

# Transition Management

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

*“The great thing in this world is not so much where we stand, as in what direction we are moving.”*

—Oliver Wendell Holmes

History shows that the only organizations that survive are those that respond well to change, step out of regularity, and transform the way they do business. Government organizations constantly undergo change. Although it seems that there is more stability in governmental structures, there are still certain economic and political events that require government organizations to react quickly, adapt, and evolve to ever-changing economic and political climates.

This case study is about the impact of organizational change on human services agency staff, and the importance of transitioning staff through change

while simultaneously addressing system change; and the recommendations for the San Francisco Human Services Agency (HSA) to adopt the Transition Management Team (TMT) model. The TMT model was implemented by the Contra Costa Community Services Bureau (CSB) in response to 2013 budget cuts in efforts to aid CSB staff during a difficult layoff period. Since the TMT model has proved to be successful in transitioning people through change, it would be advisable for San Francisco HSA to incorporate the TMT model while addressing system change in times of critical events.

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## Introduction

California has always played a leading role in its response to legislative changes in social services. In response to the Affordable Care Act (ACA), which was passed by Congress in 2010, California again took a leadership role in providing affordable health care coverage to thousands of Californians. This was the most significant social policy change since welfare reform in 1996. The San Francisco Human Services Agency (HSA) immediately started preparing for the new customer service delivery model required to implement the upcoming Covered California health insurance initiative. HSA moved from its traditional caseload into a caseload-free, task-based service center model, and implemented a horizontal integration of CalFresh and Medi-Cal programs.

It took a year to prepare for this change. HSA organized committees, which were then facilitated by a contracted consultant, InTelegy, which was hired to manage the system transition: evaluate old business processes, brainstorm ideas, and implement new technology. This process to manage the system transition was successful. However, horizontal integration implementation and moving to call centers were not only a system change, but also a change for staff as well—primarily the line workers, supervisors, and management. Staff had to move from the accustomed business process to a new call center model; some were required to relocate to other units or buildings; some to perform different tasks; and some to learn new technology and be ready to meet new customer service delivery expectations. Impacted employees experienced a tremendous amount of stress. Some of the eligibility workers who came aboard in early 1980s were not technologically savvy,

while others simply could not accept a task-based concept. “Letting a caseload go was one of the most difficult changes the eligibility workers experienced during this transition,” one of the eligibility workers admitted. For others, just simply moving to another location and losing co-workers and being out of their comfort zones was an unbearable change on top of all the other system changes. As a result, workers began calling in sick, taking time off, performing poorly, and retiring. Employee anxiety, exhaustion, and emotional stress could be easily mistaken as employee insubordination, resulting in added stress for the management.

HSA has always been known for carrying and providing quality customer service to their clients and employees. For this reason, HSA should take a closer look at the Contra Costa Community Services Bureau (CSB) Transition Management Team (TMT) model for use during difficult transitional periods due to organizational change. Implementing this model does not require any additional funding as TMT members are expected to continue to perform their regular duties.

## Background

The Community Service Bureau (CSB) of the Contra Costa County Employment and Human Services Department (EHSD) is a part of a national network of Community Action Agencies that was established by the 1964 War on Poverty legislation to address the underlying conditions that cause poverty. CSB has an annual budget of approximately \$30 million and a staff of 400 employees in 19 service locations across the county. The largest CSB program is its Child Development program, which is operated under

combined federal Head Start and state child development grants to provide early childhood education services to over 2,500 children.

Since 2009, CSB has experienced an approximate \$5.8 million reduction in state funding. In 2013, there was an additional cut of \$4 million (for a total of \$9.8 million in cuts, which is about 33% of the CSB budget) due to sequestration and Designation Renewal System for Head Start.<sup>1</sup> As a result, three preschool centers (Lake, Crescent Park, and Martinez Head Start) were closed down on June 28, 2013,<sup>2</sup> and 31 teachers lost their jobs.

