

# Leadership Development Program for Managers: Leading During a Business Improvement Process Change

FREDA COBB

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

*“The only thing that is constant is change.”*

- Heraclitus

In life and especially in our line of work as public servants, this quote rings true. In recent years, human services agencies have gone through some major business improvement process changes. A few years ago, the Contra Costa County Employment and Human Services Department (EHSD) and San Mateo County Human Services Agency (HSA) made major shifts in the service delivery of several of its public assistance programs that necessitated a change in leadership style and a shift in overall culture. In order to efficiently lead through any change effort, it is important that managers possess critical leadership skills. Therefore, arming managers with key leadership competencies is essential in making for a successful business improvement process change.

This case study examines Contra Costa County EHSD’s work with the University of California, Davis Leadership Development Program. The program has been in effect since 2010, and has two phases: (1) Leadership Development Program for EHSD managers; and (2) Leadership Development Program for Workforce Services (WFS) director and managers. The first phase consists of classroom training, and the second phase includes classroom training, group sessions, and individualized coaching. This case study will describe the two phases of the management leadership development program, its components, and its successes and challenges. It will also briefly discuss San Mateo County Human Services Agency Economic Self Sufficiency (ESS) participation in the UC Davis leadership development program, and provide recommendations for possible expansion of the program to other divisions within HSA.

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**Freda Cobb**, Management Analyst III (Policy Analyst for Child Welfare), San Mateo Human Services Agency



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## Introduction

In 2011/2012, the Contra Costa County Employment and Human Services Department (EHSD) Workforce Services (WFS) Bureau went through a new business improvement process, also known as Office of the Future (OOF), that changed the intake application process from having one case worker for the entire intake function to a task-based service center model for public assistance programs, Medi-Cal, CalFresh, and CalWORKs. OOF required a massive internal programmatic and cultural shift for WFS. The goal of OOF was to meet the department's needs by encouraging a foundational change in its leadership and a culture shift within the bureau. The expectation was that this shift would have external effects in the community through better, more efficient and effective client service delivery, and a shift in how the community viewed the agency.

In 2012, the San Mateo County Human Services Agency (HSA) Economic Self Sufficiency (ESS) Division implemented Service Delivery Redesign (SDR) that, just like Contra Costa County, also changed the intake application process from having one case worker for the entire intake function to a task-based service center model for public assistance programs Medi-Cal, CalFresh, CalWORKs, and General Assistance. SDR was necessary in order to prepare for upcoming new and increased numbers of consumers with different needs. In addition, SDR utilized improved technology that would not only improve service delivery but also provide needed data to support the agency's work.

As changes occur, especially shifts as large as Contra Costa County's OOF and San Mateo County's SDR, leadership culture must make necessary

adjustments. As such, both Contra Costa County WFS and San Mateo County ESS recognized the importance of training its managers to prepare for this leadership shift. Both agencies utilized UC Davis to provide leadership development training and coaching to its directors and managers.

## Background

In the late 2000's, Contra Costa County EHSD experienced several major changes including budget cuts, staff layoffs, an addition of a new bureau to the department, and the retirement of the department director. In 2010, EHSD recognized the need to increase morale and improve information sharing between managers and bureaus, so training was initially secured for all EHSD managers. Later, in 2011/2012, the Workforce Services (WFS) bureau began the process of shifting toward a business improvement process, also known as Office of the Future (OOF), and was in need of further leadership development training. Thus, the intensive professional leadership development program for EHSD managers was provided by UC Davis, and offered in two phases: Phase 1, Leadership Development Program for EHSD Managers; and Phase 2 Leadership Development Program for WFS Bureau Director and Managers (*Figure A*).

