

Re-Engineering Processes in a Human Services Agency: Lessons from Contra Costa County

KIM PEARSON

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In preparation for health care reform and to help meet the increasing caseloads, Contra Costa County, like many California counties is beginning to explore new ways to meet public service demands in this troubled economy. With budgetary shortfalls, unfunded mandates and high unemployment rates, Contra Costa County struggles with fulfilling its mission to “support individuals and families to thrive as contributing members of the community by providing high quality services and learning opportunities.”

In the face of these challenges, Human Services Agencies are expected to meet their obligations of protecting children, providing healthcare and food to the impoverished population, and supporting self-sufficiency. While most private sector agencies can measure their success by profit and longevity, the public sector must measure their success by demonstrating their ability to meet these public service demand, despite any obstacles or challenges. Contra Costa County has developed a comprehensive approach to begin looking at internal business processes within their agency to help streamline existing procedures, make recommendations for improvement and better understand the workflow.

Contra Costa County has recognized the importance of a standardized approach to re-engineering business processes in their county through the use of comprehensive project management tools, strategy mapping and automation. Having a fluid, controllable, uniformed process in place creates consistency and continuity within the agency and allows for a cohesive process when projects are developed, reviewed or transitioned. This case study explores the use of all of these tools and their purposes. This study also focuses on the recent Reception Business Process Re-engineering (BPR) which laid the foundation to move toward other projects for enhanced automation and business model improvements in Contra Costa County.

As San Mateo County embarks on a similar re-engineering process, lessons can be learned from Contra Costa County. Standardizing the re-engineering process with the use of uniformed project management tools, strategy maps and innovative technology can be an effective way to map strategic plans, facilitate communication internally, and provide positive reinforcement along with acknowledgment of staff function and input.

**Kim Pearson, Human Services Supervisor,
San Mateo County Human Services Agency**

Re-Engineering Processes in a Human Services Agency: Lessons from Contra Costa County

KIM PEARSON

One of the biggest challenges facing human service agencies across the state today is the uncertainty of health care reform coupled with a tough economy. The recent economy has played a huge role in increasing caseloads at a rate that makes it difficult to meet public service demands while resources continue to dwindle at nearly the same rate. Even more challenging is the possibility of health care reform introducing thousands of additional families to agency doors with varied needs and diverse backgrounds.

Human service agencies are looking at new, refined ways to do business to meet the public needs while staying true to their mission and vision. Directors and managers are looking at new ways to effectively meet these challenges by re-engineering existing business processes within their agencies and utilizing staff to help build the future model. In doing so, they may have to make tough decisions to begin streamlining and changing existing operations. To help facilitate these changes, they will need effective organizational tools to strategically plan, re-engineer and possibly re-allocate internal staff and services for the survival of the organization. This will introduce a variety of new concepts around project management, strategy mapping and automation. Contra Costa County chose to re-engineer business processes using these methods. The Reception BPR was “established to lay the foundation to implement solutions projected to address increased reception workload, achieve efficiencies and transition to a standard ideal reception business model.” This project was successful and led to a variety of additional solutions. More importantly, it helped standardize the approach to re-engineering

business processes within Contra Costa County and managers are utilizing these tools as they continue to move forward in their re-engineering efforts today.

Project Management Tools

Contra Costa County has developed a comprehensive project management tool that managers use to oversee projects. When this concept was first introduced, management staff was required to attend a project management course through UC Davis to help build skills and learn a uniformed project management approach. An on-line project management tool was established to help document risks, issues, and milestones, and also serve as a repository for project documents and a forum for sharing information.

The Reception BPR was an opportunity to demonstrate and share project management and business process re-engineering methods, tools, and deliverables. It allowed staff the opportunity to participate in the process and increased teamwork across districts.

The project management tools used by Contra Costa County allowed staff to see the progress of this project, as well as proposed projects and their prioritization. These tools allowed staff the ability to drill down to the most essential functions while being able to remain focused on the highest priorities. The tools also established a coordinated approach and oversight to project management. They found that the key to successful project management was to provide support and information to project managers so project management principles and methodologies can be applied to individual projects.

