longitudinal perspective. Also, given the semi-structure of the interviews, the full range of organizational communication activities in each organization were not necessarily captured in the interviews.

### **Findings**

Respondents shared their perceptions of employee responses to the organizational and environmental changes triggered by the Great Recession, as well as the processes used by the

leadership to communicate in the midst of organizational change. In addition to describing the specific strategies utilized in communication with their staff before, during, and after the change process, participants also noted the challenges related to providing clear, timely, or useful budget reduction communications inside and outside their organizations.

### EMPLOYEE RESPONSES TO ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGES

From the perspective of senior managers, there are three major findings regarding staff responses to shrinking organizational budgets and the increased demand for services. First, employees were fearful and uncertain about their job security. *'I mean I can remember our staff was scared.'* This fear often increased when communications from managers were incomplete due to limited information from the county and state, especially when small and random pieces of information were being received from other sources. *'Hysteria starts, you know, as rumors start happening, they'll see things in the newspaper or from other county departments . . .'* Employees were also greatly stressed by significant increases in workloads due to staff reductions and the sudden growth in demand for services from those impacted by the Great Recession. *'So that itself has been a huge morale problem for the staff because they feel like no matter how hard they work, they cannot possibly dig out of this huge hole that they have been in for years now.'* This stress, combined with the uncertainty about their future, was often overwhelming. *'The stories I would hear about people who were out in their cars at lunch crying or, you know, not able to come in the next day because of what they were feeling.'* Finally, employees made it clear to management that they felt the organizational efforts to communicate effectively were not working. One leader spoke of an internal survey they conducted. *'And we heard a lot of hard messages, including you're not being transparent enough, you're not giving people enough context.'*

### SPECIFIC CHANGE COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES AND TACTICS

Public HSOs utilized a wide variety of methods—both written and verbal—for communicating the impacts of budget reductions and the resulting changes that would be required.

#### Communication Medium

Managers employed both technology-based media (e.g., email, agency intranet, even You Tube videos in one organization) and in-person communication (e.g., staff meetings,

forums). The most frequent approach involved 'top down' communication developed by senior staff and shared with other senior or mid-level managers who were, then, asked to share the message with their staff. In-person efforts were used to address staff fears or anxieties and to equip staff to manage the impacts of the budget cutbacks.

Most respondents felt that it was better to deliver a message to staff in-person, given the complexities of large-scale organizational change. Communication strategies that were not face-to-face were viewed as being less effective. In particular, 'top-down' communication often created miscommunications that had to be addressed. *'So, we often hear how our communication tool, the manager, translates to the line staff in a way that we didn't intend it to be.'* The message distortion that often emerged in top-down communication strategies created tension. *'If you want a consistent message, you've got to give it in an email where it's very clear to everybody or delivered face-to-face from the person that wants to communicate the information.'* This dilemma underscores the key role of written and in-person communication in times of significant organizational change.

A few respondents observed the vital role of front-line supervisors in communicating with direct service employees. One agency noted that they needed a better means of supplying middle managers with accurate, detailed information to share with their staff. *'Staff really rely upon those supervisors for support and information.'*

#### Message Content

The most frequently reported messages included the facts of the budget crisis, implications for the future, decision making processes and the organizational values and priorities underlying the actions and decisions made by management.

**Focus on organizational goals** In all participating HSOs in the study, the emphasis on clear, high level organizational goals kept the focus on agency mission and values, which helped to counter bad news and bolster morale. One agency used a media team to create a set of You Tube videos for their intranet to increase organizational commitment and reinforce the mission of the work. Each video profiled a different staff person in the organization *' . . . (where) the person will talk about their life and how our mission is aligned with who they are.'* Such messages were also transmitted in writing through a formal guideline document designed to describe decision making efforts within the context of organizational priorities and values. Approximately half of the participating HSOs created and disseminated such a document as a decision support and communication tool, and

most other organizations relied on verbal understandings of a shared mission.

### **Meta-messages**

Study participants reported professional and organizational values and attitudes that surrounded their communication strategies, as well as the messages they were trying to indicate to staff in non-explicit ways (meta-messages). Through verbal and non-verbal cues, leaders tried to signal organizational values, changes in organizational priorities, or that more challenges lay ahead. Leaders also used meta messages to enhance credibility and convey transparency and candor in an effort to build or maintain trust.

**Verbal and Non-Verbal Cues** One HSO director relied upon verbal cues, rather than explicit communication, to manage the daily fiscal uncertainty and staff expectations. *‘So typically, you know, our budget process starts in January and I’ll start giving employees signals: . . .’ It’s a tough year. I don’t think anyone is actually going to lose their job, but you may have to wiggle right?’* Through tone and language, managers also took many opportunities to indicate personally how much staff were valued and heard, and potentially negative situations were reframed in a positive manner. In-person approaches (e.g., walking the halls of offices and waiting rooms) helped to convey support, transparency and accessibility to staff. *‘I think people wanted to see us more . . . even if you didn’t have the answers, but to get the pulse of what was going on.’* As the recession was ending, managers in one agency described using non-verbal communications to boost morale. *‘In 2012 we had a series of all staff meetings, where the directors and managers did flash mobs. We did like a red-carpet kind of event where the staff were on the red carpet, and they were stars, and we learned the Gangnam Style [a popular pop song and dance at the time] and we all danced . . . We just wanted to just to signal that we could all sort of breathe again.’*

**Credibility** Managers also sought to demonstrate fairness and equity through non-verbal cues, primarily by being conscious of the messages sent through their actions. *‘We deleted positions at the highest level because we wanted to show that we were not going to (expect from others) what we wouldn’t do (ourselves).’* It was reported that staff responded particularly positively to activities that demonstrated concern for all staff, and not just management, and which signaled that management was listening to their concerns. *‘And we actually tried to identify simple things we could do right away so that staff felt that we were proactively addressing the workload challenges that they were seeing.’*

**Openness and candor** Some respondents noted that a lack of openness and candor fostered staff distrust of management. *‘I think that’s important, you know, trust in your leadership is important, and when you are not communicating well, it doesn’t breed trust very well.’* Many respondents repeatedly reflected on how staff seemed to respond well to consistent transparency about any news – good, bad, or uncertain. Several of those interviewed described a personal commitment to maximize transparency with staff, including sharing with staff when they genuinely did not know the future. *‘I think that keeping people really well informed . . . with as much information as you have (and can share) is enormously important . . . When people don’t know something they’ll make it up.’* One county even created a slogan for the agency to emphasize this value. *‘In fact, I made this into a button and distributed it at our meeting that said, ‘We’re Moving Forward without All the Answers.’* Such consistent and clear messaging about the state of the organization helped to reinforce management credibility, and as one respondent observed, *‘You are only as good as your credibility.’*

**Trust** While many respondents acknowledged the role that open and candid communication can play in establishing trust with staff, the level of trust existing between management and employees was demonstrated in other ways. Many respondents indicated that they demonstrated trust in their staff by decentralizing decisions to each department. *‘It’s basically the people who do the work; they are the ones that are the problem solvers.’* On the other hand, even when managers explicitly told employees that they trusted them to make the best decisions about program cuts, some respondents felt that employees did not feel comfortable with that level of responsibility. *‘I think that there is a fear about if something bad happens. So, staff have really needed to be supported (and we would say) “As long as your kind of following those values and principles, we’re going to support you.”’*

**Level of Support** To maintain or increase staff trust in leadership, management also attempted to convey to staff that they would be supported in the change process and that leadership believed in their abilities to navigate and implement needed cutbacks while continuing to serve increasingly more consumers. Respondents noted that they promoted a supportive agency culture by verbally and non-verbally communicating genuine empathy and respect for workers. *‘You have to be there. You have to be walking through. You have to get the feel of what’s going on. You have to see how many people were in line (for services) in the morning’* Many senior managers sent messages to staff that acknowledged everyone’s

stress and helped them adjust their expectations while also keeping them focused on the needs of the community and the organization's mission. *'And he (County Administrative Officer) would say, "it's not going to be doing more with less, it's going to be doing less with less".'*

At times, however, the need to consider the feelings of employees had to be balanced with the needs of the organization to serve increasing client demands. *'It's really a matter of how you humanely manage your own staff while dealing with the masses of people that are coming to the organization with problems of their own?'* This tension was addressed by one organization with a messaging campaign: *'So we did, it's called "Quality Matters, YOU Matter."'* This effort was organized around emphasizing the value of employees by asking them to give the organization their best work.

### **Feedback Mechanisms**

All organizations had some type of mechanism for employees to provide feedback to senior managers regarding the perceptions of changes and the effectiveness or quality of communication tactics. One organization used a survey to gather staff input about improving change communications. *'We did a communication survey asking people how we could do a better job of communicating and listening.'* Another organization describes the use of a feedback tool that helped managers see when messages were being distorted. *'We have something called the Feedback Tool that is on our intranet where any of the line staff can leave their concerns and . . . we often hear how our communication . . . translates to the line staff in a way that we didn't intend it to be.'* Most organizations used feedback instruments such as surveys or suggestion boxes as a means of gauging staff satisfaction or engaging them in decision making. One organization also went to great lengths to provide feedback to staff by providing individual responses to staff regarding their suggestions for cost saving, *' . . . just so people knew that we were listening.'*

### **Participation in Decision Making**

Each organization provided an avenue for staff to contribute to budget cut decisionmaking. Some organizations engaged employees by forming work groups or committees of mid-level and front-line staff as a way of soliciting staff input—a strategy that was positively received. But in many other organizations, senior leaders maintained control over the majority of significant fiscal decisions. As one HSO director reflected on a conversation with staff, *'Let's try and think of everything we can . . . put it all in a mix and have lots of shared wisdom for use by a benevolent dictator.'* In these organizations, senior managers had minimal trust in the

administrative and financial knowledge of mid-level and front-line staff that they thought would limit the extent to which staff members could participate in budget reduction decisions. *'Sometimes, suggestions that people make might not have all the information (such as when) you cut those positions then you're also cutting (off the sources) of revenue.'* Some agencies addressed these perceptions of staff limitations by educating staff so they could meaningfully engage in decision making, *'So we had to inform, educate and then we could begin to really discuss.'*

### **Communication Effectiveness**

Respondents in a few organizations regretted that they had focused too little attention on communicating with staff. For example, *'I didn't value enough the importance of having line staff just know (more about) what we were doing . . . but I think . . . looking back on it, it was important.'* In a few organizations senior managers went to great lengths to communicate with staff throughout the budget reduction process: *'There was a lot of work and a lot of effort that went into communicating what was happening.'*

However, from the perspective of some managers, even carefully planned and executed communication efforts sometimes did not have the desired effect. *'Our communication was exceptionally good, although it was not exceptionally effective.'*

Instead, providing brief, simple descriptions of the contexts for decision-making was seen as most effective and efficient. *'What I think has been more effective is writing the little email blast that goes out that's short, it's got a cute picture on it and it's just saying one thing. If you have to go look someplace, and read it, and it's dense, and you're not involved in it in any way, it's like watching paint dry.'*

## **ORGANIZATIONAL FACTORS SHAPING COMMUNICATION**

### **Organizational structure**

In this study, the size and structure of the organization as well as the formal and informal communication networks appeared to shape the perceived effectiveness of organizational communication strategies. Large organizations found it difficult to deliver information to the front lines in a quick and clear manner. *'We have 30 locations in [this city] and 1800 employees and a dozen programs, you know. How do you best communicate stuff like this? And I think we did a poor job of it.'* Within larger agencies, boundaries between departments or programs were less permeable, and communication across and between units was less manageable. Silos existed and hindered communication in smaller



organizations as well, but it was easier for smaller organizations to collaborate with others internally and externally as the recession continued and the imperative to do so became more apparent. *I couldn't say enough about the efforts to integrate services and about the collaboration with everyone, because when I first started here, we were more siloed . . .* Further, in super agencies (those providing health and human services, rather than just human services), the need and ability to move resources across departmental boundaries encouraged more cross-departmental collaboration, awareness and support. *When the wagons are circled, and we are all worried about external things . . . and we are all moving money back and forth . . . there is a nice communal thing going on.'*

### EXTERNAL FACTORS AFFECTING COMMUNICATION

The extent to which organizations had complete autonomy over their communication practices was limited in most organizations by the local and state level politics that shaped their organizational culture and environment, as well as the agency resources available to invest in communication planning and execution.

#### Politics

Local politics, including union relations, played a vital role in shaping organizational communication during budget cutbacks. *It gets tricky, because you can't share everything because the politics of information can become a labor relations issue . . . So you have a certain amount of freedom of how you share information in your department, and the other part of the process that is orchestrated outside the organization.'* Transparency with staff was also sometimes constrained in an effort not to share information that could later be determined to be inaccurate. Due to changing information from the state or county regarding their actual allocations, county HSOs often did not know what their budgets would look like before decisions became final. *' . . . things were changing on a daily, weekly basis with respect to the County Administrator's office . . . part of our decision making around staff engagement related to our attempt to not freak them out.'*

#### Funding

A few participating organizations referred to generous political and public support from their communities that helped to encourage the Board of Supervisors and the County Administration to limit the amount of budget cutting. *Even in times of budget cuts . . . our services are still prioritized in the political structure. So, when the Board of Supervisors is deliberating on our budget, and they reallocate*

*money, we tended to benefit from that.'* In some cases, additional county funding provided more time and resources to carefully think through their communication strategies. *We had ten and a half million dollars of County General Fund money in our reserves to help us soften that load . . . we were able to hold things off longer, taper down less radically by having those financial reserves in our back pocket.'* HSOs in less politically supportive counties quickly lost county-generated funding with limited amounts of time to engage staff in decision-making or to plan a communication strategy. These counties found themselves *'making decisions right away that you have to make in the next three days . . . it just didn't seem like we had enough time.'*

### Discussion

Building on the literature related to public organization cutbacks and communications in times of change, this study explored the internal communication strategies of eleven human service organizations as their senior management teams engaged in the painful process of budget reductions resulting from the Great Recession. Study informants indicated that employees responded to changes with fear, stress, and dissatisfaction with communications from senior management who shared the facts of the budget crisis, implications for the future, and a restatement of organizational values and priorities used to inform decision-making. While communications focused on addressing employee fear and anxiety, senior managers sought to be as transparent as possible and to support staff with messages of empathy, respect and an increased focus on the importance of their mission.

The communication efforts found to be most effective were clearly and consistently crafted, brief and concise, in-person communications. Top-down communications were found to be a source of miscommunications and staff anxieties increased when critical information was withheld. Due to the concerns of senior management about the capacity of employees to understand complex fiscal matters, staff were engaged, to varying degrees, in budget-related decision making. However, most senior managers noted that providing an avenue for employees to have a voice in the process was important to maintaining trust in leadership and organizational commitment.

Most budget-reduction communications were impacted by organizational factors such as size and structure; larger and more bureaucratic organizations faced more challenges in disseminating messages with clarity due to multiple layers in the organization's hierarchy and the

sheer number of employees. External factors also impacted communications in terms of the different ways that senior managers were distracted by political pressures and time constraints. The existence of conflict in the political arenas that shaped state or local funding delayed information sharing with staff and political constraints created by elected officials inhibited transparency.

### REFLECTING ON THE LITERATURE

While study results are consistent with the findings in the literature on organizational change and communication (Allen et al. 2007; Bordia et al. 2004a; DiFonzo and Bordia 1998) and the impact of environmental constraints on the level of discretion exercised by public sector senior managers (Levine 1979; Pandey 2010), this study expands our understanding of the ways that public sector managers engage and communicate with employees throughout the cutback-related change processes, and how those efforts are shaped by internal and external organizational contexts. The contextual factors affecting organizational resources were critical to planning and executing a communication strategy, and leaders found some strategies were better received than others. Variations in staff responses to diverse communication strategies may be rooted in the differences in pre-existing organizational climate or leadership styles that engendered more and less trust between staff and managers. Non-verbal and indirect messages may have contributed to a warmer, more trusting climate, and may be indicative of more sensitive leadership styles.

These findings extend our understanding of organizational communications in times of significant change by illustrating specific strategies that were more or less productive. Managers participating in this study perceived staff to be particularly dissatisfied with communications that were seen as not responsive to their ideas or concerns, and when messages were distorted through top-down channels of communication that did not include in-person exchanges. The nuances of verbal and non-verbal communications (e.g., tone and body language) were absent or altered from the original message when not delivered in-person, making room for misperceptions or misinterpretation.

Furthermore, and consistent with many other studies on public sector communication and management processes (Allen et al. 2007; Hameed et al. 2017; O'Brien 2002), most respondents noted that it was preferable to include staff in decision-making. However, if staff were not included in this process, senior managers understood that it was critical to explain the context for the decision-making. This finding matches elements of the five part model developed by

Armenakis et al. (2000). In addition and consistent with other change communication research in public organizations (Allen et al. 2007; van der Voet et al. 2016), this study also found that high quality communications provided by line supervisors can increase staff acceptance or commitment to the change process.

The fiscal resources that reflect the political and economic dynamics of each participating county played key role in the ability of senior managers to engage in transparent communications with their staff members in the midst of profound change. Organizations with greater resources at the beginning of the recession, or those that experienced smaller reductions throughout the recession, were more likely to be in politically supportive and relatively wealthy counties with more funding for human services. In organizations in less wealthy and more politically conservative counties, budget cuts were deep and fast and change processes did not always include staff input due to lack of time. While most study participants repeatedly discussed their commitment to communicating with staff by sharing both good and bad news in order to reduce the impact of the rumor mill on staff fears, those organizations with less financial and political support from elected officials did not have the staff capacity to plan, execute and monitor agency-wide communications.

Finally, study outcomes also point to the ways in which messages sent by senior management may contribute to the overall culture of the organization and help to shape employee interpretation of those messages (Keyton 2014; Redding 1972). Further, message content may indicate a dominant leadership style in the organization—which has also been connected to employee change acceptance (Battilana et al. 2010; Kuipers et al. 2014). Messages aimed highlighting organizational mission and support for staff may indicate transformational leadership approaches to change communication management. Verbal and non-verbal indications of transparency and support aimed at increasing or maintaining trust between staff and leadership may also contribute an organizational climate that lends credibility to change communications for employees. Transformational leadership styles and a supportive and open organizational climate have both been linked to positive staff responses to change (Allen et al. 2007; Bordia et al. 2004a; van der Voet 2014; van der Voet et al. 2016).

### PRACTICE IMPLICATIONS

These findings, consistent with other studies, also underscore the critical role of frontline supervisors in bolstering morale and supporting their staff when communicating



about significant organizational changes (Allen et al. 2007; van der Voet 2014; van der Voet et al. 2016). This suggests that one strategy for managing staff during major changes is to focus on enhancing and strengthening the staff/supervisor rapport and supporting that relationship in order to manage organizational communications and change management.

Further, leaders can enhance trust and credibility by conveying respect, empathy, and support for staff as they move through difficult times and should deliver as much information as possible in a timely manner—the good and the bad news. Finally, it is important for managers to invest time and resources during financial and programmatic stability to create and implement systems that are capable of quickly and clearly disseminating critical information, obtaining timely feedback, and preparing staff to participate in decision-making. Additional approaches for managing organizational communications are highlighted in Table 1.

## RESEARCH IMPLICATIONS

This exploratory study provides a foundation for further research on how public organizations communicate with their employees during times of significant restructuring and downsizing. Further research is needed to investigate both sides of the communication equation—not just the views of senior management—in order to develop a clearer understanding of how internal communications are experienced by staff in public HSOs during cutbacks. Observational study of real time communications, combined with interviews with senior management and front-line staff would allow for a comprehensive, richer understanding of communication practices in these settings and would better identify effective approaches to organizational communications during times of change. Specifically, what role does organizational culture or climate factors play in how staff respond to organizational changes? How do specific change communication strategies contribute to the maintenance or creation of an organizational climate of trust and credibility?

Increased knowledge in these arenas is critical for public human service organizations, which operate in an environment of emotionally-laden service delivery and are often called upon to engage in swift, significant organizational change in response to external directives and changes. The staff in human service organizations represent another type of “first responder” but do not necessarily experience the same type of communications support that might be found in police or fire departments or hospitals. Future research

would benefit from a comparative approach to the structuring and implementation of communications systems to support staff in times of change.

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**TABLE 1**  
**Organizational Communication Recommendations for Public HSO Cutback Management**

**Participatory Decision Making**

1. Engage staff as much as possible in decision making.
2. Equip employees with the knowledge necessary to participate meaningfully in decision making.

**Meta Messages**

1. Be as transparent as possible with staff, sharing reasoning behind decisions, as well as good, bad and uncertain news.
2. Create messaging strategies that deliver critical information in the context of the organization's mission, while also conveying respect and empathy to employees.
3. Management should be visibly accessible to employees and provide answers to staff questions.

**Communication Tactics**

1. Communicate with staff often, repeat the message in short, simple ways and communicate in settings that minimize or alleviate staff stress.
2. Communicate in person or in writing whenever possible.
3. Involve front-line supervisors when delivering critical information to direct service staff.
4. Designate one person or team to streamline and create consistency in messaging.
5. Monitor the extent to which messages are received and understood.

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# Perspectives of Public and Nonprofit Managers on Communications in Human Services Contracting\*

SARAH CARNOCHAN, BOWEN McBEATH, EMMELINE CHUANG,  
AND MICHAEL J. AUSTIN

### ABSTRACT

Government contracts and grants constitute the largest funding source for the majority of nonprofit organizations. Contracts for complex services, such as those involved in delivering human services, pose substantial challenges for public and nonprofit managers. In this context, concerns have been raised about contract management capacity, including challenges related to proposal and contract development, implementation, and performance reporting, as well as the impact of contract monitoring tools on contractor performance. Relatively few studies have provided a cross-sectoral perspective on the concrete managerial skill sets needed to engage in the interpersonal and technical processes involved in effective contract management. This study reports qualitative findings from a survey of county and nonprofit human service managers regarding approaches to managing challenges that arise in contractual relationships. The results identify the important role played by communication in the relationships between contract managers, illustrate the content of formal and informal exchanges, and identify common perspectives on the characteristics of effective communications, including transparency, a balance of flexibility and consistency, and timeliness. Practice implications for contract management relate to enhancing communication strategies in order to promote stronger contract relationships.

**KEYWORDS:** Communication; contracting; human services; managerial; nonprofit

Human services in the United States are delivered at the local level by complex networks of public, nonprofit, and for-profit agencies, linked in a wide array of contractual and collaborative relationships (Smith, 2012). Contracted services account for the majority of public human service expenditures by federal, state, and local government entities (Kettl, 2015). For the majority of nonprofits in the human services and other fields, government revenues via contracts and grants constitute the largest funding source (Boris, de Leon, Roeger, & Nikolova, 2010). Contracts for complex services, such as those involved in delivering human services to vulnerable populations, pose substantial challenges for public and nonprofit managers (Brown, Potoski, & Van Slyke, 2015; Romzek & Johnston, 2002). Contract management activities, including feasibility assessment, contract formulation, implementation, and performance evaluation, require a broad range of knowledge and capabilities related to substantive policy, negotiation and bargaining, and program monitoring (Amirkhanyan, 2011; Brown & Potoski, 2003; Joaquin & Greitens, 2012; Van Slyke, 2003). In this context, concerns have been raised about public sector contract management capacity to ensure the effectiveness of public human services, including challenges related to managing the transaction costs associated with negotiating, implementing, and enforcing contracts, as well as limitations to the impact of contract monitoring tools on contractor performance (Brown & Potoski, 2005; Fernandez, 2007; Fernandez, 2009; Van Slyke, 2007).

Parallel concerns in the nonprofit sector related to contract management challenges have emerged over the past several decades. Nonprofit human service organizations

\*Published in:  
PUBLIC PERFORMANCE & MANAGEMENT REVIEW  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/15309576.2018.1495085>  
© 2018 Taylor & Francis

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incur substantial transaction costs associated with contract management in complex human service delivery networks related to proposal and contract development, operations, and reporting (Gronbjerg, 1991). Organizational resources and technological capacity play an important role in determining the extent to which nonprofit agencies are able to engage in performance measurement for strategic purposes (Thomson, 2011), and organization size has been found to be associated with the level of nonprofit agency satisfaction in contractual relationships (Barton, Folaron, Busch, & Hostetter, 2006). Resource issues continue to challenge nonprofits engaged in contracting with government entities, as when the Great Recession increased funding unpredictability, complicating fiscal management demands (Never & De Leon, 2014).

Early research on the experiences of nonprofit organizations engaged in managing government contracts highlighted the complex “balancing act” that contracting requires of managers, which is rendered more difficult in circumstances where performance is difficult to measure or monitor (Hassel, 1997, p. 443). More recent studies have found that nonprofit organizations continue to struggle with performance reporting demands imposed by funders when they lack the time, resources, and expertise needed to engage in formal evaluation (Carman, 2010; Carnochan, Samples, Myers, & Austin, 2014). Insufficient organizational capacity for performance measurement among nonprofit human service organizations, related to funding levels, staff expertise, and information technology, diminishes the extent to which organizations can make use of performance information (Lee & Clerkin, 2017). Research on contracting for child welfare services has highlighted managerial challenges related to designing monitoring systems that require continuous communication and other boundary spanning activities (Collins-Camargo, McBeath, & Ensign, 2011). In addition to technical challenges, performance measurement poses political challenges for managers, who must balance the interests of diverse stakeholders in efforts to define appropriate measures to monitor complex services (Carnochan, McBeath, & Austin, 2017; Kim, 2005).

Given the prevalence and scope of contracting in publicly funded human services, and the substantial challenges that contracting and contract monitoring pose to managers in the public and nonprofit sectors, relatively few studies have aimed to identify the concrete managerial skill sets required to engage in the interpersonal as well as the technical processes involved in effective contract management (Fernandez, 2007; Van Slyke, 2007). Consequently,

research is needed to further our understanding of specific strategies employed by managers in their efforts to develop and sustain contract relationships in order to support contract implementation and performance. Notably, few studies have included the perspectives of public and nonprofit human service managers involved in cross-sectoral contractual relationships (for exceptions, see Amirkhanyan, 2009; Amirkhanyan, 2011; Campbell, Lambright, & Bronstein, 2012; Gazley & Brudney, 2007), making it difficult to compare managerial experiences and identify shared understandings or conflicting perspectives.

This exploratory study reports qualitative findings from a cross-sectoral survey of nonprofit and county human service managers in five California counties regarding their views on managing challenges that arise in contractual relationships related to contract design, service delivery, performance measurement, and other aspects of the contracting process. The study focus on individual managers is consistent with the emphasis in recent public and nonprofit administration scholarship on the value of understanding the perspectives and strategies of the actors involved in public sector accountability relationships (Yang & Dubnick, 2016). The current study applies insights from theories of relational contracting and relational coordination concerning the importance of interpersonal managerial relationships and communication intensity for resolving cross-sector collaboration challenges (Gittell, 2011; Romzek, LeRoux, & Blackmar, 2012).

The results contribute to the literature by identifying and explaining the central role that communication between contract managers plays in managing human service contract challenges. The study illustrates the array of formal and informal exchanges that occur, describes common cross-sectoral perspectives on the characteristics of effective communications, and examines variation in perspectives across the sectors and with respect to nonprofit agency size. Implications for county and nonprofit human service managers relate to strategies for promoting effective communications in order to strengthen contractual relationships.

### **Managing contracting challenges in the human services**

Human service agencies seek to address complex social problems that are resistant to change, and characterized by unpredictability and uncertainty (Head & Alford, 2015). In delivering complex services to address complex problems, public and nonprofit sector agencies confront multiple,



interrelated challenges, which include highly politicized environments, inadequate resources, indeterminate service technologies, difficult-to-define and -measure service outcomes, and diverse client populations (Hasenfeld, 2010; Lynn, Heinrich, & Hill, 2001; McBeath, Carnochan, Stuart, & Austin, 2017; Sandfort, 2010). These challenges have been described as key characteristics of the human service institutional context, in which uncertainty, risk, and complexity: (a) impact public and nonprofit organizational resources, technology, goals, and accountability; (b) involve variation in client needs and service processes; and (c) complicate internal and external managerial roles and tasks (Hasenfeld, 2010; McBeath et al., 2017). Contract management, representing a central component of the human service agency manager's external management role, is shaped by each of these challenges, as managers are called upon to respond to diverse stakeholder interests, allocate or advocate for scarce resources, select and implement effective service technologies, define and measure outcomes, and engage clients in services (Benjamin, 2008; McBeath et al., 2017; O'Regan & Oster, 2000).

The uncertainty, risk, and complexity that are fundamental to human service delivery increase the accountability challenges that characterize all public contracting (Brown, Potoski, & Van Slyke, 2006; McBeath et al., 2017; Van Slyke, 2007). To date, theories of contracting have illuminated many of the dynamics and challenges that play out in the contractual relationships between public and nonprofit human service agencies and managers. Drawing upon principal-agent theory, Brown and colleagues (2006; also see Brown & Potoski, 2005) note the central task of public contract managers related to achieving goals consistent with public policies, while minimizing transaction costs associated with negotiating, implementing, and monitoring contracts. They point to the accountability challenges facing public managers who use contract specification, monitoring, and enforcement to ensure that the nonprofit agency performs according to the contract, and does not exploit information advantages related to service costs or implementation for its own benefit. In contrast, stewardship theory emphasizes the shared values and common interests of county and nonprofit human service agencies, resulting in high levels of trust among contracting partners, and obviating the need for costly contract monitoring and enforcement mechanisms (Lynn et al., 2001; Van Slyke, 2007). Although the proposed solutions to ensuring accountability differs in these frameworks, concerns with shared values and interests, trust between managers, and imperfect information regarding service costs and outcomes figure prominently.

Given the challenges associated with managing complex human service contracts under conditions of uncertainty, scholars have called for collaborative approaches to contract management, such as public-nonprofit partnering to design contract terms and performance criteria (Brown & Troutt, 2004; Head & Alford, 2015). Such approaches may be appropriate given the expectation of shared values and interests between nonprofit and public sector human service agencies, while narrow reliance on formal contract management strategies, such as contract monitoring and performance measurement, may be insufficient to address the need for trust and information that can facilitate joint problem identification and solving (Lamothe & Lamothe, 2012).

Although some researchers have found that performance measurement is associated with perceived effectiveness of accountability in contract management (Amirkhanyan, 2011), others have raised concerns about performance measurement approaches related to organizational capacity limitations, resource diversion, and mission drift (Carman, 2010; Ebrahim, 2005; Jos & Tompkins, 2004; Siltala, 2013). Nonprofit organizations may struggle to meet reporting requirements, while funders often make limited use of performance data in decision making (Carman, 2010). Performance measurement strategies may concentrate staff efforts on compliance activities, decreasing resources devoted to substantive client services (Jos & Tompkins, 2004; Siltala, 2013). In some instances, contracted agencies may respond to performance measurement regimes by engaging in opportunistic behavior aimed at meeting service targets rather than providing high quality services (Negoita, 2018). Accountability demands made by funders that focus on short term objectives can inhibit important organizational learning and interfere with the mission of nonprofit organizations (Ebrahim, 2005). Finally, performance measurement in the human services presents challenges for both public and nonprofit managers related to balancing multiple stakeholder perspectives in the process of identifying appropriate objectives and measures (Carnochan et al., 2017; Lynch-Cerullo & Cooney, 2011).

#### **RELATIONAL CONTRACTING TO ADDRESS HUMAN SERVICE CONTRACT-BASED COORDINATION CHALLENGES**

Ultimately, formal accountability mechanisms such as performance measurement and contract monitoring do not operate in isolation, but are carried out in the context of relationships among organizational actors (Ebrahim, 2005). Given the limitations associated with performance

measurement, it is not surprising that less formal, relational approaches to contracting commonly exist in parallel with formal contractual relationships in human service delivery systems (Lamothe & Lamothe, 2012; Romzek & Johnston, 2005). Relational contracts are typically characterized by “trust, discretion, joint-problem-solving, and information exchange” (Van Slyke, 2007, p. 184). Managerial relationships can thus enhance and expand upon the formal contract (Bertelli & Smith, 2009). Moreover, managerial perceptions of the effectiveness of cross-sectoral partnerships are influenced by interpersonal relationships (Gazley, 2010a). Strengthening managerial relationships through effective patterns of behavior, norms, and expectations can increase the likelihood of achieving mutual benefits for nonprofit and public human service agencies (Brown et al., 2015). Human service managers, who engage in relational contracting work beyond organizational boundaries, act as boundary spanners, who must develop interpersonal skills that include effective communicating and listening (Oliver, 2013; Williams, 2002). In addition, human service managers engaged in relational contracting may be able to “co-construct meaningful approaches” to measuring the effectiveness of human services (Lynch-Cerullo & Cooney, 2011, p. 384).

In a similar vein, relational coordination theory has emphasized the importance of interpersonal relationship development characterized by norms of reciprocity, shared goals, and a common emphasis on communication quality and intensity (Gittell, 2011). When so engaged, boundary spanning managers can help cross-functional teams address longstanding as well as emergent issues, engage in problem solving, support conflict resolution, and promote performance measurement (Edmondson & Harvey, 2017; Gittell, 2011; Gittell & Logan, 2015). Overall, theoretical scholarship in the relational contracting, relational coordination, and public-private partnership domains highlights flexibility in cross-sectoral relationships to facilitate ongoing adjustments and problem-solving in the delivery of complex services (DeHoog, 1990; Head & Alford, 2015).

Empirical research on relational contracting has found that behavioral patterns and norms related to effective communication among nonprofit and public contract managers play an important role in the development of trust (Van Slyke, 2007). Attention to extensive communication, planning, and coordinating may help to ensure accountability on the part of nonprofit service providers (Brown & Potoski, 2005). Accountability can be maintained in collaborative, networked models of contracted human service

delivery through close and continuous interaction between public agency and contractor staff (Negoita, 2018). For example, a study of local government managers in one state found that informal communications are common, and are deemed by managers to play a significant role with respect to promoting accountability (Marvel & Marvel, 2009). In contrast, in a study involving funders and nonprofit human service agencies, county and nonprofit managers reported that discussion and collaborative efforts related to performance reporting were moderately common, but described relatively lower levels of satisfaction with the level of collaboration about performance feedback (Campbell et al., 2012).

Research thus highlights the role that managerial communication can play in strengthening public-nonprofit contract relationships by building trust and identifying shared values and interests, as well as promoting accountability by addressing concerns related to opportunistic exploitation of information asymmetry (Brown & Potoski, 2005; Van Slyke, 2007). Scholars have begun to examine more closely the association between communication quality and contract relationship strength, with some studies measuring communication quality as the extent to which nonprofit executive directors view their communication with public sector counterparts as good, feel heard by their counterpart(s), and believe they can easily initiate communications (Amirkhanyan et al., 2010; Amirkhanyan, Kim, & Lambright, 2012). Mutual understanding of contract terms and related behavior is critical, requiring clear communication through technological as well as direct personal interaction (Brown et al., 2015). Open communication, as well as frequent face-to-face contacts, have been found to be effective relational strategies (Vosselman, 2016). In a prominent study, Romzek and colleagues (2012) noted the important facilitative role that communication plays in developing informal accountability relationships within the context of collaborative service networks involving contractual as well as cooperative arrangements among organizations. Key themes related to communication included: the importance of frequent and sustained communication; information sharing as an obligation and a source of power; and reliance on multiple formal and informal communication channels (Romzek, LeRoux, & Blackmar, 2012). Finally, some research has found that organizational size is salient, with larger nonprofit human service agencies reporting higher levels of satisfaction with select aspects of contract communications (Barton, Folaron, Busch, & Hostetter, 2006).

In summary, the theoretical and empirical scholarship on managerial boundary spanning to promote

organizational collaboration in contractbased human service delivery systems points to the importance of communication skills and processes in cross-sectoral relationships. Communication between organizational actors can strengthen relationships by identifying shared goals and building trust, while facilitating information exchange to promote accountability and joint problem solving of the complex issues that arise in the delivery of human services. A substantial literature highlighting the role of communications in public contracting has focused on developing theoretical frameworks to understand public-nonprofit relational mechanisms, while calling for further empirical investigation (Bertelli & Smith, 2009; Brown et al., 2015; Oliver, 2013; Vosselman, 2016). Previous empirical research has contributed to the knowledge base, while tending to report on relatively narrow data sets, including studies in which: (1) nonprofit or public sector participants are absent (e.g., Brown & Potoski, 2005) or participate in small numbers (e.g., Romzek & Johnston, 2002; Romzek & Johnston, 2005); (2) overall nonprofit and public sector sample sizes are very small, as is appropriate for qualitative research (e.g., Van Slyke, 2007); or (3) the service field is limited to a single domain (e.g., Amirkhanyan et al., 2010; Amirkhanyan et al., 2012). Related research has described the purposes and goals of interpersonal, informal communication between managers in an array of collaborative interorganizational relationships that are not, however, dominated by formal contracts that specify roles and responsibilities (Romzek et al., 2012; Williams, 2002).

Therefore, insufficient empirical attention has been dedicated to the specific complex dynamics that characterize the contract-based coordination efforts of public and nonprofit human service managers, including their qualities of communication-related engagement, purpose, flexibility, and consistency (McBeath et al., 2017). To build on these efforts, we report qualitative findings from a multicounty, cross-sectoral survey of nonprofit and public sector managers responsible for overseeing contracts related to a diverse array of services, including child welfare, adult and aging, employment and housing services. The analysis identifies managerial perspectives on strategies for responding to challenges that arise in contractual relationships, and examines differences of perspective across the sectors and with respect to nonprofit agency size. The findings support the central role of managerial communications, illustrate the diverse content of contract communications, and identify shared and differing cross-sectoral views on the characteristics of effective cross-sector communications.

## Methods

The study is a component of a longstanding research program carried out by the authors in partnership with two regional consortia of county and nonprofit human service agencies. This analysis reports results from an online survey of managers in county and nonprofit human service agencies conducted in five San Francisco Bay Area counties in 2015. The survey design was informed by dyadic case studies conducted in three consortium counties in 2014 that explored contractual relationships between the county human service agency and a large nonprofit service provider, and by the relevant empirical and theoretical literature. While the survey collected primarily quantitative data (reported elsewhere), the subset of open-ended questions forms the basis for this analysis.

## SAMPLE

The county human service agencies participating in the study are responsible for child welfare, employment and cash assistance, and adult and aging services, and reflect variation with respect to agency size and county demographics (see *Table 1*). The nonprofit agencies represented in the sample are similarly diverse with respect to agency size (ranging from 0 to 4,000 FTE) and budget (ranging from \$14,000–\$791 million) and provide a broad array of services to a diverse set of client populations. As 90% of the participating agencies were nonprofits (the remaining were private, for-profit contractors), we refer to nonprofit agencies throughout to simplify the narrative.

Survey invitations were sent to 295 county managers who were identified by study liaisons in the five participating county agencies as possessing knowledge of their agency's contracting processes and relationships with nonprofit contractors; 193 responded for a response rate of 65%. County managerial affiliations among survey respondents were: County A ( $n = 91$ , 47%); County B ( $n = 18$ , 9%); County C ( $n = 36$ , 19%); County D ( $n = 15$ , 8%); and County E ( $n = 32$ , 17%). Survey invitations were also sent to a primary contact (designated by county agency liaisons) at 329 nonprofit agencies with contracts with one or more of the five county agencies in FY 2013–2014. Responses were received from 483 nonprofit managers at 206 agencies, representing a 63% organizational response rate. *Table 2* summarizes characteristics of county and nonprofit respondents related to employment role and experience.

Overall, the number of survey respondents is large for a qualitative study; however, fewer managers responded to the two open-ended questions upon which this analysis is

**TABLE 1**  
**County Agency Sample**

	Urban/Suburban/Rural	Budget (millions)	# FTE
County A	Urban/Suburban	723.8	2614
County B	Suburban	775	2150
County C	Urban	932.4	2055
County D	Suburban/Rural	133	578
County E	Suburban/Rural	339.5	970

based. In particular, 109 county managers and 210 nonprofit managers responded to at least one open-ended question.

### DATA COLLECTION

The major survey domains related to: (1) contract-based communication and interactions; (2) perceptions of accountability systems; (3) managerial attitudes and organizational norms; and (4) contract performance. Two open ended questions asked about strategies to improve contractual relationships, and address performance measurement challenges (see *Figure 1*).

### ANALYSIS

The first and fourth authors led the analysis, employing manual coding, analytical memos, conceptual mapping, and member checking strategies (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014). In the first stage, inductive/in vivo coding was conducted jointly by the first and fourth authors in order to identify potentially new insights from the extensive qualitative data (Charmaz, 2014). The first author reviewed the data in total, and identified in vivo codes related to the context of managers' contractual relationships and to managerial communications and provided illustrative excerpts for each code. The code structure was reviewed with the fourth author, who then coded the data and comprehensively extracted excerpts related to each code. The first and fourth authors developed analytical memos and conceptual maps proposing potential relationships between the codes for discussion among the study team, which identified managerial communications as the focus for the next stage of analysis.

This overarching theme related to communication was defined based upon the perspectives articulated by managers participating in the survey, as well as the literature on communications in public-nonprofit contracting. The definition of communication incorporated multiple formal and informal modes of communication, as well as a diverse array

of issues and topics as described in the discussion of study findings. Formal modes of communication included the RFP and related guidelines, reporting guidelines, planned monitoring interactions, and required reports submitted by nonprofit agencies. Descriptions of informal communications concerned ad hoc in-person meetings, telephone calls, emails, and informal site visits. Both formal and informal communication methods referred to individual as well as group interactions.

Drawing on relevant literature to enhance the theoretical sensitivity of the analysis (e.g., studies of performance measurement and relational contracting), the first author reviewed the data again, identifying and coding themes related to communication (Gilgun, 2015). The communication themes, along with illustrative excerpts, were reviewed and endorsed by the directors of four nonprofit human service agencies that are partners in the regional nonprofit consortium. Each of these themes was prominent in both public and nonprofit manager survey responses, and across the five counties participating in the study. To further explore the existence of patterns or differences with respect to the prevalence of the themes across the sectors, we numerically coded the thematic open-ended data and examined via crosstabs the comparison of county and nonprofit responses with respect to each theme, identifying cross-sector differences within one of the themes as reported below in the discussion of findings.

Lastly, in response to research noting the role that agency capacity and size can play in contract relationships and performance measurement, we explored differences among nonprofit managers related to agency size. The open-ended response thematic data were numerically coded, and linked to quantitative items related to number of staff and total revenues from the nonprofit agency survey and a separate worksheet completed by nonprofit agencies. These linked data for nonprofit respondents were then examined



**TABLE 2**  
**County and Nonprofit Manager Sample**

	County managers		Nonprofit managers	
	Mean or %	Range	Mean or %	Range
Executive	13%		52%	
Program	43%		21%	
Administrative	40%		23%	
Other	4%		4%	
Years in current position	5	0-28	9	0-42
Years in human services	18	0-47	19	0-50

via crosstabs in order to understand the extent of possible variation related to agency staff size and revenue in respondent perspectives on the communication themes. Staff size was defined as total employees with categories defined as small (1–19), medium (20–99), large (100–499), and very large (>500) (Deitrick et al., 2014). Agency revenue categories were defined as small (\$1–\$999,999), medium (\$1 million–\$499,999,999), large (\$5 million–\$9,999,999), and very large (>\$10 million) (NTEN, 2015). The analysis of differences among nonprofit respondents related to agency size did not identify any consistent patterns or differences, and hence details of this analysis are not described in the report of findings. For example, within the themes where notable differences in the prevalence of the theme were observed, the pattern of difference typically varied across the two agency size measures. To illustrate, within one theme, with respect to the staff measure there was a difference of 14 percentage points between the prevalence of responses in the highest and lowest groups, and with respect to the revenue measure, this difference was 10 percentage points. However, the staff size category with the highest percentage of responses was large, while the revenue categories with (equal) highest percentage of responses were small and very large.

### LIMITATIONS

The study design and methods reflect several limitations in addition to the relatively low response rate for the open-ended questions. First, while the county sample provides substantial variation, it represents only five counties, and may not reflect experiences in other counties or states. Second, given the point-in-time survey design and anonymity of responses, we were not able to pursue follow-up inquiry with study participants to develop further the key themes identified in the analysis. However, the opportunities for

member checking provide a level of corroboration for the findings. Finally, it is likely that contract relationships evolve over time in complex, context-dependent ways that this study was not designed to capture.

### Findings

When asked to identify strategies for responding to contract relationship and performance measurement challenges, respondents highlighted the central role of communication. They described: (1) the diverse content of managerial communications related to the contractual relationship; (2) the importance of communication in supporting effective relationships and addressing challenges; and (3) factors that they associate with effective communication. The description of the findings below explains and illustrates these common themes, and highlights instances where the analysis identified differences among respondents related to sector.

### THE CONTENT OF MANAGERIAL COMMUNICATIONS

Respondents described formal and informal managerial communications that address a diverse array of issues throughout the contracting process that extend beyond contract negotiations and reporting (see *Figure 2*). Managers highlighted preliminary discussions related to identifying community needs and goals, as well as more specific conversations about the content and process for Requests for Proposals (RFP). Communications related to contract reporting included the input of nonprofit managers regarding the selection of performance outcomes to minimize reporting burdens. Of particular interest was the emphasis on problem solving communications designed to prevent or anticipate difficulties throughout the contract process.



**FIGURE 1**  
**Open-ended Questions**

Nonprofit manager survey	Public manager survey
We are interested in learning how you think contractual relationships with the county HSA can be improved. What strategies would help enhance the contracting process or address challenges in your relationship with the county HSA?	We are interested in learning how you think contractual relationships with contractors can be improved. What strategies would help to enhance this contracting process or address challenges in your relationship(s) with contractors?
Gathering and reporting information on service quality and program outcomes, and then reporting that information to the county HSA, can be challenging. If you can, please describe a challenge you have experienced related to these areas, and any steps your agency and/or the county HSA have taken to address this challenge.	For your contractors, gathering and reporting information on service quality and program outcomes, and then reporting that information to the county HSA, can be challenging. If you can, please describe a challenge you have experienced related to these areas, and any steps taken by your agency and/or your contractors to address this challenge.

### MANAGERIAL COMMUNICATIONS AND STRONG CONTRACTUAL RELATIONSHIPS

County and nonprofit managers emphasized the importance of communication in fostering positive relationships with their contract counterparts, or as one executive in a large urban county agency succinctly stated: “Communication, communication, communication.” Conversely, some managers noted that strong relationships enable effective communication throughout the contracting process. As an executive in a nonprofit multiservice agency explained: “We appreciate the close relationships that we have with our local HSA program and contract analysts. The relationships allow for two-way communication before, during, and after contract periods and flexibility when circumstances change.”

Regular and face-to-face communications were perceived by county and nonprofit managers as contributing to stronger relationships. A program manager in the public assistance division of a large suburban county noted: “Our HSA and contractor relationships are enhanced via open communication and regular meetings.” A county manager in a large urban/suburban agency described the way in which opportunities for direct, face-to-face communication promote trust and stronger relationships between county and nonprofit staff:

I think that there definitely needs to be a face-to-face meeting with the contractors and all of the Agency’s staff, so that people have a sense that there are humans behind these processes and to cultivate more rapport between the contractors and the Agency representatives. . . . Also, I’ve

recently initiated one-to-one interviews, and have found these to be extremely effective with contractors. I think they like the ability to just connect with just one person, be candid, and also to be in their own space.

An executive in a nonprofit agency providing adult education services expressed concern about the absence of opportunities for regular, face-to-face communication offered by the county agency:

Gathering and reporting the information is routine and not difficult. We only have 1 or 2 face-to-face meetings a year, and I feel I have little knowledge apart from the basic info we collect and provide as to what service quality they are looking for and program outcomes. It could be this basic information is all they are concerned with. I feel if we had more face-to-face meetings in a year, communication and understanding could be greatly improved.

In addition to contract-specific dyadic exchanges, a number of respondents emphasized the value of network communications that bring together multiple contracted providers within a specific service area. A fiscal manager in a large urban county recommended regular meetings involving agencies providing related services as a strategy to improve contracting relationships: “Quarterly communication meeting where all the contractors under a certain program or area can come discuss issues and get updates on internal items.” Similarly, a fiscal manager in a large suburban

county pointed to the need for additional forums for information exchange between county and contractor staff on a diverse array of topics related to contracts:

More steering committees based on services provided would be beneficial to the contractors and the agency. I currently attend a monthly/quarterly steering committee, which includes (HSA) contracts, performance evaluation staff, program staff and contractor staff. The meetings are highly informative, and all stakeholders are kept abreast of important issues relating to the delivery of services, performance, new policies/procedures, and other important contract issues. The contractor is able to share best practices, challenges, success stories, etc.

Finally, public and nonprofit managers pointed to the importance of two-way communications between nonprofit and county human service managers, as a strategy to improve decision making and achieve better program outcomes, while balancing power relations. An administrator in a large urban county highlighted the value of incorporating nonprofit perspectives in contract design:

Viewing the work of contractors more as shared work between partners who can each add critical information to the whole picture of service delivery, client assessment, and evaluation instead of a more one directional relationship in which the county agency tells the contracting agency what is needed, how much it can cost and how it is to be measured and reported would facilitate better outcomes.

An executive of a large, nonprofit multiservice organization also emphasized the value of bilateral communication, contrasting experiences in their contractual relationships with separate divisions of the county human service agency:

Because we contract with several arms of the HSA, we find that there are different levels of communication dependent upon which arm the contract is with. Contracting with one division, for instance, is easy: there is a lot of communication; we are made aware of programmatic and contract changes in advance; they work with us to find workable solutions; our representative is open and responsive to feedback. Some of the other divisions, however, are not as easy or open to work

with, and communication is lacking or one sided. Sometimes we are simply told not to ask: they are not open to feedback, and communication is one sided.

## **FACTORS SUPPORTING EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION**

In addition to highlighting the importance of regular, face-to-face, two-way communications, respondents described three characteristics they associate with effective managerial communications related to human service contracts: (a) transparency, (b) balance of flexibility and consistency, and (c) timeliness.

### *Transparency*

County and nonprofit managers perceived transparency in communications as contributing to trust in contract relationships and strengthening understanding of complex contract issues. Respondents highlighted the importance of candid and accurate communications with respect to funding priorities and decisions, contract reporting requirements, and contract performance.

Nonprofit agency managers sought and appreciated transparency on the part of county agencies with respect to overarching community priorities, as well as specific funding criteria. An executive in a nonprofit organization providing services to survivors of sexual assault and domestic violence spoke about the negative impact on trust between contracting agencies that results from a lack of transparency on the part of the county agency with respect to contract processes and funding decisions:

We would like to see [the] County be more thoughtful and transparent about awarding contracts and funds; seems like they sole-source when there are several qualified organizations. Conflicts of interest in relationships as to who gets funded, and often just as important is [the issue of] who knows what and when they know it. Things have been so relaxed for so long that an e-mail came out last year to a group of shelters where it was clear that one of the shelter directors knew before everyone else about the year's contract award. This creates serious mistrust and a lack of faith in the funding process.

Nonprofit managers also sought transparency related to the contract reporting process, including access to the data they were required to transmit to county automated

**FIGURE 2**  
**Contract Communication Topics**

Identifying needs and goals for service delivery system.	County manager: <i>We could meaningfully include client/stakeholder/community input in the RFP development process, at least the needs assessment stage.</i>
Developing RFP announcing county agency's intent to contract for particular services.	Nonprofit manager: <i>Actual performance and progress toward previous contract goals nor role in advocacy to secure funds was not fairly considered when allocating funds between contractors in a single RFP. We made it an issue and while it did not change the outcomes, we have become much more proactive in future contracts.</i>
Negotiating contract terms.	County manager: <i>Coming to agreement on clear outcome objectives and service objectives during the RFP and negotiating process that can then be tracked is difficult. We have begun to tighten this process up, but it is a challenge.</i>
Regularly exchanging information about service delivery.	County manager: <i>Contractors often serve the most challenging clients, and when unable to meet the outcomes, it gets difficult to have a frank conversation about what is happening. We are striving to build better relationship with contractors to have these conversations earlier on.</i>
Reporting by contracted agencies regarding services and outcomes.	Nonprofit manager: <i>In the latest round of contracts, we had multiple conversations about what outcomes to track and whether we could pull those outcomes out of our current tracking system. County [human services agency] has been willing to work with us to match their outcome needs with our current Homeless Management Information System tracking system so that we do not have to duplicate efforts</i>
Identifying problems and developing solutions.	Nonprofit manager: <i>Our relationship with the county has improved over the past year. Primarily because we have focused on improved relationships because of shared desired outcomes and increased transparency. We have been able to schedule more problem-solving meetings rather than waiting for something to go wrong.</i>

data systems. An executive at a nonprofit agency providing supportive housing and social services to individuals with mental illness noted that access to performance data was very difficult:

We were requested to input information into (county data system), but were not able to access the system for many months. The system is not very user-friendly, and extracting any useful indicators for performance indicators is next to impossible. If we are entering data into a system, we should have the ability to access that data in a way that we can use.

Transparency regarding performance reporting requirements is similarly valued; as an executive at a nonprofit agency providing housing and supportive services to homeless adults and families noted: "Our agency has developed practices around data collection, data systems, and contract management. It would help for [county human service

agency] to be more transparent and timely about their requirements."

Public managers emphasized the value of accuracy and candor related to reporting of client outcomes. A fiscal manager in a large urban/suburban county echoed the nonprofit manager perspective regarding the role of performance measures in ensuring the flow of adequate information about service delivery: "Training, transparency, and parity. We need to continue to standardize the measures for service categories and develop a unit cost within each category. That would increase transparency and parity." Another manager in a large urban/suburban county similarly highlighted transparency with respect to performance reporting, to ensure that contractors understand the way data are used:

We have different definitions of service, and they change sometimes with program interpretation. We worked to develop a transparent data sheet that explains to contractors how we achieve the numbers that illustrate their performance, and, therefore, what we expect them to track. We have

them submit numbers along with their invoices, and resolve them with our performance data.

Public managers also expressed views similar to those of nonprofit managers related to the need for clear communications regarding funding priorities and decisions. An executive in a large urban county agency explained the need for clarity about priorities and funding levels in an environment of limited resources:

All contractors would like more funding to maintain their organization. Due to a finite amount of funding, our department needs to put the services to customers as paramount. The key is to be very clear about the service needs and funding amounts in the Request for Proposals, so there is no misunderstanding once an agency has been funded.

### *Balance of flexibility and consistency*

Consistent with guidance offered in previous scholarship on contractual relationships and public-private partnerships formed to provide complex services (DeHoog, 1990; Head & Alford, 2015), some nonprofit and county managers highlighted the importance of flexibility in contractual arrangements. The importance of flexibility was more frequently noted, however, among the nonprofit managers. Nonprofit managers emphasized the benefits of flexibility with respect to service delivery models and contract performance. An executive in a nonprofit housing agency highlighted the linkage between flexibility and innovation in service delivery: “It would be helpful if there was opportunity for more innovation and flexibility around service delivery models and focuses on outcomes.” The executive director of a large community development agency described the importance of flexible time frames with respect to achieving contract objectives, given changes in the community and the political environment:

Our program outcomes tend to be related to community processes and policy work, so our outcomes are typically difficult to fit into the box of service provision. This type of work is also impacted by community and political dynamics, and can be somewhat unpredictable, needing flexible time considerations for meeting our objectives.

Some county managers acknowledged the need to respond flexibly to challenges that contracted agencies experience related to contract reporting databases, by developing

alternative data collection and reporting mechanisms. Several county managers focused on ensuring an appropriate level of responsiveness in contracting processes; for example, one manager in a large urban county stressed the intersection between flexibility, trust, and transparency, noting: “We can tighten up our contracting process to create more trust and flexibility in program interpretation, delivery, and reward. We can move toward a real transparent performance-based contracting system and remove much of the politics that hinder progress.” The need for flexibility with respect to contract language was noted by a program manager in a large urban county, who reported: “*Contracts usually have a ‘standard’ language across programs, but it is not always relevant from one program to the next.*”

In contrast, many county and nonprofit respondents expressed challenges and frustrations related to a lack of consistency in various components of contract communications. As with perspectives on the value of flexibility, complaints about inconsistency were more common among the nonprofit managers than among the county managers, although the difference was not as great. The most frequent issue related to the proliferation of databases across different funding streams, sectors, county agencies, and programs. A program manager in a large urban county highlighted the need for greater consistency with respect to the data systems for performance reporting: “Agencies vary a lot in the degree to which they adopt technologies—lack of a standardized database platform across all agencies. Many times the agency may use a different system in managing the clients and service deliveries, which is different from the county reporting system.” An executive in a nonprofit agency providing health and social services to veterans similarly noted burdens imposed by incompatible data systems across multiple funders, describing agency efforts to develop technological remedies: “It has been hard to meet all the data requirements of multiple funders. It isn’t so much that they want different information as that they want the same information but in different ways. It can make data collection redundant and occasionally absurd. We have tried to work with our IT group to standardize and translate where possible.” An executive at a nonprofit legal services agency noted issues related to variability in reporting requirements and eligibility criteria, highlighting the constraints imposed by external funders:

Managing different reporting systems is challenging, particularly as a smaller agency. Multiple contracts with different departments also makes it difficult for county staff to refer clients to us,

because of the varied eligibility criteria. Is this helpful to clients ultimately? There has been some discussion about unifying this. Regarding collection of specific data points, where the County contract is tied to Federal funds, it seems we are particularly limited in how we can describe our outcomes.

Respondents also sought consistency with respect to contract management guidelines and staffing. A fiscal manager in a large urban county recommended cross-division training to achieve standardized contract management practices between fiscal and program managers, as well as ensure continuity over time in the approach to supporting contractual relationships:

*My thought would be to train contract, fiscal, and program people together—and create consistency in terms of approach and handling of our contractor partners. We need to know each other and be a team—across the Agency, across departments . . . [The] benefit of having a solid team/community of agency staff means that there's a built-in succession plan, so when staff retired, other staff carry on in the same manner and spirit of the work—maintaining and supporting contractual relationships in the same, positive manner.*

An executive in a nonprofit community health center similarly highlighted the need for consistent staffing in order to ensure communication is complete and clear: “More consistency in terms of the personnel with whom we interface, and ensuring that the HSA team is all on the same page. Sometimes there seem to be gaps in information and/or communication among HSA staff that can result in confusion for us as a contractor.”

### **Timeliness**

County and nonprofit managers reported numerous challenges related to ensuring the timeliness of communications. As one nonprofit executive at a large multiservice agency reported: “We have had ongoing difficulties agreeing on performance outcomes. Ultimately, we reached agreement, but it was difficult to get the right HSA people in the room in a timely manner to resolve this.” For some nonprofit managers, including an executive in a nonprofit agency providing mental health, housing and senior services, expectations regarding the timing of responses to communication requests were seen as reflecting the power balance in their

relationship with the county agency: “Overall, we often experience a quick response required when HSA reaches out to us; however, we often receive a slower response when we reach out to HSA. [I] would like to see this become more of a balanced relationship, as we both need each other to achieve community goals.”

Among public managers, the most common concern about timeliness related to receiving reports from contracted service providers within the time frame specified in the contract. A program manager in a large suburban county who identified challenges with timely reporting highlighted the capacity challenges faced by smaller agencies: “Most challenging issue equals getting reports in a timely manner. Some contractors are very small and do not have enough staff to provide the reports needed on a consistent basis. I ‘nudge’ and remind contractors for reports needed.” Conversely, a program manager in a large urban county agency highlighted the value of providing prompt performance feedback back to contractors: “Increase frequency of monitoring activities to be able to determine service efficiency and/or provide timely feedback to contractors on their performance.” An executive of a large nonprofit multiservice agency similarly noted the importance of timely and consistent performance feedback as part of the reporting process:

*[I]n some cases, we work hard to prepare quarterly reports but we never receive any feedback. We have asked for feedback, but we still do not receive it. There does not seem to be a formal process in place to make sure that the CBOs receive timely and consistent feedback on their performance outcomes. This is not the case for all contracts. Like I said, some of the contracts are well managed, with good feedback, and the data is collected and then evaluated.*

### **Discussion**

Study results reveal that county and nonprofit managers similarly highlight the importance of managerial communication in facilitating complex contracts for the delivery of human services. The results build on previous studies that have identified an association between managerial communication and the strength of contracting relationships (Amirkhanyan et al., 2010; Amirkhanyan et al., 2012; Vosselman, 2016). Respondents noted the value of regular, face-to-face, two-way communications in building close relationships characterized by trust and mutual understanding. Conversely, strong cross-sector relationships provide an environment that facilitates effective contract communications. These findings provide evidence of the



role that direct interpersonal communication can play in supporting a stewardship or relational approach to contracting (Van Slyke, 2007).

In the current study, the emphasis on regular and face-to-face communications serves as an indicator of the importance of the intensity of relational contacting, and expands upon previous studies with respect to the association between relationship duration and relationship quality. Scholars have emphasized the contribution of repeated interactions occurring over time to the development of trust (Bertelli & Smith, 2009; Brown et al., 2015), while some research has found that the efficacy of informal exchanges regarding performance diminishes in longer term contractual relationships (Marvel & Marvel, 2009). Based on the findings of this study, the quality of the contract relationship is linked to the quality of communications in terms of transparency, flexibility, consistency, and timeliness, as well as frequency of interaction.

From the perspective of public and nonprofit human service managers, contract communications are not limited to the formal exchanges required to negotiate contract terms and report contract outcomes; rather, respondents described formal and informal conversations about wide-ranging topics that include identifying needs and goals; developing the RFP; negotiating contract terms; coordinating service delivery; reporting on performance; and solving problems. This array of topics can be classified as: (1) contract-based communications that are procedural; (2) client-focused communications that relate to service delivery; and (3) collegial communications that reflect consultation activities. These three content domains make it clear that managerial communication in cross-sector contracting in the human services is embedded in relationships that extend beyond the boundaries of the formal contractual relationship (Bertelli & Smith, 2009; Lamothe & Lamothe, 2012; Romzek & Johnston, 2005; Van Slyke, 2007). Procedural communications related to negotiating contract terms and reporting contract outcomes establish a basic framework for service delivery. However, managers also engage in continuing client-focused service delivery communications that are essential to managing client referrals in an environment characterized by multiple, overlapping eligibility criteria and to serving diverse clients with varying levels and types of need. Consulting communications to address higher level challenges was identified by numerous respondents, including the relationship between changing community needs and designing feasible, relevant performance measures. This

form of contract-related communications appeared to be less frequent than procedural or client-related communications.

County and nonprofit managers articulated common perspectives on the characteristics of effective communications with respect to the themes of transparency and timeliness. Nonprofit managers emphasized the role of transparency regarding funding priorities and decisions in fostering trust, as well as promoting a sense of equity. County and nonprofit managers alike valued candor and accuracy with respect to performance reporting and requirements, in order to facilitate informed decision making. In this respect, the findings reveal a common desire for information symmetry that may reflect the shared values and interests of county and nonprofit human service agencies when seeking to provide effective services to address community needs (Van Slyke, 2007). The desire for transparency is notable in light of the politically sensitive environments in which county and nonprofit human service agencies operate as they deliver services to vulnerable populations (Hasenfeld, 2010). The risk of catastrophic events involving child welfare or adult protective services clients, as well as continuing debates over the appropriate allocation of taxpayer dollars to an array of government functions, contribute to an environment where disclosure of errors and performance issues can result in serious negative consequences for county and nonprofit organizations (Regehr, Chau, Leslie, & Howe, 2002). Transparent communications may be especially important in developing and sustaining trust in the context of human services contracting given the inherent risks involved in serving vulnerable children and families and the heightened level of public scrutiny (Hasenfeld, 2010; Van Slyke, 2007).

In view of the resource limitations and practice complexities that characterize human services delivery systems and pose continuing challenges for contract management (Romzek & Johnston, 2002), it is not surprising that nonprofit and county managers prioritize timeliness in contract communications. Delays in contract communications throughout the contracting process increase transaction costs associated with contracting, impelling managers to engage in repeated efforts to obtain needed information, in order to avoid service interruptions or negative consequences from political stakeholders or regulatory bodies (Brown et al., 2006). While many respondents described relationships with their managerial counterparts that are characterized by collaborative problem-solving and mutual responsiveness, some nonprofit managers viewed differential expectations regarding communication timeliness as an

indication of a broader power differential. As reported in studies of collaboration between government and nonprofit organizations, managerial perspectives on power and disadvantage are shaped by multiple organizational and individual level factors, including prior experience in collaborative relationships (Gazley, 2010b). These findings lend support to the notion that responsive communication may result on the part of nonprofit managers in more positive attitudes toward collaborative relationships with county managers.

The findings related to the importance of flexibility and consistency with respect to data systems, personnel, and procedures reflected a degree of variation between the sectors, with nonprofit managers somewhat more likely to emphasize the need for communication-based consistency as well as flexibility. In light of the power differential in the contracting relationship and the capacity issues more common among nonprofit organizations, we might expect that they would be impacted more strongly by inconsistent guidelines or inflexible demands involved in contracting communications (Thomson, 2011). In order to provide consistency with respect to contract expectations and procedures, county and nonprofit managers sought continuity of staffing, in line with previous research that noted the importance of stability among managerial counterparts across organizations (Romzek et al., 2012).

The continuing challenges posed by lack of standardization across multiple data reporting systems are consistent with previous studies finding that information technology can interfere with accountability in contracting, and indicate that technology barriers may persist even where government and nonprofit technological expertise is relatively high (Romzek & Johnston, 2005; Stuart, Graaf, Stein, Carnochan, & Austin, 2017). At the same time, respondents highlighted the need for flexibility regarding performance measures and time frames to account for variation in program design and evolving community contexts. As such, the findings portray a more complex dynamic than is generally proposed in the relational contracting and public-private partnership literature, which tends to emphasize flexible approaches to cross-sectoral relationships in order to allow for ongoing adjustments and problem-solving in the delivery of complex services (DeHoog, 1990; Head & Alford, 2015). A managerial framework that incorporates and balances flexibility and consistency of systems and responses may be more appropriate in some human service contracting environments, particularly among well-established public and nonprofit agencies with a history of successful partnerships.

Several practice implications for county and nonprofit managers emerge from these findings. Consistent with conclusions drawn from previous studies, these findings indicate that managerial communications serve a particularly important function in regards to performance measurement and reporting (Campbell et al., 2012). While respondents noted challenges related to negotiating service objectives and outcomes, engaging in continuous conversations about common goals and related outcomes can facilitate cooperation to achieve shared aims. County managers may be able to enhance the benefits of performance measurement by structuring opportunities for face-to-face interactions throughout the process of contract design, implementation, and monitoring. In order to develop a bilateral approach to performance reporting, county managers should identify ways to provide more complete feedback to their contractors regarding performance data. By providing timely analysis and feedback, county managers could strengthen relationships with their nonprofit partners, and support evidence-informed decision making related to service delivery, as well as other aspects of contracting. County human service agencies typically possess in-house communications expertise that could enable them to support contract managers in framing easily accessible feedback to contracted nonprofit organizations.

More broadly, county managers will need to work toward creating a context that promotes trusting relationships in which transparent sharing of information by nonprofit managers does not bring immediate risk of sanctions. County managers can model transparency in their communications related to agency aims and funding priorities. Responses to inadequate performance by nonprofit service providers could be structured in phases where the foundation includes informal collaborative problem-solving and more formal modes of technical assistance and subsequent phases could include communications about more punitive consequences (e.g., financial sanctions for misconduct or fraud). The demands for consistency and timeliness relate to both organizational and individual capacities. Strategies that organizational leaders might use to support effective and efficient service delivery include providing specialized training to individual contract managers, structuring opportunities to review and reduce contract management caseloads, and instituting mechanisms for minimizing staff turnover.

Contracts between county and nonprofit human service agencies will continue to play a critical role in the delivery of human services to vulnerable members of local

communities. These contracts present complex challenges with respect to ensuring accountability and coordinating services. Further research to build knowledge in support of county and nonprofit contract managers might include the following qualitative and quantitative questions:

1. What is the interrelationship between transparency, consistency, and timeliness in cross-sector contract communications in the human services?
2. What contract communications-related factors most contribute to decreases in information asymmetry and transaction costs related to contract monitoring and performance measurement?
3. Are there other moderating factors in relational contracting that both clarify common interests and increase trust?
4. How are these qualities of the interorganizational contracting relationships and communications similar or different in other public services involving complex contracts and high levels of uncertainty and risk?

In addition, intervention research is needed to investigate how relationships between nonprofit and county human service contract managers might be improved using strategies such as cross-sectoral or joint training, coaching, mentoring, and technical assistance. An important yet unexplored intervention research question is: How does the strength of the contractual relationship impact the outcomes of contracted human services? Finally, the prominence of ongoing client-focused service delivery communications points to the importance of pursuing studies that examine managerial efforts to manage referrals and coordinate responses to clients, so that human services contracting can achieve its broad goals of effective and efficient service delivery.

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# **III.**

## **AMPLIFYING THE VOICES OF SERVICE USERS**

# Clients as Customers: A County Social Services Agency Listens to its Primary Constituency

RICHARD R. O'NEIL, MICHAEL J. AUSTIN, AND SETH HASSETT

### Introduction

This case study focuses on client satisfaction research conducted at Santa Clara County's Social Services Agency as part of a county-wide initiative to "enhance customer service." The initiative, entitled "County Service: Collaboration for Excellence" is notable for at least two reasons. First, the initiative brought a unique "customer service" perspective to public county services. Secondly, it took place during a time of budgetary strain and cutbacks, when the predominant value in most government agencies is survival and efforts at quality improvement are often deferred.

### Background

As was the case with most county governments in California, the late 1980s and early 1990s were challenging times for Santa Clara County, which was confronted with increased demand for services at a time of diminishing economic resources. Located in the southern Bay Area, Santa Clara is the fourth largest county in California with a population of about 1.5 million. During the 1960s and 1970s, the metropolitan area of San Jose, the largest city in Santa Clara County, grew rapidly and became known as the "Silicon Valley," a leading center for the computer and microchip industry in the U.S.

Although the booming economy of the Silicon Valley helped provide a high standard of living for some, it did not benefit all equally. Amidst the growth and prosperity, significant areas of poverty and social need continued to exist. By the early 1990s, a slow down in some sectors of the computer industry, combined with cuts in defense industries and competition from other technology centers in the U.S. and abroad, led to painful economic readjustments in the area.

Many middle class families were experiencing unemployment and increased economic insecurity. In 1990-91,

an estimated 100,000 people received some form of public assistance in Santa Clara County and the county faced the prospect of even greater demand for services. The county faced the increasingly complex needs of its population at a time when crisis in state government, and a shifting and unpredictable local economy limited its financial resources.

While the demand for services was great, county administrators and political leaders also sensed that many community residents were dissatisfied with the quality of services. For Santa Clara County Executive Sally Reed, this was an issue that could not be deferred. "Even with fewer resources," she argued, "we know we can be courteous, we know we can be polite, we know we can be efficient and effective, and we know that we have a work force that we can be truly proud of."

This perspective was shared by the Director of Santa Clara's Social Services Agency. For him, creating a customer service ethic was an essential part of making services work and improving staff morale. He seized the county's "customer service" mandate as an opportunity to assess the need for change in his own agency. He noted that, while social service clients may be dependent on the agency for financial assistance, the agency is dependent on the clients for its existence. In his opinion, the interdependence between the agency and the users of its services entitles the service users to be treated as customers. While they may not have the choice to take their "business" elsewhere, he argues, these customers have a right to be treated as if they did have that choice.

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When the agency fails to hear its customers' concerns directly, he says, they will be heard indirectly when they vote, sue, move or protest in the press or in the streets. A continuing focus on customer satisfaction provides a necessary discipline for agencies with a monopoly on a particular service or governmental function and creates an incentive for consistent attention to quality improvement. A customer service approach also provides useful criteria for the agency to evaluate and understand itself better.

### Assessing Customer Satisfaction

For the Director, it was especially troubling to hear complaints that a component of county social services—public assistance eligibility services—were an inhospitable and unhelpful environment for clients. “I got consistent feedback that welfare department people were rude, arrogant, etc,” he said. Yet it was not clear whether these complaints were representative of all service users or just a vocal minority.

To get a better handle on this issue, he decided to systematically examine “customer satisfaction” with the agency. He brought in the private research firms Strategic Research Inc. and Hamlin Harkins, Inc. to “identify the satisfaction level of clients served by the agency and to provide input for setting up an on-going satisfaction measurement process.” The research process that was conducted had three phases. First, preliminary interviews were conducted with selected “stakeholders” (staff and administrators) in the system to understand their perceptions of what were important priorities for the agency. Second, a group of college students was hired to play the role of customer and complete a mock application process and give their comments on the experience in a focus group. Third, client surveys were conducted by mail and in person with social service users as they left the agency. The results of this research included a range of client perspectives.

During the first phase of preliminary interviews with thirteen staff and administrators, agency personnel were asked to share their perceptions of an “ideal” agency, along with their views about current agency strengths and limitations. While they expressed satisfaction with the overall management and “general attitude” of the agency, there was also an interest in improving interactions with and responsiveness to clients.

As stakeholders, they placed a high priority on good management, adequate staff levels to handle caseloads, training and staff development and sufficient compensation. Their perceptions of qualities of an ideal agency with

a customer service perspective, included: 1) responsive, 2) helpful, 3) effective, and 4) sensitive. The greatest gap between their assessment of current services and their vision of an ideal agency was in the areas of “helpful,” “sensitive,” and “responsive.” Suggestions for ways to improve organizational functioning included increased staff training, more bilingual and bicultural staff, more computer equipment to reduce paperwork, and increased community liaison. Yet as useful as these responses were, they were still based on a perspective within the agency. The results were encouraging, especially the positive staff attitude toward the agency and the commitment to improving the quality of customer services. The Director hoped that the next two phases of the research would enhance the understanding of how customers viewed the agency.

Results from the focus group of college students seemed to confirm the director's worst fears. The students, who had been hired to go through an actual application process without telling staff that they were involved in a research test, had overwhelmingly negative reactions to the experience. He noted that “not a single redeeming thing was said in that focus group.” Students pretending to be clients shared their observations about the unfriendly atmosphere of the lobbies, the unpleasant staff attitudes, the intrusiveness of questions they had to answer, and the difficulty of getting assistance. Some students commented that the numerous bureaucratic signs and lists of rules and regulations posted in the lobby created an unpleasant and unwelcoming atmosphere. Others felt that staff were curt or rude to them. Some were also incredulous that, in order to get a small amount of financial assistance, they would be required to document all personal assets and might not be allowed to keep some possessions. Overall, the results of the student focus group painted a bleak picture of the agency, leading the Director to expect similarly negative results from the survey of service users.

Yet the customer satisfaction survey of actual clients revealed a much different perspective. A total of 3000 questionnaires were mailed to service users and 1200 responses were received, a respectable 40% response rate. In addition, 60 phone interviews were conducted. In general, these respondents were surprisingly positive about the Social Services Agency. Among the overall findings were the following:

#### ELIGIBILITY WORKER:

- 91% of respondents said that their eligibility worker was willing or very willing to help them;



- 89% said that their eligibility worker took just enough time to hear their story; and
- 84% reported that their eligibility worker told them everything they needed to know about their case.

#### **PERSONNEL ATTITUDE:**

- 83% of respondents rated telephone receptionists as either good or very good;
- 87% rated office workers as good or very good;
- 90% rated their eligibility worker as good or very good.

#### **COURTESY OF PERSONNEL:**

- 78% of respondents reported being treated courteously by telephone receptionists;
- 77% reported being treated courteously by office workers;
- 83% reported being treated courteously by their eligibility worker.
- **Waiting Time:**
- 74% of continuing clients felt that the wait for their initial visit was not too long; and
- 45% of intake clients felt that the wait for their initial visit was either a little too long (20%) or much too long (25%).

While these results did not show a perfect record of customer satisfaction, neither did they reflect the pervasive dissatisfaction that might have been expected given the consistent complaints that had prompted the research and the negative reactions from the student focus group. While the Director found these results encouraging, he also thought that it was also important to examine the results in more depth. While the positive results could be used to give a morale boost to front line staff who had so often borne the brunt of complaints and criticism, it was also important to read “between the lines” to understand the implications of the findings. Why, for instance, had the results differed so significantly from those of the student focus group? One partial explanation could be found by comparing the responses of service users who had been on aid for less than six months to those who had been on aid for longer periods. In general, respondents who had been receiving aid for the shortest time were more critical and less satisfied with service than those who had been receiving welfare assistance for a longer time, although the differences were not profound. Among the responses showing this pattern were the following:

- 12% of respondents on aid for less than six months said that it was “very difficult” to get the information they

needed from office receptionists compared to 6% of those on aid between six and twenty-four months and 5% of those on aid for those on aid more than two years.

- 14% of those receiving aid less than six months said it was “very difficult” to get information they needed from their eligibility worker compared to 12% of those on aid from 6-24 months and 6% of those receiving aid over two years.
- 18% of those on aid less than six months said it took “much too long” for them to get their first appointment with an eligibility worker, compared to 12% of those on aid from 6-24 months and 5% of those on aid more than two years.
- 14% of those on aid less than six months said that their eligibility worker was “not helpful at all” compared to 11% of those receiving aid for 6-24 months and 6% of those receiving aid for over two years.

While there were a few exceptions, this general pattern of declining rates of dissatisfaction showed up throughout the results. There was little reason to believe that these changes in customer satisfaction had much to do with changes in caseload sizes or changes in the waiting periods for first appointments since these had remained fairly consistent over the period covered in the study. Instead, it seemed that some changes were taking place in the way customers or clients were experiencing the services. A number of explanations were possible. It was possible, for instance, that clients and workers developed positive working relationships over time that made clients view the services and workers more positively. While this interpretation might explain the improved evaluation of eligibility workers with whom service users interacted on a regular basis, it did not seem to explain the improved evaluations of telephone receptionists and office workers, who were less likely to develop working relationships with clients due to frequent shift rotations. Furthermore, it was difficult to explain why clients who had been on aid the shortest time were the most dissatisfied with the waiting time for the initial visit.

A second possible explanation was that service users had developed greater knowledge of the system over time and were able to advocate more effectively for their own needs. According to this interpretation, people who had learned to “work the system” would be more satisfied with the services they received. Yet this explanation did not address the differences in satisfaction regarding the length of initial wait for services.

A third explanation was that client expectations about services had diminished over time, whereby increased familiarity and experiences with the system may lead to their decreased expectations of what was possible or changeable. For example, what was once considered rude behavior become more tolerable and even acceptable or what was once “much too long” to wait for service became a routine waiting period.

