

Managerial Leadership Development in a Transformational Organizational Climate

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

As the state prepares to implement “Covered California” in the coming months, local county social service agencies are reviewing their service delivery models and the potential impacts on both staff and clients. Implications for the Human Services Agency of San Francisco (HSA) will include serving a larger pool of clients, new healthcare eligibility guidelines and regulations, enrollment accessibility at HSA locations, and culture change within HSA. HSA has adopted a new vision as part of their strategic Implementation Plan to assist with these efforts. Leadership skills are critical to the success of the plan. Front line staff, serving both eligibility and supervisory functions, will need the support and leadership of their program mid-managers, who play a critical role, in carrying out the massive programmatic and cultural shifts that are

anticipated with Covered California. Mid-managers will need to demonstrate to staff how the agency will benefit from the new implementation as well as having staff understand the setbacks of not making a change.

This case study takes a closer look at the Leadership and Organizational Training and Coaching, conducted by UC Davis, to the Workforce Services Bureau (WFS) management staff in the Contra Costa County Employment and Human Services Department. In 2012, the Leadership and Organizational Training and Coaching resulted from an urgent business need to successfully implement the “Office of the Future” business model for the WFS Bureau. The case study will describe the background, training model, challenges, and successes encountered by staff, as well as recommendations for HSA.

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Introduction

In 2010, the Patient Protection Act and Affordable Care Act were passed by Congress to provide affordable health care insurance for more Americans. California was the first state to enact the legislation. For this reason, millions of Californians will be able to access health care coverage through an organized marketplace concept referred to as “Covered California.” For low to moderate income individuals specifically, Covered California will determine if they qualify for federal financial assistance with health care costs, or if they qualify for Medi-Cal. This will drive in more consumers to local county social service agencies that administer Medi-Cal, essentially bringing in a new type of consumer who may benefit from complimentary financial and supportive programs already offered by the agencies. Enrollment for coverage is slated to begin in October 2013, with coverage taking effect in January 2014. For this reason, the Human Services Agency (HSA) of San Francisco is currently reviewing and evaluating its customer service delivery model in preparation of the arrival of Covered California.

Background

HSA recently moved into a task-based center model for select programs, where all intake and carrying eligibility task functions are centralized and divided among staff. Simultaneously, operational details continued to emerge from the state regarding Covered California. HSA recognized that program accessibility and quality customer service in administering Covered California is essential to making the program a successful and viable for San Francisco residents. Thus, HSA developed a recent program

integration plan to carry out the agency’s new vision. The new vision statement reads: “Improve our customer service and prepare for an increase in clients through modernizing our systems and integrating our program service offerings.” The implementation plan is designed to roll out in various phases, including renovated lobbies to accommodate the higher number of applicants expected; redesigned customer service processes resulting in improved customer service; implementation of new technology so cases can be shared across traditional program lines, and with cross-program and cross-functional Medi-Cal and CalFresh staff, where staff are trained in both programs and in both functions (intake and carrying). Some of these changes have been announced through various program town hall meetings, conducted by executive staff to keep the staff closely abreast of what is coming. However, the new “vision” for HSA brings on a fear of the unknown for the frontline staff, and a natural reluctance to break out of one’s own comfort zone; specifically, around working in a cross-functional capacity within a task-based center where work functions will be vastly impacted by technology and increased customer traffic. Mid-managers will be tasked to lead the line eligibility and supervisory staff through a series of hurdles, including to have staff:

- Understand the change
- Absorb the change in a new physical work environment
- Driven and motivated to make the change

Mid-managers carry the heavy weight of the executive management’s message while balancing the programmatic needs carried out by the line staff.

Mid-managers, a critical leadership bridge between the two levels, will also need to be supported as the agency embraces a new model of delivering service to consumers. A few other neighboring counties have already moved into a cross-functional worker delivery system within a task-based and/or call center environment similar to what San Francisco HSA will face in the coming months. In 2011, the Contra Costa County Employment and Human Services Department (ESHSD) moved forward in launching its new business process known as “Office of the Future” (OOF) under the Workforce Services (WFS) Bureau. The WFS Bureau, through this new business process, significantly changed its intake processes for CalWORKs, CalFresh, and Medi-Cal, and moved to a task-based service center model. During the time of implementation, ESHSD was still reeling from the aftereffects of an enormous budget and staffing crisis. Its general funds were significantly depleted due to the housing crisis, resulting in less tax revenue for the county. ESHSD lost 67% of their staffing due to layoffs, salary cut-backs, and massive retirements. Morale was at an all time low, as the front line staff were overworked and overstressed. Management teams also became isolated and worked in silos. Thus, ESHSD enlisted UC Davis to conduct a Leadership Development Program, and offered it to its directors within the six bureaus. For the WFS Bureau, the Leadership Development Program was mandatory due to the timing of the OOF.