## Phase 1: Leadership Development Program for EHSD Managers

Each year, EHSD purchases a certain amount of UC Davis credits for staff training. EHSD managers were presented with information that they had not used all of their training credits for the fiscal year, and were asked what they wanted to do with them. To increase

**FIGURE A**  
**Overview of Contra Costa County's Management Leadership Development Program**

<b>Title</b>	Leadership Development Program for EHSD Managers (Phase 1)	Leadership Development Program for WFS Bureau Director and Managers (Phase 2)
<b>Participants</b>	EHSD Managers (no directors)	WFS Director and Managers
<b>Vendor</b>	UC Davis Extension, The Center for Human Services	UC Davis Extension, The Center for Human Services
<b>Funding</b>	Left over UC Davis credits	WFS
<b>Platform</b>	Classroom Training (October 2010 - June 2011) Monthly Full-Day Sessions, 2 consecutive days Standard UC Davis Curriculum	Classroom Training (Mandatory) (January 2012 -November 2012) Monthly Half-Day Sessions Customized Curriculum
<b>Group Session</b>	N/A	Mandatory Monthly, Half day Customized session focus on individual managers' strengths and weaknesses
<b>Individual Coaching</b>	N/A	Voluntary (half managers participated) 1 hour per month Customized session focus on individual managers' strengths and weaknesses

morale and improve information sharing between managers and bureaus, the managers decided to use the credits for themselves. This decision to use the training for managers instead of staff was significant in that, historically, training went to staff—specifically line workers to assist with client service delivery. During the first phase, managers in all of the EHSD bureaus (no directors) were invited to participate in leadership training through UC Davis. The intensive classroom training sessions were held in Contra Costa County from October 2010 through June 2011, on two consecutive full days once per month. The training sessions were led by Gary Izumo, an Educator and Senior Consultant for UC Davis, and his colleague. Some EHSD bureau directors made it mandatory for their managers to attend while others did not. Therefore, not all EHSD managers received the training. EHSD managers received the standard UC Davis curriculum that included leadership

competencies, identifying personal and communication styles, ability to influence others, and team work. Since this training was attended by managers across bureaus in EHSD, managers got a chance to get to know managers from other bureaus, which helped break down barriers and strengthened collegial relationships.

### **Phase 2: Leadership Development Program for WFS Bureau Director and Managers**

While all WFS managers attended the Leadership Development Program for EHSD (their participation was mandatory), that training served as a good first step in the right direction. However, more skills and support were needed around leading OOF, which was specific to their bureau, as well as more support in working as a team. At this point, there were no longer any left over UC Davis credits, so WFS had to seek out and secure funding. They were

not only able to secure funding for WFS initial training, but once the training began, it was deemed to be so valuable that funding was continued. Thus, as of the writing of this paper, WFS managers are still receiving support (group and individualized coaching) through UC Davis. To date, WFS has spent an estimated \$150,000 on WFS leadership training.

Gary Izumo, an educator and senior consultant for UC Davis, customized the curriculum and provided the training for WFS. The curriculum and training focused on creating a highly effective leadership team, and included elements around the department's new OOF focus. The training goal was to further the managers' understanding, knowledge, and skills by which to effectively lead, both internally with staff and externally in the community, through the OOF business improvement process. The WFS director's buy-in and participation in the training was also extremely important in its success.

The once-a-month half-day classroom sessions were mandatory for all WFS managers and took place from January 2012 through November 2012 in Contra Costa County. The classroom sessions were delivered in a variety of ways including lecture, videos, and interactive exercises. The managers learned about positive intent and building trust among each other. The books, *Strength Based Leadership for High Effective Teamwork* by Tom Rath and *Difficult Conversations* by Douglas Stone, Bruce Patton, and Sheila Heen were both resources introduced during the classroom training.

While the classroom training sessions were essential, they were not the final step. The classroom training sessions served as the framework used to establish the foundation for the next two steps: group sessions and individualized coaching.

### **Group Sessions for WFS**

Often what is learned during classroom trainings does not stick unless it is practiced. For

this reason, after the classroom training sessions ended, WFS managers began participating in group

sessions that provided a forum to practice the concepts learned during the classroom sessions.