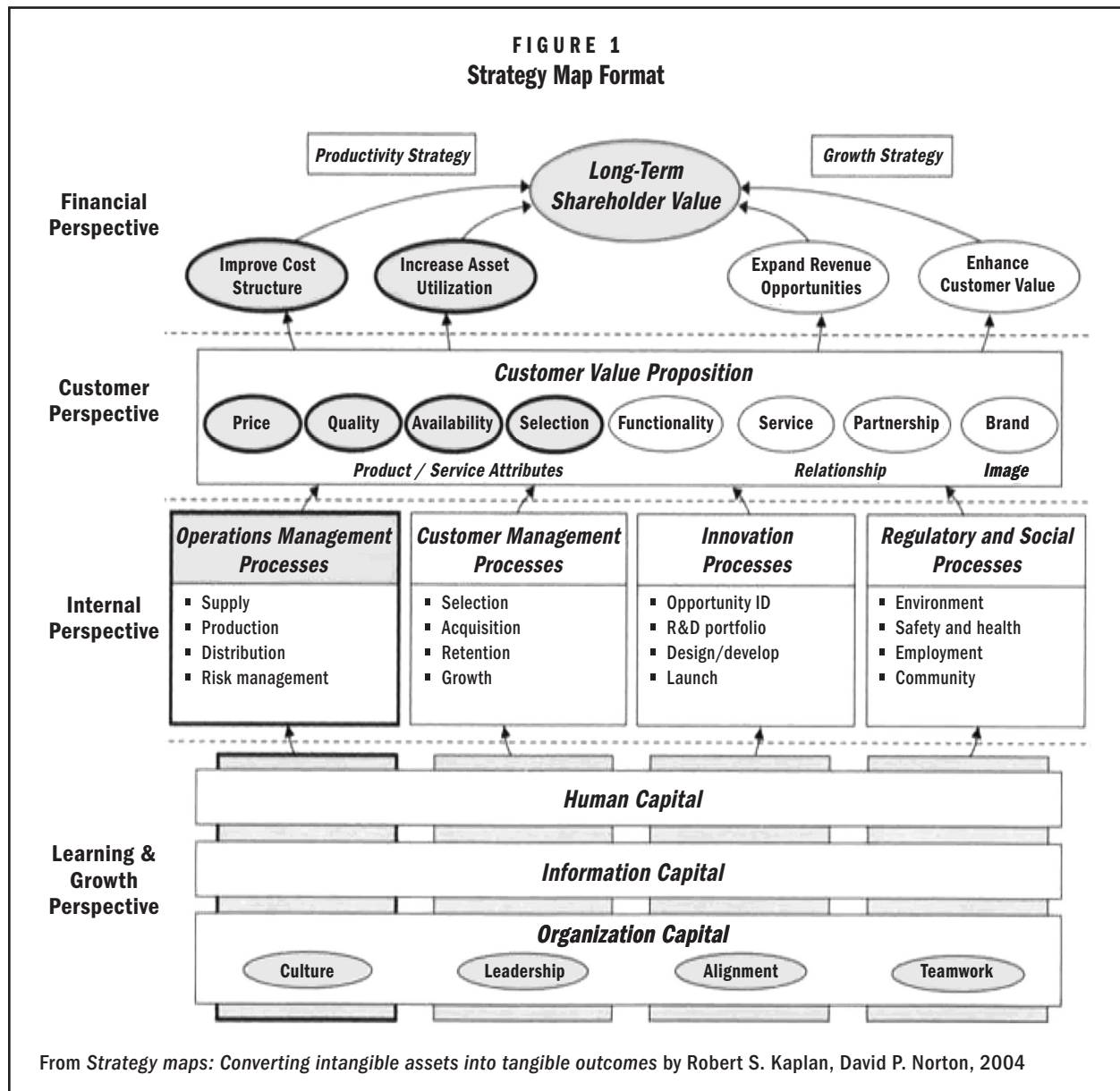
They were able to manage project management overhead relative to the scope, complexity, and impact of a project, while being realistic about the amount of project management workload required to plan and implement a project. As a result, Contra Costa County made a commitment to allocate resources for project management and business model documentation training.

During the Reception BPR, staff's ability to focus internally improved daily operations and customer service. During this process, identified problems

that affected service delivery were also addressed and modified. This process was a positive reinforcement and acknowledgment to the staff which subsequently helped improve morale.

Strategy Mapping

Strategy mapping is a tool that helps organizations chart out a comprehensive strategy for achieving their goals and helps organizations translate their mission into a strategy. Strategy mapping is a useful tool when navigating a multi-stakeholder environment.



These methods help managers maintain control over complex issues and helps measure success and strategic initiatives.