For the Director, the third explanation seemed most important from a customer service perspective because it raised the issue that the agency might be “training” its customers to accept lower quality service. Such an interpretation of “diminished expectations” could help to explain the difference between the student responses and the client survey results. The Director surmised that students brought a very middle-class perspective of entitlement in terms of what to expect from a government agency as reflected in their comments. People in serious financial difficulty, however, might be more grateful and less critical of any help as well as more experienced in accommodating hostile attitudes from people in authority (e.g., banks, utility companies, bill collectors and government agencies). In this context, an agency offering any assistance might be viewed as positive.

Even when they were somewhat dissatisfied, clients who depended on welfare assistance for survival might be hesitant to “bite the hand that feeds them” by being overly critical. As Santa Clara Supervisor Rod Diridon commented, “It is hard to get accurate data for public service. If people really need the service, they will usually be more positive than they really feel.”

Considering the possibility of an inflated positive response, the Director felt that it would be important to

examine small variations in responses for information about possible improvements. Results seemed to indicate, for instance, that clients were less satisfied with receptionists than with eligibility workers. While 83% of respondents had rated the attitude of telephone receptionists as either good or very good, this number was somewhat lower than the 90% who rated their eligibility worker as good or very good. Additionally, most respondents had rated receptionists as good while a much greater number had rated eligibility workers as very good. Examination of specific comments given by respondents showed that many clients had experienced difficulty in understanding and communicating with telephone receptionists, many of whom were Vietnamese and spoke with an accent.

Looking into the issue further, the Director also became aware that it was common practice in the clerical staff to assign the newest workers to telephone or office receptionist duties. Few experienced clerical workers wanted these responsibilities, which were seen as requiring few skills and were stressful. Yet these receptionists were also the first agency contact for most service users. To the Director, placing the workers who were the least knowledgeable about the agency as the first point of contact for clients was unacceptable, yet he understood the need for a sense of status and professional development in clerical work. To help address this issue, he and his staff developed a “clerical induction sequence” in which new staff were familiarized with agency and county services before being put in the positions requiring interaction with the public. A key ingredient of this induction process is a small desktop booklet entitled “50 Ways to Serve Our Customers” (*Figure 1*).

**FIGURE 1**  
**50 Ways to Serve Our Customers**

**I. In-Person Techniques**

1. Make eye contact
2. Acknowledge customer's presence
3. Welcome the customer
4. Smile

**II. General Techniques**

5. Ask how you can help
6. Use a pleasant tone of voice
7. Use the customer's last name, address the individual as Ms. or Mr.
8. Be polite
9. Be helpful
10. Be patient
11. Exhibit customer empathy
12. Handle private matters confidentiality
13. Maintain the dignity of the customer
14. Wear name tags
15. Say "thank you"
16. Say "we"
17. When appropriate say "I made a mistake"
18. Develop and practice listening skills
19. Give clear and concise explanations and directions
20. Verify customer's understanding
21. Respond quickly
22. Explain any delays
23. Focus on business issues
24. Be complete
25. Understand all procedures and policies
26. Where possible, do everything right the first time

**III. Telephone Techniques**

27. Speak clearly
28. Identify the office you represent and yourself
29. Give clear explanations to the caller
30. Do not put the caller on hold for longer than 2 minutes

- individual you are transferring the call
32. Use an answering machine after hours

**IV. Personal Techniques**

33. Be aware of the personal image you project
34. Be appropriately groomed
35. Dress appropriately
36. Be aware of your personal hygiene

**V. Physical Environment**

37. Post clear and language-appropriate signs
38. Post hours of operation
39. Make clear and language-appropriate brochures and information available
40. Provide comfortable and clean waiting areas
41. Provide access to telephones, restrooms and wastebaskets
42. Provide kid-friendly areas
43. Provide a variety of reading, audio and visual materials

**VI. Employee Support Techniques**

44. Exhibit teamwork
45. Have clear service goals
46. Recognize and publicize accomplishments
47. Make supervisors easily accessible for dispute resolution
48. Promote customer feedback and publicize it
49. Ask for help when needed
50. Be proud of your work

# Redefining the Bureaucratic Encounter Between Service Providers and Service Users: Evidence from the Norwegian HUSK Projects

SARAH CARNOCHAN AND MICHAEL J. AUSTIN

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## ABSTRACT

The HUSK projects, involving collaboration between service users, providers, educators, and researchers, coincided with the reorganization of national government services (NAV). The NAV reorganization brought together employment services, social insurance, and municipal social service benefits, and called for a service model where users would be empowered to influence the provision of services. In this analysis of the HUSK cases the authors focus on the relationship between the service user and the service provider, identifying themes in two broad domains: concepts of the individual that included the service user and the service provider and concepts of the relationship that included power, role, activity, interaction, and communication. Within each theme, the analysis highlights the transition from a traditional or historical state to a new or desired state and draws upon some of the classic literature that frames the encounters between service users and providers.

**KEYWORDS:** Service user, street-level bureaucrat, bureaucratic encounter, dialogue

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Given the unique dimensions of the Nordic welfare state and the HUSK projects designed to improve public social services in Norway, it is important to frame an analysis of the HUSK case studies within the context of social policy. As noted elsewhere in this volume, the local HUSK projects were based on the collaboration between service users,

providers, educators, and researchers that also coincided with the major reorganization of national government services (NAV). The NAV reorganization brought together employment services, social insurance, and municipal social service benefits for the purpose of making welfare services more efficient. The NAV reform was intended to address poverty and social exclusion by providing work incentives to help with the transition from benefits to gainful employment. Work-oriented services were required to be based on a comprehensive assessment of service user experiences and expertise as well as active service user involvement in activities that maximized choice and individual initiative.

This form of Norwegian “welfare reform” also called for a service model where each user or user group needed to be, to a greater degree, empowered to influence the provision of services by inserting their experiences and needs into service delivery decision making (Kildal & Nilssen, 2011). This transition from passive receipt of monetary assistance to active engagement in employment services raised questions about the difference between user participation and user involvement. User participation often focuses on policy development related to a social contract that includes specifying user rights and entitlements as well as duties and responsibilities. User involvement, on the other hand, often refers to policy implementation that features the availability of integrated, geographically accessible services. As Julkunen and Heikkilä (2007) note, the processes of user involvement can be viewed as part of a continuum “from weaker to stronger or from more passive forms towards more active forms of involvement” (p. 89). The strongest or most

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\*Published in:  
JOURNAL OF EVIDENCE-INFORMED SOCIAL WORK,  
12:64–79, ISSN: 2376-1407 PRINT/2376-1415  
ONLINE DOI: 10.1080/15433714.2014.954944  
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active stage of the process features users as service definers/managers of their own programs, the next stage involves user influence (independent and competent to assess service quality), followed by user involvement (contributing to changes in service delivery), and finally user participation (advisers and informants, often related to the development and/or evaluation of public policy).

The empowerment of service users relies heavily on the normative foundations of the Nordic welfare state. As Kildal and Kuhnle (2005) note, the normative foundation in Norway includes a commitment in legislation to broad and universal protection and centralized administration using a complex set of regulations (sometimes leading to long delays in processing claims and negative stereotyping of people who are dependent). They identify the three essential features of the welfare state as: (a) a comprehensive social policy, (b) institutionalized social entitlements as social rights, and (c) social legislation in support of universal welfare for all citizens. They also identify the elements of universal welfare in Norway as including the following:

- Community-building and social inclusion (“pension as people’s insurance,” p. 21)
- Protection against social risks leading to social rights and prevention (“we are all in the same boat,” p. 22)
- Support for human dignity to counter social exclusion—removing the humiliating loss of social status and self-respect (“no longer the worthy or unworthy poor as a public burden,” p. 23)
- Economic and bureaucratic efficiencies (“no more selectivity or discrimination based on moral or economic grounds,” p. 24)

The historical origins of universal welfare in Norway can be traced to the role of citizens directing their welfare demands toward government, the emergence of egalitarian social structures rooted in preindustrial peasant society, the cultural homogeneity of the society (ethnic, religious, and linguistic), and the extra-ordinary crisis of World War II that brought political opponents together to form a “broader common values platform” (Kildal & Kuhnle, 2005, p. 20).

In this analysis the authors focus on issues in the relationship between the service user and the service provider reflected in the HUSK cases. As highlighted in *Figure 1*, the cases can be categorized in terms of dialogical processes, social work education, and service innovation. In the next section, a brief review of classic works that examines the service user–service provider relationship identifies central dilemmas and dynamics in the encounters between users and providers. The cross-case analysis that follows

**FIGURE 1**  
**Selected HUSK Cases**

### **Dialogue**

#### *Individual Perspectives*

1. Traces of User Participation: User Perspectives on Conversations between Social workers and Users (HUSK Agder)
2. A Researcher’s Experience with Service User Involvement: A self-reflective essay of participating in a Course for Changing Attitude

#### *Group Perspectives*

1. Dialogue Seminars in Baerum (HUSK Oslo Region)
2. The Evolution of the HUSK Dialogue Group (HUSK Mid-Norway)

### **Social Work Education**

1. The University Clinic in Social Work in the NAV Sagene District Office (HUSK Oslo Region)
2. User Involvement in Social Work Education (HUSK Agder)

### **Service Innovation**

#### *Service Users*

1. Courses for Changing Attitudes (HUSK Oslo Region)
2. Users Experiences with the Social Services (HUSK Stavanger Region)
3. The Meeting Place (HUSK Stavanger Region)

#### *Service Providers*

1. Professional Text: Documenting Professional Work (HUSK Mid-Norway)
2. The Conceptual Project (HUSK Agder)

represents a thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) that is informed, but not limited, by this literature. In the concluding section, we reflect on questions and lessons emerging from the HUSK cases.

## **Literature Review**

Much attention has been given in the social work literature to the relationship between service users and service providers in the context of public social services. This selective review focuses first on the provider experience articulated by Lipsky (1980; 2010) in his street-level bureaucrat (SLB) framework. It then turns to the analyses of service user experiences outlined by Hasenfeld and others (Hasenfeld, 1985; Hasenfeld, Rafferty, & Zald, 1987; Hasenfeld & Steinmetz, 1981). Last, counterbalancing these largely critical views of the relationship, more optimistic perspectives offered by



Goodsell (1981), Hupe and Hill (2007), Lefton (1970), and Seikkula, Arnkil, and Ericksson (2003) are highlighted.

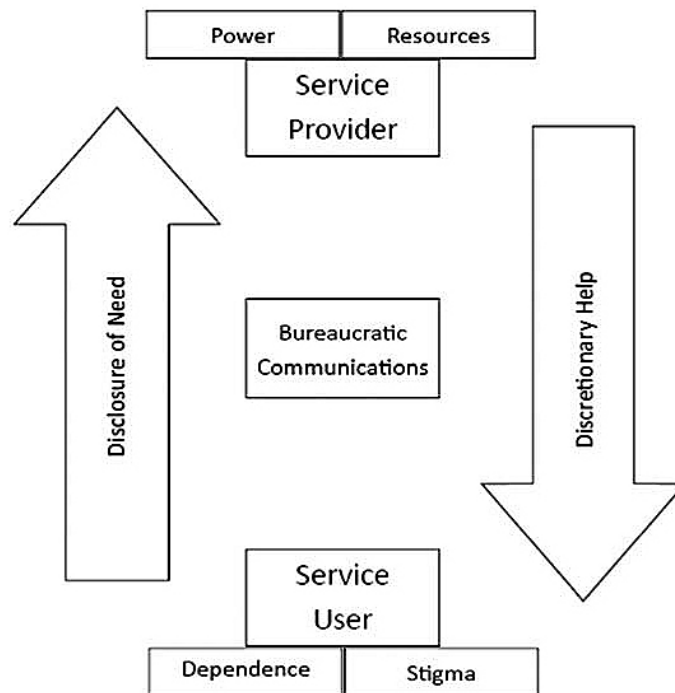
The pioneering research of Lipsky (1980, 2010) sought to identify the discretionary components of the work of service providers whom he called SLBs. As Lipsky (2010) notes, when exploring different concepts of work, service provider discretion is needed given the complexity of service needs and the sensitivity required to address them. Lipsky (1980) articulated a framework in which the conditions of the street-level bureaucracy shape the exercise of discretion by the SLB. The conditions impacting the use of discretion include uncertain policies and goals, inadequate resources, and the need to exercise human judgment in order to carry out the SLB role. In response to these conditions, SLBs develop work routines and beliefs about the client that allow them to manage work responsibilities; however, while these routines and simplifications assist them in managing complexity, they are frequently subject to bias and the objectification of the service user (Lipsky, 2010). Beliefs about the client include views about the role of the clients in assuming responsibility for their troubles and about their capacity to exercise choice or judgment about their own lives. There is an ongoing tension between the bureaucratic model of detachment and resource limitations and the human relations model of recognizing the humanity in each person and being equipped to respond to specific needs (Lipsky, 2010). Commenting in an updated edition, Lipsky (2010) notes the importance of strategies for increasing client power “for their potential contribution to changing street-level relationships” (p. 193), including demystifying bureaucratic policies and practices, instituting practices to strengthen accountability to clients, and developing mechanisms allowing client participation in agency governance.

While service providers represent the welfare state in their role as SLBs, service users assume the role of applicant while engaging in a wide range of bureaucratic encounters. Hasenfeld (1985) defines bureaucratic encounters as including the following elements: (a) a form of exchange relationships involving the transfer of resources between clients and service bureaucracies, (b) the client obtaining services at minimal personal cost, (c) the organization obtaining resources needed to operate and minimize costs, (d) the power-dependence relationship between clients and SLBs determining the outcome, (e) client dependency proportional to the client’s needing services (the poorer the client, the greater the impact of the SLB), and (f) bureaucracies dependent upon the client for achieving their mission.

In an effort to focus on the power dependency associated with the bureaucratic encounter in public assistance organizations, Hasenfeld and colleagues (1987) focused on such organizational factors as the client’s limited awareness of service availability and eligibility criteria, administrative controls reflecting service scarcity, low levels of professionalization despite high levels of discretion, and the existence of stigmatizing norms and perceived unfair policies and procedures. They found that service users experience bureaucratic encounters with a sense of powerlessness, low expectations for satisfaction, and low rates of utilization due to reluctance to exercise their rights based on the stigmatizing aspect of disclosing private problems to public officials and experiencing the bureaucratic encounters as demeaning. In particular, they noted that “the bureaucratic encounter is both an information exchange and a negotiation of a conflict management process through which the applicant’s normative framework and expectations are brought in line with the organization’s” (p. 402). In essence, they observed that “welfare state bureaucracies use their power advantage (over the applicant) to structure the bureaucratic encounter in a manner that buttresses their political economies” (p. 405).

Hasenfeld and Steinmetz (1981) found that client-official encounters are shaped by the forces inside and outside the organization that result in a set of tactics used in the bureaucratic encounter by both parties. The tactics used by service users include: (a) sustaining persistence in the face of discouraging obstacles, (b) exercising persuasion regarding need and service eligibility, (c) managing appearances in order to “pass” as higher social status (dress, appearance), (d) gaining familiarity with bureaucratic procedures and language, (e) using threats, and (f) participating in collective organizing (client advocacy groups). In contrast, the tactics used by service providers when dealing with service users include: (a) ignoring the impact of waiting time, (b) using discouraging or abusive language, (c) controlling communications (completing questions on intake form), (d) selectively disseminating information (limited transparency of policies and procedures), (e) labeling or defining client identities for the purpose of organizational processing, and (f) engaging in incomplete or insufficient communications due to differences in culture and/or class. Lefton (1970) provides an alternative to the primarily negative depictions offered by Lipsky, Hasenfeld, and others. Using the concepts of laterality (client’s biographical space) and longitudinality (time dimension of service), Lefton (1970) notes that client-serving organizations are as influenced by the behaviors of clients

**FIGURE 2**  
**Traditional Bureaucratic Encounter**



as they are by the behaviors of staff members and other stakeholders. In defining a high degree of organizational responsiveness to client needs, Lefton (1970) developed the concept of “plus laterality” in which “a client-serving organization takes the ‘whole’ person into account in its efforts to effect given social, psychological or physical change” (p. 19). Based on the view of organizations as social psychological systems of interacting parts (e.g., service users and providers), he viewed “plus laterality” as a way to democratize bureaucracies.

Similar to Lefton, Goodsell (1981) found in his research on service providers and users in a public assistance organization a form of bureaucratic encounter that he called “positive discrimination.” Goodsell (1981) defines positive discrimination as “the granting of personal favors in the form of extra-attentive behaviors to individual clients (not categories of them) who are for some reason personally appealing (worthy)” (p. 771). This form of bureaucratic encounter involves a more open manner in the face-to-face client encounter where interest is shown in the ongoing events in the life of a client (e.g., health, children, etc.) as well as sharing limited aspects of the worker’s life (children,

etc.) as a form of power-sharing and humanizing dialogue. The benefits of “positive discrimination” include increased service user comfort based on receiving extra attention, temporary service provider relief from exhausting routines and enhanced self-image as a valued professional helper, and an increased sense of job satisfaction experienced by service providers based on the exercise of personal power and empowerment achieved by resisting bureaucratic constraints.

Citing Lipsky (1980) and Hasenfeld and Steinmetz (1981), Hupe and Hill (2007) acknowledge the traditionally asymmetrical relationship between the service provider and the service user resulting from the non-voluntary status of service users and the service provider’s discretion over resources. They offer a typology of accountability regimes in which the public administrative type is characterized by conformity to standard operating procedures and rule-bound relationships between users and providers. In contrast, they propose a model of participatory accountability involving “shared goal and standard setting” between SLBs and service users (Hupe & Hill, 2007, p. 294). In this model, accountability occurs within a relationship of trust

**FIGURE 3**  
**Themes Emerging from Cross-Case Analysis**

**Concept of Individuals:**

**Toward Partnership and Shared Expertise**

Service Provider:

Expert Helper —————> Participant/Partner

Service User:

Passive Recipient —————> Expertise and Worthiness

**Concept of Relationship:**

**Toward Equality and Authenticity**

Power

Asymmetry —————> Voice/Rights

Role:

Helper and Helped —————> Reciprocal Disclosure

Activity:

Bureaucratic Encounter —————> Shared Dialogue Activity

Interaction:

One on One —————> Group

Place:

Office —————> Shared/Safe Space

Communication:

Formal —————> Informal

Problems —————> Worries

that emphasizes service user voice and is focused on whether shared outcomes have been achieved.

Recent efforts to understand the bureaucratic encounter can also be seen in the work of Seikkula and colleagues (2003) who conceptualize “zones of subjective worry” (small worries, growing worries, and great worries). The zones can be captured on a continuum from no worries (1) to *slight worries* (2) to *repeated thoughts of worry* (3) to *growing worry that diminishes confidence* (4) to *marked worry resulting in reduced resources* (5) to *strong and constant worry that reduce energy and resources* (6), and finally to *very deep and strong worry that exhausts capacities and leads to danger or harm*. Since worries are shared by all humans, Seikkula and colleagues contend that the concept of “zones of subjective worry” provides for a more equal “playing field” for building and maintaining the service user–provider relationship. Exploring “zones of subjective worry” involves: (a) separating “talking” from “listening” in order to make room for inner dialogues, (b) finding a safe place to address

unexpected questions that provide opportunities to think aloud and engage in thought experiments, and (c) approaching the present situation by focusing on the future where many worries reside (Seikkula et al., 2003).

This brief review of the literature provides multiple perspectives to inform analysis of the HUSK cases. *Figure 2* summarizes the key concepts that characterize the traditional bureaucratic encounter as described by Lipsky, Hasenfeld, and others, including power dependence, stigma, and unilateral disclosure on the part of the service user, contrasted with power, resources, and discretionary assistance on the part of the service provider, with communication constrained by bureaucratic requirements.

## Methods

Following close reading and discussion of the HUSK cases, the authors developed an initial analysis with reference to Lipsky’s (1980, 2010) SLB framework, drawing additionally upon Hupe and Hill’s (2007) related work defining participatory accountability. In this analysis, a set of preliminary codes were created and used by the authors and a research assistant to code the set of cases using the comment function in Microsoft Word to perform coding. The codes developed for this first stage of the analysis included participatory accountability, power sharing, coproduction of services, reciprocity, choice, asymmetrical relationships, objectification of service user and provider, role of place, conceptions of work, and goals.

After reviewing the first draft of the cross-case analysis, a decision was made to broaden the analytical approach in order to integrate an inductive coding strategy using a line-by-line emergent coding process. This process generated a set of codes that retained revised versions of some of the original SLB concepts, added new codes, and restructured the relationship between codes. A list of code frequencies was generated in order to identify high frequency codes both within and across cases. At the same time, the authors engaged in additional reading in the literature on bureaucrat encounters in the social services. Drawing upon this literature and with reference to the code frequency analysis, the codes and related excerpts were reviewed by the authors, and an expanded thematic framework was developed as summarized in *Figure 3*. Each concept was represented in multiple cases ranging from three (e.g., Activity) to nine (e.g., Service User Conceptualization). In the cross-case summary that follows, a purposive selection of examples from the cases is used to illustrate the themes.

## Summary of the Cross-Case Analysis

As summarized in *Figure 3*, the cross-case analysis identified themes in two broad domains: concepts of the individual that included the service user and the service provider and concepts of the relationship that included power, role, activity, interaction, and communication. Within each theme, the analysis focused on the transition from a traditional or historical state to a new or desired state. The following discussion briefly describes and illustrates each theme.

### CONCEPTS OF THE INDIVIDUAL: TOWARD PARTNERSHIP AND SHARED EXPERTISE

Participants spoke of the traditional conceptualization and roles of the service provider and service user in the Norwegian welfare state and described ways in which these were changed within some of the HUSK initiatives. As one participant in the Users Experiences with Social Services case noted, both *providers and users approach the relationship with biased views* about their counterpart:

I learned that both the social worker and the user enter the service relationship with their own prejudices; namely, my views as a social worker of service users, and the users views of both social workers and the system they represent. (p. 41)

In the case on Courses of Changing Attitudes, participants noted the importance of reducing biased views by developing understanding between providers and users with regard to the “skills, personal qualities, and personal experiences of the other” (p. 11).

### CONCEPT OF WELFARE STATE BUREAUCRAT: TOWARD PARTNERSHIP

Comments by participants in some HUSK cases reflect the concepts of the traditional and transformed service provider. For example, a social worker involved in the HUSK Mid-Norway Dialog Group described her previous work experiences in the 1990s, highlighting the effect of high case loads and absence of oversight that contributed to the traditional conceptualization of service provider as “helper” and service user as “passive recipient.” She explains:

Under such conditions I struggled to get good conversations and build relationships, where I could become familiar with the particular man or women in front of me. This created frustration in my daily work. . . . I was the good helper who knew best, while the client was and would still be the passive recipient. (p. 29)

As the concept and role of the service provider changed in profound ways in the HUSK Dialog Group, some staff welcomed the transition, while others resisted, stating:

Not all staff members were comfortable with working side-by-side with service users, especially left (sic) alone to share a meeting room with them. It was strange to go from conversations at the office behind a closed door to casual and informal conversations with ordinary people. Many staff members noted that they got energy and strength when they worked closely with people who often felt powerless. (p. 30)

The Meeting Place case captures the difficulties and benefits associated with a changed concept of the service provider and service user. In this case, the provider’s expert knowledge is challenged by the user’s knowledge derived from experience as follows:

Practitioner’s expert knowledge as the norm is being challenged with the meeting with users. The knowledge is based on the users’ own experiences and how they feel about being dependent on the system. When the practitioners are present within a users’ area of comfort, they can help to break down the boundaries that are there. (p. 34)

A social worker involved in the Users Experiences with Social Services case spoke to the reframing of provider expertise and its relationship to power asymmetry in the relationship:

Those of us who worked in the HUSK projects were probably more open than was usual in the social services. Social workers are used to being the experts and being in control so when the user is in need of help, we are the helpers. An equal partnership clearly challenged this view. The staff found it strange that they should deal with people whom they suspected would be very critical of the social services department. (p. 41)

### CONCEPT OF SERVICE USER: TOWARD WORTHINESS AND EXPERTISE

To an even greater extent, the HUSK cases reflect changes in the conceptualization of service users. The following five interrelated concepts emerge across the cases: recognition, worthiness, expertise, individuality, and responsibility.

**Recognition.** In many of the cases, recognition (i.e., hearing and seeing the service user as a human being) was an important aspect of the experiences reported by participants. Without this basic experience of recognition by the service provider, a service user in the Users Experience case described the following loss of sense of self:

They do not think about the person. You mean nothing, and I was very preoccupied about it; don't they see me? Is it really true that I almost do not exist? I then feel that they do not care, I do not mean anything. I feel like I literally slip away. (p. 38)

In the Traces case, the experience of being recognized and taken seriously is captured in the following:

The youth explains that user participation is about taking people seriously, and not avoiding their issues. . . . The youths say that social workers must take them and what they say seriously if participation is to take place. They say the social workers, as professionals, must be able to understand them, especially beyond what is explicitly expressed. (p. 58)

For service users to be heard, service providers needed to listen beyond the spoken words in order to interpret what is known about the individual user.

**Worthiness.** Many of the HUSK initiatives reflect a central concern with transforming the view of the service user from unworthy to worthy. Participants in the Dialog Group initiative described the following sustained shift in the perceived status of service users:

We all had the same social status, everyone were [sic] equal. The group developed a feeling of togetherness, where you could be yourself without fear of being looked down upon. You did not need to feel ashamed. It made it easier to try new things and face new challenges that might not have been considered in the past. (p. 31)

These participants reported a related shift in the relationship between service user and service provider when “the user is no longer in the role of seeking help, but is a person with resources” (p. 29). In the Traces case, youth participants noted the connection between self-worth and individual change, as one described how her social worker challenged her to do new things: “I am very much a person who believes

she can't do anything. It has been important to show what I can do. I can't do that. Or . . . I have to be pushed to do it.”

**User expertise.** The changes in perceptions of service user worthiness were related to increased recognition of user expertise in the design, delivery, and evaluation of services and the education and training of new social workers. For example, in the Meeting Place case, it was noted that the emphasis on service user expertise challenged the traditional model of “practitioner's expert knowledge” by focusing on “the users' own experiences and how they feel to be dependent on the system” (p. 34). The Dialog Group case described challenges in helping service providers and users understand that user participation:

. . . was important because their knowledge and experience was needed to develop the new space. We needed to develop a culture where everyone felt comfortable to participate and where the experiences of everyone were equally important, regardless of background and education (p. 30).

The experiences of service users contributed to the education of nonuser members:

All members of the Dialog Group had their experiences which they brought with them. While no one in the group had a social work degree, everyone had many years of experience with the ‘system.’ You could say that everyone in the group acquired an informal education about the experiences of service users. (p. 32)

**Individuality.** Perhaps implicit in the theme of recognition is the focus on individuality that appeared in some of the cases. For example, in the Dialog Seminars, a proposal that emerged in the third seminar related to the design of individualized measures for assessing user progress: “Measures must be tailored to the users so that they fit the user—and not vice versa. We need to find non-traditional solutions that suit the user” (p. 24). Similarly, the aim in the Professional Text case was to provide a guide for documentation that would help the provider “become familiar with the client's situation, needs, resources, and perspective” (p. 63).

In contrast, a social worker participant in the Dialog Group described her struggles in traditional social work settings to “become familiar with the particular man or woman in front of [her]” (p. 29). Similarly, in the Conceptual Project, participants were “concerned about how



categorization of users could represent an obstacle to capturing the uniqueness of each individual situation” (p. 68):

In NAV labor (employment services), the users were considered as ordinary job seekers but in NAV social insurance (services) the users were considered as disabled and needed follow-up. I think we’ve had very different views of exactly the same users, due to the type of (service or) benefit they received” (p. 68). With respect to the reforms, one provider noted the need to be more concerned about how we treat each other and said: “We must not treat everyone in the same way: If you are not like this or like that, then you are not interested in getting a job. It’s not like this. (p. 69)

**Responsibility.** The recognition of the worthiness, expertise, and individuality of the service users was accompanied, in some cases, by changes in how user responsibility is viewed and exercised. For example, service users in the Meeting Place case assumed considerable responsibility when they were:

. . . hired to do a job; they are responsible for when the house is open, for purchasing and serving, cleaning and practical tasks, such as maintenance . . . . It is the host’s responsibility to organize the day, determine what is to be served and how long and how often the facility should be open. (p. 33)

In the Traces of User Participation case, youth participants noted the value of their own initiative and action. For example, one participant “emphasized that it was his own efforts that gave him the job” (p. 57). As the author explains:

The youth’s reflections show that they see user participation as part of being active in promoting the changes that have taken place. This activity goes beyond their interaction with their social worker, and relates to more options than those the social worker can offer. They present themselves as proactive individuals who do not settle for suggestions or activities that they are dissatisfied with. They appear as autonomous individuals who take control and do not want their days filled—at least not for the long run—with what other people fill them with. (p. 57)

However, the author goes on to point out that while the youth view themselves as acting autonomously, the youth’s

goal of being engaged in activities is consistent with the overall goals of the program.

## CONCEPT OF RELATIONSHIP: TOWARD EQUALITY AND AUTHENTICITY

### *Power: Toward Voice and Rights*

A number of the HUSK cases involved efforts to make the transition from power asymmetry to less asymmetry and more equality between service users and providers. The leaders of the Dialog Seminars who were service users envisioned a project in which they would “work equally with practitioners towards common goals” (p. 19) and led a change process that they referred to as the “coup” (p. 20). After demanding equal user control of meetings (including the agenda and minutes), they reported that “[w]e felt we had accomplished something, a balance of power was created” (p. 20). However, these efforts faced considerable resistance from service providers, who explained:

The user representatives realized their desires, but not without resistance and after several rounds of negotiations. Such a process is in line with the essence of empowerment where you have to expect resistance when it comes to the redistribution of power. (p. 22)

The user-led group went on to establish a series of Dialog Seminars that “made it possible to achieve a redistribution of power in the way that user representatives gradually took more responsibility . . . [giving] them the opportunity to meet the staff in a more equal position, where they in partnership can collaborate to improve the services” (p. 25). However, subsequent experiences of user participants with respect to power symmetry were very different. Two who went on to work as employees of KREM reported: “As project managers with user experiences, we experienced powerlessness, rather than the power and influence (we developed) in the work at HUSK Baerum” (p. 27).

The Dialog Group also sought to empower service users. Reflecting on the power relations when she worked in a traditional social service office in the 1990s, one of the social workers noted:

When I decided to study to be a social worker, I had a hope to enter into a partnership with human beings on an equal arena. I wanted to engage in joint efforts that could lay the foundation for change and a better life for the clients, however, conversations with clients were either in the reception or in the office behind closed doors. No one

could monitor what we said, (how we) behaved, or how we exercised our power. . . . The power structure was evident, and those clients who needed our help were completely at the mercy of our reviews. (p. 29)

In contrast to this earlier experience, the Dialog Group was “user-driven” and designed to allow service users to express their opinions on services where “we all had the same social status, everyone was equal” (p. 31).

### ***Role: Toward Reciprocal Contributions***

Accompanying efforts to balance power in the service user–service provider relationship were changes in the roles played by these individuals in service delivery and decision making. For example, the Dialog Group emphasized a shift in role for service users, from help-seeker to active resource contributor. In the case on Changing Attitudes, service users were trained as coaches for other participants and acted as role models for current service users. In the Dialog Seminars, user representatives served as process advisors, led the seminars, and engaged in data collection. The case author concludes that “The users are a resource and should contribute, and the (official) ‘helpers’ should not help, but collaborate.” The author goes on to highlight individual challenges in assuming new roles, often relying on personal characteristics as well as past practices and experiences that call for reflecting on these roles to plan further work and how the tasks should be allocated.

In the Meeting Place case, users were hired as hosts and performed tasks that included “purchasing and serving, cleaning, and practical tasks, such as maintenance” (p. 33), as well as deciding “how they will organize the day, what to serve and how long, and how often they should be open” (p. 33). As in the Dialogue Seminar case, this role transformation presented challenges for service users and service providers, as it required “new ways of understanding equal collaboration” (p. 34).

### ***Activity: From Bureaucratic Encounter to Shared Dialogue Activity***

Several of the HUSK projects featured new types of shared activities that differed from the typical bureaucratic encounter that focuses on eligibility determination, needs assessment, or service referrals. In the Changing Attitudes case, the participants hiked, climbed, and explored the local town in Turkey where the course was held. They used these outings as an opportunity to share issues and get to know each other. As the participating researcher noted, it was essential that all participated equally in the storytelling and

other activities, so that all could feel confident sharing. The participant researcher explained:

I shared many things about myself in the group that I would not tell to (almost) anyone because I developed a sense of full confidence in the group. The confidence was there *because everyone did the same sharing*—it was not only one party that would “confess” to another where the other is [a] professional worker. I gained such a strong feeling when I could see/hear that others understood what I was saying and what I was feeling. (p. 16)

In the Dialog Group case, service users and providers shared meals together in a common meeting space that provided an opportunity for informal dialog and cooperation, representing a substantial change from common practices. The change was described as “. . . quite a contrast from communicating in a public office, and this new idea met with considerable resistance. Not all staff members were comfortable with working side-by-side with service users, let alone sharing a meeting room with them” (p. 32).

Some service users also struggled with feeling comfortable in this new shared activity: “Some (service users) sat with their bowl of food in a corner or in another room until it became comfortable to join the rest of the group at the table” (p. 32).

One of the initial events in the Meeting Place case involved service users and managers traveling together to Copenhagen to visit a similar project. The trip enabled them to walk and talk together so that they “got to know each other as persons,” contributing substantially to the level of respect, cooperation, and trust among participants (p. 33). The development of the Meeting Place itself provided further opportunities for shared activities, “both practical and organizational” (p. 33). Participants noted that shared activity led to a sense of shared ownership: “the facility renovation was an important part of the partnership, and was performed by the participants in the project . . . (where) the practical work and effort from all parties gave everyone a sense of ownership of the house” (pp. 33–34).

### ***Interaction: Toward Group Processes***

Group processes were a common feature of the HUSK cases that provided a number of benefits. For example, in the case on Changing Attitudes, the group provided emotional support and an experience of equality for participants. “When the participants were asked to read their stories to the group (only as a voluntary act), the fairy tales elicited emotional responses in an environment where the service

users, researchers, educators, students and practitioners were all equal" (p. 10). The group process also contributed to the development of a shared understanding between service users, practitioners, students, educators, and researchers and provided a venue to identify changes at the level of individual and system relationships.

In order to design the User Involvement Project, a group process was developed to involve service users, a student, representatives of service user organizations, and an educator. After regular meetings and discussions of user involvement and user expertise, a decision was made to employ service users as mentors to students, with the mentoring itself to be provided in a group format. While the user representatives felt the need to acquire specific training in group methods, the educator sought to reassure the service users that they were fully equipped to engage in dialogue that emphasized "reflection as the basis for learning" (p. 50). Group membership was an important factor, such that the planning group decided to exclude teachers and supervisors in order "to give students a space where they would not be evaluated (when it came to sharing) their own practical experiences" (p. 52).

### *Place: Office to Shared/Safe Space*

The multiple HUSK projects highlighted the importance of place, particularly settings outside of the social service offices. These alternative service locations were seen as contributing to shared understandings, authentic relationship building, and the empowerment of service users. For example, the Changing Attitudes case took place in a small rural town in Turkey where the foreign location amplified "the impact of the experience of service users, service practitioners, students, and academics working together to develop a common understanding of what is needed to achieve a better relationship and cooperation, both at the individual and on the system level" (p. 11). The participating researcher highlighted multiple benefits, stating:

It was clear that the venue made a difference in terms of its remoteness, privacy, intimacy, and feeling of being in another world. The climate of Turkey made it possible to be outside for large parts of the day, both on adventure tours of nature and the sea as well as for small group meetings. (The process of) being so close to nature gave me new energy and many others expressed the same reaction. (p. 14)

However, some raised the question of whether changes achieved in a new and distant location could be sustained

upon return to a familiar environment to work with a social worker who had not participated in the course (p. 16).

With respect to the impact of place, the Dialog Seminars represented contrasting experiences. The seminars identified a desire on the part of users and staff for "a meeting place outside the office, where they can share experiences and information, and how they can work together more informally" (p. 25). In a contrasting reference to place, two service users hired as project managers experienced striking exclusion from the NAV/social service offices, explaining:

After a while we got an office with a good size for the two of us, where we could work and have meetings. The office was not part of the NAV or social services, but physically nearby, just across the hallway. The office had no access to toilets, water or canteen. . . . When we finally got the key to the social services office, it felt like we did not belong there, that we had snuck in and we were followed, and sometimes even stopped by the employees. (p. 26)

In the Meeting Place case, communal meeting spaces were created where service users and providers could engage in very different kinds of interactions and conversations. The Meeting Place was designed as a "big room in the middle of the house owned by the municipality and used by various nonprofit organizations" (that provided) a place to meet for informal discussions over a cup of coffee where facilities were shared. The rooms were used equally by participants and staff. We got feedback that it was nice to gather there and one participant noted, "Here, I know that they are happy together. There are no conflicts hanging on the walls. Here you can talk together like normal people" (p. 30). By moving the interactions out of the social services agency and into the community, the Meeting Place provided a different physical context for interaction that helped to challenge the "actors' perceptions and stereotypes of each other" (p. 33). The conversations between users and providers were altered and became more "informal and not about results or writing minutes" (p. 34). Summarizing the lessons of the project, the author wrote that "it is important to have a venue to meet, not necessarily to come up with solutions or answer of questions, but to talk and find support in each other, and to avoid unnecessary misunderstandings or unrealistic expectations" (p. 34).

In the University Clinic case, social work education experiences were moved out of the university and into the agency in order to facilitate collaboration with practitioners

and service users. This experience helped to challenge student stereotypes about the agency:

For many students, it is their first experience in a NAV office, while others have experience as former NAV service users. The students really appreciated this orientation to practice as it made a positive impression on them, especially given the negative media coverage of the NAV reorganization reforms and scandal. (p. 45)

The NAV office became a classroom that reflected “situated learning” within a “community of practice” (p. 47). Similarly, the User Involvement case makes the point that student mentoring by service users is provided in the workplace, helping to further distinguish this experience from the university-based guidance they receive (p. 51).

### *Communication: Toward Authenticity*

Finally, the HUSK cases involve substantially different kinds of communication between service users and practitioners, based on dialogue involving storytelling, reciprocal disclosure, and informal conversations, with the potential to transform the relationship between individuals with different backgrounds and experiences. The Traces case focuses intensively on the individual communications between youth and social workers, highlighting the central role of dialogue in social service encounters. Communications between social workers and youth were recorded, transcribed, and reviewed by the participants, who were then interviewed about their perception of the conversation. The youth participants emphasized “the importance of talking together to clear things up. In conversations, they could exercise influence, and could be influenced” (p. 57).

In the case on Changing Attitudes, fictional storytelling using fantasy figures, metaphors, and symbols was used to help participants “create meaning in their lives through the stories they tell about themselves” (p. 10). Through this exercise, using a very different kind of language than the bureaucratic language of assessment or case planning, “service providers and users are given the opportunity to develop a common understanding of each other’s experiences and perspectives, meeting the person ‘behind the mask’ and exploring the process of redefining relationships in social service settings” (p. 11). The researcher who participated in the course explained that while social workers typically do not self-disclose in their professional interactions with service users, she viewed it as appropriate to “be more personal than is usual for a social worker or researcher” (p. 14), allowing participants to “connect with each other as

human beings and get to know each other as a humans” (p. 15), through a process “founded on reciprocity and trust” (p. 17).

In the Dialog Group and Meeting Place cases, participants also highlighted the different kinds of communication in which they engaged, including informal discussions. A Meeting Place participant praised these informal encounters that allowed people to “talk together like normal people” (p. 30). While it felt strange for some to “go from conversations at the office behind a closed door to casual and informal conversations with ordinary people” (p. 30), the authors report that “social workers gained considerable experience by engaging in informal conversations with participants in this new space” (p. 30). This project further focused on communications by creating the Dialog Group to develop “an easier way for service users to present their views on things they found to be a problem as well as what seemed to be working well” (p. 31). The topics were selected by group members, based on their importance, often leading to “engaged and heated discussions” (p. 31). As one participant explained, the Dialog Group was a setting where authentic communication was made possible: “The Dialog Group was a place where you could drop the social mask that you normally use to hide the fact that you are a social services user. In the Dialogue Group, we all had the same social status, everyone was equal” (p. 31).

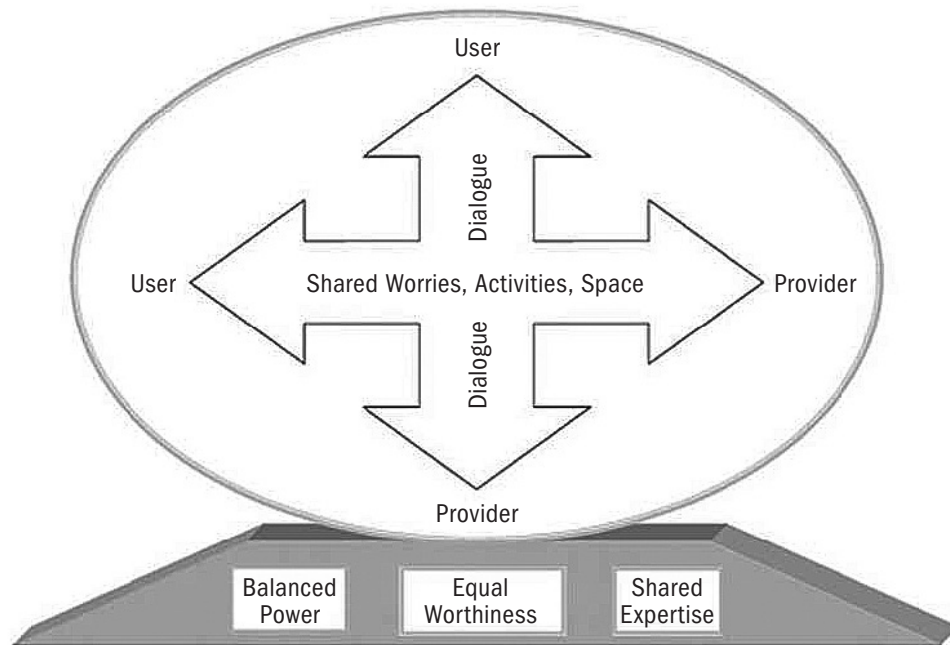
### **Discussion**

The HUSK projects reflect efforts to redefine the nature of practice within public assistance programs, with particular attention to transforming the relationship between service users and providers. *Figure 4* highlights key aspects of the redefined encounter between users and providers that emerged in the HUSK cases.

Central to the HUSK reforms was the recognition of the equal worth of service users that is in stark contrast to the traditional stigma described by Hasenfeld and colleagues (1987). The discretionary nature of the activities carried out by SLBs (Lipsky, 1980) made it possible to expand frontline practice to include increased power sharing within the bureaucratic encounter. In line with Lipsky’s later prescription for increased client power (Lipsky, 2010), multiple approaches to power sharing provided both the service provider and user with an opportunity to reflect upon and share their own perspective as a way of making explicit their tacit knowledge. Power sharing served to humanize the discretionary power of the service provider and empower the service user, maximizing both experience and expertise



**FIGURE 4**  
**Redefining the Bureaucratic Encounter**



relevant to managing the bureaucratic encounter. This focus on service user expertise from experience provided a way to increase client resources, thereby, decreasing the dependency on the provider that Hasenfeld (1985) described. Rebalancing the power between service users and providers facilitated role transformations in which their contributions to the exchange relationship were more equal, though not identical.

As illustrated in the HUSK cases, shared activities provide a form of intervention when both service users and providers are engaged in meal preparation and meeting planning. While this form of activity may be common in residential human service organizations where both users and providers are in sustained contact with one another, it is less common in community-based services where various forms of individual bureaucratic encounters are the dominant activity. Shared service evaluation activities were also important, reflecting a more participatory accountability model as outlined by Hupe and Hill (2007). In addition to these shared activities, the location of service was also significant in a number of cases. Moving out of government offices to locales that foster communications proved to be another important finding from the HUSK cases. The shift in the communications environment from formality to informality increased the potential for power-sharing and

more open, candid relationships reflecting both “positive discrimination” as noted by Goodsell (1981) and “plus laterality” as noted by Lefton (1970).

Another example of power sharing can be found in the language used for discussion of services and goals between service users and providers. As service providers shift their focus from “helping to address service user problems” to joint engaging in an exploration of self, it becomes possible to amplify the volume and clarity of service user voices as well as rebalance the traditional hierarchical, power-dependent relationship between two human beings. As the content of communications between service users and providers shifted away from the information exchange related to user problems described by Hasenfeld and colleagues (1987) and toward authentic and reciprocal disclosure, the stigma associated with unilateral disclosure of personal problems to public officials was reduced and, in some cases, removed.

The emphasis in the HUSK cases on dialogical communications (Seikkula & Arnkil, 2006) illustrates the importance of “removing masks” through dialogical meetings as a way to open up communications within unequal power relationships. Seikkula and colleagues (2003) point to the need in the service provider–user relationship to move from a predominant focus on objective facts (e.g., limited job skills, inadequate work histories, etc.) to subjective



worries in order to capture what service providers see subjectively and what service users experience subjectively. The focus in the HUSK cases on listening in order to fully recognize the uniqueness of human beings engaged in the service provider–service user relationship can be informed by the worry zone framework outlined by Seikkula and colleagues (2003), where listening and thinking out loud are critical aspects of communication.

The pioneering efforts of the HUSK projects raise many questions for future practice and research, and a few are noted below:

1. How can future social work practitioners learn the power-sharing skills associated with this form of redefined practice and use them effectively in bureaucratic settings?
2. Is there evidence that the use of these skills leads to improved outcomes for service users?
3. What are the implications of shifting the focus of dialogue between service providers and service users from “problem solving” within the context of the bureaucratic encounter to the articulation of “shared worries” within the framework of “zones of subjective worries?”
4. To what extent are the practice issues of shared activities, alternative meeting places, and authentic communications relevant to different fields of practice beyond public assistance services?
5. What types of organizational and managerial supports are needed in a wide variety of human service organizations to help staff engage in new forms of practice?
6. To what extent can government policy and funding support future innovations as illustrated in the HUSK projects?

In reflecting on the role of helping and helplessness, Gummer (1979) nearly 35 years ago commented on the structure of discretion in the American welfare system by noting:

that the social work profession, because of its history, assumes an orientation to its clients that flows from a conception of the client as intrinsically dependent and thus with limited abilities to participate in the process of service provision. Social workers must seriously reappraise their positions as more and more clients demand to be treated in ways that require severe limitations on the prerogatives traditionally claimed by professionals. The issue of professional and administrative discretion

gets to the heart of one of the most pressing of modern concerns; namely, the way in which people's behavior should be regulated. (p. 225)

To what extent does this perception of dependent service users and dominant service provider continue to exist in today's welfare systems? While some will argue that there has been little change, others will note that our colleagues in Norway and elsewhere in other welfare states are taking promising strides in the direction of transforming practice and redefining the bureaucratic encounter.

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# **IV.**

## **CAREER CHALLENGES**

# The Politics of Executive Entry: The First Year as General Manager of the San Francisco Department of Social Services

BRIAN CAHILL AND NIAZ MURTAZA

The goal of this case is to describe the process of executive entry and the way in which new executives can create a new vision and position the organization for the future. The case includes the experiences of the General Manager (GM), Department of Social Services (DSS), San Francisco, during the first year of his appointment in 1993. The case describes the challenges faced by a senior administrator of a social service agency in a large metropolitan city facing significant social problems, a diverse population, strong interest groups and a shrinking budget.

Executive entry is defined as “the personal process of managing oneself in order to lead others” when entering in an organization new to the executive (Austin, 1989). The process involves the executive in rapid and intense learning about the organization, its staff, and its environment in order to develop a vision for the organization and herself/himself. The new General Manager spent a hectic year making important programmatic changes in the San Francisco Social Services Agency as he quickly became aware of the agency’s politically charged internal and external environment.

While the Bay Area is one of the largest metropolitan areas in the country, the city and county of San Francisco has a diverse population of only 752,000 (47% white, 28% Asians, 14% Hispanics and 11% African Americans). The city and county has been facing increased social problems, especially in the areas of homelessness and violent crime, along with five years of budget deficits (1988-93) related to the recession in the state economy, reduced state support and local collective bargaining agreements. In 1993 the San Francisco Department of Social Services had a budget of approximately \$300 million with 1300 employees serving over 80,000 clients.

The new General Manager is a 52 year old San Francisco native and was appointed at the end of December 1992. Prior to assuming the position he was the President of Hathaway Children’s Services, a private Southern California

residential treatment and special education program for abused, neglected and emotionally disturbed children. His previous administrative experiences included the positions of the Executive Director of the California Association of Services for Children, Executive Director of the San Francisco Boys Home, and Executive Director of ChildHelp, Los Angeles. He was also the President of the Los Angeles Children Roundtable, a group of 70 public and private sector leaders working with county government and the schools to improve services for children and families. He holds a Masters degree in Social Work from the San Francisco State University.

### Entering A Highly Politicized Environment

In addition to the significant social problems, the position of General Manager is extremely high-risk and stressful due to the existence of strong advocacy and interest groups and an influential media. The new incumbent experienced a number of politically volatile situations soon after taking charge.

One of the first such experiences involved his decision to remove some children from a foster home who were perceived to be at risk. The case came to his attention since he was also serving at that time as the Acting Assistant Director of Children Services to cover the responsibility of a vacant senior management position. In view of the gravity of the situation, he approached the court to obtain permission to remove the children. The judge denied the request. The GM, while receiving conflicting input from staff, was in a fix as he was well aware of the danger that the children would be in over the weekend at the foster home. Thus, he took the risky and unusual decision of removing the kids

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despite the court decision. The judge held him in contempt of court and sentenced him to six weekends in the Sheriff's Work Alternative Program. There he spent time with those held on drug charges, robbery, and assault who found it hard to believe that the judge had sentenced a county agency director to do time.

No sooner had the GM done his time, then the department was awash in negative newspaper publicity related to a senior manager who was arrested on federal drug charges and taken away in the middle of a meeting in the GM's office. The incident seemed to have been preplanned by the District Attorney's office to embarrass DSS as it occurred at 10:00 am and was reported in the 11:00 am morning edition of the local newspaper. This incident reflected part of the adversarial relationships which had evolved among various city departments in San Francisco. The GM decided to retain the manager after he was released on bail, especially since the indictment indicated that he was unknowingly implicated. The GM's decision was criticized in the press and different parts of the community. It became very clear to the GM that the local media had the power to disrupt the work of public agencies. The principle of standing up for staff who are innocent until proven guilty or for children in dangerous situations were clearly tested in the first few months on the job.

The GM also learned about the difficulties involved in dealing with personnel and civil service rules as he attempted to retain an outstanding African-American worker when it was discovered that there were a number of felony charges on her record, most of which were subsequently dismissed. Although the worker had disclosed all felony charges at the time of her hiring application, she inadvertently forgot to mention two misdemeanor offences. The DSS Personnel Division wanted to have her fired for failing to disclose the misdemeanors. In view of the outstanding performance of the worker, the GM worked with Probation, the court, and the DA's office and was able to retain her.

As if public ridicule in the press was not enough, the charged issues of racism also emerged, requiring more attention and problem-solving skills. A white manager turned down a request from an African-American clerk for leave to study French art in Paris on the grounds that it was not relevant for the clerk's job. When rebuffed, the clerk offered to study the French welfare system instead. The manager responded by saying that she could not foresee the benefits from having a clerk study the French welfare system. The clerk, who had worked previously at NAACP, claimed racial harassment and the incident received considerable

negative attention from NAACP. The incident highlighted the importance of using more diplomatic and sensitive communication in such situations as well as citing the risks of losing the vacant position due to tight budgetary conditions.

The GM also ran afoul of one powerful state legislator who wanted him to fire a manager from the previous administration. When the GM refused to comply and wrote a letter to the legislator, the letter was reported in the press. This prompted the legislator to suggest to the Mayor's office that the GM should be replaced. Nothing came out of it, but it was another distraction. These events demonstrate how seemingly small matters can explode into extremely volatile situations in a highly politicized environment and take attention away from addressing the agency's primary responsibilities. They highlight the degree to which political considerations compete daily with administrative decision-making in public agencies.

### **Providing Leadership On Key Administrative Issues**

Besides the external political pressures mentioned above, the new GM also had to give immediate attention to a wide range of programmatic issues within the agency in the areas of General Assistance, Homeless Programs, Family and Children Services, Adult Services and Personnel. For instance, when he took over, the agency was out of compliance with the state child welfare regulations, faced the threat of a law suit by a children's advocacy group, and was requested to eliminate 100 positions due to budget cuts. The GM made a number of strategic decisions to deal with the issues in each of these areas.

### **General Assistance and Homeless Programs**

Important programmatic changes were made in the General Assistance (GA) and Homeless programs. The department worked actively to avoid cuts in the grants for GA clients in view of the high cost of living in San Francisco. In spite of the budget cuts, the county was able to avoid a cut in the GA grant, double the amount spent on employment and training services for GA clients, and maintain the current level of spending for homeless service providers. This was made possible by the approval of Proposition V placed on the local ballot, a controversial initiative developed by the Mayor and DSS. Under its provisions, the county began a program for electronic finger printing of GA clients in order to prevent clients from receiving duplicate aid. The county also increased sanctions for program violations and fraud from 14 days minimum to 30 days, with the provision to



increase progressively to 60 and 90 days on repeated violations. These measures were designed to save the county approximately \$1.25 million per year.

It is estimated that two-thirds of the homeless population contacted by DSS outreach staff is on SSI or GA. The county has also assigned additional outreach workers under the Matrix program (the Mayor's controversial program designed to move the homeless off the streets into housing) to go out with police officers. The outreach workers have contacted over 1000 individuals and have referred 300 of them to emergency housing and signed voluntary agreements with 200 of them for directly deducting rent from their GA checks when assigned to low-rent hotels.

All of these measures, including the Matrix program, Proposition V and mandatory housing, have come under heavy attack from advocate groups who brand them as infringing upon the freedom of choice of clients. DSS expects future litigation over some of these measures, even though the county feels that it is only asking the clients to fully meet the current requirements of the program. The department feels that the success of such measures will allow it to better serve clients and avoid cutting the GA grant.

### **Family and Children Program**

The goal of the children's services program for 1993 was to develop a corrective action plan to comply with state child welfare regulations and a family preservation program to target the disproportionate number of African American children in foster care.

The Department had been out of compliance with state requirements pertaining to performance evaluation and reporting in its child welfare program since 1986. During 1993, the state approved, with some revisions, the corrective action plan developed by DSS. The results for the first quarter of FY 1994 showed that the department was able to make significant progress in this regard. However, the county is still facing the threat of a lawsuit from the Youth Law Center which feels that the DSS has taken inadequate steps to address issues such as visitation of foster children and access to health and dental care. The department feels that a lawsuit at this stage would undermine the progress made so far.

The county is also working on developing a plan for improving family preservation services. The department launched a community planning body composed of representatives from community organizations, parents, foster parents, service providers, schools and other public agencies

to develop strategies for early intervention and family reunification. DSS is also participating in the newly formed Children's Collaborative Planning Committee, a group consisting of department heads, community leaders, and elected neighborhood representatives. The group has adopted a set of planning principles to guide decisions on the Proposition J Children's Fund allocations and the development of a comprehensive public/private neighborhood based planning process for all family and children's services in the city. There is an ongoing tension between those who focus on the distribution of the Proposition J funds and those who want to concentrate on planning and decision making related to all city funding for family and children.

### **Adult Services**

Adult services, like the GA and Homeless program, were new to the GM since he had spent his entire career in children's services. In spite of this challenge, he was able to guide the following DSS initiatives by including senior staff in testifying before the Board of Supervisors and negotiating with state and federal officials to: 1) develop a community-based consortium to improve the quality of in-home support services (IHSS) for adults along with plans to develop a provider referral system to better serve the entire community, 2) obtain a \$ 1 million increase for the GAIN program which will allow increased job training and placement services for AFDC clients, 3) start new outreach efforts to reach the elderly and disabled population in the Food Stamps program, and 4) deploy more Medi-Cal workers at clinics and community centers to better serve clients needing perinatal care.

### **Personnel Changes**

A \$ 15 million cut in the DSS budget led to the elimination of 100 positions (37 employees were laid off while over 60 employees were reassigned). Some African-American workers charged that the layoffs were discriminatory against them and challenged the agency. However, upon investigation, the Civil Service Commission ruled that the layoffs were done in compliance with its requirements without any discrimination against any ethnic group or program. However, the Commission pointed out the need for more sensitivity in communicating layoff decisions.

The department is exploring the possibility of obtaining Civil Service Commission cultural competence waiver to recruit more African-Americans for specific positions in view of the high number of African-American clients served by the agency. DSS is also working under a court

ordered mandate to hire workers who speak Spanish, Russian, Cantonese and Vietnamese. As part of the GM's plans to increase the percentage of African American staff at all levels, DSS was able to hire an exceptionally qualified African American Assistant General Manager for Family and Children's Services.

## Conclusion

The case highlights the challenges confronting a new director of a large urban county social service agency. It describes the process of dealing with a variety of interest groups impacting administrative decision-making in times of shrinking financial resources. It emphasizes the need for administrators to be fully aware of political environments and the need to develop skills to deal with the cross-currents of public agency administration. Based on the experiences of the new GM at San Francisco, the following ten lessons can be useful for senior administrators taking up new assignments in public agencies:

- 1 Stick to the important priorities even when distracted by local politics or controversies
- 2 Develop a "thick skin" to handle the assaults on your position and a sense of humor to handle the ridiculous
- 3 Engage in daily management activities with an eye for the immediate issues as well as the more long range issues (it is important to develop and articulate one's own agenda in the first year but also to understand that only 10% of one's time will be available to pursue the agenda)
- 4 Use the position as a "bully pulpit" to do what is right for clients and staff
- 5 Pay attention to small problems knowing that they can quickly escalate into large problems
- 6 Understand there is a mentor role with staff (taking staff to Board of Supervisors meetings)
- 7 Assess your preparation for assuming a politicized position by noting your capacity to think on your feet (e.g. prior experience as a crisis intervention worker proved to be very helpful)
- 8 Recognize that dealing with multiple and unexpected crises can be scary but also addictive
- 9 Be open to learning new issues (came from a background of family and children's services and had to learn quickly about adult services and homeless population)
- 10 Feel secure enough to be able to resign the position at a moment's notice and make sure to find a supportive spouse prepared to handle change.

## Discussion Questions

- What were your reactions to the multiple challenges confronting the General Manager?
- Which leadership qualities are most difficult for you to envision as part of your management style?

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# From Vision to Reality and Back to Vision: Reflections on Three Decades in Public Social Services Administration

RICHARD R. O'NEIL

A social services agency director's vision of the way things should be often collides with the reality of the way things are. As a result, the effective administrator must be prepared to deal with roadblocks—sometimes by pushing or pulling, but most often by going around, under or over. Most directors come to their positions prepared to offer vision and leadership in shaping services to better meet the needs of clients and the larger community. But they soon discover that they operate in an environment of constraints and dilemmas involving government regulations, the political process, and conflicting goals and responsibilities. The path from vision to reality and back to vision requires creativity and flexibility in dealing with an environment that is at once rigid and bureaucratic, and shifting and changing. The successful administrator must be:

- comfortable and confident in “working the system” without compromising basic principles;
- vocal and willing to step out on a limb to advocate on behalf of clients with local, state and national legislators as well as the media;
- flexible in trying out innovative ideas on a small scale or in a less than ideal way to ensure that some forward progress is made; and above all tenacious in holding on to his or her vision.

These lessons learned over the past 30 years emerge out of three major domains of administrative practice:

- organizational-environment relations, including working with county and state governments, the impact of Federal policies, community relations, working with the courts and law enforcement, and working within the constraints of limited resources and rigid regulations;
- organization-staff relations, including working with unions, developing effective ways to train and evaluate staff, and facilitating communication between staff and administration; and

- organization-client relations, such as enhancing client satisfaction and balancing the many and sometimes conflicting client needs and priorities.

The following reflections illustrate the array of factors shaping and being shaped by the administrator's actions on a daily basis.

### Organizational-Environment Relations

Organization-environment relations occur at multiple levels—federal, state, county and the local community—and involve a range of constituencies including government regulators, elected officials, community-based organizations, the media and the courts, as just a few examples. Working with these various constituencies involves a delicate balancing act between accommodating their ways of doing business while continuing to promote changes that better serve the needs of clients and the community.

### Working Within County Government

Santa Clara county is a charter county. It has a county executive rather than a county administrator. One of the major distinctions of this model of government is that the county executive is the appointing authority for the majority of the department heads. Most of my colleagues in other counties are appointed by their Boards of Supervisors and can truly be said to have a “Tuesday to Tuesday” job — Tuesday because that is when most boards meet in California, and therefore on any Tuesday, with a three to two vote a department head can be ousted. In most of the charter counties,

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the department head is appointed by the county administrator and in effect enjoys a civil service status, which gives a different character to how one goes about managing an organization. I often say I have the best job in the state of California. I work in a very liberal community, I have a very liberal Board of Supervisors and I have an autonomy that is not given to many welfare directors.

My relationship with the Board is through the county executive. That doesn't mean I don't have to deal with the Board directly — I certainly do. But the charter prohibits the Board from any direct involvement in agency administration. Board members can have a great deal of influence on the administration of an organization but as a matter of fact, you have that shield — when they get too close you can remind them about the charter and about the role of administration and the role of the Board and the bridge between the two, which is the county executive. Still, Board members have a staff of aides, and that gives them opportunity and authority to involve themselves in a wide range of activities. Their aides are assigned an area and they concentrate on it just like they do with a legislator in Sacramento. So you're constantly dealing with the Board on that aide level, answering questions and dealing with constituency calls through them.

## The State Government

The state is our supervising agency and I define them as being in charge of no—"no," not "k-n-o-w". Their view of their role is control in terms of the regulatory process. They create well over 900 rule changes a year between the Health Department, Food Stamps and AFDC. One of the reasons that it is so difficult to automate welfare in California is that it takes over a half a billion data elements to do it correctly. The rules and regulations for food stamps are not the same as for AFDC or MediCal. So basically what we've got is a regulatory agency that spews out regulations, with very little concept of what the client would want or need or what is best for California.

The second aspect of the state is that they're in the "gottcha" business. Instead of looking at things like whether the client benefited from an intervention, they monitor error rates and review compliance — whether you signed the form before the 30th of the month or whether you got the CA-7 processed and looked at it on time or whether the client returned it before the third working day in the month. In my almost thirty years in social services, I have never been asked for an outcome measure, I have never been audited on an outcome measure, and I have never been

evaluated on an outcome measure. No one has ever asked me whether the client benefited from the services.

The relationship with the state is influenced by the size of the county. The twenty smallest counties tend to see the state as their principal source of authority for everything they do. If you can get the state to say you must do something, you can compel your Board to fund it. And so you transfer the advocacy for your programs from yourself to the "they made me do it" mode. The middle size counties go back and forth. Sometimes they go to the Board and say, "The state is making me do this. You've got to fund it." And sometimes they go to the Board and say, "Despite what the state wants to do, I want to do this." The larger urban and suburban counties are more likely to tell the state how we want to do things most of the time. We have our own governmental relations staff with access to the legislature. Santa Clara County has three governmental relations staff members, one of whom works in Sacramento almost exclusively. Thus, we are able to follow and influence the legislative process with the best interests of the client and the county in mind.

## The Impact of Federal Policies

The current welfare reform debate is the fifth federal change agenda I've gone through in my 30 years in public social services. This 1995 welfare reform debate is very different from the past, where we made marginal changes. What's being discussed now is really a fundamental and very profound change in welfare. We've always had the basic entitlement structure and universal eligibility. Now, we are talking about a proposal that eliminates federal entitlements. One thing we have never had to do since 1935 is at the front entrance, say "you, you, you, and you, are eligible—you, you, and you are not, because we ran out of money." This welfare reform platform has the potential to put us into that category.

When we look at it from the local level, all we see is another group of people who are going to be excluded, another set of entitlements that are going to be denied, and another set of restrictions impacting the families in our community. If the state and federal block grant guidelines result in fewer restrictions, we could potentially do some creative things at the local level. But the fact of the matter is that our time will be devoted to figuring out how to finance former entitlements through state-level and local decision making. It is highly doubtful that we will have a chance to invest that block grant money in a front-end delivery system. In the large urban communities, welfare reform is

going to be very, very traumatic and will cause a lot of social disruption. For example, our agency spends \$12 million every day, 365 days a year. We are a significant part of our community. If that were cut in half, it would be significant. I've estimated that we would lose 700-800 workers out of 2400, and I'm not sure how to finance the 1600 that would be left. And all of this is occurring in an environment where our mandate is to move people off the caseload and on to self-sufficiency.

The impact of welfare reform on the local community is going to be most clearly expressed in the child welfare area. There is an estimate that approximately five million children could come into the child welfare system as a result of welfare reform. How in the world are we going to ration our services to children? Are bad bruises okay? Or is bleeding going to be the criteria? When Board members consider such a dilemma, they absolutely have no idea how to deal with it. When you think about such an impact on the local community, it's overwhelming.

I think the welfare system is not successful and we really ought to replace it. My vision of what welfare should be is that we should never let anyone who is unemployed sit for 26 weeks or 52 weeks on unemployment. We should never let people get near a welfare department if they are able to work. We should have a program that steers them into a training and employment system. I would go back to the that old method of basic social services in which you have social workers who serve families in their homes, and they don't have to be a CPS referral in order to get help. Social services should focus on the families that are really unable to succeed in the labor market. I really do believe we entrap able-bodied people in the welfare system when we should be empowering them to go back to work.

Given the fact that welfare reform is upon us, what we are doing at the local level is trying to prepare our boards for a radical change in how they view welfare. I've already talked to my Board about the fact that they might want to think about starting the process of giving the programs back to the state. You can't get away with that because the welfare and institutions code doesn't really allow a Board to do that. But we have to start thinking about a worst case alternative. I have spent time at Board meetings going through a review of the impacts of welfare reform proposals and what Board members could do about it. In a similar manner, I have approached our local business roundtable with the message that they have been advocating welfare reform for a long time and they think it's a system that ought to be eliminated. If so, it is now time to step to the plate and create the jobs in order to employ these folks. But even if we could get

them all minimum wage jobs, it's still going to leave us with a need for a social welfare system.

## The Constraints of Resources and Regulations

There are tremendous opportunities for us if we could have a chance to rationally reform welfare. There are all kinds of things you could save money on. For example, I have sixty-five thousand square feet of archival records space that I pay for. We have cases that are three, four and five volumes because the paper builds up so much. We literally have 20-25 worker disability claims a year from staff injuring themselves bending over and picking up case files. It really is Byzantine, and it's a process that just confounds reason. Let's consider computer automation, for example. I can rent a building for \$10 million a year but I can't buy more than \$25,000 worth of computers without having state permission or more than \$200,000 without federal permission. One of the reasons you don't see automation innovation in California is because of those restrictions. I can buy all the cars I want, but I can't move forward with an automation system.

It would be nice to be able to say that most of the time we're motivated by what's the best delivery model for the client. However, that usually comes second or third. What you hope is it doesn't come last. It's difficult to consistently keep the client service focus in mind because everything you do is defined in terms of dollars. And beyond the dollar, everything in government is prescribed — what you do needs to be written down. You've got to find either a legal justification or some kind of regulatory justification for doing what you do. Money, then regulations, then politics, and at the bottom is the client. When you try to do it differently, you can succeed, but it takes an extraordinary amount of effort, and I don't think you could do it if you were in a "Tuesday-to-Tuesday" kind of job.

Let me give you an example. I wanted to implement family resource centers. I didn't have a complete definition of what a family resource center should be, but I believed there must be a mechanism for a big government agency to serve a community in a way that clients have a role in defining the services they need. I knew I didn't have a budget allocation and I didn't necessarily have permission from the Board of Supervisors. There was nothing in the regulations that would define a family resource center, but nothing that would really prohibit me from proceeding. So I happened to have a building located in the Latino side of town that was used for the summer youth employment program, but in the Fall it was vacant. Instead of returning it to the landlord, I decided to continue paying for it. Then I assigned two social



workers to go out there and see what they could make out of this opportunity. I got all kinds of input over the course of the year within Administration to the effect that there was nothing going on out there. “We’ve only seen two clients in a year. Do you know how much money that’s costing?” I got constant feedback about how wasteful this program was. Well, after a year and a half we had a giant open house to establish the Caesar Chavez Family Resource Center, and it is now a model for four other centers we’ve opened. It was basically the community and a couple of social workers with a vision, without any administrative constraints, putting it together. If I had been a “Tuesday-to-Tuesday” director, the chances are I wouldn’t have taken that risk because somebody could have come by and blown the whistle. As it was, I had the freedom to experiment without an elaborate plan, budget or grant proposal. For me, the best way to change the bureaucracy is to use what Tom Peters calls the “skunk works process” of putting creative people together to build something from the bottom up, and not to direct it from the top down. As these projects mature, however, I begin to see bureaucracy creeping back in. I went to a center the other day and there was a government form posted at the front door. These symbols of bureaucracy need to be less obvious in order to create a comfortable environment for clients, but it’s difficult to get staff to change the way they do business.

### Community Relationships

Social services agencies must always contend with local community standards and values. Santa Clara County’s Social Services Agency is seen as the “big kid on the block” because of the scope of our programs, the size of our organization and our impact on the community. If we are late with the monthly warrants, it is not necessarily the clients that call, it’s the apartment owners who want to know why the warrants are late, why the client can’t pay on the first of the month.

Because of our scope and size, we are seen as the organization that gets priority consideration, which can contribute to an adversarial relationship with many community organizations. This is sometimes a “knee-jerk” reaction, but sometimes well deserved. We do wield clout and have veto power over many programs such as Healthy Start, which is a school-funded program but requires clearance through the Welfare Department. The same is true for employment training programs under the auspices of the Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA). The forty plus organizations that contract with us have a different relationship than those that do not contract with us. The ones that can’t get money from us often find reasons, some valid and some not, to be

very critical of what we do and how we do it. Those that contract with us tend to be supportive of our organization. They might have disagreements with us, but they typically would not go public with critical comments.

The process of contracting for services in a county can be very political. As a result, we contract with a wide variety of youth organizations, nutrition programs, emergency shelters, drug abuse programs and counseling programs. Of the 42 contracts that we’re administering this year, only about 10% have been initiated by our department to respond to a specific need. For example, Saratoga, one of the richest communities in the nation, with approximately two years of budget reserves, came to the Board of Supervisors and got funding for a senior program at \$16,000 a year. It’s basically a way for the Board member who represents that district to respond to that community. I don’t mean to be cynical but that’s part of life.

### Working With the Courts and Law Enforcement

In child welfare, we’ve got a civil procedure within a criminal atmosphere. In Santa Clara County every case has at least three lawyers. Most have four, five or six, and that’s probably true of most other jurisdictions. You’ve got the District Attorney representing the child, the County Counsel representing the Department of Social Services, the Public Defender representing the parent, and a conflicts attorney representing the non-custodial parent or the non-abusing parent. The costs of the system right now in the urban counties are enormous. Santa Clara County spends \$2.5 million dollars per year on legal services, and we’re only the fourth largest in the state. We have eight court officers who each cost \$102,000 a year. We’ve got many hours of wasted social worker time waiting in court.

My objective is to keep cases from getting to the court because once they get there, we’ve essentially lost. I think we’ve gotten this system to the point where there are too many legal checks and balances, too many procedures and court requirements. For example, a social worker recommends placing a child in a foster home in Cupertino and the District Attorney says, “I don’t think that’s a good home for the kid,” and the Public Defender says, “That’s too far for my client to travel.” Meanwhile, the child is sitting in the shelter or temporary foster care. The social worker comes back and says, “Well, I’ve got a home in Mountain View.” The District Attorney says, “That’s too close to the railroad tracks. I’m afraid my kid’s going to run out and get run over.” The Public Defender says, “That’s closer for my client but it’s still not on a bus line.” Children’s lives are hung in the balance but once you get into court the best interests of the child

don't seem to be a factor anymore. In Santa Clara County 75% to 80% of all of the children enter the system directly from a law enforcement intervention without social service involvement. They're coming from drug busts, shoplifting, domestic violence, school-reported neglect, and so on. They are coming into the system from law enforcement, which runs counter to the public's and the grand jury's perception that social workers are running around grabbing children from their homes and taking them away. Because there is minimal social services collaboration with law enforcement, we really aren't doing a triage at the front end to figure out if there isn't something else we could do with a troubled family before they get caught up in the system. Once they are in the system, we're compelled to do an investigation within a 48-hour time line. We are then faced with putting a child in satellite care or shelter care or with a relative and the family is trapped in the process. As we proceed, we become protective and begin to defend our decisions as the right thing to do. We don't question the decision-making in picking up the child in the first place.

I would like to change the way we do intake. I think we have a fundamental problem in not being able to respond to the family when the crisis occurs; we're always there after the fact. I've placed social workers in two or three police departments, and it really works. They go out with the police officer on the complaint. If a call comes in that there is a drug bust, the police ask, "Are there children involved, or are there children in the household" and if there are, they take along my social worker. This is the type of incremental change an administrator can make to improve services to families, but at the same time we need to continue to advocate for broader systems changes.

## Organization-Staff Relations

Organization-staff relations, like organization-environment relations, occur at multiple levels. At the most basic level, we in the social work profession are confronted with the issue of professional standards including using the M.S.W. as minimal qualifications for entry level into child protective services. Maintaining this entry level standard helps to elevate the competency of the entire organization. It also leads to the importance of professional development and staff training in order to maintain a level of excellence. Committing organization resources to staff training programs, conference travel, professional association involvement, and the pursuit of continuing education are all part of the equation. Today labor-management relations are a critical component of fostering effective organization-staff relations. This includes educating union shop stewards as well as learning

from them about employee concerns. Formal relations need to be balanced with informal relationships and therefore mentoring has been another essential ingredient in effective organization-staff relations.

## Working With Unions

We have a highly unionized work force. We're one of the few counties in California that has case load standards negotiated in a contract, signed by the Board of Supervisors. That means that every time we have a contract negotiation session, we negotiate very specific caseload numbers. This defines our relationship as traditional shop floor concept where the view is that management is trying to take advantage of the workers and the workers constantly need to be alert to being manipulated. We spend a great deal of time negotiating over changes in forms, redefinition of rules or something else that is viewed as more work by the union but not by management.

When I started with the County I was a union activist. We were working in an environment that didn't value welfare or social work, and we had quite a disruptive transition period. We went on a major strike, the second strike of any county welfare department in the state. We wound up with these negotiated caseload standards and it has been that way ever since. Many administrators think that's a burden and of course it can be a burden, but it is also one of the blessings of life, because it allows you to determine your budget very easily. And since it is a contract signed by the Board of Supervisors and not by the administration, the Board can't really say no to a staffing request. If cases go up, you go to the board with your caseload standard. If they want to change the caseload standard, they've got to direct us to negotiate with the union, and we have never had them direct us to go in and negotiate standards up in order to accommodate caseload growth. We've always been able to find the dollars to maintain our caseload standards.

## Training and Evaluating Staff

I think training is probably the most important thing we do and I wish there were ways to make it more compulsory than it is. Our social workers are required to take 50 hours of continuing education a year. Whether they do it or not, that's another issue. I was going to try to tie it to compensation, but was not able to get that approved. We've got union rules that will allow anyone to transfer into a job assignment, whether or not they're good at that job or trained at that job. I don't think you can ensure good practice under these circumstances. If we're going to be permitted to be this intrusive in the lives of families, we have to change the

structure of how we go about delivering services. I don't think you can have absolute seniority rights for staff, with limited disciplinary ability. You've got to be able to hold staff accountable for what they do on the job. If we're going to be so involved in the lives of children, we can't have unlimited protections of the sort that a civil servant gets.

In 1975, we had the strike and as part of that strike we eliminated the evaluation of social services employees. You can go to a Santa Clara County Social Services Agency personnel file and you can find nothing in there that describes how an employee has performed on the job. All you know is how long they've been there and whether there have been disciplinary actions. Since 1975 we have had an ongoing battle with grand juries and the Board about whether we should have an evaluation system in the Social Services Agency. The unions, of course, have fought against it. Employees have fought against it. The problem is that there are a great majority of employees who feel demoralized by the fact that they may do a very good job, but someone next to them who is goofing off gets the same pay, the same raises, the same opportunities.

Instituting an evaluation system is going to be a long, involved process. I'd say the weakest part of the organization is first line supervision. We define them as management in terms of their disciplinary and evaluation functions, but they are still part of the union. As a consequence, that whole area of disciplinary action and employee evaluation gets bumped up to the second line manager. The second line manager or program manager doesn't directly observe the performance of the employees and isn't responsible for daily supervision, which results in a weak case for disciplinary action. We take the case anyway, we do termination or we do suspension, and it goes to arbitration. Usually we lose because the facts are not there and we don't have the support of the first line supervisor. Serious offenses can get taken care of. It's the subtle issues that don't get dealt with — the way workers treat clients, their attitude, the feelings of clients toward workers. It isn't an issue of workers not doing their work. If they have 50 cases, they do 50 cases. But they could treat 48 of those clients very badly and it's difficult for the supervisor to either know that or deal with it if the forms are completed and the checks are going out.

The child welfare area is the most disturbing to me, although I'm not dismissing the attitude and behavior of people in income maintenance. I think the main problem in income maintenance is laws and regulations. I'm afraid what we have developed with the regulations, with the monitoring of error rates, with everything else, is an attitude of

"prove to me you're eligible," and I think that's the attitude that most welfare departments in California have for people coming in applying for assistance. But child welfare is the area that concerns me the most. I'm perplexed by the attitude of some of our workers toward the clients. Those are the ones that are so darned hard to get at because everyone says it's their professional style or method, not attitude, that clients dislike. Another big complaint I get is about variance in attitudes on the worker's part. Complaints are in the context of, "Well, the last social worker that I dealt with was different than this social worker," or "I know somebody who did this and their kid wasn't taken away. How come?" And you begin to see a pattern of behaviors. I did some snooping around in Emergency Response about two years ago because there were some problems down there, and I found out that I had a social worker who had worked there for eight years and had never taken a child into custody. I had another worker in that same unit who took 90% of the children that she saw into custody.