Following the WFS Bureau Director’s participation in the Leadership Development Program, the WFS Bureau Director recognized that her internal management team of eight mid-managers needed to re-energize, re-focus, and re-evaluate, as OOF required a massive internal programmatic and cultural shift for WFS, which comprised of over 900 employees. This recognized need served as the catalyst for implementing a much needed overhaul of how mid-managers viewed their role within the WFS Bureau, and how they needed to serve as role models, albeit with dwindling resources, to meet the WFS’ new focus. The WFS Bureau Director strongly advocated for staff training to guide her and her team

of mid-managers through this transition. She first looked at internal resources, including ESHSD’s own staff development to help facilitate management training around the new call center focus; however, ESHSD staff development was unable to provide such training. She recognized the training as an urgent business need and continued to look elsewhere for other resources. Luckily, another bureau had underutilized UC Davis credits for the budgeted year. The WFS division was allowed to leverage those credits and apply them toward a customized training from UC Davis called “Leadership and Organizational Training.”

The Model

The Leadership and Organizational Training took place over the course of eleven months, from January to November 2012. The training took place once a month in full-day group sessions at ESHSD. The program was facilitated and led by Gary Izumo, an experienced UC Davis trainer with an executive coaching background. Mr. Izumo developed the curriculum and customized his approach by tying the training to the department’s new focus around the OOF in order to maximize the benefits of the training for staff. The training participants included all the WFS managers, as well as the WFS Bureau Director. The group sessions were also coupled with “optional” individual coaching sessions led by Gary Izumo. The individualized coaching sessions were tailored to participants’ unique needs, focusing not only on the leadership topics learned through the group sessions, but allowing the individual to explore their own personal strengths and barriers to increase self-awareness and support their development.

GROUP SESSIONS

The Leadership and Organizational Training began with each manager, including the Bureau Director, signing an agreement adhering to full-fledged active participation in an honest and respectful manner while adhering to specific ground rules established by the trainer. Mr. Izumo administered a team assessment questionnaire to the managers to ascertain

a baseline reading of how the team currently functioned collectively in meeting program goals. The team assessment questionnaire asked fifteen questions using a 9-point rating scale, and the scoring applied to five categories including Absence of Trust, Fear of Conflict, Lack of Commitment, Avoidance of Accountability, and Inattention to Results. The team's average rating score was 4.5, using a scale from 1 to 5, with 5 being worst. Mr. Izumo referenced the low team score as the guiding principle for the leadership training, focusing the coming months on identified topics tailored to the team around OOF, with each topic becoming the building block for the next. The topics of the group sessions included:

- Personal Influence and Organizational Insight
- Sustaining Transformational Change
- High Performance Organizations
- Human Capital
- Thinking Skills
- Determining and Setting Direction
- Putting It All Together

The group sessions involved intense group exercises that led the team to self-identify program needs and concerns, specific attitudes and behaviors exhibited within the team, and their own individual managerial styles affecting the team and staff. Some group exercises were uncomfortable and uneasy. Exercises required managers to fully disclose personal feelings about co-workers and/or to face their own deficiencies as a manager in order to break through the silos and identify barriers conflicting the group and stifling their progress. The group sessions also demonstrated how to be an "active" participant in meetings, how to have those difficult conversations with staff and each other and how to approach work with a positive intent, and allowed the group to develop their own motto, which is to "always work together in the best interest of clients and staff." Assigned homework readings and homework peer exercises were designed around objectives, outcomes, and roles for the Office of the Future.

INDIVIDUALIZED COACHING

The Individual Coaching Sessions were optional for those managers who wanted to participate. Each session was confidential, and tailored to the managers' needs. The sessions were the first of its kind offered to the managers, and complemented the lessons learned through the group training sessions. For the managers, including the Bureau Director, who chose to participate in the coaching sessions, it allowed them to address personal inadequacies, some very painful in nature in order to become a stronger manager. It also provided an opportunity for managers to practice what they learned in the group sessions and to provide an open outlet to voice concerns in an open and non-threatening environment. For those who participated, it assisted them in identifying personal strengths and goals to help them become a better manager. Coaching sessions allowed managers the necessary "me" time to step away from the job, de-stress, and rejoice in the strengths that they bring to the table. Managers kept journals on their progress, and used that as a supplementary tool to expand their knowledge of leadership.

