

# **WHITMAN'S SAMPLER: EXPLORING COLLABORATIVE AND INTEGRATIVE SERVICES IN NAPA AND SANTA CRUZ COUNTIES**

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## **INTRODUCTION**

In the current time of "down sizing" and "flattening the organization" the search for ways to optimize resources has been in the forefront of many directors and managers of social service agencies. Thus it has been an increasing interest this writer to explore those service delivery models which appear to manage their resources to the community by either collaborative or integrated models. Smaller, rural counties are often in the best position to demonstrate this development. Often faced with limited resources and with an increasing demand for services, these organizations tend to develop a service delivery system that meets the mandates placed upon them by utilizing their fiscal and staff resources to the maximum. The two counties that were the basis for the internship represented two models for consideration. In this case study the variables that either act to encourage the development of the model, influence the model selection and act as a constraint will be considered. The implication for the adaptation to a larger, urban area will also be partially addressed. The following material is based upon impression gathered while at the agencies and is not intended to be interpreted as the results of extensive research.

## **SANTA CRUZ COUNTY AND THE COLLABORATIVE MODEL**

Located on the Pacific Ocean, south of San Francisco and west of San Jose, Santa Cruz County is known for its relaxed life style. The hustle and bustle of urban congestion and a plethora of population is left beyond the mountain range that acts as a buffer to the east. Light industry, a major educational institution and agriculture provide the financial base for this county along with the tourist industry. Politically from the fiscal perspective it is more on the conservative end of the continuum although from a philosophical perspective more moderate in nature. Santa Cruz County Social Services is part of a larger structure, Santa Cruz County Health and Human Services Agency. It maintains it's own administrative structure and organization for the delivery of services and includes departments of Income Maintenance, GAIN/JTPA, Child and Family and Adult Services.

Although traditional in some of its service delivery, the emphasis on collaborative endeavors infuses the agency across programmatic entities as well as throughout the employee spectrum. When speaking of the Collaborative Model, this writer's definition is "to work with someone else for a special purpose; to bring together resources where the combination results in more than the individual contributions." This is particularly evidence in the collaborative programming with the private sector in the Families in Transition program as well as the collaboration in the children's area between Mental Health, Child and Family and Income Maintenance for their wraparound program. What are those variable that might contribute to the fostering and maintenance of such an approach is the question.

Internal variables that appear to be essential in the development of the collaborative model encompass the following: leadership style, consistency with the agency mission, staff attitude,

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stability of staff, and organizational culture. This is by no means a complete list but rather those which are perceived as critical to the model. Leadership style which sets the tone by modeling the desire for collaborative endeavors and rewards staff for creative programming in this direction is critical. When queried as to when the change toward collaboration occurred most staff contributed it to the current director's, Will Lightbourne, assumption of his role. With years of experience in the non-profit sector, combined with background in political science and his ability to analyze a political trend toward simplification of government, the path of collaboration was a familiar and effective approach. Risk taking, creative problem-solving was encouraged and supported. Staff was recognized for their involvement beyond the agency. Emphasis on community in the broader concept was stressed and when opportunity arose connections were supported. In addition internally the preliminary stage to collaboration, co-location became another supported building block in the collaborative model.

Staff attitude, commitment and stability also are a variable that plays a crucial part in the model. When there is a preponderance of staff that have confidence in the direction that leadership is advancing and a willingness to experiment with new forms of organization and service delivery there will follow the desire to make use of the opportunity to propose creative and innovative programs. This is more easily implemented when there is stability of staff and turnover is at a minimum. Too much change can result in chaos and confusion while stability can provide the foundation for creativity if strengthened by administrative support. Santa Cruz has for the most part a stable staffing pattern with numerous veterans as well as some newcomers. Administrative staff appears stable as well and line staff has had the opportunity to see collaborative efforts rewarded. Additionally the administrative staff have served in other governmental units thus bringing a willingness to look for common themes and potential collaborative opportunities. The above serve to contribute to an atmosphere and organizational culture that supports creative, collaborative programming and thus encourages staff to respond accordingly.