I think the best model of evaluation has got to be peer model, and all of us need to be evaluated in that process. The evaluation needs to be not just a check sheet, but an ongoing dialogue in an ongoing development process between the supervisor and staff. This is tricky to implement with professionals because practice skills are practice skills and we define ourselves as artists, not technicians. I also think evaluation needs to be connected with some kind of incentive. I don't know whether it's monetary or not, but there must be some kind of recognition of positive behavior.

As critical as I am, I'm not going to give up on the solutions. But I really do believe that we, as a profession, have a responsibility to start thinking about how we do business. Consistently when you talk with parents that are involved in the system, particularly those middle class parents who find themselves caught up in the system for one reason or another, the first words out of their mouth are on this issue—"I thought social workers were here to help me. Your staff didn't do a thing for me."

### **Staff-Director Communications**

I have an open door policy. Anyone can call me and get an appointment, but I usually schedule those appointments between 4:30 and 5:30 in the evening so I'm giving up a little bit and they're going to have to give up a little bit. An open door policy can potentially undermine middle managers unless they understand what your role is and what you're doing. If it doesn't work, it's largely my responsibility because I need to communicate with the middle manager.

I'll go to the Assistant Director and say, "So and so's coming to see me. There's an issue that has come up from the line and he or she apparently has not been able to get satisfaction." Surprisingly enough, before that appointment, usually those problems are resolved.

Since I grew up at the organization, one of the problems is that everybody knows me, just plain old Dick, you know, that goofball that used to be down in intake. And so staff have felt a level of comfort in coming to me, talking in the elevator, the cafeteria or wherever I am. It's taken about seven years for the mantle of directorship to impact my attitude, and as a result staff attitudes have changed toward me. I have become a distant, unreachable director and they feel that distance. But initially I would get in the elevator and talk to people and they'd tell me about a problem they were having. I think many staff today are intimidated by the management hierarchy in my organization. As a result, it's hard for people to be very candid and forthright. It's very hard to modify an organization to incorporate an open door policy. It's either there and people accept it and are comfortable with it, or it's not.

### Organization-Client Relations

Client-centered administration is at the core of organization-client relations. It requires a constant monitoring of client perceptions of the services provided. Periodic client satisfaction surveys represent core approaches to the monitoring process. Helping staff assess survey results and identify new approaches to meeting client needs involves sharing the courage to "face the music" even if the results are painful to absorb. Client-centered administration includes:

- venerating the client as our sole reason for existing as an organization;
- placing clients at the top of the organizational chart and not at the bottom;
- demonstrating a healthy disrespect for the impossible when it comes to trusting clients to identify and address issues which they feel strongly about;
- maintaining an open mind with which to learn about the changing needs of clients and finding new ways to address them, and;
- assisting staff in finding ways to continuously evaluate the impact of services by soliciting client perceptions.

### Client Satisfaction

We did a client survey and we found out, interestingly enough, that about 88% to 92% of our clients described their interface with the organization as being positive to very

good. But what we also discovered is that the approval rating went up significantly as the clients moved from intake to continuing eligibility. My interpretation is that we don't necessarily do a better job with the intake, we just teach them how to behave as welfare clients.

In October, we will open a brand new central intake facility in Santa Clara County. We will run extended office hours, from 7:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m., and we will probably work on Saturdays. We have also redefined the way the clients are treated at intake. There will be no receptionist, but there will be client service advocates. The facility looks like a credit union where instead of standing in line you go up to a window. It's got a day care center, it's got housing services, job services, and other organizations providing ancillary services.

I think it's very important to sit in on an intake interview at least once a year, and to go sit in the lobby as often as you can. I can't do it with my suit on because I clearly don't belong in the lobby, but once in a while I dress down and sit in the lobby and listen to the discussions and how people feel. I think it's humiliating the way people mispronounce people's names. By golly, if you can't pronounce the name correctly, you shouldn't broadcast it over the loudspeaker. I'm hoping for a different atmosphere in intake. There's a restaurant in Santa Cruz where you place your order at the window and they hand you a pager and when your order is ready, the thing buzzes. So I'm going to do that for eligibility clients. I'm going to give them a pager device, and they can go outside and smoke, they can sit in their car, they can take the children for a walk.

I'm going to try to change the way we interface with the client because I don't think it's good model right now. First of all, there are the forms we have to go through. If you've ever done it, you understand. It's absolutely insulting to everybody. You're asking a couple of nineteen-year-olds how many bonds and stocks they've got and it's demoralizing, humiliating—I don't like the process. So we're starting with changing the physical environment, but we're also looking at the job and the way the eligibility worker looks at the job and beginning to make changes there as well.

### The Difficulties of Balancing Client Priorities and Needs

As much as I'd like to say that in child welfare we have a unified practice of evaluating families, it is not a unified practice. We have guidelines and procedures, but quite frankly, when we've got a child in the shelter and that child is Spanish-speaking and we don't have any Spanish-speaking



placements available, we place them wherever we can. The pressure is on the worker is to find a placement designed to meet the management edicts that no children under eight should be in the shelter and they also should all be placed in ethnically and culturally appropriate homes. That is often like a mission impossible and the workers have to make some of these decisions on a very quick basis. Sometimes it's not to the benefit of the child.

In the ideal world, I would do strengths-based family assessments. I would try to find a way to give workers more time than that 48-hour window. I don't think that's enough time in today's society to assess situations and develop interventions. I would try to involve the family in more of the solutions, try to seek out the significant extended family members, involve their church or involve their community supports, do some basic social work instead of the kinds of things we're forced to do now. I wouldn't be averse to temporary care but I would try to find ways to make temporary care different, such as home visitation on the weekends, maybe having the mother come and stay in foster care, do things that are different than the way we do it now. I'm working on starting a program where mentors adopt a family. I would like to investigate the possibility of placing caring persons in the home instead of taking children out of the home.

### Reflections on Administrative Practice

One thing I find with many people in my organization is that you'll say to somebody, "Hey, how'd you like to go down to South County and see if you can do something down there?" and the response is, "Well, it's a long commute. Do I get any more money for it?" or "Do I have to do my original job, too?" My advice is to try to look at the opportunities these requests offer. For example, about 20 years ago I was a supervisor of a CPS unit — a prestige job. I got a call on a Friday from the Director saying that Monday morning he wanted me to take over the job of Bureau Chief of Food Stamps. I thought to myself, "I don't want to do Food Stamps. I'm an MSW. I'm the CPS supervisor." I didn't tell him yes or no, but I walked out and I went home and I told my wife, "This is it. I am not going back on Monday. I am not going to supervise their Food Stamp unit." Then over the weekend she talked to me and I talked to me and everybody talked to me and I called a couple of buddies and I called my mentor on Sunday and we had a long talk. Monday morning I walked in and I said, "I'll do it." I went over there and I supervised the unit for a three-month interim period, and it was one of the best experiences I ever

had. When they appointed the permanent replacement I started working in Administration and never looked back. So try not to get too stuck on your ego principles. Don't compromise your career or values but be as flexible as you can in taking advantage of these opportunities.

The other thing to remember is that no one is going to tell you what the keys to success are. No one is going to give you those tools — you have to get them yourself. As an example, in 1974 we were cutting back Title 20, and we had a big staff meeting up in the executive conference room. We were told we were going to have to cut fifty workers out of the budget by the end of the month. We were out of money. Al Swanson (who's now a professor at the School of Social at San Jose State) and I decided this couldn't be real. This didn't make sense that we could be out of money. We asked for a copy of the administrative claim, but they wouldn't give it to us. We broke into the fiscal officer's office on Friday evening, took the administrative claim out of his files, went home, learned how the administrative claim worked, walked in on Monday morning and said we can afford not only not to lay off these people, we can hire about twenty or thirty more. I learned finance that way and wound up becoming the Assistant Director for Administration. I don't recommend breaking into people's offices. It was touch and go, it really was, and if it had come out the other way and the Fiscal Officer had been right, I think we'd have been looking for work. We got written up for it. It was in our personnel files for some time but it was worth the risk.

My final word of advice is to never give up your vision of where you think you ought to be and what your purpose ought to be. This is very difficult in a bureaucracy. It's hard to maintain that perspective. You do redefine what the bottom line is. You're not going support any policy that really hurts the clients or your staff. You draw that line and you say no. But there are a lot of compromises you make in between. For example, there may be an organization you don't want to do business with, but if the Board says fund it, you fund it. But you can and do draw your lines in different areas. Never give up your vision of what you want it to be. And always keep a sense of humor and don't take yourself too seriously. I mean, that's one of the things that most of us get caught up in—we take ourselves so seriously. We think we're so important. We're not. I mean, really, if you wanted to pay somebody to do something, you wouldn't pay them to do what I do.



# The Leadership Challenges in Transforming a Public Human Services Agency

MAUREEN BORLAND

### Introduction

When I first arrived in San Mateo in 1992 to assume the Director position of the county human service agency, one of the members of the Board of Supervisors shared her concern with me about the number of families who had complained to her about the fact that there didn't seem to be a single point of contact for somebody who had any kind of a social service need. She wanted to see the system changed so that it would be easier for clients and the community to understand. The goal was to reduce the need to shop around or call multiple locations to address the needs of residents. She felt that clients should not have to deal with multiple, separate services and agencies and tell their story over and over to multiple people in order to receive the services they need. The system was not customer-friendly. This Board member was convinced that there needed to be a better way to serve clients in the community with a single point of entry or contact. Creating such a systems change would require strategic planning.

We began our planning by assessing all the programs administered by the Human Services Agency (HSA). Most of the programs were mandated by the federal and state government and included different populations, policies, forms, and eligibility requirements. We looked for ways that we could serve clients across multiple problem areas. We began to look at the issues from the client or customer service perspective. Our philosophy was that client needs should drive the organizational processes, not the other way around. I had learned from my experience in Florida where they created an integrated organizational structure but were never really able to translate the service integration concepts down to the service delivery level. In San Mateo County we undertook a review of the many different processes utilized in the different programs to determine how much of it was federally or state imposed versus locally designed and how much flexibility there was to change those processes within the confines of federal and state laws or regulations.

### Strategic Planning

The Human Services Agency (HSA) was a new agency created by merging programs from 5 different county agencies. These components had been combined in order to locate most of the critical services for children and families together in one organization to promote integrated service delivery. In order to create a common understanding of the community needs, prioritize those needs and create a common direction, a community strategic planning process was undertaken. Given my background in community service, I felt very strongly that you do not just focus on a strategic plan for a public agency, but rather on a strategic plan for the larger community. The main focus of the strategic plan was to improve outcomes for children and families. Prior to 1992, services for children and families in San Mateo County had deteriorated. My charge was to change the declining social indicators in the county by creating an organization that focused on serving people through the use of comprehensive and less bureaucratic services. There were also many human services being offered in the community by community-based organizations (CBOs) under contract with the public programs. In order to deliver comprehensive services, HAS would need to work together with the community to form a network of services that provided a continuum of services that improved the lives of children and families. Our first strategic planning process involved 1 ½ years of intense discussion amongst 600 people representing different segments of the community (e.g. staff from community-based organizations, consumers and former consumers, staff from our agency, business and others) in 12 different work groups.

One of the things that emerged early in the process was the recognition that people did not really have information about how clients were doing or not doing. While

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community-based organizations had individual client information, they had no aggregate information that reflected trends in their community. A new set of priorities emerged by looking at data, sharing it together and working with it together to decide what needed to be done. Three common goals for our service system were set: 1) promoting economic self-sufficiency, 2) strengthening family functioning and 3) building community capacity for prevention/early intervention. Three major directions to work on together were identified: 1) monitoring client outcomes, 2) building community partnerships, and 3) creating responsive customer services. By working in a partnership approach, we were also able to improve our communication and develop better working relationships.

As an outcome of the strategic planning process, we created a Human Services Advisory Council to oversee the efforts to improve the system. It was comprised of staff from public and community-based organizations, former clients, political representatives, and a board member from a local foundation. This community group met monthly to oversee the implementation of our plan.

### **Organizational Planning**

Once the strategic goals and directions for the human services system had been set, we focused inside the agency to see what needed to change in order to achieve the strategic goals and directions. We went through an internal process of dialogue among the top managers to critically assess how we needed to structure ourselves and operate differently. It was not just a matter of having strategic planning goals. It was a matter of figuring out how the organization needed to change in order to implement those goals. A new mission, principles and values were identified, written, and rolled out to staff for discussion and input. Getting staff “buy-in” was a struggle. It does not happen over night and it took about three years with the help of some outside business consultants who were very interested in helping government improve the way it was serving the community. They donated their time to work with the executive and management teams, often challenging some of our thought processes. They brought their business expertise to our public sector organizational change effort. This was sometimes controversial because some staff had an anti-business bias and did not see how business approaches could improve our organization or customer service. We decided to approach our organizational change by first focusing on customer service improvements.

### **Focusing on Customer Service**

The organizational changes and innovations in HSA stem from the continual focus on improving the way we serve the customer. Our consultants helped us to think about the essence of good customer service and how to improve it. We conducted client satisfaction surveys to determine both satisfaction and dissatisfaction with all of our services. This enabled us to identify what we could improve and monitor over time. It was based on the continual messages “We are here to serve the community and to serve the customers more effectively.” There was initially a lot of pushback and negativity from staff who were more comfortable with the concept of client than the concept of customer. For example, staff claimed that clients do not have any choice to go anywhere else except our agency for the services they need, so they are not really customers. Continual dialogue with staff at all levels about our values, which included treating customers with dignity and respect and a commitment to excellence in delivering customer services, was necessary to get them focused on what they could do differently. Since the word “customer” seemed to be more an issue than the concept of improving service, we decided to use “customer” and “client” interchangeably. This concession reduced the resistance considerably. The shift to a customer service approach to service delivery involved constantly pointing out where comments or actions diverged from the values identified in our strategic plan. We did lots of customer service training. It didn’t matter what program you were in but rather how you could serve the customer more effectively. More intensive customer service training was offered for staff in areas where customer feedback was most negative. Customer satisfaction questionnaires are now a regular part of doing business in HSA and results are now posted on the intranet quarterly, by office, trends identified and customer service improvement actions undertaken.

### **Outcomes and Data-informed Decision-making**

One of the issues that emerged as we tried to focus on improving customer service was that staff members did not have information on how clients were doing. HSA had several large main frame systems with dumb terminals which staff shared to enter data, but staff and management got only raw data print-outs to work with and did not have information analyzed or presented in a way that was useful for decision-making. The data focus was on tracking task completion and not on client outcomes. As a result, information on community needs and agency-based decisions on resource allocations were being made on anecdotal

information. Community-based agencies that contracted with HSA had only individual client information available to them and had no automated, aggregate information on client outcomes. Managers were unable to hold contract providers accountable for performance.

Creating a customer service focus required focusing on identification of client and community outcomes agency-wide and for each program. It also required developing a special strategic plan for information systems that served the agency and its contract agencies. It included contracting with an outside vendor to analyze the current capabilities and gaps of the automation in place in HSA and our contract providers and developing a multi-year plan to implement a new information system. It required agency managers and staff to understand that resources would need to be committed to the development of this automated network, not just to hiring more staff. This was controversial because previous management had taken the position that computers and automation were a waste of money.

I decided to provide concrete examples of how automation could help managers and staff do their jobs better by contracting with our county library system, which had created a database of human services available in the community. HSA had contracted with them for years to maintain and update that data base. We decided to add resources and work with them to apply for a grant from our local community foundation to allow them to acquire staff and mapping software. We then contracted with them to map out all our client data from our multiple systems by city and zip code. These maps then became tools for structuring dialogue, both within HSA and with our community planning groups, regarding what services were needed in which areas of the county. This provided a model for data informed decision-making, rather than the anecdotal approach of the past and was very enlightening for many participants.

The need to analyze data and look at trends has now become an accepted part of decision-making at all levels of the agency. HSA spent several years developing a data warehouse which is capable of providing outcome reports to staff at all levels. Automation has been deployed to the desktops of all staff and information on outcomes is regularly discussed for quality improvement purposes. It is an accepted practice to share information with community groups and partner agencies in an effort to have all parts of the system work more effectively together.

### Service System Redesign

While customer service improved within our traditional service areas, the next step in creating a single point of entry

for comprehensive services required different strategies. The emergence of welfare reform waivers as a major policy tool for systems change in 1994 provided us with both an opportunity and a challenge. It was an opportunity to put our mission as a “catalyst for systems change” to work. Building on our successful community strategic planning process and with the strong support of another member of our elected Board of Supervisors, we decided to undertake a community planning process to redesign the welfare system in San Mateo County. Through our ongoing efforts to work with the community, we learned that people disliked the welfare system because they saw it as promoting dependency and preventing people from getting out of poverty. The community planning process included over 500 individuals from the community and HSA staff who were engaged in a series of focus groups and planning sessions. I challenged them to “Forget the system as it is now, forget the rules as they are now. If we are trying to help people become economically self-sufficient (one of the goals in our strategic plan) and get out of poverty, how would we design the system?” It was difficult for many participants to think that way. It took almost a year of continual meetings, focus groups, and draft proposals to reach consensus on a new service design and principles. The final plan (**S**hared **U**ndertaking to **C**hange the **C**ommunity to **S**upport **S**elf-sufficiency (SUCCESS) was presented to and approved by the Board of Supervisors, who charged me with working with the State Department of Social Services to obtain approval to implement this pilot in our county. It took us almost two years to obtain approval for a waiver from State law and regulations to implement our program design. SUCCESS was implemented in four months, between the waiver approval in August 1996 and actual roll-out January 1, 1997. The HSA implementation planning incorporated a single point of contact for comprehensive family screening and assessment, the initial vision for human service delivery in the county when HSA was created. Continual focus on the goals, perseverance, and identifying opportunities had achieved results. SUCCESS sparked many service innovations which are highlighted in the promising practices case vignettes (see Appendices).

### Organizational Structure

Once the SUCCESS service model was created, the Executive Team searched for ways to support the integrated service model more effectively. Our controversial organization chart reflects our ongoing struggle to break down the traditional hierarchical governmental structure (*Figure 1*). Governmental structures tend to be top-down command and control organizations that mirror military structures.

Hierarchical structures do not promote open, cross program teamwork, which is crucial to making the SUCCESS model work. Therefore, with the help of our outside organizational consultants, we looked for organizational structures that business was using to change their culture and products. We developed a matrix organization adapted to meet the needs of the service model. In order to break down the program silos that operated in the agency, we began by looking at the outcomes we were trying to achieve. For example, if economic self-sufficiency is the outcome, how do we need to be structured so that we are bringing all of the resources to bear on promoting economic self-sufficiency? It was a different way of looking at service delivery.

We needed to create teams that focused on designing and building services so that everybody understood the whole system and how they contributed to improving client, program and system outcomes. We took the matrix management concept (originally developed by NASA) and applied it to what we were doing and the organization chart in *Figure 1* illustrates the results of our efforts. The organizational model that the Executive Team created recognizes the realities of our environment while still promoting community-focused, integrated services. We were mindful of the categorical nature of federal and state legislation, policy and funding. We needed a way to relate our strategic planning goals to our policy and funding streams and the matrix approach helped us link our integrated service system at the client level with strong integrated management focused on supporting integrated service delivery.

Instead of just having a director for welfare programs, employment programs, child welfare programs and housing programs, we revamped these positions so that they had dual responsibility as lead for their program area and also served as directors of three geographic regions that covered the entire county. As regional directors they are responsible for assessing client trends and needs in their region, promoting working relationships with community-based agencies, city governments, school districts, adult education programs, community colleges and businesses in their region. Each of the three regional directors took the lead on one particular program area (e.g. child welfare, public assistance and welfare-to-work, integrated support services) by chairing a policy team with county-wide accountability for their specific program. For example, the Northern region director was most knowledgeable about children and family services including child welfare and provided leadership for the children and family services policy team. That policy team is comprised of children and family staff from each of the other two regions, as well as the Northern Region. The

policy team meets twice a month to assess all the policies, practices, funding and outcomes related to that policy area. This enables HSA to continue its accountability to the state and federal government and to ensure consistent implementation of programs countywide.

Another cross-program team structure was created at the service delivery level as part of the SUCCESS model. These teams were called Family Self-Sufficiency Teams. Three regional teams were instituted and comprised of line staff from welfare-to-work, child welfare, substance abuse, mental health, housing, probation and our community-based core service agencies. The teams are convened by a supervisor in each region who serves as team leader and is responsible for coordinating, scheduling cases for presentation, and scheduling periodic case reviews. Clients are invited and encouraged to participate in their case planning in order to develop and agree to a case plan. One member of the team is assigned as primary case manager, depending on the primary needs of the family.

It was also critical that the agency administrative functions were realigned to support the integration in the SUCCESS model. A Deputy Director was created to coordinate a number of the administrative support functions (e.g. facilities, human resources and staff development, etc.) Particular emphasis was placed on organizational development, job redesign and reclassification, re-training and career development. The financial management, information systems, and research and planning functions were identified as critical to our new way of doing business. Therefore, a Director of Financial Services and Director of Information Systems positions were created from other positions within the agency and reported directly to the Agency Director. A Research and Planning unit (later Planning and Evaluation) was also created reporting to the Agency Director. This unit serves as the link between information systems and programs, provides data analysis for planning and management, and coordinates the knowledge management function and continual quality improvement functions of the agency. In 2005 (as part of the response to a child death crisis described later) some adjustments were made to this model. A separate policy Director for Children and Family services was created to focus more attention on improving the cross-systems relationships in child welfare and on the implementation of the child welfare redesign in the county. At that time, due to a lack of available positions, a Director for Program Support was added which combined the administrative functions, including financial and information systems. The regional matrix model continues.



## Organizational Development

The changes in the HSA organizational culture and the dual role assumed by each regional director represented a great deal of change. I knew that the directors, as well as their staff, would need some assistance in making this transition. The structural changes we were making required staff to operate in new relationships and structures, and required a new level of mutual accountability. I researched the business literature for techniques that could be utilized to promote and implement these changes. Because the change was so large and complex, I decided that HSA needed to create a position for an internal organizational development (OD) specialist. (see *Appendix*) The OD specialist worked with each regional director to build their policy teams. She also worked with each director (team leader) to help team members understand their roles in sharing information and leading action planning in their regions. Each team reviewed their composition to ensure appropriate representation and developed their mission, operating rules, schedule of team meetings, and other meeting management processes. Minutes were taken and disseminated so that everyone in the agency knew what was going on and the decisions being made by the team. The Executive Team (comprised of regional directors and other senior managers) serves as the coordinating body for all the policy teams.

The creation of policy teams also allowed us to open up the budgeting and financial management functions of the agency to comprehensive review and understanding. Each policy team reviews the allocations for their programs and works with their financial analyst (also a member of the policy team) to prepare the budget and make priority decisions about where those resources are most needed. These decisions are informed by data regarding client, program and system outcomes and linked to commitments to outcome improvement in our outcome-based management system. Annually each team goes out into the community to get input on community needs, how services are working, and gaps in service. We have put together a community mapping process where we use zip code data so that staff can actually see where there are clusters of problems and which neighborhoods and zip codes need attention. This information is shared with the communities in order to inform collaborative community action.

Each director also meets regularly with a regional management team and holds periodic regional staff meetings to share information and obtain input on issues and staff needs. This has helped to create a regional identity across programs and has resulted in better coordination and understanding between the program staff. The OD

specialist also assisted the directors with building the operations of these regional teams.

Particular emphasis was placed on developing the Family Self-Sufficiency Teams (FSSTs). The internal OD specialist spent a good deal of time helping these multi-disciplinary teams understand their role, how to function and make decisions as a team, how to schedule cases and hold productive case planning discussions as equals, and how to monitor and periodically review case progress. These teams became the core of our transformed service delivery system.

## Multi-Disciplinary Case Planning

The complicated lives of our clients require multiple strategies. For example, poverty is very complicated and it involves much more than economics. When we look at self-sufficiency in terms of family functioning and community involvement, there are different strategies needed to produce good client outcomes. These strategies vary depending on the family, where they live and the resources, both family and community that are available. We have tried to place special emphasis on working with those communities where poverty and social dysfunction are most prevalent. For example, we work with grassroots planning teams involving the police and a whole array of other organizations dealing with crime in high crime communities. The problems of crime and poverty are so intertwined that we try to work together and develop multiple approaches including job training, job placement, transportation supports, family resource centers, and schools. The Family Self-Sufficiency Teams, which include criminal justice and health representatives, are the mechanism for cross-system case planning when families are involved with multiple systems or have multiple needs. Nonprofit community agency partners, with whom we contract, are also involved in team meetings as necessary.

The FSSTs have become the mechanism for providing integrated services to multi-need families. The creation of those teams moved us toward the initial vision for the agency and the service system. It became clear to us that if we were trying to develop integrated service plans, all the relevant service providers needed to be at the table, with the client, to discuss and understand: 1) all the family issues, 2) the services they were receiving, 3) what they were trying to achieve, and 4) how they wanted to participate in the service plan.

When we initially put these teams together, the team membership was not so all inclusive. It was a struggle to get staff, even from the smaller teams, to schedule cases for



team discussion. Staff were accustomed to doing individual case planning and did not regularly consult with multiple service providers. Staff needed to learn how to work in teams. Our OD specialist worked with the team leaders and the teams to clarify relationships, develop team rules, understanding of shared responsibilities, criteria for bringing cases to the team, team meeting frequency, how cases would be followed-up, and clarify the expectations for the outcome of the team work. We found that while effective team functioning is critical to providing integrated services, a managerial tracking and monitoring mechanism is needed to ensure that staff behavior shifts and that staff are bringing their cases to the team.

Today, staff both within HSA and the community see the FSSTs as a critical resource in providing improved services to families. The teams have grown. Staff regularly take cases to the team for consultation and find them helpful. Inviting clients to participate in the team meetings has changed the culture of the way services plans are developed and implemented. Family responsibilities become a part of the discussion, as well. While there was initial concern about inviting families to participate in team meetings, approximately 75% of families are now coming to team meetings. The families are engaged in case planning, learning what to expect from the systems and programs, and agreeing to implement their case plan. Team meetings are now located in the neighborhoods where clients live.

### **Creating a Culture of Innovation in a Learning Organization**

I am a firm believer in identifying what needs to be done and trying to find the funding to do it. My experience has shown me that money often follows good ideas. Too often public organizations limit their planning and thinking within their perceived fiscal constraints, rather than identifying community and client needs and encouraging new ways to meet them. Once you have a broad-based community strategic plan, it is possible to seek out ways to implement it. In San Mateo County we worked closely with foundations to get one-time funding to initiate innovations in our community. Partnerships were developed with the Peninsula Community Foundation, Center for Venture Philanthropy, and other regional foundations. Our partnerships focused on jointly meeting the needs of our community. Since the San Mateo County Strategic Plan had involved representatives from the foundations, as well as those from business, education, cities, community non-profits, health and criminal justice, and clients, it was owned by the community as a whole.

We looked for opportunities to leverage public dollars with private matching funds.

The earliest innovative model piloted by HSA was the creation of the FUTURES family resource centers in 1992 (see *Appendix*). The FUTURES project was a collaboration in Daly City (one of the cities in our county with the largest influx of new immigrant families with children) between the county and local school districts, community-based organizations and county health and human services. It was the pilot for the concept of neighborhood-based, integrated, prevention/early intervention services for children and families. The involvement of HSA staff in this project informed the larger organization and created a concrete example of what neighborhood-based, integrated services could look like. The staff that were part of the project became ambassadors for the new collaborative model of service and were given great exposure throughout the agency. While some other staff were jealous of the attention and resources committed to the pilot, the message was clear that those involved in implementing the strategic directions of the agency would be rewarded and seen as leaders.

When California's welfare reform program (CalWORKS) was implemented we took the opportunity to use one-time federal incentive funds for the start-up of innovative programs to assist former welfare and low-income families in moving toward economic self-sufficiency (see *Appendix*). We also used those funds to create the one-stop service and employment centers in our low-income neighborhoods where we could co-locate multiple services. If you have a strategic plan, when the opportunities arise, you can target the funds to the priorities in your plan and interest your partners in doing the same.

Another major step in creating a learning organization resulted from the decisions we made in struggling with the change in job roles and the skills and abilities staff would need as we implemented our service integration program (SUCCESS). Staff needed to become good assessors, interviewers, and case managers. We had staff with high school diplomas, some with AA degrees and some with BA degrees all working as eligibility workers in the old system. We realized we really needed to upgrade the level of skill and promote a culture that valued skill development and education as a part of career development. This message was consistent with the message we wanted staff to impart to welfare clients who were trying to move from welfare to work. Major alliances were formed with the community colleges, who had previously worked as partners in welfare-to-work efforts for clients, to work with us to develop training for

human services providers, including HSA staff. The Family Development Credential and Human Services Certificate describe some of those efforts (see *Appendix*). We also worked with the community colleges to offer an AA degree in Human Services and have been working with them over the past couple of years to co-locate a BA degree program in social work on a community college campus.

We also began to recognize the participation in educational and career development programs as a preference factor in promoting and selecting staff for special assignments and promotions. A major one-day HSA career conference was held annually to communicate our commitment to learning and education and encourage staff to take charge of their own career planning and development. These actually became models for county-wide human resources approaches.

It also became obvious to the Executive Team that our managers and supervisors needed training and assistance with the role changes we were defining for them. We brought in consultants to work with us on training topics that included facilitative leadership, managing with data, and project management. The Executive Team spent months identifying the core competencies that they needed in managers and supervisors and agreed that these would be rolled into the screening and interviewing processes for the selection of future supervisors and managers across programs. A comprehensive training program was developed for existing supervisors and managers to help them to develop these competencies. This training course is still in existence and is a valued program within the organization. The implicit goal of this training is to foster intellectual curiosity and critical thinking. The message conveyed is that although we may be doing good work, it can always be improved. This has led to an agency commitment to continual quality improvement.

My assumption in creating the original Research and Evaluation unit in 1996 was that by hiring a well-trained research person in HSA we would be more capable of evaluating our own efforts. This never really worked well, partly because the research staff struggled with the organizational understanding and readiness for research and evaluation. It became obvious to us that training and a more collaborative working relationship between research and service programs would be required to build an organizational value for formal research and evaluation. It took time for managers to see how research information could help them improve their outcomes. Today, the Planning and Evaluation unit in HSA has taken the lead on coordinating the Continual Quality Improvement efforts of the agency. This unit is responsible for researching evidence-based and best

practices and working with the service programs to review their outcomes and promote dialogue and decision-making on what needs to be changed.

In San Mateo County we have developed many of our own models and programs that we think make sense in meeting client and community needs. We are tracking outcomes and have created a culture committed to improvement. We have struggled with the fact that we have not had the resources to evaluate all these programs and their impact on client outcomes. Our Planning and Evaluation unit makes considerable use of administrative data and does the analysis for the programs to help them with their decision-making. The limited availability of relevant research in the human services field has forced us to do the best we can through this unit and outside contracts with private research groups to evaluate our programs. It is hoped that the new emphasis on evidence-based practice and the improved linkages between program and researchers in the state will strengthen this effort.

### **Advocating for Change**

In addition to promoting change inside the agency, we have been actively involved in advocacy at the state level with our professional organizations and with the State Departments of Social Services (CDSS) and Health. As we began implementation planning for our SUCCESS redesign, it became clear that our thinking was ahead of the state's planning. We met with the CDSS top management to present our community planning process and the plan we wished to implement and they indicated that they were not interested in approving county pilot projects, no matter how innovative or community supported. It took us almost two years to finally obtain approval for a waiver of state laws and regulations. We were told that a waiver could not be granted to do what we wanted to do because our design was too comprehensive and involved too many different components of the service system. By this time our Board champion had been elected to the State Assembly. I informed him of the CDSS position and we decided to have him sponsor legislation to allow us to pilot SUCCESS. It was only after legislation was introduced that the CDSS Director decided that they did have the authority to grant a waiver.

This was both an education in the State political process for me and my Executive Team and a tremendous challenge to actually implement in four months. We were able to implement our own local version of welfare reform two years before the California CALWORKS program. We had an outside evaluator design a waiver evaluation and work with us as we implemented to track our welfare-to-work

participants. We tracked exits from welfare, what kind of work clients entered, the average salary, and the availability of health benefits. We had the largest percentage of caseload reduction in the state and it was because people went to work. The economy was strong at the time and 76% of our participants who had been on welfare went to work. That was a huge change. Subsequent studies have estimated that approximately 40% of the caseload reductions nationally during that time were due to the economy, but we worked with our community to take advantage of our good economy. Our SUCCESS program informed the thinking behind the design of the CALWORKS program for the state.

Two years into our three year waiver, and after the CALWORKS legislation was passed, we were sued by a statewide advocacy group. Two of our rules in SUCCESS were more stringent than in CalWORKS. The advocacy organizations had fought the battle at the state level for less stringent rules and felt that allowing our project to continue the way it was would undermine that success. We lost in court and had to come into compliance with the CalWORKS process. The two major differences were : 1) in order to be approved for welfare and receive a check, a client had to participate in a week-long employment services seminars and if they did not cooperate, they did not get approved to receive a welfare check, and 2) while we had many services in place, many more than are in the state program (e.g. home visitors from community-based organizations), if clients did not participate in welfare to work planning or efforts they were given a full family sanction. We had the lowest sanction rate in the state (less than 3%), so this final sanction was used very sparingly. However, the advocates felt that they needed to make the point because other counties did not have a rich array of community services in place and might want to move to full family sanctions. We brought our SUCCESS program into compliance by modifying the entry and sanction policies and have been operating according to state rules ever since while still maintaining the comprehensive screening and assessment and integrated case planning features.

While this was frustrating for us, we took the positive lessons from this experience and learned that it is important to advocate for the legislative and regulatory changes that you need to meet your community needs. We later had success in helping to design the Child Welfare Redesign approaches and the California Children and Families Accountability System. While it is a lot of extra work, volunteering to be part of the design and legislation development has great rewards. It often results in a more rational community service orientation in state and federal policy.

## The Leadership Role

I have always envisioned myself as a leader of a team. I have worked hard to promote teamwork throughout our organization and in the community. Our organization has an Executive Team comprised of the Regional Directors and the Directors of the key support services. It took several years to develop into a real team. We actually developed rules for how we operate. We agreed to bring major issues and policy team decisions to the team for discussion and input and to make decisions by consensus. I made the final decision if consensus could not be reached. That was not the environment that top managers had operated in previously. I obviously had a lot of influence in the team process, but if we did not all agree on something we took the time to work out our differences so that we could ultimately reach consensus.

Dialogue is critical to good decision-making. The "command and control" approach to leadership does not promote common understanding and teamwork. Our organization has over 750 employees and an annual budget of about \$185 million a year. Our community has over 700,000 residents. There is too much going on inside and outside the organization to think that you can control all of it. To me, leadership is promoting the vision, mission, values, and influencing the processes to move forward and achieve our goals. It takes constant effort to find ways to get feedback from people on what is working and what is not. I learned that sometimes I thought things were working a certain way, but they weren't. I sometimes think that leading teams by trusting others is my strength and biggest weakness. However, it is really effective in creating shared ownership. However, you can get blind sided, which is why it is so important to continuously look for feedback.

One of the key roles I played as a team leader was to constantly look for opportunities to move our strategic plan forward and link external directions from the federal and state levels with the strategies our community had laid out. Some of the questions we would contemplate in our Executive Team meetings were: "How do the new laws or policy changes mesh with our strategic plan? How do we leverage or harness this new development as a catalyst for moving toward our vision and implementing our strategic directions more effectively?" Leadership is getting the team to think strategically within the framework of the overall vision and goals rather than looking at each change as a mandated program to be implemented separately. Leadership is not waiting for others to do it to us, but figuring out what we think makes sense for our community and then formally

putting in place a process to develop a plan that can inform federal or statewide thinking on implementation.

Another role of the leader is to model critical thinking skills. This often takes the form of rigorous inquiry and may be viewed in a negative way by managers or staff who do not think that top management should be probing or assessing ongoing operations. My experience has taught me that if you do not build a depth of understanding regarding how the organization operates, you cannot really change it. Discussions of processes and the need to redesign them were key in creating the organizational and service changes we made as well as promoting the culture of a learning organization.

### Managing Crises

Another key leadership role is to manage crises that affect the organization. One such crisis occurred in the process of creating organizational change. In late 1994 we were working with an external business consultant who was assisting us with the organizational change process. On his advice, I brought in an outside team to evaluate how things were going with the changes we were undertaking in the organizational culture. The team conducted focus groups and sent questionnaires to select staff and worked with an internal team to construct a report for management on how change was progressing and where there were problems that needed intervention. The report was rather candid and laid out many areas which needed additional attention. This was to be expected, since it was early in the change process for such a large organization. The report was intended for Executive Team discussion and action planning. It was an internal progress report that we shared with staff. I really trusted staff to use it in order to improve operations, but it became very politicized. Although I had briefed the county manager on the report and our plan to address the staff concerns, the report was leaked to a Board member with a cover note indicating that our agency was in a "mess". I had to manage the discussions with the Board and county manager. The business consultant volunteered to join me in those discussions and lauded the openness and commitment to a process of continuous organizational improvement that the Executive Team and I had made. The Board actually put the topic on a future meeting agenda and the consultant did a presentation on the process we had utilized and lauded the agency leadership. Ironically, the organizational self-assessment process was adopted by several other county departments following the consultant's presentation. Our staff learned a lot from the crisis and the way it was handled. It was a

difficult process, personally, however, and I learned that I might be a bit too optimistic about openness and information sharing in a political environment.

The second major crisis of my tenure was a much more serious one. We had a child who was in foster care who went home on an unsupervised visit and became a victim of shaken baby syndrome. The perpetrator was the father. It occurred over the Christmas holidays about three years ago. This was a very difficult situation, not only because of the emotions surrounding a child's death, but because there was a lot of controversy generated by the juvenile court judge. While the judge had actually approved unsupervised visits for this child, she criticized the agency for permitting it and proceeded with an open court hearing to investigate the agency's behavior and decision-making process. It became a major focus of the local media and she used that opportunity to criticize the worker, the agency, the director for child welfare and me. Since she was part of the case decision-making, I believe that she should have recused herself and had another judge oversee any investigation. The child's foster parent was very attached to the child, had wanted to adopt him and was not pleased with the reunification process before the incident occurred. She became one of the harshest critics of the worker and the agency for allowing the child to go for this unsupervised visit. A detailed internal investigation, including county counsel, had found that there was no negligence on the part of the worker. There was, I believe, some miscommunication between the therapist and the worker. The therapist from the private contract agency was also very critical of the worker. However, there was no proof on either side of what was said back and forth to each other. It did point out some real gaps in the system in terms of the fact that we were not getting written reports and recommendations from our contractor provider agency. Most reports were verbal, as had been agreed upon in the 1980s when the contract was first negotiated. I felt that it was my responsibility to support the worker, especially when there were many people calling for her termination. There was no reason to terminate her and I felt that it was unfair for someone to lose their job because they made a judgment that did not work as planned. All indications in the reports had been that the child would be safe at home. In fact, an older sibling had already been reunified a month earlier and was doing fine.

I strongly supported both the worker and the child welfare director in my court testimony. The judge was not happy with me. It became a real political issue since the judge is a good friend of the editor of the local newspaper



who continued to criticize me in print. I had no relationship with the editor and refused to get drawn into a public battle in the press. As a result, the county manager appointed a "Blue Ribbon panel" to look into the controversy. The agency was the only party not represented on the panel. The report issued was very critical of the agency and me. This continued to fuel the press coverage in the local paper. While some of my colleagues thought that I should have fought it out in the press and become as nasty as the judge, I refused to stoop to that level and would not do so today. I believe that leadership sometimes involves taking politically unpopular and principled positions, even at a risk to yourself and even when the political establishment is searching for cover.

In response to these facts, I led the agency in conducting a comprehensive assessment of our policies, and procedures and made improvements in several areas. The grand jury did an outside investigation and made some recommendations for policy, process and service changes which we were already in the process of implementing. I think that our child welfare system today is stronger than ever, including some new service providers and an improved documentation process.

In the spirit of using opportunities (even negative ones!) to promote strategic directions, I volunteered our agency to participate as one of the eleven counties piloting the new California Child Welfare Redesign as part of our child welfare improvement strategy. California had developed a Child Welfare Redesign Plan which was issued in 2003. The plan involved developing a differential response system in which community agencies provided services to families who had been referred for abuse and neglect, but were determined not to need intervention from the child welfare system. This system required the development of a community service system to provide prevention and early intervention services to families. Since HSA had already developed a network of 14 Family Resource Centers in high need areas of the county, an infrastructure already existed upon which the differential response services could be built. The second component of the Child Welfare Redesign was implementation of standardized safety and risk assessment at key points throughout the life of the case. Since this was one of the issues in our child welfare death, our county participation in piloting new tools and re-training staff was part of our improvement plan. We utilized the State's mandate to develop a Systems Improvement Plan to convene a broad-based community and cross-systems advisory committee to review our child welfare outcomes (defined by the federal

and state governments) and system. This committee reviewed all aspects of the system, including police and referral sources, court processes and legal representation, and community services and supports, including those from health, mental health and substance abuse systems. This committee was co-chaired by a member of the Board of Supervisors and the Director of the Peninsula Community Foundation. The committee produced a systems-wide Child Welfare Systems Improvement Plan (SIP). The result has been a much better community understanding of the Child Welfare System and the laws and processes surrounding it and a commitment of private foundation funds to help implement the systems improvements. Greater ownership of our strategic direction of building community capacity to support children and families has resulted and services have been expanded in collaboration with schools, cities and community-based organizations.

### **Knowing When it is Time to Leave**

It is very difficult to know how long you should stay in the Director position in the same organization. On the one hand, a long tenure can be a positive because you are in an organization long enough to really make deep changes in the culture of the organization. On the other hand, sometimes those changes are seen as only linked to you instead of the organization as a whole. Resistance to change can become personalized. This is very common in hierarchical organizations where every success and failure is identified with the leader.

There were several points during my 13 year tenure when I thought about exiting, something everyone experiences at some time during a long period of employment. The work environment is very important to me, especially an organizational environment where I believe that I can move forward and make the changes to meet the strategic goals. If I do not think that I am going to be able to move anything forward, then it is time to leave. I think that sometimes you get to a point, emotionally and professionally, where you have taken on enough challenges and think that it may be time for the organization to have new leadership.

Quite honestly, I was ready to leave about 2½ years before I retired. The child death crisis is what convinced me to stay, because my work was not done. It was critical to guide the organization through this difficult time and enable it to make the improvements that needed to be made within the county systems and the community. It was important to re-establish the credibility of the agency in our



community and rebuild our partnership approach to service improvement.

Leaving an organization after investing so much of your life in it is very difficult. If you feel that you have hired the right people and that the team really owns the mission, values and strategic directions, the organization can carry on without you, and it makes leaving a little bit easier. That is why it is so critical to spend the time to identify the values, attitudes, and core competencies needed to lead the organization and invest in training and development of managers. Succession planning is about the competencies, philosophies, and skills that you want to be a part of the organization and how you make sure that you are developing a pool of people who could potentially become the director at some point and carry the vision forward.

### Reflections and Implications

As I reflect back upon leaving the agency, it occurs to me that one of the most important legacies of my tenure is the fact that the mission, values and strategic plan for human services have been implemented in HSA and in the county. The time that was spent working with senior staff paid off in terms of building a shared commitment to excellence, becoming big picture thinkers, developing a sense of accountability for outcomes and performance, becoming team builders and collaborators and developing flexibility and creativity in the way in which people worked together. These core competencies were much more important to me, and have become much more important to the senior staff, than detailed program knowledge when selecting managers in the organization.

It has also become clearer to me how much organizational change is dependent on leadership setting the behavioral examples. For instance, the functioning of the Executive Team meetings as opportunities for team building and open dialogue on issues leading to consensus decisions set an example for how other teams in the agency could work. You can talk about the mission, values and strategies all you want, but when managers and staff see it in practice repeatedly it becomes ingrained in the organizational functioning. Seeing things change for the better creates hope among staff and unleashes their ability to be creative, think and develop the community relationships necessary to generate innovation.

My experiences in San Mateo have confirmed my commitment to proactive management. As difficult as some of the experiences were emotionally, I can see that perseverance can result in significant improvements in social service

systems over time. Proactive management involves taking risks and challenging people or institutions. It can generate hostility. I have seen many managers who conceptually supported a direction, but were not willing to take the actions necessary to create real change in operations. Identifying, recruiting, and/or promoting proactive managers is a complicated process because reference-checking can be limited and superficial. It is only when you work with managers and see them in action that you can really access their courage and willingness to work through conflict.

Reactive managers have a strong tendency to “want to be liked”. These are not the people who can promote organizational and systems change. However, they are often the managers who are most liked in public agencies. I believe that it is much easier to survive and thrive in public systems if you are a reactive manager and well liked, but this approach does not always serve the best interests of our clients, communities or society. Reactive managers in your organization can undermine your best efforts.

Directors and top management can be easily diverted from the strategic vision by organizational crises. There is always something coming at you and there is too much to be managed effectively. I can now see how important it is to continually bring the focus back to the mission and strategic plans. I think this requires the same set of skills that are needed to be an effective parent. Parenting is a balancing act between being permissive and being authoritative (not authoritarian, there is a real difference). Being authoritative (reminding staff of the mission, establishing realistic boundaries, use of caring firmness to help everyone move in the same direction) is the most effective parenting skill and has similarities to effective proactive management. Even with these skills, however, it is clear that both children and staff can wait you out in order to find ways not to change. That is more difficult, however, if the proactive manager is persistent, consistent and follows-through.

My San Mateo experience also made me realize that while public sector leadership and management needs to improve, the vast majority of managers in human services systems work extremely hard and are emotionally committed to the work they do. While skill development and strategic approaches can help them to make these systems more responsive to the real needs of the poor in our society, the political realities with which they contend make this work extremely difficult and frustrating. It is important for each individual to be introspective enough to determine when they have done what they can in that environment and then find other ways to promote the cause of social change.

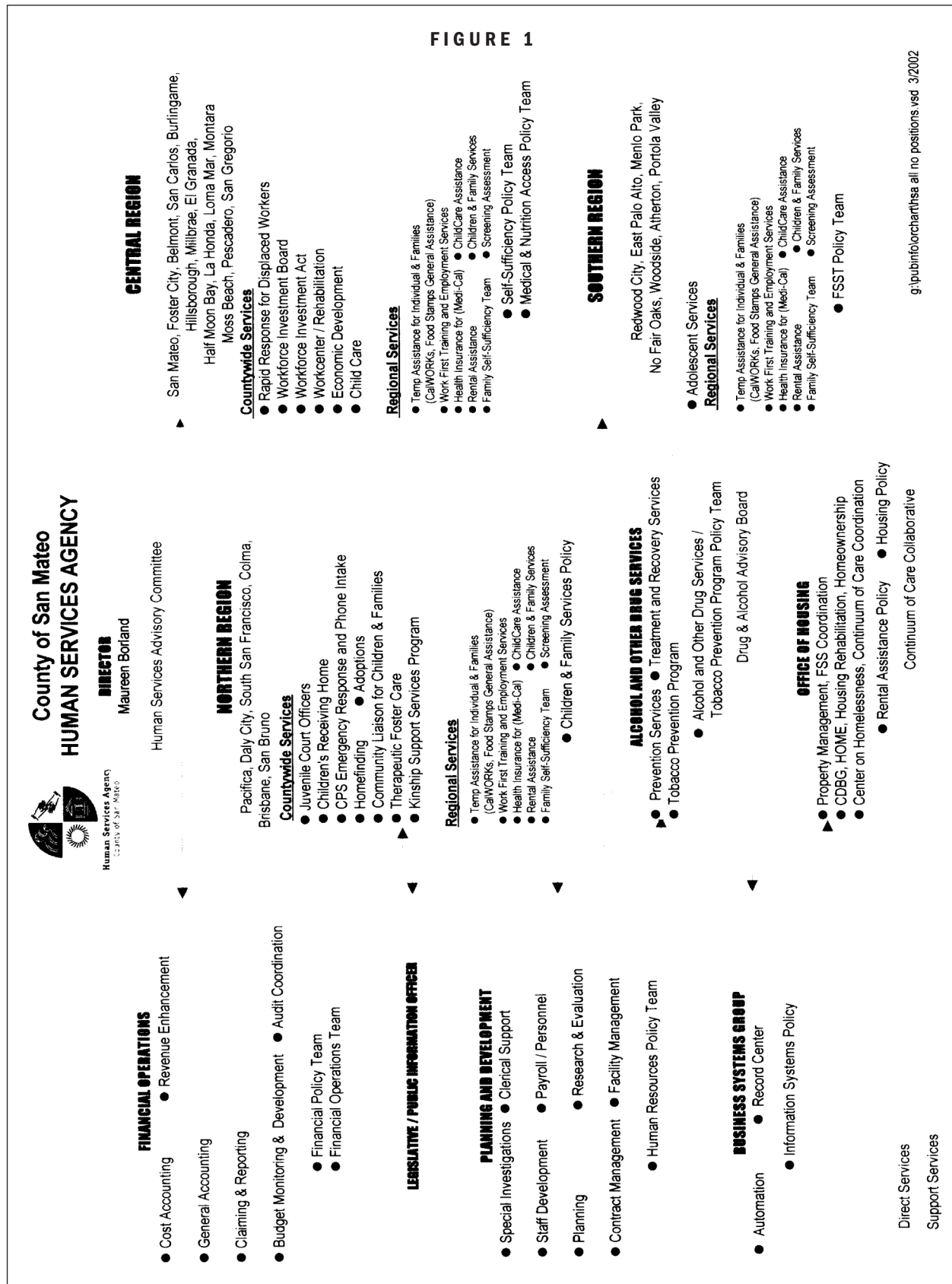


FIGURE 1

## APPENDICES OF PROMISING PRACTICES<sup>\*</sup>

### APPENDIX A

#### Combining Business with Rehabilitation in a Public Workcenter with Disabled and Low-Income Participants in San Mateo County

##### *Executive Summary*

Most work centers operate with the major objective of fully integrating participants into the competitive workforce by assisting them with job experience, training, placement and retention. Vocational rehabilitation services are provided alongside on-site business operations that include assembling, packaging and shipping products for private industry. Often, these activities are accompanied by offsite work (termed enclaves) such as janitorial crews or supported employment in public hospitals and offices. Whether on-site or off-site, the service goal is to find the right balance between rehabilitation services and business operations.

To identify the potential of work centers to address the needs of welfare to work clients before and after their TANF benefits expire, the Workcenter in San Mateo County, California is viewed as a prototype of a welfare reform implementation resource. Founded in 1967 on a \$200 grant, the Workcenter has grown to a two and one-half million dollar a year organization that serves multiple populations, including participants 1) receiving general assistance (GA), 2) receiving County mental health services, 3) receiving County drug and alcohol services, 4) with physical disabilities, 5) participating in a prison work-furlough program and 6) referred by the Family Court for nonpayment of ordered child support.

About two-thirds of current Workcenter participants are referred from the mental health unit and about one-third receive GA, although the number of GA participants tends to increase dramatically during recessions when competitive employment is difficult to find. Other populations of participants represent only a small percentage of Workcenter labor. Participants entering the Workcenter complete an extensive intake process that includes screening and evaluation, a week-long job seeking skills class, and a ten-day work assessment if indicated. After they complete the intake process, participants work at the Workcenter and continue looking for employment and self-sufficiency at the Network Center. The Network Center is staffed by job search specialists and is equipped with computers, telephones, job listings, and other resources that assist in seeking employment. This is what one Workcenter participant said of his experience at the Network Center:

*I go to the Network Center three days a week, when I am not at the Workcenter. Everyone is asked to bring in three or four job leads. Sometimes they pan out and sometimes they don't. They teach you how to use the newspaper, how to fill out an application correctly and how to use the phone. We did a couple of mock interviews, where they videotaped us. We also got help using the computer. They even have maps to give locations of where*

*to go and what busses to catch to jobs and interviews. There are only two of us left from the group of eight that I came in with. Everybody is really taking the initiative to get out of there and look for work. It really works when they help you send out your resume and use the phone. It's so much better than running up and down the street looking for some work.*

While Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) recipients do not work at the Workcenter, they do receive County Vocational Rehabilitation Services (VRS) that work in unison with the Workcenter. Workcenter and VRS staff help participants to achieve self-sufficiency in accordance with recent welfare reform legislation that contains work requirements and places time limits on the receipt of public benefits.

In addition to Workcenter and VRS services, social service clients receiving GA or TANF have access to an additional array of supports. After attending the job-seeking skills class, Human Service clients are mandated to attend the Workcenter and the Network Center until competitive employment is found. On a monthly basis, Human Services Case Managers meet with participants that have been referred to VRS. If they are experiencing difficulty they receive home visits from their Case Manager or are referred to rehabilitation specialists in other County departments (such as health, mental health, substance abuse or domestic violence).

In summary, public work centers offer many benefits to a) participants (job training, work experience, access to rehabilitation services and opportunities for mainstream employment), b) social services personnel who can help participants become self-sufficient, c) taxpayers when participant employment results in reduced public expenditures, and d) the business community through competitive pricing, quick job completion and quality that is able to compete with private industry.

Work centers can serve people with more severe disabilities (health or mental health problems, lack of work skills or education, substance abuse, domestic violence issues, legal difficulties or caretaker responsibilities) who are hard to place in the workforce. Employing "hard to place" individuals is becoming increasingly important, as many welfare recipients that are capable of working will have found employment by the time the first wave of time limits expires. Only those with significant barriers to employment will remain on the welfare rolls. These recipients can potentially benefit the most from workcenter services and support.

##### *More than five years later*

By the year 2000, the welfare caseload in San Mateo County had been reduced by 76%. While the SUCCESS evaluation estimated that approximately 40% of this reduction was due to improvements in the economy, this was an astounding success story. The remaining population, however, seemed to be very difficult to engage, despite extraordinary efforts at outreach and home-visiting by both HSA and community partner staff. It became apparent

<sup>\*</sup>A full description of each of these summaries is located in: Austin, M.J. (2004). *Changing Welfare Services: Case Studies of Local Welfare Reform Programs*. Binghamton, NY: Haworth Press

that many of these individuals were dealing with significant barriers to employment, including mental illness and substance abuse. Because of the Agency approach to providing integrated services to multiple populations, instead of creating something separate for the CALWORKS hard-to-serve clients, HSA decided to redesign how the workcenter was serving its current population and include CALWORKS clients in that model.

Vocational Rehabilitation services were offered through the workcenter. Many of the welfare clients required a vocational rehabilitation approach. The workcenter and the Peninsula Works One-Stop Employment Center have been co-located to incorporate the Network Center and Workfirst approach for all clients, including the GA and mentally ill clients who had previously only been served at the workcenter. The workcenter itself has become part of the continuum of options available to all clients seeking employment who are identified with special employment barriers or needs.

Over the past several years the focus of the program has shifted from a sheltered workshop for those with barriers to employment to job development and community employment for that population. Partnerships have been developed with community employers and have resulted in increased job placements for difficult to place clients. Several new business ventures have been developed to increase revenue for vocational rehabilitation services and to place clients. The Workcenter currently operates a joint venture with Goodwill, San Mateo Recycleworks, and Dell computers, which diverts computers from the County landfill. This created

14 new jobs which were filled with hard-to-place clients. A joint venture with the San Mateo County Library System has created the Library Cafe to serve library customers coffee and treats and created 3 new jobs. A full service cafe located at the San Mateo Hall of Justice was recently taken over by the Workcenter and 16 new jobs created for clients. Responsibility for operating the Imaging Center attached to HSA's Health Insurance Telecenter (Medi-CAL call center) was recently given to the Workcenter and will employ 19 clients. Clients are currently employed by an array of community businesses, as well. Some of the employers are Safeway, Mervyn's, Longs, Walgreens, Albertsons, Home Depot etc. Clients placed into these positions are averaging \$8.20 per hour, despite their disabilities, and are working over 20 hours a week. From July 2004 to June 30, 2005, 902 clients were served through the Workcenter network and 115 were placed in community jobs. The job retention rate was approximately 50% at 90 days. For the population with the most severe barriers to employment, this is remarkably good.

The progression of collaborative services offered through the Workcenter network reflects the entrepreneurial approach and attitude fostered within HSA as the "learning organization" approach has grown. The focus on changing service approaches and making the community collaborations necessary to succeed is reflected in the transformation of the workcenter and employment services. Staff and managers have learned to seek out best practice approaches and seek community opportunities to develop them.

## APPENDIX B

### ***The Adopt-A-Family Program: Building a Network of Resources in San Mateo County***

#### ***Executive Summary***

The Adopt-A-Family program, founded in November 1997, helps low-income families in their struggle for self-sufficiency. Designed as an expansion of the popular holiday programs of the same name, this San Mateo County effort provides both material and emotional support to low-income families over a period of one year by matching client families with "godparents" who are individuals and/or employees of local businesses. The goal of the program is to facilitate the development of a relationship between client families and middle-class families in the same community.

The program included the following components:

- *Program goal.* Help families make the transition to self-sufficiency through individuals and businesses who "adopt" a low-income family for a period of one year.
- *Client referral.* Families are referred by a variety of social service agencies throughout the county. Families are pre-screened by these agencies and their profiles forwarded to the Adopt-A-Family program for matching. Families develop a "Wish List" of items that they need. These typically include pots, pans, toys, clothing, bedding, and cribs.
- *Godparent recruitment.* "Godparents" are recruited largely through community presentations, publicity and word of mouth. They are encouraged to collect and contribute second-hand items in good condition to fill the family's "Wish

List." Although they may spend money on their family, this is not an expectation. The program does not accept cash donations. Godparents are encouraged to develop a personal relationship with the family outside of providing for their material needs.

- *Program follow-up.* The program keeps track of its adoptions through the referring caseworkers who continue to have a relationship with the client families. Support is offered to the family and the godparents, as it is needed.

In the first 18 months, the program has matched up approximately 100 families with community sponsors. There are three major lessons that have been learned to date:

- 1 Build a strong resource network. The commitment and experience of the founder, Al Teglia, significantly aided the establishment of this program. With over 48 years of public service experience in San Mateo County, his knowledge about the needs of the county's families and the potential resources available was extremely valuable in the implementation of the program. Despite the unique experiences of Al Teglia, this program can be replicated elsewhere by establishing a network of agency and business representatives which focuses on two main areas (1) cultivating relationships with social service agencies who can refer clients, and (2) wide



dissemination of program information throughout the community to reach potential godparents.

- 2 Minimize bureaucratic procedures and costs. Unlike most programs for low-income populations, this one is not interested in getting more funding. In fact, the success of its implementation and expansion is, in part, because it is based exclusively on donations of time and materials. Outside of the staff time that is needed to establish and develop a program like this. The overhead costs are minimal. The program continues to refuse to accept cash donations because it would create too much "red tape." Any money that does change hands goes directly from the godparent to the family without incurring any administrative costs.
- 3 Make it easy to participate. The network-based approach and minimal bureaucracy make it easy for the key players (referring agencies, godparents, and client families) to participate. This program places only a small burden on the staff time and resources of referring agencies. The only requirement placed on clients is that they be pre-screened by a social service agency in the county. And godparents only need to commit to helping their family in whatever way they can for a period of one year. Beyond this the program places no requirements on participants.

The simplicity and strength of this program implies that it will continue to mature and grow as it is only limited by the amount of time, energy and resources to be mobilized without burdening the program with too much red tape. It should be noted, however, that the expansion process will face three major challenges in the immediate future:

- 1 Need for increased public awareness of the program. Continued public exposure of the program is critical for its future, especially keeping the program uppermost in the minds of referring caseworkers to encourage appropriate families to participate. It is also crucial to maintain a sufficient number of godparents who want to adopt these families through the use of flyers, websites, and volunteers who give presentations to local community groups which is the program's primary method of recruiting godparents.
- 2 Need for additional services. The flexibility of the Adopt-a-Family program makes it possible to expand the types of goods and services it can offer to client families. As new resources come to the attention of the program's manager, they should be incorporated into the program, given the changing needs of client families.
- 3 Need for program self-sufficiency. This represents the greatest challenge to the future development of the program.

The program is currently dependent on the personality and reputation of its founder, Al Teglia. The Human Service Agency of San Mateo has recently created a Community Liaison position to provide support to the Adopt-a-Family program in addition to numerous other community outreach projects. Judyt Bardales, the newly hired Community Liaison, is helping to develop the program's operating protocol, advertising materials, and job description for when she becomes the main contact of the resource network. As transition develops, Bardales will be more and more responsible for keeping track of potential godparents and client families. Teglia continues to coordinate the program and the partnership with Bardales at the Human Service Agency will insure that the program continues to flourish.

In the era of welfare reform, programs for low-income families that promote community building are more important than ever to address the social isolation experienced by those in the poorest neighborhoods who have the least interaction with the larger community, although many are located near more affluent areas. As one of the Adopt-A-Family godparents noted: "We all know that there are poor people out there, but we don't realize they live that close to us."

#### *More than five years later*

The Adopt-a-Family program has been in continual operation since its inception in 1997. The lessons learned from the implementation of the Adopt-a-Family program are still valid. The Human Services Agency has ensured that the program is coordinated and continues to flourish. Approximately 50 new families are matched with "Godparents" each year. The program has been able to increase the number of families matched each year due to increased sponsorships from corporate employees and small businesses. Participating low-income families have had from one to six children. The value of the "wish list" items provided to each child has averaged about \$275. No cash is accepted and sponsors buy the items that are needed by the families.

While some public speaking at community groups and some publicity from newspapers have helped to spread the community knowledge of the program, most of the growth has come from word-of-mouth endorsements from sponsors who have had positive experiences with their matched families. The community has embraced their role in supporting low-income families and children and is benefiting from this "hands-on" approach to helping. This program is another example of an innovative public/private approach to improve the lives of low-income families within the community.



## APPENDIX C

## Introducing Organizational Development (OD) Practices into the San Mateo County Human Services Agency

### Executive Summary

It is rare that a public county human service agency has the opportunity to incorporate an internal organizational development (OD) function to assist with managing organizational change. This is a case study of one such agency that hired an internal OD specialist to facilitate organizational restructuring related to the implementation of welfare reform. The case study is based on the first three years of implementation (1996-1999).

Organization development (OD) is one approach to managing change within an organization. Organization development is a top-management-supported, long-range effort to improve an organization's problem-solving and renewal processes, particularly through a more effective and collaborative diagnosis and management of organization culture. However, it is important to develop realistic expectations for what OD can and cannot accomplish 1) OD is long-range in perspective and not a "quick-fix" strategy for solving short-term performance problems (Rothwell, et al., 1995). 2) While OD efforts can be undertaken at any level within the agency, successful OD interventions need to be supported by top managers, 3) OD expands worker's perspectives so that they can apply new approaches to old problems, concentrating on the work group or organization in which these new approaches will be applied, 4) OD emphasizes employee participation in the entire process from diagnosing problems to selecting a solution to planning for change, and evaluating results, and 5) the process of organization development is most effectively facilitated by a consultant who is either external or internal to the agency.

Numerous factors contributed to the creation of a permanent, full-time organization development (OD) staff position within San Mateo County Human Services Agency. In 1992, a newly reorganized agency and a new director, followed by a strategic plan completed in 1993, marked the beginning of a comprehensive organizational change process. All aspects of the agency were impacted including service delivery, increased use of teams, organizational structures, and community relationships. In 1995, following the implementation of many changes, the agency conducted a self-assessment involving all levels of staff in order to "take the pulse" of the agency and identify staff needs and perceptions. The self-study indicated that agency staff were struggling to keep up with the myriad of changes and needed more: 1) understanding of the strategic plan, 2) feedback on how staff were doing in implementing the plan, 3) honest and open communications from bottom up and top down, 4) attention to concerns about customer service and productivity; and 5) attention to job performance and workplace stress.

The director of the Human Services Agency presented a convincing case to the County Manager for the creation of an internal OD position to help implement a new model of service delivery. The idea for creating an internal OD specialist was further helped by increased attention throughout the county in 1996 to the field of organization development. Because of the high stakes associated with bringing a change agent into the agency through the creation of this new position, the Human Services executive

team devoted considerable efforts to developing a job description, recruiting, and using an assessment center strategy to pick the best candidate.

Following the orientation phase, the initial responsibilities of the internal OD specialist emerged as (1) working with the executive staff to create different types of teams that would implement the changes driven by the new service delivery model (such as policy teams, management teams, regional teams, and process teams); (2) working with each team to identify the team's purpose and procedures for accomplishing tasks; and (3) designing and conducting team-building activities and all-staff forums with line staff and supervisors to deal with issues related to the regionalization of services.

After two years of operation, several preliminary lessons can be gleaned from the experiences of the San Mateo County Human Services Agency. It is important to be cautious about applying them to other agencies since each agency responds to organization development in a unique way. Some of the lessons learned include:

- 1 It is important for the internal OD specialist to invest the necessary time and energy in developing a close working relationship between staff and management.
- 2 The internal OD specialist does not develop change recommendations for the agency.
- 3 Provide information to all levels of staff at the same time.
- 4 Organization development is not a solution to all of the agency's problems.
- 5 Relationship-building and sustaining has several levels: (1) creating and nurturing; (2) trusting and supporting; (3) risk-taking and new learning.
- 6 While OD specialists are in a unique agency position to see both sides of an issues since they are not in the chain of command to manage or deliver agency services, they need to help others expand their capabilities to see and sense.
- 7 It is crucial to monitor the changing and multiple staff perceptions of the OD function.
- 8 Moving from project learning to individualized learning requires time and patience.
- 9 Communication and collaboration with staff development is essential for the future viability of OD.

### More than five years later

In 1996 the San Mateo County Human Services Agency (HSA) began implementation of SUCCESS, its local community designed welfare reform model, under a waiver granted by the California Department of Social Services. Changing the jobs and functions of hundreds of staff from individuals working in a hierarchical command and control organization to an outcome oriented, team process approach was a major undertaking and staff, supervisors, and managers required assistance in the transition process. The organizational development approach was one tool that was utilized to implement this massive change effort at all levels of the organization.

Introducing the OD function into an organization during a transformative change, such as SUCCESS, has had lasting impacts on how managers and supervisors think and perform their functions. For example, the gathering of data and input from staff is now second nature at all levels of the Agency when designing, implementing and evaluating changes in service delivery and programs in order to produce improved outcomes. Today, as program changes are made the OD approach to dealing with the reactions to implementation of the plan results in identification of necessary changes and quick course corrections. Employee morale has improved as they have seen that their concerns and suggestions are being sought, heard and course corrections made quickly.

In 2000 the internal OD specialist assumed managerial responsibility for the staff development function in HSA. As a result of this shift in function, OD tools and techniques were introduced to the staff development trainers. Staff development trainers became comfortable with utilizing team-building and visioning exercises, cross-Agency strategies for consensus building, and working with managers and supervisors to develop enhanced leadership training and coaching. The OD approach has become institutionalized in HSA and has contributed to the development of a “learning organization” culture.

## APPENDIX D

### Building the Capacity of High-Quality Childcare by Training Exempt Providers

#### *Executive Summary*

It is nationally recognized that there is an urgent need to increase the capacity of high-quality infant and toddler childcare (The Carnegie Corporation of New York, 1998; The Annie E. Casey Foundation, 1998; Kahn & Kamerman, 1998; Modigliani, 1994). One way to increase the capacity and quality of childcare is to recruit, train and support unlicensed, or exempt providers who care for their own children, the children of relatives and/or the children of only one other family.

This case describes the Child Care Coordinating Council Exempt Provider Training Project in San Mateo County which was established in 1997 to: 1) increase the quality of care offered by exempt child care providers, 2) promote the healthy development of infants and toddlers served by exempt providers, 3) increase the availability of child care for low-income parents receiving services from Medi-Cal's Prenatal to Three Initiative and other community programs, 4) educate providers about the economic benefits of family child care as a profession, and 5) evaluate the effectiveness of services that provide outreach and education to exempt child care providers.

The training program encourages providers to facilitate healthy child development rather than simply custodial care.

Provider training needs are assessed as part of a sixteen-hour training program that includes four training sessions of four hours each. Classes are conducted in Spanish and English and are usually held on Saturdays to meet the needs of participants. Topics include: 1) how quality child care experiences can facilitate healthy early child development, 2) the importance of self-assessment in providing patience and consistent care, 3) teamwork and relationship-building with children and their parents, and 4) creating an environment for infants and toddlers that fosters healthy child development. The Project offers many other services, in addition to training, that include home visits, support groups, transportation, child care, referrals, educational literature and mentors.

Incentives are used to encourage attendance at the training sessions. Initially all participants were paid \$25 for each session they attend and another \$25 for coming to all four, but these payments were reduced to \$20 after class sizes became larger. In addition, the Project offers \$40 scholarships to attend CPR/first aid training and \$90 for registering with Trustline which includes

fingerprinting as a way to assure parents that their child care provider does not have a criminal conviction.

In the second year of operation, the Project staff gathered information about the participants to learn more about their characteristics, employment outside the home, and business practices. The evaluation yielded the following information: 1) approximately 75% of the first year participants were Spanish-speaking immigrant women that are married, live with a partner, or one or more adult friends or relatives who provide additional household income, 2) approximately 63% of the first year participants were parents with children under the age of three, and most participants and their partners have low incomes which leads to difficulties finding affordable, adequate housing and providing for the needs of children, and 3) approximately 17% of the first year participants have completed the child care licensing process while many others have made progress towards licensure.

Other program outcomes are difficult to quantify, but the following staff observations include: 1) an increase in attention paid to children in care instead of primarily completing household chores, 2) an increase in the safety and utilization of child care environments such as covering electrical outlets and clearing more space for the children to play, 3) an increase in provider patience and a decrease in over-protectiveness (as well as improved parenting abilities displayed by husbands/partners), 4) an increased connection between participants and public services, leading to increased utilization of support services, and 5) an increased connection among participants leading to continued support of each other personally and professionally.

Several lessons have been learned in the first two years of operation:

- Most low-income women with infants and toddlers that receive health services from Medi-Cal's Prenatal to Three Initiative do not plan to leave their children in child care but instead choose to care for their own children at home while providing exempt care to the children of friends or relatives. Most choose this form of self-employment because it more closely suits the needs of their families.
- When the initial referral process was not effective in reaching the community of exempt providers, staff greatly increased participation through phone calls, fliers and community

presentations. Participation increased even more rapidly after the first few groups of participants spoke positively of the Project to friends and family members.

- Parents that care for only their own children (i.e., they are not child care providers) are also interested in attending Project trainings. There is a wider audience for childcare training than simply reaching providers.

### *More than five years later*

The Child Care Coordinating Council's Home-Based Child Care Training Project was established and has been operating since 1997. Over the past 9 years, the funding sources for the project and the name of the project have changed, but the basic goals of enhancing the quality of care provided in license-exempt, home settings, and providing professional development opportunities for these providers have remained the same. The project continues to offer training in the core areas of child development, nutrition, and health and safety in childcare environments. Materials are constantly revised with participant feedback. Courses are offered in both English and Spanish, depending on the need. A play-group has been developed to connect providers and home visiting is a key part of the program. The program has found that the

trainings seem most successful and empowering when they focus on enhancing participants strengths and knowledge. Marketing the program is a collaborative function and was redesigned in 2003 when there was a drop in enrollment. The classes are now held at the San Mateo Adult School as part of their class offerings, providing a wider audience of individuals interested in becoming childcare providers. Since 1997, 2,079 providers have been trained and technical assistance has been provided to 742 providers.

The strategy of increasing both the quality of in-home childcare provided by exempt providers and increasing the pool of licensed childcare providers has paid off in San Mateo County. Many participants have moved to the status of licensed family care provider. The quality of the care provided by the participants has been reviewed by the Child Care Coordinating Council and has shown significant improvement. This program has contributed to several goals of HSA: improved early childhood development and child well-being, improved child safety in these settings, increased utilization of support services by providers and parents and increased availability of licensed child care providers in high need low-income neighborhoods, particularly Spanish speaking providers. It is a good example of partnering with the community to improve outcomes for children, families and low-income communities.

## APPENDIX E

### The Futures Project: School-Based Service Integration in San Mateo County

#### *Executive Summary*

This summary briefly describes San Mateo County's experience with the Futures Project, a pilot system of school-based health and human services in Daly City, California. The Futures Project was implemented as part of a consolidation of San Mateo County's human services system and the creation of the San Mateo County Human Services Agency (HSA). It helps illustrate the connections between system-oriented reform efforts and service integration.

The Futures Project was developed to test a more accessible and interconnected system of services for children and families in San Mateo County with an emphasis on prevention and early intervention. It was conceived as a way to create an interdisciplinary teamwork approach to meeting family needs in place of traditionally fragmented and categorized systems of services. Unlike most California counties, where school-based collaborative projects were developed separately from any changes in the larger human service system, the Futures Project was connected to a more comprehensive reorganization process. A major goal of the larger process was to support and develop stronger families. By addressing a wide range of needs for "at-risk" children and families the agency hoped to prevent major family problems such as child abuse and neglect. Linking public services for children and families to school systems was seen as a mutually beneficial approach for service providers, the schools, and families. Locating services at school sites increased accessibility by providing services at a site that families and children were already likely to visit for other reasons and tended to be in their neighborhoods.

Implementation was done on a pilot basis in Daly City, one of the four areas of the county in greatest need. Daly City was selected through a competitive application process, since it

required the involvement and commitment of the school districts and city to succeed. Resource limitations also dictated that it be a pilot project. The program design was the result of a complex collaborative network, including: HSA, mental health, public health, probation, County Office of Education and three separate school districts, city representatives and numerous community-based service providers and advisory groups. The county committed 25 county positions worth approximately \$1.5 million worth of services. The Peninsula Community Foundation committed funding for the Project coordinator. The county efforts coincided with the development of the statewide Healthy Start program that funded an operational grant for \$100,000 per year, plus one-time funding for remodeling and renovation expenses. The Futures Centers became operational in August, 1992.

During the first year, top-level administrators worked intensively to make the new model work. The project served as a laboratory for how to do things differently at the service delivery level to improve outcomes for children and families. Although staff initially found the multi-disciplinary process difficult, they gradually developed a sense of teamwork. The project also showed the difficulties of service collaboration between large bureaucracies. As HSA redefined its role in the community it was identifying the need for changes in the organizations with whom it partnered. Changes in the educational systems were much more difficult to make. This difficulty was intensified by the state regulations around the Healthy Start program and its evaluation design requirements.

Despite these difficulties, however, the Futures Project emerged as a very successful pilot initiative for re-engineering of the service model used in San Mateo County, the state and nationally.

### *More than five years later*

The Futures Project was the pilot for a system of school-based health and human services in San Mateo County. It was unique, in that it was designed and developed as a pilot for a new way of delivering human services within the San Mateo County Human Services Agency (HSA) in collaboration with other county agencies, school districts, cities and community partners. During the difficult times of promoting organizational and culture change in HSA, the Futures Project served as a concrete example of how services could be delivered more effectively in a multi-disciplinary, collaborative, community setting.

The model initiated at Futures has since been adapted in other communities in San Mateo County where a network of 15 Family Resource Centers now exists in high need communities. One of the 4 Futures sites has served as a pilot for the new Differential Response approach which is a part of Child Welfare Redesign in California. Lessons were learned from the Futures pilot and redesigns of the school-based services administration, staffing, training and funding have come from the experience. The Futures approach has transitioned into the Daly City Family Resource Center Network. However, Redwood City has developed the most extensive network of school-based Family Resource Centers in San Mateo

County. It is structured quite differently from Futures, but incorporates the multi-disciplinary, prevention and early intervention focus learned from the pilot. Redwood City has made the most progress in systematically evaluating the outcomes of the school-based services approach. Redwood City has also demonstrated that for true strong partnerships, all parties need to be committed to resources, not just oversight. The financial partnership in Daly City could be much stronger and change efforts are underway to modify the relationships. The county still funds much more of the Daly City Family Resource Center Network than any other community.

One important lesson learned from Futures is that management and supervision of Family Resource center county staff is still critical, even though daily coordination and supervision may be provided by a collaborating partner. Over the past 14 years, there have been difficulties with clinical supervision of mental health and public health nursing staff and problems with quality control on record keeping and documentation when agency supervision and management have not been strong. Strong partnerships and strong ownership of the collaborative structure and services is necessary for all partners to make Family Resource Centers successful in meeting the needs of their communities.

## APPENDIX F

### ***San Mateo County's Organizational Assessment and Service Survey: How Are We Doing?***

#### *Executive Summary*

Organizational change is a complex process. It is often difficult for top management to determine how messages about change are being incorporated in agency functions. In order to understand staff perceptions and to assess how organizational changes were being viewed throughout the agency, the San Mateo County Human Services Agency (HSA) involved staff in an Assessment and Service Survey in 1994. The survey was conducted by a private-sector consulting organization that donated its time. HSAs reorganization was seen as similar to many private sector businesses experiencing the re-engineering of their infrastructure and mission. There were three purposes for the survey: 1) to measure effectiveness and quality of the work environment, 2) to determine staff assessment of customer service, and 3) to identify opportunities for improving decision making in HSA.

Five broad issues emerged from the results and were to be used to continually improve change efforts. The breadth of the negative comments was surprising to the Executive Directors of HSA. The HSA Executive Team looked carefully at the results to determine what kinds of changes could be made immediately to address staff concerns. In the spirit of openness and shared ownership for the solutions, the survey results were widely distributed to all HSA staff with a memo indicating that the Executive Team was in the process of crafting a plan of action to deal with the survey issues and recommendations and would be discussing with staff once it was drafted. It was stressed that it was committed to keeping the lines of communication open and creating a work environment that would inspire trust, creativity and integrity. The Executive

Team action plan was distributed to staff eight weeks after the survey results. Staff members were asked for input and participation in finalizing the plan to further deal with the recommendations.

Other county agency directors were intrigued with the idea, but some felt it was too risky in a political environment. This was reflected when an anonymous copy was sent to a member of the Board of Supervisors with no context, without the memo and with no action plan. This member was satisfied when supplied with the information and was impressed with the level of agency self-examination being undertaken.

Some of the lessons learned include:

- Assessing organizational change through staff input is a lengthy, all-encompassing process for the entire agency. The depth of effort to implement the survey and establish and action plan was not anticipated.
- Organizational changes take time. Staff had difficulty functioning with uncertainty created by the multitude of changes taking place in their environment. Extra effort was required during the transitions in such a bureaucratic and hierarchical structure.
- Develop a communication plan. Direct, timely and consistent communication from management and supervisors through a variety of methods is critical to creating a common understanding.
- The change process can be made easier by dividing the process into four or five specific tasks. Piloting changed ways of doing business can make it easier for staff to understand the change required in their jobs.