Challenges

WFS experienced three main challenges in implementing the training and coaching sessions: funding, time, and manager buy-in. First, in terms of cost, the Leadership Development Program offered to the Bureau Directors was priced at \$51,000. For the customized WFS Leadership and Organizational Training/Coaching, it cost roughly \$87,000. As mentioned previously, EHSD was already in a heavily reduced fiscal climate and without the ability to shift underspent funds; it would be difficult to say how WFS would have been able to administer any type of training to meet their urgent business need for OOF. Second, the customized WFS Leadership and Organizational Training was a significant investment of time for the WFS managers, including the WFS Bureau Director, who were already swamped with completing their daily responsibilities. Adding to the time invested would be the optional individual

coaching sessions with the trainer, coupled with outside reading and homework assignments. Third, the leadership training faced its main challenge, WFS manager buy-in for the training. To convince the team, who already worked in silos and suffered from low morale, it required tremendous leadership and courage from the WFS Bureau Director. The Bureau Director's vision needed to be clearly articulated to her team, and it also required the Bureau Director to reevaluate herself and invest more time and energy for the greater good of the team.

Successes

Were the above challenges worth the investment? Was this training successful for WFS? The training, as mentioned previously, began in January 2012 and ended in November 2012. In this case study, it was difficult to measure progress in a numerical way or to quantify success, as there were no pre/post-evaluations to determine an accurate reading, except for the team questionnaire. As stated previously, the team rated themselves a 4.2, with 5 being worst. At the conclusion of the training, their new rating was 2.0, indicating significant progress within less than a year. In addition to these data, interviews were conducted with staff, from line level supervisors all the way up to the Bureau Director.

In the course of interviews with some members of the WFS Bureau, including line supervisors, managers, and the Bureau Director, it was reported that significant change occurred at all levels. One supervisor indicated that she saw her manager change for the better and work more collaboratively with her direct reports and fellow managers, and communication flowed more smoothly, becoming an environment of open level communication where managers took the time to "explain" more. Another line supervisor echoed the same comments of her direct manager, thus breaking the silos that existed within units and buildings. In the manager interviews, they expressed an immense gratitude for having had the training, especially the individual coaching sessions. They indicated that they learned so much about themselves, often equating the group sessions

to group therapy. The individualized coaching narrowed down specifically on past personal issues that affected how the managers applied their delivery style at work. It also helped bridge the connection between the two and provided a holistic picture for optimum growth as a productive, healthy, and well-balanced person. The managers proudly apply what they learned through their individual coaching sessions, and still follow the internal "motto" that the team adopted in the group sessions. All in all, they found a way to work "for" the team and not against it, learning the true meaning of positive intent. One manager simply stated the following:

- We assume positive intent from and for each other.
- We try not to present our conclusions as the truth.
- We ask each other to paraphrase our understanding of what was said.
- We do not exaggerate with ALWAYS and NEVER.
- We ask how each sees it differently.

The interview with the Bureau Director was particularly insightful. She identified her own strengths and weaknesses as a result of her individual coaching sessions. She continuously hears anecdotally that it created a positive work atmosphere from the top down. The Bureau Director indicated that her managers now find trust within each other, allowing for open communication where issues do not become sideways or fester. The Bureau Director's team is requesting a wrap-up meeting and re-evaluation from UC Davis, and posed the question to her as to "where do we want to go from here?" indicating an increased self-awareness to continuously improve in fulfilling their roles as influential frontline leaders.

Recommendations

Although HSA has already moved toward a task-based center with CalWORKs and CalFresh as separate programs, HSA will be facing a similar transitional point as EHSD did a few years ago in blending eligibility programs and staff functions, but with

an added layer of a potentially new type of customer. Enrollment for Covered California begins as early as October 2013, a mere six months away, with full coverage taking effect in January 2014. As testified through the staff interviews and post-team assessment rating, there appears to be significant value to the Leadership Training and Individualized Coaching provided by UC Davis. That includes shaping, strengthening, and energizing the HSA mid-management levels to help reinforce the new vision of the agency while providing a positive impact to the front line staff levels. This would in turn allow the HSA implementation plan to be carried out successfully with minimal interference, if any. Some action steps to help achieve this would include:

- Administering an interest survey to the section managers of those programs affected in the integration service plan to seek the level of interest in training
- Contacting UC Davis to check on availability and cost estimates for conducting a condensed Leadership and Organizational Training/Coaching, in light of the tight timeframes
- Identifying potential funding resources, including such areas of program underspending and programmatic under-utilization, for training costs
- If training is allocated, re-evaluating the vision statement and implementation plan to identify key programmatic outcomes that would feed into the training curriculum to maximize the usage of the training

Conclusion

As the agency transforms its service delivery model, leaders will need to emerge. You will find them at the front lines, at the mid-manager level, and through the executive team. However, it is within the mid-manager level where the cross-program coordination and collaboration is critical to setting the tone of how the new vision is transmitted to staff, how communication is distributed, how business processes are developed and followed, and how goals

and objectives are carried out within programs. Mid-managers need support and training on how to lead the way, especially around how to communicate more clearly, more effectively, and more often. They need to learn how to own the implementation, remove those anticipated roadblocks to pave the way for the staff, and allow for an efficient and successful service delivery to clients.

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