



Positioning Public Child Welfare Guidance
Strengthening Families in the 21st Century

Change Management Guidance

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Change Management Definition

The field of public child welfare has the ability to assess its performance, self-correct, innovate, manage its performance improvement and enhance its ability to achieve positive outcomes. It builds on the strengths of current practice and is responsive to contemporary and emerging issues.

Overview

Public child welfare agencies need a clear, well-understood and action-oriented plan and related methods for improving the lives of the children, youth, and families they serve. They must know how to develop such a plan, make it happen, and condition their agency to work on a range of improvements every day, at all levels, and in all functions. They must link all priorities for change and improvement to their desired practice model, reinforcing that model at every turn. They must avoid having major obstacles and points of chronic resistance stall their progress, resolve related debates and tensions, avoid reactive or limited responses to the challenges they face, and instill a sense of hope and forward progress among the staff.

While there are always differences between what an agency aspires to do and what it actually does at a particular point in its development, effective plans and efforts to change and improve approach current limits in budgets, technology, programs, policies and research as a “two-way street.” Agencies must be both working within their current environmental limits as well as influencing these limits to move in a positive, evolutionary direction over time.

Agencies that are evolving in this way will experience a pattern of change that over time resembles an “upward spiral,” moving from more reform-oriented change and improvement to more innovative and progressive change, at times interrupted or delayed by temporary setbacks, disruptions and plateaus:

- Incremental progress forward, meeting basic expectations such as mandates, non-negotiable expectations and limited budgetary requirements
- Initial feedback from the environment, connected to direct experiences with agency services
- Rallying of support, commitment and participation from staff and stakeholders through related communication and relationship-building efforts
- Renewed or improved resources and decisions to provide a greater level of empowerment to the agency based on its growing credibility
- Further incremental progress, often through redesigning or revamping programs and processes to either streamline them or eliminate low value-added activities
- Further confidence within the environment that the agency uses resources wisely and a growing desire to listen to the agency’s ideas and recommendations
- Further incremental steps forward, often through integrating programs and processes to be more child youth and family-centric, meeting more strategic environmental needs that move closer and closer to realizing desired outcomes for those served
- Broader environmental influence; being regarded as a vital political “player” even in regards to somewhat non-related environmental priorities
- Further incremental steps forward, at times even serving field-wide needs and objectives by creatively resolving general tensions within the field that typically result in “false choices”

As mentioned above, a critical breakthrough occurs as agencies change, improve and evolve from either a program or a staff-focused culture to one that focuses on the children, youth and families it serves. In a program-focused culture, the primary interests of the agency strategy and leadership are program compliance and the level of output by the agency in comparison to program-specific output goals (e.g., accuracy and timeliness of program delivery). In a staff-focused culture, the primary interests are staff satisfaction with leadership and with the benefits of working for the agency (e.g., a lucrative pension program, or strong union and HR protection of marginal performers). In a culture that is focused on who it serves, programs and staff interests are shaped in the service of the most effective practice model for improving the lives of children, youth and families (e.g., changing program policies and job requirements to support the innovation of a child and family-focused practice).

This guidance is intended to provide a pathway to this evolving reality: everyone in an agency using methods and techniques for continuous improvement and innovation that lead to ever-

improving performance and capacity for helping to improve the lives of children youth and families.

Questions the Guidance Will Answer

- What is change management, why is it important, and how does it affect those we serve?
- How do front-line practice effectiveness and innovation and an agency's general approach to change management mutually reinforce each other?
- What set of plan-based elements comprise an effective road map for change?
- How do agencies ensure that their plans lead to desired changes at all levels?
- What constitutes the capacity and readiness of an agency to make ambitious changes?
- How do disparity and disproportionality-related improvement efforts fit within broader change efforts?
- What general stages of development and evolution do agencies go through to reach their highest potential? What are learning organizations, and how do they learn?
- What specific process should teams use for continuous improvement and innovation?
- What are the roles of leaders, managers and others in making change happen? How should leaders handle resistance to change?
- How do quality assurance efforts relate to continuous improvement in general?

Why is this Critical Area Important to the Field of Public Child Welfare?