- A strategic plan is a living document. Discussing the plan on an individual program and systems level helps to develop the “shared sense of reality”.
- Ongoing learning is an important part of staff development and change.
- Managers need to provide leadership in a way that coaches and encourages staff. Staff expects managers to help interpret the strategic directions and provide guidance on how jobs can be modified to achieve the vision.

#### *More than ten years later*

The San Mateo Human Services Agency Organizational Assessment and Service Survey was an attempt to utilize the donated expertise and time of a prominent business consultant and member of our community who was interested in seeing a public sector agency undertake major organizational change. The differences in the environments were underestimated on both sides. At the time of the assessment HSA had only been in existence for two years. It was comprised of a multitude of human service, employment and housing programs with multiple cultures and processes. Although

the process and results of the assessment were difficult, in retrospect, it was a key factor in communicating a new way of doing business and new expectations and resulted in an action plan that moved the changes in HSA significantly over the next decade.

Organizational assessments require a significant amount of managerial and leadership effort. They are risky in that once undertaken the results cannot be ignored and must be responded to in an open and visible manner. They often produce conflicting feedback that is a measure of the divergent cultures: the old and the new. Organizational assessments can create an expectation that every concern will be addressed, which is not possible. They can, however, provide insight to Executive management about how their actions and messages can be misinterpreted if the context is not communicated effectively. Communication is of utmost importance and all methods of communication must be utilized and messages repeated many times. The San Mateo County Human Services Agency benefited from undertaking this assessment. It was a part of moving the organization to the “learning organization” culture of today.

## APPENDIX G

### ***Preparing Human Services Workers to Implement Welfare Reform: Establishing the Family Development Credential in a Human Services Agency***

#### *Executive Summary*

This case study describes an effort undertaken by the San Mateo County Human Services Agency to train human service workers in collaborative case management to deliver strength-based services within a new multi-disciplinary system as part of the implementation of welfare reform. It focuses on the start-up and implementation of the Family Development Credential in San Mateo County, California.

In order to meet the new work participation outcomes mandated by the 1996 federal Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA) San Mateo County Human Services Agency (HSA) decided to restructure its service delivery and training approach to promote a comprehensive, interdisciplinary service delivery system. This resulted in significant changes in job functions. Much more emphasis was placed on family screening and assessment, case management, employment services and multi-disciplinary case planning. An in-service training program was developed to re-train former eligibility workers. A partnership was developed with the College of San Mateo, one of the local community colleges, to create a two-year Human Services Certificate program. Many eligibility workers had not attended or completed college. This new program was designed to teach them new skills in “Interviewing and Counseling” and “Case Management.” Courses were offered on-site at HSA, as well as at the community colleges. Staff received college credit for all training satisfactorily completed. In some cases courses were offered on work time. It shortly became clear that staff required more training than this program provided. In order to meet this need a collaborative effort was undertaken with the Community College Foundation (CCF) to bring the successful Family

Development Credential (FDC) program that had been developed by New York State with Cornell University to San Mateo County.

In August 2000 HSA decided to begin training for its front-line human services workers, as well as interagency collaborative partners, in FDC. The primary goal of FDC training is to empower human services staff to provide services in ways that are family-focused, strength-based, and help families develop their own capacity to solve problems and achieve self-sufficiency. There were three components designed to meet this goal: 1) The Facilitators Institute, 2) Field Instruction, and 3) The Family Development program. HSA viewed this program as a key tool in transforming the culture of the organization to meet its new mandates. In October 2000 training began with two groups of 25 participants. Participants received college credit for the training.

There were both successes and challenges associated with implementation of this collaborative program. The following lessons were derived from start-up and implementation:

- 1 Commitment is essential at all levels of the agency. Supervisors, as well as managers, must provide support for participants and co-workers in order to handle the workload while staff are trained.
- 2 Time management emerged as a critical work and program issue for facilitators, field advisors and participants. Training on time management and problem solving could be added as a half-day component to the facilitators’ institute.
- 3 Agency supports (time, tuition, field supervision, etc.) clearly enhance program participation and can reduce resistance to mandatory training.



- 4 It is necessary to address the disconnect between strength-based concepts of FDC and federal, state and HSA forms which are problem focused.
- 5 Adequate time to apply concepts learned in the facilitation and training sessions in critical.
- 6 Diversity of participants and facilitators from different service units and community agencies is essential to learning and future collaboration.
- 7 High levels of satisfaction among FDC graduates may help with future staff recruitment and retention, as well as increased productivity within HSA.

#### *More than five years later*

The implementation of the Family Development Credential (FDC) in the San Mateo County Human Services Agency (HSA) proved to be a key factor in re-training front-line staff for the transition from eligibility processing to screening, family assessment and case management functions needed to meet the new vision and outcomes set forth under welfare reform. The partnership with the Community College Foundation and the emphasis on enhancement of skills through education for college credit gave the program credibility and provided incentives to the staff to improve their careers through education and training. It was a critical component to changing the organizational culture in a direction that reflected the messages staff were to be communicating to clients. Staff felt supported and valued during a difficult period of systems change.

As of June 2006, 204 HSA staff and many partner agency staff have graduated from the FDC program since its inception in 2000. The FDC has expanded in the community to include two classes taught by Canada College (another local community college), one in Spanish and one in English. Canada College also offers an on-going class sponsored by the Home Visiting Improvement Project directed at home visitors in community agencies and Head Start workers.

Some of the new lessons learned include:

- Offering the class twice-weekly presented coverage issues that made it difficult for supervisors and co-workers to be supportive of participating staff. Classes were reduced to once a week in 2002-03 and since then the issue of coverage and ongoing support has not resurfaced.
- According to staff, the FDC strength-based, empowerment model does result in increased numbers of individuals and families who implement welfare-to-work plans and move toward self-sufficiency.
- Human service staff in both HSA and community partner agencies report feeling more confident in their work and that their work is more rewarding since participating in the program.
- The implementation of CalWIN, the new automated welfare system, presents special challenges for staff. Techniques for connecting with and establishing rapport with a client while also entering information into the computer system need to be developed and staff training provided.

## APPENDIX H

### ***Promoting Self-Sufficiency Through Individual Development Accounts (IDAs): The San Mateo County Experience***

#### *Executive Summary*

The average American family holds only \$3,700 in net financial assets and nearly one-third of American households operate with zero or negative financial assets. The typical family is only about three monthly paychecks away from financial ruin. The savings rate for U.S. households is under 5 percent. Government policies have not promoted asset building among the low and middle-income populations. Welfare reform legislation passed in 1996 required that millions of families become self-sufficient. Implementation strategies have primarily focused on promoting work and job training. Little attention has been given to asset building, although the highest rates of asset poverty are among former welfare recipients, primarily female heads of households with children.

In an effort to address this issue, a new program, the Individual Development Account (IDA) has emerged. IDAs are special savings accounts designed to help people build assets to reach life goals and to achieve long-term security. Account holders receive matching funds as they save for purposes such as buying a first home, attending job training, going to college, or financing a small business. Funding for IDAs can come from public and/or private sources. Three major federal laws provide the framework for the option of developing IDAs. These are: (1) the

Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA) (2) the Assets for Independence Act of 1998 (AFIA) and (3) the 1977 Community Reinvestment Act (CRA). As a result several states have allowed for the creation of IDA programs related to welfare reform or have utilized TANF funds for such programs. California has enabling legislation, but implementation was dependent on additional federal appropriations, which have not been forthcoming. California did establish incentive funding for counties related to implementation of welfare reform. Counties developed plans for use of these funds within state guidelines. This case study describes the implementation of an IDA pilot program by the San Mateo County Human Services Agency (HSA) as part of its plan to move low income former TANF families to self-sufficiency.

San Mateo County Human Services Agency established a public/private funded IDA program in partnership with the Assets for All Alliance in 2000. Alliance investors included HSA, the Peninsula Community Foundation, the David and Lucille Packard Foundation, Community Foundation Silicon Valley, the Candelaria Foundation, Citibank and Bank of America. The pilot program enrolled 50 families through the Peninsula Works One-Stop Employment center in Daly City. Families committed to a five-week money-management class, one goal-specific seminar, and six meetings of the investor club annually. As of May 2001,

ninety-two percent of participants had demonstrated a regular pattern of savings, exceeding both the program performance goals and the national average. Eighty-four percent had reached their monthly savings goal. Based on these outcomes HSA extended the program throughout the county with an additional investment of incentive dollars to include 75 new low-income families.

This case study offers lessons learned in the following four areas:

- 1 **Resources:** Building on current resources was critical to success. Enterprising staff and the personal relationships between the workers and their clients were central to the recruitment efforts and initial success.
- 2 **Flexibility:** Adapting the program based on participant feedback is critical. For example, after the second set of money-management classes the program content was reorganized.
- 3 **Program Development:** It was important to include participants, staff and partners in identifying program strengths and weaknesses in an effort to constantly improve the model. It was agreed that recruitment and retention was dependent on personal contact between case managers and participants, with follow-up mailings and telephone reminders.
- 4 **Personal transformation:** The money-management seminars, presented in a family-like environment by friendly professionals, have led to other outcomes beyond financial gains. Improvements were noted in family relationships, healthier lifestyles, and high motivation and self-confidence about improving their and their children's futures.

#### *More than five years later*

The first class of families enrolled in The Individual Development Account (IDA) program in the summer of 2000. The final class enrolled in the fall of 2004. The program is continuing with existing funding for program administration, case management and matching savings until June 2007. No further funding has been committed beyond that date. IDA programs nationally are facing similar problems. The program was funded with both public

(CALWORKS incentive dollars) and private resources. The foundations that supported the effort advocated for public legislation to establish the program through changes in tax laws and to support the administration and case management aspects of the program through federal and/or state funds. The federal efforts have been thwarted due to the federal budget deficits. California has passed enabling legislation but has not provided new funding in addition to the federal and state matching Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) funds to establish an IDA program statewide.

The results of the program have been positive at reducing the economic uncertainty of low-income working families:

- 275 families have completed financial literacy classes (as of 12/31/05).
- 72 families have successfully graduated from the program using all their match funds for an eligible asset purchase
- 98 families have made withdrawals for an asset purchase
- 91 families are still actively saving
- 85% of active savers demonstrated a regular savings pattern

The estimated total impact of the program so far is approximately \$1,000,000. This amount includes participants' savings, earned match and withdrawals to date. The following asset purchases were made: 1) 13 home purchases, 2) 21 home improvements, 3) 12 education purposes, 4) 21 education for their children, 5) 5 small business development, and 6) 26 retirement funds.

Considering the average monthly deposit and average income, San Mateo County participants are saving at a rate of 4%. In 2005 the saving rate for the American public as a whole dipped into the negative realm. This demonstrates that low-income families can be trained and will save with clear goals in mind. Strong emphasis on automatic savings systems has significantly contributed to this success. Clients, however, are struggling to obtain a home in the San Mateo County high priced market. Clients also require intense case management and support. A longitudinal study is in process on the graduates and should be available by the end of 2006.

## APPENDIX I

### Collaborative Partnerships Between the San Mateo Human Services Agency and Local Community Colleges

#### *Executive Summary*

The events that led to the collaboration between the Human Services Agency and the community colleges in the County of San Mateo are a mixture of legislative and agency-based circumstances. The initiation of managed care, the passage of welfare reform legislation, and the Workforce Investment Act (WIA) made job development and employment outcomes the common objective of all mental health and human services providers. In addition, WIA initiated One-Stop centers, mandating that diverse human services providers work together in one location to help clients attain the common goal of employment success. Noting the lack of trained staff to aid in the rehabilitation and job placement of developmentally disabled, mental health consumers, and public assistance recipients, Edie Covent and Tim Stringari concluded that a

community college curriculum responding to the system changes and training needs of mental health and all other human service providers might gain the support of local community colleges.

With these prospects in mind, Edie Covent formed the Human Services Educational Collaboration (HSEC) and invited the participation of all major stakeholders: the State Department of Mental Health, County Department of Rehabilitation, Poplar ReCare, and local community colleges (College of San Mateo, Canada College, Skyline College, Solano Community College, and Riverside Community College). The San Mateo County Human Services Agency became a partner in the Collaboration during the Spring of 1997 upon realizing that their training needs in case management and employment outcomes could also be met by a human service curriculum.

The Human Services Certificate curriculum is designed to prepare students for various para-professional fields, such as mental health case manager, job coach/employment specialist, social service intake specialist, community health worker, and other entry-level human services agency positions. Each course includes 48-54 hours of instruction and can be completed in 16-18 weeks.

The instructors are primarily professionals currently working in the human services field. This adds to the credibility of the program from the perspective of employers who want to ensure that employees participating in the courses are learning pragmatic skills. A majority of students attending the courses are employed full- or part-time in the human service field. Only a few students in each class are not employed or are employed in other fields. To date, approximately 200 employees of the San Mateo County Human Service Agency have attended classes on-site at the Agency as part of job training. Approximately 200 other adults have attended classes at the College of San Mateo and Cañada College from the Human Services Certificate curriculum.

The collaboration is often characterized as a “win-win” in terms of the following benefits: 1) both public and private human services providers get their employees trained in case management and employment strategies, 2) community colleges gain a significant number of students enrolled in the courses, 3) the Human Services Certificate Program is now a part of the community colleges permanent curriculum, offered to any resident of San Mateo County, 4) consumers of human services receive assistance from more highly skilled providers, 5) employees of human services enjoy an increased level of professionalism, and 6) the Collaboration can serve as a model to other counties in the State of California.

Some of the lessons learned include:

- 1 The extensive investment in curriculum development by the community colleges, the Human Services Agency, and a wide variety of human services agencies throughout the community helps to make the curriculum relevant and timely.
- 2 The involvement of agency-based professionals as instructors in a human service certificate program contributes to its credibility in the eyes of the students, the agencies, and the community.
- 3 Fostering collaborations and community involvement contributed greatly to establishing a successful Human Services

Certificate Program as a permanent part of the local community colleges' curricula.

- 4 Human services staff need an increasing level of training and professionalism to effectively meet the changing and complex needs of clients.

#### *More than five years later*

The Human Services Certificate Program, as collaboration with the community colleges, began in 1997. Since that time over 1,000 students, a mix of both community and agency employees, have participated in the program. Nearly 300 have completed the Human Services Certificate. Both San Mateo County Human Services Agency and community agency staff are tremendously supportive of the program. Some of the new lessons learned from the collaboration are:

- Public and private human services providers enrolled together in classes gain a better understanding of the others' programs and increase their effectiveness as service providers.
- Human services managers, both public and private, report higher productivity on the job from workers enrolled in classes.
- The Human Services Certificate Program has sparked interest from staff in other areas of higher education.
- Staff demonstrate an increased interest in promotional opportunities within the Human Services Agency.
- Other residents of San Mateo County who have enrolled in the Certificate program have become interested in employment with the Human Services Agency. A number of these individuals have been hired and are now valuable employees.

The success of the Human Services Certificate Program has led to more collaborative efforts with the community colleges. A Community Health Worker Certificate program has been developed and 40 students have graduated to date. New classes are being added to the course offerings, including a new class on Rehabilitation and Recovery, which will be available in fall 2006. These expansions have been initiated by public and private agencies in the county to meet their need to provide more effective services. The community colleges have proved to be invaluable partners in improving the overall quality of services provided by the human services system in the county.

## APPENDIX J

### Hiring TANF Recipients to Work in the San Mateo Human Services Agency

#### *Executive Summary*

While the San Mateo County Human Services Agency had a history of hiring clients for temporary assignments, the Agency's most recent effort to hire clients into full-time, permanent positions occurred with the implementation of welfare reform. The primary goal was to address the Agency's staffing needs by providing meaningful employment for former welfare recipients as well as set an example for the larger community. In 1997, the San Mateo County Human Services Agency developed a new service delivery model called, “SUCCESS” (Shared Undertaking to Change the Community to Enable Self Sufficiency) which

included restructuring the Benefit Analysts positions into new case-management roles. The transfer of employees from one unit to another left many vacant positions, particularly in the MediCal program where the County's caseload is the largest. In their effort to fill these positions, the Human Services Agency began hiring their own clients and this case study describes this process.

While former clients were hired in a variety of clerical and support positions, the primary focus of this case is the job description and hiring practices of the MediCal Benefits Analyst I. MediCal Benefits Analysts process MediCal applications, as well as provide on-going monitoring of individuals' eligibility for MediCal

benefits. This task requires skills such as information retention, comprehension, organization, and mathematics. Hired as "Extra Help," the position does not include health insurance, sick leave, or job guarantees. While permanent positions are periodically available, applicants must successfully pass the civil service testing process to be hired as permanent employees of the Agency. As of the summer of 1999, approximately 6 to 8 former clients in Medi-Cal Benefits Analysts I positions have become permanent employees of the Agency.

To recruit for vacant Medi-Cal Benefits Analysts positions, the Medi-Cal program Training Specialist sends flyers advertising available positions to SUCCESS Centers, the Income and Employment Services Specialists (case managers), and to the Agency's clerical staff. The lead instructor of Human Services Certificate Program at San Mateo Community Colleges is also notified.

To train applicants for these positions, three cycles of training were completed (July, 1998; January, 1999; and May, 1999) and a fourth will be held August, 1999. Each training cycle includes approximately 10-12 participants. By the end of the training session, approximately 6 individuals are offered positions since some do not pass training tests, have poor attendance, or elect not to continue training. The seven-week training program includes a combination of academic/classroom instruction, on-the-job training, and computer training. Trainees are tested each week and must achieve an overall score of 80% or better to be hired.

Hiring former welfare recipients to fill vacant positions in the Agency not only addresses recruiting difficulties, but also sets an example for others in the community to hire public assistance recipients. It also helps to increase staff diversity. Former clients are often passionate about the jobs they perform, which is an attitude very much valued by the Agency. Obtaining employment with the Human Services Agency increases the potential of former clients to achieve long-term self-sufficiency, especially for those who become permanent employees.

Some of the lessons learned include:

- 1 In order to maintain the success of the hiring efforts, the Agency needs to address the difficulty of finding job-ready individuals among the rolls of public assistance clients since many welfare recipients with the best employment qualifications have already obtained jobs.
- 2 Extra efforts need to be made to assist former welfare recipients

to pass the civil service testing process. Supervisors' support and assistance would help prepare former clients for the civil service testing process. More emphasis is also needed on job performance when determining former clients' promotion to permanent employment.

- 3 Agencies need to find ways to increase the support networks of former welfare recipients as well as address the issue of inadequate health care benefits, sick leave, or job guarantees.
- 4 Developing and expanding mentoring and internship opportunities for former clients would help them make more successful transitions into the work world.

### *More than five years later*

In 1998 the Human Services Agency initiated an effort to hire former welfare recipients to fill vacant positions in the Agency. This effort was initiated as a way to meet two needs: 1) the Agency's difficulty with recruiting a diverse workforce that reflected the demographics and languages of our client population, and 2) to set an example for other public and private employers in San Mateo County in hiring welfare recipients as part of our welfare-to-work efforts. At that time there were 11 clients hired into the Agency's Medi-Cal training unit. Approximately, 50% of this cohort is still employed by the Agency today. The others have either terminated voluntarily or were terminated for issues, such as performance.

The Human Services Agency continues to urge clients to apply for agency positions, but has not undertaken a special training class of only welfare recipients. No tracking is done to determine which clients are hired. While this effort served its initial purposes, it was not formally continued or developed. Clients are made aware of county jobs as part of their participation in the Peninsula Works One-Stop Employment centers.

The extra effort required of supervisors to assist recipients to pass the civil service testing and the extra mentoring and support required to ensure acceptable performance proved more difficult than expected. The job may have been too complex for the average level of skill of some of the clients. It may be unreasonable to expect to identify a cohort of clients at one time who possess the level of skill required to be successful in the benefit analyst position. This effort was an admirable attempt to assist clients in getting a good paying job with benefits, but was clearly not a good match for half of them.

## APPENDIX K

### ***The Family Loan Program: A Case Study of a Public-Private Partnership in San Mateo County***

#### *Executive Summary*

Recent federal welfare reform legislation has transformed the way counties serve their low-income populations. San Mateo County has responded with a series of new programs designed to address the changing client needs. One of these new programs is the Family Loan Program, originally designed in 1984 by the McKnight Foundation (Minnesota), which provides low-interest loans to working families to help them deal with large, or unexpected,

one-time expenses. The McKnight Foundation, in partnership with the national Alliance for Children and Families, offers a series of matching grants for the local replication of the program. As a result of community collaboration between the San Mateo County Human Service Agency, the Peninsula Community Foundation, the David and Lucille Packard Foundation, and the Family Service Agency of San Mateo County, this innovative family loan program was launched in January 1998 to serve San Mateo County welfare recipients and low-income families.



The family loan program provides: 1) low interest loans of up to \$3,000 to low-income parents to help with one-time job or education-related expenses (most loans used for car purchase, car repair, work or school uniforms, tools for a trade, and childcare), 2) an opportunity for training and education in “real-life” skills involved with applying for, obtaining and repaying a bank loan, and 3) an opportunity to establish or repair a credit history. The client eligibility requirements include: 1) must be employed or enrolled in vocational training at least 20 hours a week and been at their present employment or vocational training 3 months or longer, 2) pursuing post-high school education (at least 9 credits semester), 3) have exhausted other loan sources and unable to qualify for conventional financing, 4) have sufficient disposable income (no less than \$80/month), 5) must be resident of San Mateo County (for at least 3 months), 6) must demonstrate the ability to make monthly payments, 7) loans must be related to helping parents make employment or education a success, 8) availability of loans to qualifying families regardless of race, sex or religious affiliation, and 9) can be custodial parent of child(ren) under 17 years of age, living in household (or 18 if child is in high school).

Loans are serviced by one of three local banks, Borel Bank and Trust, Bay Area Bank and Liberty Bank. Through the Family Loan Program, banks are able to reach underserved members of their community and qualify for low-interest federal funds under the Community Reinvestment Act (CRA). Additional community partnerships such as the free auto diagnostic services offered by the California Chapter of the American Automobile Association (AAA) are constantly being developed.

The San Mateo County program has benefited greatly from the experience of the national model. A review of the first year and a half of the program’s operation yields the following information: 1) of the 203 applications received, 89 (44%) were approved, 2) 71% of approved loans were for car purchase. The remaining funds were used for housing related expenses and child-care, 3) average application processing time was 15 days, 4) 97% of those receiving loans are women, 5) average loan size was \$2,594.00, 6) repayment rate of 91% (compared to the national rate of 70-75%), and 7) clients report an 89.9% decrease in work time missed; a 92.61%

reduction in travel time to work; and a 25.9% increase in attendance in job-related educational activities.

The program has helped many families achieve their education and job-related goals by providing them with low-interest loans. This unique blend of business and social services helps to link public sector clients with the private sector resources in order to: 1) alleviate hardship, 2) provide education and training, and 3) contribute to family self-sufficiency.

#### *More than five years later*

The Family Loan program has been in continual operation since 1998. Family Service Agency continues to operate the program and fund new loans with repaid loans from former clients. Family Service Agency has been able to secure private funds to support the administrative costs of delivering the program. Existing loans continue to be serviced by the partner banks and approximately 80 new loans are projected for FY 06-07. In order to issue 80 new loans, 2,560 inquiries from low-income families will be reviewed and assessed and 320 loan applications will be processed. Analysis of the zip codes of loan recipients has resulted in identification of the need for more outreach and promotion of the program to East Palo Alto and the Coastside communities. This will be a priority this year.

The most recent analysis of outcomes was completed in December 2005. The following were the results: 1) 91.7 % reduction in work time missed, 2) 90% reduction of time in transit to work, 3) 27.8% increase in attendance in job related education, 4) 90.3% maintenance or improvement in earned income, and 5) 34% average increase in monthly gross income for clients with loans.

Clients are benefiting from obtaining a reliable means of transportation to their jobs. They also are improving their credit ratings, and increasing their opportunities to secure additional training and better jobs. The Family Loan program has become a critical tool for promoting self-sufficiency in San Mateo County. It is an example of a public/private partnership approach that has resulted in a program that continues to serve low-income working families, including those transitioning from welfare to work, without on-going public financing.



# Leadership Development at the Top: A Teaching Case on Coaching in a Public Human Service Organization

ALEXIS FERNÁNDEZ, MICHAEL J. AUSTIN, AND STAN WEISNER

## Introduction

This case study examines the use of executive coaching as a leadership development tool at the top management levels of a rural public human service agency in a large metropolitan area of the U.S. It considers the organizational factors that led to the use of executive coaching and a leadership development program that focused on the development of shared expectations and desired results (individual and team) and required a considerable investment of agency resources.

This case on coaching takes place in a public agency setting and describes in some detail a successful strategy for expanding organizational leadership within a framework of collaborative management. Much of its success is due to the vision and leadership of a committed agency director who chose to make this kind of investment in his top leadership under the assumption that, in his own words, *“the public should expect the agencies it funds to be as productive, effective, and efficient as possible. These are basic organizational attributes that apply equally in the public and private sectors. The surest way to promote these attributes is to adopt evidence based practices in the management of an organization.”*

## Setting the Stage

In mid-2007 Suzanne Smith, the department director of 85 to 90 staff, began working with an executive coach with the goal of further developing her skills as an effective agency leader.\* With more than twenty years of county experience, and having been a manager since 1993, Suzanne was leading the largest of ten divisions in a mid-sized human service agency and had the full support of the director to continue to do so. Her partnership with an executive coach was the result of a larger agency-wide initiative to move toward a model of collaborative management. The initiative's success required an emphasis on supporting agency leaders in order to maximize their effectiveness as administrators. Prior to

her experience with the executive coach, Suzanne's management style was regimented and overly structured. She often felt she used the right management ideas and tools but was not always able to translate them into an effective leadership style. Her ability to manage the program and meet a range of the outcome goals was strong, but she felt she was missing certain components that would enable her to become a more effective leader of her organization.

The agency she worked for was entering a period of transition that included increased attention to collaborative management strategies. Donald Davis, the agency director, was relatively new to his position, but his prior experiences and keen awareness of the changing state of public sector human services led him to reconsider the agency's traditional structure of service delivery. Regardless of the difficult economic challenges facing the agency, Donald and his staff could no longer focus solely on survival. Donald believed that in order to thrive in the current environment, the agency culture needed to change. One approach was to invest in the development of a collaborative style of management that would require the use of newly acquired leadership skills.

For Donald, the greatest distinction between the current state of the agency and the future he envisioned was a shift toward an organizational structure that supported managers who were given the opportunity to lead proactively, rather than focus reactively to task-based assignments. A collaborative management environment involved the development of skills that would enable managers

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Partially subsidized by Title IVE training funds through the Bay Area Academy.

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\*All names used in this teaching case are disguised to maintain confidentiality.

to: (1) use honesty and transparency to empower staff, (2) strengthen relationships with co-workers at all levels, and (3) actively engage people in the process of reinforcing these skills. Donald knew that Suzanne possessed the capabilities that he saw as essential for collaborative management. His next step was to develop a process that would help bring these capabilities to the forefront of her leadership style.

Donald acknowledged that the agency did not necessarily possess the internal expertise that was needed to efficiently and effectively implement this shift. In Suzanne's case, a professional executive coach was hired to provide her with the additional resources and guidance that she would need to realize the change. Though not common in the public sector, Donald recognized that acquiring new and different techniques needed special supports to provide managers with the tools that would foster success. Having past experience with organizational consultants and coaches, Donald could appreciate their ability to provide a "reality check", expertise beyond the agency's capacity, and make suggestions and present resources based on a wide array of past experiences.

Before committing to employ an executive coach, Donald and Suzanne discussed the reasoning behind the decision, the potential outcomes, goals, and the likelihood of success based on Suzanne's own understanding of the roles that Evonne, her future executive coach, and Suzanne would play during the process. All those involved would need to share a common understanding of collaborative management within the context of the agency.

In addition, Suzanne had time to think through the personal investment she would have to make in the process. She analyzed her own ability to not only move ahead with an executive coach but also to gain something from the experience. This recognition step was a moment of growth and one that is often difficult for any manager to accept that their leadership style developed over many years might need revision. Moreover, Suzanne needed to become comfortable with the possibility of feeling vulnerable and confronting areas for improvement, as opposed to her need to exert power and control in multiple situations. After a period of self-reflection, Suzanne not only was ready to commit to the executive coaching process but had opened herself to the experience in a way that would allow her to find true success.

The next step was to bring Evonne in as Suzanne's executive coach. Evonne holds a Psy.D in organizational psychology and a Master's in Human Services Administration. Her past experiences include administrative roles in government and the judicial branch. After spending more than 15 years in the field, she realized that effective leadership was

much more complicated than she had ever imagined. She returned to school to become an executive coach in order to help executives and professional managers find a safe place to talk about their thinking patterns, their behaviors, and alternative ways to strengthen their management style and leadership capacities. A coach had the ability to present managers with alternative scenarios and challenge a leader's thinking in order to help them explore and improve their management style.

An executive coach is not a counselor or a traditional consultant that might search for the psychological origins of a client's leadership technique. A coach is often an organizational development specialist who assists clients by helping them interpret their behaviors in order to identify techniques to deal with the pressures they face as leaders. The basic framework of executive coaching is to focus on generating new learning or behaviors that need to be reinforced through the use of feedback. A skilled executive coach helps people build these new connections, particularly through the use of alternative thinking. Most executives have already achieved a high level of success which explains how they ended up in executive positions. An executive coach simply helps them become even better at what they do. Evonne describes a successful coach as one who listens carefully to a client's needs and helps them to attain the goals they and their employers have set for them.

## The Process

As Suzanne entered into the coaching relationship with Evonne, she began to identify several challenges facing her as a manager. She had a difficult time encouraging staff to improve performance and would make accommodations when the going got tough. Because she was accommodating in these difficult situations, she often found it difficult to give constructive feedback. Instead she would simply assume staff would work harder and eventually get through it. In addition, she had difficulty articulating her vision in a way that was tangible for others. While she felt that she had the right ideas, she seemed to frequently use the wrong approach to communicating her vision of how to proceed. Staff could see her frustration as she got bogged down by the day-to-day tasks that disabled her from projecting the "bigger picture" that she felt should be a larger part of her responsibility as a leader.

Suzanne needed to shift directions. Unsatisfied at many levels, she was not able to effect the change she wanted to see in her department. After initial conversations with Donald and time spent seriously considering whether this was the right step, Suzanne committed to the executive

coaching process. She was ready to try something new, something beyond the traditional management training programs and management approaches that she had used in the past. In particular, she was intrigued by the individualized coaching that would be tailored to her specific needs and past experiences.

Donald considered Suzanne's openness about the process as a pivotal component in her initial success and a significant factor of her transformation into a successful leader. Once she made a commitment, Suzanne talked with her colleagues about the process. She engaged people at all levels, both within the department and across the agency management team. She was open about her goals and let staff know that she "wanted to expand her leadership skills" and quickly gain their trust and support. Suzanne's colleagues describe this as the beginning of a long process of staff engagement which still remains today. The level of openness that Suzanne used to initiate the process strengthened her relationship with other managers as their interest and cooperation became an important component of her success. In addition, Evonne engaged staff and colleagues through conversations that focused on Suzanne's leadership style, techniques and strengths. This process emphasized the importance of the total work environment and those relationships that would enable a process of continuous learning.

While the personal relationship with a coach is a key aspect of the process, every executive coaching experience is unique. Goal-setting, outcome specification and frequency of contact are different for each coaching relationship. This is especially true if an employer is clear about his/her expectation, strongly supports the process, and there is a good fit between the executive coach and all of those involved.

Though meetings are confidential, information about the progress that the manager is making needs to be communicated to other leaders in the organization. In this case, Donald was supportive of the process but also wanted to be kept informed. He clearly wanted to see Suzanne succeed because the investment in her success was also an investment in the success of the agency. The total cost of the coaching experience was about \$12,000 and extended over nine months. Donald felt strongly, however, that expending a percentage of the "annual cost of a manager to develop an essential skill is a small investment compared to the alternatives, such as searching for a new manager or abandoning collaborative management and resigning the organization to lower productivity and effectiveness."

Donald's support of the coaching sessions helped Suzanne transfer her new learning into various aspects of her

everyday work. She was given the time to meet with Evonne and also the time to engage in self-reflection by writing in a journal on a regular basis. Suzanne practiced and applied the strategies that were discussed during these meetings and was expected by the coach to share a self-assessment of the process and outcomes.

Executive coaching is a one-on-one program that often begins with an initial "getting to know you" stage where the coach and the client assess the nature of the relationship "fit" in order to see if their working relationship can lead to success. The first meetings between Suzanne and Evonne were held in a casual setting where Suzanne quickly identified the process of inquiry and discovery that Evonne would employ throughout their time together. They also were able to identify their shared understandings and expectations. Suzanne entered a phase of intense individual self-reflection. In this way, her executive coaching experience was significantly different from management and leadership training programs that she had attended in the past. Never before had she invested so much time in such a thorough self-assessment. The focus was on identifying Suzanne's strategies to improve her leadership skills based on her own personal strengths. The ultimate goal was to widen Suzanne's comfort zone and support her efforts to practice new strategies developed during their meetings.

One of these initial assessments was conducted using the "16PF Leadership Coaching Report" developed by David G. Watterson that focuses on the personality dimensions of leadership and how the questionnaire results compare with other leaders. The self-assessment tool is focused on self-awareness in order you increase one's odds of success, by explaining the following dimensions:

- (1) Problem-solving (scale: abstract thinking to concrete thinking)
- (2) Influence (scale: accommodating to influencing)
- (3) Emotional Resilience (scale: stress prone to resilience)
- (4) Extraversion (scale: introversion to extraversion)
- (5) Practicality (scale: receptive to practical)
- (6) Self Control (scale: spontaneous to self controlled)

The results of the assessment were intended to give Suzanne a starting point to begin thinking about the personal characteristics and skills that she possessed and those that she could enhance in order to become a more effective leader. The dimensions in the self-assessment tool are applicable in multiple settings, not just in her work environment. She realized she was fairly balanced in the area of emotional resilience, practicality and self control, even though, she

noted that she could learn to be more spontaneous at times. In terms of problem-solving, she tended to rely on more abstract thinking than concrete thinking. Her score on the influence scale was more accommodating than influencing, which was clearly displayed in her day-to-day work. Lastly, she scored higher on introversion than extroversion scale and recognized that she needed to push herself to get outside of her comfort zone to reach her new goals.

Together Evonne and Suzanne outlined strategies to build upon the outcomes of this self-assessment tool. These included: (1) making efforts to share responsibility and accepting that she could not do everything by herself, (2) learning to present clear expectations and allowing staff to follow through in their own way, and (3) working to more clearly establish and communicate desired outcomes. Using strategies similar to those used in executive coaching, she would set forth goals and coach staff rather than take responsibilities away from staff and over commit her own direct involvement in task-based work. Overall, she would increase her awareness of her own strengths and areas for improvement in order to feel empowered to take on an active leadership role. In this way, she consciously sought to assume a leadership role by pushing herself to practice some of the strategies developed during her own executive coaching sessions.

After her initial meetings, Evonne noticed that Suzanne was experiencing some difficulty in articulating a level of self-awareness (what Evonne referred to as her “authentic self”) that could be carried over into the work environment. She seemed unwilling to let staff and colleagues see some of the same personal characteristics (e.g. humor, care, and fallibility) that are a part of her persona outside of the work environment. Suzanne had expressed difficulty in developing an authentic “work self”, and Evonne recognized this as a potential barrier that would kept Suzanne from achieving the goals she had established during their initial meetings. Evonne observed that first getting in touch with her “authentic self” would be an essential component of Suzanne’s coaching experience. She began to look for additional resources that could help Suzanne address this issue.

Though not usually a component of the executive coaching process, Evonne suggested to Donald that Suzanne attend a retreat workshop called *“Leading from Within”* that was to be held in Colorado. The retreat focused on recognizing authentic leadership and from this foundation help executives develop effective relationships in their everyday work. Evonne checked with Donald on this option first because of the budget considerations, especially

since the coaching process was already a large financial investment for the agency. In total, attendance at the retreat workshop, including travel, would come to about \$5,000. She shared her rationale with Donald, explaining that the retreat would be an important experience for Suzanne and would greatly enhance the coaching experience and would far outweigh the cost. Evonne was confident that a better understanding of her authentic self would prepare Suzanne to make greater gains and make her “learning curve” more manageable. Evonne acknowledged that it was a slight risk because it was not a typical component of her executive coaching, but, if successful, the outcome could substantially enhance the entire experience. Donald agreed and Suzanne was off to Colorado.

The retreat was not only a financial investment for the agency, but also a personal investment for Suzanne where she would address both the personal and professional dimensions of her work. The crossover between her work life and her personal life was a key component of the retreat where finding your “authentic self” included eliminating the idea that you had to keep your work and personal life completely separate.

The objectives of the ‘Living From Within’ retreat were to:

- (1) gain a whole new self-awareness regarding your ability to lead your life with purpose, passion and integrity,
- (2) become aware of how to integrate your true leadership abilities into all facets of your life,
- (3) develop the resources and skills needed to lead your life as an authentic leader,
- (4) identify unwanted patterns of your past and re-create new patterns to live and lead by, and
- (5) create your own unique personal leadership, vision, and purpose that will guide you to optimal performance in both your personal and professional world.

The retreat used an individualized approach, similar to that used during the executive coaching sessions. With only a few participants, the retreat was held in a remote location and Suzanne was given the opportunity to spend time alone reflecting on the learning process and applying concepts to her own experiences. The connections to her coaching process were clear to her.

The retreat consisted of a combination of individual and group work, trust-building exercises, self-assessments, group presentations, and focused on identifying the barriers that often prevented a person from going outside of his or



her comfort zone. In addition, near the end of the retreat, Suzanne created a personal strategic plan that would set the direction for her future coaching sessions. The plan helped her maintain a clear vision of where she was going and how she was going to get there.

Attending the “Leading from Within” retreat gave Suzanne the opportunity for reflective observation, something many managers and executives seldom have the time to do. Setting aside this time, not only during the retreat, but on an ongoing basis, gave Suzanne the opportunity to engage in visioning, planning, and alternative thinking. This time investment allowed Suzanne to build the confidence and competence to help her reach her professional goals.

As Suzanne herself describes, moving into the role of leader can be a difficult transition if a person does not have a strong idea of the realities of the new role. Advancement in the work environment is often perceived as holding certain promises or advantages, but once people get there they may not have the support to manage the difficulties of the transition and are therefore not ready to be successful in this role. The opportunity for reflection and self-analysis was a critical component in enabling Suzanne to be as successful as possible in her role as leader.

After the retreat, Suzanne continued her meeting with Evonne on an ongoing basis. For over a year, they would continue to build on Suzanne’s strengths as a leader. Suzanne’s executive coaching continued to be built into her work schedule, and she set aside time for self-reflection and entering thoughts and observations into her journal on a regular basis. She would often refer to additional readings and the application of theories to practice as well as her personal strategic plan as she continued to develop her understanding of effective leadership and collaborative management. The transformation is ongoing, but Suzanne has committed to her work and her colleagues have seen the changes for themselves.

### **Impacts on the Department**

Suzanne was making noticeable strides as she made the transition from a manager to leader. The changes were evident in her relationships with staff and the resulting positive outcomes. For example, she is no longer directing staff to carry out the work within her department, but rather coaching her staff to set goals and objectives for their own success while at the same time identifying innovative ways to improve organizational processes. Suzanne began leading her own staff through a process of inquiry and self-discovery, similar to what she had experienced with her executive

coach. This process emphasized asking questions, allowing a person to articulate what they were thinking and describe how they would work through the presenting problems and potential solutions. Use of an “inquiry and discovery” technique allows a leader to assist an individual in identifying for themselves the pieces they are missing, where they are going, and help them to clarify potential solutions. This method is purposely neutral and collaborative in nature and can change the way a department functions.

A trickle-down effect began to take place, as department supervisors were practicing the type of coaching relationship exemplified by Suzanne. An often slow and challenging process, management was learning to use Suzanne’s techniques, such as inquiry and discovery, with their own staff. This resulted in a greater sense of shared responsibility, wherein members of the department were held accountable, and Suzanne could let go of some of the fear and frustration associated with the idea that certain responsibilities would not be met. Suzanne was no longer carrying the weight of the department on her shoulders alone and was empowering management, and therefore supervisors and line staff, to set their own standards and meet individual goals. Some staff members have described the process as being slow with some resistance, but Suzanne’s ongoing commitment and continued use of these leadership techniques has fostered ongoing change within the department.

In addition to a trickle-down effect, management and supervisors who have been with Suzanne from the beginning of her executive coaching experience to the present can see other tangible differences within the department. Collaboration, particularly at the management level has improved. Departmental managers hold ongoing team meetings, supporting autonomy and responsibility, while emphasizing the supportive nature of their work. Managers take this back to their staff, adapting the leadership techniques to their own needs and modeling the transparency and motivation Suzanne has shared with them. This has resulted in general improved moral and fewer negative feelings about “management”. With shared responsibility, staff cannot simply blame “top management”. Staff at multiple levels can work together to develop new solutions and build a sense of ownership over improved client outcomes. As one supervisor in Suzanne’s department describes, line staff may not even realize or know that Suzanne went through an executive coaching process, but they can feel the effects of her efforts at becoming a more effective leader.

Staff describe these changes as an evolution, releasing the burden of sole responsibility and accepting failures (as



well as success), moving through ups and downs, and maintaining humility throughout the process. It would appear that the agency's large financial investment in expanding Suzanne's leadership skills were far outweighed by the outcomes. She has been able and continues to share the benefits of her executive coaching experience with department staff at a variety of levels.

Donald has been able to observe the impact of social leadership with data from outside of the department. Suzanne's team of 85 to 90 staff is large enough to reflect significant trends in the county. For example, there has been a marked downturn in Human Resources complaints related to caseload re-organization and the need for more team-based work. He also saw a general increase in job satisfaction and effective teamwork that translated into lower rates of absenteeism and staff turnover. In addition, a major shift in resources and policies occurred across the agency which enabled Suzanne to more effectively implement changes throughout the collaborative management environment she had developed. Under her leadership the department moved from one that effectively administered public benefits to one that truly believed they could move clients from dependency to self-sufficiency. This belief soon went from the staff perception of an elusive goal to an enthusiastically supported mission that guided the department's work. Donald believes Suzanne would have moved the department in this direction, regardless, because this is what she believes in. But he also acknowledges that the benefits of executive coaching allowed her to move farther and faster. He can easily identify a direct return on his investment, both organizationally and in terms of the benefit to the community.

He described the payoff from the investment in executive coaching as "immediate and ongoing", commenting that one of the major benefits of the coaching experience was that:

*"this manager has become a role model in collaborative management practices and a mentor for other leaders in the agency. She has reorganized the management structure within her division, creating a collaborative management team. Staff satisfaction polls have risen. Complaints and employee grievances have dropped substantially. While the economic downturn is certainly a major contributor, it is clear that the changes the manager has made in her leadership style have been key in supporting an increase in productivity of approximately 25 percent across her division in the past two years, measured by caseload per staff."*

## Concluding Thoughts

Suzanne's successful transformation into an effective leader is an ongoing process. While she can already see concrete changes both in her management style and departmental outcomes, Suzanne continues to make a conscious investment and time commitment in her evaluation as a leader. The executive coach guided Suzanne through a process of self-assessment and helped her develop new strategies needed to balance the demands of managing and leading. Suzanne continues to employ these strategies as she applies the tools of self-assessment and reflection to new issues on a regular basis. Setting aside the time to add this component to her regular work responsibilities has allowed Suzanne to continue moving forward in a way that is innovative and responsive to her ever-changing work demands.

Suzanne remains in contact with her executive coach, though the coaching component is no longer central to the process. She continues to make entries into her journal and reflects on her personal strategic plan. In addition, she references many of the learning materials used during her executive coaching experience and uses the skills and strategies developed during her coaching experience.

In the five years that Donald has been a director, he has sought out the assistance of an executive coach about five times and organizational consultants another five. He strongly believes that the introduction of outside resources can provide excellent support for leadership goals, particularly for people who can already do their job well, but just need a little extra push to keep moving forward. He understands that managers and executives who have been working for a long time can benefit from an outside resource to help promote change by gaining new perspectives to address old and new problems. In the end Donald feels that the financial investment in coaching and training far outweighed the costs and can actually save public money.

This form of evidence-informed management practice illustrated how the culture of public human service organizations can be changed and improved in the same way that public agencies seek to help their clients. These same agencies need to invest in finding new ways of helping their staff. In this case, a unique, individualized approach supported the successful transition of a manager into a successful leader who in turn helped to transform her staff and work environment. It took the strong commitment of an agency director AND an external executive coach to help Suzanne become and remain a successful leader.

# Reflections on Race and Gender Throughout the Career of a Senior Human Service Manager

ANTOINETTE HARRIS

## The Early Years

My name is Antoinette Harris and I grew up in South-Central Los Angeles (sometimes known as Watts) and similar to predominantly low-income neighborhoods in East and West Oakland. I remember very clearly being in elementary school and thinking that it is so wonderful to have such a variety of women of color teaching me with the exception of one white male who was German. They were women who spoke different languages and they were African-American, Latinas, and Asian-Americans. In my mind these women were very powerful because they could impart knowledge and I received it. They made things clear and made sure that the classrooms reflected their culture. So my first thought about a future career was that I wanted to be a teacher and make sure that people understand who I am as a person and not just as a teacher. Those teachers demonstrated a way of being: you can have a career, not just a job, but have a career, without losing a sense of who you are as a person. I have carried that lesson throughout my career.

After high school, I moved out of LA to attend to UC Davis in the mid-70s and experienced major culture shock. I had just turned 17 and the summer after graduating high school I attended the Upward Bound program at UC Davis that was established primarily for people of color and foreign students where English was their second language. Almost everyone, including teachers and students, that I saw during my first summer on campus were people of color. It was very international; so many people from different countries with major exposure to different cultures. I loved it.

After it was over and I had spent a few weeks in August at home, I returned to campus in middle of September and I was shocked and wondered where did all these white people come from? I didn't get it. I was mad because I didn't appreciate the fact that all of a sudden I was immersed in this culture that was totally different from where I grew up. I had experienced instructors during the summer who were all people of color, a mixture of women and men, all very prominent and acknowledging of their culture. They made sure that we were not only aware and confident of who we

were but also able to appreciate the differences in other people by getting to know them. I wanted that experience back.

One of the things that I noticed when I had to speak with the Director of the Home Economics Department, the home of my major (I wanted to go into counseling which included psychology or sociology and cultural experiences as well as my interests in textiles and clothing), I discovered that he was a man and I was kind of thrown off about that. As I looked at the wall of pictures of former department heads, they were all men and I just kept thinking, all my instructors are female but the people who are in charge of home economics are men. Similarly, when I went to talk to the Director of Admissions, I encountered another man but also noticed that he was surrounded by women doing most of the work. Although there were a lot of women in various positions, the people who had the top roles were men. I actually spent time talking about all these observations with the Director of the Student Counseling Center (an African-American man) where my work-study job was located.

At that point in my life, I was a rebel who really wanted to change things. I kept asking questions about why I saw females having really good jobs, but when it comes down to who makes the final decision and who signs the check it is a man who nobody really sees and no one can really engage. The Counseling Center Director said to me: "What is your mission? Is it to become the first woman of whatever?" and I said no, "I just want to gain an understanding of what my role is going to be, what impact can I have so that I'm not just the only person that's saying "how come" and not doing something about it". I was very purposeful in wanting to make sure that no matter what I did, I wasn't going to be at a lower level. I was very intentional in wanting to move my way up to a certain level in an organization so that I can make an impact but more importantly so that the folks that we work with can see somebody who looks like them. That was and is very critical to me because I didn't want to necessarily to work in all African-American communities or all

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Antoinette Harris, Regional Director, Unifying Families

African-American agencies but I wanted to make sure that people could see that there are people of color.

At that early point in my career, all I saw was White men in power and I kept wondering about this. I saw that there were other people in leadership roles, but they would only reach a certain level and then not move further up. Around that time there was a lot of discussion around women hitting the glass ceiling and I was really beginning to question and wanting to make sure that if I was going to hit a glass ceiling that I would hit it with something that was powerful enough to break through.

### **My First Social Work Job**

So I'll fast-forward. After I graduated from UC Davis, I worked for a runaway shelter and it just so happened that the shelter director was an African-American woman. Over time, I recognized that she was taking direction from the associate director of the agency who was a White male. I made the mistake of questioning her one time, (not in a public setting but in her office privately) and wondered why she agreed with everything that the Associate Director said and I wanted to know where she got her power. The biggest question was how does she exert her own leadership?

She said a few things to me that kind of implied that my questions could get me fired and she questioned my need to ask such questions. Within five months of our conversation, the agency closed but before it closed I actually went to another agency. That conversation stuck in my mind because over time I actually saw her "shrinking", not presenting her true self to the staff, being a mouthpiece and kind of feeling defeated. I didn't know that there were other things happening in her life but I saw her kind of dethroning herself and that bothered me that a woman of color who was making a difference in the community could act such a way.

I am going to fast-forward again and reflect on my move to another agency; namely, FamiliesFirst where I have worked for the past 32 years. One of the first things that I noticed was that there was a female who was in charge. While she was the executive director, I reported to a man and I still consult with him even though he is working elsewhere. One of the things that he asked when he conducted the initial interview was "where do you see yourself in five years?". I said, well I do not want to be just a residential counselor as I wanted to learn counseling skills and understand the inner workings of an agency. He goes, "Wait a minute, are you saying that you want to be able to have your own agency?" and I said, probably some day, but in the meantime I want to know how to run an organization and make it work (the financials and the organizational

structure). It's not just about what happens on the ground but I want to understand the workings of it so that I can promote change. I felt that if things remain the same we are going to get swept away and I wanted to be one of those persons who explores all kinds of options.

Within the process of advancing up the ranks within FamiliesFirst, I was very intentional in watching the leadership team and it took me a long time before I finally agreed to become a supervisor and then continued to observe management and executive leadership, and not only within my own agency but in other agencies and really wanting to see how people did things, especially in relationship to the role of women in leadership positions.

While the executive director was a female, the other executive leadership team members were men who reported to her and supervised my work. I wasn't happy about that but at exactly the same time I needed to figure out how do I impact it and then I observed other agencies. I was trying to understand if there was something culturally different among the agencies that are headed by people who are White? I was also trying to understand how a person of color could move up in an organization. With the exception of having an advance degree and clinical license, what did I need to do differently?

As an African-American female, I kept wondering if I needed to work harder to advance. I concluded that I needed to do the very best and work smarter. Based on conversations with women of color in my position we all have come to the same conclusion that as females we need to work doubly as hard as men to be recognized because we experience a double disadvantage; namely, being a person of color and being female.

I needed to pay attention to agency policies and procedures as well as current service delivery trends. I needed to not only learn the craft but also learn about some of the advances in the field; namely, what are people thinking about in relationship to listening to families, the community, and interests. All of these sources of information have given me a big advantage. For example, many years ago I could see that foster care would no longer be a big ticket item in the agency's array of services. I could see the emerging shift in foster care and moving kids out of residential care and back to living with their families. This shift would occur by establishing the therapeutic safeguards needed so that families who are having difficulties can actually have the tools to help them stay together as a family. However, there will always be a need for foster care for kids whose needs can not be addressed at home. I knew that if we continued to put all the agency's resources into foster and

residential care, we would be going out of business since government contracts would no longer support the high-end costly foster care and residential services. By promoting family-based services we're working in the family's home and community and that would be our road to continued business. So I was able to get a team of folks (including several members of the executive team) to agree with me on the focus of the business direction. We continue to provide foster and residential care and we shifted our focus to provide home, community and school-based services, as well as mental health-based services.

As I reflect on my elementary school years, my mom was a social worker but I did not really think of her as a traditional social worker; although she was a unit supervisor, I remember her going to people's homes to observe her workers. As she described some of her work, I figured out it's not just about counseling, but it's about understanding the whole person. I was raised with the understanding that if you meet a person's basic needs, ensure that they are comfortable, pay attention to the social environment that can explain the precipitating events, you can gain the understanding needed to learn about the needs and wants of an individual. The counseling piece really becomes much easier when you are meeting clients with a full understanding of their situation and not imposing your views or service upon them but rather actively listening to what they want and need.

When I was doing direct services and providing family preservation services that cross cultures, I sought to be very impactful. I viewed service delivery from the standpoint that everyone has different stories to share and they want to be heard. I grew up in a family of individuals and my parents really drew upon our strengths and helped us to mature in the areas where we were having difficulties. It was a natural fit for me to have that same strengths perspective to bring to my work.

Several months before completing my Bachelor's degree, I had a child and soon thereafter recognized that I wanted to go on and get my MSW. My supervisor encouraged me to build upon my knowledge and skills by pursuing further studies in order to put a framework around my practice. I entered the three-year part-time MSW program at San Francisco State University because I was working full-time and could not afford not to work. I had been in the field for so long that I felt that some of my instructors were out of touch with practice realities. I was one of the older students (in my 30s) and my cohort included five African-Americans people and other people of color but the majority of the students were White and young. So I brought to

the table what I felt were experiences that were not in the course readings and that was a challenge for some of my instructors because they wanted to stick to the book and I wanted to focus on current practice issues. I had to learn not to be disruptive but to be instructive and I had to learn how to present cases that were relevant without countering the instructors but adding to what they had to say (80% males). For me that took a lot because I just wanted to discuss current realities in the community. I learned how to raise questions that were not offensive yet challenging. I had to learn how to temper and frame things in such a way where people could receive the message. I learned that in order to get my ideas heard, I needed to learn how to communicate without the need to learn a different language to gain acceptance.

### **Moving Up in the Organization**

My advancement within the organization has been exciting but it has also been somewhat challenging. I have declined central office senior executive positions because it would take me away from my community-based focus. It has also been challenging when I attend our senior leadership and executive leadership meetings and look around the table where I do not see a lot of diversity in terms of socio-economic status, race or gender. Sometimes I find it is difficult to understand how they do not understand the clients we serve who come from impoverished backgrounds. If I get too far removed from community-based services, I'll become cynical and forget the reason I entered this field. To make a difference as a female African-American in my regional director role, I can be both a voice for the concerns of senior management and a voice from the bottom that goes back to the top to reflect the changing needs of vulnerable populations and the staff members who serve them. Sometimes my voice is the only voice that is heard and sometimes I don't even think it is heard but it is the only voice that is bringing colleagues back to the reality of those we serve. If we forget who we serve, then I think we have lost the reason for why we do the work. If our clients and staff feel that I am unreachable or insensitive or not connected, then you can lose your connection with the clients and thereby lose your impact.

For some time, I had to talk with my mom about this because she was a manager before she retired. I had to ask her what it was like to have to think before you speak or have to think about the audience because sometimes people refuse to accept the ideas of a woman of color. My biggest challenges came from a couple of males who were my managers and they never really listened to what I had to say and that frustrated me. I actually went to the Human Resources



department (HR) regarding one of my managers because I said to him, “I feel like you are really being sexist and racist”. He was a white male and he said, “What? I married an African-American woman,” and I said yeah, but you’re divorced”. While I know it was wrong for me to say that, I said, “What does one have to do with the other? You are my supervisor and when you say certain things to me it feels as if you’re being very sexist and racist and that feels very uncomfortable.” So my next step was to talk to HR.

My frustration with my supervisor could be traced to several examples. When we were talking about folks who live in a particular community that was predominantly African-American, his response would be, “That’s just how those people are and you know, you should never go there because you never know what they are going to do and don’t go there at night.” I responded that I feel safe and our clients want us to come to their home and this is the time we can visit. We feel safe.” The whole team that he was supervising indicated that they felt safe and his response was, “You never know what they are going to do. I bet they can attack you, I bet they can steal from you. You need to watch your purse.”

The thing that was interesting for me was the reactions of our team members who never said much in staff meetings when they heard racist comments. However, after the meetings, they would share with others comments like “How can he say something like that?” They could not understand with all the cultural competency training that we have had and with all the opportunities that we have had to be work with people of different cultures, how he could make those statements? We would talk to each other and check in because we did not feel safe in those meetings and we needed to own our feelings by openly talking about racial, ethnic and cultural differences and even differences within cultures. We also wanted to make sure that the families we served felt comfortable and if we had an issue around safety, we would bring it up in our meetings and make plans accordingly. We would raise questions like, what is it like to be a black female or what is like to be a white female working in the black community? How do you feel about it? Do you stick out? We would talk openly about what it is like for a White female to work with an African-American family where you’re working with the father and there is no female and what that feels like and so we would have some very intimate and intense conversations to make sure that staff had opportunities to share their concerns.

Other examples include females working with male clients and feeling intimidated or White males working with an African-American or a woman of color where there is no man in the house. We would talk openly about the impact

of gender differences. For example, how does a male staff member who is 6’5” sit in the room with the female who has no husband but has experienced violence perpetrated by a male. It is so important to consider how one’s presence can impact the delivery of services. In our supervisory sessions, we talked about how he could sit smaller by bending over at the waist or sitting sideways without being sexually suggestive. He understood how important it was for his presence not to overwhelm this mom who was newly out of a domestic violence relationship with a tall man.

As a senior manager, I continuously raise the question, “Am I creating an environment where people who need services will feel comfortable?” Throughout the years, I have really worked on diversity issues and oversee our agency’s local diversity initiatives to make sure they are functioning and that we’re constantly doing and focusing on cultural humility. Cultural competency and humility are a driving factor in how we do business. It is part of our agency service delivery principles not just in terms of it’s appearance in training programs but rather how the staff act towards our customer base and towards each other. We are asking questions and making acknowledgments about what we do or do not know and how open are we to hearing and learning, and receiving information to improve our services.

When our two large agencies (\$45 million/year) came together to form EMQ FamiliesFirst (\$90 million/year), both agencies were perceived in the community as white agencies and I strive to ensure that is not the perception of those we serve.

When you look at our executive team and board of directors, you see a lot of White people. To address these issues, we have incorporated into our staff performance measures dimensions of cultural competency and how it is demonstrated.

As I reflect back over my career with respect to the issues of gender and race, I have reached a set of conclusions that work for me. This includes:

1. Be true to yourself, your culture, and value system
2. Education, knowledge and understanding is key to integrating gender and race into the work force without using gender and race as an excuse for poor performance.
3. The desire to be the most effective provider/director of services should be a motivator rather than the lack of gender and race representation within the organization.



# Making the Career Transition from Child Welfare to Adult and Aging Services: A Teaching Case

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### Introduction

This teaching case emerged from conversations among Adult & Aging Services Directors who participate in the Northern California Bay Area Social Services Consortium (BASSC) when it was noted that several of the members had built their careers in Child Welfare before transitioning to Adult & Aging Services. This teaching case identifies some of the themes emerging from those mid-to-late career executives who made the transition from Child Welfare to Adult & Aging Services. It takes into account the workforce challenges that are prevalent in the field of aging (Hussein & Manthorpe, 2005; Kovner, Mezey, & Harrington, 2002; Lee, Dooley, Ory, & Sumaya, 2013; Lin, Lin, & Zhang, 2015) and is based upon in-depth interviews with six individuals (see Note 1). Several elements emerged from the interviews with these county executives who drew upon 20+ years of human services experience. The elements are organized into the following overarching themes: 1) *Facilitated Transitions* (Being Mentored or Encouraged; Macro Practice Comfort Zone; and Transferrable Social Work Skills; 2) *Valuing the Professional Challenge* (Acquiring New Subject Matter Expertise; Being an Outsider & Upgrader; Advocacy & Empowerment; and Funding Constraints in Adult & Aging Services), and 3) *Retrospective Reflections* (Less Stressful Work Environment and No Regrets).

### FACILITATED TRANSITIONS

As with many transitions, these Directors of Adult & Aging Services who moved over from Child Welfare were assisted in that career change in several important ways. First, all of those interviewed made the career-altering choice after listening to the advice and experience of others.

Many reported having mentors who encouraged them and believed the move to Adult & Aging Services was good for them. In a similar vein, others reported the encouragement of colleagues as part of the reason they felt confident to make the move. Most of the participants reported having a mentor and emphasized the importance of that mentor relationship in their career decision-making. As Jasmine, Erik and Lenny noted below, they were being mentored and encouraged:

JASMINE: “She [my mentor] saw skills in me that I didn’t see in myself at the time. She said, “you have [this] background,” and I said, “no I don’t.” She said, “I’ve done this, and I know you can do it.” She gave me the permission to not have to be the [content] expert – knowing that when I needed [something specific], someone on the staff could do it. She helped me see the position as more about developing teams, new deliverables, bring leadership to the department, etc. I put her off for over a month, but she gave me a deadline and I didn’t want to disappoint her – it was a leap of faith.”

ERIK: “[I] wasn’t aware of the job opening – a friend approached me, who was also recently promoted to a director approached me and asked, “Have you thought about this?”. “No not me!” My mentor had encouraged me to the Division Director position in CW as they were planning to retire

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1. All names have been changed to maintain confidentiality of study subjects

in 4-5 years. I thought I was perfectly content in my position. But then there weren't people in Adult & Aging who were applying for the position. There wasn't someone really in the running, so with all of those things it somewhat became a calling. . . . I knew I could learn the programs and had enough human services experience for the rest of it."

LENNY: "A couple people I'd worked with had gone over to Adults & Aging, so I thought it would be a good move for me . . . they said it was a good work environment with good leadership."

Even with careers that ranged from 19 to 25 years in Child Welfare among all the participants, they did not view themselves as primarily Child Welfare Workers but rather as macro practice social workers focused on systems change and improvement. This broader perspective on their career identity helped them perceive the move from Child Welfare to Adult & Aging as being in line with their social work skills, knowledge and expertise and provided them with the confidence needed to make such a career-shifting move. They generally considered themselves to be practitioners who wanted to make an impact, or as advocates or community engagers. Some participants talked about their work and expertise in terms of administrative, macro or systems social work. Marty, Laura, and Jasmine provide examples below of this broader social work identity:

MARTY: "When I started, I thought I'd be a direct social services worker, but over time I realized I am more of a systems/macro social worker."

LAURA: "I never connected as a Child Welfare worker (not my identity) – but I found ways for my work to be meaningful by seeking change/impact. . . . It wasn't what drove me [to move] there, but I feel passionate about older adults. Land of haves & have-nots. So much money to serve women & children. It's inequitable in Adult & Aging just to get a little piece of the pie. So older adults weren't represented – they're the underdog & that fires me up. I'm always going to take that on. Children's always got so much attention – more appealing – but I saw such a need in Adult & Aging Services."

JASMINE: "Mind you, my passion is really around this kind of macro, systems social work. Other's perceive my passion as Child Welfare given the

duration I spent in that area. I went into my MSW knowing I was really a macro social worker at heart. I knew I'd enjoy community organizing . . . I do love Children's, but more than anything I just love doing social work. "

The last element in the theme on facilitated transitions includes the transferability of social work skills. From the perspective of those interviewed, much of the social work skills, knowledge and expertise that they acquired in Child Welfare were fully transferrable to Adult & Aging. This understanding of their social work skills and knowledge enabled them to move from one service arena with self-assurance even after a long career in Child Welfare. Instead, of viewing their careers as serving a particular population or as a subject-matter expert, they perceive themselves as capable, with their social work background, of working in many different service domains. Marty, Erik, Jasmine, and Jessica illustrate below their experience with the transferability of social work knowledge, skills and expertise.

MARTY: "Interagency work has been very translatable. Starting with a non-mandated former foster youth advisory board. Then transferring to trying to get voices of older adults. Very similar work. Politics of that process was similar and engaging consumer voice is similar."

ERIK: "As a result of those learnings in child welfare, (which were really in their infancy in Child Welfare as well) we are making a much more purposeful effort to include older adults in the decisions we make . . . Supervisory and management skills and learnings also transfer . . . How supervision works is very similar across divisions/units and the basic skill-building efforts are not unique. The structures of the organizations have also all been the same, pretty much. "

JASMINE: "Some of what I specifically brought from children's services is that legality/oversight lens . . . It's been important to have adult services social workers be more mindful of clear policies and procedures . . . Those are the lessons learned from children's. Mind you that is a huge shift here in Adult Services, because that hasn't been their reality. It's bringing more checks and balances, which we are currently exploring how to implement right now . . . So, while there are learnings, I also knew it wasn't apples to apples. So, some of

what I brought from children's is actually my general social work knowledge on empathy, engagement, understanding strengths and challenges, listening, etc."

JESSICA: "I had a lot of managerial experience but none in Adult & Aging Services. In child welfare, I did admin work – contracts, fiscal, management. A lot of that work was transferable – beyond operations experience. From social worker to supervisor to social work manager. It all is useful to my current work."

### VALUING THE PROFESSIONAL CHALLENGE

The second major theme includes *Valuing the Professional Challenge* in which the interviewees commented on their growth and learner mindset. None of them made the move from Child Welfare to Adult & Aging with the idea that the work would be easier and they could then take it easy in their mid-to-late career. On the contrary, they embraced and valued the professional challenges "as welcome opportunities" with regard to the following four elements: acquiring new subject matter expertise; being an outsider & upgrader; advocacy & empowerment; and dealing with funding constraints in Adult & Aging Services

As part of valuing a professional challenge, they were challenged to *Acquire New Subject Matter Expertise*, especially since they did not view their human services careers in terms of specific service populations. And yet, viewing one's career broadly does not lessen the task of learning an entirely new subject matter area when moving from Child Welfare to Adult & Aging Service. These executives welcomed that learning opportunity, and expressed considerable trust in their abilities to learn the context and content of their new practice arena in Adult & Aging services. In other words, these executives are life-long learners who seize opportunities and enjoy challenges as well as pursue promotions or new work assignments. For example, one of the interviewees actually asked the county for a job assignment where she was most needed. For others, seizing opportunities took on the pursuit of advanced degrees (one participant a PhD, one an MBA, for instance). The following reflections by Jasmine, Erik and Lenny provide illustrations of this theme:

JASMINE: "Obviously, the adult population is unique and engaging with these clients is different and something I have needed to learn and continue to learn. But moving into contracts and procurement taught me the importance of my

leadership and managerial skills, over and above the subject matter expertise. I knew I could learn the content."

ERIK: "I have a high tolerance for change for one thing. There's two aspects – I'm not a career climber. I'm not good at setting the next goal in terms of career advancement, purely. I've always been content where I am and just learning what I can. But then when it comes to learning something new, I have the energy for it. I have a comfort/discomfort relationship with that. Sometimes being the least knowledgeable challenges one's comfort and confidence, but then there are only so many opportunities for learning if you remain in that posture. Gaining a deeper understanding and appreciation is the driver to not becoming stale to be able to continue to meet the needs of the community. Intentional curiosity – not career mobility driven. Two years ago I would've said there was no way I'd change divisions, and yet here I am."

LENNY: "It wasn't a difficult transition for me – no more of a learning curve than when I came into Children's Services all those years ago with a law degree."

The second element of valuing the professional challenge is *Being an Outsider & Upgrader*. All of the respondents reported that their Child Welfare experience gave them the "outsider" knowledge and vision to see the needs in Adult & Aging Services. They were not viewed by Adult and Aging staff as outsiders because they brought with them their extensive departmental experiences related to human resources as well as contracts and procurement that tended not to be the experiences of those in the existing ranks of Adult & Aging Services staff. In several counties, more than half of their management staff in Adult & Aging Services had transferred from Child Welfare despite the fact that there are a variety of opportunities for supervisor, lower, middle and upper management opportunities across myriad Child Welfare programs. In contrast, one of the appeals of working in the smaller division of Adult & Aging services is that the organizational hierarchy is "flatter" with fewer opportunities for advancement. Most of the county Child Welfare divisions have more than double the size of the staff in the Adult & Aging Services divisions. This Outsider perspective is reflected in the following examples provided by Laura and Erik:

LAURA: “I don’t think I could’ve done the leadership that I’ve done without the Child Welfare experience. It was all part of it. Everyone should have good bosses and bad bosses. I had more opportunities to grow leadership & management skills in Child Welfare. Adult & Aging is flatter as an organization, so it’s harder to grow the same opportunities for advancement.”

ERIK: “[I had] multiple roles in Child Welfare—each one had difficulties and obstacles and challenges. That range gives you confidence to go into a whole new agency. Any one of the supervisory or management roles I had presented different types of challenges and opportunities to lead people through different obstacles. Having the range of those has certainly given me some confidence to experience any manner of that in a different agency.”

This *Outsider* perspective is connected to the notion of being an *Upgrader*. Specifically, these social work county executives shared the view that Adult & Aging was really behind the practices found in Child Welfare (like “going back in time”, “stepping into a time machine, “being in a time warp”). There was a shared view among the interviewees that the assessment, tracking, data management and systems within Adult & Aging Services were quite far behind that of Child Welfare. For example, the interviewees reported that Adult & Aging Services did not have a regular training/continuing education culture (like the extensive Title IVE national/state training funding in Child Welfare) and did not use data effectively, especially lacking robust data tracking or developing an understanding of program or client outcomes. They did not have systems like Quality Assurance and other program infrastructure support. Their *Outsider* status gave them the perspective to see these contrasts in ways that those within Adult & Aging were not able to notice. As a result, the interviewees saw themselves as systems upgraders. From their perspective, the Adult & Aging workers and managers in those programs had no idea of how to engage in systems improvement. In essence, the *Outsider’s* perspective was crucial for becoming an *Upgrader* to help the field of Adult & Aging Services move forward. The following quotes from Lenny and Laura illustrate how the *Outsiders* also became *Upgraders*:

LENNY: “Compared to Child Welfare, measuring outcomes was primitive or non-existent – I was

aware of this from my work in HR, so I knew this going in. Adult & Aging Services stood out as not very forward-focused, lacking consistency or any real standards.”

LAURA: “You can’t undo what you know or your experience, so it made it hard to step back in time. I had to slowly make changes to help bring Adult & Aging into the 21st century.”

The third element of valuing the professional challenge involves *Advocacy & Empowerment*, especially getting their local communities to pay attention to aging issues. This lack of interest or attention on the current crises occurring in the growing unmet needs of the aging population creates and opportunity for advocacy. While the interviewees did not want the over-regulation and stress of child welfare system, they wanted more public attention given to their programs and clients (especially media attention to advocating for adult & older adult programs). They noted the public sentiment that adults are to blame for their problems, whereas children are victims. These perceptions create and highlight the advocacy challenge of finding ways to feature the important issues and growing unmet needs in Adult & Aging Services. The following quotes by Lenny, Jasmine and Marty provide examples of this *Advocacy and Empowerment* challenge:

LENNY: “Now, the challenge is getting the community to pay attention to aging issues. Current demand/need for services is high and exponential growth that’s coming. APS exceeded CPS cases for the first time ever in [our] County . . . When something happens to an older adult, it rarely makes the paper (as opposed to something that happens to a child), so getting leaders in county government to pay attention and getting folks in the community to pay attention to the growing needs of older adults is an ongoing challenge.”

JASMINE: “We have a different reaction when we see a neglected child in our society versus when we see a neglected older adult. We need to give adult services more of a voice. Elderly don’t have a voice in our society, and they also aren’t as respected as they are in some other societies. So, what are the benefits to providing services? To investing in adults? We can and need to tell the investment story to an evolving and aging society.”



MARTY: “in Child Welfare I’m used to fierce & sometimes ugly advocacy, because children are suffering – there’s a fire in the belly of the advocate dragon. In Aging & Adult Services, everyone is so polite & nice, seemingly a bi-product of societal ageism. I kept waiting for someone to yell. It was a very striking difference. People need to advocate or they don’t get their slice of the pie. Aging & Adult Services needs a little more fire in their belly. Vulnerable older adults are society’s most important population. If people knew the state of some vulnerable elders, they would be angry and advocate. But there will only be awareness if we raise it.”

The *Funding Constraints* are another challenge when moving from well-funded Child Welfare to under-funded Adult & Aging Services. This reality is particularly startling given that in most, if not all, California counties, Child Welfare client rolls are shrinking while the expanding growth of the aging population is putting a strain on the funding of existing programs. This pressure to “do more with less” was expressed by all the interviewees and captured below by Jasmine, Jessica, Laura, and Erik:

JASMINE: “In our county, there is a perception that Children’s feels like they are “better” – sort of a “we’re dealing with real life and death issues over here” kind of notion. Children’s feels like they’re more privileged, get more resources because of the severity of the cases at play. Children’s feels like they are one up – it’s the nature of the complexity of the cases, working with courts, removals, etc. There is a step-child feeling for adults, “Why does Children’s get everything?”

JESSICA: “Adult services are not well-funded. Period.”

LAURA: “Not having funding, not having the same platform, a bit of a learned helplessness with the staff. I had to wake them up and teach them to demand more instead of “this is just how it is.” . . . Lack of support, meant that Adult & Aging hadn’t been a priority . . .”

ERIK: “Budget and funding are a challenge. Understanding the budget complexities are an enormous challenge and the constraints to fight for what we need to run our programs feels more

emphasized in adult and aging. There is not a constant flow of money into Adult & Aging Services – rather, fighting for what we need to run our programs. Increasing population of older adults and diminishing population of children have not kept pace with demand in Adult & Aging services. As a result, it’s a challenge to maintain workable caseloads. If we cannot keep pace, then we’ll have to refine what we do and we may not be able to provide some services in the future. Needs will continue to go unknown and/or unmet, which is a challenge for our service.”

### RETROSPECTIVE REFLECTIONS

The third major theme relates to retrospective reflections that include the elements of a *Less Stressful Work Environment* and *No Regrets* [when social work executives speak about 20+ years of county human services work]. Most experienced public sector social workers and human services executives would agree that Child Welfare is a challenging environment in which to work. While half of the interviewees were fairly content in Child Welfare, in retrospect most of them were not aware of how stressed they were until they transitioned to Adult and Aging Services. As a result, most of them were looking for a change from such a challenging environment relating to the incredible pressure of caring for vulnerable children and the intense oversight and government regulation of every aspect of that work. To be clear, they were not saying that Adult & Aging social work was easy as it had its own challenges. However, the work environment of Adult & Aging, as noted by Jessica, Laura, Erik, and Marty includes much more autonomous practice than that of Child Welfare:

JESSICA: “I don’t think anything could’ve been worse than the child welfare job that I had . . . My whole training was in children’s & I just needed a change. I don’t think there could be a harder job than child welfare and frankly, I wish I had come over sooner. In looking back now, I can’t even imagine going back there as an executive staff. I tell people I wish I’d come over sooner. I’ve been in Adults for a while now. Adults feels like a good place to be.”

LAURA: “I again found myself working for another boss who fostered an oppressive and hostile work environment and was feeling so miserable. I wondered at this point, is it the people drawn to Child



Welfare or is it the pressure and related politics that create such a negative environment.” While she initially blamed the misery on the “horrible boss” at the time she made the move, in retrospect, she now believes that she simply needed to get out of the toxic environment of Child Welfare. “I’ve often speculated about the regulations, public pressure, higher stakes of child welfare – that it creates this tense, volatile environment, and as a result, tense volatile workforce . . . which makes it a difficult place to work and feel like you’re making a difference.”

ERIK: “All those regulations in CW were “starting to eat me up.” It was a challenge. Took the social work out of social work in child welfare. Hard to work in child welfare. It became a saving community versus a family preserving community, and I got unable to train people in this model. This is something that Adult & Aging gets – freedom of choice – people don’t need saviors in us; don’t need us to fix everything for them. That’s been quite a nice change. We need to trust the social worker. I know that Child Welfare wasn’t intended to go down that road – the regulations were intended to provide safeguards, but it’s unfortunate about how far it’s gone.”

MARTY: “there is a spirit of collaboration in Adult & Aging Services, that is impressive . . . advocacy [in Child Welfare] seemed less collaborative and venomous at times. I was initially just so shocked by how nice people in Adult & Aging Services were. I really appreciate the collaboration – when I attend these meetings, I feel like I’m going to a family reunion. There’s something special in the field of Adult & Aging Services that lends to this culture of collaboration and kindness.”

The second element in theme of *Retrospective Reflections* is the shared perception of *No Regrets* in moving from Child Welfare to Adult & Aging Services. They noted their high level of satisfaction derived from working in Adult & Aging Services made it difficult for them to envision a return to Child Welfare, especially the opportunities to innovate and create best practices in a growing field of social work practice. In addition, they did not know any staff member who transferred from Child Welfare to Adult & Aging Services who wanted to go back to Child Welfare, as noted below by Jasmine, Laura and Erick:

JASMINE: “I don’t have any regrets – no I don’t think so. I love what I’m doing. This move hasn’t been a career stopper by any means; I’m still making an impact. I’m all about impact. I love learning, and I’m learning a lot. I’m excited to see how we can tell our story a bit differently here in our county.”

LAURA: “. I don’t know people who came over who regretted coming over, “this is so much better,” was the prevailing sentiment. It’s not easier work – it’s really hard – but the environment is so much better. It’s not a place to put your feet up, but you can thrive as a social worker here in ways I didn’t/couldn’t in child welfare.”

ERIK: “Envious of not growing up in Adult & Aging world. I lack context – even still. [I] did a lot of the work in Child Welfare, so I had that context there. But no – no regrets. It’s an amazing place to work. It’s an amazing organization to lead . . . Don’t think I’ll ever return to Child Welfare . . . I don’t want to, for myself. There’s too much to correct in Child Welfare. In my career at this time, this is the right place for me to be and it became hard to watch things we did on a daily basis in Child Welfare that just felt wrong after a while.”

## Lessons Learned

As noted in the introduction to this teaching case, the three major themes are comprised of nine elements. Several lessons can be identified that can serve as a foundation for the use of discussion questions to explore many different facets of the case. First, broadly defined career expertise and the ability to view social work skills as transferrable provided these practitioners with the conviction to move across practice domains. This lesson is important for organizations to retain a skilled social services workforce in light of the reality of shifting demographics; namely, decreasing Child Welfare rolls and increasing aging population demands for Adult & Aging Services (Beck & Johnson, 2015; Committee on Child Maltreatment Research, Policy, and Practice for the Next Decade, et al. 2014). Another lesson buried in the theme of Valuing the Professional Challenge related to the element of Outsider & Upgrader experience is the continuous need for human service organizations to promote innovation and promote leadership. One approach is to plan for opportunities to encourage staff to move across practice domains.

Given the workforce challenges that are prevalent in the field of aging, this teaching case captures some of the dynamics of the career trajectories of those boundary-crossers who made the transition from Child Welfare to Adult & Aging Services. One of the lessons learned is that Adult & Aging Services represents an organizational environment that includes exciting current and future social work challenges.