External variables that might be considered as critical to the development are: Board of Supervisors, the Chief Administrative Officer, community preference, business and non-profit sectors as well as other public and governmental entities. In Santa Cruz, spearheaded by the United Way Agency, the planning process that was collaborative in nature resulted in a blueprint for services within the county. Other endeavors involved Monterey County and joint ventures in the Healthy Start Collaboratives which spanned county boundaries and the conversion plan for Fort Ord and the California State University at Monterey Bay. Another variable often overlooked is the strength of the informal networks that occur in smaller communities. This often leads to the ability to access resources or to develop a collaboration. The combination of the above variables when favorable can lead to collaborative endeavors in many sectors. One will observe the same process when an area is subject to a disaster of crisis proportion which Santa Cruz has also encountered namely the Loma Prieta Earthquake.

Each variable that has been mentioned can also act as a significant barrier to collaboration if negative in form. Leadership can be territorial, competitive and can be seen by staff as not modeling the desire for collaboration. Staff while providing stability can also be entrenched and resistant to modification. Fear of failure and the need to risk may be too threatening especially if staff is ridiculed or chastised for such behavior and ideas. Structure becomes paramount and control the password . Creativity and innovation is not forthcoming and this can have a negative

impact on the morale and delivery of service. This does not appear to be the case within Santa Cruz Social Service Agency at this time nor does it appear to be the county environment.

## **NAPA COUNTY AND THE INTEGRATED MODEL**

Napa County is the other model explored. The county itself is similar in some respects to Santa Cruz county in that both are approximately the same in size, share similar financial basis such as agriculture, the tourist industry and light industry. Located inland, north of San Francisco and approximately 30 miles from the Pacific Ocean, Napa also enjoys the protection of two mountain ranges. Demographics with respect to population, ethnicity, age, gender are again similar but that is where the similarities begin to diverge.

Napa County Health and Human Services Agency has more than any other county known to this writer, structurally integrated the Health, Mental Health and Social Services agencies under one organizational structure. The Agency has two major divisions: Adult Services and Child and Family. Drug and Alcohol, Public Guardian, Income Maintenance, Employment Training, and most recently, the Public Health Nurses are assigned to one of the divisions depending upon the population and ages served. Thus Perinatal Drug and Alcohol programs are under the Child and Family Division while the Veterans Services with the other components of the comprehensive older adult program are under the Adult Division.

In the Child and Family Division the emergency response function of both CPS and Mental Health have been merged. Thus mental health counselors do CPS risk assessments and conversely CPS social workers are designated and trained to place 5150 involuntary holds on clients. It is the intake function of the agency that has merged, an accomplishment that did not occur quickly. The evolution of the current agency structure has been in process since 1978, when the former director then Director of Mental Health was asked to assume responsibility for the Social Services Agency upon the retirement of the director. The following years have seen the gradual change to the current organizational structure of today. How did this happen and what were the variables that acted to produce this model?

Leadership has been recognized as one of the essential variables for determining the direction and shape the organizational model will follow. In Napa County the former director, who was a long time resident of the county, had built credibility with both the formal power structure within the county government as well as with the community at large. Having worked in a line position as well as within the educational structure his leadership style incorporated a number of power bases. Certainly, there was power from the position itself, from influence, from credibility, from experience and expertise and from the strength of his own personality or charisma. Energetic, and with vision, he encouraged innovation of programs. In part, an educational emphasis on community organization also contributed to the path or model that was developed. He was able to take the collaborative model one step further toward integration. Staff were willing to follow his direction thus an internal variable was positive and the direction also coincided with the agency mission.

The direct service staff is stable and averages eight-plus years of employment, with senior administrative staff averaging anywhere from seventeen to twenty-five years with the county.