In order to deal with these tremendous cuts and facilitate an organizational transition, Camilla Rand, CSB Director, had to evaluate and modify her business approach. She came up with the idea of implementing a Transition Management Team (TMT), which was inspired by William Bridges' *Managing Transitions: Making the Most of Change*. In his book, *Bridges*, the organizational management guru, suggests that organizations have a Transition Monitoring Team to guide through difficult transformation times. Bridges recognizes that **“managing people and organizations during time of tumultuous change is one of the most difficult tasks a leader faces.”**<sup>3</sup> Even with a well-prepared plan for the future, the transition process and period of instability is what scares people the most. The purpose of a TMT is to address these fears and concerns and serve as an “organizational pulse check.” Although a TMT has no power of decision-making or changing the organization's course, by creating a TMT an organization demonstrates that it cares about its employees and acknowledges a difficult time. Rand suggested renaming the Transition Monitoring Team to Transition Management Team based on the

fact that the TMT will not only monitor, but also manage people through the transition.

In April 2013, a TMT was created. It consisted of a cross-section of eleven dedicated staff members, including site director, teacher, mid-level managers, mental health staff, union representative, and others who were led by Christina Reich, CSB Division Manager. All of the members were carefully selected and recommended by Rand, and shared the same quality—they were recognized by their peers as role models and change agents who had positive influence on others.

### Transition Model

The role of the TMT was to analyze plans and communications before they were announced, capture and address rumors, manage the “grapevine,” disperse speculations, and communicate upward.

The TMT operated based on Bridges' transition model as presented in his book, where in he affirms that **“it isn't the changes that do you in, it's the transitions.”**<sup>4</sup> Bridges explains that change is something that happens externally. Transition, on the other hand, is a psychological process and is inside people's minds when they experience change. It is not change that people are mostly scared of, but instability, lack of clarity, and not knowing what to expect. Although people have no control over change, they can manage transition.

Bridges defines three stages of the transition model that people go through when they are impacted by change: Ending, Losing, and Letting Go; the Neutral Zone; and the New Beginning. Every transition starts with an ending and finishes with a beginning, and the Neutral Zone is the individual and the organization's best chance to renew themselves. Going through each stage of transition is extremely important when change occurs. This time should be used to address employees' concerns, fears, and worries, as well as to educate and gradually prepare staff for the company's transformation.

1. Contra Costa Community Services website: <http://www.co.contra-costa.ca.us/2537/Community-Services>

2. Memo from Kathy Gallagher, Employment & Human Services Director, to Board of Supervisors, Contra Costa County: [http://64.166.146.155/public/print/ag\\_memo\\_pdf\\_popup.cfm?seq=14362&rev\\_num=0&mode=CUSTOM](http://64.166.146.155/public/print/ag_memo_pdf_popup.cfm?seq=14362&rev_num=0&mode=CUSTOM)

3. *Managing Transitions: Making the Most of Change*, 3rd edition (2003), by William Bridges with Susan Bridges, Introduction, p. x.

4. William Bridges, *Managing Transitions: Making the Most of Change*, 3rd edition (2003), by William Bridges, p. 3

TABLE 1

Transition Stages	Emotions
Stage 1: Ending, Losing, and Letting Go	Fear, denial, anger, sadness, disorientation, frustration, uncertainty, and a sense of loss
Stage 2: The Neutral Zone	Resentment and skepticism toward the change initiative, low morale and low productivity, and anxiety about their role
Stage 3: The New Beginning	High energy, openness to learning, and renewed commitment to the group or their role

Following Bridges' transition model, in which managing organizational transition requires assisting people through each stage of the transition period, the TMT developed a curriculum that focused on transition—not on change. The TMT learned about the symptoms of each stage for a better understanding of the types of emotions employees experience when undergoing transition.

