

Organizational Development: Promising Practices in Employee Engagement

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Santa Cruz County's Human Services Department (HSD) developed an Organizational Development and Employee Engagement model. This paper includes observations and three recommendations taken from the HSD model for Santa Clara County Social Services Agency (SSA) to consider adopting. These recommendations are: (1) to create an Organizational Development and Planning Unit, (2) adopt a list of priorities for employee recognition and professional development, as well as self-care and stress reduction, and (3) to replicate

Santa Cruz County's process for onboarding all new employees. Adopting these recommendations will help reach the SSA Executive Team's 2019 thematic goal: to Enhance Employee Satisfaction, Engagement and Success. Santa Cruz County's HSD is undertaking many other promising practices and employee engagement efforts that are beyond the length of this paper. Santa Clara County Social Services Agency could also consider adopting the additional efforts under the umbrella of the included recommendations.

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Santa Clara County Social Services Agency Director Bob Menicocci posited: How do we get to be healthier, move forward, and shift the culture? What do we do to get better?

To answer this, many organizational development plans start with Social Services Agency's (SSA) most valuable assets: its employees. To begin these efforts, SSA is focusing attention on those assets, working on increasing employee engagement and improving agency culture.

Authenticity requires a collaborative work environment, is critical to organizational success, and is an important part of an organization as it applies from the executive team to line staff. Leadership sets the cultural tone and actively supports engagement at every level. Achieving a thriving work culture with daily effort and commitment, as well as effective engagement, fosters a collaborative caring culture.

Santa Cruz County Human Services Department (HSD) is engaged in promising Organizational Development and Employee Engagement practices. This paper provides an overview of some of HSD's efforts in Organizational Development (OD) and Employee Engagement (EE), SSA's efforts, and recommendations for SSA to expand efforts in these areas.

Santa Cruz County Human Services Division Overview

In 2016, HSD hired Organizational Development Manager Jennifer Kaley, to engage staff and to partner with the organization's various divisions to achieve the goals of increasing employee engagement

and following through on staff identified changes. Kaley began engagement efforts using the lens of organizational development to design cultural engagement frameworks to increase agency-wide staff engagement and employment satisfaction. She engaged divisions within the broader organization and identified, analyzed, and documented staff responses to surveys and focus groups. Kaley made recommendations and offered next steps, all while incorporating staff in the division's change process.

HSD's overall objectives were: (1) capture the viewpoint and experience of staff; (2) incorporate those viewpoints and experiences into cultural change efforts; (3) establish one or more vehicles for maintaining staff engagement; (4) evaluate cultural change. The desired outcomes were to: increase employee job satisfaction, increase employee retention, and increase internal candidate promotions.

Santa Cruz County HSD's premise was that "effective employee engagement results in enhanced employee well-being, longevity and contribution via an environment where the work is meaningful and makes a difference, they are valued, trusted, and respected, and they feel secure and self-confident" (Kahn, 1990). The corresponding engagement strategy is based on communication best practices that include expansion of trust, transparency, inclusion, and open communication between the organization and its individuals.

Through research and employee feedback, their system of organizational development provides an effective opportunity to identify areas of operations such as recruitment, retention, and professional development. When change is needed the change

management plan prioritizes incorporating the viewpoint and experience of staff. “The HSD plan provides a specific outline for the way in which the desired change will improve organizational operations, who will be impacted by the change, and how it can be rolled out efficiently and with the participation of staff.” (Jennifer Kaley, OD Manager, Santa Cruz County Human Services Department, 2019).

HSD Pilot Projects

Two divisions, Adults and Long-Term Care and Family and Children’s Services partnered with Kaley in developing strategies for their Organizational Development: Employee Engagement Initiative. This work was conducted within two pilot projects. The first pilot project focused on a new leadership restructure, along with the development and implementation of a Design Team in the Adult and Long-Term Care Division (ALTC). ALTC’s Design Team and Implementation Workgroup’s goals were to engage and develop their workforce through building a platform for staff input and project management, while supporting division-wide change management efforts along with staff-led initiatives, projects, and system improvements.

The ALTC Design Team’s strategic priorities for 2017-18 included projects such as addressing the need for caregivers, professional development and support, flexible work schedules, and mobile work or telework.