## Discussion Questions

While there are certainly other lessons to be learned, the following discussion questions are structured to continue the exploration of career trajectories:

1. What, in your view, are the three most important lessons learned from this teaching case?
2. How would you identify a mentor or career facilitator related to current or future social work practice? How would you assess your own outreach help-seeking behaviors with respect to consulting with others?
3. Which characteristic do you think that human service organizations value more: the outsider perspective or the subject matter expert? What gives you this impression?
4. Is there anything in your family or personal background that might capture your interest in working with the aging population?
5. Why do you think that the vast majority of social work students want to work with children and families rather than aging adults?
6. How might this case change or influence your thinking about macro practice? On geriatric social work practice?
7. Do you believe county human service organizations are prepared to serve an increasingly aging society?

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- PROJECT METHODS**
- This teaching case emerged from a qualitative exploratory study involving in-depth semi-structured phone interviews with six participants (7 individuals were interviewed; one chose to withdraw from the study for personal reasons). Participants were mid-to-late career (20+ years county work experience) county social work executives from 6 of the 58 California counties. Each interview lasted approximately 1 hour. Interviews were recorded via Zoom™ and transcribed along with memos taken by the interviewer. All interviews were conducted by the lead author. While the interview process did not follow a specific sequence of questions in order to respect the interviewees' telling of their own story, a broadly-followed interview protocol was constructed to ensure most topics were ultimately covered. At the outset of each interview, the interviewer stated something like, "I am interested in the personal story of people who are currently working at a high level in Adult & Aging Services, but who came to those positions after a career in Child Welfare. I would like to hear your story and would appreciate any assistance from you to enable me to comprehend it as fully as possible." Participants were then asked broad, open-ended questions concerning their career trajectory, and any reasons for the move from Child Welfare to Adult & Aging Services. Participants were also asked to identify any skills or learnings they brought from Child Welfare that they found particularly relevant. The interview also involved an exploration of the differences between working in Child Welfare & Adult & Aging (culture, policy, funding, environment, etc.). Participants were

asked what made this career change possible and how their career has been affected by the move to Adult & Aging (for better or for worse). Participants were also asked to reflect on lessons derived from this career change. When necessary, the interviewer asked additional questions for clarification and elaboration. Following the completion of the interviews, the lead author created profiles (case stories) for analysis and description of career trajectory themes. Each

respective case profile was reviewed by the Adult & Aging Director for completeness and content. Transcripts and memos of the interviews were also shared with the respective study subject. The lead author developed the key themes in consultation with the BASSC staff director. This study was approved by the Institutional Review Board of California State University, East Bay for the protection of human subjects (protocol # CSUEB-IRB-2019-182-F).

**V.**

**KNOWLEDGE SHARING  
IN SUPPORT OF  
EVIDENCE-INFORMED PRACTICE**

# Building Organizational Supports for Knowledge Sharing in County Human Service Organizations: A Cross-Case Analysis of Works-in-Progress

CHRIS LEE AND MICHAEL J. AUSTIN

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## ABSTRACT

Building on the literature related to evidence-based practice, knowledge management, and learning organizations, this cross-case analysis presents twelve works-in-progress in ten local public human service organizations seeking to develop their own knowledge sharing systems. The data for this cross-case analysis can be found in the various contributions to this Special Issue. The findings feature the developmental aspects of building a learning organization that include knowledge sharing systems featuring transparency, self-assessment, and dissemination and utilization. Implications for practice focus on the structure and processes involved in building knowledge sharing teams inside public human service organizations.

**KEYWORDS:** Evidence-based practice; evidence-informed practice; human service organization; learning organization; knowledge sharing

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## Introduction

As standards for accountability and service outcomes are increasingly more common in public human services, the question of how to effectively incorporate the management of data and knowledge into daily practice becomes progressively more relevant. While human service organizations might aim to inform their practice with administrative data and relevant research, the greatest challenge relates to identifying ways of systematically incorporating such information in the midst of work overload and limited resources.

The purpose of this analysis is to illustrate and explore this very challenge: What is a knowledge sharing system; what does it look like? What sorts of barriers do public human service organizations face in terms of collecting, analyzing, and utilizing administrative data? In what ways are public human service organizations systematically integrating new evidence and knowledge into their daily service provision? What do these integrating processes look like and how might others learn from them?

Building on the work of previous authors, the authors begin with a brief review of the literature around evidence-based practice, knowledge management, and knowledge sharing, exploring how each of these concepts are defined and what factors may inhibit or facilitate these processes (Austin, 2008; Austin & Claassen, 2008; Austin, Claassen, Vu, & Mizrahi, 2008; Johnson & Austin, 2008; Lemon Osterling & Austin, 2008). The authors also review the concept of a learning organization and how it provides a context for facilitating the sharing of knowledge. Twelve case examples that capture “works in progress” are then examined, reflecting the experiences of 10 local public human service organizations in developing their own knowledge sharing systems. The authors conclude with future directions for developing systems of knowledge sharing and integrating evidence-informed decision making practices in public human service organizations.

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## Brief Literature Review

### EVIDENCE-BASED AND EVIDENCE-INFORMED PRACTICE

The concept of *evidence-based* practice was first introduced in the field of medicine, defined as “the conscientious, explicit, and judicious use of current best evidence in making decisions about the care of individuals” (Sackett, Richardson, Rosenberg, & Haynes, 1997). More current definitions of evidence-based practice also include the involvement of clients as informed participants in the decision-making process (Gambrill, 1999). Identifying and locating appropriate evidence on which to base practice, however, proves to be challenging (Gambrill, 1999). Evidence-based practice relies heavily on systematic reviews of evidence resulting from Randomized Control Trials (RCTs); conversely, *evidence-informed* practice allows for the utilization of a wider range of data and evidence (Austin, 2008). For example, most traditional evidence is found in the published research literature (e.g., findings from empirical research studies or synthesized reviews of research). However, often overlooked and less utilized is data and evidence created from the experiences of service users, professional practitioners, administrators, and contributions of policy makers (Johnson & Austin, 2008). Accordingly, evidence-informed practice emphasizes the incorporation of these less traditional forms of evidence, broadening the scope from which practitioners have to apply evidence in practice.

Not surprisingly, difficulty in identifying appropriate evidence on which to base practice has led to a limited number of evidence-based models available for practice in public human services, though they are more prolific in the fields of mental health and health care (Austin, 2008). There are beginning efforts to remedy the situation in human services, such as the California Evidence-Based Clearinghouse for Child Welfare (CEBC), which identifies evidence-based practice models in public child welfare. The CEBC reviews child welfare interventions that have been scientifically researched, synthesizes the evidence, and makes this information publicly available by posting it online. A large gap remains, however, between the practical needs of practitioners and the availability of explicitly documented evidence-based practice models. Broadening the range of evidence used to inform practice, as in the case of evidence-informed practice, helps to close this gap and apply information gleaned from daily practice such as case documentation of changing client needs or administrative data collected as part of an agency's information system.

The inclusive nature of evidence-informed practice, however, can quickly lead to an underutilized, overabundance of data and evidence-with no systematic structure in place to efficiently and effectively integrate the information. Organizational supports are needed to facilitate the sharing and managing of knowledge among staff in the organization (Austin et al., 2008). First introduced in the for-profit sector and distinguishing between data, information, and knowledge (Davenport & Pmsak, 2000), knowledge management involves the following six elements (Awad & Ghaziri, 2004):

1. Utilizing accessible knowledge (derived from inside or outside sources),
2. Embedding and storing knowledge,
3. Representing knowledge in accessible formats (e.g., databases),
4. Promoting the cultivation of knowledge,
5. Transferring and openly sharing knowledge, and
6. Assessing the value and impact of knowledge assets.

Furthermore, organizational knowledge can be both tacit and explicit (Nonaka, 1994). Tacit knowledge is implicit, displayed through workers' actions and decisions but not easily communicated or explained (Nonaka, 1994). Explicit knowledge, on the other hand, is more readily processed, shared, and stored and may take such forms as organizational manuals or information relayed through staff training (Austin et al., 2008). Both tacit and explicit knowledge can be found in the experiences of service users, care providers, and professional practitioners as well as organizational and policy documents (Pawson, Boaz, Grayson, Long, & Barnes, 2003).

Identifying sources of evidence is only the first step toward realizing evidence-informed practice and effective knowledge management. The next step recognizes the role that organizational culture plays in supporting or discouraging practitioners to integrate evidence into their practice. Successful implementation of evidence-informed practice is largely contingent on having a supportive organizational environment that involves all levels of the organization from line workers to upper management (Barwick et al., 2005; Lawler & Bilson, 2004). Some of the specific characteristics of an organizational culture that supports evidence-informed practice include: investment from all levels of leadership (e.g., both middle and top management), active involvement of stakeholders, cohesive teamwork, accessibility of organizational resources, and a readiness to learn by the organization (Barwick et al., 2005). Other

factors related to the success or failure of evidence-informed practice includes the attitudes, practices, and behaviors of staff (Hodson, 2003).

In addition to identifying the organizational factors that support evidence-informed practice, promoting the dissemination and utilization of data is equally important. *Dissemination* of evidence involves knowledge sharing activities, while the *utilization* of evidence relates to the different ways that knowledge can be applied to practice (Gira, Kessler, & Poetter, 2004; Lavis, Robertson, Woodside, McLeod, & Abelson, 2003). The dissemination and utilization of evidence is impacted by both individual and organizational factors as well as characteristics of the research evidence itself (Lemon Osterling & Austin, 2008). At the individual level, there may be both barriers (e.g., lack of awareness of research) and facilitators (background in research methods) to the dissemination and utilization of knowledge.

Similarly, at the organizational level, factors such as unsupportive staff and management may act as barriers, while in-service trainings promoting the use of evidence in practice settings may act as facilitators (Carroll et al., 1997; Kajermo, Nordstrom, Krusebrant, & Bjorvell, 1998; Barratt, 2003; Humphris, Littlejohns, Victor, O'Halloran, & Peacock, 2000). The timing, nature, and relevance of research evidence can also affect its dissemination and utilization (Beyer & Trice, 1982). For example, research that is seen as conflicting or confusing, not applicable to a particular practice setting, or irrelevant to client needs will most likely not be incorporated into practice (Barratt, 2003; Hoagwood, Burns, Kiser, Ringeisen, & Schoenwald, 2001; McCleary & Brown, 2003).

### ELEMENTS OF A LEARNING ORGANIZATION

Ultimately, regularly incorporating evidence-based and evidence-informed practice into daily service provision can lead to an organization engaged in an overall culture of learning and knowledge sharing. According to Garvin (2000), a learning organization is characterized by five functions. The first function—information gathering and problem solving—refers to putting in place the structural foundation needed to create a culture of learning. For example, these activities might include defining a locally-relevant learning culture, demonstrating learning processes, and personally investing in learning. Next, a learning organization engages in experimentation—searching for new and better ways to improve organizational operations. A learning organization also learns from the past, by gathering prior reports and tacit knowledge of senior staff; placing

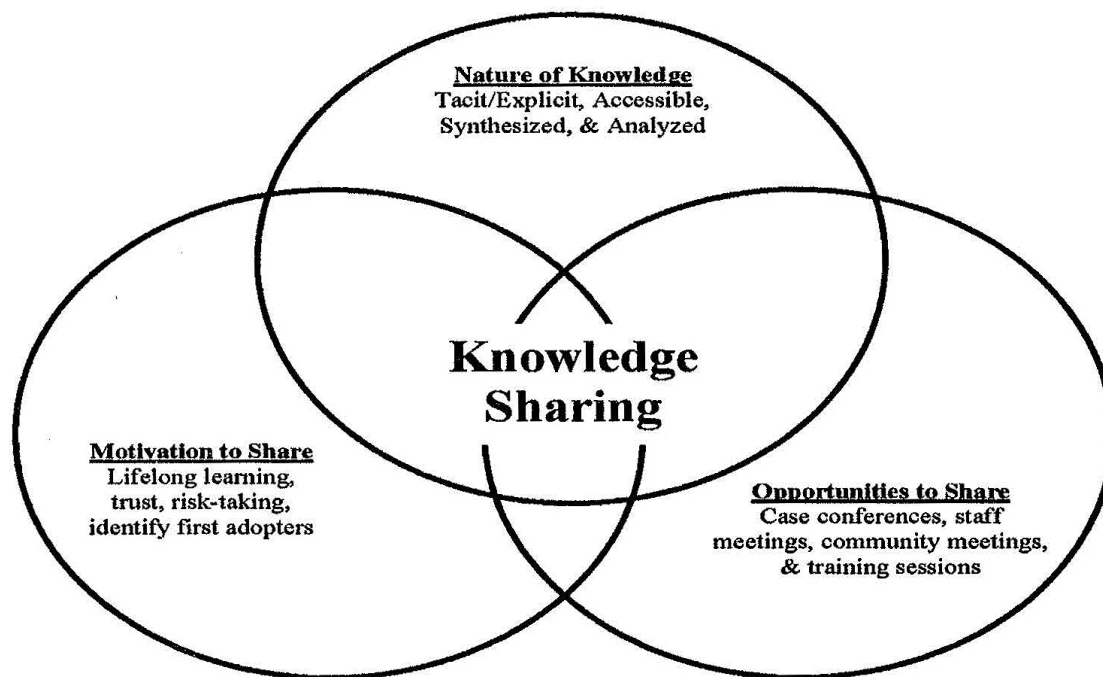
present realities on trend lines from the past; conducting after-action reviews from lessons learned; and engaging in small-scale research and demonstration projects. In addition to learning from the past, being aware of current best/promising practices and how others address issues or implement ways to improve operations is also important. These practices may be identified both inside and outside the agency, and then adapted to meet local needs. Finally, learning organizations facilitate the transferring of knowledge by sharing relevant literature, using staff meetings to share recent learning, and establishing other sharing mechanisms such as journal clubs or brown-bag lunch discussions.

Certain mechanisms in support of organizational learning can also help to facilitate the development of a learning organization, as noted by Lipshitz, Friedman, and Popper (2007). Specifically, while *individual learning* involves mental/cognitive processes (e.g., experience, observation, reflection, generalizations, experimentation), *organizational learning* involves social processes (e.g., beliefs, actions, outcomes, insights, dissemination). In order to provide a sense of psychological safety for staff to learn together, individual learning needs must be met in combination with organizational learning needs in order to transform changes into new organizational routines, operating procedures, and shared beliefs. A safe, learning environment provides a space in which staff may question, learn, and share their thoughts and ideas without being seen as ignorant, incompetent, negative, or disruptive, and thereby make room for new ideas and changes. In essence, organizational learning involves creating trusting environments that allow staff to take risks and avoid defensiveness.

Similar to organizational learning, knowledge sharing relies heavily on the interactions between individuals within an organization. As noted above, the sharing of knowledge is a process by which individuals are able to convert their own knowledge into a form that can be understood, absorbed, and used by others. Knowledge sharing allows individuals to learn from one another as well as contribute to the organization's knowledge base. Knowledge sharing also promotes creativity and innovation as individuals collaborate together, circulate new ideas, and contribute to innovation and creativity in organizations.

Largely impacting the development or preclusion of a learning organization, organizational culture can also influence knowledge sharing—as illustrated in *Figure 1*, which depicts the overlapping aspects of: the nature of knowledge, opportunity structures, and motivations (Ipe, 2003). These three elements interact with one another in a non-linear

**FIGURE 1**  
**Knowledge Sharing between Individuals in Organizations**



Source: Adapted from Ipe (2003)

fashion to ultimately promote or inhibit the sharing of knowledge within an organization. Indeed, Ipe suggests that an organizational culture that is not supportive in any one of these three essential areas can limit or undermine effective knowledge sharing. Accordingly, this cross-case analysis was conducted to further explore the nature of knowledge creation, development of knowledge sharing structures, and motivation as they were encountered and implemented in real-life contexts. Results of this analysis are discussed further in the sections below.

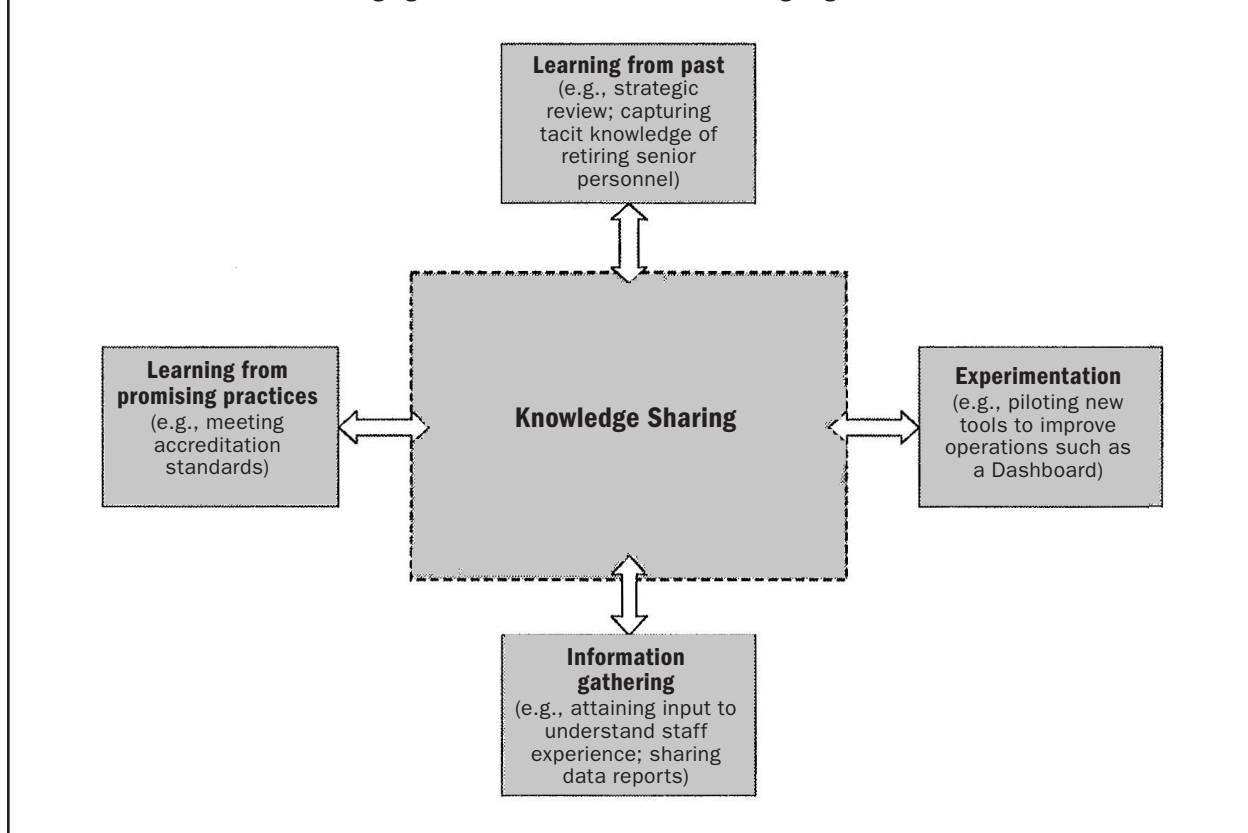
## Methodology

Case study research is particularly useful in acquiring a better understanding of a phenomenon as it occurs in its natural context, or providing insight into a theory in need of further substantiation (Hancock & Algozzine, 2006; Stake, 1995; Yin, 2003). This method may focus in-depth on an individual experience or compare multiple experiences stemming from different situations, as in the case of cross-case analysis (Hancock & Algozzine, 2006). For either mode of analysis, data may be gathered from various

sources, including interviews, observations, or reviewing existing records and documents, and then synthesized to provide information pertaining to the research question of interest (Hancock & Algozzine, 2006; Stake, 1995). As effective knowledge sharing processes and mechanisms in human service organizations are not yet well understood, the cross-case analysis method was especially useful for this study of building knowledge sharing systems in public human service organizations (PHSO).

Each of the 12 case examples included in this analysis is the result of content review of agency documents, supplemented with face-to-face interviews conducted by three social work graduate research assistants. Interviews were conducted with senior social service staff from 10 Bay Area county human service organizations from May to September 2008, resulting in 12 case examples included in this analysis. Agency documents were provided by senior staff and reviewed and synthesized in addition to interview data. These individual case studies represent “baseline” information that will also be used in subsequent annual follow-up surveys and interviews. Preliminary results of these

**FIGURE 2**  
**Emerging Elements of Public Sector Learning Organizations**



baseline case examples are discussed in further detail in the section below.

## Findings

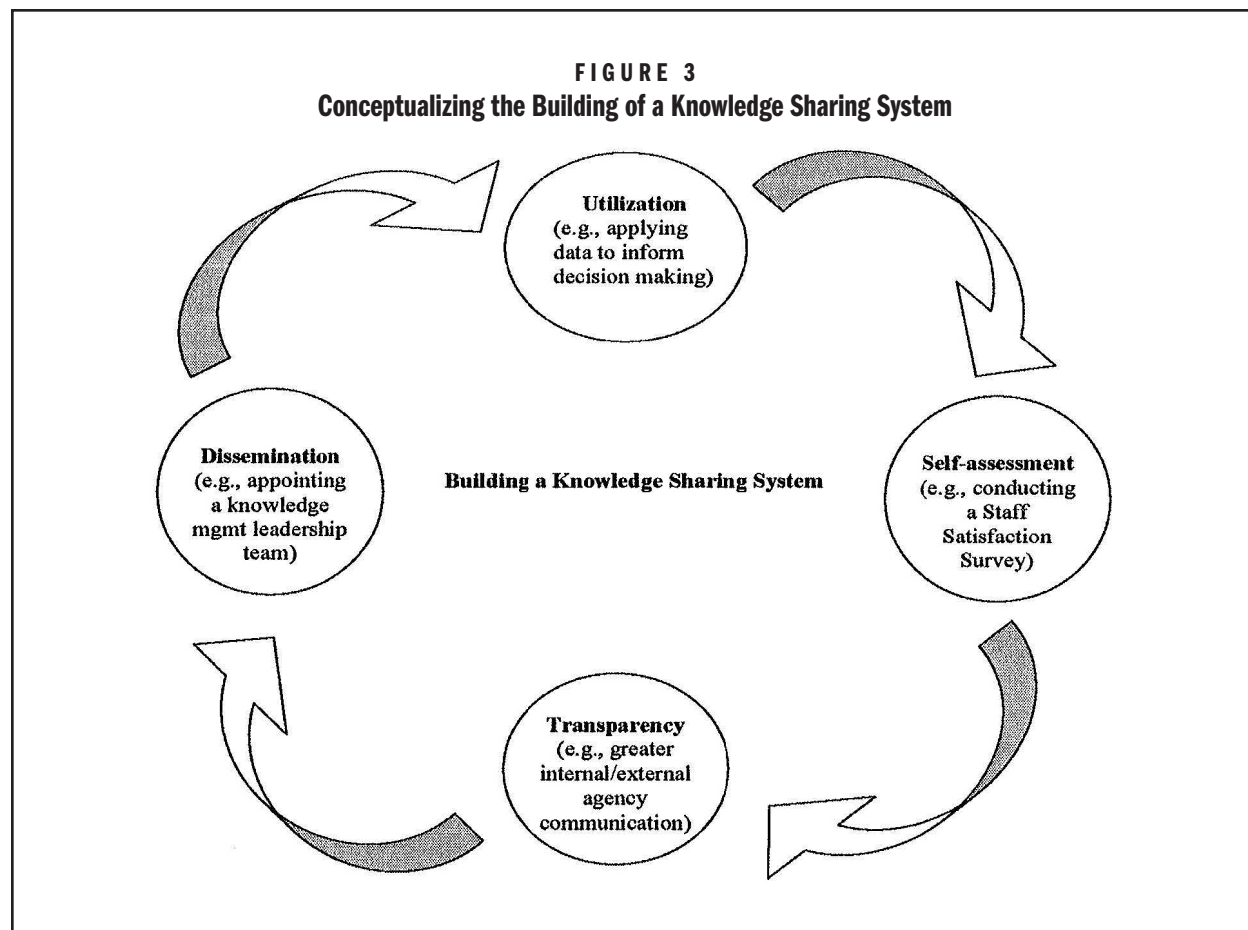
### DEVELOPMENT OF A LEARNING ORGANIZATION

In analyzing the 12 cases for common themes across organizational experiences, it became clear that while each of the 10 PHSOs are seeking to facilitate knowledge sharing processes, each agency is also uniquely incorporating different elements of a learning organization within their own organizational context. For example, several case examples captured processes of information gathering and analyzing through conducting staff surveys and interviews, and hiring personnel or creating new departmental units for managing data and evaluation tasks. Many agencies are also experimenting with new ideas and tools to improve information dissemination and utilization, such as implementing dashboards or other data management tools. Efforts to learn from the past are also common, as reflected in one organization's efforts to create multi-media tools for capturing the tacit knowledge of a retiring chief financial officer, and

another organization's strategic review of the agency's current operations and services. There are several examples of efforts to learn from promising practices, including learning about performance indicators and industry standards from the Commission on Accreditation of Rehabilitation Facilities (CARF), or the use of a knowledge management matrix to develop and implement knowledge sharing strategies. And finally, all cases illustrate different aspects of knowledge sharing among different staff members, including via staff meetings or the distribution and discussion of data reports. *Figure 2* illustrates the elements of how PHSOs are evolving into learning organizations and how these elements facilitate and interact with other aspects of the organization to support ongoing learning.

In addition to strengthening their capacities as learning organizations, each of the 12 case examples illustrates the different ways that knowledge sharing can emerge in a public human service agency. Though the sharing and transferring of information is the most obvious motivation for developing a knowledge sharing system, the idea of "knowledge sharing" requires further conceptualization.





Emerging from the cross-case analysis are themes that represent intermediary organizational level outcomes that can help to define an organization's larger knowledge sharing structure. These intermediary outcomes include: transparency, self-assessment, and knowledge dissemination and utilization. *Figure 3* illustrates how each of these outcomes contributes to the development of a knowledge sharing system. While each of the intermediary outcomes may have their own goals, they also collectively promote a larger knowledge sharing system by building on and supporting one another. For example, an organization may conduct a self-assessment to identify major issues and challenges, then facilitate transparency by disseminating assessment findings among all levels of staff members, and then utilize the information by initiating discussion among all staff members to develop strategies for addressing agency challenges. Finally, after implementing one or more strategies for addressing agency issues, findings might be disseminated widely through use of meetings and reports, and perhaps motivate another agency-wide assessment to repeat the cycle and thereby institutionalize a culture of knowledge sharing across the organization.

Before discussing how these components were employed among the 10 PHSOs included in this cross-case analysis, an overview of definitions is needed. The first outcome, *transparency*, may be located within and outside of the agency. Specifically, it may involve the desire to increase horizontal transparency among similar level personnel (e.g., line worker to line worker), vertical transparency between personnel of different agency levels (e.g., line worker and manager), or transparency with members in the larger public community. Transparency can also provide greater clarity about existing agency data and thereby reduce/eliminate staff confusion and other barriers to integrating evidence into practice. The second outcome relates to *self-assessment* and reflects an organization's efforts to assess the current status of services and operations in order to learn and improve organizational performance. The third outcome area incorporates the ideas of knowledge or evidence *dissemination and utilization*. PHSOs collect an abundance of data for various reports and to meet legislative mandates, but often struggle to effectively utilize such data for decision making. The following section discusses these themes in more detail.



### THE ROLE OF TRANSPARENCY IN A KNOWLEDGE SHARING SYSTEM

Many PHSOs are engaged in activities related to increasing transparency. Efforts to increase transparency in order to develop structures for greater knowledge sharing include activities such as: encouraging more open and pro-active communication, greater discussion of topics previously given limited public attention, and encouraging greater interpersonal interaction and contact. For example, one agency concentrated efforts on strengthening two-way communication between different levels of executive members by increasing interpersonal contact (via more in-person meetings), and encouraging them to view their roles as more participatory and built on partnership. The same agency also increased transparency and encouraged greater interaction among various levels of staff members by opening up membership to an existing leadership team to allow any interested staff member to join, rather than limiting it to those in supervisory or management positions. Another case example includes developing and implementing division-specific action plans and reports for sharing with other staff members on a monthly basis. Similarly, another agency devised a central document as a means for providing regular updates on client information from all departments in order to increase cross-departmental communication, information sharing, and collaboration.

With regard to increasing transparency in the broader surrounding community, another PHSO proactively engaged the media in discussion around agency programs and services using informational brochures and formal presentations, news articles and editorials, and radio and TV interviews. Similarly, another agency employed their new research and evaluation manager to engage more with the larger community by communicating more publicly and regularly about the impact of their services and programs. These case examples display ways in which knowledge sharing systems need to account for increased transparency both within and outside of an organization.

### THE ROLE OF SELF-ASSESSMENT IN A KNOWLEDGE SHARING SYSTEM

Another theme emerging from the cases involves organizational self-assessment. Several of the case examples feature efforts to assess the status of agency operations and services in order to find ways to improve upon organizational performance. For example, one agency implemented an online dashboard for data collecting, tracking, and/or reporting purposes. The dashboard is used as a mechanism for

assessing service and/or program changes in a timely manner in order to increase the organization's capacity to address issues as they arise, and generate reports and status updates to the board of supervisors and other relevant stakeholders. Another PHSO used a staff satisfaction survey to gather responses from all levels of staff regarding their experiences and perspectives on the agency's strategic plan, supervisory structure, information sharing practices, and opportunities for affecting organizational decisions. Results of the survey were used to highlight areas in need of improvement and inform the development of future steps.

Another illustration of organizational self-assessment can be found in two case examples. One PHSO utilized the accreditation process as an opportunity to assess their operations using national standards to identify the areas that were in need of support and improvement. The accreditation process helped to renew staff interest in quality improvement and generated greater ownership of agency performance. By gathering input from various staff members as well as external stakeholders, another PHSO conducted a strategic review of agency operations and services in order to assess what areas were doing well, what areas were not, and identified opportunities for greater data utilization and service improvement. Such a strategic review provides a foundation for increasing the use of evidence-informed practice and engaging in more effective knowledge sharing.

### THE ROLE OF DISSEMINATION AND UTILIZATION IN A KNOWLEDGE SHARING SYSTEM

Several of the case examples illustrate a natural progression toward developing a system for greater knowledge sharing that involves more effective and efficient *dissemination and utilization* of knowledge. For example, one agency designated a new staff role to provide for the interpretation and communication of data in order to facilitate easier use of this information by staff. The new role quickly led to the development of a knowledge management leadership team that identified responsibilities, strategic priorities, and standardized decision making in four designated knowledge areas. Another PHSO appointed a new senior management position to build structures and facilitate processes in support of knowledge management by developing a knowledge management matrix that identifies uniform areas for departmental reporting. In this way staff are able to learn from each other and stay current on the status of agency operations and service issues.

Also related to dissemination and utilization, one agency sought to develop ways for capturing the tacit

knowledge of a well-known and respected retiring chief financial officer. With expertise in several areas of service, the PHSO was concerned with the large gap that would be left without the resource of this senior manager's abundance of valuable practice wisdom and experience. Though the project required devotion of large amounts of time and energy, the agency devised several tools that may now be used online by future employees to utilize the senior manager's previously tacit knowledge (e.g., a video/audio slideshow of the director's training sessions, Power Point presentation slides, knowledge maps, process flow charts, and process narratives).

## Conclusion

The results from this cross-case analysis of 12 "works in progress" reveal that public human service organizations are pursuing unique and innovative ways to effectively and efficiently incorporate evidence into everyday practice and service provision. Agencies are also committed to and focused on developing their work environments into learning organizations, even amidst high stress conditions—as seen in the case examples evidencing several elements comprising an organizational learning environment. Moreover, the case examples depict ways to conceptualize the development of a knowledge sharing system for implementation in the context of daily practice. The concrete outcomes that agencies sought to achieve regarding the sharing and transfer of knowledge include: increasing transparency inside and outside the agency; learning from agency self-assessment; and increasing the dissemination and utilization of data and evidence. While only specific examples are highlighted in this analysis, all agencies are clearly engaged at some level in increasing transparency, learning from self-assessment, and strategically applying the benefits of capturing, disseminating, and utilizing knowledge. And despite increasing workloads and decreasing budgets, human service agencies are engaging in increasingly resourceful and innovative ways to effectively and efficiently utilize various forms of evidence to inform practice.

## IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

While there is a growing interest in developing organizational structures for sharing and transferring knowledge, it is less clear how to implement knowledge sharing in public human service organizations. These works in progress help to address this issue by illustrating intermediary outcomes that are helpful in building an infrastructure for promoting knowledge sharing and utilization at the system level.

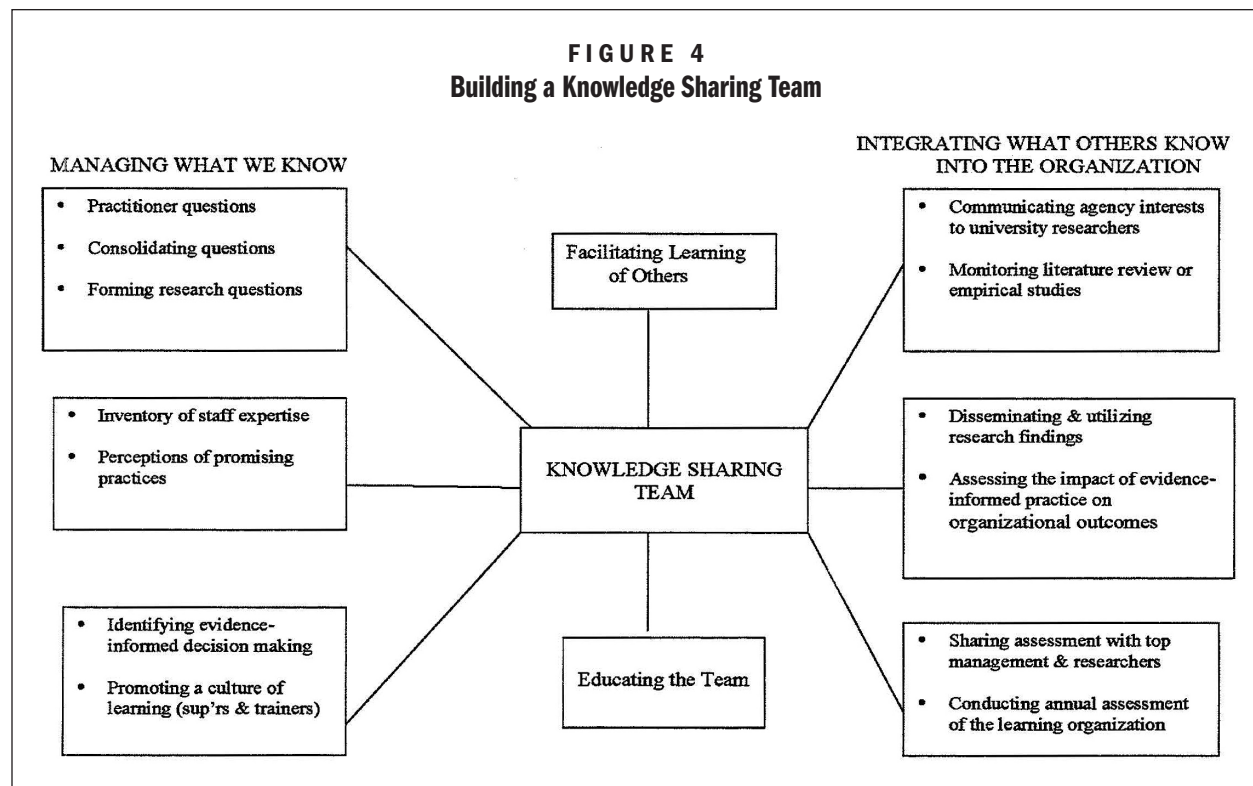
Many of these cases illustrate the creation of organizational supports for more open communication in order to increase transparency both within and across agency boundaries. Consistent with the principles of a learning organization, the organizational tools of self-assessment are being used to evaluate agency operations, strengths, and weaknesses to help management create greater effectiveness, and efficiency in working toward change. Finally, using technology to promote knowledge dissemination and utilization can encourage staff to remain informed so that they may, in turn, inform their daily practice when working with clients.

In many of these knowledge sharing cases, these intermediary outcomes were used to begin the process of building organizational supports for knowledge sharing. They involved senior managers who recognize the merits of creating a learning organization and supported the building of cross-departmental relationships in the form of knowledge sharing teams. These teams developed their own shared understanding of a learning organization, the mechanisms needed to foster shared learning, and the key elements of knowledge sharing. All these cases can serve as important examples for increasing our understanding of the knowledge sharing process of a learning organization.

## STRUCTURE AND PROCESSES OF A KNOWLEDGE SHARING TEAM

Based on an understanding of the learning organizations and the mechanisms of organizational learning, human service organizations can learn from this cross-case analysis and the related case studies if they have an internal structure to process this type of information. The simplest structure is a group of senior managers that can begin the process of knowledge sharing as a way of modeling the process, ultimately, for the entire organization. As noted in *Figure 4*, the structure and process features the processing of internal information (e.g., administrative data) and external information (e.g., research reports and/or descriptions of promising practices). The internal information is referred to as "what we know" since it is related to the explicit information in agency documents and the tacit knowledge held in the memory and experiences of staff. It also includes the compiling of an inventory of staff competencies as well as questions emerging from practice based on learning more about "what works" in other agencies. The external information relates to efforts by human service organizations to connect with local and regional universities in terms of linking faculty expertise to organizational priorities in the form of literature review and/or practice research.

**FIGURE 4**  
**Building a Knowledge Sharing Team**



In summary, the implications for practice that can be derived from this cross-case analysis of knowledge sharing cases include a reaffirmation of the importance of transforming human service organizations into learning organizations, the understanding of organizational learning and knowledge sharing, and developing the structures and processes to build an organization's knowledge sharing systems to support the use of evidence-informed practice.

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# Building Organizational Supports for Research-Minded Practitioners\*

MICHAEL J. AUSTIN, TERESA S. DAL SANTO, AND CHRIS LEE

### ABSTRACT

One of the biggest challenges facing human service organizations is the proliferation of information from inside and outside the agency that needs to be managed if it is to be of use. The concepts of tacit and explicit knowledge can inform an approach to this challenge. Tacit knowledge is stored in the minds of practitioners (often called practice wisdom) and the explicit knowledge is often found in organizational procedure manuals and educational and training materials. Building on this perspective, this analysis provides a preliminary definition of research-minded practitioners by explicating the elements of curiosity, critical reflection, and critical thinking. The organizational implications of developing a cadre of research-minded practitioners include the commitment of top management to support “link officers”, evidence request services, research and development units, and service standards. The challenges include the capacity to identify/support research-minded practitioners, promote an organizational culture of evidence-informed practice, redefine staff development and training, redefine job descriptions, and specify the nature of managerial leadership.

**KEYWORDS:** Research-minded practitioner, organizational support

### Introduction

In the process of building knowledge sharing systems in local, public sector social service organizations, it has become increasingly clear that more attention needs to be given to an array of organizational supports for practitioners as well as to the identification and nurturing of research-minded practitioners (Austin, Claassen, Vu, & Mizrahi, 2008). This analysis addresses this new challenge

for senior management by describing the emerging organizational context for evidence-informed practice, an evolving definition of the critical elements of a research-minded practitioner, a beginning framework for conceptualizing relevant organizational supports, and case examples of organizational supports provided by national organizations in the United Kingdom. It concludes with an emerging set of lessons learned and questions to guide practice and future research.

### ORGANIZATIONAL CONTEXT

In this age of service accountability in the United States and United Kingdom, increased attention is being given to measuring and assessing outcomes. This development has placed new pressures on managers and practitioners to specify service objectives and invest time and resources in measuring the outcomes of these objectives. The efforts to establish, expand, update, and refine information systems have been at the heart of this recent development. While there has been considerable investment in this type of managerial infrastructure, there has been much less attention

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Special thanks to the following UK colleagues who contributed immensely to the ideas in this article: **Dr. Mary Duffy** and her colleagues at Barnardo's (England, Northern Ireland, and Scotland), **Celia Atherton** and her colleagues at Research in Practice (Dartington), **Mike Fisher** and his colleagues at the Social Care Institute for Excellence (London), and **Jan Fook** and her colleagues at the University of Southampton.

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\* *Journal of Evidence-Based Social Work*, 9:3-18, 2012  
Copyright © Taylor & Francis (iroup, LLC)  
ISSN: 1543-3711 It print/ 1543-3722 online  
DOI: 10.1080/15433711.2012.615473



given to the presentation, dissemination, and utilization of the results coming out of these information systems. Monthly or quarterly reports on services have focused over time on outputs (e.g., how many clients served, etc.) and less on outcomes (e.g., level of change or improvement in client conditions). Even when outcome data is available, it is rarely presented in a form that practitioners can either understand or utilize to improve their practice.

At the same time that outcome measurement is being stressed, practitioners are being called upon to identify how evidence, either administrative data emerging from their agency information systems or evidence emerging from research centers, is being used to inform their practice. For some staff, the language of evidence-informed practice is viewed as another mandate from top management that needs to be accommodated. For others, the elements of evidence-informed practice have challenged them to look for new ways and promising practices that they might assess and incorporate into their own practice. In addition to these internal organizational dynamics, there is a growing interest (especially in the United Kingdom) to incorporate the voices of service users and carers into the process of promoting evidence-informed practice. All of these new developments are creating a new climate in which to reassess organizational-staff relations as well as organizational-client relations.

One of the biggest challenges facing human service organizations is the proliferation of information from inside and outside the agency that needs to be managed if it is to be of use. The for-profit sector has the most experience in the area of knowledge management, and the applications of this experience to the public sector is captured in the concept of knowledge sharing and knowledge transfer (Austin et al., 2008). The essential elements of knowledge sharing are the use of tacit and explicit knowledge; namely, the tacit knowledge stored in the minds of practitioners (often called practice wisdom) and the explicit knowledge reflected in organizational procedure manuals and the textbooks developed to prepare practitioners.

The concept of knowledge transfer relates to the substantial investment made by organizations in the on-the-job training of staff and the capacity to transfer new learning back to the workplace. Both of the processes of knowledge sharing and knowledge transfer rely upon the capacities of intermediary organizations (e.g., universities, institutes, consortia, etc.) or intermediary units within organizations (e.g., research, policy, evaluation staff, or link officers) to effectively disseminate knowledge and promote utilization (Anthony & Austin, 2008). In light of the challenges

presented by knowledge management, it is clear that very few of them can take place until human service organizations adopt the principles of a learning organization and reflect them in their mission, future directions, and practices modeled by senior management (Austin & Hopkins, 2004).

## DEFINING THE RESEARCH-MINDED PRACTITIONER

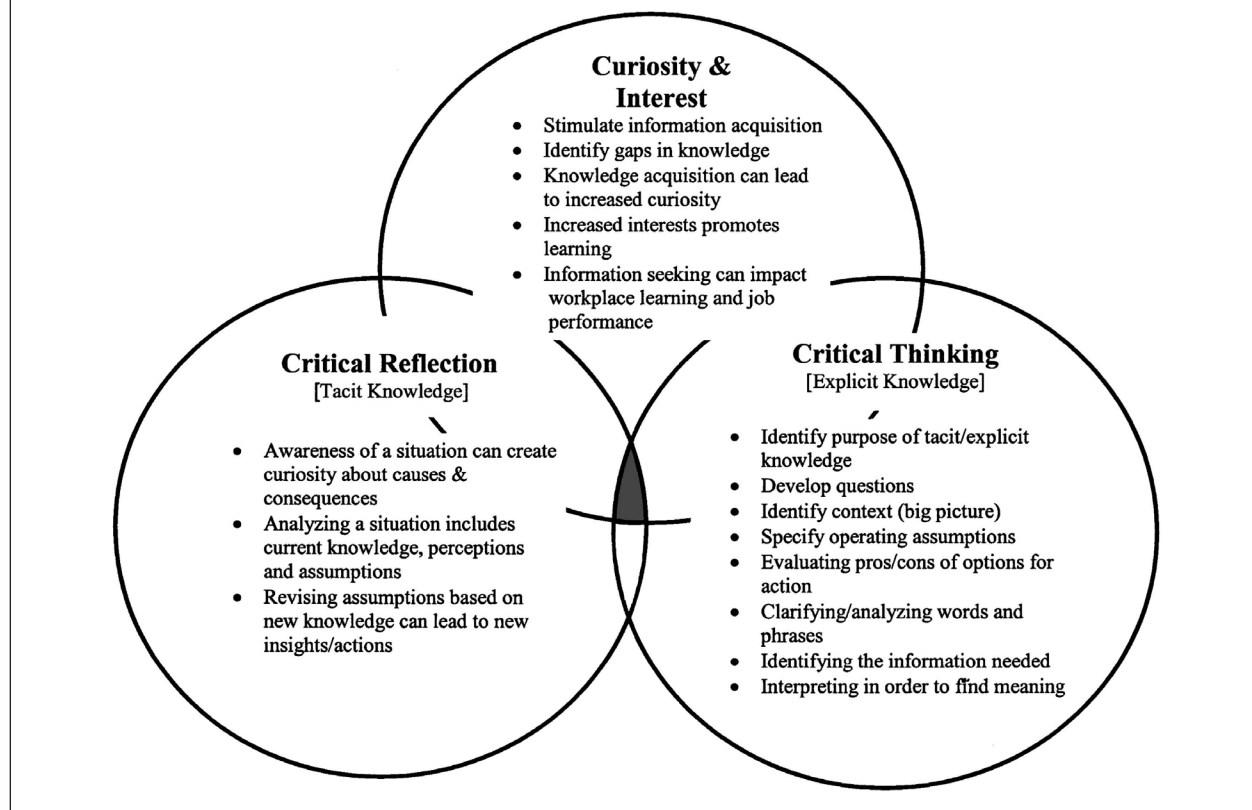
The definition of the research-minded practitioner depends on who does the defining. If educators do the defining, it usually focuses on becoming knowledgeable research consumers (sometimes referred to as appraisal training in the context of agency training programs) and/or becoming a beginning social science researcher. If practitioners do the defining, it often includes aspects of the following: (a) an essential practitioner attribute, (b) a capacity to critically reflect on practice to develop researchable questions, (c) a capacity to be informed by knowledge and research related to social work values, and (d) capacity to understand research designs and related methodologies in order to theorize about practice (Harrison & Humphreys, 1998).

The growth and support of a research-minded practitioner is often assumed to emerge as a result of attending research courses while pursuing professional education at the undergraduate and/or graduate level of a college or university where practitioners gain an overview of research methods and are encouraged to conduct research projects. However, given the fact that most research courses are taught without much attention to practice, many practitioners acquire either a limited appreciation of research or a negative perception of its relevance to practice. As a result, it often falls to the workplace and on-the-job learning experiences for practitioners to begin to value the use of data and see the value of research within an organizational practice context.

An example of a career trajectory of a research-minded practitioner is presented in *Appendix A*. There are several important processes buried within such a trajectory, one of which is *curiosity or interest* in finding explanations to practice dilemmas:

I increasingly found myself in a process of exploring research and thinking about methodological issues that were interesting, stimulating, and empowering . . . the movement from being concrete to identifying patterns that are informed by previous knowledge and theories were very enlightening . . . my mind had been opened up and I was seeing practice and service delivery in a new light . . .

**FIGURE 1**  
**Key Elements of the Research Minded**



Have a capacity to engage in *critical reflection* of one's practice also emerged as an important process:

My feeling is that this intellectual work, required for evidence-informed practice can be very challenging for practitioners as it requires time and support to reflect and make judgments. Perhaps most challenging, the process raises questions about what you are doing and why (this uncertainty, in the first instance, can be quite overwhelming but it is part of the learning process that many practitioners are not exposed to) . . .

In line with critically reflecting on one's practice, having a capacity to engage in *critical thinking* about available knowledge usually reflected explicitly in the research literature is another important process for research-minded practice:

Making the transition from viewing individual clients as unique to seeing common patterns in their behaviors and searching for similarities and differences and speculating on the reasons why these patterns occurred . . . I was questioning

pretty much everything and my efforts to challenge common practices probably threatened some of my colleagues . . . of course the relationship between evidence and practice is not straight forward and implementing research findings is most challenging.

These three elements are the focus of the next section, and examined further especially in relationship to facilitating research-informed practice (see *Figure 1*).

### Exploring Curiosity and Interest

Curiosity is an approach-oriented motivational state associated with asking questions, examining/manipulating interesting images/objects, reading exhaustively, and/or persisting on challenging tasks. The function of curiosity is to learn, explore, and immerse oneself in an interesting topic/event. Curiosity also serves a broader function of building knowledge and competence.

In the process of defining curiosity, Kashdan and Silvia (2009) note that curiosity can include the recognition, pursuit, and intense desire to explore novel, challenging, and uncertain events. It is an innate characteristic of humans

that varies in its level of intensity but is always present to some degree (Harvey, Novicevic, Leonard, & Payne, 2007). To truly appreciate the importance of curiosity in nearly every area of human activity, it is important to examine its fundamental attributes. According to Loewenstein (1994), curiosity is voluntary, intense, transient, immediate, stimulus-bound, and varying in satisfaction. It is caused when focusing on a gap in one's knowledge. Curiosity also can result from a motivation to increase one's competence related to mastering one's environment (Deci, 1975).

Over a century of psychological study has resulted in several different models of curiosity. Berlyne (1971 cited in Silvia, 2006, p. 33) proposed that new, complex, and surprising things activate a reward system related to exploring novel things (externally stimulated) and identified four approaches to understanding curiosity: (a) *epistemic curiosity* (desire for knowledge), (b) *perceptual curiosity* (aroused by novel stimuli), (c) *specific curiosity* (desire for a particular piece of information), and (d) *diverse curiosity* (general seeking of stimulation). In Berlyne's research he identified situations that aroused curiosity as complex, novel, uncertain, and conflict-laden (Berlyne, 1954a cited in Silvia, 2006, p. 180).

Curiosity and interest have also been placed within the category of knowledge emotions (Keltner & Shiota, 2003) that are associated with learning and thinking as well as the building of knowledge, skills, relationships, and wellbeing (Kashdan & Steger, 2007). By connecting curiosity to interests, an appraisal model of curiosity can help to explain why people don't find the same things interesting, why interest changes dynamically over time, and why feelings of curiosity vary in response to similar events.

Kashdan, Rose, and Fincham (2004) further elaborated on curiosity as a knowledge emotion, proposing that curiosity is a "positive emotional-motivational system associated with the recognitions, pursuit, self-regulation of novel and challenging opportunities" (p. 291). This personal growth model of curiosity differs from motivation or cognitive models in that it assumes that curiosity stems from a person's interest in self-development. In this more recent area of research, Litman and Jimerson (2004) have proposed that individual differences in curiosity can reflect either curiosity as a feeling of interest or as a frustration about not knowing something. As an emotional-motivational state, curiosity is complex in that its arousal can involve positive feelings of interest associated with the anticipation of learning something new, as well as relatively unpleasant feelings of uncertainty due to a lack of knowledge (Litman &

Jimerson, 2004). Curiosity is aroused by novel questions, complex ideas, ambiguous statements, and unsolved problems, all of which may point to a "gap" in one's knowledge and reveal a discrepancy between that which one knows and desires to know (Litman & Spielberg, 2003; Loewenstein, 1994). It has become increasingly clear that curiosity is influenced by both situation and disposition where situational interventions can stimulate a disposition to satisfy one's curiosity.

The model of situational and individual curiosity includes three types of curiosity: (a) individual interest is a *dispositional tendency* to be curious about a certain domain (individual differences in what people find interesting), (b) when someone with an individual interest encounters an activity relevant to the interest, *actualized interest* arises, and (c) curiosity is caused by external aspects of activities and objects that may involve complexity, novelty, uncertainty, conflict and/or inherently emotional content (Hidi, 1990; Hidi & Anderson, 1992, cited in Silvia, 2006, p. 184).

Loewenstein (1994) offers an intriguing theory of curiosity based on information theory. He proposes an information gap theory, which "views curiosity as arising when attention becomes focused on a gap in one's knowledge" (p. 86). Such information gaps produce the feeling of deprivation labeled curiosity. He notes, "The curious individual is motivated to obtain the missing information needed to reduce or eliminate the feelings of deprivation" (p. 87). Thereby, nurturing practitioners' curiosity may also facilitate the development of research-minded practice, with the following implications for the development of staff:

1. Curiosity requires a pre-existing knowledge base and the need to "prime the pump" to stimulate information acquisition in the initial absence of curiosity.
2. To stimulate curiosity, it is important to recognize/increase staff awareness of manageable gaps in their knowledge, helping staff "know what they don't know."
3. As staff gain knowledge in a particular area, they are not only likely to perceive gaps in their knowledge but those gaps will become smaller relative to what they already know. Staff members are likely to become progressively more curious about the topics that they know the most about.
4. The intriguing intersections of cognition and emotion suggest that interests promote learning (Schieffele, 1999; Son & Metcalf, 2000, cited in Silvia, 2006, p. 204).

5. Curiosity-induced behaviors such as information seeking can play a meaningful role in workplace learning as well as in job performance (Reio & Wiswell, 2000).

Ultimately, staff members who are curious are able to challenge their views of self, others, and the world around them as they seek out information, knowledge, and skills. This process can provide a pathway to the building of a meaningful work life that is supported by a focus on the present (mindful engagement, sense of meaningfulness) and the future (continuous search for meaning with minimal concern about obstacles).

### Critical Reflection

One of the specific contributions of workplace learning is the emphasis on informal and socially situated learning that focuses on the everyday ways that people learn within specific work situations (Argote, 2005 cited in Fook, 2008, p. 7). Hager (2004 cited in Fook, 2008, p. 8) argues that we need to view learning as a reflection process in which learners construct their learning in interaction with their environments. In this sense, reflection is more about the processes by which individuals think about their experience and learn about this in organizational context (Fook, 2008, p. 10). The process includes the recapturing, noticing, and re-evaluating of their experience and “to work with their experiences to turn it into learning” (Boud et al., 1993, p. 9 cited in Fook, 2008, p. 24).

Reflection refers broadly to the intellectual and emotional processes by which individuals change their thinking in order to make meaning of and thus learn from experience (Fook, 2008, p. 33). This may involve many different activities and processes and many different changes in different types of knowledge. Reflection, therefore, can take many different forms, and be enacted in many different ways. According to Fook (2008), learning from experience is not prompted by the existence of experience per se, but by the disquiet or discomfort that some experiences entail and reflection is the key element in response to this disquiet. For example, reflection more specifically refers to the notion of discrepancies between professional practice as enacted and the need to expose the tacit assumptions inherent in enacted practice to resolve the discrepancies. Reflective practice therefore involves the unearthing of implicit assumptions by professionals in their own work.

While critical reflection refers to general thinking processes to make meaning from experience, there are

several specific theories that differentiate those processes and changes. For example, “Transformative learning refers to the process by which we transform our taken-for-granted frames of reference . . . to make them more inclusive . . . and reflective as that they may generate beliefs and opinions that will prove more true or justified to take action” (Mezirow, 2000, pp. 7–8 cited in Fook, 2008, p. 35). Transformative learning is linked to critical reflection when it transforms “frames of reference within the scope of one’s awareness through critical reflection on assumptions” (Mezirow, 1998, p. 190 cited in Fook, 2008, p. 35).

By recognizing and allowing the expression of the disquieted or emotional elements of professional practice, critical reflection may provide invaluable support in sustaining workers in difficult or anxiety-producing work situations. It also may assist in managing some of the organizational dynamics which are driven by emotions. For example, by understanding how power works (implicitly and explicitly) in an organization, critical reflection may help workers gain a sense of their own power and see different ways in which to create organizational changes (Fook, 2008, p. 39). For instance, critical reflection may be used as a form of dialogue which “involves learning how to learn from one’s own experiences and learning how to learn from the experiences of others” (Schein, 1993, p. 82, cited in Fook, 2008, p. 40).

Critical reflection is a process which may be used to mine tacit knowledge and make tacit knowledge more assessable so it can be more organizationally acknowledged and changed. To quote Senge (1990, p. 12 cited in Fook, p. 40), “A learning organization is a place where people are continually discovering how they create their reality and how they can change it.” According to Fook (2008, p. 40) essential elements of the learning process involve critical reflection processes that involve cognitive, emotional, and action elements throughout, and some of the following: (a) initial discrepant experience; (b) examination of discrepancy with regard to both past experiences and cultural contexts; (c) re-examination of past experiences/interpretations; (d) reconstruction of past and present experiences in this light; and (e) testing the resulting interpretations (in action).

### STEPS IN THE CRITICAL REFLECTIONS PROCESS

The reflective process includes several different stages or levels. Williams (2001) identified the following key stages: (a) awareness of an event or situation that creates puzzlement, surprise, or discomfort, (b) an analysis of the situation leads to an examination of current knowledge, perceptions, and



assumptions, and (c) revised assumptions that lead to a new sense of balance.

**Step #1: Creating awareness.** Identifying the discomfort that some experiences entail is a key element of critical reflection. Reflective practice involves staff in exploring the implicit assumptions in their own work based on perceived discrepancies between a practitioner's beliefs, values, or assumptions and new information, knowledge, understanding, or insight. According to Stein (2000), the learning strategies designed to create awareness in individuals and work groups include dialogue journals (Kottkamp, 1990 and Meziro, 1990, both cited in Stein, 2000), diaries (Heath, 1998 and Orem, 1997, both cited in Stein, 2000), action learning groups (Williamson, 1997, cited in Stein, 2000), autobiographical stories (Brookfield, 1995, cited in Stein, 2000), and sketching (Willis, 1999, cited in Stein, 2000).

Three additional techniques often used in critical reflection include critical incidents, diaries, and small group processes. Critical incidents are used in teaching critical reflection (Hunt, 1996, cited in Stein, 2000) as a way to critically examine one's beliefs and (Newman, 2000) positive or negative experiences. Creating a safe and structured climate can increase the willingness to share difficult experiences (Haddock, 1997, cited in Stein, 2000). Diary keeping or journaling involves recording events and reactions to events for later reflection (Heath, 1998, Mackintosh, 1998, Orem, 1997, and Williamson, 1997, all cited in Stein, 2000). The limitations of this approach may include the lack of writing skills and expressive skills, or the inability to confront comfortable assumptions (Heath, 1998, Orem, 1997, and Wellington, 1996, all cited in Stein, 2000). Using a small group process to share experiences, personal insights, and ideas among practitioners is another reflective strategy to develop ways of improving professional practice (Graham, 1995, cited in Stein, 2000). Using the concept of "externalization," Nonaka and Takeuchi (1995, cited in van Woerkom, 2004) place reflection in a process of social interaction between individuals devoted to the development of new explicit knowledge out of tacit knowledge.

**Step #2: Analyses.** Questioning is an essential component of critical reflection that is needed to make explicit assumptions explicit and to validate underlying premises. Brookfield (1988, cited in Clark, 2008) identified four processes for analyzing critical reflections:

- Assumption analysis—activity engaged in to bring awareness of beliefs, values, cultural practices, and social structures that regulate behavior in order to assess their impact on daily activities (making explicit the "taken-for-granted" notions of reality).
- Contextual awareness—identify how assumptions are created within specific historical and cultural contexts.
- Imaginative speculation—opportunities to challenge prevailing ways of knowing and acting by imagining alternative ways of thinking.
- Reflective skepticism—represents the combination of assumption analysis, contextual awareness, and imaginative speculation needed to question claims of universal truths or unexamined patterns of interaction.

**Step #3: Action.** The primary outcome of critical reflection is an increased ability to reflect and act on newly formed knowledge understandings based on reconstructing experiences in the light of new interpretations or areas for further elaboration (Stein, 2000). At the individual level, critical reflection can increase a practitioner's understanding of the need for change, the complexity of personal or interpersonal dynamics, and the prospects for future action by:

- Identifying and constructing shared meanings from critical reflection experiences.
- Identifying and developing ways in which this shared meaning can be supported at the colleague, group, and organizational levels.
- Identifying new ways to make tacit knowledge more explicit in the form of new organizational processes that link organizational learning with the development of a culture of learning that is essential for the growth of learning organizations.

Critical reflection provides an opportunity for managers and practitioners to learn from their own experiences as well as the experiences of others. Critical reflection contributes to a learning organization where staff can continuously discover how they create reality and how they can change it. Engaging colleagues in critical reflection allow practitioners and managers to examine differing views from their own. Understanding the views of practitioners is essential for building the trust that is critical for developing the creative tension need to encourage learning.

- When it comes to organizational supports for critical reflection, it is clear that management needs to provide a safe space where practitioners/ managers have the freedom to build their understanding of how their own



experiences shape, and are shaped by, social conditions (Ecclestone, 1996, and Mackintosh, 1998, both cited in Stein, 2000). This process is based on the following assumptions:

- Power is both personal and organizational;
- Practitioners/managers participate in their own sense of being dominated;
- Organizational change is both personal and collective;
- Evidence is both empirical and constructed; and
- Dialogue and communication are essential in critical reflection.

In summary, with the appropriate organizational supports, the use of the steps in critical reflection (creating awareness, conducting analysis, and action) can lead to the following outcomes (Fook, 2008, p. 41):

- Increased understanding of the connections between individual and organizational identity (and ways of preserving individual integrity).
- Increased understanding of the need to acknowledge, express, and accept emotion in individual work and organizational dynamics, to both support workers and improve organizational processes and practices.
- Increased capacity to use an awareness of power (both personal and organizational) in helping staff to see different possibilities for change.
- Increased capacity to make sense of organizational issues.
- Increased capacity to “mine” the tacit knowledge (about both being and doing) related to individual and group/organizational practices in order to make these explicit and allow reformulation.

## Critical Thinking and Decision Making

Decision making is at the heart of social service practice (e.g., making and using client assessments for service planning and evaluation) (Gambrill, 2005). The quality of well-reasoned practice decisions depends precisely on the quality of the thought involved. If we want to think effectively, we need to understand the rudiments of a thought process (Elder & Paul, 2007). Several structures can be used to describe the critical thinking process. The eight-part structure developed by Elder and Paul (2007) is illustrated in *Figure 1* and the process explained as follows:

When we think, we think for a purpose within a point of view based on assumptions leading to implications and consequences. We use concepts, ideas, and theories to interpret data, facts

and experiences in order to answer questions, solve problems, and resolve issues. These elements are interrelated. If you change your purpose or agenda, you change your questions and problems. If you change your questions and problems, you are forced to seek new information and data. (2007, p. 5)

This eight-part structure (Elder and Paul, 2007) is used to outline the next sections and the outline is supplemented with material from Gambrill (2005 and 2006).

### IDENTIFY FUNDAMENTAL PURPOSE

Several questions can be used to help determine the fundamental purpose of the social services practice decision. What exactly is the issue or pattern of behaviors that you want to understand or what data or information have you received or want to receive? What context can be used to clarify the issue (program changes or big picture concerns related to connecting personal trouble to social issues)? What am I trying to accomplish?

### DEVELOP QUESTIONS

A key step in critical thinking is translating practice and policy issues or concerns into specific, answerable questions and stating them as clearly and precisely as you can (Gambrill, 2006, p. 287). Different kinds of questions illicit different types of information and require different forms of analysis. Examples of different types of questions include the following (Gibb, 2003 and Sackett et al., 1997 both cited in Gambill, 2006, p. 291): (a) For people recently exposed to a catastrophic event, what evidence exists to support brief psychological debriefing or doing nothing in order to avoid or minimize the likelihood of post-traumatic stress disorder? And (b) For adolescents in foster care, what is the evidence that early home visitation programs reduce the frequency of delinquency?

Experience may be a valuable source of ideas about what may be true, (Gambrill, 2006, p. 80). However, experience must be critically appraised using additional sources of information related to practice such as “what works, for what client, in what circumstances, and to what effect?” Are there other studies that support the findings? Do the findings apply across populations or only for certain populations? Also, some suggest that answerable questions need to be posed as part of critical thinking: (a) how can the population be described; (b) what interventions are relevant to address the need of the population; (c) how can the interventions be compared; and (d) what are the outcomes? (Sackett et al., 1997; 2000 as cited in Gambrill, 2005, p. 289). Gibbs

(2003 cited in Gambrill 2005, p. 289) referred to these as COPEs questions because they are client-oriented, have practical importance, can be used to search the literature, and can be used to identify outcomes.

### POINT OF VIEW

Critical thinking includes the search for the big picture to identify and make explicit underlying or opposing points of view (Gambrill, 2006, p. 30). In everyday practice, it is often easy to forget about economic, political, and social context in which personal and social problems are defined (Gambrill, 2006, p. 31). Therefore, when thinking critically, it is important to clarify the influence of values and standards used in decision making. Values can be defined as the social principles, goals, or standards held by an individual, group, or society. Values reflect preferences regarding certain goals and how to attain them. They are used to support decisions at many different levels (Gambrill, 2006).

Problems are often socially constructed and defined differently at different times and receive more or less attention (Gambrill, 2006). In addition, resources available to address personal and social problems are related to larger structural variables (Gambrill, 2006). There are many organizational factors that influence a practitioner's decisions (e.g., large caseloads, lack of clear policy concerning priorities, contradictory demands from diverse sources, availability of resources, social and time pressures, perceived value of task, goals pursued, access to information, and agency culture) (Gambrill, 2006).

### OPERATING ASSUMPTIONS

An assumption is an assertion that we either believe to be true in spite of a lack of evidence of its truth or are willing to accept as true for purposes of debate or discussion (Gambrill, 2006). A recommended question for checking for assumptions is—What am I taking for granted?

Identification of bias is central to critically appraising the quality of research and decision making. Bias is a systematic “leaning to one side” that distorts the accuracy of thinking. For example, we tend to seek and overweigh evidence that supports our beliefs and ignore and under weigh contrary evidence (Nickerson, 1998 cited in Gambrill, 2006, p. 227) (i.e., we try to justify or confirm assumptions rather than to question them).

Oversimplifications can be based on biases about certain groups, individuals, or behaviors that influence our judgments (Gambrill, 2006). Generalizations influence what we do and what we believe. They are quick and easy and we do not have to think about all the ways in which a

client, for example, may not fit pre-conceptions. However, if the degree of variability is underestimated, a chance is lost to identify clues about what a person is like or may do in certain situations. If we search only for evidence that supports a stereotype, we may miss more accurate alternative accounts (Gambrill, 2006).

### IMPLICATIONS AND CONSEQUENCES

Different ways of defining problems have different consequences. Critical thinking requires an *evaluation of options*, taking into account the advantages and disadvantages of possible decisions before acting. What consequences are likely to follow from this or that decision?

### ESSENTIAL CONCEPTS

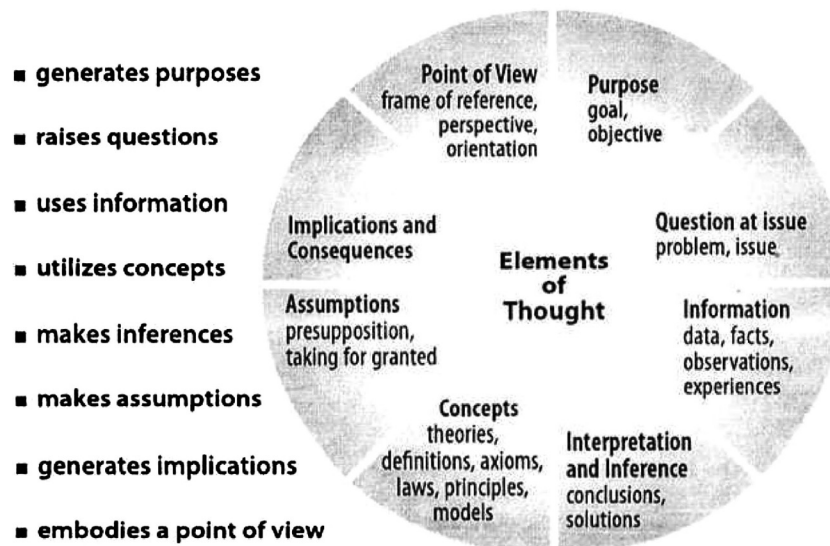
Gambrill (2006) points out the importance of clarifying and analyzing the meanings of words and phrases. Practitioners use words to describe people and events, to describe relationships between behavior and events and to express evaluations, and language is used in posing and “thinking” about practice questions (p. 123). Language may compromise the quality of decisions through (a) carelessness, (b) lack of skill in writing and thinking, and (c) deliberate intent. Some common errors in clarifying and analyzing the meaning of words and phrases, include: (a) incorrectly applying labels, (b) assuming that a word has one meaning when words have different meanings in different contexts, and (c) using vague terms (p. 131). If terms are not clarified, different meanings may be derived.

### WHAT INFORMATION IS NEEDED?

Observation is always selective and is influenced by our theories and related concepts. We are influenced by our own evolutionary history in how we see and react to the world as well as by the culture in which we have grown up. According to Gambrill (2006), we see what we expect to see. Therefore, we need to collect information carefully by asking such questions as:

- What data is most helpful in making evidence-informed decisions?
- How can such data be obtained?
- When has enough information been collected?
- How should contradictory data be handled?
- What criteria should be used to check the accuracy of data?
- How can inaccurate and incomplete accounts be avoided?
- Does the measure reflect the characteristic it is supposed to measure? (Gambrill 2006, p. 466)

**FIGURE 2**  
**Eight Basic Structures of Critical Thinking (Elder & Paul, 2007)**



### WHAT DOES IT MEAN? INTERPRETATION AND INFERENCE

Basic to deriving meaning is the critical discussion and testing of theories (eliminating errors through criticism). What is called scientific objectivity is simply the fact that no scientific theory is accepted as dogma, and that all theories are tentative and are continuously open to rational, critical discussion aimed at the elimination of errors (Popper, 1994, p. 160; cited in Gambrill, 2006, p. 103). Scientists are often wrong and find out that they are wrong by testing their predictions. In this way, better theories (those that can account for more findings) replace earlier ones. Unexamined speculation may result in acceptance of incomplete or incorrect accounts of problems. Untested speculation can get in the way of translating problems into outcomes that, if achieved, would resolve problems (Gambrill, 2006). The kinds of inferences questioned in an evidence-informed assessment include the following: (a) frequency of a problem, (b) contextual factors, (c) accuracy of assessment measures, and (d) accuracy of different practice frameworks.

Additional analytic techniques that are used in critical thinking include: (a) identifying significant similarities and differences, (b) recognizing contradictions and inconsistencies, and (c) analyzing and evaluating arguments, interpretations, beliefs, or theories. Evaluating an argument is a classic critical thinking technique to understand a problem. An argument is a group of statements one or more of which (the premises) support or provide evidence for

another (conclusion). An argument is aimed at suggesting the truth (or demonstrating the falsity) of a claim. A good argument offers reasons and evidence so that other people can make up their own minds. Argument is an essential form of inquiry. It provides a way to evaluate the accuracy of different views. Steps to analyze an incomplete argument include the following from (Nicerkson, 1986a, p. 87 cited in Gambrill, p. 74).

1. Identify the conclusion or key assertion,
2. List all the other explicit assertions that make up the argument as given,
3. Add any unstated assertions that are necessary to make the argument complete (Put them in parentheses to distinguish them from assertions that are explicit in the argument as given),
4. Order the premises (or supporting assertions) and conclusion (or key assertion) so as to show the structure of the argument.

In summary, critical thinking involves the careful examination and evaluation of beliefs, arguments, and actions by considering alternative views to arrive at well-reasoned decisions, for example, “paying attention to the process of how we think, not just the outcome” (Gambrill, 2005, p. 253).

In an effort to integrate all three elements of a research-minded practitioner, *Figure 2* summarizes the elements and provides the conceptual foundation for the construction of training and course curricula.

## Defining Organizational Support

The traditional forms of organizational supports are usually located in a range of professional development activities for practitioners. They include taking an educational leave to complete a degree program or a more timelimited certificate to workplace related activities that include learning from a performance evaluation, participating in induction or specialized training, effective supervision, and/or given a special assignment that involves new learning.

The newer forms of organizational support can be found in an array of examples from the United Kingdom where the implementation of evidence-informed practice has had a longer lifespan. The examples noted in this section include the role of top management, the use of link officers, the use of an evidence request service, the use of agency-based research and development units, the role of service standards (and accreditation), and the sharing/learning from other organizations.

### COMMITMENT OF TOP MANAGEMENT

Since the design and management of organizational support systems are often the responsibility of senior management, it is logical to start with the role of top management in supporting evidence-informed practice. According to Research in Practice (2006) in their publication entitled *Firm Foundations: A Practical Guide to Organizational Support for the Use of Evidence-informed Practice* (see Attachment 1 for abridged version), organizational support includes: (a) giving strategic leadership, (b) setting expectations, (c) supporting local research, (d) improving access to research, and (e) encourage learning from research. Setting directions and expectations involves bringing together and consulting with any staff interested in evidence-informed practice, often led by one or more senior staff members who can demonstrate how evidence-informed practice can be linked to both planning and review processes.

A second dimension of organizational support involves increasing staff competence related to evidence-informed practice through training and ongoing support. The support could include outcome measurement, opportunities to use data-based websites, leading focus groups with service users, and involving student interns. The roles of senior management related to research (modeling critical thinking, incorporating evidence into agency documents, and maintaining research partnerships with universities, institutes, and consultants) are identified in *Appendix B*.

Another approach for senior management is to identify the role of evidence-informed practice in the organization's mission statement. For example, Barnardo's in the United

Kingdom has developed the following component for their agency's mission statement related to:

- Improving outcomes for children based evidence-informed decision-making: Service development and design are driven by evidence drawn from performance evaluation data derived from existing services and/or external research evidence.
- Practice decisions are based on the best available evidence (external research, views of service users, government service audits, program evaluations, and expertise of managers and practitioners).
- Practice is monitored, evaluated, and performance data generated to ensure that intended outcomes are being achieved and not causing harm.
- If staff is unsure about the effectiveness of an approach or intervention, pilot efforts are evaluated before full scale implementation.

While there are multiple staff barriers to achieving this mission (e.g., work pressures and lack of time, lack of research knowledge, lack of practical supports and resources, relevance of current research to practice, etc.), it is also recognized that senior management can help to address these barriers by:

- Demonstrating a clear commitment to the mission,
- Investing organizational resources in staff training and senior staff facilitation as well as Internet access,
- Build evidence-informed practice into ongoing organizational processes (e.g., supervision, team meetings, reading opportunities, Internet searching, etc.),
- Increasing communications devoted to sharing practice knowledge up and down as well as across the organization,
- Managing and sharing in-house (administrative) data and ensuring that information reaches the people who need it,
- Using evidence to inform (influence) public policy,
- Modeling reflective practice as an organizational norm by creating a learning organization that values curiosity, inquiry, and life-long learning, and
- Supporting communities of practice that bring practitioners in similar areas together on a regular basis to work on similar issues and share resources.

### LINK OFFICERS

Another approach to creating organizational support for evidence-informed practice features the role and functions of staff members who serve as Link Officers (Research in Practice, 2006). The role can be carried out by a staff



member or a group of staff working as part of a knowledge sharing team. While each organization can shape the role to meet its own needs, the link officer role often includes one or more of the following:

- Fostering relationships between agency and research organizations (e.g., universities),
- Helping staff use service evaluation research to improve services and outcomes,
- Identifying opportunities for special projects and partnerships,
- Contributing to the integration of evidence-informed practice in the agency,
- Participating in multi-county knowledge sharing projects when they benefit the agency,
- Coordinating learning events, disseminating materials, and encouraging the use of relevant websites.

The implementation of the link officer concept can include a wide variety of activities. If the role is shared with a group of key managers, it could include monthly meetings that involve: (a) sharing external reports with specific staff along with an overview of key findings and possible relevance for practice, (b) assessing the transfer of learning from various learning events, (c) sharing information on agency intranet site, (d) coordinating student research projects by including relevant staff members, (e) assisting staff with the conduct of small evaluation projects, (f) supporting staff with the presentation of in-house or outside research at staff meetings, (g) promoting research collaboration with local universities, (h) fostering greater service user involvement in evaluating services, (i) including content on evidence-informed practice in staff induction programs, and (j) promoting more staff training related to becoming a more research-minded practitioner.

### EVIDENCE REQUEST SERVICE

While senior management often has access to analysts or evaluators who have the skills and resources to engage in quick literature searches, this is often not the case for middle-management and line staff. It is clear that the research interests of top management are often different than those of line staff. As a result, the search for evidence is different. Senior management tends to focus more on the issues facing populations being serviced (e.g., why are there so many children of color entering the child welfare system) while line staff tend to be more interested in learning about interventions or “what works” with specific types of clients.

One approach to address this dilemma is the development of an Evidence Request Service (ERS) by Barnardo's

in the United Kingdom. Building upon the publications from a nationally funded project (What Works for Children, Economic and Social Research Council, 2001–2005), the ERS was launched in 2004 to improve staff access to relevant and reliable research evidence and to increase the use of research evidence in service planning and delivery. Based on specific requests from staff that are refined for data-based searching, the ERS operation (one full time researcher and an assistant) informs staff to existing research and information inside and outside the organization through the use of a comprehensive online search for the most rigorous and relevant research related to the topic under investigation. Staff members are then provided with a clear and easy-to-read summary (3–5 pages) that identifies some preliminary implications so that staff can meet to develop their own implications for practice. With a sufficiently refined search topic, the literature review summaries can be produced in up to eight weeks (at an average cost of \$350 and an average time of 10.3 hours based on an hourly rate of \$35 for skilled electronic database searcher, without costs associated with managing this service).

Some of the topics researched in the first several years of operation included:

- What is the best way to involve young fathers with children on the child protection register?
- What are the best counseling interventions for sexually abused children?
- What are the effects of abuse and neglect on brain functioning and cognitive development?
- What are the risk factors associated with sibling sexual abuse?
- What works with children of parents who abuse substances?
- What works in emergency and short-term foster placements?

### RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT UNIT

One of the most innovative forms of organizational support can be found in the local public social service agency in Helsinki, Finland. When staff members were unable to find relevant research related to their practice concerns, they needed a venue for engaging in small scale studies to build their own foundation for evidence-informed practice. When staff defined the research questions (in contrast to those developed by academics, policy analysts, and/or senior management), a form of practice research was begun and needed a place to thrive. When the Helsinki department established an agency-based Practice Research & Development Unit



(R&D), it was created to help staff explore client and service delivery issues emerging from their practice.