Interestingly, they had all filled positions either line or supervisory in areas other than their current assignment. Thus the challenges of the other divisions were known to them and promoted the opportunity to have a broader perspective. It is important to note that in some ways the merging of functions lends itself to a "generalist" approach much like that in the medical field of the general practitioner/family practice doctor. In order to fulfill the various functions and accompanying tasks, one becomes broader in scope and application and less specialized. There may be a point of diminishing return where the optimal number of functions may need to be defined before the organization can realistically merge more areas. This may be more applicable in the line and particularly the supervisory level where technical expertise is expected.

Both the leadership style and staff variables contributed to an internal variable of an organizational culture where this staffing pattern and structure was the norm and over a period of time new staff were committed to the maintenance of the structure as well.

Externally the variables that appear to have had the major influence were the desire of the Chief Administrative Officer and the Board of Supervisors. They knew the director and had confidence in his ability to challenge the prior structure and achieve the new. 1978 was also the time when the fiscal crisis of Prop 13 forced many county governments to search for ways of decreasing spending and eliminating duplication of administrative services was attractive.

Napa county staff will be the first to acknowledge that the integration is far from complete but rather is a work in progress. Areas of integration to still be addressed include a single case record, confidentiality restrictions, funding streams, employee classifications and merit system/county personnel practices and the integration of the on-going assignments once they leave the intake function. It remains to be seen how the remaining challenges will be addressed and whether they will be surmounted.

## **IMPLICATIONS FOR LARGER URBAN COUNTIES**

As with any model how it will lend itself to another structure is intriguing. Whether a county such as Santa Clara with its urban issues, dense population and large governmental entities can successfully adopt either of the preceding models is the question. Certainly one can profit from studying the other two counties and learn from their experience. Some aspects can be duplicated and others not. External variables will be affected by the time limits placed on the Board of Supervisors as well as legislators at the state and federal level. The impact of welfare reform has yet to be fully recognized and the challenges all levels of the organization will be required to meet.

Environmentally, the size and population will never be at the same level as either Santa Cruz or Napa thus informal networks of support are less likely to occur. However if the county were to look at smaller units such as the South County, Gilroy area then they could lend themselves to the development of these models. In fact Gilroy has achieved some advancement within the Department of Family and Children's Services. The context of the external environment of the Silicon Valley industries also encourages more of a competitive rather cooperative approach. To some extent this may be reflected then in the governmental structures. In Napa's situation change

came over a number of years and is continuing. It also may be in some ways reflective of the environmental context.

Leadership style can have a tremendous influence but may be modified by the stage of development of the organization. There are times in the development of the organization that changes must be incorporated and consolidated before more change can be embraced. Change in and of itself is not necessarily negative it is the degree and frequency that can undermine the ability of the organization to move forward. It is the chaotic confusion that will at times cause the system to resist.

The internal variable of the staff is again subject to the leadership and the clarity with which they can communicate the agency's mission to them. The commitment then to the process for implementation is further modified by the factor of how the change is introduced, how much will it involved and the time frame by which it will occur. As with many other agencies, Santa Clara's supervisory, middle and executive management levels are of similar age and professional experience. This cohort and its departure will prompt an internal change. The implication is an incredible movement of staff turnover due to retirements and promotions thus opening the door for new employees. It will be interesting to watch the impact on the stability of the organizational structure and the organizational culture.

It is the relationships both externally as well as internally that will either support the change that will be necessary in a positive manner or will act as a negative influence resulting in poor morale and difficulty in delivering the services to our client population.

## **SUMMARY**

The more you know, the more you don't know. The opportunity of looking and exploring the other two county systems has certainly left me with that impression. There were more questions left unanswered and queried than resolved. In spite of the frustration of limited time in each county, the experience was invaluable. The final impression is an increased appreciation for the complexity of factors that influence how and where we practice and the persistent strength of the individuals within the organizations to provide the services in a time of unknown change ahead.