The group sessions, which still continue today, are held monthly during WFS regularly scheduled management bureau meetings. Mr. Izumo facilitates the group sessions, which take the competencies learned during classroom training and personalizes it to their team dynamics so they can talk through specific issues that they are currently experiencing. Group sessions also focus on how to be an active participant in meetings, how to have difficult conversations, how to assume positive intent when working with others, and team work. The group sessions were designed for the managers to work on building trust, and intense and sometimes uncomfortable conversations occurred as they worked towards this goal. During the group sessions, managers have learned that their number one team is not the unit that they manage, but the other managers. They have learned the importance of maintaining a united front; as in parenting, if both parents are on the same page, the child cannot go to one parent and get another answer.

### **Individualized Coaching for WFS**

Individualized coaching provides an additional place to practice the concepts learned during classroom training sessions and group sessions.

While WFS managers' participation in the classroom training and group sessions were mandatory, participation in individualized coaching was voluntary. Many managers saw this added benefit as a gift, and therefore approximately half the team took advantage of this incredible opportunity, including the WFS director. Therefore, many managers are participating in the mandatory group sessions as well as voluntarily in the individualized coaching sessions.

The managers who volunteered to participate in coaching receive—and, as of the writing of this paper, continue to receive—one-hour customized coaching sessions with Mr. Izumo. The sessions are tailored to each manager's needs and focuses on their strengths

and weaknesses. One of the main tools used during individual coaching is the book *Difficult Conversations: How to Discuss What Matters Most* by Douglas Stone, Bruce Patton, and Sheila Heen. Often Mr. Izumo assigns the manager a task to work on from the book and at their next individual coaching session, Mr. Izumo checks in with them about what they have learned and how they will use it. This holds the manager accountable for learning and practicing. One thing Mr. Izumo has stressed is that individual coaching is for the benefit of the clients receiving service, not the employee. Individual coaching is not therapy and therefore, not confidential. Therefore, it is appropriate that Mr. Izumo has conversations with directors about the manager's progress in individual coaching.

### Successes

During interviews conducted for this research project, managers indicated that they are now sharing experiences, becoming more transparent, and working more as a team, which makes their team more productive and efficient. They have indicated that previously, it was very competitive among managers and the leadership program has improved this; there is now a large degree of trust. The group and individual coaching sessions have helped deter bad behavior among managers because they are now capable of having constructive difficult conversations. Managers are now more comfortable with each other, can call and run ideas by one other, and ask for advice whereas before they wouldn't share because they did not want to be vulnerable.

One manager indicated that she has grown as a manager so much that when an opportunity came up for a promotion, she was confident to apply for it and knew she could do it. Additionally, she indicated that she's seen the growth of other managers who are going through the coaching and attributes their growth through this effort.

The positive accounts expressed by managers who participated in the program seems to indicate that the training goals of helping managers to lead through the business improvement process of OOF

and teaching them how to work as a team, leans clearly toward success.

### Challenges

While the leadership development program seems to have achieved its training goal, it is not without its challenges. Two of the challenges WFS experienced in implementing the leadership development program and maintaining its progress were time and incorporating new managers.

Participation in the training program requires a significant time investment for managers who already have large workloads. The once a month, half-day sessions that spanned just under a year, took time away from day-to-day duties. Additionally, monthly group sessions occur during regularly scheduled bureau meetings, so often times the group wouldn't get through their regular agenda which meant they had to schedule an additional meeting to finish the agenda. Individual coaching requires outside reading and homework, which is also time consuming. It has also been difficult to involve new managers who join the group. In a period of 7 months, WFS received five new managers who had not had the benefit of the initial classroom training but were now participants in the group sessions that occur during regular bureau meetings. This places new managers at a disadvantage because they do not have the same basic foundational leadership knowledge as the other managers.