The R&D Unit has several unique operating features: (a) staff can submit a plan for conducting a piece of exploratory research, provided that it relates to the strategic directions of the department, (b) if the topic is selected, they can be re-assigned to the R&D Unit for a period of time (a year or more) along with a small number of other staff working on different topics, (c) staff are supervised by a part-time researcher from the faculty of a local university social work department who rotate through the unit for a period of time (a year or more), (d) most approved research projects include multiple perspectives (staff, administration, service users, and faculty researchers), and (e) the research process includes weekly case presentations (internal staff or external experts), weekly journal clubs, involvement of students currently placed in the agency, and annual senior staff presentations. The outcomes of the R&D Unit include:

- Expanded number of research-minded practitioners,
- Increased faculty involvement in practice research,
- Increased agency capacity to identify and disseminate promising practices,
- Increased agency capacity to focus on service outcomes and improve service effectiveness,
- Increased opportunity to elicit service user perspectives,
- Expanded venue for agency–university collaborative research, and
- Enhanced in-house think tank capacity to engage in policy-relevant research.

## SERVICE STANDARDS

As noted earlier, one of the strongest rationales for providing organizational support for evidence-informed practice can be found in the current pressure on social service agencies for increased accountability in the form of measuring outcomes. These new pressures often require a change in the culture of an organization that has been more concerned with serving as many clients as possible than with measuring service outcomes. As a result, senior management often finds itself searching for tools to use in communicating the importance of outcomes with staff. However, Research in Practice (UK) has developed a promising communications tool called Performance Pointers.

These publications are designed for dissemination to staff and combine the following critical ingredients of outcome assessment:

- A full explanation of a service standard in terms of its policy origins and rationale (e.g., stability of placements of foster children in terms of number of moves

related to: (a) increasing choice of placements, (b) developing/supporting foster carers, (c) using multi-disciplinary treatments, (d) stabilizing placements of older children, and (e) stabilizing residential care);

- A synthesis of relevant research (selected, not comprehensive);
- An identification of promising practices related to the service standard (selected, not comprehensive);
- An identification of key questions for staff to explore in staff meetings; and
- A selected list of references for further inquiry.

## Lessons Learned: Implications for Practice

### IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE: IDENTIFYING THE RESEARCH-MINDED PRACTITIONER

This analysis provides an opportunity to explore the processes needed to identify research-minded practitioners and the types of organizational supports needed to promote evidence-informed practice. As noted in *Figure 2*, the activities of a research-minded practitioner might include: the search for promising practices (curiosity) to address practice dilemmas, integrating critical reflection into one's daily practice, and regularly engaging in critical thinking about the available knowledge and research related to one's practice. One of the first steps toward identifying research-minded practitioners and enhancing their professional development may include consulting with staff to locate practitioners who display considerable curiosity about the services provided, critically reflect on their practice, and critically think about the impact of research on their practice. Supervisors and administrators are often in a position to identify critically thinking practitioners who use organizational data and knowledge to inform their practice as well as request or seek out specific research to increase their understanding of specific practice questions.

Conversely, senior level administrators may find less interest in research-mindedness where practitioners are resistant to learning how to use data, reading reports, or seeking out practice relevant research. It may be that the previous attempts of staff members to pursue their curiosities and interests were met with organizational challenges and barriers. In a similar way, the tools being used to convey knowledge and research may be incomprehensible and confusing for practitioners (e.g., complicated graphs and reports with little clarification).

Supporting research-minded practitioners, once identified, often requires the development of organizational supports to promote evidence-informed practice. These

include focusing on staff and career development, revising job definitions to include research learning, incorporating evidence into ongoing managerial decision-making, and creating a culture of curiosity. Developing a culture of curiosity within human service organizations may help bridge the link between organizational supports and nurturing the growth of research-minded practitioners.

### ORGANIZATIONAL SUPPORTS PROMOTING EVIDENCE-INFORMED PRACTICE

**Culture of curiosity.** The organizational culture of curiosity can be described in terms of goals, processes, and supports. The goals of such a culture could include efforts to create an organizational climate where there is room to be creative, where it is safe to question decisions and those in authority, and where there is a consistent message about pursuing new or better ways of doing business. The processes that would need to be visible in an organizational culture of curiosity include: (a) creating a sense of wonder about how things might be done better, (b) encouraging staff to ask why and to value the pursuit of more information, (c) encouraging the search for input from others at all levels of the organizations, and (d) clarifying boundaries for question-raising related to the rationale for work procedures and/or ways to improve them as they might relate to client outcomes. And finally, the organizational supports for a culture of curiosity might include: (a) increased recognition for those who develop new approaches, (b) encouragement of those who innovate by acknowledging their contributions, (c) increased attention to opening doors for staff to pursue ideas, and (d) providing resources for staff to search for alternatives and thereby cultivate individual and situational sources of curiosity.

**Staff development and career development.** The second crossover area between the research-minded practitioner and organizational supports relates to staff development in the form of learning/training events and career development in the form of project-based learning as noted in *Appendix A*. At least three core skills are needed to promote evidence-informed practice in an organizational environment of outcome assessment: (a) cultivating curiosity, (b) critical reflection, and (c) critical thinking. These three competency areas need to be reflected in all training programs and project learning opportunities, irrespective of their content.

Three primary connections need to be made in order to incorporate these areas into all practice learning opportunities. The first connection is between the *tacit knowledge*

(stored in the head/experiences of all staff) and *the capacity to critically reflect on their practice*. Critical reflection capacities grow over time if they are nurtured and supported by peers, supervisors, and managers as part of life-long learning. The second connection is between explicit knowledge and critical thinking. Analyzing new social policies or recent research articles/reports involves critical thinking skills that are needed for evidence-informed practice. While it is often assumed that these critical thinking skills are acquired in undergraduate and graduate programs, it is not clear that these skills are well developed and/or effectively transferred to the workplace. For many staff members, years of experience with trial and error efforts have contributed to their own skill development in critical thinking.

The third connection that needs far more attention in the workplace as well as on campus involves *the interrelationship between practice skills and research skills*. Until staff and students fully recognize that engaging in practice is a form of research, it will be difficult to make this connection apparent to all. It means that practice and research need to be taught as two sides of the same coin and integrated on campus and in field work education. For example, efforts to assess client outcomes need to be integrated into all phases of case management practice. The challenges associated with this level of integration are beyond the scope of this analysis but call for considerable dialogue and creativity, especially since very few current training curricula, course outlines, or textbooks reflect this integration.

**Job redefinition and research learning.** In addition to the focus on a culture of curiosity, there are many implications for prioritizing organizational supports. For example, in the area of job descriptions, it is necessary to expand the definition of practice performed by line staff from worker–client facilitator and worker–supervisor facilitator to new collaborator roles “worker–evaluator” and “worker–policy analyst.” The scope of practice needs to include the evaluator/researcher role as well as the policy practice role in order to help staff connect what they see in their caseloads with the broad policy dialogue about how policies need to be changed, enhanced, or created (Harris, Scott, & Skidmore, 2009). While some have noted that these multiple roles are part and parcel of generalist practice, they have rarely been integrated for students on campus or called for in agency practice.

Both agency senior management and university educators need to be able to articulate the theories of change that underlie practice and demonstrate how logic modeling

**TABLE 1**  
**Systems of Organizational Support for Evidence-informed Practice**

	<b>Practice wisdom (tacit knowledge)</b>	<b>Published research (explicit knowledge)</b>
Evidence requesting	Survey promising practices	Search existing literature
Evidence linking	Convening staff to share	Routing and discussing relevant sources/citations
Evidence generating	Critical reflection for research questions	In-house research and development units (R&D)
Evidence monitoring	Case record review, case conferencing, and administrative after-action reviews	Administrative data and reports linked to national service standards

can inform research on practice. In addition to educating knowledgeable research consumers on campus and in the agencies, practitioners need to be equipped and supported in the conduct of exploratory pilot studies of practice issues. This often requires an in-house research and development capability. In a similar way, senior management needs to find ways to support the career trajectories of their most research-minded practitioners through in-house research opportunities and outside learning opportunities at universities and elsewhere.

**Managerial leadership and organizational support mechanisms.** Organizational supports for evidence-informed practice need to be mainstreamed into ongoing managerial decision making (Reynolds, 1998). As noted in *Table 1*, systems of organizational support need to be built in the four areas of evidence requesting, evidence linking, evidence generating, and evidence monitoring. Each of these can be described in terms of their relationship to tacit knowledge (practice wisdom) and explicit knowledge (published research).

First, evidence requesting involves the capacity to continuously scan the local, regional, national, and international environment for promising practice related to human service delivery. The same scanning is needed in the area of explicit knowledge through in-house and national databases, most frequently aided by experts in the field and on campuses. Second, evidence linking involves continuous efforts to convene staff to share in relationship to curiosity (e.g., raising questions), critical reflection (e.g., recent practice experiences), and critical thinking (e.g., issues raised in a Journal Club) as well as to learn from each other by the sharing of tacit knowledge and related practice wisdom. From the perspective of explicit knowledge, systems need to be created by senior management to enhance the routing,

sharing, and discussing of relevant research publications, policy analyses, and other citations. Third, the process of evidence generating involves efforts to support the translation of critical reflection questions emerging from staff into research questions to be addressed inside or outside the organization. In addition, the explicit knowledge generated by senior staff in the form of administrative data needs to be effectively disseminated in a form that all levels of staff can understand and ultimately utilize as part of service delivery decision making. Densely filled tables of numbers with little attention to the principles of effective dissemination and utilization are no longer effective evidence sharing activities.

Finally, the fourth dimension of organizational supports relates to evidence monitoring. The tacit knowledge dimensions of monitoring can be found in the processes of case record review, case conferencing, and after-action reviews where the tacit knowledge of staff can be shared, organized, and disseminated for future decision-making.

It is clear that developing a culture of curiosity involves special attention to staff/career development, job redefinition and research learning, and managerial leadership related to organizational support mechanisms. There are many challenges facing research-minded practitioners and senior managers engaged in creating organizational supports for evidence-informed practice. However, the opportunities to transform human service organizations into learning organizations that engage in data-based decision making at all levels are unlimited.

## Conclusion

Evidence-informed practice continues to gain momentum as a framework for linking research and practice in human service organizations. Despite consistent offerings of research courses while preparing future social work practitioners during graduate school supplemented with much

attention to evidence-based and evidence-informed practice in the field, integration of data and research into daily practice remains an elusive goal for human service organizations. Delving further into the mechanisms that may be influencing the integration (or lack) of evidence in practice, it is clear that many factors come into play. By nurturing aspects of curiosity, critical reflection, and critical thinking in front-line practitioners, those that are responsible for implementing evidence-informed practice may be more capable of seeking out, consuming, and applying the knowledge needed to support evidence-informed practice with clients. Simultaneously, putting in place organizational supports that promote the pursuit and application of information and knowledge is also needed for the research-minded practitioner to succeed. With administrators and managers leading the way, working to develop a culture of curiosity within their organizations, research-mindedness and evidence-informed practice can become the new norm needed to promote excellence in human service organizations.

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## APPENDIX A

### A Case Example of Organizational Career Development Supports for On-the-Job Continuing Professional Education\*

1. Learning on the job following completion of professional education
  - Learning from other professionals through case conferences
  - Learning from a supervisor who encourages practitioners to be reflective about one's practice in order to identify future learning needs
  - Being given assistance in making conscious the impact of one's professional knowledge and practice experience on service users
  - Learning from other members of a service team
  - Being made aware of learning opportunities, formal and informal, that could be pursued or self-directed
2. Working in an organization that fosters learning by
  - Scheduling weekly staff development events in the form of an afternoon journal club, case discussion, in-house learning event, research presentation
  - Promoting links with local university research centers
  - Using case scenarios that simulate real cases and provide staff a safe place to unpack the service issues
  - Receiving special assignments to develop a program and search out resources electronically and through networks (small-scale literature reviews)
  - Receiving support for conducting a needs assessment related to a client population or participate in a program evaluation
  - Given opportunities to consult with researchers to find resources related to a client population
3. Providing support for pursuing further education (certificate or degree programs)
  - For example: "We were encouraged and coached to apply for a study fellowship through contacts with an academic researcher. I considered it because it was an exciting opportunity to work with researchers on a practice problem that I felt was important to our clients and for the opportunity to design a service that facilitated better client outcomes. Intellectually it was a huge opportunity and challenge as I increasingly found myself in a process of exploring research and thinking about methodological issues that were interesting, stimulating and empowering. I think it is interesting to reflect back on the links between my own intellectual curiosity, my practice concerns, the need for service design, my previous work experience, and exposure to critical and reflective thinking and the supportive organizational systems and structures. I'm not sure that if any of these elements were missing whether or not I would have found my way into the research arena. It was a very non-linear process that included a mix of several facilitative factors."
  - Reviewing literature fosters increased opportunities to reflect on one's own practice
  - The process of analyzing data in which one moves from concrete description to analysis of aggregated data can be challenging and provide for much learning
  - Making the transition from viewing individual clients as unique to seeing common patterns in their behaviors and searching for similarities and differences and speculating on the reasons why these patterns occurred.
  - For example: "This movement from the individual to the collective and the movement from being concrete

\*Developed with the assistance of Dr. Rhoda MacRae, Institute for Research and Innovation in Social Services, Dundee, Scotland



to identifying patterns that are informed by previous knowledge and theories were very enlightening. My feeling is that this intellectual work, required for evidence-informed practice can be very challenging for practitioners as it requires time and support to reflect and make judgments. Perhaps most challenging, the process raises questions about what you are doing and why (this uncertainty, in the first instance, can be quite overwhelming but it is part of the learning process that many practitioners are not exposed to)."

- Pursuing doctoral education does not mean a commitment to an academic career when there are numerous opportunities in an agency to promote evidence-informed practice
- For example: "I was totally inspired by my academic supervisor but I never for a moment thought I would be able intellectually, practically or financially pursue a PhD. The issues of confidence and identity were pertinent here. In my mind at the time, someone who pursued a PhD was clever, had done well at the university, and was a good student prior to university enrollment. When I got the "research bug," my mind had been opened up and I was seeing practice and service delivery in a new light. I was

questioning pretty much everything and my efforts to challenge common practices probably threatened some of my colleagues. I wanted my work to impact on practice—directly and immediately—but of course the relationship between evidence and practice is not straight forward and implementing research findings is most challenging."

- For example: "After my PhD, which I found to be the most stimulating and challenging of processes, I was driven to undertake research that had a relevance to and currency with practice. I took a job as a researcher in a social work research centre and worked there for 4 years as a contract researcher. However it continued to frustrate me that not enough of the research focused on practice. So when this position came up I saw it as an opportunity to promote evidence-informed practice at strategic and operational levels by encouraging government to fund practitioners and managers to use research in a way that benefits their services and service users as well as expanding the use of technologies to increase access to knowledge and working with managers to see the value in it."

## APPENDIX B

### Role of Senior Management in Promoting Evidence-informed Practice (EiP)—Barnardo's Northern Ireland

1. Supporting and enabling critical thinking about practice and applying evidence to improve services for users
  - Exercises in critical thinking built into EiP training related to Research in Practice materials and searching electronic databases
  - Working with staff to define models of service user assessment and engagement
  - Evaluating services using surveys and focus groups of service users and service referral sources
  - Helping staff use appropriate research methods in evaluating service outcomes
  - Sharing logic modeling with staff
2. Generating and sharing evidence
  - Encouraging staff to write-up and share their evaluation results at conferences and online
  - Help staff prepare briefings for senior management and other staff
  - Encourage staff to participate in larger, multi-country studies
3. Modeling appropriate behaviors
  - Making sure that evidence is incorporated in annual reports, business plans, communication tools, and communications with funders
4. Creating strategic partnerships
  - Maintain relationships with other EiP organizations
  - Maintain university partnerships

## APPENDIX C

### FIRM FOUNDATIONS

# A Practical Guide to Organizational Support for the Use of Research Evidence\*

## I. USING RESEARCH EVIDENCE

### *What do we mean by research evidence?*

Although few people would dispute that decision-making should be informed by the best available research evidence, there is still vigorous debate about what constitutes credible and robust research in the social science context. There has been much debate about the validity of different research methods—for example, the relative merits of studies based on experimental designs to determine the effect of an intervention (such as randomized control trials) versus studies using qualitative methods (concerned with people's experiences and opinions). It depends on the question you are seeking to answer as to which is the most valid or appropriate research method. But just as important as an appropriate research design is that the research has been soundly conducted so that the results are reliable.

### *How should research be used?*

Research can be used in individual cases to inform the assessment or planning of services for children, young people and their families. It can also be used more strategically to inform policy, procedures and service developments. The ways in which research is used can be challenging because:

- The nature of research in social care is that it is often more about increasing background understanding, giving insights into the nature of problems, changing attitudes and beliefs, and generating ideas, rather than prescribing action. Child welfare research rarely provides strong, directive evidence or definitive answers that signpost what to do.
- Research findings cannot just simply be taken at face value and applied to any situation. Messages must be assessed for their relevance and transferability to the local context and circumstances (which might be a complex family situation with ill-defined, contradictory or competing goals and multiple stakeholders).
- Practitioners are not passive recipients of research. They have to make sense of research by reconstructing or synthesizing it with other sources of knowledge (such as professional experience and the views of service users).
- Research must also be melded with other (sometimes conflicting) factors that influence decisions about the way forward (such as the resources available or the risks involved).

According to Brechin and Sidell (2000), social care practitioners are likely to draw on 'different ways of knowing, moving in and out of them seamlessly or engaging in them simultaneously.' Such 'ways of knowing' include empirical knowing (where a practitioner

uses research evidence), theoretical knowing (where a practitioner recognizes different ways of approaching a problem), and experiential knowing (a tacit knowledge based upon years of experience). All three are useful 'evidence' when reaching a decision.

So, research evidence should not (and cannot) drive decisions. Rather, the practitioner goes through a considered and thoughtful process where a range of factors (including research) influence the judgment or proposal made. It is this thoughtful process that we call evidence-informed practice (EIP). The evidence-informed practitioner carefully considers what research evidence tells them in the context of a particular child, family or service, and then weighs this up alongside knowledge drawn from professional experience and the views of service users to inform decisions about the way forward.

$$\text{evidence-informed practice} = \text{research evidence} \\ + \text{practice wisdom} + \text{user views}$$

Evidence-informed practitioners: Adopted from Lewis (2002)

- ask challenging questions about current practice
- know where and how to find relevant research
- are aware of research about what is likely to improve outcomes for children and families
- consider the implications of research in different case contexts
- reflect on their experiences in order to learn
- measure the impact their work is having for users
- listen to what users have to say about services
- are explicit about how research, experience and user views have informed their conclusions, proposals and decisions
- share their knowledge and best practice with others.

It is because research evidence is just ONE of the factors that needs to influence practitioners' decisions and judgments that we think the term 'evidence-informed practice' is much more appropriate than the more commonly encountered phrase 'evidence-based practice.'

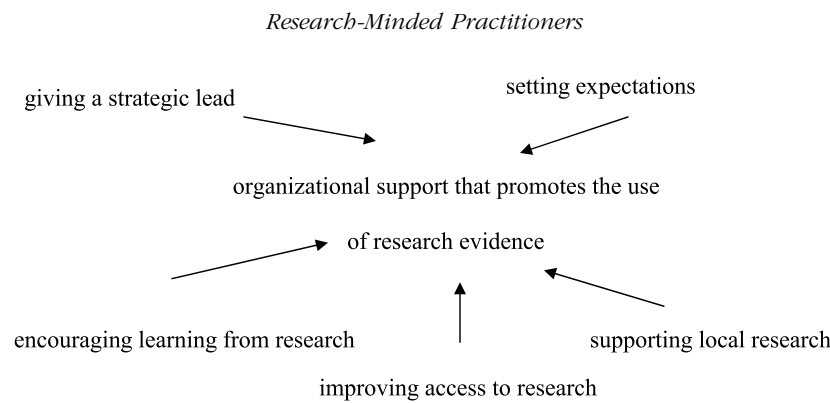
### *Why using research is important*

Social service staff members make significant interventions in the lives of children, young people and families, with possibly far-reaching and permanent consequences. It is the responsibility of professionals to do so only on the basis of the best available evidence of what is likely to help. Otherwise, their actions become nothing more than experiments in helping (and worse, may actually do some significant harm). It is not enough to mean well. Making proper, transparent use of the research evidence base will improve the likelihood of positive outcomes for children and families.

Every child has the right to expect that anyone involved in practice decisions about them and their family knows what is most likely to work—thereby increasing the likelihood of achieving positive results, and also making sure that time and money is not wasted on things that have little, no, or even a negative effect.

\* Selectively abridged from the full 2006 report available from:  
RESEARCH in PRACTICE  
Blackers, Park Road, Dartington, Tones, TQ9 6EQ, UK  
<<http://www.rip.org.uk/>> ask@rip.org.uk

**FIGURE C.1**  
**Five Key Foundations of Organizational Support**



### *Are there other benefits to using research?*

Apart from the obvious gain of better outcomes for service users (as discussed above), practitioners have also reported that making greater use of research evidence:

- makes work more rewarding by delivering better results and experiences for service users
- enables us to articulate why we think a particular course of action will produce effective outcomes
- helps us to explain to service users the rationale for our decisions and actions
- encourages a reflective and learning culture that prepares us to meet the challenge of the Every Child Matters change agenda
- ensures our precious time and resources aren't wasted on things that are less likely to work
- is a source of new ideas and innovation, which is motivating
- gives us a sense of professional confidence and identity
- provides a theoretical framework for our practice.

### **WHY IS ORGANISATIONAL SUPPORT SO IMPORTANT?**

#### *Getting research into the bloodstream*

Spreading the use of research into routine, mainstream practice requires your agency to take purposeful action to overcome barriers, create incentives and make it easier for people to use research. This is what we mean by providing organizational support for evidence-informed practice.

Your agency will have a number of individuals (or maybe whole teams) who are research-minded. You can probably think of several staff members who are:

- committed to making sure they keep up-to-date with research in their field
- feel confident about their knowledge base actually use research to guide their decisions and explain their rationale.

The problem is that these committed enthusiasts are probably in rather isolated pockets around your agency.

- For example, they will need:
  - access to good-quality research (through journals, libraries, the internet or a budget to purchase materials)
  - forums to discuss research with the authors themselves, and with their colleagues to debate the practice implications
  - opportunities to develop their skills in finding and understanding research; the space to think about how research fits with their existing knowledge
  - an expectation and encouragement from their managers to work in this way.

These facilities and opportunities depend on action being taken on an agency-wide basis, rather than by individuals or teams.

Research about how to achieve changes in any sort of behavior suggests that success depends upon people:

- knowing what they are expected to do (**what**)
- being committed to it (**why**)
- being enabled to do what's expected (**how**).

Dissemination of research is clearly an important enabling action, but it's only one of the things staff need to help them do what's expected of them. And of course, focusing on dissemination alone fails to address both the 'what' (setting clear expectations) and the 'why' (winning hearts and minds).

#### *What sort of organizational support is important?*

The evidence indicates that these are the key ingredients of effective organizational support:

- senior leadership that clearly signals the importance of research as a source for new ideas, 'sells' the benefits and models EIP personally
- strategic oversight and effective co-ordination of efforts to take EIP forward
- credible 'champions' who act as catalysts in promoting integration of research into practice
- clear expectations about research knowledge and its use in job descriptions
- procedures which embed the use of research in working practices

**FIGURE C.2**  
**Organizational Support Audit**

A. Giving a strategic lead

- |   | 1                        | 2                        | 3                        | 4                        |
|---|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| 1. There is a senior manager and steering group clearly responsible for supporting the development of EIP               | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 2. There has been a debate about what evidence-informed practice means in reality, and a shared vision documented       | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 3. There is a published action plan that sets out what steps will be taken to encourage greater use of research         | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 4. Practice development posts (e.g., senior SWs) are used to promote learning from research, consultation & evaluation. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 5. The extent to which research actually informs policy and practice decisions is monitored and formally measured       | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

Key strengths

Key areas of improvement

B. Setting expectations

- |   | 1                        | 2                        | 3                        | 4                        |
|---|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| 1. Job descriptions, competencies & progression criteria state what is expected of staff in terms of research awareness & use | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 2. Practitioners are expected to record how research evidence and user views have informed their assessments and plans        | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 3. Service strategies & plans are required to demonstrate how they've been shaped by research evidence & user consultation    | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 4. Managers understand their role to develop a research-minded culture and how to model EIP themselves                        | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 5. There are incentives to work in an evidence-informed way and mechanisms to recognize and reward achievements               | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

Key strengths

Key areas of improvement

C. Encouraging learning from research

- |   | 1                        | 2                        | 3                        | 4                        |
|---|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| 1. In-house events for staff are often used to raise their research awareness & keep them abreast of developments     | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 2. Supervision & annual personal reviews are used to develop reflection & professional research-based knowledge       | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 3. There are many examples of innovations, pilots and trials of new models & services which are formally evaluated    | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 4. The research expertise, events and resources of partners, universities and professional bodies are fully exploited | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 5. There are regular opportunities to share professional expertise and good practice between teams                    | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

Key strengths

Key areas of improvement

D. Improving access to research

- |   | 1                        | 2                        | 3                        | 4                        |
|---|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| 1. Training and professional help is available on where to look for research and on getting, understanding & applying it    | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 2. A library of agreed key research publications (e.g. journals, reports, bulletins, books) is available at each worksite   | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 3. All managers and practitioners have access to the internet at work at a time and location convenient to them             | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 4. There is a managed process for disseminating to target staff any new research publications and the practice implications | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 5. The results of local research (e.g. projects, evaluations and consultation are shared with staff as sources of learning) | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

Key strengths

Key areas of improvement

E. Supporting local research

- |   | 1                        | 2                        | 3                        | 4                        |
|---|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| 1. There is a strategy to promote more effective consultation with all children, young people and families using services.  | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 2. Services are supported to routinely evaluate the outcomes and impact of their work and how users think it could improve. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 3. The use of published scales and tests to measure the outcomes of interventions is common.                                | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 4. A program of research work that explores priority issues and gaps in knowledge has been agreed and is resourced.         | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 5. The projects undertaken by PQ students are shaped by the agency's research priorities and are centrally logged           | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

- incentives to work in an evidence-informed way and to try new approaches
- a culture that rewards constructive challenge and values research-informed behaviors and decisions
- opportunities for reflection and to look for and read research
- adequate training to develop skills in finding research, reading it critically and applying the messages
- easy access to digestible research to promote and research literacy and awareness
- information and research support staff to offer expertise in finding, interpreting and using research
- time with researchers and colleagues to consider together the practice implications of research findings
- a local program of research studies, routine service evaluation and systematic consultation with users.

### *The five key foundations of organizational support*

It's clear from the list above that a number of elements need to be in place to create the right infrastructure and climate for evidence-informed practice to thrive in your agency. As noted in *Figure C1*, we have crystallized into five key foundations the support that organizations need to put in place.

## II. GETTING STARTED

### *How to use the organizational support audit tool*

The self-assessment exercise has five sections—one for each of the key foundations of support described above—but it's not a test! Instead, think of it as a helpful tool that prompts you to stand back and reflect critically on what's going well, and what isn't.

We recommend that a group of people complete the self-assessment together, rather than one person doing it alone. This way, you are more likely to get a balanced view of the current state of support for EIP, gather a richer mix of ideas for improvement and start to build some ownership of the need for action. You might want to use an existing forum (such as a practice development group or research committee) or you might need to convene a special group. The group will probably need to meet twice—once to kick-off the audit, and once to share and discuss the results. In either case, make sure the group has cross-agency representation. It's important that you capture the perspectives of staff:

- who work in a range of children's services
- from different professional disciplines (e.g., social work, education, health)
- in front-line, higher and management grades
- in strategy and planning roles
- in support functions (like personnel, information and performance).

If these perspectives are not represented in the group, you may need to do some consultation as part of the audit process to make sure you build a balanced picture of what's going on. You might also like to think of inviting someone from outside your agency to offer an independent perspective and some new ideas perhaps a contact at your local university, or a colleague from another agency.

The group might want to work through the audit together, or you could allocate each section to one or more people to complete

separately and report back. Encourage participants to do some digging to answer the questions.

## III. GIVING A STRATEGIC LEAD

### *Nominating a senior leader*

- developing a vision of evidence-informed practice and communicating it
- giving strategic direction about how to get there
- bidding for any additional resources that might be needed
- motivating followers and building allies (both internally and with outside partners)
- monitoring progress and sustaining momentum.

### *Setting up a steering group*

- debate what you actually mean by 'evidence-informed practice'
- develop a shared vision of how research should influence practice and policy decisions
- agree some realistic actions that will develop the necessary culture, systems and skills to support learning from research
- co-ordinate progress and ensure it is tied in to other related initiatives.

### *Setting objectives*

on giving a strategic lead time  
on setting expectations  
on encouraging learning  
on improving access to evidence  
on supporting local research

### *Action planning*

### *Evaluating impact*

## IV. SETTING EXPECTATIONS (see full report)

## V. ENCOURAGING LEARNING FROM RESEARCH (see full report)

## VI. IMPROVING ACCESS TO RESEARCH (see full report)

## VII. SUPPORTING LOCAL RESEARCH (see full report)

## VIII. REFERENCES AND FURTHER READING (see full report)

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# Supporting Evidence-informed Practice in Human Service Organizations: An Exploratory Study of Link Officers\*

GENEVIEVE GRAAF, BOWEN McBEATH, KRISTEN LWIN,  
DEZ HOLMES, AND MICHAEL J. AUSTIN

## ABSTRACT

Human service organizations seeking to infuse research and other forms of evidence into their programs often need to expand their knowledge sharing systems in order to build their absorptive capacities for new information. To promote their engagement in evidence-informed practice, human service organizations can benefit from connections with intermediary organizations that assist with the dissemination and utilization of research and the use of internal knowledge brokers, called link officers. These boundary-spanning individuals work to embed external research and internal evidence in order to address current organizational priorities and service demands. This exploratory study describes the characteristics, major activities, and perceptions of link officers connected with three pioneering intermediary organizations. Quantitative and qualitative data from a survey of 137 Canadian and UK link officers provide a profile of these professionals, including how they engage practitioners to promote evidence-informed practice and the degree to which they are supported within their organizations and by intermediary organizations. The article concludes with practice and research implications for the development of the link officer role in human service organizations.

**KEYWORDS:** Boundary spanning; evidence-informed practice; human service organizations; knowledge broker; knowledge translation

## Introduction

Human service organizations (HSOs) are increasingly seeking to develop knowledge-sharing systems to support evidence-informed practice (EIP). Recent literature has highlighted the “communication link” or purveyor role as key to the process of connecting research to practice (Bornbaum, Kornas, Peirson, & Rosella, 2015; Damschroder et al., 2009; Fixsen, Naoom, Blase, Friedman, & Wallace, 2005). Pioneering research, as reflected in the work of Havlock (1967), suggests that “any detailed consideration of the dissemination and utilization of knowledge must sooner or later focus on the question of linking roles” (p. 1).

Anthony and Austin (2008) note that a type of management support organization, also known as intermediary organizations (IOs), can serve as one such link to build individual, relational, and organizational research capacities in HSOs by connecting research with practice. Another approach to the development of knowledge-sharing systems involves link officers who connect their organization’s high priority interests with external research in order to promote evidence-informed practice. This exploratory study of link officers draws upon the experiences of three pioneering IOs that seek to develop and sustain intra- and interorganizational knowledge-sharing systems among HSOs in Ontario, Canada, and the United Kingdom.

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\* *Human Service Organizations: Management, Leadership & Governance*  
2017, Vol. 41, No. 1, 58–75  
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/23303131.2016.1192575>  
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Based on a review of relevant literature on boundary-spanning positions within organizations and the characteristics of those who occupy such positions, this study focuses on knowledge brokering roles in HSOs called link officers and link PARTners and their location between their employing agency and one of the three IOs. The study draws upon an online survey of 137 Canadian and UK link officers designed to develop a profile of these professionals, how they promote evidence-informed practice, and the nature of organizational support inside and outside their HSOs. The implications for human service management and continuing investigation are noted in the discussion section.

### **Link officers as boundary-spanning-knowledge brokers**

The origins of the link officer concept can be traced in the United Kingdom to government policies designed to encourage responses to citizen concerns (e.g., law enforcement liaisons with the community or school liaisons responding to the needs of families). The historical function of link officers is to represent the interests of their organizations in their contacts with external stakeholders and to relay relevant information back to organizational leaders for enhanced decision making.

Given their unique ability to connect colleagues to new information and facilitate communication, link officers are in a position to connect stakeholder groups inside and outside of HSOs; for example, a link officer can help to address the barriers experienced by practitioners seeking to engage in evidence-informed practice. These barriers include bureaucratic or rigid organizational structures, organizational cultures and climates that are resistant to research and experimentation, and/or the lack of time and fiscal resources needed for staff training for implementing evidence-informed practice (McBeath & Austin, 2015). In this era of increasing accountability for social services, there has been an ongoing search for ways to model evidence-informed practice, create learning environments, construct knowledge-sharing communities, and promote a culture of ongoing practice improvement to support the capacities of practitioners to integrate research and practice (Austin, Dal Santo, & Lee, 2012; Gray, 2009; Plath, 2014; Raffel, Lee, Dougherty, & Greene, 2013). Some of the knowledge brokering tasks needed to strengthen the development of learning organizations include the capacity to (1) identify, evaluate, and translate research for use in different practice settings (Jackson-Bowers, Kalucy, & McIntyre, 2006; Lomas, 2007; Meyer, 2010; Waring, Currie, Crompton, &

Bishop, 2013); (2) apply relevant research to specific practice settings (Jackson-Bowers et al., 2006; Kramer, Cole, & Leithwood, 2004; Lomas, 2007; Meyer, 2010; Waring et al., 2013); (3) build research-focused relationships between practitioners and researchers (Jackson-Bowers et al., 2006; Lomas, 2007); (4) build the research capacity of staff (Meyer, 2010; Rivard et al., 2010; Traynor, DeCorby, & Dobbins, 2014); and (5) manage research resources and data (Jackson-Bowers et al., 2006).

From a classical organizational behavior perspective, knowledge-brokering link officers can be understood as boundary spanners whose role is situated specifically at the intersection of organizational subunits, or between the organization and its external environment, for the purpose of sharing knowledge and supporting organizational innovation (Tushman, 1977). Within each organization, specific norms and values evolve to reflect the distinct needs and culture of the organization that can impede the flow of information across different organizational settings (Katz & Kahn, 1978; March & Simon, 1993). As argued by Tushman and Scanlan (1981a), "Boundaries can be spanned effectively only by individuals who . . . are attuned to the contextual information on both sides of the boundary, enabling them to search out relevant information on one side and disseminate it on the other" (p. 291). Tushman and Scanlan (1981b) distinguish between individuals with the responsibility of communicating across primarily internal boundaries (i.e., *within-organization boundary spanners*), individuals with external communication responsibilities for only spanning external boundaries (i.e., *interorganizational boundary spanners*), and individuals who access external information and disseminate that information within the organization and share intra-organizational information with external entities (*bidirectional boundary spanners*).

Early studies of internal boundary-spanning roles focused on the relationship between the primary functions of the organization and the resources needed for boundary spanning to be carried out effectively and efficiently. In organizations concerned with discrete tasks and predictable outcomes (e.g., manufacturing), boundary-spanning roles may require little time commitment or training and are often situated in formal positions of authority (Frost & Whitley, 1971; Pettigrew, 1972; Whitley & Frost, 1973). In contrast, more-complex organizations with less predictable or repetitious functions (e.g., medicine) may call for a boundary-spanning role that is (1) able to span organizational hierarchies and represent the perspectives of multiple organizational stakeholders as opposed to only

administrative elites, (2) more likely to require significant organizational supports (e.g., time dedicated to information processing and disseminating, additional staff resources, access to internal and external networks for information sharing) and (3) more likely to need advanced education/training and continuing professional development (Farris, 1972; Tushman, 1977).

Health care studies of boundary spanners in knowledge brokering roles have emphasized the interpersonal dimensions with an focus on the value of trust, interpersonal relationships, and informal leadership as facilitators of linkage efforts (Bornbaum et al., 2015; Williams, 2002). Other research features the importance of boundary spanners being perceived by peers as credible and skilled but note the possibility that being in senior organizational roles may hinder their effectiveness (Waring et al., 2013). Studies have also suggested that a combination of personal qualities, group characteristics, and formal and informal organizational supports are needed to sustain the linkage role (Chew, Armstrong, & Martin, 2013; Currie & White, 2013; Long, Cunningham, & Braithwaite, 2013).

Based on the current literature, the concepts of task complexity and resource allocation are critical to understanding the bidirectional nature of boundary spanning that underlies the link officer role in HSOs. First, task complexity in the human services calls for boundary spanners to be highly educated and experienced practitioners who do not necessarily need to be in formal positions of authority but need to be well connected within and outside the organization to be viewed as credible by colleagues and a valuable source of external information and new ideas (Conklin, Lusk, Harris, & Stolee, 2013; Tushman & Scanlan, 1981b; Waring et al., 2013). The second concept relates to resource allocation where HSO leaders are called upon to support the boundary-spanning efforts of link officers by providing sufficient time and resources for them to build or access the professional networks needed to facilitate effective information exchange inside and outside the organization (Chew et al., 2013; Tushman, 1977; Tushman & Scanlan, 1981b).

Another factor that impacts the knowledge-brokering process is the role of intermediary organizations (IOs) designed to expand the capacity of individual HSOs by providing consultative assistance to managers and supporting organizational infrastructure development, particularly for small, start-up organizations. The literature on IOs in the human services has focused on their connections to academic institutions (Austin et al., 1999). In a similar way, the literature on intermediary management

service organizations features their importance for supporting the development and sustainability of community collaborations (Connor, Kadel-Taras, & Vinokur-Kaplan, 1999), and their role in supporting fledgling nonprofits in multiorganization nonprofit centers (Vinokur-Kaplan & McBeath, 2014). In contrast, little research has focused on how IOs help transfer knowledge to HSOs despite the existence of a literature on the role of IOs in other sectors such as education (Cooper, 2014). In particular, there has been little attention to IOs that seek to facilitate the transfer of knowledge from researchers to practitioners in social service settings; nor has there been much investigation of the strategies that human service IOs use to support evidence-informed practice among their partner organizations.

### The current study

This study focuses on three IOs that support themselves with membership dues and project grants: (1) Practice and Research Together (PART) in Ontario, Canada, and (2) Research in Practice (RiP) and (3) Research in Practice for Adults (RiPfA) in the United Kingdom. Prior to this study, the research team had no affiliation or relationship with PART, RiP, or RiPfA. RiP was established in 1996 with the purpose of helping to embed evidence into the daily practice of child-welfare organizations (Dill & Shera, 2015). The success of this organization prompted the creation in 2005 of a sister organization, RiPfA, which focuses on promoting the use of evidence in adult social and protective services. RiP and RiPfA operate as knowledge repositories, knowledge translators, and knowledge transfer experts that operate to identify, distill, and disseminate relevant research in audience-specific formats. They also seek to enhance the research absorptive capacities of member organizations by providing organizational support through the development of collaborative interorganizational networks. Their respective missions are to bring together research, practitioner expertise, and client voice, and to support practitioners, managers, and leaders in order to embed research and evidence into the design, development, and delivery of adult and children's services.

Inspired by the success of RiP and RiPfA in the United Kingdom, PART was established with the support of RiP in Ontario, Canada, in 2006 (Shera & Dill, 2012). Though smaller in size than RiP and RiPfA, PART has a similar mission of identifying, synthesizing, and translating relevant research into accessible, usable informational resources, primarily for use by members, which includes nonprofit child-welfare organizations.

PART and RiP/RiPfA promote evidence-informed practice within membership networks by providing an extensive array of professional development resources using publications, workshops, webinars, organizational support and consultation, and online tools and guides to help members locate, access, and evaluate research. Each organization relies on its member HSOs to designate a specific staff member—called a Link PARTner (LP) by PART and a Link Officer (LO) in RiP and RiPfA—to help the member organization maximize the value of their membership by serving as a liaison for disseminating evidence and learning opportunities throughout their respective human service organizations. LPs and LOs thus function as critical boundary spanners between their employing HSO and the IO.

These three IOs view the role of LPs and LOs as critical to their mission: they are the conduit for sharing resources with staff and practitioners in member HSOs, and they connect these staff to the range of resources offered by each IO. Each IO trains LPs and LOs on the nature of evidence-informed practice, on the target audiences for each of the IO's resources, on how to access those resources that include events and workshops, and on how to monitor membership usage. In order to maintain the relevance of their resources, the organizations regularly solicit input from their LOs and LPs. For example, PART annually gathers the perceptions of its LPs regarding current challenges in practice in order to develop programs as well as locate relevant research, often published as PARTicles. Similarly, RiP and RiPfA identify local and national topics for their learning program in consultation with LOs to ensure that they address current policy priorities and local organizational needs.

While the IO membership agreements do not refer specifically to the link officer role, written descriptions of the role that include recommendations about the type of staff best suited to the role are provided to new members. In the case of RiP and RiPfA, this informational bulletin states, *"It is usual for Link Officers to be situated in roles where they have a good overview of the needs of an organisation and are able to exercise their enthusiasm for research. Link Officers need to have very good links with workforce development, though they need not be sited there. An understanding of practice issues is very important."* The bulletin also includes tips and techniques for Link Officers to use in carrying out the role and provides strategies for providing organizational support for the role.

Once an LP or LO has been appointed, he or she receives coaching and advice about the new role from IO account managers, orientations by prior LPs or LOs in their organization, and formal training and networking events

offered by the IOs, including one or more annual meetings for LPs/ LOs and regional meetings. In the context of ongoing IO support, the training events include descriptions of the primary functions of their role as (1) a conduit between their organization and IOs, (2) a source of information regarding current practice concerns in their organizations, and (3) champions of evidence-informed practice in their organizations and in their professional sectors. Training content includes educating LPs and LOs about evidence-informed practice—what it is and why it is important—and logistics about how to connect staff in their organizations with IO resources including web-based resources and learning events. Further, RiP/RiPfA requires that membership account managers meet regularly with the LOs in their region—every 4 to 6 weeks— usually via telephone. PART offers quarterly online meetings between PART staff and LPs.

While the history and organizational strategies employed by these three IOs have been captured by previous studies (Dill & Shera, 2015; Shera & Dill, 2012), little is known about the mission-critical role of Link Officers and Link PARTners. The current study sought to increase understanding of the role of LPs and LOs and of the current perceptions of LOs/LPs in supporting evidence-informed practice within their HSOs. The primary research questions included the following: (1) What are the professional characteristics of individuals serving in a LP/LO role? (2) What do LPs/LOs understand their role to entail and what major activities are involved in fulfilling those responsibilities? and (3) How well are the professional efforts of LPs/LOs supported by their own organizations and their IOs?

### Study methodology

In late 2014, current and former LPs were invited to participate in a brief online survey focused on understanding the LP role. The survey invited both current and former LPs in order to broaden the sample size and capture reasons for former LPs leaving the role. The survey was developed with input from IOs to ensure that survey questions were relevant to LPs and LOs. The survey involved a mixture of closed-ended questions (either categorical questions or Likert-type questions) and short, open-ended questions organized into the following domains of inquiry: respondent characteristics; approaches to evidence-informed practice; understanding of the LP role and major activities; and perceptions of the organizational environment for evidence-informed practice and in support of the LP role. Respondents were asked to specify the extent to which they were involved in five types of evidence integration and promotion activities



as part of their LP role, through a series of five-point Likert scales, and were given the opportunity to describe useful strategies and approaches to their LP role through open-ended, short-answer questions. The survey link was distributed electronically by PART to 93 LPs in Canadian child-welfare and family service agencies, representing 64 current LPs and 29 former LPs.

To expand this investigation, the survey was distributed by RiP/RiPfA to 198 current LOs in United Kingdom child and adult welfare agencies in early 2015, after adjusting the wording of several survey questions to suit the local HSO context. A link to the survey was also included in an e-bulletin that may have been forwarded by recipients to other potential respondents, including former LOs. The overall study was administered under the human subjects protections of the institutional review board of the University of California, Berkeley.

Of the 98 potential LPs connected to PART, 70 respondents completed the survey, for a response rate of 71.4% (57 current LPs, 20 former LPs, and 3 unidentified). Of the 198 potential LOs connected to RiP/RiPfA, 67 respondents completed the survey, for a response rate of 33.8% (65 current and 2 former LOs). However, because the UK survey was sent to a potentially greater number of respondents through e-bulletin forwards, a definitive response rate is unknown. The combined response rate was 46.2%.

### Analysis

Descriptive statistical analyses of the survey data were conducted using the responses to the closed-ended questions. Analysis of continuous measures (e.g., years in current organizational position, FTE dedicated to the LP/LO role) and Likert-type measures involved the calculation of means and standard deviations; percentages were calculated for categorical measures. The analyses utilized Stata 13.0.

The qualitative data from the open-ended survey questions were uploaded into Dedoose, a cloud-based qualitative analysis software program. Analysis involved multiple coding cycles in which inductive coding schemes were developed that included descriptive and focused coding (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2013; Saldaña, 2013). Initial qualitative analysis began with the LP data. The first coding cycle was completed by coding all responses from one question at a time by capturing response content or themes within responses. A similar process was used for coding the LO data from the United Kingdom.

For the second round of coding, the qualitative data from the LP and LO surveys were combined, and analysis focused primarily on understanding LP/LO activities and

perceptions of organizational support. The code list was refined by collapsing similar codes, removing nonessential codes, and reordering and reorganizing remaining codes. A third and final round of coding was conducted in which a few codes were identified for more detailed analysis, including the use of subcodes. In reporting findings, code counts and co-occurrences were used to identify the density of specific LO and LP activities and levels of perceived organizational support.

## Findings

### *Demographic characteristics of LPs/LOs*

The majority of Canadian LPs were located in public child-welfare organizations ( $n = 48$ ; 72%), with approximately a fifth of LPs located in organizations providing child welfare and child-mental-health services ( $n = 13$ , 19%). Six respondents (9%) were located in other HSO settings (e.g., an advocacy organization, a child-welfare-education organization, an agency providing child-welfare services in combination with a variety of other human services). Most British LOs were located in public-sector, local authority organizations ( $n = 58$ ; 95%) dedicated to protecting and promoting the welfare of the children, adults, and families within a specific public jurisdiction. Three LOs (5%) worked in nonprofits.

As Table 1 illustrates, the majority of LPs and LOs were experienced, well-educated professionals who held middle-management positions that included a moderate level of organizational authority. These positions included quality assurance, staff development or program supervision (e.g., 3 to 4 staff) and reported directly to senior managers or directors. When asked to describe their job responsibilities outside of their role as a Link PARTner, most Canadian survey participants described overseeing a team of direct service practitioners or a staff development team where they functioned as middle managers or upper-level administrators. These administrative positions included such tasks as staffing and managing a team of direct service staff, engaging in strategic planning, managing budgets, developing and implementing agency policies, serving on community or organizational committees, and managing internal and external communications. Several UK respondents reported overseeing staff development and/or quality assurance (e.g., internal program or service evaluation and managing and interpreting agency data for quality-control purposes). Staff development managers (sometimes called practice development managers) described creating and delivering internal training, assessing training needs, planning training events, coordinating external training, and fostering committee or



**TABLE 1**  
**Characteristics of Link Officers (LOs) and Link PARTners (LPs)**

	LO	LP	Total
	Mean (SD)	Mean (SD)	Mean (SD)
Tenure in Link role			
Current LO/LP – Years in role	2.93 (2.8)	2.6 (2.1)	2.8 (2.5)
Past LO/LP – How long ago LP/LO?	0.5 (0.0)	2.0 (1.0)	1.8 (1.0)
Past LO/LP – Years in role	2.5 (2.1)	3.4 (1.8)	3.3 (1.8)
<b>Experience in formal role</b>			
Number of supervisees	2.8 (5.8)	4.3 (3.7)	3.6 (4.9)
Years in organizations	11.2 (7.6)	12.7 (8.0)	12.0 (7.8)
Years in position	4.7 (4.5)	5.4 (4.6)	5.1 (4.5)
Years in social services	14.2 (9.4)	19.4 (8.3)	16.9 (9.2)
<b>Path to the Link role</b>	<b>Percentage</b>	<b>Percentage</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Volunteered for the position	31%	31%	25%
Recommended for the position	22%	22%	15%
Assigned to the position	52%	52%	58%
Other	3%	3%	2%
<b>Education level</b>			
High school diploma/A Levels	0%	0%	0%
College diploma	8%	7%	11%
BSW degree	24%	13%	25%
Other Bachelor degree	29%	9%	25%
MSW	15%	46%	43%
Other Master's degree	24%	19%	29%
Ph.D. or other doctoral degree	0%	4%	3%
<b>Formal organizational role</b>			
Frontline service	2%	3%	2%
Supervisor	3%	34%	19%
Director of service	3%	15%	9%
Quality assurance	13%	21%	17%
HR/staff development	58%	15%	35%
Other	23%	12%	17%
<b>To whom LP/LOs report</b>			
Director/head of service	26%	31%	27%
Senior manager	56%	54%	53%
Team of administrators	32%	5%	18%
Other	10%	15%	12%

workgroup participation. A few notable UK participants described themselves as “lead practitioners” who consulted on complex cases, supervised other direct-service practitioners, and shared best practice resources.

### *Understanding of LP/LO role and activities*

Many respondents described their role as a “conduit” or “catalyst” to promote and facilitate the use of research in practice by increasing an awareness of and access to research resources provided by their IOs. As illustrated in *Table 2*, LOs and LPs dedicated an average of 1.4 hours per week to the LP/LO role. In the previous month, they had reviewed an average of 5.3 research articles, chapters, and reports,

shared an average of 4.1 such research materials, and received 2.3 requests from agency colleagues for assistance with evidence-informed practice.

Using a 12-item scale of engagement in evidence-informed practice activities, respondents noted that they were engaged in evidence-informed practice efforts between “A little” and “Sometimes” at work ( $M = 2.4$ ,  $SD = 0.7$ ). *Table 2* and *Figure 1* summarize quantitative and qualitative survey responses depicting activities required in fulfilling the LP/LO role. As noted in *Figure 1*, the major activities related to carrying out the LP/LO role are divided between (1) *externally-focused linking activities*, connecting

**TABLE 2**  
**Link Partner/Officer Activities and Supports**

<b>General activities</b>	<b>Mean (SD) or %</b>
Hours per week dedicated to the Link Partner/Officer role	1.40 (1.20)
Research articles, chapters, and reports reviewed in the past month	5.31 (6.98)
Research articles, chapters, and reports shared with agency colleagues in the past month	4.06 (5.54)
Requests in the past month from agency peers or supervisors for assistance with evidence-informed practice	2.25 (3.43)
Engagement in evidence-informed practice activities (scale)	2.37 (0.70)
Interaction with PART/RiP (scale)	3.28 (0.85)
<b>Specific knowledge brokering and organizational support efforts</b>	
Promoting evidence-informed practice in the agency (scale)	2.67 (0.95)
Staff training around evidence-informed practice (scale)	2.17 (1.04)
Supporting evidence-gathering projects (scale)	2.60 (1.05)
Supporting evidence-informed practice conversations (scale)	1.80 (0.87)
Locating and sharing relevant evidence (scale)	2.78 (0.95)
<b>Supports for the Link Partner/Officer role</b>	
Frequency of communication with other Link Partners/Officers (scale)	1.86 (0.83)
Individual supports for the Link Partner/Officer role (scale)	2.96 (0.94)
Organizational supports for evidence-informed practice (scale)	3.20 (0.76)
Received training in preparation for the Link Partner/Officer role	23%
Sees self as a part of a community of professionals including other Link Partners/Officers	64%

Note: Full sample of LPs and LOs was used. All scales were measured via 5-point Likerts. The composition of scales is described in the Appendix.

agency staff to IOs and other outside evidence resources and (2) *internally-focused linking activities* to promote the use of evidence in practice and embedding research into organizational practice.

### *Externally focused linkages*

In locating and sharing evidence resources, LPs/LOs primarily sought to build the research absorptive capacity of their organizations through promoting and accessing IO research materials and resources. For example, one LO noted, “We also use RiP promotional material and have tag lines on our e-mail signature strip linking to the RiP website. We incorporate RiP learning events into our own Learning Programme e.g. if you like that, you will like this.” Further, LP/LOs also described engaging in considerable efforts to promote and coordinate staff participation in IO training and learning events (e.g., “Disseminating information from RiP, confirming training event participation, responding to questions and promoting RiP membership”). Less attention was given to specific steps for increasing access to non-IO resources for evidence-informed practice or the process of finding and evaluating relevant research. Based on a seven-item scale of engagement in locating and sharing relevant evidence throughout the agency, respondents noted that

they were involved between “A little” and “Sometimes” ( $M = 2.8$ ,  $SD = 1.0$ ).

### *Internally focused promotion of evidence-informed practice*

Using a six-item scale of engagement in promoting evidence-informed practice in the agency, respondents noted that they were involved between “A little” and “Sometimes” ( $M = 2.7$ ,  $SD = 1.0$ ). To facilitate the engagement of staff in evidence-informed practice, LP/LO described networking with agency staff to support their evidence-informed practice efforts (e.g., “maintaining personal relationships with key staff who will then continue the promotion/embedding in relation to the messages”). Many respondents noted that sharing and disseminating research resources with others in their organization was an essential aspect of their LP/LO role (e.g., “email to key people highlighting specifics to save them time”). In response to a five-item scale of efforts to promote staff training around evidence-informed practice, respondents suggested that they were similarly involved between “A little” and “Sometimes” ( $M = 2.2$ ,  $SD = 1.0$ ). Some participants reported conducting internal training via staff meetings, lunch hour trainings, workshops, or forums that included the distribution of IO materials and developing informal learning communities through group-based

**FIGURE 1**  
**Perceptions of Major Responsibilities of the Link Partner/Officer Role\***

**I. Externally Focused Linking Activities**

- Promoting and facilitating access to PART/RiP and external research materials for agency staff (n=206).
- Increasing access to resources for evidence-informed practice (n=40).
- Finding and evaluating relevant research (n=21).
- Serving as a liaison or advocate for PART/RiP by promoting and coordinating staff participation in PART/RiP trainings and events (n=93).
- Increasing awareness of resources for evidence-informed practice (n=36).

**II. Internally Focused Promotion of Evidence Informed Practice**

- a. Facilitating the engagement of specific staff in evidence-informed practice
  - Networking with staff to support their evidence-informed practice efforts (n=124).
  - Sharing/disseminating research resources with others in their organization (n=162).
  - Working with individual staff members through case consultation, individual support, mentoring, or coaching to support their evidence-informed practice efforts (n=90).
  - Conducting internal training via staff meetings, brown bags, workshops, or forums, often involving the distribution of PART/RiP materials (n=61).
  - Developing informal learning communities through group-based activities (n=30).
  - Promoting the use of evidence in practice by modeling evidence-informed practice or providing concrete examples of successful evidence-informed practice in action (n=54).
- b. General efforts to embed research into organizational practice
  - Encouraging staff to participate in research and evaluation about ongoing agency services (n=52).
  - Managing and analyzing agency data (n=30).
  - Integrating evidence into auditing processes (n=11), individual clinical supervision practices (n=7), strategic planning for the organization (n=7), the use of specific evidence-based programs (n=5), and integrating the use of evidence in practice in staff performance review processes (n=2)

\*Some of these themes were mentioned in relation to non-link partner/officer duties, as all respondents balanced their link partner/officer responsibilities with other formal duties.

activities. However, respondents were comparatively less involved in supporting evidence-informed practice conversations (five-item scale;  $M = 1.8$ ;  $SD = 0.9$ ). And yet several respondents noted that they gave priority to working with individual staff via case consultation, mentoring, or coaching to support their evidence-informed practice efforts and to modeling evidence-informed practice or providing concrete examples of successful evidence-informed practice in action.

Several respondents also noted that their goal was to embed evidence into the daily work of all aspects of their organization. As one respondent suggested, *"We are at the beginning stages of engaging management and staff in using the tools provided as a first step in embedding evidence-informed practice in everything we do."* For some LP/LOs, this process was described as including integrating evidence

into auditing processes, individual clinical supervision practices, strategic planning for the organization, the use of specific evidence-based programs, and integrating the use of evidence in practice in staff-performance review processes. This also entailed encouraging staff to participate in research and evaluating agency services that included managing and analyzing agency data. A six-item scale determined that LPs/LOs were involved between "A little" and "Sometimes" in supporting evidence-gathering projects ( $M = 2.6$ ,  $SD = 1.05$ ).

***Perceptions of organizational supports for the LP/LO role***

As can be seen in Table 2 on the perceptions of organizational supports for the LP/LO role, LP/LOs noted they could commit only a limited amount of time to the role; and less than a quarter of respondents (23%) had received

any training in preparation for the role. Many respondents reported that the time demands of their formal role limited the amount of time they could dedicate to the LP or LO role, including attendance at training and networking events for LPs and LOs. Two scales were used to determine the degree of supports available for LPs/LOs. An eight-item scale was used to determine the sufficiency of individual supports for LPs/LOs; on average, respondents neither agreed nor disagreed with statements that they had sufficient time, training, and preparation to carry out their LP/LO role ( $M = 3.0$ ,  $SD = 0.9$ ). Over 30 respondents explicitly stated that they did not have enough time to sufficiently fulfill the requirements of the role.

In addition, a 12-item scale was used to identify whether organizational supports (including funding, mentoring, and administrative champions) were available for LPs/LOs. On average, respondents generally did not perceive these supports to be sufficient ( $M = 3.2$ ,  $SD = 0.8$ ). While many participants characterized their organization as having a learning culture and promoting a positive view of EIP, several respondents noted that their organization supported evidence-informed practice “in word only.” Others noted that evidence-informed practice needed to be included in their organization’s long-term planning strategies in order to increase organizational support for the specific LP/LO role. Some respondents felt that staff did not have enough time to access, absorb, and consider application of IO resources and that having more face-to-face time with staff would increase staff use of evidence.

Using a six-item scale to report the level of their interaction with IOs, respondents indicated that they participated in activities between “Sometimes” and “Frequently” ( $M = 3.3$ ,  $SD = 0.9$ ). A subset of respondents reported receiving agency-specific support and training from the IO in the form of in-person contact, telephone consultation, and/or written materials. In addition, in response to an eight-item scale designed to assess the general level of communication with other LPs/LOs, respondents noted that they communicated between “None” and “A little” with other LP/LO colleagues ( $M = 1.9$ ,  $SD = 0.8$ ). In open-ended questions, few respondents reported connecting with other LPs/LOs, and several made comments about feeling isolated in their role and desiring more contact and on-going support from peers. In contrast, approximately two-thirds of respondents (64%) viewed themselves as part of a community of professionals comprising other LPs/LOs.

## Discussion

Building on the literature related to knowledge-sharing systems within and among HSOs, as well as the classic and contemporary studies of knowledge brokers (particularly in health care settings), this study sought to: (1) develop a demographic portrait of Canadian LPs and UK LOs, (2) identify the major activities performed by LPs/LOs in their formal organizational role, and (3) capture their perceptions of the degree of support provided by their HSOs. Our survey data suggest that LPs and LOs were seasoned professionals, with over a decade of experience in the human service sector and approximately 5 years in their current role. Most respondents supervised between 2 and 4 employees and occupied staff development, direct-service supervisory, and quality-assurance roles. The levels of LP/LO activity were modest, reflecting the small number of hours per week (1.4 on average) that they were able to dedicate to the role. The LPs’/LOs’ understanding of their role as a promoter and facilitator of IO resources can be seen in the following frequently reported activities: (1) sharing and facilitating access to IO research resources; (2) facilitating the engagement of staff in evidence-informed practice through outreach, training, and consultation; and (3) using various methods to embed research into daily organizational processes. In general, respondents reported moderate levels of support for their efforts within their own HSOs and from the external IO.

These findings need to be understood in relationship to a number of limitations associated with the study methodology. First, due to the manner in which they were invited to participate, a definitive response rate for LOs in the United Kingdom could not be determined. Second, because the survey was sent only to LOs and LPs for whom the IOs had accurate email addresses, the study may have undercounted the number of potential respondents. Third, due to the nature of the survey questions, less active LPs and LOs may have felt uncomfortable answering questions concerning their LP/LO activities, thus potentially biasing responses to these questions. Fourth, a similar possibility may have existed due to social desirability bias, as respondents may have overestimated the significance of their efforts in carrying out the role. Fifth, while each of the multi-item scales developed in the current study had strong internal consistency, it is possible that measurement error was incorporated into each scale through the omission of other indicators of the underlying construct being measured.

Despite these limitations, the study findings provide insight into (1) the nature of the individuals engaged in the LP/LO role; (2) the active dimensions of the LP/LO role;

and (3) the degree of organizational supports available to LPs/LOs. With respect to the first topic, LPs/LOs varied somewhat in their level of education and prior human service experience, their formal role in the organization (which ranged from administrative assistants to executive-level personnel), and their pathway into the specific role (i.e., whether they were assigned to the position or volunteered for it). Despite these differences, the main findings point to the population of LOs/LPs as comprising experienced professionals in positions of middle or senior management with some authority within their HSOs. This is consistent with classic and recent findings that, in organizations with complex task environments, effective boundary-spanning-knowledge brokers hold some degree of formal authority, are well respected by peers for their technical skills and experience, and are more likely to have advanced education or training (Tushman, 1977; Bornbaum et al., 2015).

These descriptive findings help situate the LP/LO role (and those embodying it) within HSOs. From a theoretical perspective, a central premise in classic organizational-behavior literature is that organizational status denotes role importance—that is, the level of authority of individuals attached to a formal role can serve as a marker of its importance to the organization and can also be used to draw inferences concerning the value of the underlying organizational functions for which the role was developed (Katz & Kahn, 1978). In the current study, practitioners in important organizational roles (e.g., program supervisor, staff-development specialist, quality-assurance analyst) were often carrying out the LP/LO role. Despite their years of experience in the human service sector and their HSOs, most LOs/LPs were not in senior executive-level positions. These results suggest that LOs/LPs were chosen by their organizations (more than half of the respondents reported being assigned to the role) because of the specific position they held in the organization (e.g., moderate levels of formal authority with possibly a high degree of informal credibility and influence with peers). Such a choice might indicate a strategic understanding held by senior management of the qualities that would enhance the link role; alternatively, the selection of individual LOs/LPs may reflect informal advice provided by IOs in helping new member organizations identify promising candidates for the role.

With respect to the active dimensions of the LP/LO role, the findings suggest a distinction between internal activities to promote evidence-informed practice within HSOs and external activities designed to connect HSOs and their staff members with the research resources of the

IO. We considered our findings using the classic question of time versus task (Katz & Kahn, 1978); namely, given the limited amount of time devoted to the LP/LO role, which tasks should be prioritized or de-emphasized and with what implications for the development of the role? The average ratings on all scales pertaining to various dimensions of internally focused engagement in the LP/LO role ranged from “A little” to “Sometimes.” We interpret these findings as reflecting the modest priority given to the internal tasks associated with the LP/LO role. Since the standard deviations on these scales averaged around one point, the magnitude of difference in the intensity noted by LPs/LOs across the major internal task domains was small. And externally, respondents noted that the frequency of the interaction with their IO was between “Sometimes” and “Frequently,” suggesting that greater attention was given to external rather than internal activities associated with the role.

A similar portrait of LP/LO role and tasks can be derived from the qualitative data in which the most-frequently-cited activities were externally focused. LPs/LOs sought to promote and facilitate access to materials and learning events provided by the IO and clearly identified themselves as liaisons between it and their HSO. Internally, respondents viewed their role, to a lesser degree, to include the following components: sharing/disseminating research resources; promoting attention to evidence-informed practice across the organization; and supporting individual staff members engaged in evidence-informed practice through case consultation, individual support, mentoring, or coaching. It is clear in the findings that the research resources and training programs being supplied by the IOs were the primary resources LPs/LOs shared in order to promote and embed evidence-informed practice.

These results suggest that the activities of LPs/LOs reflect a substantial dependence upon the research resources and learning events provided by the IO, which is consistent with how the role is conceptualized by the IOs. It is also consistent with most LOs’ and LPs’ understanding of their role as the primary brokers of the relationship between their HSO and the IOs. The stronger emphasis on externally focused activities may be a reflection of the way in which LPs and LOs managed their time-versus-task dilemma; that is, given the limited time LOs and LPs were able to dedicate to the role, these individuals may have focused first on discrete, routine activities that reflected their primary duties—that of linking staff to external resources.

The time-versus-task dilemma was apparent in the central finding that LPs/LOs perceived that they did not



have enough organizational support to fully inhabit their role. When asked about their preferences for carrying out the role, LPs/LOs called for more-concrete resources to support their role, especially time and training. Only 23% of respondents reported being trained for the role. Many reported that their non-LP/LO duties prevented them from carrying out their internal LP/LO responsibilities or developing stronger connections with the IO or with other LPs/LOs by participating in quarterly or annual training and networking events. Given the limited amount of time dedicated to the position, these findings may suggest that the LO/LP role was viewed within the HSOs included in this study as important but not critical. However, this possibility is balanced by the fact that the respondents did perceive moderate formal and informal support from senior management regarding the importance of implementing evidence-informed practice and for carrying out the LP/LO role. This paradox may reflect the significant cutbacks many participating organizations were experiencing at the time of the study.

### *Implications for practice*

Taken together, these findings suggest a number of implications for developing and sustaining the LP/LO role within HSOs.

1. *Role clarity related to LP/LO tasks and responsibilities as well as the process of linking the HSO to the IO are essential.* These findings highlight the importance of connecting leaders from the IO with those of HSOs to engage in ongoing dialogue to clarify expectations in the form of job descriptions and specifying the time and resources needed to support the linking role. This dialogue could lead to decisions that help to alleviate the role strain experienced by LPs and LOs as they seek to fulfill their commitments to both the member HSO and to the IO. In addition, formal job descriptions for the LO or LP role can help HSOs identify potential LPs and LOs whose current duties can be modified to accommodate the linking role. Finally, it is important for IOs to recognize and collaboratively address the inherent tension that exists for service-delivery organizations between allocating resources to support evidence-informed practice and those resources needed to support the service mission of the agency.
2. *Sufficient resources need to be identified to support the role both within the HSO and from the IO in relationship to the necessary time, training, and mentoring for effective role performance.* HSOs also need to provide

LPs and LOs access to formal channels of organizational communication to effectively disseminate evidence and other informational resources. HSO leaders can further support boundary spanning by enhancing the overall culture of the organization related to promoting evidence-informed practice. This type of leadership is needed to avoid isolating the LPs/LOs with the sole responsibility of serving as the primary conduit for research resources within the organization without sufficient organizational supports. As reported by some LPs and LOs, one strategy is to develop a team approach to implementing evidence-informed practice where LPs/LOs partner with other senior administrative staff and junior staff from different service units to become the organization's champions of evidence-informed practice and part of a "knowledge mobilization team" (Dill & Shera, 2015, p. 330). Such models also illustrate greater investment of organizational resources in EIP, signaling to staff that senior leadership is committed to engaging in evidence-informed practice.

3. *Attention needs to be given to the extent to which the LP/LO role complements the other professional roles and duties of the employee (e.g., program manager, staff-development specialist, quality-assurance analyst).* For example, LP/LOs holding staff-development roles appear to be more likely to invest in coordinating external training events and creating and executing relevant internal training events related to EIP. Similarly, LP/LOs working in quality assurance may focus more on engaging staff in internal evaluation and assessment of programs in order to increase staff commitment to evidence-informed practice. The biggest challenge may be faced by those serving as program managers overseeing service delivery where EIP competes with the demands of daily practice.
4. *More attention could be paid to the selection of LPs/LOs by identifying candidates who have (a) sufficient informal influence among their peers, (b) sufficient technical capabilities relevant to evidence-informed practice, and (c) sufficient investment in assuming the knowledge-broker role.* Such candidates need to be provided with access to formal channels of dissemination within the organization along with the formal authority often associated with middle- or senior-management positions. In essence, the effectiveness of the LP/LO role relies

upon the capacities of agency leaders to convey a clear understanding of the linking role, the allocation of supports for effective boundary spanning, and the identification of staff members with the professional capacities to balance the multiple roles held by LPs/LOs. Ultimately, the success of those assuming the linking role is dependent upon the selection of individuals with the necessary professional and technical attributes to (a) model evidence-informed practice, (b) access training and research resources, (c) coach colleagues on engaging in evidence-informed practice, and (d) develop support structures to sustain it.

### Implications for research

Since this study is one of the first to capture the LP/LO role within HSOs, additional research is needed to address the following questions: (1) What individual and environmental factors contribute to the level of activity and role engagement of LPs/LOs? (2) What are the major individual, organizational, and interorganizational factors that inform LP/LO effectiveness? (3) How do more engaged LPs/LOs differ from those who are less engaged in their specific duties? (4) How do LP/LO perceptions of organizational and peer supports (their individual characteristics and reported levels of activity) relate to the way they enter into the LP/LO role (i.e., volunteered or assigned), and how is this related to their level of engagement? (5) How are evidence-informed practices related to the technical skill, interest, and experience of the activities undertaken by LPs/LOs? and (6) How do internal organizational supports, peer support, personal and role characteristics, and EIP-related attitudes and efforts affect the strategies used by IO (e.g., new staff-training modules, new methods of research synthesis, web-based innovations to promote research sharing more easily) to influence the activity levels of LPs/LOs? These questions can be addressed through case studies and/or panel surveys to shed light on the degree to which the major activities of LPs/LOs vary in relation to changes in the professional and organizational settings in which LPs/LOs are embedded.

In addition to research seeking to identify the personal and organizational characteristics associated with different levels of LP/LO activity, future studies need to focus on the question of effectiveness. For example, to what degree are LPs/LOs able to meet the needs of individuals around evidence-informed practice through resource dissemination, individual and group training, and other methods? Similarly, how do the efforts of LPs/LOs contribute to an organization-wide shared understanding of evidence-informed

practice and the creation of a learning culture? Finally, intervention research studies could focus on evaluating the impact of LPs/LOs on improving service effectiveness and outcomes.

### Conclusion

The development of the link officer role is an organizational strategy for HSOs seeking to integrate research and other forms of evidence into their daily operations. This exploratory study of Canadian LPs and UK LOs sought to understand their characteristics, activities, and sense of support from within their HSOs and from their IO. These findings document the boundary-spanning nature of the role in relation to its organizational and interorganizational context and highlight the importance of developing supportive infrastructures within HSOs and between HSOs and IOs in order to help LPs/LOs engage in the process of embedding evidence-informed practice into the learning culture of their HSO.

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## APPENDIX

Scale = Engagement in evidence-informed practice activities (average of 12 items,  $\alpha = 0.85$ ) (drawn from *The Measure of Evidence-Informed Practice in the Human Services* (McBeath, Jolles, Carnochan, & Austin, 2015)).

Question wording: "On average, how often do you do this at work?" (1 = None, 2 = A little, 3 = Sometimes, 4 = Frequently, 5 = Continuously).

Item	Mean	Standard deviation
Using and searching online databases to identify promising practices	2.82	1.01
Conducting quick literature reviews (to gather the best available evidence) to look for answers to my questions	2.70	0.98
Surveying clients to assess their needs	2.17	1.16
Conducting program-improvement studies to see if the agency is delivering services the best way possible	2.13	1.23
Conducting outcome studies to see whether agency services and programs are affecting clients as intended	2.13	1.25
Reviewing case records from past and/or current clients to see how we are serving them	2.27	1.23
Reviewing agency reports containing information such as quarterly statistics to see how the agency is doing in key areas	3.15	1.26
Involving outside researchers to help improve agency practices and impacts	2.26	0.99
Involving clients in evaluating programs and services	2.16	1.15
Involving clients in planning and improving programs	2.01	1.06
Developing researchable questions in response to current agency needs	2.06	1.05
Reviewing literature to inform strategic planning or potential interventions	2.63	1.19
Average	2.37	0.70

Scale = Interaction with PART/RiP (average of 6 items,  $\alpha = 0.85$ ).

Question wording: "In general, how often do you participate in the following activities?" (1 = None, 2 = A little, 3 = Sometimes, 4 = Frequently, 5 = Continuously).

Item	Mean	Standard deviation
Distributing PART/RiP materials in the agency	3.88	0.98
Encouraging your agency colleagues to use the PART/RiP website	4.03	0.90
Keeping PART/RiP informed of major changes occurring to your agency	2.49	1.19
Attending link partner/officer-specific meetings	2.93	1.20
Participating in PART/RiP change initiatives	2.96	1.23
Coordinating agency participation in PART/RiP-related meetings and events	3.39	1.16
Average	3.28	0.85



Scale = Promoting evidence-informed practice in the agency (average of 6 items,  $\alpha = 0.87$ ).

Question wording: *"In general, how often do you engage in the following evidence-informed practice activities?"*

(0 = I am not required to support this activity, 1 = None, 2 = A little, 3 = Sometimes, 4 = Frequently, 5 = Continuously).

Item	Mean	Standard deviation
Promote agency-wide use of evidence to support improving services and outcomes	3.35	1.17
Strategize and plan for evidence-informed practice implementation	2.58	1.26
Coordinate the integration of evidence-informed practice in agency departments/units	2.24	1.21
Cultivate staff interest in involving service users in evidence-gathering projects	2.56	1.37
Engage in administrative tasks related to evidence-informed practice correspondence and project management	2.59	1.37
Present information about evidence-informed practice (e.g., staff meetings, conferences, etc.)	2.70	1.21
Average	2.67	0.95

Scale = Staff training around evidence-informed practice (average of 5 items,  $\alpha = 0.84$ ).

Question wording: *"In general, how often do you engage in the following evidence-informed practice activities?"*

(0 = I am not required to support this activity, 1 = None, 2 = A little, 3 = Sometimes, 4 = Frequently, 5 = Continuously).

Item	Mean	Standard deviation
Train individual staff around evidence-informed practice	2.21	1.53
Lead workshops for groups of staff in evidence-informed practice	1.84	1.25
Lead agency-wide, evidence-informed practice training and learning events	1.89	1.27
Gather feedback from evidence-informed practice training and learning events	2.53	1.32
Periodic sessions to introduce new staff to evidence-informed practice	2.32	1.47
Average	2.17	1.04

Scale = Supporting evidence-gathering projects (average of 6 items,  $\alpha = 0.90$ ).

Question wording: *"In general, how often do you engage in the following evidence-informed practice activities?"*

(0 = I am not required to support this activity, 1 = None, 2 = A little, 3 = Sometimes, 4 = Frequently, 5 = Continuously).

Item	Mean	Standard deviation
Identify agency needs related to evidence-gathering projects and Partnerships	2.64	1.33
Develop evidence gathering projects in collaboration with staff	2.63	1.38
Lead special evidence-gathering projects and partnerships	2.40	1.26
Assist students with their evidence-gathering projects	2.56	1.35
Assist staff with their evidence-gathering projects	2.89	1.29
Assist external researchers (e.g., from local universities) with their evidence-gathering projects	2.57	1.27
Average	2.60	1.05

Scale = Supporting evidence-informed practice conversations (average of 5 items,  $\alpha = 0.81$ ).

Question wording: *"In general, how often do you engage in the following evidence-informed practice activities?"*

(0 = I am not required to support this activity, 1 = None, 2 = A little, 3 = Sometimes, 4 = Frequently,

5 = Continuously).

Item	Mean	Standard deviation
Present evidence at staff meetings	2.24	1.22
Facilitate dialogue about evidence-informed practice at staff meetings	2.26	1.25
Hold regularly scheduled meetings with groups of staff to talk about evidence-informed practice	1.87	1.31
Facilitate "journal clubs" with groups of staff to review current literature	1.14	0.96
Facilitate discussions about current literature with different agency programs/units	1.30	1.08
Average	1.80	0.87

Scale = Locating and sharing relevant evidence (average of 7 items,  $\alpha = 0.86$ ).

Question wording: *"In general, how often do you engage in the following evidence-informed practice activities?"*

(0 = I am not required to support this activity, 1 = None, 2 = A little, 3 = Sometimes, 4 = Frequently,

5 = Continuously).

Item	Mean	Standard deviation
Search for evidence that would be helpful for staff to improve services and outcomes	2.99	1.12
Search for evidence related to service user perspectives	2.62	1.32
Maintain an online library of relevant evidence (e.g., webinars, reports)	2.38	1.52
Share relevant external evidence (e.g., reports, articles) with specific staff	3.11	1.15
Share relevant internal evidence (e.g., reports, program data) with specific staff	3.07	1.28
Share evidence on service-user perspectives with specific staff	2.55	1.47
Make external and internal evidence available on agency intranet site	2.63	1.38
Average	2.78	0.95

Scale = Frequency of communication with other link partners/officers (average of 8 items,  $\alpha = 0.96$ ).

Question wording: *"In general, how often do you communicate (in person, by phone, or via email) with other link partners about the following topics?"* (1 = None, 2 = A little, 3 = Sometimes, 4 = Frequently, 5 = Constantly).

Item	Mean	Standard deviation
Evidence from outside your agency	1.73	0.89
Evidence from inside your agency	1.83	0.94
Strategies for locating relevant external evidence for your agency	1.82	0.89
Strategies to share external and internal evidence effectively with agency staff	1.90	0.93
Strategies for training staff about evidence-informed practice	1.91	1.05
Strategies for cultivating staff interest in evidence-informed practice	1.96	1.02
Strategies to support evidence-gathering projects in your agency	1.71	0.92
Strategies for carrying out your link partner/officer role more effectively	2.00	0.96
Average	1.86	0.83

Scale = Individual supports for the link partner/officer role (average of 8 items,  $\alpha = 0.87$ ).

Question wording: *"In order to identify potential challenges facing link partners/officers, please note your responses to the following statements."* (1 = Strongly disagree, 2 = Slightly disagree, 3 = Neither disagree nor agree, 4 = Slightly agree, 5 = Strongly agree).

Item	Mean	Standard deviation
I have enough time to carry out my link partner/officer responsibilities.	2.28	1.20
Protected time is available for me to attend external evidence-informed practice training workshops.	2.84	1.46
I have enough resources to carry out my link partner/officer responsibilities.	2.86	1.33
I have enough training in evidence-informed practice to carry out my link partner/officer responsibilities.	2.99	1.34
I have enough experience with implementing evidence-informed practice in agencies to carry out my link partner/officer responsibilities.	3.04	1.27
I have enough experience finding evidence-informed practice resources to carry out my link partner/officer responsibilities.	3.41	1.16
I have enough experience training others in evidence-informed practice to carry out my link partner/officer responsibilities.	3.02	1.30
I have enough support from key senior managers to carry out my link partner/officer responsibilities.	3.22	1.33
Average	2.96	0.94

Scale = Organizational supports for evidence-informed practice (average of 12 items,  $\alpha = 0.88$ ).