The team developed a Roadmap describing the responsibilities of ALTC Leadership, the Design Team, Program Leads, and Program Staff. They indicated activities and drivers for readiness, design, implementation, evaluation phases, and a celebration.

An ALTC Survey Tool was designed which focused on areas of Organizational Environment, Workforce Development, and Program and Practice Development. They reported the challenges in five Workforce Development areas specific to the programs existing in ALTC (Veterans Services, In Home Support Services, Adult Protective Services, Public Authority, and Clerical and Support).

They also identified the strength themes and values (such as dedication and commitment to serving clients) existing in ALTC at the individual, unit, and division levels. Additionally, ALTC reported on the Survey and Small Group Feedback regarding what was working well and where concerns or suggestions were identified.

The second pilot was in HSD’s Family and Children’s Services (FCS). In 2017, FCS began facilitating engagement efforts including roundtable discussions led by the Division Director and the OD Manager and an Employee Engagement Survey based on Roundtable feedback. Using employee feedback data from these tools, HSD identified specific areas for improvement within three areas: Workforce Development, Organizational Development, and Program and Practice Development. They developed a plan to explore the development areas through workgroups, committees, improved communication, and other engagement strategies.

Building Upon the Pilots

In 2018, to continue to build on the 2017 baseline engagement survey, HSD again conducted Roundtables and an Employee Engagement Survey. Feedback analysis from the 2018 Roundtable and Employee Engagement Survey identified three areas of focus: areas previously identified in 2017 but not yet focused on, areas where they are making a positive difference, and new or expanded themes to target for improvement.

The resulting findings led HSD to identify several improvement themes, which were provided to staff as follows: the goals, the status of the themes, and the possible inclusion in their 2018-19 OD plan.

To capture changes and demonstrate progress, HSD created an Employee Engagement Survey Response Report Card. Response data one year later showed improvement in 14 of 19 areas surveyed. The remaining five showed the same level of satisfaction. Overall, the FCS OD feedback analysis indicates they are moving in the right direction. They have been steadily improving in many areas and continue

to dialogue about new ways to be a stronger, more effective, and trauma-informed division.

Related Efforts as SSA

Five years ago, Santa Clara County Social Services Agency began organizational development and strategic planning. In the past year, Agency Leadership focused on creating a team in order to provide a unified voice and consistent practices agency-wide in support of uniform employee experiences. SSA focused on listening to employees through a combination of brown bag sessions with Department Directors, Director 'Road Shows', Employee Engagement Surveys, and a Unit-Based Team focused on employee engagement. Through their support of these efforts leadership is laying the foundation on which to build next steps in employee engagement. They are working to incorporate the voice of staff in department-wide decisions, practice, etc. As a result, the agency mission and vision (Serve, Empower, and Transform) have been integrated into a set of Guiding Principles (Compassionate, Responsive, and Innovative).

These efforts proved necessary as the 2018 Countywide Gallup Poll showed SSA scored below average on measures of well-being in every metric category. While two-thirds of respondents reported at least some degree of job satisfaction, less than fifty percent felt that their opinions counted or that they received recognition for doing good work. Additionally, fifty percent of responding staff would like to build more trust at work and over fifty percent don't feel heard or valued at work. Measures of recognition, connectedness to other employees, and opportunities for development were low across several indicators.

In response, SSA is engaged in several efforts around Employee Engagement and Organizational Development. Some of these efforts are agency-wide and some are department specific, but without an agency-wide employee engagement strategy that considers the differences in departments through the lens that we are all one SSA, serving the same clients [ex. Department of Family and Children's Services

(DFCS) Trauma-informed Training; Department of Employee Benefits Services (DEBS) Organizational Development; DFCS Learning Labs, etc.].

As an example of one department's specific engagement efforts, DFCS brought in Alia, a Minnesota-based non-profit agency. This work relies on human-centered design to transform child welfare agencies to support employee engagement and wellness, two all-staff visioning sessions and a follow-up closeout session, and the creation of the DFCS Employee of the Month program (which provides a certificate, an "A" parking sticker for the month, DFCS Employee of the Month water bottle, a celebration, and public recognition by their director, including a public letter of recognition stating why they were chosen and what behaviors they exhibited).

In another example, the Department of Aging and Adult Services staff worked with the Moran Group on enhanced customer service and developed their Universal Service Standards which defined the standards they would use with clients and staff.