### Recommendations and Conclusion

The Contra Costa County WFS bureau implemented a business improvement process, also known as Office of Future (OOF), and San Mateo County ESS Division implemented Service Delivery Redesign (SDR), both of which changed the intake application process for public assistance programs. Both divisions utilized UC Davis' Leadership Development Program to assist its directors and managers with this shift (*Figure B*). While Contra Costa County WFS had the benefit of classroom sessions, San Mateo County ESS managers could not fit in the classroom training due to the timing of the

**FIGURE B**  
**Contra Costa County WFS and San Mateo County ESS**  
**Management Leadership Development Program**

<b>Title</b>	Contra Costa County Leadership Development Program for WFS Bureau Director and Managers	San Mateo County Leadership Development Program for ESS Director and Managers
<b>Purpose</b>	New business improvement process called Office of the Future (OOF)	New business process called Service Delivery Redesign
<b>Participants</b>	WFS Director and Managers	ESS Managers
<b>Vendor</b>	UC Davis Extension, The Center for Human Services	UC Davis Extension, The Center for Human Services
<b>Funding</b>	WFS	ESS
<b>Platform</b>	Classroom Training (Mandatory) (January 2012 –November 2012) Monthly Half-Day Sessions Customized Curriculum	N/A
<b>Group Session</b>	Mandatory Monthly, Half day Customized session focus on individual managers' strengths and weaknesses	Mandatory Monthly, Half day Customized session focus on individual managers' strengths and weaknesses
<b>Individual Coaching</b>	Voluntary (half managers participated) 1 hour per month Customized session focus on individual managers' strengths and weaknesses	Mandatory 1 hour per month Customized session focus on individual managers' strengths and weaknesses
<b>Cost</b>	\$150,000* (Jan. 2012-present)	\$96,000 (Jan. 2013-present)
<b>Successes</b>	More transparent Working more as a team Improved trust	More transparent Working more as a team Improved trust
<b>Challenges</b>	Time commitment Involving new managers that later join the group	Time commitment Involving new managers that later join the group

\*estimated

Service Delivery Redesign. The curriculum from the classroom sessions, however, was incorporated into the group and individual coaching. The goal of the training was the same for both counties: to prepare for challenges of the new improvement process and improve teamwork. ESS managers echoed many of the challenges and successes of the leadership development program voiced by WFS managers. While

San Mateo County has participated in this leadership development program since early 2013, it is necessary for this training to continue to obtain optimal results.

Therefore, the recommendations for San Mateo County Human Services Agency are:

(1) **Consider expansion to the other HSA Divisions.** Directors and managers in all HSA

departments can be surveyed to get feedback on whether they think the leadership development training would be useful to them. The training could be rolled out one division at a time. Those divisions that opt in must make it mandatory for the director and all managers to participate in all three parts of training: classroom sessions, group sessions, and individual coaching sessions, so that they can receive the common competencies in classroom sessions and then practice them through group and coaching.

(2) **Explore ways to incorporate new managers who are later added to the team.** It will be important for new members to receive the same foundational training as those already on the team. If the recommendation cited above is implemented, new managers could participate in the classroom sessions at the time the session rolls out for the next division. While the new managers won't get the training with managers in their division, it will still be beneficial in that it will allow managers across programs to work together and get to know other managers.

In conclusion, as human services programs continue to face increased demands and implementation of new legislation, agencies will need to continue to remain ready to face the demands of those changes. Both Contra Costa County and San Mateo County have already invested heavily in leadership development for its managers, who have indicated that it has helped them lead through change and work better as a team. Therefore, ongoing training is a must in order to maintain and ensure continued growth.

Since January 2013 to date, HSA has spent approximately \$96,000 for the customized assessment and ongoing group and individualized coaching

for ESS managers and its director. While leadership development is a huge investment in money, time, and commitment, it stands to have a large return on investment. There is a price to pay either way; pay up front and arm the managers with the necessary training to become effective leaders, or risk paying in the end with ineffective leadership.

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