Question wording: *"In order to identify potential challenges facing link partners/officers, please note your responses to the following statements."* (1 = Strongly disagree, 2 = Slightly disagree, 3 = Neither disagree nor agree, 4 = Slightly agree, 5 = Strongly agree).

Item	Mean	Standard deviation
Evidence-informed practice is supported throughout the organization.	3.88	1.13
Agency staff have enough time to help me carry out my link partner/officer responsibilities.	2.37	1.08
The agency is required to engage in evidence-informed practice.	3.66	1.21
Funding is available to support evidence-informed practice implementation across the agency.	3.01	1.20
The agency has the resources needed for me to carry out my link partner/officer responsibilities.	3.15	1.13
The major changes experienced by my organization provide opportunities for me to carry out link partner/officer responsibilities.	3.15	1.17
Senior managers act as champions of the link partner/officer role throughout the agency. <sup>2</sup>	2.97	1.3
Senior managers provide mentorship to me as a link partner/officer.	2.46	1.31
Past link partners/officers provide mentorship to me as a link partner/officer.	2.23	1.29
Senior managers possess an understanding of the importance of evidence-informed practice.	4.00	0.94
Senior managers understand how to implement evidence-informed practice.	3.54	1.14
Senior managers support evidence-informed practice implementation.	3.89	1.02
Average	3.20	0.76

# Managerial and Frontline Perspectives on the Process of Evidence-informed Practice Within Human Service Organizations\*

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AND MICHAEL J. AUSTIN

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## ABSTRACT

Emphasis on evidence-informed practice (EIP) in human service organizations aimed at improving service quality and client outcomes has increased in recent decades. Research has suggested that the organizational context shapes EIP, yet few studies have explored the agency-based activities that constitute this form of practice. This survey of 473 managers and frontline practitioners in 11 county human service organizations examines EIP activities in agency settings. Analysis of responses to open-ended questions identifies the specific cognitive, interactive, action, and compliance dimensions of EIP, including challenges. EIP emerges as complex and nonlinear, shaped by organizational environment, practitioner perspectives, and client needs.

**KEYWORDS:** Critical thinking; evidence-informed practice; human services; organizational learning; organizational structure

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In recent decades, the social work profession has experienced growing attention to the use of evidence to improve service quality and client outcomes. The task-centered practice, empirical clinical practice, and single-system design models of frontline practice represent efforts to link empiricism to social work practice (Marsh & Fisher, 2008; Okpych & Yu, 2014; Reid, 2002; Thyer & Myers, 2011). Since the 1990s, two related but distinct approaches to incorporating evidence into human service delivery have emerged: the empirically supported interventions (ESI) approach and the evidence-informed practice (EIP) or, alternatively,

evidence-based practice (EBP) framework (Fisher, 2014; McBeath, Briggs & Aisenberg, 2010). These frameworks are increasingly dominant in social work policy and practice and occupy an important position in the social work literature (Hodge, Lacasse, & Benson, 2012).

The ESI approach seeks to improve service effectiveness by implementing rigorously evaluated interventions with fidelity to specific practice protocols (Barth et al., 2012; Thyer & Myers, 2011). In the United States, federal, state, and local government entities have engaged in an array of strategies to promote ESIs (Bellamy, Bledsoe, & Traube, 2006). For example, the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration offers a website listing evidence-based mental health interventions, while the California Evidence-Based Clearinghouse for Child Welfare website provides similar information for child welfare services (California Evidence-Based Clearinghouse for Child Welfare [CEBC], 2015; Thyer & Myers, 2011). These federal- and state-level efforts to promote the diffusion of ESIs have influenced parallel efforts by local governments and community-based agencies. In Sonoma County, located in Northern California, the Upstream Investments Initiative provides information on a comprehensive set of empirically supported interventions and prioritizes these interventions in decisions to fund community-based service providers (Sonoma County, 2011). In other states, including Oregon, public agencies (and private agencies providing contracted

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\* *Human Service Organizations: Management, Leadership & Governance* 2017, VOL. 41, NO. 4, 346–358  
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/23303131.2017.1279095>  
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services) are required to dedicate substantial proportions of their service expenditures to providing ESIs (McBeath, Briggs & Aisenberg, 2010).

Despite these efforts, the implementation of ESIs is still limited in human service settings, attributable to cost, challenges involved in ensuring treatment fidelity, and the complexity of adapting individual ESIs to suit specific agency and client demands (Barth, 2008; Barth et al., 2012; Horwitz et al., 2014). Scholarly critique of the ESI framework has highlighted three additional issues: (1) the mechanistic nature of “manualized” interventions that may undermine the exercise of professional judgment; (2) the top-down nature of performance measures and service models prescribed by policy makers and external researchers; and (3) the emphasis on compliance-oriented practice based on past evidence rather than innovative practice responsive to current evidence (for summaries of this literature see McBeath, Briggs & Aisenberg, 2010; Nevo & Slonim-Nevo, 2011; Webb, 2001).

In contrast to the ESI approach to strengthening frontline practice, evidence-informed practice (EIP) proposes a process framework in which practitioners integrate “individual practice expertise with the best available external evidence from systematic research as well as considering the values and expectations of clients” in order to inform practice decisions (Gambrill, 1999, p. 346). (We use the term evidence-informed practice (EIP) in our discussion of the literature for the sake of consistency.) While ESI strategies are comparable to managerial performance measurement approaches, with a strong emphasis on administrative accountability and control of frontline practitioners, EIP as framed by Gambrill (1999) and others is consistent with a street-level perspective in which evidence-informed decision-making by frontline practitioners is viewed as essential (Brodtkin, 2008; Ganju, 2006).

Over the past decade, studies conducted in the United States and internationally have found generally positive attitudes toward EIP among human service managers and frontline or direct service practitioners working in public and private sector settings (Beddoe, 2011; Booth, Booth, & Falzon, 2003; Collins-Camargo, Sullivan, & Murphy, 2011; Gray, Joy, Plath, & Webb, 2014; Knight, 2013; Savaya, Altschuler & Melamed, 2013). EIP process guidelines have focused on the activities of the individual frontline practitioner, outlining a process of critical reflection that involves framing researchable questions; identifying and evaluating relevant research; integrating research findings, practitioner expertise, and client values; and assessing outcomes

(Gambrill, 1999; McCracken & Marsh, 2008). This multi-step process has generally been understood as sequential, although little research has evaluated the extent to which practitioners view it as such. Despite the growing emphasis on using research to inform practice decisions, challenges related to research availability and utilization persist (Marsh & Fisher, 2008).

More recently, research focus on the role of practitioners and managers has expanded to consider the effects of organizational context on individuals engaged in EIP (Austin, Dal Santo & Lee, 2012; Lee, Bright, & Berlin, 2013; McBeath et al., 2015; Yousefi-Nooraie, Dobbins, & Marin, 2014). Research situating the individual evidence-informed practitioner within the organization focuses attention on practitioner discretion in carrying out formal roles within the immediate task and technical environment. Studies have identified concerns related to the effects of monitoring and the diminished professional responsibility of frontline practitioners due to managerialism and funder-driven expectations of effectiveness and efficiency (Gray, Joy, Plath, & Webb, 2012; Mullen, Bledsoe, & Bellamy, 2008; Savaya & Altschuler, 2013). Organizational factors reported in the research relate to implementation barriers and facilitating factors including leadership, organizational culture, supervision, staff training, agency resources, and access to evidence (Barratt, 2003; Booth et al., 2003; Collins-Camargo et al., 2011; Gray et al., 2012; Mullen et al., 2008; Savaya & Altschuler, 2013).

These studies highlight the practical and ethical complications of engaging in EIP within a changing political economy of human service provision emphasizing efficiency, effectiveness, and outcome attainment. This research also suggests that the role of individual evidence-informed practitioners and managers is influenced by organizational context, such that engagement with various forms of evidence may reflect (a) the availability of different types of data; (b) the priorities of administrators; (c) the overall culture of the agency in relation to the use of evidence; and (d) the degree to which individual practitioners and managers are supported to engage in evidence-informed practice.

Research situating EIP in an organizational context increasingly reflects a “methodological pluralism” with respect to the definition of evidence. This perspective acknowledges the presence and potential value of multiple types of evidence, including qualitative, quantitative, and practice-based research and agency-generated administrative and performance data, needs assessments, and client surveys (Epstein, 2011; Gould, 2006; Qureshi, 2004;



Shlonsky & Mildon, 2014). Practitioners and managers in human service organizations may have limited access to external scientific research due to publisher licensing restrictions or limited time to search for, evaluate, and apply the best available scientific research (Barratt, 2003; Buckley, Tonmyr, Lewig, & Jack, 2014). In contrast, they may have access to substantial internal organizational data and reporting; however, only some of these may be relevant for addressing practice-based questions (McBeath et al., 2015).

Absent from the literature on EIP are direct explorations of the daily and organizationally situated practices involved in EIP—namely, the ways in which managers and practitioners use diverse types of evidence to inform their decision making in specific organizational settings. With respect to organizational context, the literature on knowledge management, organizational learning, and virtual communities of practice in human service organizations identifies the important role that social and relational processes play in knowledge diffusion among managers and practitioners (Cook-Craig & Sabah, 2009; Gould, 2000; Herie & Martin, 2002). This work highlights limitations inherent in the EIP process model that focuses on individual frontline practitioners without also attending to the manner in which practitioner processes may be embedded within formal organizational goals and structures and within informal organizational norms and processes. For example, Nutley, Walter, and Davies (2009) note that interactive approaches and social influence appear to be most effective in improving research use among social work practitioners, and a Canadian study of public health workers found that interpersonal relationships and social and contextual factors influence information seeking in EIP (Yousefi-Nooraie et al., 2014). These studies suggest that practitioner and manager engagement in EIP is a group activity that may reflect prevailing social processes (e.g., the efforts of staff teams) and hierarchical and organizational forces (e.g., the influence and perspectives of key agency stakeholders).

More specifically, scholarship to date on EIP has not investigated the particular cognitive and interactive processes involved in gathering, interpreting, and making use of evidence. Generally, scholarship about critical thinking in social work practice suggests that EIP cognitive processes might involve (a) reframing and challenging assumptions; (b) synthesizing, comparing and evaluating ideas and observations; (c) problem solving; (d) creativity; and (e) critical talk, dialogue, and engagement (Gibbons & Gray, 2004). These critical thinking processes, when situated within a

social and organizational context, suggest that evidence-informed managers and practitioners engage in dialogue using agency data and other forms of evidence with colleagues at diverse levels of the agency (i.e., frontline, supervisory, and administrative) and in the service of identifying agency solutions to current practice dilemmas.

To further our understanding of the EIP process as carried out in the daily, agency-situated work of social work managers and practitioners, this qualitative study addressed two central questions: (1) What processes do managers and practitioners in public human service agencies engage in as they work with multiple sources of evidence to inform their practice decisions? and (2) What individual and organizational challenges do managers and practitioners experience as they work with various forms of evidence? Our empirical study presents findings from open-ended questions from an online survey involving responses from 473 individuals, including executives, managers, supervisors, and line staff, in 11 county human service organizations in the San Francisco Bay Area. The findings describe the cognitive, interactive, action, and compliance processes involved in EIP and the organizationally situated challenges related to integrating stakeholder perspectives, developing measurement schemes, and managing resources. EIP emerges as a form of collective action within organizations that is carried out by managerial and direct practitioners through nonlinear and complex processes.

## Methods

### *Sample and data collection*

The 11 county social service agencies that participated in this online survey conducted in June–July 2013 are responsible for Child Welfare, Benefits/Public Assistance, Employment Services, and Adults and Aging, with three of the agencies additionally overseeing county health services. They were selected purposively to represent a diverse set of organizations with respect to (a) size (e.g., 350–2,200 full-time-equivalent employees), (b) budget (e.g., \$93 million–\$738 million), and (c) resourcing and structure of research and evaluation functions (e.g., multi-staff, stand-alone unit directed by PhD-level researcher compared to individual master's-level analysts assigned to program divisions).

The purposive, nonprobability sample of respondents included staff at the frontline, supervisory, managerial, and executive levels. Email invitations to participate were sent to 958 employees; a total of 497 responded to the online survey that included closed- and open-ended questions,

representing an overall 52% response rate, above average for organizationally based employee surveys (Baruch & Holton, 2008). Among these 497 respondents, 473 individuals provided responses to one or more of the open-ended questions, representing a 49% response rate; 24 did not respond to any open-ended questions. With respect to program responsibilities, the largest percentage of respondents worked in Child Welfare (43%), followed by Benefits/Public Assistance/Employment Services (19%), and Adults and Aging (7%). The remainder of the respondents worked in administrative or analyst roles that were not program specific (e.g., fiscal, HR, IT, planning, evaluation) (31%). With respect to work role, a substantial majority of respondents were in managerial positions. The largest percentage of respondents were supervisors (37%), followed by middle managers (28%), executives (17%), frontline staff (9%), and administrative/support staff (6%). Approval for the study was granted by the authors' institutional review board, and consent information was included in the online survey.

The survey sought to understand how human service managers and practitioners use multiple types of evidence, including those generated by performance measurement systems and program evaluations, as well as external research, client perspectives, and professional experience, to inform their practice and enhance services and agency operations. This analysis used qualitative data from open-ended questions related to four domains: (1) ideas for improving client services or agency operations (e.g., What are some recent examples of your thinking about how to improve client services or agency operations, and what are some barriers? [384 respondents]); (2) interest in EIP activities and training (e.g., If you could find time to attend a short program on EIP, why would or wouldn't you be interested in participating? [355 respondents]/Why would or wouldn't you be interested in participating in an evidence request service? [335 respondents]); (3) uses of internal and external sources of evidence (e.g., For what purpose do you use your agency's/program's dashboard or regular reports? (254 respondents)/How else would you investigate reasons for caseload changes? [44 respondents]); and (4) defining and measuring service quality and outcomes (e.g., Describe a challenge you have experienced in your agency related to defining and measuring "service quality" and "client outcomes", and strategies to respond to this challenge [248 respondents]). The length of responses to questions in each of the four domains ranged from partial sentences or phrases to paragraphs of 5 to 6 sentences.

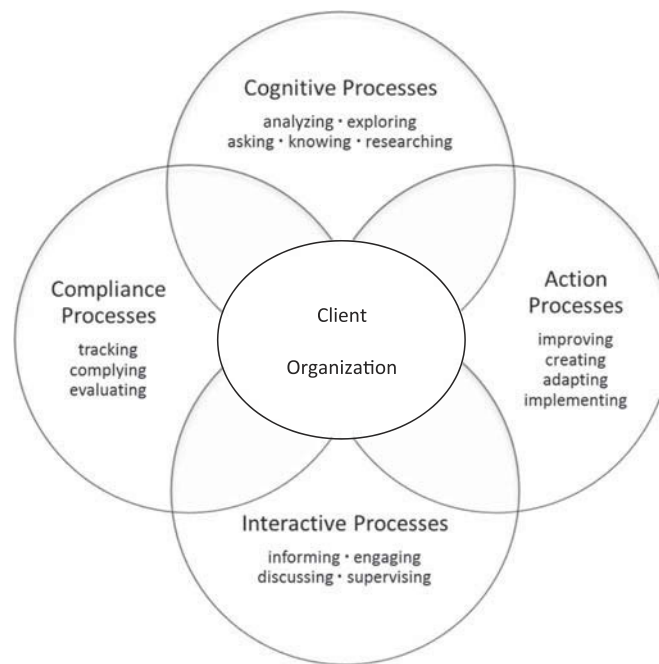
## Analysis

Our approach to analysis was consistent with the definition of grounded theory methods proposed by Charmaz (2005): "a set of flexible analytic guidelines that enable researchers to focus their data collection and to build inductive middle range theories through successive levels of data analysis and conceptual development . . . that provide tools for analyzing processes" (pp. 507–508). The analysis was carried out in three phases, and integrated multiple coding strategies, consistent with the flexible approaches to qualitative analysis suggested by Saldaña (2013) and Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014). Coding was carried out by the first author using Dedoose in conjunction with manual-coding methods. Dedoose is a web-based qualitative analysis software application that provides tools for data management and analysis common to computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software (e.g., excerpting, coding, cross-referencing of codes, memo writing and linking, importing of quantitative data for mixed-methods analyses, and visual data displays) (Dedoose, 2016; Gilbert, Jackson, & di Gregorio, 2014; Moylan, Derr, & Lindhorst, 2015). Coding strategies and specific codes were noted and described in analytic memos and were reviewed with co-authors, with memo-sharing and discussion conducted regularly throughout the analytical process (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

The first cycle coding scheme was developed based upon a complete reading of the data, which identified three high level codes: (1) values coding to capture responses related to the importance or value of EIP; (2) descriptive coding focused on concrete activities and processes, with subcodes that identified EIP activities and distinguished them from other practice activities; and (3) coding to capture tensions and challenges associated with EIP (Saldaña, 2013). These codes were then applied to the data in a case-based approach in which data were sorted by respondent.

The second phase of the analysis focused on mapping and conceptualizing the specific processes and activities involved in EIP. An export of all the EIP-activity-coded data was used to create a new document that was loaded into Dedoose. A new subcode, Process Verb, was then created in Dedoose and used to code all action verbs and verb phrases related specifically to EIP activities, excluding activities unrelated to EIP. This process resulted in a list of 807 verbs or verb phrases that were exported into Excel for review and cleaning. The list of verbs was condensed by merging repeat instances and synonyms, and the resulting list of 129 unique verbs was organized in a conceptually ordered matrix that displayed activities under six high-level categories in order

**FIGURE 1**  
**EIP Processes**



to “subsume the particulars into the general” (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 129). This matrix was then reviewed and critiqued by the study coauthors, followed by a process of member checking involving review and discussion by 38 supervisors and managers at the 11 participating agencies, the group representing 65% of the survey sample. The lead author presented the matrix to the group, who then spent 20–25 minutes in small discussion groups critiquing the content and organization of the matrix. The small group discussions were reported back to the lead author and the full group, followed by further discussion to develop a unified perspective on the validity of the concepts outlined in the matrix. These critical reflections, grounded in prior research and practice experience, were used to develop a concept map identifying four EIP process domains (described in the next section). Finally, an analysis was conducted to develop an understanding of the relationship between the four EIP process domains as well as the agency-based factors that inform manager and practitioner engagement in EIP. In this stage, using a manual-coding process, the full data set was reviewed and coded with two high-level binary codes, linear/nonlinear and organizational driver/client driver.

### **Limitations**

The purposive organizational and individual samples dictate caution when generalizing findings to other public

human service agencies. Further, the data are based upon self-report, and responses may reflect a social-desirability bias toward EIP in the current policy and practice environment. Lastly, while the open-ended survey questions generated a large number of responses, the detail provided by each respondent was limited as noted above.

### **Findings**

Respondents described a broad array of EIP activities in which they use multiple forms of evidence to achieve multiple purposes. They reported engaging in EIP, in order to respond to drivers that reflect organizational as well as client needs, and carrying out EIP activities in multiple, varying sequences. EIP activities clustered in four domains: (1) cognitive processes; (2) interactive processes; (3) action processes; and (4) compliance processes, as depicted in *Figure 1*. In the cognitive, interactive, and compliance domains, respondents identified associated challenges; however, they did not describe significant or common challenges associated with the action process domain.

### **EIP drivers and sequencing**

Respondents described a balance between *the primary drivers of EIP—responding to client needs and addressing organizational priorities and challenges*. EIP related to *client needs* included responding to individual clients as well as broader

efforts to improve service quality, service targeting, and aggregate outcomes. As a mid-level child welfare manager in a medium-size county agency noted when explaining her interest in attending an EIP program, “[p]roviding EBP’s is paramount in our agency thinking. All our programs are built with this in mind, to protect resources and to target only the highest populations in child welfare.” With respect to *organizational drivers* of EIP, respondents reported multiple aims, including (a) increasing productivity and efficiency; (b) responding to externally imposed mandates and incentives; (c) improving staff morale; and (d) providing opportunities for staff development. Client and organizational drivers of EIP were often described simultaneously, as illustrated by an administrative support staff person in the child welfare division of a small rural county agency who described her interest in an EIP program: “To see what we could do better to improve our service to clients. What can we change to make it a better experience for the families we serve, in addition to providing opportunities for growth for our staff?”

The *four EIP process domains* were described as occurring in multiple, varying stages, rather than as a fixed, linear or cyclical process. For example, monitoring (compliance activity) may follow a sequence in which a service strategy is designed (cognitive process) and implemented (action process) and staff are trained and supervised (cognitive-interactive processes). In another context, monitoring (compliance process) may generate questions and subsequent analyses (cognitive processes), as when one mid-level manager in a large urban county agency’s fiscal division noted that she used the agency dashboard to “see what overall trends look like and identify any questions I might need to ask depending on what the data is.” EIP activities also occur simultaneously, such as when work teams review data dashboards together (cognitive process) and discuss (interactive process) client trends and staff performance. For example, a mid-level child welfare manager in a large urban county agency noted using a dashboard “to review information with my peers, staff and supervisor about how my program is performing.”

### *Cognitive processes*

Respondents described a series of cognitive processes as central to EIP: (a) *asking*, (b) *exploring*, (c) *researching*, (d) *analyzing*, and (e) *knowing*. The asking process was prominent among respondents’ descriptions of EIP, indicating they formulate a diverse array of questions such as “how to support the move towards unsupervised/community visits” (mid-level child welfare manager) and “how to shorten wait time to complete work requests” (supervisor

of administrative support staff). *Exploratory activities* (e.g., looking, searching, and investigating) were common, reflected by an adult and aging supervisor in a large suburban county agency who sought to “hear new ideas and explore how other programs are meeting the needs of the community, effectively.” More systematic *research activities* were also common, particularly reading internal and external materials (e.g., “Read articles about utilizing technology and identify ways to translate into service delivery (child welfare supervisor). Analytical processes were central (e.g., thinking, comparing, analyzing), as illustrated by an executive overseeing public assistance in a large urban county agency who reported s/he would “analyze data re: families waiting for child care subsidies against employment data on unemployment, CalWORKs data, and child welfare data” in order to better understand the reasons for a major change in caseload size. Finally, a less common but important cognitive process involves using evidence to *predict* or *forecast* (e.g., “track trends, levels of service, determine whether we’re meeting service targets, attempt to forecast future” [member of executive team]). Engaging in these cognitive activities, respondents seek to determine the source of and solutions to current and future needs and problems.

Respondents noted that cognitive processes underlie the development of measures that utilize agency data to inform decision making, raising challenges related to developing accurate logic models, selecting outcomes, and determining appropriate metrics. A number of respondents expressed *concerns about the logic models* underlying the programs and services being delivered, pointing to a disjuncture between service quality and client outcomes. As an employment services supervisor in a large suburban county agency explained, “Services provided may be of high quality, yet outcomes do not reflect that; the same is also possible in reverse.” A child welfare supervisor in a medium size suburban/rural county agency highlighted the challenges associated with developing *accurate models of human behavior*: “Predicting human behavior is very difficult if not impossible. A good quality service is never a guarantee that a client will be successful.” Given the complexity of human services, these practitioners in county human service agencies found it difficult to *define service outcomes and quality*, as noted by an executive in the fiscal division of a small rural county agency: “We constantly struggle with the definition of success and whether the outcome of a case was successful or not.” Respondents also described difficulties with operationalizing the “independent and dependent variables that impact a person’s life and life situation which impact the



success and/or the non-success of service delivery” (public assistance executive). As with developing logic models, a central difficulty relates to accounting for client variation in the design of measures to evaluate services. As a child welfare worker in a large urban county agency noted:

Each client came from a different background and they each are from a different playing field, so we cannot expect each client fits our standard measure based on their situation; it would be unfair and unrealistic to expect certain clients and families to fulfill our standard and requirements at certain level and at certain timeline.

### *Interactive processes*

Respondents described relying heavily on interactive processes that involve working with others as they engage in EIP, including *engaging, talking, informing, and supervising*. A substantial majority of respondents proposed interactive strategies when describing actions they would take to address an increase in caseload size. This array of strategies included: (a) internal and external information gathering from colleagues; (b) consultation with peers and experts; and (c) collaborative decision making. *Reaching out to stakeholders and colleagues* was seen as important to determine need and identify and implement promising strategies (e.g., “engage CBOs and possibly our own staff to get trained in trauma informed models that work, such as Dialectical Behavior Therapy for high risk teens and Parent Child Interaction Therapy for parenting coaching” (child welfare executive)). *Providing information* to multiple audiences within and outside the agency was reported to be a very common element of EIP, through formal reporting and training, as well as through informal communication activities. Evidence use is also an important component of *supervision*, used to direct and motivate staff.

*Interactions with both internal and external stakeholder groups* were described as common in the EIP process, including: (a) agency employees (e.g., line staff, staff in other programs or divisions); (b) community members (e.g., clients, families, community members); (c) professionals (e.g., community service providers, other county agencies, other county human service agencies; and (d) researchers/academics. An executive in the public assistance division of a large urban agency noted that after examining multiple evidence sources, including agency caseload data and regional economic and employment statistics, she would “interview line staff and supervisors in focus group type settings to glean info from the ground on trends. Routinely

when there are caseload or demand shifts, this is discussed in statewide meetings to fact check and determine if it is the result of changing practices or policies or if it is unique to our county.”

Respondents described the *significant, complex roles played by stakeholders* in EIP, including generating new ideas to improve practice (e.g., “meeting with staff to solicit ideas how best we can serve our clients with the many changes that impact their lives” [adult and aging executive]). Respondents also emphasized the importance of stakeholder perspectives in defining or conceptualizing outcomes/quality/success. A mid-level manager with cross-division responsibilities in a large urban agency highlighted the importance of incorporating service user input by “allowing our customers to define what high quality service and successful outcomes are,” while a child welfare supervisor in a large suburban agency sought to gain input from multiple stakeholder groups, by using “focus groups of families, staff, and service providers in order to develop measures and ultimately to shape future strategies and practice.” Strategies to gain client perspectives were seen as particularly important when evaluating service quality, including “focus groups or post service contact with clients to ask how well we did and what we could have done better” (administrative support executive). Some respondents spoke of the value of stakeholder perspectives that can aid in interpreting and validating data, including a mid-level child welfare manager in a large suburban agency who described “talking with community providers to see if perceived trends are congruent with reality.” Colleagues and other professionals were the most common source of information about innovative or best practices.

Finally, while incorporating the perspectives of multiple stakeholders in EIP processes was generally viewed as important and useful, by contributing to knowledge or clarifying issues, it also appears to *complicate decision making*, particularly related to measuring and assessing service quality and outcomes. As a mid-level manager in the planning and evaluation division of a medium-size suburban/ rural agency noted, “everyone has a different perception of service quality and client outcomes.”

### *Action processes*

Respondents reported that evidence provides the foundation for multiple types of managerial and organizational actions including *implementing, improving, adapting, creating and directing* (e.g., “act upon the data”; “implement better solutions”; “drive decision making”; “create the most efficient and effective customer service”). An important aim



of EIP, as described by participants, relates to *improving agency services and operations through creating and/or adapting* new services, business processes, and measures. As an administrative support supervisor in a medium-size suburban agency observed: “We would use the data to constantly refine and improve our work processes to adapt to client needs, while increasing efficiency and worker satisfaction.” Describing her interest in playing a role in information-sharing activities within the agency, a child welfare supervisor in a medium-size suburban/rural agency explained that she would “see the benefit in engaging in dialogue and training within the department to improve service delivery. Clients would benefit, staff would feel that they are having an effective impact and the agency would likely improve its compliance measures.”

When asked to provide examples of their thinking about how to improve client services or agency operations, many respondents reported engaging in EIP-related activities. For example, a child welfare executive in a large urban agency noted she had “reviewed evidence based practice for working with high needs teens, asked a friend in emergency management for ideas in disaster prep, [and] attended training on my own time to learn EBP for high risk teens.” A child welfare supervisor in the same agency similarly described turning to externally generated research evidence and consulting with experts: “reading national publications about child welfare services; network[ing] outside of work with professionals in related fields.” These examples illustrate the strong link between EIP and active efforts to improve multiple aspects of agency practice, including work processes, client experiences and outcomes, measurement decisions, and worker satisfaction. In contrast to the challenges described by respondents related to cognitive, interactive, and compliance processes, the analysis did not identify responses that described challenges specifically associated with action processes.

### *Compliance processes*

Activities related to complying with federal and state mandates were also common EIP processes described by participants, including *tracking, monitoring, and reviewing data* in order to meet performance standards. Respondents utilized data monitoring for multiple purposes that included: (a) supervision (e.g., “helping [staff] track what has been done and what needs to be done on their caseloads on a weekly basis” [child welfare supervisor]), (b) identification of caseload trends (e.g., “tracking trends such as caseloads size, case types, reunification rates” [mid-level child welfare manager]), and (c) performance reporting (e.g., “track my

staff efforts, report out to agency on measures my staff are responsible for and use in decision making processes” [mid-level administrative support manager]). Tracking and monitoring were used to make “daily and strategic decisions” and were typical across agency divisions, including child welfare (e.g., “caseloads, numbers of youth in care, placement types”), welfare benefits (e.g., “use to establish the error rate and trends”), and external reporting by executive teams (e.g., “report to the board [of supervisors]”).

Responses to a question about challenges in measuring service quality and client outcomes highlighted *issues associated with using quantitative data*, including for compliance monitoring. Some participants noted concerns related to what a child welfare executive in a large urban/suburban agency described as the focus on “numbers (nuts & bolts), not the quality of work/engagement social worker is making with family.” While some respondents viewed quantitative data as “easy to capture” (child welfare analyst), others noted that it can be difficult to “get the numbers to be meaningful to line staff” (mid-level planning and evaluation manager). A planning and evaluation executive reported similar difficulties involved in efforts to “engage staff with consistent data collection” in order to provide the data necessary for compliance monitoring. Finally, several respondents described *resource constraints* that can impede using data to inform compliance processes; as a mid-level public assistance manager in a large urban agency explained: “Data need interpretation. Time is a factor in dealing with the abundance of data.”

## **Discussion**

These findings provide insight into the organizationally situated activities of managers and practitioners involved in EIP. Overall, these EIP processes are described as (a) multi-level (e.g., involving frontline staff, supervisors, managers, executives, and analysts); (b) multi-question (i.e., client questions, program questions, planning questions, administrative questions); and (c) driven by multiple organizational goals (e.g., accountability and learning, stakeholder engagement, compliance, and innovation). Specifically, managerial and practitioner engagement in EIP can be organized along cognitive, interactive, action, and compliance dimensions. The *cognitive* processes that inform decision making include asking, exploring, researching, analyzing, and knowing. Each of these elements is rooted in the perspective of “research-mindedness” that includes curiosity about ways to improve practice at different levels of the organization, critical reflection upon one’s practice and how it might inform

decision making, and critical-thinking capacities needed to understand, analyze, and interpret evidence (Austin, Dal Santo & Lee, 2012).

The *interactive* processes reflect the interpersonal skills needed to engage, talk, inform, and supervise in organizational settings. Study findings suggest that managers and practitioners do not engage in EIP activities in isolation. Rather, they gather information from, consult with, and engage in collaborative decision making with agency colleagues, community members, and external professionals and researchers. These cognitive and interactive processes operationalize three key elements of EIP identified by Sackett, Straus, Richardson, Rosenberg, and Haynes (1997) nearly 20 years ago—namely, identifying relevant research, drawing upon practice wisdom, and continuously seeking and utilizing the perspectives of service users. They point further to the need to expand the traditional EIP focus on constructing researchable questions derived from one's own practice to include questions derived from organizational challenges and from the perspectives of others within the agency setting. The findings related to the interactive nature of EIP highlight the social networks through which managers and practitioners engage in EIP within their agencies. We find evidence that individuals working in human service organizations are engaging in complex reasoning and critical thinking in the company of co-workers, clients, and community members. These interactions are organizationally structured in the sense that practitioners and managers are talking with colleagues in their immediate work environments and with other individuals they may encounter through boundary-spanning roles.

The *action* processes described by study participants are aimed at improving multiple aspects of agency practice (e.g., business processes, client service outcomes, service quality and outcome measurement, and staff development and satisfaction). Action processes involve seeking out and using diverse forms of evidence to design, implement and adapt new structures and processes in order to improve program services and operations. In this sense, EIP focused on action can support innovation in response to critical organizational prompts. Innovation often involves learning from others inside and outside the organization, and this learning can be traced to the capacity to engage with the evidence emerging from daily practice (Hargadon, 2002).

In contrast, *compliance* processes are responsive to administrative and funding requirements, involving tracking, monitoring, and reviewing data, in order to demonstrate achievement of performance standards and program

fidelity. The focus on fidelity to existing service strategies and compliance with standards based in historical measures of performance may serve to inhibit efforts to innovate. EIP thus emerges in these findings as a tactic to pursue multiple organizational goals, not all of which may be consonant. While one of the purposes of public human service organizations is to demonstrate accountability for public funds received and the quality of the services provided, there is also a growing interest in finding ways to respond to changing client needs. One way for human service organizations to weather turbulent fiscal and policy environments is through innovation in service programs.

These findings point to several implications for practice and research. The importance of interactive processes in EIP indicates that staff development programs need to emphasize skills related to relationship building and maintenance, negotiation, and consensus building in order to support staff efforts to engage diverse stakeholders in EIP. The findings suggesting that EIP in public human service organizations occurs across multiple levels of organizational hierarchy indicate that senior agency staff may need to develop new forms of communication to support the sharing of data and evidence throughout the organization. Skill development also needs to focus on the cognitive capacity to engage in EIP, including the ability to create logic models and measures of service quality and outcomes. In addition to staff capacity building, collaborative initiatives involving researchers and agency staff can assist in developing meaningful measures of service quality and outcomes that draw upon professional, client, and stakeholder values and expertise. Finally, agency funders and leaders need to do more to ensure that staff members have sufficient time to engage in EIP.

Future research is needed to explore the nature of EIP as a form of collective action inside organizations. To what extent will organizational culture support informal norms, like trust, that may be necessary for promoting participatory forms of EIP? What organizational supports are needed to create open, engaging, and safe spaces to gather and assess complex data? Given the common perception that individuals who work in human services are people oriented and data averse, the dynamic interplay between cognition and interaction also emerges as an important area for exploration. Research is needed to inform strategies that help managers and practitioners engage with evidence in ways that are analytically rigorous and socially interactive. Specific questions include (a) What kinds of materials and communication strategies can support critical reflection on

research? (b) How can management or team meetings be designed to help participants examine and interpret agency data as well as use it to guide program and practice decisions? (c) What kinds of processes can effectively engage clients and community members in assessing and interpreting research and agency data? and (d) What kinds of organizational incentives and other tools can serve to make these processes both inclusive and productive?

The findings emphasize dual processes of action and compliance when translating evidence into individual and organizational behaviors, raising the potential for tension between innovation and accountability. Whereas the action processes described by study participants reflect a future-oriented desire to improve service quality and client outcomes, the compliance processes focus on tracking current outcomes and behaviors and ensuring fidelity to existing forms of practice. Given the current accountability environment of public human service organizations, research is needed to examine the effect of compliance-oriented forms of EIP practice on innovation-minded human service managers and practitioners. Important questions relate to understanding individual motivations to innovate, as well as identifying agency factors that promote innovation in the regulation-dominated and resource-limited environment of public human service organizations. Finally, although the findings of this study did not identify significant challenges related to action processes, the study design did not allow for follow-up inquiry, hence, further research exploring this theme might uncover additional challenges.

## Conclusion

These findings offer a more comprehensive picture of EIP in daily practice than previous research has provided, illuminating respondents' understanding of EIP and their experiences engaging with diverse forms of evidence within their agencies. The understanding of EIP as a continuous, multi-dimensional process embedded within agency-based social and organizational practices and priorities and conducted at all organizational levels differs substantially from the ESI model that focuses on the implementation of manualized interventions originating outside the agency. It differs similarly from the linear, stepwise model, in which EIP is (a) carried out by individual, isolated frontline practitioners, (b) focused on external research while excluding agency generated data, and (c) limited to addressing individual client problems. This study finds that engagement in EIP may be influenced strongly by organizational demands and goals, rather than staff or service-user interests alone. The findings suggest further that EIP frameworks used in agency settings

involve both cognitive and interactive processes, where managers and practitioners engage simultaneously in "critical talk, dialogue and engagement" (Gibbons & Gray, 2004, p. 21; Peake & Epstein, 2005). Finally, findings highlight the potential for tension between compliance- and innovation-oriented aims for individuals and agencies engaged in EIP.

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# Using Performance Measures to Manage Child Welfare Outcomes: Local Strategies and Decision Making\*

MARK SAMPLES, SARAH CARNOCHAN,  
AND MICHAEL J. AUSTIN

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## ABSTRACT

The federal child welfare performance measurement system exerts a profound influence over the design, delivery, and evaluation of child welfare services at the local level, with funding contingent upon participation in the federally mandated Child and Family Services Review. In this exploratory study the authors focus on local efforts to respond to and comply with the federal child welfare performance measurement system in 11 northern California counties. The authors review the System Improvement Plans of each county and the findings from focus groups with child welfare staff conducted in five of the counties that included the limitations of federal performance measures, the difficulty using these measures to inform decision making, and the continuing struggle to achieve the major child welfare goals of safety, permanency, and well-being. The implications include the need for: flexibility in the federal performance measurement system, opportunities to integrate local values and priorities, and child well-being measures so that timeliness does not take on more significance than well-being or the quality of relationships among local stakeholders in the child welfare system.

**KEYWORDS:** Child welfare, performance standards, compliance, decision making

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## Local Strategies and Decision Making

The federal child welfare performance measurement system exerts a profound influence over the design, delivery, and evaluation of child welfare services at the local level, with funding contingent upon participation in the federally mandated Child and Family Services Review (CFSR; Reed & Karpilow, 2009). The federal CFSR was established under the Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997 (ASFA), enacted to address the issue of children remaining in foster care for long periods of time without a permanent resolution through reunification or adoption (Adler, 2001; Berwick, 2009). In addition to imposing stricter limits on the time children spend in foster care, ASFA mandated a set of child welfare goals and performance measures to ensure systematic data collection and measurement of state performance in relationship to the federally defined goals.

In order to avoid financial penalties, states must demonstrate progress toward the goals and outcomes set forth under ASFA. In California, the federal CFSR process and performance measures are also incorporated at the state level into the California Child and Family Services Review (C-CFSR), effectively transmitting federal mandates to local county agencies responsible for delivering child welfare services. As the California Department of Social Services (CDSS) notes, "By design, the C-CFSR closely follows the federal emphasis on safety, permanency, and well-being" (CDSS, 2009, p. 2). The C-CFSR incorporates the federal

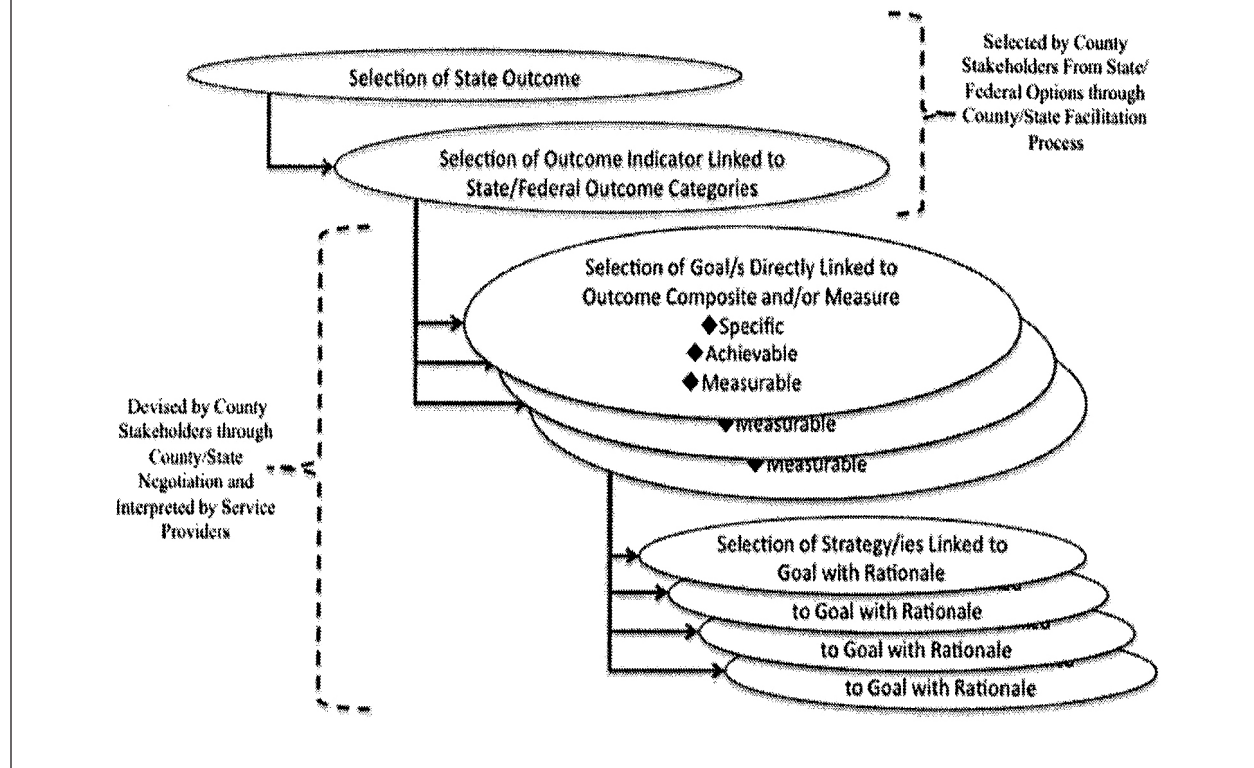
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\* *Journal of Evidence-Based Social Work*, 10:254-264, 2013  
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ISSN: 1543-3714 print/1543-3722 online  
DOI: 10.1080/15433714.2013.788954

**FIGURE 1**  
**Procedure in Practice as Explained by State Guide**



performance measures, supplementing them with additional measures under the goals of safety, permanence, and well-being (Reed & Karpilow, 2009). The C-CFSR process involves a three-step cycle of peer review, self-assessment, and strategic planning to evaluate and address county agency performance related to the federal child welfare performance measures. Through this process, each county develops a local System Improvement Plan (SIP) to guide decisions about program strategies and resource allocation.

In this exploratory study the authors examine local efforts to respond to and comply with the federally mandated child welfare performance measurement system in a sample of northern California counties. It includes a review of the SIPs of 11 counties, examining the decisions counties report in their selection of goals and related performance measures to be addressed. It is followed by a discussion of the findings from focus groups conducted with staff in 5 of the 11 counties, in which local practitioners were asked to describe their perspectives on the federal outcomes and performance measures. The examination of agency and staff level responses to the federal performance measurement

system concludes with a set of implications for future reform efforts.

### County System Improvement Plans: Local Efforts at Results-Oriented Management

The purpose of the review of county SIPs was to examine the experiences of local counties in their efforts to comply with the federal performance measurement system established at the federal level. The SIPs reviewed in this analysis were accessed online through the website of the CDSS (Alameda County, 2008; Contra Costa County, 2004; Marin County, 2007; Monterey County, 2004; Monterey County, 2008; Napa County, 2007; San Francisco County, 2007; San Mateo County, 2007; Santa Clara County, 2006; Santa Cruz County, 2008; Solano County, 2004; Sonoma County, 2008). The 11 counties represent the diverse political, racial, and economic demographics of northern California, with rural, semi-urban, and urban populations ranging in size, according to 2008 U.S. Census Bureau estimates, from the smallest county, with under 60,000 people, to the largest, with about 1.7 million people.

**FIGURE 2**  
**Example of Outcome Selection with Directly Linked Goals and Strategies**  
**from a County System Improvement Plan 2007-2009**

(color figure available online)

<b>Component C: Safety</b>	<b>Outcome/Systemic Factor: 3 F Percent of admissions who are re-entries</b>		
	County's Current Performance: For the most recent 12 month period for which results are available, ending 9/30/06, 9.8% of children admitted to child welfare supervised foster care were subsequent entries within 12 months of a prior exit.		
	Improvement Goal 5.0: Maintain the rate of admissions that are reentries as less than 8.6%.		
	<b>Strategy 5.1:</b>	<b>Strategy Rationale:</b>	
	Utilize Differential Response to use community-based, culturally competent preventative services for families at risk of child abuse and neglect; this will support communities in increasing quantity and quality of services.	The use of Differential response will improve family engagement, assist referred families to build on their strengths, and link families with community leaders and resources. This will help communities to "care for their own."	
	<b>Milestones</b>	<b>Timeframes</b>	<b>Assigned To</b>
	5.1.1 Establish Differential Response Implementation Planning Committee.	May 2007	Senior Staff Services Analyst
	5.1.2 Explore Collaboration with COPE, Family Resource Centers and other community partners.	February 2007	Senior Staff Services Analyst
	5.1.3 Explore potential funding sources for implementation and ongoing support of DR.	July 2007	Child Welfare Director
	5.1.4 Develop Policy responding to funding requirements including reporting time frames and implementation goals.	Aug 2007	Assistant Child Welfare Director
			Senior Staff Services

To provide guidance to counties in the development of their SIPs, the CDSS disseminates a County Self-Assessment Process Guide. As noted explicitly in the guide, "[a]nalysis of the outcomes forms the heart of the CSA" (CDSS, 2009, p. 20). The CSA Guide is based on a logic model that is common in the performance management literature (Hatry, 2006; Poister, 2003; Savaya & Waysman, 2005; Schalock & Bonham, 2003). Counties engaged in the SIP process are directed to review their administrative data in order to identify outcome measures where performance improvement is needed, and identify specific, achievable, and measurable goals and corresponding strategies directly linked to these outcome measures (see *Figure 1*). The guide also mandates that counties include local stakeholders and peer review as they develop goals and strategies related to the outcomes and standards identified by federal and state human service agencies (CDSS, 2009).

In our review of the 11 county SIPs, we found that most offered at least one example in which the county utilized the assessment and planning process described in the state guide, based on the recommended logic model format. In these examples, while the SIP goals and strategies were

selected by local stakeholders, they were always tied to specific outcome measures defined by the federal performance measurement system. For example, one county selected the outcome measure "Percent of admissions who are reentries" and established a goal of maintaining "the rate of admission that are reentries as less than 8.6%" (*Figure 2*). This goal was specific, measurable, and directly linked to the state and federal reentry outcome measure.

In contrast, some counties specified outcome measures related to disproportionality and child well-being that differed from the federally defined measures. For example, one county determined that racial disproportionality should be a central focus for the county, explaining "it is critical to view improvement efforts from the lens of disproportionality given the alarming overrepresentation of children and families of color, including African American, Native American, and Latino." Another county also noted that the issue of disproportionality was an area where improvement was needed, highlighting the intersection with established standards for timely permanency. This excerpt from the SIP narrative described the need to balance the federal



performance measurement mandates with performance management priorities determined by local stakeholders:

The Redesign's emphasis on permanency and youth transition will assist the Bureau in addressing racial disproportionality and the fact that over 50% of children still in care after 54 months are African American. *While respecting the cultural viewpoint of African-American families regarding terminating parental rights and adoption of kin, the Bureau recognizes that it needs to improve its permanency focus for African American children and youth.* We intend to work with our collaborating agencies, faith-based communities and African-American community members in crafting an approach that will address this need [emphasis added].

A number of counties also used their SIPs to highlight child and family well-being as a critical outcome in addition to the federal and state performance measures. However, this approach runs contrary to the CSA Guide because while the state has established several process measures related to child well-being, neither the state nor the federal system has defined outcome measures related to child or family well-being. In one county that focused on the outcome of "no recurrence of maltreatment" the stakeholders participating in the SIP process did not propose simply reducing maltreatment recurrence by a certain percentage as its goal in this area, as the CSA Guide would have dictated. Instead, the county developed the goal to "Reduce and prevent parental substance abuse" along with a list of strategies and a rationale linked to substance abuse rather than to recurrence of maltreatment. The rationale for this approach is explained below:

Survey and key informant data identified parent's alcohol and drug issues as a major factor in ensuring child safety. *A majority of parents participating in the telephone surveys identified substance abuse as one of the top two challenges they faced.* Despite this high need, local key informants reported that there was a dearth of substance abuse services for child welfare parents. Parents who had difficulty assessing substance abuse services were parents with children living in the home and parents with children ages three and over in out of home care [emphasis added].

While federal performance measures appear to provide a degree of guidance for local agencies seeking to improve outcomes for children and families, locally defined priorities are deemed to take precedence in a number of instances. In these examples, agencies seek to frame and integrate needs and values articulated by local stakeholders (e.g., substance abuse treatment or the cultural views of African American families) into the federal performance measurement structure and process. It should be noted, however, that the SIPs leave the reader to interpret the intent of county stakeholder decisions because they are primarily a performance reporting tool for state and federal accountability. For example, when county stakeholders identify a specific outcome measure to address in their SIP, it is difficult to determine conclusively if this is the most pressing area of children's services to address.

### Staff Perspectives on Outcome Measurement

In addition to the analysis of the SIPs, focus groups captured the perspectives of child welfare staff with respect to the federal child welfare performance measures. The focus groups of 10 to 15 participants included line staff, supervisors, managers, and analysts who engaged in two to three hour discussions focused on one or more of the following six CFSR performance measures that had been selected by their agency directors: (1) reunification timeliness; (2) exits to permanency; (3) placement stability; (4) adoption timeliness; (5) recurrence of maltreatment; and (6) re-entry to care. The detailed notes on each session were content analyzed to identify common and central themes. While the focus groups were conducted in a diverse cross section of northern California counties with staff holding a range of positions, they did not represent a random stratified sample, as county agencies volunteered to hold a focus group and staff were invited by senior management to participate. As a result, it is difficult to generalize the findings beyond these specific locales.

The findings illustrate the different ways that staff try to balance the aims of locally responsive daily practice with the accountability requirements of the state and federal review processes. The findings are organized into three categories: (1) performance measures that are not adequately addressed in the CFSR and C-CFSR processes; (2) specific challenges in utilizing official measures or performance to inform decision making, and (3) the struggle to achieve the major child welfare goals of safety, permanency, and well-being.

### MISSING PERFORMANCE MEASURES

Participants described two missing performance measures in the CFSR process; namely, *child well-being* and stakeholder engagement. First, participants explained that although they were ultimately responsible for making decisions that were in the best interest of the child, efforts to maximize child well-being were not adequately addressed by existing CFSR and C-CFSR outcome measures (e.g., school performance and general health). Second, participants noted that the level of stakeholder engagement (e.g., strong supportive relationships with and among children, families of origin, kin, foster and adoptive families, group home coordinators, and representatives of the court) was not incorporated into the federal measures, despite the local priority given to developing a strong network of care-giving among these stakeholders.

### USING DATA TO INFORM DECISION MAKING

The second theme emerging from the focus groups involved the following challenges in using existing CFSR measures to guide decisions: (1) the practice dilemmas created by the use of the performance measures, (2) the influence of stakeholders representing the legal profession, and (3) the impact or the local context.

**Challenge 1: Performance measures creating practice dilemmas.** Focus group participants noted that CFSR performance measures often presented counties with the dilemma of balancing conflicting assessments of performance arising between timely reunification and adoption as well as between timely reunification/exits to permanency (other than adoption) and placement stability. In essence, the focus of practice efforts on one outcome measure could put the county at risk of inadequate performance on another measure.

Balancing reunification timeliness with adoption timeliness posed challenges for caretakers as well as for child welfare workers. In concurrent planning it is the role of child welfare workers to convince all stakeholders that working toward timely reunification and adoptive placement simultaneously is based primarily on promoting child well-being. Strong supportive relationships among all stakeholders are required to achieve this goal. However, focus group participants reported that potential adoptive parents are often conflicted as they struggle with a process that could potentially lead to reunification with the family of origin after they bond with the child in hopes of adoption. Many adoptive and foster parents thus seek to maintain emotional distance from families of origin, based on a fear of losing the child

and and/or resentment about the apparent lack of attention to the supportive family environment that they are trying to create to promote child well-being. For example, engaging in full disclosure practices with foster and adoptive parents regarding the problems that the biological parents are experiencing (e.g., substance abuse and other mental health issues) can backfire when this practice leads to raised expectations on the part of adoptive parents who are seeking to formalize their relationship with the child. By using permanency timelines to assess performance, it is difficult to account for the time it takes to develop strong relationships among the child welfare stakeholders in order to build the integrated child support network needed to facilitate quality long-term placements.

In addition, the barriers to coordination between adoption and reunification workers demonstrated the challenges posed by using CFSR outcomes for results-oriented decision making and those posed by the lack of performance measures focused on child well-being and stakeholder engagement. For example, one group noted that when intake workers assess the potential for reunification between a child and the family of origin and focus only on the likelihood of timely reunification, this practice can lead to inadequate attention to finding placements that offer the possibility of adoption. Where reunification efforts fail, workers may pass the responsibility for the case on to the adoption unit where workers focus on adoption timeliness. Simply measuring the timeliness of reunification and adoption may inadvertently encourage this type of uncoordinated practice.

Similar challenges are evident in the conflict between measures of placement stability and the timeliness of exits to permanency. For example, when focusing on child well-being, efforts to establish permanency are often more effective when viewed within the context of an integrated network of support for children (e.g., a child might maintain a permanent placement with kin but never attain legal permanency with these relatives). In essence, current CFSR measures do not adequately capture an alternative view of permanency where priority is given to “emotional permanency” and “long-term stability” based on the assessed well-being of a child within a more holistic network of kin support.

**Challenge 2: Influence of legal stakeholders.** Relationships between the county and representatives of the court (along with the regulatory and procedural frameworks governing child welfare) also present challenges to performance with



respect to the CFSR outcome measures. For example, the judge who interprets child welfare law in relationship to permanency decisions (along with legal counsel/advocates for children and their families of origin) directly influences performance outcomes related to reunification and adoption timeliness as well as reentry into care. In addition, overloaded court dockets can negatively impact adoption and reunification timelines but are beyond the control of county child welfare agencies.

Interactions with the court system highlight the need for CFSR measures to focus on outcomes related to child well-being and the strength of stakeholder connectedness. By requiring the termination or parental rights within a certain timeframe, the federal Adoption and Safe Families Act (ASFA) limits the possibility of reunification for families of origin making progress toward dealing with personal struggles (e.g., substance abuse problems or struggling to find steady sources of income) or working to build strong support networks (e.g., with county social workers, kin, etc.). Court representatives in some instances interpret ASFA's emphasis on exits to permanency as requiring quick determination of the likelihood of reunification followed by the termination of parental rights, leaving adoption and guardianship as the only remaining options.

Other court-related challenges involved the unique preferences of individual judges and court workers, which in some instances required child welfare workers to balance a judge's assessment of the performance of the agency with the CFSR measures of performance. It is clear that the strength of the relationship between child welfare agencies and judges is a key to achieving effective performance on CFSR measures. The nature of the relationship between individual social workers and judges is also important. For example, child welfare cases may be assessed by judges in terms of the agency's performance on how well holistic approaches are used to assist the child (e.g., how well social workers knew the child's progress in school) rather than focusing more narrowly on the federal permanency and stability measures. Some judges make decisions based on the preferences of the child, sometimes contrary to the recommendations of social workers, making it difficult to meet CFSR requirements when there is the potential for recurrence of abuse.

**Challenge 3: Local demographic and system differences.** In each focus group, participants repeatedly challenged the federal measures for failing to take into account the importance of demographic and other local characteristics in shaping performance on the federal measures. The majority

or these discussions fell into the following three categories: (1) specific child characteristics (e.g., age or mental health status), (2) cultural beliefs and knowledge of child welfare held by families of origin as well as adoptive and foster parents, and (3) local differences in county size and geography.

The majority of participants expressed concern that the standards for county agency performance, as measured by the CFSR performance measures, did not account for specific child characteristics and needs. Participants explained that specific child characteristics can lead social workers to make decisions that might seem unpalatable to policy makers but are influenced by the lack of viable placement options for youth. For example, the best interest of a 16-year-old child who is able to negotiate her environment in order to ensure her own safety with a non-abusive alcoholic parent may be different than the best interest of an 8-year-old where the risk of a recurrence of neglect poses a greater threat of harm.

Participants also noted that the prevalence of particular cultural beliefs and knowledge of child welfare held by families of origin as well as adoptive and foster parents presented another important factor that is not accounted for in the federal performance measures. For instance, some participants described the reluctance of family members who provide kin placements to engage in more formalized procedures to ensure a more permanent placement for the child, because they approach their roles as temporary guardians of children with the expectation that the child's parents would re-engage with their parental duties. Participants also described kin as often having a sense of entitlement to the child, believing that it preempted child welfare intervention (e.g., the reluctance of a grandmother to complete adoption paperwork because she felt that being a child's grandparent already established her legitimacy as a parent to the child).

Cultural competence is another prominent issue, particularly as it relates to matching foster and adoptive families with children. Participants explained that placement stability depends upon how well the specific needs of the child can be met by culturally competent, knowledgeable, and trained adoptive and foster families who fully understand the challenges they face with a particular child. However, participants also explained that the availability of culturally appropriate families and the resources needed to ensure placement stability were either limited or lacking in their counties. Some participants in rural counties noted that working with a large proportion of mostly Spanish-speaking migrant workers impacted the timeliness of finding stable and permanent placements because of language

and cultural barriers that slowed progress on procedural matters and impeded their understanding of how child welfare agencies operated. These participants also explained that cultural, language, and financial barriers often limited their ability to recruit foster and adoptive families from a diverse pool of potential applicants, thereby reducing the likelihood of matching children with families that were prepared to handle the array of child needs.

A final set of local factors related to a county's resources, size, and population density. For example, the recent state budget cuts are likely to diminish the level of county due diligence in assessing the risk that temporary and permanent placements for children pose for instability, reentry, recurrence of maltreatment in reunified families, or occurrence of maltreatment in foster care. Resource constraints affected the amount of staff time available for assessing individual child well-being or facilitating inter-agency collaboration (e.g., agents of the court, CalWORKs, mental health) and family involvement (families of origin, foster parents, kin, and potential adoptive parents). Participants from smaller counties suggested that their capacity to engage in these practices was affected by fewer resources in smaller economies when compared to larger counties that had more financial and human capital.

### **Implications for the Child Welfare Performance Measurement System**

The review of 11 county SIPs and focus group discussions with representatives from five counties provide insights into how individual counties and child welfare workers respond to the federal performance measurement system. The perspectives of local child welfare staff, who are engaged in the daily practice of protecting children and responding to the federal performance measurement system, should inform efforts to improve that system. While the focus groups identified a number of specific challenges and tensions relating to the federal performance measures, they also noted that the measures provide a framework for dialogue among practitioners to critically examine their own practice and the outcomes they seek for children and families.

The county SIPs offered examples of the interaction and tensions between the accountability aims of the performance measurement system at the federal and state level and the internal performance management objectives of local county level practice. In some cases, there was clear alignment between federal and local priorities. In others, counties sought to incorporate the needs and values of local stakeholders, including substance abusing parents in

families of origin and African American family members providing kin placements. A degree of flexibility needs to be built into the federal performance measurement system in order to ensure that local values, needs, and priorities can be integrated into performance improvement efforts.

By explicitly authorizing and encouraging states and counties to incorporate locally defined goals into their system improvement efforts, the federal performance measurement system can provide the context for multiple pilot projects around the country aimed at improving outcomes for children and families. Overly rigid performance measurement systems can inhibit experimentation and lead to "ossified" systems of care (Smith, 1995, p. 284, as cited in Van Thiel & Leeuw, 2009). By maintaining rigorous standards for the evaluation of projects or programs addressing locally defined priorities, a flexible performance measurement system can help to identify new evidence based practices. Furthermore, requiring states to develop performance measures and standards to evaluate progress toward locally determined goals could provide a laboratory for measuring child and family well-being across the country. Finally, to ensure that implementing local objectives does not hinder progress being made toward ensuring safety and timely permanency, it is necessary to continue tracking these outcomes.

The findings from focus groups identified multiple themes, including: (1) the failure of the current federal performance measurement system to address child and family well-being or the engagement of essential stakeholders; (2) the competing practice demands created by existing CFSR performance measures; (3) the role of legal stakeholders in achieving timeliness of adoption or reunification; and (4) the contributions of local factors such as demographics or county size to performance outcomes.

The issues noted by child welfare workers raise a number of potential implications for child welfare practice and related research. In the absence of explicit child well-being measures, the safety and permanency measures are at risk of promoting outcomes that are inconsistent with the ASFA's goals of child safety, permanency, and well-being. Strengthening the focus on child well-being and the engagement of stakeholders will demand that child welfare staff think about children holistically by examining their experiences and outcomes in multiple domains (in addition to safety, stability, and permanency) that include education, social networks, and more fundamentally, emotional stability and connectedness. This kind of practice will demand a broader systems perspective, drawing on formal institutional entities as well as informal systems, including community, family,

and friends, to develop a strong network of support and emotional connection for the child (Wulczyn et al., 2010).

To support the shift from a sole focus on safety and permanency to an increased emphasis on well-being, research is needed to identify appropriate measures of well-being. Most notably, measuring well-being requires the child welfare system to take a longitudinal perspective by tracking outcomes for children and youth into adulthood (Hook & Courtney, 2010). Focused efforts are needed to develop workable measures of child and family well-being as a way to ensure that the performance measurement system does not give rise to a performance paradox (Van Thiel & Leeuw, 2002) in which timeliness takes precedence over child well-being or the quality of relationships among local stakeholders in the child welfare system.

Placing well-being at the center of the federal performance measurement system offers a potential remedy to the competing demands experienced by child welfare workers as they seek to balance the goals of safety, stability, and timely permanency. As focus group participants described, there are multiple instances where the federal guidelines may inhibit a decision that benefits the child. For example, a decision to move a child that exceeds the federal guideline of two moves per stay in care may promote child well-being by offering a better cultural fit. Similarly, the complex process of achieving readiness to adopt for some caregivers may dictate a slower timeline than established under the federal system, but ultimately result in permanency for the child. A performance measurement system needs to be redesigned around the central goal of child well-being in order to allow for local flexibility that benefits children in care.

Accounting for the role played by legal stakeholders in the child welfare system raises additional concerns and questions for child welfare researchers and practitioners. While child welfare staff can provide numerous illustrations of the impact of the judicial process on federally defined outcomes, a scan of the research literature reveals few studies that systematically examine this issue. Promising court improvement initiatives around the country provide opportunities to enlist judicial support for better outcomes, as well as enlarge our understanding of the ways in which the court system hinders or helps the promotion of positive outcomes for children. As a starting point, improved court-agency relations may serve to improve timeliness outcomes, enabling system level issues such as scheduling conflicts to be jointly addressed (Carnochan et al., 2007).

Finally, although the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (U.S. DHHS) has declined to develop

risk adjustment models that would account for critical local variations in population demographics, child welfare staff participating in the focus groups provided illustrations of the potential harms to children that may result. Some described the additional time required to help non-English speaking families, whether original or adoptive, to understand the aims and requirements of the child welfare system. Failure to allow for longer timelines in these cases may result in premature TPR or the loss of potential adoptive placements. At the level of policy and practice, incentives to engage these families may be lessened, as efforts are centered on achieving the timeliness benchmarks set forth in federal regulations. To ensure that risk adjusted outcomes for certain populations do not lead to worse outcomes for these children or for all children in care, agencies must track and compare outcomes over time between populations and between locales. However, it is important to note that the effectiveness of risk adjusted measures may be limited, as Rothstein (2009) argues:

Attempts to control analyses of outputs for variation in the quality of inputs (severity of cases) can never be fully successful, because practitioners in direct contact with clients will always have insights about clients' potential that is more sophisticated than can be revealed by clients' membership in defined demographic groups. To avoid such distortion and corruption, an accountability system for child welfare services should rely on human judgment of trained professional evaluators. (p. 71)

As Rothstein argues, the assessments made by child welfare workers reflect a depth of knowledge about specific clients that broadly applied quantitative measures of performance cannot replicate.

These findings from exploratory research conducted at the local level examining agency and child welfare worker responses to the federal performance measurement system echo the arguments made by child welfare experts that the current performance measures and standards are problematic and require reform (Schuerman & Needell, 2009; Rothstein, 2009). The broad critiques articulated by Schuerman and Needell (2009) relate to: (1) variations in the state data that were used to develop the national standards, stemming from differences in policies, practice, population demographics, and other factors, (2) variations in the quality of data used by states to assess outcomes, (3) conflicts among the aims of the measures, (4) equal weighting of large and small states in developing national standards, and (5) failure

to utilize longitudinal measures to assess outcomes. Efforts to improve the current federal child welfare performance measurement system should be informed by the analyses and experiences of local child welfare practitioners as well as child welfare researchers, in order to achieve better outcomes for vulnerable children in care.

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## APPENDIX

### System Improvement Plans

- Alameda County (September 24, 2008) Waiver Implementation Plan/System Improvement Plan: June 2007–2010.
- Contra Costa County (September 28, 2004) System Improvement Plan.
- Marin County (June 1, 2007) Child and Family Services System Improvement Plan: June 2007–June 2010.
- Monterey County (September 27, 2004) Child and Family Services Review: System Improvement Plan: October 1, 2004–September 30, 2005.
- Monterey County (January 26, 2008) California Outcomes and Accountability System (COAS) System Improvement Plan: 2008–2010.
- Napa County (June 5, 2007) System Improvement Plan: 2007–2009.
- San Benito County (August 8, 2008) System Improvement Plan for the Period of July 1, 2008–June 30, 2010.
- San Benito County (January 2009) System Improvement Plan: Update: January 26, 2009–January 26, 2010.
- San Francisco County (April 7, 2007) AB636 Child Welfare Services System Improvement Plan: October 2007–September 2010.
- San Mateo County (March 12, 2007) California's Child and Family Services System Improvement Plan: FY 06/07–FY 08/09.
- Santa Clara County (November 9, 2006) System Improvement Plan: August 1, 2006–July 31, 2009.
- Santa Cruz County (February 15, 2008) Child Welfare System Improvement Plan: 2008–2010.
- Solano County (September 2004) Child and Family Services System Improvement Plan.
- Sonoma County (June 2008) System Improvement Plan: Update: July 2008–June 2009.



**VI.**

**INNOVATIVE ORGANIZATIONAL  
PRACTICES**

# Introducing Organizational Development (OD) Practices into a County Human Service Agency\*

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AND MICHAEL J. AUSTIN

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## ABSTRACT

Organization development (OD) is one approach to managing change within an organization. In this case study, organization development is defined as a top-management-supported, long-range effort to improve an organization's problem-solving and renewal processes, particularly through a more effective and collaborative diagnosis and management of the organization's culture. It is rare that a public county human service agency has the opportunity to incorporate an internal organizational development (OD) function to assist with managing organizational change. This is a case study of one such agency which hired an internal OD specialist to facilitate organizational restructuring related to the implementation of welfare reform. The case study is based on the first three years of implementation (1996–1999).

**KEYWORDS:** Organizational development, human services, change management

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It is rare that a public county human service agency has the opportunity to incorporate an internal organizational development (OD) function to assist with managing organizational change. This is a case study of one such agency which hired an internal OD specialist to facilitate organizational restructuring related to the implementation of welfare reform. The case study is based on the first three years of implementation (1996–1999). It is organized into the following sections: highlights from the literature, the assessment center approach to hiring an OD specialist, an array

of agency-based OD start-up initiatives and a concluding section on some of the “lessons learned” from this work in progress.

Organization development (OD) is one approach to managing change within an organization. While there are many definitions of OD, the following definitions are most relevant to this case study:

Organization development is a top-management-supported, long-range effort to improve an organization's problem-solving and renewal processes, particularly through a more effective and collaborative diagnosis and management of organization culture-with special emphasis on formal work team, temporary team, and intergroup culture-with the assistance of a consultant-facilitator” (French & Bell, 1990, p. 17). Organization development focuses on assuring healthy interand intra-unit relationships and helping groups initiate and manage change through primary emphasis on relationships and processes between and among individuals and groups (designed) to effect an impact on the organization as a system. (McLagan, 1989, p. 7)

Rothwell et al., (1995) provide a brief description of the following key steps in an OD intervention:

1. **Entry:** A problem is discovered and the need for change becomes apparent in the organization. Someone in the agency looks for an individual who is

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\* *Administration in Social Work*, Vol. 25(4) 2001  
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- capable of examining the problem and facilitating change.
2. **Start-Up:** The change agent begins to work with agency staff to identify issues surrounding the problem and to gain commitment from staff for participating in the change effort.
  3. **Assessment and Feedback:** The change agent gathers information about the problem and provides feedback about the information to those having a stake in the change process.
  4. **Action Planning:** The change agent works with decision-makers and stakeholders to develop an action plan to correct the problem.
  5. **Intervention:** The action plan is implemented and the change process is carried out.
  6. **Evaluation:** With the change agent, decision-makers and stakeholders assess the progress of the change effort.
  7. **Adoption:** Members of the agency accept ownership of the change, which is then implemented throughout the agency or work unit.
  8. **Separation:** The change agent is no longer needed for the change project because the result has been incorporated into the agency. Staff will assume responsibility for ensuring that improvements continue.

These steps are then carried out using a variety of OD interventions, or activities, such as those identified by Stacey (1992): diagnostic data collection, team-building, intergroup communications, survey feedback, training and education, restructuring, process consultation, coaching and counseling, and strategic management and planning.

Given the definitions of OD, the major steps in an OD process, and the array of OD techniques, it is important to note the following observations of Rothwell et al., (1995) when it comes to developing realistic expectations for what OD can and cannot accomplish:

- OD is long-range in perspective and not a “quick-fix” strategy for solving short-term performance problems.
- While OD efforts can be undertaken at any level within the agency, successful OD interventions need to be supported by top managers.
- OD expands worker’s perspectives so that they can apply new approaches to old problems, concentrating on the work group or organization in which these new approaches will be applied.
- OD emphasizes employee participation in the entire process from diagnosing problems to selecting a solution to planning for change, and evaluating results.

- The process of organization development is most effectively facilitated by a consultant who is either external or internal to the agency.

With these caveats and guidelines in mind, the Human Services Agency of San Mateo County, California began the process of envisioning the involvement of an internal OD consultant. Before describing the process, it is important to note the highlights from the limited literature on OD in the human services.

### Literature Review Highlights

While the OD literature reflects many more examples of applications from the private sector than from the public human services, this brief review highlights some of the challenges of using OD practices in a human service agency. The bureaucratic nature of public social service agencies and the general absence of leadership familiar with innovative processes for accomplishing change have created “closed systems” that are often inflexible and resistant to change. OD requires an “open system” in order to succeed (Norman & Keys, 1992). The organizational culture of maintenance and survival, along with the unique constraints imposed on public social service agencies, creates unique challenges for OD interventions (Resnick & Menefee, 1993; Golembiewski, Proehl, C., Jr., & Sink, 1981). Successful change processes in human service organizations require mechanisms and models that can deal with the organizational complexity as well as guide diagnosis, action planning, and implementation (Martinko & Tolchinsky, 1982).

Burke (1980) noted that “most OD consultants find working with bureaucracies, especially public ones, to be difficult at best” (Golembiewski et al., 1981, p. 679). Documented applications of OD in the public sector tend to focus on resolving: racial tension; conflict between individuals, specialties, and organizational units; community conflict; and tensions emanating from reorganization (Golembiewski et al., 1981). Research indicates that OD in public organizations can work particularly well with modest goals, acceptance of unexpected setbacks, and willingness to tackle manageable issues as opposed to attempting to change an entire system at one time. OD may be more useful for “fine tuning” and improving operations rather than bringing about massive change (Stupak & Moore, 1987).

While OD may confront unique challenges in the public sector, it is important to identify some of the reasons for these challenges before exploring specific OD applications in the human services. French et al. (1989) and

Golembiewski (1989) pointed out the following major factors that impact the application of OD to the public and service sectors:

1. Public and private organizations have different measures of organizational effectiveness than the for-profit sector, especially the lack of clear-cut, verifiable outputs that lend themselves to objective measurement (in contrast to the financial bottom-line in the for-profit sector).
2. The public sector places greater emphasis on regulatory constraints and a diffusion of power (legislative directives, civil service rules, confidentiality requirements) due to the complex system of checks and balances which make it difficult for top management to make long-term commitments (as is the case in the private sector).
3. The conditioning of executives in the public sector to favor management styles that maximize sources of control and minimize the discretion of subordinates. As Golembiewski (1989) noted, the chain of command characterized by competing identifications and affiliations, often producing a fragmented management hierarchy and old public sector management habits favor patterns of delegation that maximize the sources of information (as seen in the term "direct reports") and minimize the control exercised by subordinates.
4. There is far more public scrutiny of the decision-making process in the public sector related to open meeting laws and the role of the media. As Golembiewski (1989) noted, there is multiple access to an array of decision makers (political and managerial) that seeks to assure that the public's business gets looked at from a variety of perspectives. He also observed that a greater variety of individuals and groups are involved in decision-making, each with its own set of interests, values and reward structures, than in the for-profit sector.
5. There are outdated views of professionalism and change (e.g., taking the position that staff training is unnecessary if you hired people who have the abilities to do the job or using old fiscal procedures that include practices which no longer made sense) (Golembiewski, 1989).

These constraints clearly document the challenges facing the introduction of OD strategies into public sector organizations. While it is important to keep these constraints in mind, it is also useful to look more closely at a few case

studies of the use of OD in public social service agencies provide some specific examples of OD applications. Norman and Keys (1992) describe their external OD work in the Department of Public Social Services in Riverside, California where they used process consultation and team-building to address the lack of teamwork, peer consultation, and change management capacities. It concluded with OD training for supervisors.

A second case, described by Martinko and Tolchinsky (1982), takes place in a state department of social services where a training needs assessment led to the planning and implementation of the following activities: (1) a role-clarification process for all levels of management; (2) training activities designed to foster greater integration of service delivery in a matrix organization; (3) performance review training; and (4) first-line supervisory training. During the intervention process, the consultants found that legislative action at the state and federal levels often superseded both program and managerial decisions (e.g. legislative mandates requiring uniform salary increases and mandated program reporting procedures) which required considerable sensitivity and flexibility from the OD practitioner in order to successfully conduct meaningful interventions in a highly politicized, bureaucratic system.

A third case, described by Glassman and McCoy (1981) features the Los Angeles County Bureau of Social Services (BSS) and its efforts to deal with budget cutbacks, increasing caseloads, and a loss of a sense of control among workers and administrators. In an effort to shift the culture of the organization from a "crisis-oriented" perspective to one that is forward-looking and proactive, the external OD consultant "teamed-up" with an internal change agent to assess organizational goals and programs; agency resources; existing managerial systems; staff training needs; staff commitment to the profession and the department; staff participation in decision-making; and job satisfaction. With this information, the change agents observed and facilitated staff meetings by assisting with defining goals and objectives, improving communication processes, and assessing group behaviors and identifying areas of influence. This work culminated in an OD plan developed in consultation with the Bureau's executive committee to work extensively with line supervisors as well as foster improved relationships between all managerial personnel and line workers.

The common themes emerging from these case examples relate to the need for an external OD consultant to provide technical assistance with goal setting, shared decision making, conflict resolution, work group cooperation,

and staff training on OD techniques (Norman & Keys, 1992). Similar themes are illustrated in this case study of San Mateo County Human Services Agency noted below.

### **Defining Organizational Development and the Need for a Specialist**

Numerous factors contributed to the creation of a permanent, full-time organization development (OD) staff position within San Mateo County Human Services Agency. In 1992, a newly reorganized agency and a new director, followed by a new strategic plan completed in 1993, marked the beginning of a comprehensive organizational change process. All aspects of the agency were impacted including service delivery, increased use of teams, organizational structures, and community relationships. In 1995, following the implementation of many changes, the agency conducted a self-assessment involving all levels of staff in order to “take the pulse” of the agency and identify staff needs and perceptions. The self-study indicated that agency staff were struggling to keep up with the myriad of changes and needed more: (1) understanding of the strategic plan; (2) feedback on how staff were doing in implementing the plan; (3) honest and open communications from bottom up and top down, (4) attention to concerns about customer service and productivity; and (5) attention to job performance and workplace stress (Borland & Kelley, 1997).

Throughout this change process, an external OD consultant had been working with the agency to involve external community groups and internal agency stakeholders in the agency’s strategic plan. This consultant worked with a group of staff who were to become internal change agents skilled in strategic planning, facilitation skills, and change methodology. In addition, the external consultant worked with the executive staff to expand their views beyond managing their particular job functions and assume new roles as agency-wide leaders. Because the strategic plan called for agency-wide change, the external OD consultant recommended the hiring of a full-time internal OD specialist which the agency director saw as a more cost-effective strategy for the agency. Such an individual would be available to work with staff on a regular basis, engage in “hands-on” problem solving, acquire and use an insider’s view of the agency’s future directions, and contribute to the skill base of staff at all levels with respect to learning and applying OD techniques.

The idea for creating an internal OD specialist was further helped by increased attention throughout the county in 1996 to the field of organization development. For the

first time, the county sponsored an 18-month OD course for representatives from each county department to prepare them to work periodically as OD “consultants” throughout county departments. This development helped the director of Human Services present a convincing case to the County Manager for the creation of an internal OD position. The director documented the need for internal OD services to help implement a new model of service delivery (the SUCCESS program and school-linked service teams). The director also assured the county manager that creating this staff position would complement the county system by involving the OD specialist in teaching county OD courses and consulting with other county departments.

### **Hiring Process**

Because of the high stakes associated with bringing a change agent into the agency through the creation of this new position, the executive team devoted considerable efforts to developing a job description, recruiting, and using an assessment center strategy to pick the best candidate. The position called for designing and facilitating processes to help the agency deal with significant change and required experience in process design, workflow analysis and re-engineering along with knowledge of OD theory and practice and public sector management systems. The major skill sets included the ability to establish collaborative relationships, build consensus, foster effective intra- and inter-group communication, and demonstrated ability in effectively utilizing an array of OD interventions. After an unsuccessful effort to recruit through local newspapers and informal human resource networks, it became clear that a national search was needed. By accessing the Organizational Development Network and university OD programs, a pool of qualified applicants was developed by identifying persons with OD training and experience.