- Well-respected and credible fields are proactive and transparent about the improvements and innovations they choose to make, in accord with their overall strategy and values and in partnership with their stakeholders. Doing so results in approaches to change that are flexible and adaptable, maintain strategic focus, strengthen staff and program performance accountability, establish cultures of continuous improvement, and enjoy greater staff and stakeholder buy-in.
- There is strong public support for efforts that result in safer, more secure, healthier and better-adjusted children. The public child welfare field must be clear and persuasive that agencies are able to continuously improve and innovate in order to make this happen. Effective agencies do this in large part through listening to feedback from the public and enlisting the community, including the families and youth they serve, to become part of the improvement process. This is crucial to building public trust and enhancing the perceived value of our field's work.
- In the absence of effective change management practices, an agency is likely to react to crises or follow idiosyncratic direction of leadership as its primary way of doing business and making changes, or to have change mandated or directed from their broader environment. This typically leads to unsustainable "flavor of the month," or non-strategic change. This "change for change's sake" can be highly dysfunctional and debilitating to agencies.
- Effective change management is, in accord with the agency's practice model, the foundation for all the other PPCWG critical areas, providing overarching and tangible guidance for how an agency can improve both itself and the lives of children, youth and families over time. Other PPCWG critical areas provide guidance on key components of change management in support of the practice model, including strategic clarity and focus, leadership influence, workforce readiness, supportive community partnerships, and the necessary communication, financial and information services tools and techniques.

How Will Outcomes be Achieved for and with Children, Youth and Families?

- Effective change management provides the developmental principles and key processes of improvement and innovation for agency programs, staff and stakeholders to advance outcomes related to the children, youth and families served. These principles and processes must keep improved outcomes for children and families central to their purpose, and

provide an analogous or parallel approach to effective front-line practice, which is essentially a change management activity at its core.

- Effective change management establishes the decision-making ground rules and boundaries from which staff may operate with greater discretion, resulting in an organization that knows how to make improvements and drive innovation at all levels. This leads to stronger and better-aligned program and staff values and accountability, a greater degree of internal and external collaboration, and greater service flexibility and innovation.
- Improvement monitoring and quality assurance processes need to be guided and supported by the right data and analysis tools and methods. Otherwise, the agency risks making changes that do not result in the desired outcomes, or fails to capture lessons learned that make it easier to achieve desired outcomes over time.

Strategy

Three Foundational Aspects

Historically, the field of public child welfare has been more reactive than proactive in regard to change management. From the highest level of an organization developing a budget down to direct service workers responding to allegations of abuse, being ahead of the curve on trends versus reacting to immediate needs has been difficult for public child welfare staff to master. Effective change management requires all levels of an organization to be forward thinking and willing to work towards goals and desired outcomes in a manner that connects all the way through an organization from the identified leader to their management team, supervisors, strategic support staff, and direct service workers.

“Macro” Change Management

There is a “macro” aspect of change that is best led and managed through high-level change planning in alignment with the agency’s strategic priorities and practice model. Broad, multi-year and cross-functional change planning efforts should follow directly from and be fully integrated with preceding or concurrent strategic planning efforts. While the primary purpose of strategy work is to determine what the agency seeks to do and why, the primary purpose of “macro” change management is to determine how to get from here to there. Strategy and change management work are not separate and distinct as much as they are a spectrum of work, where the greater emphasis is initially on strategic considerations and later on the change management ones. Indeed, a change planning effort can force greater strategic clarity and purpose to be defined, in turn leading to more effective strategic planning and practice model development over time.

“Mezzo” Change Management

A Change Plan also establishes priorities for continuous improvement: within and among particular agency functions, at the local office, program-specific or regional level, and with community partners. Continuous improvement encompasses both remedial efforts to “fix” something in the agency, as well as innovations and breakthroughs that make use of the agency’s strengths and capacity to reach exemplary levels of performance. Continuous improvement also encompasses both new, additional agency activities as well as activities for the agency to automate, outsource or eliminate altogether. This “mezzo” aspect of change is best accomplished through project-driven initiatives that are led and managed by continuous improvement teams that align to clear direction and guidance from the overall sponsors of the improvement priorities. Such project-oriented improvement priorities might include redesigning staff selection and development programs to be more in line with the desired practice model, or developing a system of care approach to service delivery that is well-integrated with other agency programs and functions. These continuous improvement (CI) efforts must become a “way of doing business” for an agency to succeed in the long run with making complex and comprehensive programmatic change happen.