### TMT Best Practices

It took about two weeks for the TMT to study Bridges' transition model, to come up with a plan, to aggregate all available resources, and to create packages with essential materials to support all impacted staff. The TMT focused on employees facing layoffs and those to be relocated to other buildings and programs. The TMT introduced itself and its mission to employees by way of a letter, and then assigned each member to a number of employees to assist them through the transition. Each member performed outreach, visited work sites, provided emotional support, assisted with job searching, organized workshops on variety of topics (e.g. money management, resume writing, stress relief, etc.), and provided resources. Employees were grateful for the services offered by the TMT. One teacher who lost her job stated, "They talked to me and they actually knew my name! They cared about me as a person and not as a number." Another teacher said, "They were always available to answer all my questions and piled me with the information about available jobs." Another stated that thanks to TMT, she did not feel like she

was left in a dark and that evening therapy sessions were helpful. All teachers interviewed stated that they appreciated the moral support provided by the TMT, and that it was important for them to feel that management cared.

While continuing to perform their regular duties, TMT members made themselves available to CSB employees at all times. No employee in need of help was left without support. Since the children and parents lost their services as a result of teachers being laid off, the TMT visited Head Start centers, met with parents, shared information, and assisted with searching and placing the children in other centers. The management, union, Employee Assistance Program (EAP), and personnel supported the work of TMT. Union chapter leader Lynda Middleton was actually a member of the TMT. As Rand stated, "Lynda was a voice of people and the best questions came from her." Charlene Calica from personnel was not a part of the TMT, but she attended the TMT meetings from the start. On her own initiative, she created binders full of resources for the TMT to provide to impacted staff. EAP presented three workshops, and were available upon the team's request at any time. Rand continued her support to staff through emails and newsletters.

### Success

Thanks to the efforts and support of TMT, people felt that "management cared" and that they "were not forgotten." Per Camilla Rand's statement, during that hard period of time, not a single complaint was

received from the public or the staff. With the help of TMT, 29 teachers (94%) were either back to work at CSB or obtained another jobs. The TMT worked for four months and successfully completed their mission in July 2013. Once trust in the TMT had been established, CSB staff accepted changes, went through the transition faster, and entered a New Beginning energized and with a higher level of morale.

### Challenges

One of the main challenges TMT experienced was helping impacted staff through the second stage: the Neutral Zone. People were mentally disengaged, felt depressed and pessimistic, called in sick, and had low morale. Addressing these issues required extra effort and time from TMT members, especially because CSB service locations were dispersed throughout Contra Costa County and it was time consuming to commute to the centers.

### Recommendations and Conclusion

Although HSA is not facing layoffs and has already undergone the implementation of horizontal integration and task-based center change, impacted HSA staff still continue to undergo the transition period, adjusting to a new environment, technology, and expectations. Therefore, it is desirable, while addressing system changes, to also focus on people and how they transition through these changes. It is recommended to identify leaders or “Change Champions,” as they are called at HSA, to assist staff through this transition by providing moral and emotional support. There is absolutely no cost for the agency—and based on interviews, people would accept change better when they are inspired and supported by their change champions peers. It is highly recommended to use the TMT model during the critical time of significant changes. The following steps are suggested:

1. Create TMT to manage “rumor mill” and dissipate gossip. Managers commonly expect that feedback from subordinates and vice versa come through chain of command. It is important to understand that often, delivered information is filtered. Therefore, TMT will

help with facilitating upward and downward communication.

2. Identify eight to twelve cross-section change champions—people who are recognized for their true leadership quality, respected by their peers, welcome change, can inspire and encourage others, and who are compassionate, resourceful, and have sense of people’s psychology. Include personnel, EAP, and union leader in TMT. Include in the group an individual who has the “leader’s ear” to ensure that TMT has access to the organization’s leadership. Appoint a strong TMT coordinator.
3. Share problems, provide support, and educate TMT in its purpose.
4. Establish a transition timeframe and set up TMT meetings once a week or every other week based on this timeframe.
5. Provide TMT assistance at least one month after the transition is completed.
6. For the duration of the change process, TMT is the management’s version of the National Guard, so management should be able to say, “I can sleep well tonight; the transition team is managing this.”<sup>5</sup>

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5. *Harvard Business Review on Change, Ideas with Impact*, Harvard Business School Press, p. 75

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