The assessment center strategy included the process of presenting to top candidates an array of agency problems and role-plays in order to observe the candidates in a simulated OD consultant role. *Figure 1* reflects a matrix of the assessment criteria and activities. Candidates also engaged in private consultations with the agency director and were asked to develop and present a plan to senior staff which addressed specific agency problems. The assessment center approach included an opportunity to observe candidates in a “leaderless group” where they worked together to solve a problem, while being observed and evaluated by the executive staff and consultants. Another activity required applicants to facilitate a meeting among a group of staff members



**FIGURE 1**  
**Human Services Agency Senior Organizational Development Consultant Assessment Center**

DIMENSIONS	Application Screening	Panel Interview	Facilitation Exercise	Leaderless Group Exercise
Adaptability	X	X	X	
Analytical	X	X	X	X
Awareness of Political Ramifications		X		
Career Orientation	X			
Decision Making	X		X	
Interpersonal Relations		X	X	X
Leadership				X
Oral Communication		X	X	X
Teamwork		X		X
Technical Experience	X	X	X	X
Written Communication	X			

who were intentionally resistant to having a successful meeting, based on pre-scripted roles. Third, each candidate met with various senior managers to review different presenting problems and, based on limited data, provide a response by framing the issues. Finally, the candidates were required to make a presentation to the executive staff about a previous client, reviewing his/her process of start up, data collection, feedback, intervention, and evaluation in working with this client.

The OD specialist who was selected came to her position with two masters degrees, one in counseling and the other in organizational development. Her primary OD experience was in a large state university and included: (a) organizational assessment (using focus groups, needs assessment surveys, team effectiveness surveys, action research related to sources of conflict and service inefficiency, and executive assessment and feedback); (b) inter and intra-departmental team-building and small group facilitation related to fostering collaboration, facilitating strategic planning, team start-up, and program design; (c) organizational training related to management development, diversity training, organizational change management, and quality management, and (d) individual coaching and consulting. Since her move to San Mateo, she is concurrently pursuing a doctorate degree in OD and is interested in developing a research focus in organization development in order to complement her work as an OD practitioner.

### OD Entry

The entry phase for new managers is complex under the best of circumstances (Austin, 1989). Learning about a new organizational culture, clarifying one's job description, and assessing realistic start-up activities can be totally consuming. This process becomes even more complex when the senior management role is new and not well-understood by other senior managers, let alone staff at other levels of the organization. This was the case for the first OD specialist hired by the agency. It took awhile to fully develop a comprehensive OD job description and then find ways to communicate the OD function to the rest of the staff. *Figure 2* includes the updated job description as of 1999.

In the midst of this entry phase, the organization was going through a culture change of its own, where the vestiges of centralized autocratic management processes and scapegoating among staff were being replaced with a strong decentralized community focus based on teamwork and collaboration. It became apparent to the OD specialist that the organizational culture reflected significant capacities to identify problems but fewer skills in problem-solving. It was not easy for senior managers to incorporate OD approaches into their domains because OD symbolized the potential for redistributing power within a unit or division; whereby staff could be empowered to voice their concerns without fear of retribution.

As a result of concerns about the loss or gain of power, early OD efforts were primarily framed as projects which would impact more than one unit or department in the

**FIGURE 2**  
**Program Service Manager Positions–Organization Development**

Current Classification: Organization Development Manager  
 Current Position Title: Organization Development Manager  
 Report to: Agency Director

**Primary Functions**

*Supervision*

Supervise organization development work of internal and external consultants

*Consultation Services–Organizational and Group Levels*

- Consult to the agency directors, managers and supervisors on organizational structure, system and policies (reward, performance and career systems), organizational procedures (decision-making, communications), job design, practices and procedures that impeded efficient functioning, leadership behaviors, and group processes.
- Provide action research services to the agency directors, managers and supervisors about structure, technology, culture, performance management and organizational feedback systems.
- Provide consultation, training and education on process improvement to process improvement teams and self-directed work teams where applicable.
- Design organizational and group level questionnaires and focus group interview schedules.
- Conduct organizational and group level diagnosis using questionnaires and focus groups.
- Summarize and analyze data for agency directors, managers, supervisors, teams and community partners.
- Prepare and present status reports for purposes of action planning by the agency directors, managers, supervisors, staff and community partners.
- Design, develop, implement and evaluate interventions to address agency needs as identified through organizational and group level diagnosis, i.e., role negotiation intervention for agency directors, program and support managers, and supervisors.
- Design, develop, implement and evaluate team start-up, team development, and team maintenance retreats with agency directors, managers, supervisors, staff and community partners to decrease intergroup competition and enhance collaborative work efforts.
- Educate the SUCCESS ADVISORY STRATEGIC PLANNING COMMITTEE regarding the elements of strategic planning and implementation.
- Conduct an environmental analysis for the welfare reform industry, and the agency's environment, as well as external and internal stakeholders through research, focus groups and surveys in conjunction with the SUCCESS ADVISORY STRATEGIC PLANNING COMMITTEE.
- Research and educate the agency directors, managers, supervisors, staff and community partners about new methods of change management, planning and organization development processes.

- Design, develop, instruct and evaluate curriculums to support ongoing interventions, i.e., coaching, change management, etc.
- Deliver process consultation to intact teams and workgroups including the executive team, regional implementation teams, etc.
- Develop and implement evaluation tools and instruments to measure the effectiveness of organization development and interventions.

*Consultation Services–Individual Level*

- Mentor and instruct directors, managers and supervisors through on-the-job training how to do short and long term planning, strategic planning, process improvement, succession planning, performance analysis.
- Provide performance coaching to agency directors, managers, supervisors and staff.
- Assess performance of agency directors, managers, supervisors, and staff through the use of psychological tests, questionnaires, checklists.
- Administer instruments (see above item for complete listing), score, interpret and feedback data to client for performance related action planning.

*Consultation Services–County-Wide*

- Design, develop, instruct and evaluate San Mateo County's organization development curriculum for directors and managers in San Mateo County departments and other county agencies.
- Design, develop, instruct and evaluate course components, re: Interdisciplinary Practice for the Bay Area Social Services Consortium.
- Design and develop a case study, re: change management for the Bay Area Social Services Consortium.
- Consult to other agency directors, managers and supervisors on organizational structure, system and policies, organizational procedures, job design, and practices and procedures that impede efficient functioning, leadership behaviors, and group processes in conjunction with the San Mateo County organization development consultants. This work to be performed quid pro quo.
- Present at local, regional and national meetings and conferences on the organization development work performed for the agency.

**Other Areas of Responsibility**

Coordinate and write quarterly implementation report. Write articles for the newsletter.

Attend implementation team meetings.

Attend Executive and Management Team Meetings and provide process consultation. Special projects and assignments.

agency. Line supervisors were most responsive to this approach. Out of projects grew opportunities for individual coaching and consulting as staff at all levels became more comfortable with the role of an OD specialist.

The OD specialist was gradually introduced throughout the agency, in order to minimize staff resistance to her position. In recalling this period of her work, the OD specialist said that staff often did not welcome her because they saw her as “a spy for the management team.” Yet she viewed her main objective as helping the “client,” which she defined as the entire agency, rather than to serve an individual supervisor or worker. Her primary responsibility was to assist the “client” (agency) in accomplishing changes that were identified as desirable. Specifically, her first goal was to help staff change the service delivery system into a seamless, “one-stop” model that required substantial change in the agency’s culture. She viewed her responsibility as helping the agency identify “points of leverage for the changes” and developing resources to sustain organizational changes, rather than as advocating for specific changes. As she was gradually introduced throughout the agency, she used many of the classic OD skills related to gaining acceptance, gathering and analyzing data, framing complex issues, developing options, and educating staff about OD principles and practices (Blake & Mouton, 1970).

The OD specialist applied these skills throughout the agency as illustrated in the following examples:

- *Fostering acceptance:* While some staff resisted efforts to address feelings about the workplace and difficulties in dealing with changes, other staff welcomed the opportunity to discuss their feelings with her.

The OD specialist worked first with the Executive Team so that staff and top management could see how she operated to help improve staff meeting processes and priority-setting by gathering the perceptions of individuals, aggregating the findings, and collectively developing guidelines to deal with shared needs. The outcome was a new structure for presenting new ideas at meetings, a sponsor system to assist outsiders make presentations, and increasingly productive meetings based on sharply focused agendas and reduced interpersonal friction. Other outcomes included annual review of performance objectives (Key Results Areas linked to the agency’s strategic plan) and the establishment of a new Policy Group related to Human Resources focusing on issues related to succession planning (powerful demographics related to a wave of future retirement),

leadership development, career development, and mentoring

- *Collecting data and information:* Valuable data was available when the OD specialist assisted staff in their preparation to work in multifunctional teams through the use of “team start-up” activities. Staff concerns simply bubbled up to the surface. For example, she sought to create a shared understanding between management staff and line workers about implementation of new job functions (e.g. assisting Income/ Employment Services Specialist identify the new case management responsibilities). In performing this type of assistance, the OD specialist was able to gather data and information based on what management staff wanted to know, and what line staff needed in order to function effectively, thereby helping identify gaps in understanding between the groups.

Other OD-led data collection activities included the use of internal process evaluation to identify implementation issues. These efforts complemented the external program evaluation of service outcomes. The major benefit of these two approaches to evaluation was to demonstrate to staff that the evaluation of “what” is to be accomplished needed to be balanced with an ongoing evaluation of “how” objectives are being implemented. These are two key elements of continuous process improvement. These efforts have led to the development of a Comprehensive Guidebook to facilitate the linkage between contract agencies providing client services and the agency’s automated case management information system.

- *Framing difficult issues:* Through the process of data collection and information gathering, the OD specialist determined that staff was not responsive to the term “strength-based services” (e.g., building on client strengths) which had been promoted by senior management. This was an area of disconnect between the expectations of management and the understanding of line staff. Management staff assumed that the staff had understood and adopted the concept of “strength-based services,” while staff members were generally not familiar with the skills sets needed to implement this service delivery approach. By pointing out the tension between the various conceptual frameworks for the provision of services held by management and line staff, the OD specialist helped to create a readiness to

engage collaboratively in effective issue identification and problem-solving.

- *Developing options for group decision-making:* While OD specialists are positioned to identify many areas for improvement, the goal of an internal OD specialist is to provide senior management with a range of options for the effective implementation of change. The framing of options, and the shared thinking about additional options, maximizes flexibility and creativity. Being overly prescriptive can deprive staff of the ultimate ownership of their problem-solving process. In essence, the OD specialist developed recommendations in partnership with management staff.

For example, creating the new matrix management structure (see *Figure 3*) required senior managers to shift from managing one service (e.g., child welfare) to an array of services in a region of the county linked to implementing the new geographically-based service delivery system. The OD specialist assisted the group of managers identify potential challenges, establish new accountability processes, facilitated the work of new cross-staff policy teams, and created communication systems related to improving information systems and meeting management through electronic calendaring.

- *Demonstrating OD principles and practices:* Before presenting data collected from staff focus groups regarding their responses to agency changes, the OD specialist prepared staff by focusing on how individuals commonly react when they receive survey results about themselves. The goal was to minimize defensiveness. Then if they did respond defensively, the OD specialist worked with the staff to explore their reactions by demonstrating OD principles and practices.

The OD specialist also engaged in a great deal of process consultation to help team members improve their capacities to function as team members. In particular, she helped staff deal with significant organizational change by validating their understandable resistance and framing problems as systems issues related to organizational change instead of personal issues related to job performance. It was striking to find so much internalization of change directives where the need for change was perceived to be related to poor worker performance. Facilitating open exchange between management and staff in meetings for all staff to attend began to model OD approaches for fostering open communications. One of the significant outcomes of these efforts was the staff

realization that they had more operational control of their areas of activity than they had realized and that they could take responsibility for initiating change.

### Ongoing OD Consultation

Beyond the major activities just described, the OD specialist is also available as a consultant to respond to requests for assistance in dealing with team functioning or individual staff issues. These requests include:

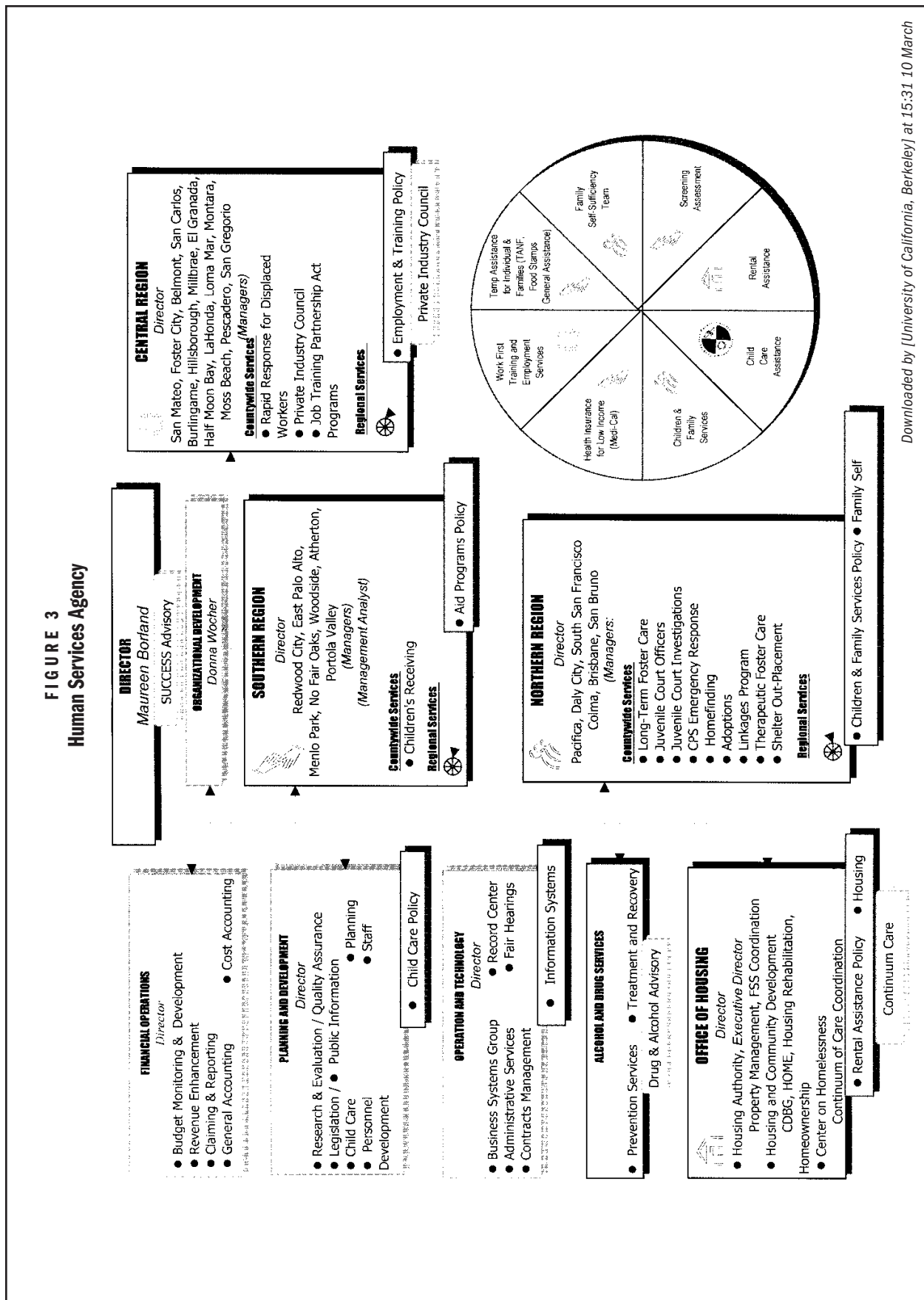
- **Periodic Strengthening of Team Building:** Assist team members in examining methods and procedures for working more effectively on problems and issues (offered to teams that have worked together for 4-6 months).
- **Expanding Meeting Management Skills:** Work with committee chairpersons to design effective meeting processes and procedures that accomplish the charge of the committee and motivate committee members to continue working together.
- **Developing an OD Training Course:** Foster OD skills and techniques among key staff throughout the agency.
- **Coaching:** Support staff in learning how to acquire the skills to get the desired results from others.

Given the successful completion of the entry phase (3 years) of introducing OD into the agency, the agency director decided it was time to fully integrate organization development into all aspects of human resource development by promoting the OD Specialist to Manager of Human Resource and Development (all staff development and personnel functions). The primary purpose of this change was to train and coach current “trainers” into new roles as internal consultants engaged in assessing organizational issues and providing coaching and training on workplace issues. This transition was completed with the assistance of an external OD consultant. A second purpose was to create a Human Resource Policy Team that would oversee the implementation of a leadership and management development structure consisting of orientation, succession planning, multi-source feedback, career development, and recruitment and retention strategies. All these elements are part of a new human resource strategy to be implemented by the new OD/HRD division and manager by March 2001.

### Lessons Learned from a “Work In Progress”

There were numerous issues that the executive staff considered before hiring an OD specialist, given the high

**FIGURE 3**  
**Human Services Agency**





stakes associated with creating a staff position for someone whose primary job was to facilitate organizational changes. Although many of the executive team members were interested in filling the position, they were also aware of the potential for negative staff reactions to an internal OD specialist. One common concern was that the OD specialist would be viewed by staff as the administration's representative hired to enforce change, especially related to implementing the SUCCESS model. Anticipating this reaction, the executive team gave careful consideration to selecting a supervisor for the OD specialist, and selected the agency director so that every area of the agency could be open to OD consultation. In an effort to anticipate the feeling of being "spied on," staff were told that while the agency director would have a general knowledge of the projects and units utilizing the services of the OD specialist, the details of these projects would remain confidential. For example, if a supervisor requested the OD specialist's services, the director could be informed of the length of time required to complete the task and the geographic location where the OD specialist would be working, but the details surrounding a particular problem or conflict would not be shared with the director.

In retrospect, there have been few occasions that required completely confidential services. While the executive staff may make referrals to the OD specialist, asking her to evaluate functioning of teams when there is rumored to be a problem, they do not ask for the details of the intervention. This highly professional and confidential process was necessary, however, to minimize staff resistance to the OD specialist within the agency.

After three years of operation, several preliminary lessons can be gleaned from the experiences of the San Mateo County Human Services Agency. It is important to be cautious about applying them to other agencies, since each agency responds to organization development in a unique way.

- *Lesson 1: It is important for the internal OD specialist to invest the necessary time and energy in developing a close working relationship between staff and management.*

The OD specialist described this relationship as "co-partnering," explaining that there must be constant efforts to continue to build trust and communication, and share information between the two groups.

- *Lesson 2: The internal OD specialist does not develop change recommendations for the agency.*

While it is appropriate for external OD consultants to be "prescriptive," by recommending specific changes that should be made, the internal OD specialist needs to help staff sort out their options by documenting feelings and needs, collectively developing action plans, and demonstrating how to confront and deal with problems.

- *Lesson 3: Provide information to all levels of staff, preferably at the same time.*

Guaranteeing staff input and feedback on data collected from staff, prior to sharing the data with the executive team, has given staff members a sense of assurance that they can share their experiences more openly with the OD specialist. It also allows them to make any changes in how their feedback is portrayed, helping them control its presentation to management.

- *Lesson 4: Organization development is not a solution to all of the agency's problems.*

There are limits to changing individual behaviors and the organization development process can not address every problem within the agency. Some staff feel threatened by OD practices and are not interested in using them as tools for changing organizational processes.

- *Lesson 5: Relationship-building and sustaining has several levels: (1) creating and nurturing; (2) trusting and supporting; (3) risk-taking and new learning.*

Early on in establishing the OD function, it became apparent to the OD specialist that relationship building and sustaining (worker-client, worker-worker, and worker-manager) were essential ingredients in successful agency service delivery (as well as in successful OD). Acquiring new risk-taking behaviors may require new learning experiences in order to transform bureaucratic organizations into learning organizations.

- *Lesson 6: While OD specialists are in a unique agency position to see both sides of an issue since they are not in the chain of command to manage or deliver agency services, they need to help others expand their capacities to see and sense.*

OD specialists are in a position to use their "antennae or radar" to sense the level of interest or disinterest in promoting change. Based on these capacities, they continuously focus on readiness and thereby circle and come back to issues where there is disinterest or resistance. It is the capacities to see and sense that need to be introduced and

cultivated among all levels of staff. OD specialists can demonstrate “seeing and sensing” through their role modeling in nearly all OD interventions. Another approach is to develop an informal OD network inside the agency based on staff completing in-service training on OD procedures and processes.

- *Lesson 7: It is crucial to monitor the changing and multiple staff perceptions of the OD function.*

OD specialists need to continuously monitor their work in order to identify the different ways in which staff perceive their interventions, both the formal and informal as well as the planned and unplanned. Positive and negative staff feedback are extremely important ingredients for improving the agency’s OD operations. Since staff feedback may not be plentiful or continuous, the OD specialist also needs to find outside sources of support and learning related to ethical issues, confronting one’s own biases, and avoiding the “blame-frame” often rampant in organizations undergoing massive change. OD colleagues (OD Network) and OD educators (graduate programs) are two of the most frequently used sources of outside support.

- *Lesson 8: Moving from project learning to individualized learning requires time and patience.*

Most of the OD activity in the first three years of operation involved projects which addressed issues in more than one area of the agency. As the trust level rises, it should be possible to increase the amount of individualized coaching and consulting to foster more staff learning and expand the ability to change old behaviors.

- *Lesson 9: Communication and collaboration with staff development is essential for the future viability of OD.*

Since many of the organizational issues identified indicate needs for additional training, on-going communication and collaboration between OD and staff development personnel are crucial.

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# Moving Young Families on Welfare Out of Poverty through Interagency Case Coordination: A Teaching/Learning Case

ADITI DAS, NOELLE SIMMONS, AND TERRI AUSTIN

### Introduction

The 1996 welfare reform law created The Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program, a time limited program designed to help needy families achieve self-sufficiency through mandated participation in work-related activities. The Federal government provides grants to States to run the TANF program. The main performance measure for TANF is the work participation rate (WPR), which measures the share of families in the caseload with a member who is either working or engaged in welfare-to-work activities. The development of the WPR outcome measure led to a reduction in caseloads along with a mandate to get as many TANF participants into the workforce. Even though the intent of the federal legislation was focused on moving people off aid into economic self-sufficiency through time-limited welfare benefits and job search skills, the implementation has proven to be far more complicated. Some of the complications include a limited availability of jobs with adequate wages and benefits, lack of affordable housing, physical and mental health issues, lack of social support networks, poor educational backgrounds and lack of access to affordable, quality child care amongst others. This situation is even more dire amongst young families since their limited life skills, parenting skills and soft job skills relevant to employment make them more vulnerable to enter sustained periods of poverty, if not a lifetime of poverty.

Given the myriad complexities faced by vulnerable populations and recognizing the limitations of traditional welfare services related to benefits and employability, San Francisco Human Services Agency (SFHSA) was tasked

with implementing a mayoral initiative in 2015 to assist vulnerable young families move out of poverty and called it Project 500 (P500). The focus of P500 is on disrupting inter-generational poverty by strengthening cross-system collaboration among agencies. This case provides lessons for other human service organizations related to reallocating existing resources in new directions.

### CONTEXT

P500 is an initiative launched by the late Mayor Edwin Mah Lee under the leadership of the SFHSA. P500 seeks to integrate resources, wrap-around services, and case management across City departments and nonprofit providers. These organizations include the San Francisco Department of Public Health (DPH), DPH's Nurse-Family Partnership (NFP) and Field Nursing Program (FNP), DPH's Behavioral Health Services (BHS) division, Child Support Services (CSS), and the San Francisco Office of Early Care and Education (OECE) in collaboration with the California Work Opportunity and Responsibility to Kids Program (CalWORKs)<sup>2</sup> within SFHSA. The primary focus of this teaching case includes the two large public sector organizations (DPH and HSA) that provide home visitation and case management services for P500 participants. However,

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1. Information is presented here was collected in the Spring of 2019 by a researcher who conducted fifteen interviews across different levels of management within SFHSA and the San Francisco Department of Public Health (SF-DPH), 1) the Deputy Director, Economic Support & Self Sufficiency, DPH Nursing Director, P500 Initiative Manager, California Work Opportunity and Responsibility to Kids (CalWORKs) program manager (upper management), 2) Mentor supervisor, nurse manager, NFP supervisor, behavioral health supervisor (middle management), and 3) mentors, CalWORKs case managers, field nurse, NFP nurse (lower management). Besides interviews, the researcher also collected case-relevant material from the agency. The case was developed with the support of the Mack Center on Nonprofit and Public Sector Management in the Human Services at the University of California, Berkeley. The author wishes to acknowledge the guidance of Michael J. Austin, Mack Professor Emeritus and Founding Director of the Mack Center at the University of California, Berkeley.

2. CalWORKs is California's version of the federal TANF program. For more details, visit <https://www.cdss.ca.gov/CalWORKS>

it is also important to note the role of the child support organization (CSS) related to ensuring that children receive the financial and medical support they need from their parents to be healthy and successful.<sup>3</sup> Similarly, the early child care and education programs (OECE) ensure continuous access to quality early care and education regardless of their parent's welfare status.<sup>4</sup>

The two major goals of P500 include: 1) providing disenfranchised families with “meaningful pathways up and out of poverty, and disrupt[ing] its intergenerational transfer” in order to improve child and family outcomes, and 2) building an integrated and comprehensive system of care that improves cross-system collaboration and reflects a family-centric, research-informed service delivery approach in order to achieve specified outcomes. P500 began as a research and development lab designed to explore new ways to move five hundred young families on welfare out of poverty by bringing together separate service teams that have historically worked in isolation. Research domains explored by the designers of P500 included evidence around the impact of home visiting, quality early education, and parental involvement on child outcomes, as well as research about the effectiveness of subsidized employment and strategies to build executive functioning skills on adult self-sufficiency outcomes, as well as collective impact literature. Even though P500 is affiliated with the CalWORKs program within SFHSA, it was initially important to differentiate P500 from the regular CalWORKs program as stated by the Deputy Director for Economic Support & Self-Sufficiency Programs:

*When the Mayor said, “I want an initiative to move 500 of the most vulnerable families out of poverty,” one reaction was, we’re already doing that. Isn’t that what the CalWORKs program does? It was really a challenge for us to think about the constraints of the CalWORKs program in order to “think outside the box”. I think that was an exciting issue to pose not just to our staff internally at HSA but also to our partners in other departments. It helped us to think collectively about the work that each of our systems are doing individually, and to see if we could strategically stitch together those different system efforts where creating something that’s bigger than just the sum of its parts.*

The target population of P500 includes families with first time parents (primarily mothers) who are eligible and willing to enroll in both the Nurse Family Partnership (NFP program) and the welfare-to-work program (CalWORKs). Clients can be referred to P500 from either CalWORKs or Nursing. Currently P500 has more than 140 families enrolled. While a few of the participating families tend to leave P500 and the county due to rising housing costs, they do so to secure job opportunities elsewhere in counties with lower costs of living. There are many of the original cohort of program enrollees who continue to benefit from the program, especially the ongoing support of the mentors when dealing with the many daily life challenges facing young families. There is no formal exit criterion for P500 participants, and families may remain in P500 even after exiting CalWORKs.

### EVIDENCE-INFORMED PLANNING

At different points in their program planning and implementation, the P500 team engaged with both Economic Mobility Pathways (EMPath)<sup>5</sup> and Mathematica Policy Research (MPR) to draw on their expertise in brain-science-informed strategies for coaching low-income individuals on the path to self-sufficiency. P500 draws from EMPath’s Mobility Mentoring model and Bridge to Self-Sufficiency,<sup>6</sup> a comprehensive approach to support upward economic mobility. EMPath’s approach utilizes brain science research to understand what hampers the optimal executive functioning of clients and what motivates them in the face of chronic stress, which was an early influence on P500’s program design. P500 operationalized this through adoption of a goal-oriented framework, adaptation of EMPath’s Bridge, and the use of Goal4 It!<sup>7</sup> tools and training provided by MPR (refer to *Appendix A*). To attain economic independence, low-income families today must navigate a complex environment requiring strong strategic-thinking skills to identify an occupational pathway and optimize their lives related to five key areas: family stability (principally housing and child stability); well-being (principally health/behavioral health and social supports); education; financial management; and career management. These areas were developed by the Crittenton Women’s Union as pillars of its Bridge to Self-Sufficiency<sup>8</sup> as illustrated in *Figure 1*.

5. EMPath was formerly known as Crittenton Women’s Union

6. For more details visit <https://www.empathways.org/approach/mobility-mentoring/in-practice> and <https://www.empathways.org/approach/bridge-to-self-sufficiency>

7. For more details on the Goal4 It!™ toolkit developed by Mathematica Policy Research, visit <https://www.mathematica-mpr.com/toolkits/goal4-it>

3. For more details visit <https://sfgov.org/dcsc/about-us>

4. For more details visit <http://sfocce.org/>



**FIGURE 1**  
**Crittenton Women's Union Bridge to Self-Sufficiency® Theory of Change**



Research has shown that families experiencing significant deficits in any of the pillars of the Bridge are unlikely to be able to reach and maintain their economic independence.<sup>8</sup> Not only is each pillar critical to supporting the Bridge as a whole, but the five pillars are also mutually connected and reinforcing. Deficits in one pillar can cause weaknesses in others.

The logic model for P500 was developed based on the entire literature review conducted during the P500 planning and design phase (refer to *Appendix B*). The logic model reflects the key inputs from the major stakeholders, the funding structure to support program staff and the intended target population. The overarching P500 strategy involves cross-system coordination that supports various activities that engage the following key partners: NFP staff or Field Nursing staff, CalWORKs staff, P500 case management mentors, early child care and education staff, child support services staff and mental health clinicians. Each program component has its own outputs that relate to P500's short-term and long-term outcomes designed to disrupt intergenerational poverty and improve child and family outcomes. Success within P500 is defined in terms of both family outcomes and system outcomes. According to the P500 initiative manager,

Family well-being is the ultimate goal . . . rather than designing services that meet our individual program needs or agency needs, we start with what's best for the families we're serving, and how we can change our business processes, change our policies, and change our service delivery model so

that they respond to what families need, rather than expecting families to adapt to the way the system is designed.

### *Collective Impact Framework*

Hypothesizing that better cross-system collaboration among agencies is one mechanism to help disrupt intergenerational family poverty, P500 also draws on Kania and Kramer's collective impact theory of change.<sup>9</sup> Collective impact refers to the commitment of a group of relevant actors from different sectors to a common agenda for solving a specific social problem. Collective impact initiatives include a centralized infrastructure, a dedicated staff and a structured process that leads to five conditions of collective impact: 1) a common agenda, 2) shared measurement, 3) continuous communication, 4) mutually reinforcing activities among all participants, and 5) a backbone support organization as noted in *Figure 2*. In the case of the P500 program, SFHSA was designated by the mayor to be the backbone agency to support the collective work of P500.

### *Evaluation Plan*

P500 contracted with the Urban Institute in Washington, DC to develop the P500 Evaluation Plan with the goal of capturing how P500 is functioning and achieving its goals. It focused on assessing the impact of cross-system collaboration based upon an array of interventions as well as efforts related to improving child and family outcomes. The evaluation plan provided the foundation for a formal formative process evaluation, to be followed by a more rigorous impact and outcome evaluation.

8. Babcock, E.D. (2014). *Using Brain Science to Design New Pathways Out of Poverty*. Crittenton Women's Union

9. Kania, J., & Kramer, M. (2011). *Collective Impact*. *Stanford Social Innovation Review*

**FIGURE 2**  
**The Five Conditions Of Collective Impact**

<b>Common Agenda</b>	All participants have a <b>shared vision for change</b> including a common understanding of the problem and a joint approach to solving it through agreed upon actions.
<b>Shared Measurement</b>	<b>Collecting data and measuring results consistently</b> across all participants ensures efforts remain aligned and participants hold each other accountable.
<b>Mutually Reinforcing Activities</b>	Participant activities must be <b>differentiated while still being coordinated</b> through a mutually reinforcing plan of action.
<b>Continuous Communication</b>	<b>Consistent and open communication</b> is needed across the many players to build trust, assure mutual objectives, and appreciate common motivation.
<b>Backbone Support</b>	Creating and managing collective impact requires a dedicated staff and a specific set of skills to <b>serve as the backbone for the entire initiative and coordinate participating organizations and agencies.</b>

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Urban Institute staff collaborated with the P500 team to review the logic model, literature, and research related to outcomes of interest. It was recommended that P500 staff clearly define the measures to be used to track specific outcomes in areas such as employment, mental health treatment, early care and education, and mentoring. In addition, the P500 staff were encouraged to conduct a rapid cycle evaluation (RCE) in order to: 1) explore aspects of client identification, recruitment, and/or engagement, and 2) examine and improve services and activities such as participants setting and achieving goals. All of this assessment planning was critical to P500's evaluation plan.

### Key Program Components

As noted earlier, the two major home visiting program components supporting first-time mothers include coaching and case management by P500 mentors who are employed by HSA and the nurse family practitioners who are employed by DPH.

#### MENTORING

Mentoring involves relationship building between mentors and CalWORKs participants with the goal of acquiring resources, skills and sustained behavior changes needed by young mothers to attain and preserve their economic independence.

In mentoring, the Bridge tool adapted by P500 is used in conjunction with the GOAL4 It! tools as assessment, goal-setting, and measurement devices that help participant gain self-awareness about the decisions and actions needed to help themselves get ahead. The Bridges tool arrays the five

key pillars of economic mobility on one piece of paper so that both mentor and participant can easily understand and navigate the connections between them as part of the process of making future decisions. During coaching sessions, mentors help participants identify their unique motivations and desires so that they can: 1) identify goals, 2) navigate and set priorities among the Bridge pillars, 3) develop practical steps for achieving goals, 4) find alternative strategies when plans do not work well, 5) recognize all progress made, 6) specify reward goals that are ultimately achieved, and 7) optimize their lives in all areas of the Bridges tool so that participants can make substantive gains towards self-sufficiency. As families seek to achieve their goals, they are incentivized through the use of \$50 gift cards when they accomplish various goals. Mentors within P500 are the primary system navigators for families, as Deputy Director for Economic Support & Self-Sufficiency Programs noted,

*One of the things about P500 is there are so many of those paths that people can take, and it can be so confusing to families. One of our goals is to reduce the external sources of stress. The mentor is the one who is the glue that holds the case together and needs to understand who what the family needs, not just from CalWORKs but from DPH and from community-based organizations.*

#### NURSE FAMILY PARTNERSHIP

NFP is an evidence-based, community health program with over 40 years of evidence demonstrating significant improvements in the health and lives of first-time moms and

their children living in poverty. NFP was developed by Old and colleagues in the 1970's at the University of Colorado, Denver.<sup>10</sup> It engages specially-trained nurses in regular visits with young, first-time moms that begin early in the pregnancy and continue through the child's second birthday.

NFP has three major goals: 1) improve pregnancy outcomes by helping women engage in good preventive health practices, including thorough prenatal care from their healthcare providers, by improving their diets and reducing their use of cigarettes, alcohol and illegal substances, 2) improve child health and development by helping parents provide responsible and competent care, and 3) improve the economic self-sufficiency of the family by helping parents develop a vision for their own future, plan future pregnancies, continue their education and find work.

P500 also partners with a second nurse home visiting program called Field Nursing, which can serve a broader range of pregnant women and their children compared to NFP which is only meant for first-time mothers. NFP follows a particular, manualized curriculum since it is an evidence-based practice, whereas field nursing is a short-term intervention and is much more individualized based on the critical health needs of the family.

## Cross-system Coordination

### "BOOTS ON THE GROUND" IMPLEMENTERS AND THEIR SUPPORT

According to the Director of Public Health Nursing, the greatest impact on families comes from those staff with "boots on the ground"; namely, the mobility mentors, public health nurses and their direct supervisors. *Table 1* provides an overview of the roles and activities of each of the front-line workers (NFP, field nurse, mentors and CalWORKs managers). Nurse Managers support the nurses in interfacing with P500, both NFP and field nursing teams whereas the Mentor Supervisor engages in reflective supervision with mentors. The behavioral health team members support all home visitors through training, case consultation, and therapeutic groups for a select group of families.

### GOVERNANCE STRUCTURE

P500 is built upon a multi-layered governance structure. At the very top, there is the executive steering committee that is comprised of Department heads and/or Deputy Directors from key public agencies, including but not limited to the core P500 partners. In addition to the formal P500

partners, other partners in policy development and planning, such as the Mayor's Office and the Department of Children, Youth and Families are involved. Situated below the steering committee is the management team that is comprised of Program Directors of core partners; namely, OECE, Child Support, Maternal and Child and Adolescent Health, Behavioral Health and CalWORKs. The management team directs, guides and leads P500 efforts but is not a client-facing team. Below the management team is the Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI) team comprised of line staff and their supervisors who analyze data about what's working, troubleshoot operational issues, develop business process changes including client hand-off procedures and coordinate case management. Finally, there is a data-sharing and evaluation team that is internal to SFHSA that engages all the partners in data-sharing and analysis.

## Recent Policy Changes

Given that P500 has now been operational for three years, and due to the evolution of the CalWORKs program at a state level, SFHSA recently transitioned P500 from an independent initiative to a sub-program within CalWORKs. In 2017-18, many of the 58 county social services agencies in California began to adopt a customer-centric, goal-driven approach to service delivery within the CalWORKs program (CalWORKs 2.0<sup>11</sup>). In 2018-19, the state made a new investment in evidence-based home visiting services for CalWORKs households,<sup>12</sup> and in July 2019 it will kick off a new continuous quality improvement process that will begin to move CalWORKs programs away from a singular focus on work participation to a broader range of program performance metrics.<sup>13</sup> SFHSA devoted the new state funding to P500, which effectively became the CalWORKs Home Visiting program for the county. The funding was used in part to adopt a new home visiting curriculum called Parents as Teachers (PAT) for use by the Mentors. PAT is an evidence-based practice to work with parents on parent-child communications, child-centered development, and family well-being.

P500 anticipated the statewide shift towards a more holistic view of serving families in poverty by strategically leveraging CalWORKs as a platform for delivering a wider range of services to low-income children and parents. As

10. For more details visit <https://www.nursefamilypartnership.org/about/program-history/>

11. For more details visit <http://calworksnextgen.org/background/>

12. For more details visit <http://www.cdss.ca.gov/inforesources/CalWORKsHomeVisitingInitiative>

13. For more details visit <http://www.cdss.ca.gov/inforesources/CalWORKs/Cal-OAR>

**TABLE 1**  
**Role and Activities of “Boots on the Ground” Implementers and Their Support Staff**

P500 Personnel	Roles & Activities
<b>Home Visitors/Front-Line Staff</b>	
Mentor	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Working directly with families focused on family well-being and child development</li> <li>Goal Setting for families using the P500 Bridge to Well-Being and Goal4 It! tools</li> <li>Bi-Annual Assessment plan</li> <li>Meet clients as often as weekly based on family need</li> <li>Incentivize families by giving them a \$50 gift card on achievement of goals</li> <li>Consistent, single point of contact within CalWORKs</li> <li>Model behaviors for families</li> </ul>
Nurse Family Partnership Nurse	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>NFP is for first-time mothers in the 2nd trimester with no previous live birth (based on EBP clinical curriculum)</li> <li>Assess individual families + home environment+ larger community (medical, holistic model)</li> <li>Provide mental health, physical health, dental health +parenting support</li> </ul>
Field Nurse	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Field nursing is for women and children with a medical need</li> <li>Goals of support are similar to NFP, but services are short-term and not evidence based</li> </ul>
CalWORKs Managers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Oversee employment specialists and eligibility workers who handle the more technical aspects of CalWORKs participation such as eligibility maintenance, work participation, turning in forms etc.</li> <li>Help clients establish and follow assigned WTW activities</li> </ul>
<b>Support &amp; supervisory team structure for front-line staff</b>	
Mentor Supervisor	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Reviews eligibility criteria for clients</li> <li>Use reflective supervision practices</li> <li>Personal and professional development of mentors</li> </ul>
Nurse Manager	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Support the nurses in interfacing with P500 (NFP + Field Nursing Teams)</li> </ul>
Behavioral Health	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Capacity building for mentors and nurses through mini trainings twice a month focused on 1) building a learning community 2) deeper-dive into individual case presentations on parent-child relationship and attachment formation</li> <li>Support the reflective capacity of providers through mental health consultation</li> <li>Carries small caseloads of P500 families and runs therapeutic groups for families</li> </ul>

stated by the Deputy Director for Economic Support and Self-Sufficiency:

*In the fiscal year 18-19 budget, the state provided funding to CalWORKs programs all over the state to deliver home visiting services, and because home visiting was really at the core of the P500 innovation, it made natural sense for P500 to become our CalWORKs home visiting program rather than*

*build a parallel program. Once we did that it just made sense for operational reasons to move the lines of reporting and accountability for P500 under CalWORKs, but we've also been very explicit about not wanting to lose the innovative spirit of P500. It feels like we are converging—all of those different strands are starting to come together in a really nice way, actually, not just in San Francisco but also at*



*a state level. P500 was at the leading edge of implementing a lot of the concepts that are now a part of CalWORKs 2.0, part of the CalWORKs home visiting initiative.*

P500's funding model blends state allocations for CalWORKs welfare-to-work services and CalWORKs home visiting with \$3 million in county general funds, and leverages the in-kind contribution of home visiting funding streams from DPH. Despite the arrival of the new state funding sources and the new evidence-based home visiting model, the P500 team continues to focus on the collective impact aspect of P500 that reinforces interagency collaboration. The impetus of restructuring P500 under CalWORKs was to promote more cross-pollination of knowledge, skills and resources from P500 to CalWORKs staff and vice versa, with the goal of scaling best practices across both.

## Challenges

### PROGRAM RESTRUCTURING WITH RECENT POLICY CHANGES

With the recent restructuring of P500 as the new CalWORKs home visiting program, communication within and across agencies about implementing new policy decisions related to P500 has become more complicated. Some of the confusion can be seen in the following comment of the P500 initiative manager:

*While CalWORKs is great regarding access to all these resources, the organizational change process is more open for miscommunications. Now that the staff members are sharing information, things are getting misinterpreted and we really need to be more vigilant on how we articulate things to them, how we communicate, because sometimes they take it, they read something and/or they misinterpret it, but that's really not the intent.*

Another source for confusion with respect to organizational collaboration is the potentially overlapping roles between the new PAT-trained mentors and NFP nurse educators given that both use evidence-based models focused on parent-child attachment. When P500 was introduced, there was greater coordination and collaboration between the nurses and mentors, including visiting clients together, engaging in warm hand-offs and creating a joint care plan. However, interagency case coordination appears to have suffered a setback in recent months as a result of adding a new home visiting model. Roles and responsibilities of the

different home visiting partners are being revisited as a result and it will take some time for staff to adjust to the latest program iteration.

### DIFFERING CULTURES AND PRIORITIES

There have been historical differences in agency cultures and priorities between HSA and DPH as described by several interviewees. For instance, the culture of highly regulated eligibility programs administered by HSA is task-based and accountability-focused, while DPH is more educational-process and prevention focused. HSA uses an incentive-based motivation structure to help participants attain their goals using the Bridges Tool. In contrast, DPH adopts an educational approach wherein they believe that clients have the knowledge and ability to comprehend the benefits of their programs without the need to externally motivate them. A nurse manager highlighted the following cultural differences and varying approaches to client engagement and motivation at DPH and HSA:

I've heard nurses really feel in opposition to the incentivization of the meeting of goals in Project 500. Almost feel like it's manipulative and they feel really conflicted about it. Like the clients are getting thrown gift cards left and right, and it provides incentives to stay in the program.

Both agencies (HSA and DPH) operate with their own often inflexible funding streams and policy mandates, making collaboration very challenging right from the beginning. The priority of HSA's CalWORKs program is to help clients become job-ready workforce participants while the priority for DPH's nursing programs is home-based parent-child bonding and attachment. This difference was captured by a Mentor Supervisor as follows:

*Another challenge has really been trying to do collective impact work and bring different departments together, because we all have our own end game... I believe there is a building on a culture of yes, they are home and bond with their baby and breastfeed and you know all of those things that we know are best for children's outcome. On the CalWORKs side we're focused on helping them become self-sufficient and getting back to work. I think that there are competing cultures and priorities. I have no judgment on either one, for some women staying home with a baby is the best for them. For other women, going to work is going to be what's best for them, but because we have those competing priorities, I think that's made some of the collaboration difficult.*



The ongoing challenge for P500 is to help staff from across the partner agencies see how the goals of their respective programs can be mutually reinforcing, and to keep them focused on their shared vision of family well-being.

## Conclusion

P500 is an innovative cross-system collaborative initiative focused on moving young families out of poverty through the active collaboration of two major partners, HSA (CalWORKs) and DPH (NFP). They provide home-based case management services to needy families through mentors and nurse home visitors. Mentors use coaching tools focused on an incentive-based goal attainment process for families to become self-sufficient, whereas nurses use an evidence-based educational process focused on parent-child attachment. With recent policy changes, the locally-initiated P500 program has evolved into the new state-funded CalWORKs home visiting program. As anticipated, there have been some bumps along the way, as mentors and nurses were forced to revisit their overlapping roles and relationships. In addition, differing organizational cultures and mandates have posed challenges to shared case-coordination, but to date these challenges have been surmountable and all partners remain committed to the vision and goals of P500. The following discussion questions are designed to explore future implications and problem-solving strategies.

## Discussion Questions

1. With recent changes in the P500 program brought on by the CalWORKs mandates and funding streams, how would you go about redesigning the logic model in *Appendix A* to reflect the actual implementation and intended outcomes of P500?
2. Why do you think that the co-location of front-line staff and the use of cross-training across agencies can reduce the divide between those organizations in the P500 collaborative?
3. Given that the movement of families towards meeting the Bridge to Well-Being goals is considered “success” within P500, what advice would you give to senior management regarding the achievement of success for families and preventing program recidivism when success is so impacted by larger challenges outside of the program’s control, such as the lack of affordable housing, the absence of a living wage and the effects of institutional racial bias?
4. How might the P500 partners ensure that their different cultures and mandates don’t have a negative impact on the families they serve?
5. To what extent does the mentor’s provision of monetary gift cards for families to encourage the achievement of specific family goals undermine the major goal of disrupting inter-generational poverty?

## APPENDIX A

### P500 Bridges to Well-Being Tool

# MY JOURNEY TO CROSS THE BRIDGE TO WELL-BEING

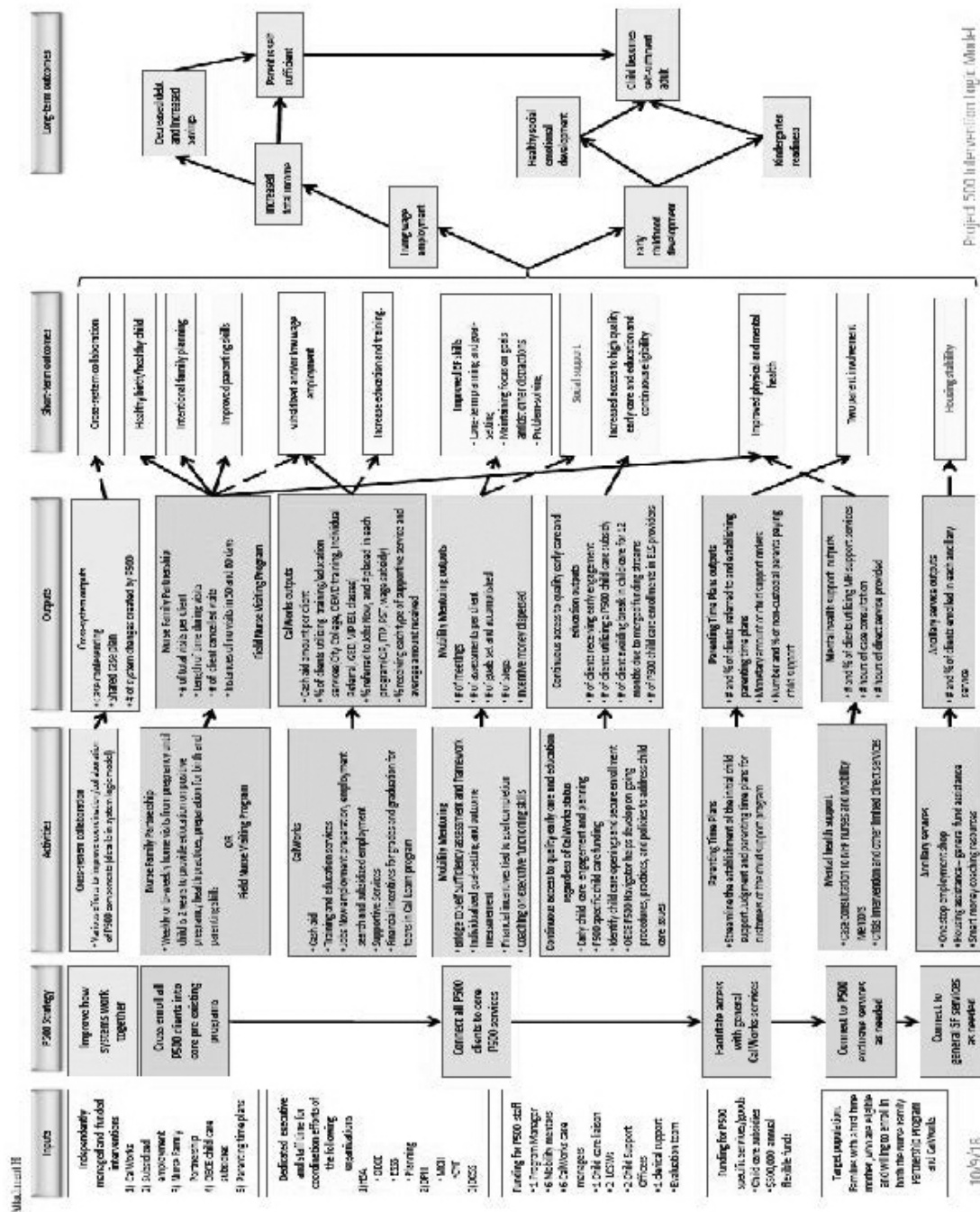
MY NAME \_\_\_\_\_  
 MY COACH \_\_\_\_\_  
 ASSESSMENT COMPLETED DATE \_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_

	Not working and/or in job training	Working part time or seasonally	Working full-time in subsidized employment	Working full-time in unsubsidized employment	Working full time in a stable job and I see a future here
<b>Economic Security</b>					
<b>Employment</b>					
<b>Income</b>	No wages from a job	33% of the CA Self-Sufficiency Standard \$_____ per year	33 and 65% of the CA Self-Sufficiency Standard \$_____ per year	65 and 99% of the CA Self-Sufficiency Standard \$_____ per year	Greater than the CA Self-Sufficiency Standard \$_____ per year
<b>Financial Planning</b>	Not interested in developing a financial plan with an adviser	Interested in developing a financial plan with an adviser, but haven't done so yet	Developed a financial plan with an adviser, but haven't made any progress on that plan	Developed a financial plan with an adviser, and made some progress on that plan	Developed a financial plan with an adviser, and have met the goals of that plan
<b>Education &amp; Training</b>	No high school diploma or GED	High School Diploma or GED	Job training or certificate complete (beyond high school)	Associates degree or professional certification or enrolled in higher education	Bachelor's degree or higher complete
<b>Stable &amp; Nurturing Environment</b>					
<b>Housing</b>	In shelter, unsure of where I will sleep today, being evicted or sleeping on couch	In a transitional housing program (up to 24 months)	Living in housing with a time-limited rent subsidy	Living in stable permanent housing but rent exceeds 50% of my income	Living in stable permanent housing that costs less than 50% of my income
<b>Social Support</b>	Can never rely on a support system to provide advice, guidance and/or support	Can rarely rely on a support system to provide advice, guidance and/or support	Can sometimes rely on a support system to provide advice, guidance and/or support	Can often rely on a support system to provide advice, guidance and/or support	Can always rely on a support system to provide advice, guidance and/or support
<b>Two-Parent Involvement</b>	Single parent with no support from the other parent	Other parent is inconsistently present in child's life, and interactions are not positive for our child when they occur	Other parent is consistently present in child's life, but is not a positive influence on our child	Other parent is inconsistently present in child's life, but interactions are positive for the child when they occur	Other parent is consistently present in child's life, and is a positive influence on our child
<b>Parenting Skills</b>	Parent is too overwhelmed to think about why they parent the way they do AND does not know why child behaves the way they do.	Parent either has ideas about why they parent the way they do OR why the child behaves the way they do.	Parent has ideas about why they parent the way they do AND why the child behaves the way they do AND they both still have difficulty calming down when upset.	Parent has ideas about why they parent the way they do AND why the child behaves the way they do AND parent is occasionally able to use this knowledge to help both calm down when upset.	Parent has ideas about why they parent the way they do AND why the child behaves the way they do AND parent is usually able to use this knowledge to help both calm down when upset.

(Adapted from EMapath's Bridges to Self-Sufficiency Tool)

## APPENDIX B

### P500 Logic Model



Project 505 Intervention Topic Model

10/9/18

# Creating an Agency Workforce Development System that Links Pre-Service and In-Service Learning: A Teaching/Learning Case

ADITI DAS, BARRETT JOHNSON, AND MELISSA CONNELLY

### Introduction

Students greatly appreciate the opportunity to learn from an experienced agency-based practitioner. Agencies in turn hope to hire talented students as full-time employees after completing their field placements. However, a gap exists within public human service agencies wherein agencies do not have a system in place for promoting life-long learning that builds upon linking pre-service training with in-service training. This teaching case describes the development of the Family & Children's Services (FCS) Workforce Development System launched in 2015-16 in the San Francisco Human Service Agency (SF-HSA). It features the innovative practices associated with building a workforce development system in order to improve child welfare workforce retention and development as well as foster the development of a learning organization.<sup>1</sup>

### CONTEXT

The FCS Division of SF-HSA provides the full range of child protection activities, including the child abuse hotline, emergency response assessments and investigations, family reunification and family maintenance services, and adoption and foster care. Prior to development of the Workforce Development System, staff in these units provided learning opportunities each year for MSW students from local universities. The stipend-supported MSW interns are enrolled in specialized child welfare preparation MSW programs at local schools of social work and complete their second-year fieldwork internship with a county child

welfare agency during the academic year from September through May. California Social Work Education Center's (CalSWEC) Title IV-E Stipend Program, a federally funded program is intended to provide professional education and financial support to undergraduate and graduate social work students who wish to pursue a career in the field of public child welfare.<sup>2</sup> Participating students receive a stipend while in school and in exchange they agree to work as a child welfare social worker at a public child welfare agency for 2 years after graduation. Despite this effort to engage students in future careers in child welfare, research evidence underscores turnover as one of the biggest challenges facing child welfare social workers largely related to workload and supervision. Other issues include successful recruiting of qualified candidates, developing staff's skills in critical areas related to child welfare practice, and facilitating a healthy organizational environment that supports quality practice. To address these issues, the FCS developed a multi-level competency-based Workforce Development System through data-informed practices, training and coaching.

The FCS Workforce Development System was designed to address the linkage between pre-service and in-service for a continuum of learning by drawing upon the California Child Welfare Core Practice Model (CPM) and Safety Organized Practice (SOP). The CPM is a multi-level model that guides child welfare practice, service delivery,

2. <https://calswec.berkeley.edu/programs-and-services/title-iv-e-stipend-program>

1. Information is presented here by a researcher, who conducted eight interviews across different levels of management—the program director and workforce development manager (upper management), the training coordinator and internal practice coach (middle management) and an FCS team supervisor and front-line child welfare social workers (lower management). Besides interviews, the researcher also collected case-relevant material from the agency. The case was developed with the support of the Mack Center on Nonprofit and Public Sector Management in the Human Services at the University of California, Berkeley. The author wishes to acknowledge the guidance of Michael J. Austin, Mack Professor and Director of the Mack Center at the University of California, Berkeley.

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and decision-making in order to help professionals become more effective in their roles.<sup>3</sup> SOP is a set of strategies and tools that supports the CPM. The CPM and SOP both emphasize the importance of teamwork in child welfare and utilize strategies and techniques that align with the belief that a child and their family are the central focus, and that the partnership exists in an effort to find solutions that ensure safety, permanency, and well-being for children.<sup>4</sup> The CPM and SOP are embedded in the Workforce Development System in order to assist with learning about practice during pre-service preparation. The goal is to support career development and enhance professional commitment of workers and further enable agency retention efforts. Orienting students to county policies and procedures takes time when combined with the transfer of social work knowledge and skills from the classroom into agency practice. Given that FCS was a part of a California effort to develop and implement the CPM, the FCS workforce development team began to explore the role of various methods of training and workforce development, including coaching and leadership development, for implementing CPM and SOP. Therefore, supervision and leadership play a critical role in creating a hospitable environment for building a competent, confident and stable workforce in child welfare.

### EVIDENCE-INFORMED PLANNING

To implement this learning framework, the FCS Workforce Development Team utilized the findings from the 2014 Comprehensive Organizational Health Assessment (COHA) developed by the National Child Welfare Workforce Initiative. This assessment identified critical workforce strengths and challenges that provided the foundation for the design of integrated interventions needed to support organizational development in the form of targeted workforce developments. The COHA used a mixed-methods design that included an online survey administered to staff, as well as focus groups and interviews with agency directors, managers, supervisors, and workers across three FCS offices at SFHSA. Data from the COHA were used to advance and integrate the multiple, complementary change initiatives with the end goal that FCS would more effectively meet its practice objectives and achieve better outcomes for families. A 2018 COHA follow-up study assessed the changes

3. The California Child Welfare Core Practice Model is a project of the County Welfare Directors Association (CWDA) of California(link is external) with support from the California Department of Social Services(link is external), the Child and Family Policy Institute of California(link is external), CalSWEC, and the Regional Training Academies.

4. <https://theacademy.sdsu.edu/programs/cwds/sop/>

**TABLE 1**  
**FCS Evidence-informed Planning and Design**

<b>Baseline COHA 2014</b>
Identify critical workforce strengths and challenges to create a learning organization and eliminate barriers while assisting families
Build structures based on an implementation science framework to streamline the development of a compliance oriented, accountable strengths-based learning organization
Develop a logic model connecting pre-service preparation to in-service training
Devise a coaching program for coaches to mentor FCS team supervisors since supervisors play a critical role in staff retention and learning
Create Training Unit Logic Model that supports the training of Title IV-E students from partner universities and continues their structured learning support as child welfare social workers leading to the creation of a skilled workforce in order to provide better services and outcomes for families
<b>Follow-up COHA 2018</b>
Identified 5 key priority areas for action teams within FCS (bias, workload, retention, morale and communication)

in organizational health as a result of various interventions. *Table 1* showcases the evidence-informed planning and design that came out of the COHAs.

A logic model, noted in *Appendix A*, was created by drawing upon the core practice competencies to reflect three major activities (domains, activities and outputs) related to coordination of pre-service preparation with in-service training and coaching. In addition, the logic model incorporates aspects of recruitment, career development, performance management and accountability, and improving the overall organizational culture and climate. As specified coaching and leadership are a central to the FCS Workforce Development system and is discussed in greater detail in the following section.

### COACHING TO SUPPORT A STRENGTHS-BASED LEARNING ORGANIZATION

Coaching is often viewed as a parallel process in which senior managers can coach managers, managers can coach supervisors, supervisors can coach social workers, and workers can coach families involved with the child welfare



system. Specifically designated internal and external coaches are also used in order to build these skills in staff, supervisors and managers. The coaching process includes creating a structured, focused interaction with learners and uses intentional strategies, tools, and techniques to promote desirable and sustainable change for the benefit of the learner, making a positive impact on the organization (Cox, Bachkirova, & Clutterbuck, 2010)<sup>5</sup>. Through coaching, individuals can gain a clear sense of direction and purpose, self-confidence, increased motivation, and enhanced skills and knowledge. Coaching at all levels is designed to improve competence and success in working with families and colleagues. This success can lead to improved outcomes related to safety, permanence, and well-being for children and youth as well as improved staff retention. The culture of the organization is also impacted and becomes more creative, engaging, effective, satisfying, and accountable.

San Francisco invested in three designated coaching positions, primarily focused on building the skills of supervisors to coach staff to build skills related to the CPM. In contrast to the required Statewide Common Core Training for new social workers related to gaining knowledge, practice skills, and transfer of learning<sup>6</sup>, coaching sessions with the designated coaches are generally voluntary and confidential and cannot be used for disciplinary purposes. Program Directors and Managers can refer staff for coaching as a method to build their skills, but participation is ultimately voluntary and goals are established by the coach and learner. Coaches and supervisors were also integrated into the design and implementation of a cohort-based model for both interns currently in an MSW program and newly hired line staff. The cohort training model focuses on skill building, knowledge development and team building exercises in order to enhance the development of supportive cohorts of interns and cohorts of newly hired staff.

Coaching and supervision training is carried out through accessing and building multiple training resources across all levels of management. These resources include the Leadership Academy for Supervisors and Middle Managers sponsored by the National Child Welfare Workforce Institute, and the Bay Area Academy with its regional training contracts with each county that features the Art

of Coaching, and the statewide core training for supervisors. Besides these formal training resources, FCS coaches and Workforce Development Team members also conduct in-house training sessions, skills labs, and group coaching sessions that provide creative learning opportunities for units or groups of supervisors. The skills labs are customized to focus on a particular skill or new practice, and include such topics as reflections on bias related to race and equity within the agency, using critical thinking to develop effective safety plans, and other topics identified by supervisors and managers. Additional learning activities focus on professional growth, such as exploring ways to develop yourself professionally and setting goals in relation to interviews or applications linked to promotional opportunities.

Bay Area Academy also provides train the trainer opportunities, curriculum development, and advanced coaching support for the supervisors and staff assigned to the Workforce Development Team, in order for them to build skills at facilitating trainings, skills labs and other custom learning activities. Internal practice coaches receive professional development coaching from mentors who are under contract with the regional child welfare training academy on building a coaching relationship, group facilitation and curriculum development

### PROGRAM STAFFING STRUCTURE

There are multiple staff roles and associated activities related to the FCS workforce development staffing structure. As noted in *Table 2*, the program director has overall leadership responsibility, followed by the program manager who is responsible for the entire workforce development team. The program manager oversees the internal practice coaches, the training coordinators (who also serve as unit supervisors) child welfare social workers (who also serve as MSW Field Instructors), MSW interns and newly hired child welfare social workers.

Under the supervision of the program manager there are six supervisor level staff; three of them function as training coordinators with assigned tasks of training and onboarding MSW interns and new child welfare social work hires as well as coordinating ongoing training for the full FCS workforce; and the other three work as internal practice coaches who assist with the implementation and refinement of practice skills for supervisors and child welfare social workers. The training coordinators ensure continuity of training and onboarding. For example, the training coordinator in charge of the internship program also serves as the training coordinator of the newly hired child welfare social workers. As one of the training coordinators noted:

5. Cox, Bachkirova, & Clutterbuck (2010). *Coaching Toolkit for Child Welfare Practice* produced by the Northern Training Academy in partnership with Casey Family Programs, Adapted from Mink, Owen, & Mink, 1993.

6. <https://calswec.berkeley.edu/programs-and-services/child-welfare-service-training-program/common-core-30>

**TABLE 2**  
**FCS Program Staffing Structure**

<b>FCS Personnel</b>	<b>Role</b>	<b>Activities</b>
Program Director (1)	Executer and implementer of program development and support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Program development, outcomes and accountability activities across FCS workforce development, policy, data, contracted services oversight, Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI), HR and IT Liaison</li> </ul>
Program Manager (1)	Supervision of FCS workforce development team	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Training, coaching, recruitment, retention and organizational development activities for all FCS staff</li> </ul>
Internal Practice Coaches (3)	Implementation & refinement of practice skills for supervisors, child welfare social workers and other classifications	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Engage with supervisors to build a coaching relationship</li> <li>Facilitation and curriculum development</li> <li>Individual and skill-based group coaching for supervisors and their units</li> <li>Practice skills coaching on SOP and CPM for child welfare social workers</li> </ul>
Training Coordinator 1: MSW Internship Program	Training, onboarding and supervision of FCS workforce including child welfare social worker	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Coordination with Schools of Social Work</li> <li>Coordinate weekly case consultations with all stakeholders</li> <li>Cohort model team building exercises (such as developing healing circles) and training on engagement, interviewing and structured decision making, SOP, behaviorally based case management</li> </ul>
Training Coordinator 2: Child Welfare Social Worker Onboarding	Training, onboarding and supervision of child welfare social worker hires and their supervisors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Coordinates Onboarding training + State wide Common Core mandated training</li> <li>Build support groups (continuation of healing circles) and regular cohort check-in's</li> <li>Program assignment and shadowing opportunities</li> <li>Probation evaluation</li> </ul>
Training Coordinator 3: All Child Welfare Social Workers training	Training for all staff	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Training past probation for child welfare social worker hires, at least 20 hours of training annually</li> <li>Onboarding assistance for other classifications</li> <li>Ongoing training for all FCS staff</li> </ul>
Service Unit Supervisors	Leadership skill development in program development and implementation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Voluntary outreach to coaches for assistance</li> <li>Supervision of child welfare social workers: Response to a case, honing their assessment skills, gaining familiarity and execution appropriate protocols/tools, writing case notes, court reports + Professional Development activities</li> </ul>
Child Welfare Social Workers (4) in the Training Unit	Train and onboard MSW interns	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Carry FSU and ERU caseloads</li> <li>Serve as MSW field instructors to the MSW interns</li> <li>Provide key onboarding training and shadowing opportunities</li> </ul>
Child Welfare Social Work Interns (Pre-Service)	Work under the direction of the training unit field instructors and work directly with families	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Voluntary outreach to coaches, training coordinators and supervisors for assistance</li> <li>Weekly case consultations with all stakeholders</li> <li>Shadowing opportunities across FCS units</li> <li>Conduct assessments and provide services to families</li> </ul>
Child welfare social worker Hires (In-Service)	Work under the direction of the service unit supervisors as they gradually build up their caseloads	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Voluntary outreach to coaches, training coordinators and supervisors for assistance</li> <li>Completion of Common Core Training,</li> <li>Weekly case consultations with all stakeholders</li> <li>Shadowing opportunities within assigned FCS unit</li> </ul>

**FIGURE 1**  
**Competencies Related to Building an Employee Success Roadmap**

ORGANIZATIONAL CORE COMPETENCIES			
PERSONAL EFFECTIVENESS	COMMUNICATION	WORK EFFECTIVENESS	INTERPERSONAL EFFECTIVENESS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Conscientiousness</li> <li>• Continuous Learning</li> <li>• Ethics &amp; Integrity</li> <li>• Personal Accountability</li> <li>• Stress Management &amp; Resilience</li> <li>• Team Oriented</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Verbal Communication</li> <li>• Written Communication</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Organizational Skills</li> <li>• Learning New Tools and Work Processes</li> <li>• Adaptability</li> <li>• Problem Solving</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Interpersonal Skills</li> <li>• Collaboration</li> <li>• Service Focus</li> <li>• Respecting Diversity</li> <li>• Conflict Management</li> </ul>

JOB SERIES CORE COMPETENCIES	
PROFESSIONAL EXPERTISE	PEOPLE MANAGEMENT
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Technical Knowledge               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Knowledge of Child Welfare Regulations</li> <li>○ Knowledge of Family and Children's Services Program Policies and Procedures</li> <li>○ Knowledge of tools used in Assessment and consultations (SOP, SDM, SafeMeasures, etc.)</li> <li>○ Advocacy</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Data Gathering and Analysis</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Performance Management</li> <li>• Developing Others</li> <li>• Change Management</li> </ul>

*The idea is that these interns that we have right now will then become our employees, and she is overseeing that program right now, and she will continue to support them. Yes. So, instead of becoming just knowing them for those nine months, I have been with these guys for like the last year and a half. They know me, I know them. I'm their support*

#### TRANSLATION OF LEARNING THROUGH COACHING & TRAINING

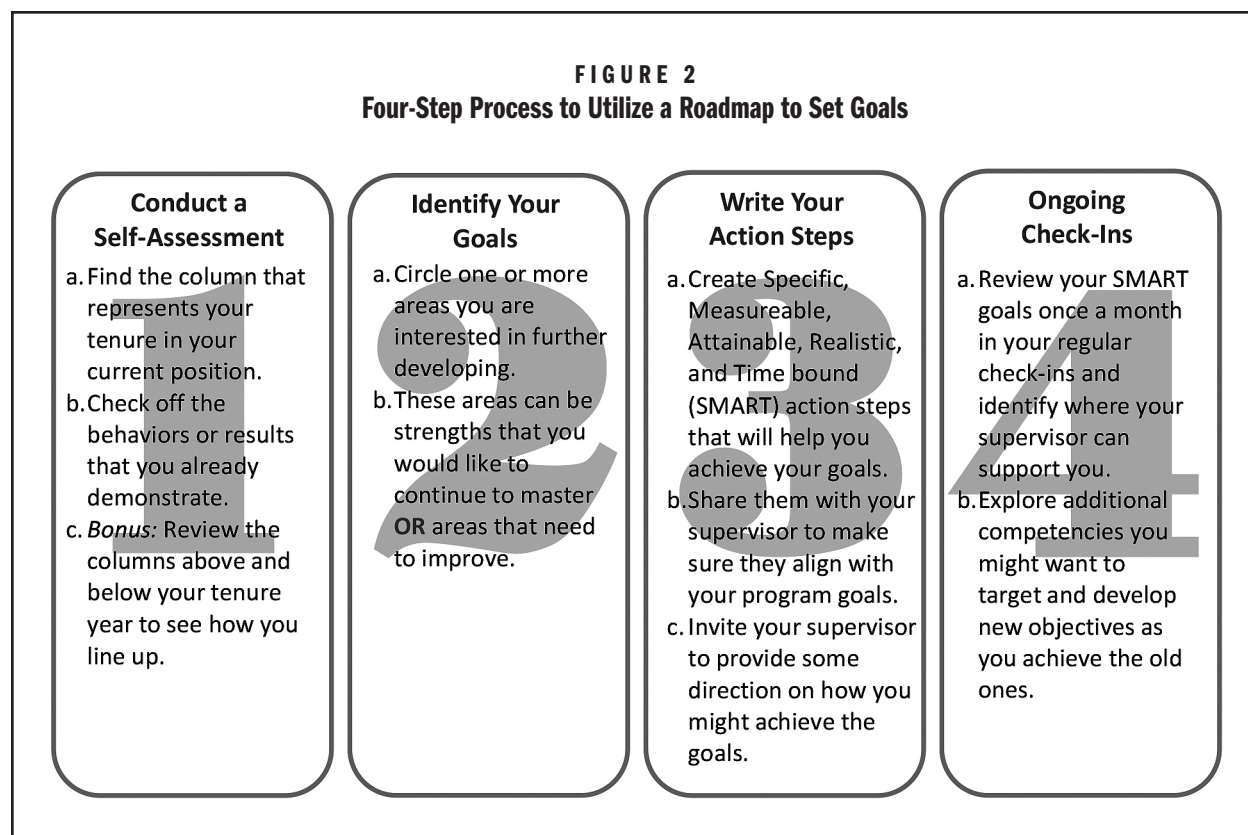
All case carrying and non-case carrying child welfare social workers and supervisors engage in a self-assessment review process of their respective competencies. They begin with the development of a personal success roadmap comprised of competencies (knowledge, skills, abilities, and other characteristics) that identify the characteristics of successful performance for each job class. These competencies serve as the foundation for employee development, and also

drive the staff selection process, the learning and development curriculum, and performance management process. The rationale and intent of a roadmap is designed to, 1) align employee and supervisor expectations by providing a standardized map of successful performance in a job class by length of service, 2) help guide professional development conversations, and 3) provide clear guideposts for maximizing employee potential to move up a career ladder.

The two major core competencies used in employee evaluations relate to organizational and job series competencies. Organizational competencies are essential for supporting the mission, vision, and values of the agency. The job series competencies are required for success within a particular job series described as specific technical expertise needed to perform effectively. Examples of these two sets of competencies are illustrated in *Figure 1*.

Employees and supervisors utilize a specific roadmap to clarify job expectations and identify strengths and

**FIGURE 2**  
**Four-Step Process to Utilize a Roadmap to Set Goals**



coaching opportunities. Goal-setting is a process used to develop competencies that includes the following four steps: Step 1 involves conducting a self-assessment of the behaviors or results that the employee already demonstrates for the job class, Step 2 includes identifying one's goals and areas for improvement. Step 3 involves the development of specific action steps based on the use of SMART goals that are Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Realistic and Time Bound and are reviewed by one's supervisor to see how the implementation plan relates to the program's service goals, and Step 4 comprises ongoing check-in's wherein the employee reviews their SMART goals on a monthly basis with their supervisor and also explores additional competencies based on existing goal attainment. The details of the four-step process are captured in *Figure 2*.

Setting up SMART goals using the success roadmap is a completed as part of the annual performance evaluation process between the child welfare social workers and their supervisors, the supervisors and their managers, and the managers and their program directors. It is designed to improve upon an existing competency and promote one's career development. In addition, employees who are not meeting performance standards will be involved in a work plan or a performance improvement plan involving the

agency's HR staff to ensure a closer monitoring of ongoing professional development as well as meeting the basic requirements of the job. According to the FCS program manager, being accountable towards the learning objectives of the workforce development plan is key, as she states:

*It's really intended to be an accountability process. We want you to be accountable for meeting these competencies and showing professional development in these competencies. Your rating includes such questions as: is this an emerging skill. Is this a skill that illustrates mastery of all of the competencies and reflects continuing professional growth? And if you're not showing growth, then we would either set a smart goal for you or an actual performance improvement plan or work plan for you. A smart goal is definitely more voluntary, more something that you and your supervisor develop. The other goals are still worth addressing. A work plan or a performance improvement plan is where we've identified there's a deficit and then it's more closely and frequently monitored.*



In addition to individual employee assessment and evaluation, an ongoing formative evaluation is underway to evaluate the impact of coaching on child welfare practice.

## Continuing Challenges

Despite the considerable progress made by the FCS workforce development team towards creating a strength-based learning organization, this work-in-progress has identified continuing challenges.

### COMPETING TIME PRESSURES

Given the nature and intensity of child welfare work as caseload demands rise, the feasibility of scheduling ongoing workforce development training has become increasingly challenging. As new hires transition from the training unit to their eventual program assignment over the first six months of employment, their capacity to attend training diminishes. As a consequence, the training cohort model becomes more difficult to sustain when child welfare social workers try to balance caseload dynamics with training and coaching needs.

### IMPACT OF CIVIL SERVICE HIRING PRACTICES

The FCS workforce development system operates on the premise of ensuring continuity of learning and training from pre-service preparation to in-service training as Title IV-E MSW interns become child welfare social work hires. However, seeking full-time employment in this county calls for all MSW interns to complete a child welfare social work application and exam process. There have been instances where the specially-trained Title IV-E child welfare interns did not score high enough on the exam and were not hired as new child welfare social workers in SF county (although they were hired in other Bay Area counties). The skill level and competencies of interns vary and further study could reveal that the exam process results in hiring of those most promising interns over interns who did not gain as much knowledge and skill through the process.

There can be tension between civil service policies and practices and the FCS hiring preferences. For interns who do pass the civil service requirements, they are joined by new co-workers who did not participate in the agency's pre-service experiences. As a consequence, the former interns repeat some aspects of the ongoing training courses and thereby experience redundancy from the repetition. One of the training coordinators highlights the challenges associated with civil service hiring practices:

*Since San Francisco is a civil service city, all the MSW interns have to interview and apply just like everybody else who is applying. We don't just open it up to them. So, they're hired based on how high they score. And so, you have to rank in the top in order to be offered a job. And some of our interns, like last time, ranked a little lower... So we got other new workers. Onboarding is for all new workers... it would be great if we only hired our interns, because they are a part of that onboarding, we could eliminate some of the repetitive training content.*

### INCORPORATING TRUST AND SAFETY INTO SUPERVISION

Since coaching and supervision are part of a voluntary process, the burden of seeking self-improvement is placed on staff to seek out training areas for improvement and mentoring. In addition, supervisors are often hesitant to be candid about their own supervisory and coaching competencies given their seniority and experience level. As a consequence, there is a lack of trust in supervision when subordinates do not feel safe with disclosing their areas for improvement, especially when a disclosure could affect their long-term career prospects. For example, one of the internal practice coaches (and FCS supervisor) noted concerns about the level of trust in coaching and supervision amongst supervisors:

*I found some supervisors find it hard to say I need help in this area. A lot of my work has been continuing to sort of reassure them that they're okay pointing out the areas where they're really doing well, and noting that I am here to help them along their journey. I found that staff find it hard to say that they have been making these mistakes. They need to feel safe enough to say it, and only those people that feel 100 percent safe with you will share with you instead of admitting it to a colleague.*

In addition, child welfare social workers called for more intentional, reflective supervision beyond discussing cases and referrals. Most references to supervision by child welfare social workers focus on confirming that they had completed the core training rather than critically reflecting on one's own practice and talking about how one can grow and improve in certain areas. Learning and growth within the organization is related to the ability to apply one's learning and then reflecting on it with a supervisor as indicated by one of the child welfare social workers:



*Just applying it, I think, is the key. I think you could go to hundreds of hours of training, but if they are not actually applying, and thinking about how to apply it, and reflecting on it, and talking to someone about it, then what good is it?*

## Conclusion

The case of the FCS Workforce Development System illustrates how a system can be designed and implemented utilizing evidence-informed planning to build a strengths-based learning organization. The goal is to ensure a continuum of learning from pre-service to in-service training and address workforce retention and development within public welfare agencies. A cascading vertical parallel process of coaching and supervision at multiple levels in the organization was established in order to ensure accountability and translation of learning, skills and competencies across the FCS workforce. Organizational change projects usually create a few ongoing challenges and this case is no different, especially regarding the issues of competing time pressures, complex civil service hiring practices and the need to create trust and safety within the supervisory process. Addressing future implications and identifying problem-solving strategies can be explored, in part, by answering the discussion question below.

## Discussion Questions

1. Implementation of the FCS Workforce Development System reveal that workload demands tend to compete with time for supervision and coaching. How would you give higher priority to the workforce development activity of coaching that underlies professional development?
2. We observe a tension between civil service hiring policies and practices which tend to undermine the workforce development cohort model of moving from student to practitioner and potentially creates training redundancies by mixing pre-service grads with newly-hired practitioners with no experience in the agency. How would you address this systems issue?
3. Given the goal of encouraging supervisors to assume leadership roles associated with coaching differentially-prepared staff, how would you encourage supervisors to request coaching services for themselves to improve upon their existing competencies without threatening their job security?
4. How could experienced supervisors acquire a greater trust in the coaching process (something they never experienced in their career advancement process) when there may be limited candor or insight into their own capabilities?

## APPENDIX A

### FCS Workforce Development Logic Model

# FCS Workforce Development System