“Micro” Change Management

As they become internalized and intuitive for staff throughout the agency, these CI methods and techniques become the basis for reflection, critical thinking, improvement making, innovation and creativity that occurs in an ongoing, organic way. These methods also serve as the foundation for the agency’s quality assurance processes and practices. Not all improvement and innovation efforts have to be programmatic and centrally managed to be important. In fact, it’s at this “micro” level of self-correction and change that many of the best ideas for improvement and innovation begin to have influence on strategic thinking and agency-wide improvement and innovation. And as this aspect of change is fully embedded within the agency, it naturally reinforces the principles and practices that are more formally advanced by

the agency's practice model. The process for supporting CI is provided in the Key Process section of this guidance.

Improving the Agency Culture

An agency's culture both defines and is defined by how it does its work and by how leadership treats its staff. Agency leadership defines the culture of the organization by shaping the way staff think, perceive, understand, feel and act. Culture includes the norms and values of agency staff, as well as the fundamental underlying beliefs and assumptions that leadership and staff use in their daily work and interactions. Cultures can be relatively authoritative or they can be relatively laissez-faire and neither of these options serves public child welfare agencies well. Child welfare work requires a strengths-based, solutions-focused culture that is based on empowerment: enabling staff to exercise discretion and collaborate to provide service and solve problems within well-defined boundaries such as the agency's vision and mission. It also requires a culture that is focused on who it serves, versus one focused primarily on program or staff-driven needs and interests. The macro, mezzo and micro aspects of change outlined above, if practiced by the agency and reinforced by its leadership, will result in the most effective culture for public child welfare work.

Change Management and Front-line Practice: Parallel Processes

Within an agency, effective change management and effective front-line practice are parallel and mutually reinforcing processes that lead to positive outcomes. Imagine a direct service worker learning and applying the skills of effective change management: identifying problems; completing thorough assessments based on data and observations; developing, implementing, and monitoring real, strategic change plans; working collaboratively with children, youth and families on these steps and techniques. When effective, front-line practice unfolds in a parallel way to what an agency does to develop change plans, continuous improvement initiatives and ongoing performance and quality improvement efforts for the organization as a whole. By creating a culture of change management, leaders in public child welfare can provide workers with both organizational resources needed to perform job functions and the model for how positive change is possible for the children and families the agency serves.

Change Planning

Change Plans

A Change Plan lays out in a clear, orderly flow the answers to a range of questions about how an agency will "make its strategic priorities happen" and thereby achieve outcomes for and with children, youth and families. It spells out the work to be done to execute agency strategy in a way that is comprehensive and concrete, yet still flexible to the unfolding realities of any complex change effort. This results in stronger partnerships, more secure funding and other forms of long-term support, better implementation of specific initiatives, clearer roles and expectations throughout the organization and within each program and functional area, and an enhanced perception of the agency and its work.

These areas include:

◆ Strategic Direction Set by the Agency Strategic Plan

The leading section of a change plan must establish the path for improved outcomes to which the change efforts are aligned. This path must include an understanding of the agency's vision, mission and values, its core principles including reducing disproportionality and disparity, its environmental challenges and opportunities, the needs of who it serves, and especially the child and family practices that are most likely to help them improve their lives. The change plan must identify any formally established strategic

goals, objectives and initiatives, stakeholder mandates and non-negotiable expectations, financial or other identified resource limits. It also identifies projects already launched and other work commitments already made, established means to measure and monitor progress, and any established oversight and governance for strategic plans and initiatives.

◆ **Organizational Strengths and Gaps Related to the Strategic Direction**

While the most effective strategic plans consider the agency's workforce capacity to actually make changes happen, many do not do so. One of the primary benefits of change planning is that the agency becomes more purposeful in making changes that result in improved outcomes for the children, youth and families it serves. It also becomes more self-aware and engaged in using its strengths confidently and making improvements to its capacity to continuously improve and innovate, something we will refer to as "readiness." Complex changes are more likely to succeed when a thorough assessment is made of the organization's readiness for making such changes. For example:

- Does the agency have the structure, culture and leadership platform in place to drive successful improvement and innovation?
- Does staff have the skills, the time, the passion and the commitment to implement strategic initiatives?
- Does staff understand process simplification and streamlining of their daily efforts in order to open up capacity for new initiatives and innovations?
- Are we adding things to the roles and responsibilities of staff without understanding with equal focus what needs to be reduced or eliminated from them?
- What is the level of trust that staff and stakeholders have in the agency's executive team? Why is this?