While other departments have also contributed engagement efforts, many of these individual department efforts achieved positive results, they do not necessarily have an agency-wide focus. Therefore, they do not allow for a uniform standard of practice.

Through these efforts, SSA has a good foundation on which to build more impactful agency-wide efforts. Components include: Gallop Poll data, Executive Team Roadshows and Director's Brown Bag Sessions, SSA's Communication Team ("SSA Today"), Office of Research and Evaluation agency-wide annual "State of SSA" focusing on culture and climate, Employee Wellness Program, Employee Engagement Groups, Unit-Based Teams, and the upcoming agency Mentoring Program pilot.

Promising Practices and How Santa Cruz Efforts Apply to SSA

Integrating Planning and Evaluation

To effectively support their work, HSD has a division of Planning and Evaluation where Business Analytics and Continuous Process Improvement

(CPI) is housed. The Quality Improvement Manager works closely with the OD Manager in parallel engagement efforts. The OD Manager reports directly to the HSD Deputy Director as does the Planning and Evaluation Division ensuring agency-wide support of engagement efforts. HSD is an exemplary model for OD and EE. Most compelling about their model is the way in which they combined seven areas of focus. These include: (1) onboarding, (2) professional development, (3) recognition and wellness, (4) communication strategy and team, (5) supervision, (6) integration of CPI efforts, and (7) exit interviews and retention. While not all divisions are engaged in every focus area, they do overlap in five or six of the focus areas.

SSA would benefit from replicating some promising practices of the HSD model including focus on organization climate and culture, employee recognition and wellness, organizational performance and communication, and the integration of CPI.

Project Management

Project management is integrated into all aspects of the efforts. A unified and consistent approach to project management is woven throughout HSD efforts. Everyone on an ALTC work group or Design Team takes a one-hour E-learning class. This training provides all participants with the same foundation and understanding of project management to their work together.

Communication and Transparency

Santa Cruz HSD has a strong emphasis on departmental communication and transparency. Utilizing the engagement vehicle of focus groups is a powerful tool, especially when used in combination with the employee engagement surveys. This model ensures that group feedback is actionable.

SSA has the opportunity to do the same by acting on the recent “Say What?!” cross-department Unit-Based Team. This team investigated conditions driving SSA staff’s Gallop Poll response. Employee responses to their ‘Cookie for Your Thought’ employee engagement effort were illuminating. “The

results emphasized the critical role of relationships – relationships with clients, peers, and supervisors. Unfortunately, relationships are reflective of culture, and culture can’t be cured through a handbook change or newsletter” (Katie Hubner, Research and Evaluation Specialist, Santa Clara County Social Services Agency, 2019).

Recommendations

In order to support employee engagement at SSA, it is recommended that an Organizational Development and Planning Unit be created where all SSA organizational development and employee engagement efforts would be centralized. This unit could combine the existing individual contributors of Employee Engagement, Mentoring Program, Unit-Based Team coordination, and communications with the Continuous Quality Improvement Team. This team, while working on their specialties, would focus on organizational climate, culture, and employee engagement. The team would be intentionally attentive to the well-being of both the agency and its employees. By centralizing organizational and employee engagement activities and drawing on the Office of Research and Evaluation as a consultant, this new team could evaluate practices and engagement efforts to determine what is really working and what changes should be examined. It is important to note that this proposal would not require additional staff.

Similarly, the agency should adopt a list of priorities for employee recognition and professional development, as well as self-care and stress reduction, and then dedicate funding for these areas. Santa Cruz County HSD maintains a separate budget of \$25,000 for all things Organizational Development related, part of which is used for recognition and professional development supplies and materials.

A final recommendation would be to replicate Santa Cruz County’s process for onboarding for all new staff, including a Self-care Handbook and Desk Guide which includes a Director’s Welcome, data about the county, the HSD department structure and their clients. The Desk Guide also shares HSD’s

frameworks for engagement, information on supervision and available opportunities for professional development. The new SSA team can look at what SSA employees would find valuable.

Conclusion

If organized quickly, this team would help facilitate reaching the Executive Team's thematic goal to enhance employee satisfaction, engagement, and success by the end of 2019. Integrating recommendations like those previously stated will allow SSA to benefit from developing a culture that goes beyond just having a set of values and a vision to allowing everyone in the organization to thrive, making the application of HSD's promising practices even more timely.

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