Strategy mapping uses four different perspectives to map and measure success. All four directly map back to the agency mission:

- **Customer**—“To achieve our vision, how must we look to our customers?”
- **Financial/Fiduciary**—This is how “sustainable growth” will be created for “shareholders.”
- **Internal**—The process in which value is created and delivered.
- **Learning and Growth**—“To achieve our vision, how must our organization learn and improve?”

Strategy mapping is essential in identifying the stakeholders. Contra Costa County identified the following stakeholders with Reception BPR:

- Board of Supervisors
- State and federal government
- Public
- Internal employees

These stakeholders provided the foundation for moving this project along as they will be impacted by any process change or outcome. The internal business process allowed the County to move their BPR forward after key stakeholders were identified.

Identifying the key stakeholders is only one of the main focuses in strategy mapping. Implementation of the core strategies must accompany this process in order for strategy mapping to be effective. Implementation requires:

- Selecting the strategy activities
- Establishing targets
- Validating cause and effect
- Developing a timeline for action (each strategy must have an action)

Automation

Automation played a key role in re-engineering business processes within Contra Costa County. The use of the SharePoint intranet and content management site has vastly improved internal communication and helps facilitate project management and staff awareness. Project teams use this site

to post project management documentation and collaborate on documents. This site also provides an essential communication channel for internal stakeholders.

Each project begins with well-defined roles. Most projects are assigned one or two designated project managers and a designated sponsor providing oversight. Also, project status is shared with the Executive Oversight Group (EOG), a department team formed to approve, prioritize and monitor department-initiated projects.

During the Reception BPR, documentation and data were gathered from internal and external stakeholders. This data was transferred into dashboards, matrices, swim lanes, Visio documents, etc. and posted in the SharePoint site. Project value was established through this process and set the foundation for future business process re-engineering.

Recommendation

As San Mateo County is undergoing similar process re-engineering, many lessons learned from Contra Costa County could benefit San Mateo in the establishment of its re-engineering methodology. Recognizing that business process re-engineering and re-tooling is an ongoing initiative to solve systemic problems that exist in public service agencies is the first lesson learned from Contra Costa County. Investing in the uniformed Project Management training for all managers standardized the agencies approach towards projects. Identifying a management structure for project management was another big lesson learned as effective project sponsorship and support of the project manager(s) are key to a successful project. Establishing these positions and training internal staff reduces long-term costs by eliminating the need to pay consultants each time BPR is needed in the agency. The return on investment cannot be calibrated with just a dollar figure alone. Internal staff who already know the key stakeholders, business model and uniformed project management tools can help reduce long-term cost overall and allows for a tenacious approach to project management.

Strategy mapping along with other project management tools helped build the infrastructure for change. Contra Costa County utilized technology and established an on-line project site (SharePoint) that maximized efficiency at all levels. This site allowed for a comprehensive view of each project through collaborative documentation and posting of project documents. Staff in turn have the opportunity to see, understand and quantify projects at a detailed, strategic level. As a key stakeholder, many internal staff have the desire to be involved and the shared content manager allows for this to happen in many different ways.

Conclusion

Human service agencies are constantly changing and the instability of the economy plays a huge factor in formulating ongoing strategies. Understanding that a county will no longer be able to do business effectively without re-engineering is an essential step in meeting public service needs. Investing in long-term solutions is critical in improving business process re-engineering. Long-term solutions provide the most effective way to manage change and meet all stakeholder needs. Having a uniform process in place creates a level of consistency and continuity within the agency that allows for a cohesive process when projects are developed, reviewed or transitioned. Contra Costa County has made a commendable effort in developing strategies to re-engineer business processes within their agency.

Acknowledgements

I would like to extend my heartfelt appreciation to Contra Costa County for allowing me the opportunity to get a close up view of their internal business process. Special appreciation goes to Judy Simmons, Dave Eisenlohr, and Anna Pineda-Martinez for their time, guidance and insight.

I would also like to thank the staff at San Mateo County who supported and assisted me during this process: Beverly Beasley Johnson, Human Services Agency Director; Donna Woche, Manager HRD; Clarisa Simon, Director Self-Sufficiency; Al David, Director PPQM (and many more); Ed Kiryczun, Manager Service Center. Additional thanks to: Diane Webster, ISD Relationship Manager, Marissa King, Human Services Supervisor; Laura Grogan, Benefits Analyst III, Monika Rassouli, Benefits Analyst III; Ruvilyn Dayao, Administrative Assistant and Valerie Ferreira, Office Assistant.

References

Kaplan and Norton, Strategy Maps, Harvard Business School, 2004