A general continuum of readiness within which agencies should plot themselves includes: (a) an awareness of the need for changes, (b) buy-in and commitment to make the required changes, (c) developing confidence and competence for actually making the changes, and (d) self-sufficiency in doing so. If the agency is confronting a crisis or a major opportunity (e.g., a significant increase in resources), the change plan considers how this might be used as a springboard for change through awareness-building that creates a sense of energy, urgency and resolve. Agencies who commit to change but have limited experiences from which to draw will include partners and outside resources in their plans to help them through the initial stages. And while any change effort will encounter obstacles along the way, these can often be anticipated and planned for proactively, often by taking advantage of one of the agency's strengths in making change happen. If the agency's readiness and capacity for change are stronger than these obstacles, change efforts will generally succeed.

◆ **Resources and General Tactics for Change and Innovation**

Once the agency's strengths and gaps for making change happen have been identified, it should identify how it will make use of those strengths and shore up those gaps in general, in turn improving the likelihood of successful change or of changes being made with less time and energy required. Here are the primary "readiness factors," or areas for an agency to either make good use of its strengths or address its gaps in order to make complex changes happen:

- Establishing a well-understood and practiced set of leadership beliefs and norms
- Employing communication plans and tactics for building the "public will" inside and outside the agency through shared purpose and meaning
- Enlisting stakeholders and people it serves into the agency's change efforts, employing constructive political tactics along the way
- Building trust with the majority of staff through efforts that demonstrate top management's caring, integrity, openness, reliability and competence

- Promoting supervisory effectiveness in coaching, mentoring and communicating with staff
- Including staff in decision-making wherever their expertise and buy-in are needed
- Empowering staff to make decisions and take action within clear boundaries
- Shifting ownership and responsibility for continuous improvement and innovation from top management to program leads and local office management teams
- Identifying and using “champions of change”—staff with passion and commitment to build up their teams and achieve the agency mission
- Employing tactics for understanding the root causes of resistance, enfranchising the constructive resistance, and then minimizing entrenched resisters to change and innovation
- Employing methods for gauging staff capacity and skills for doing more and for doing new and different things
- Maximizing staff development resources through a combination of classroom training (for primarily technical or routine tasks) and mentoring or facilitation efforts (for more relational or dynamic areas of their work)
- Establishing the needed programs and systems for change and innovation through support functions like HR and Training, IT, Finance, Communication, Quality Assurance, Policy, Planning and Facilities
- Scanning and taking ideas from best practice and case study resources, both within the child welfare field and from other fields with analogous challenges

◆ **Specific Plans and Commitments: Major Project or Work Priorities**

The agency’s strategic planning activities should include a set of high-level strategic objectives and initiatives for improving outcomes, and these should be enhanced by the above-mentioned readiness assessment and related planning. Once a comprehensive set of improvement and innovation activities and projects has been identified, the agency can more thoughtfully sequence and phase these activities over time.

In a complex change effort, it is usually best to plan over a multi-year timeframe, organizing the agency’s efforts into quick wins, mid-term and long-term changes. Quick wins can be accomplished within 30 days and within current capacity limits, with reasonably good staff and stakeholder buy-in. They often set the stage for more challenging change initiatives. Phases of change tend to move sequentially from efforts to generate input and buy-in, to those that build and support required workforce capacity (including eliminating legacy tasks and activities that add little value), and finally to the most complex program innovations and general projects.

◆ **Timeframes, Milestones and Governance**

At this level of change planning, specific milestone dates and detailed action plans can be developed. The key is to put form over substance, as there are many task planning and project management methods that can be overly complex and confusing. The priority is for public commitments to be made by all those with a role in a change effort, and converted to written accountabilities that connect to the performance management system. This serves to both clarify roles and strengthen follow through, in turn building trust and credibility.

Sponsor groups, continuous improvement teams and working committees must be established for the most complex initiatives within a change plan, and continuous improvement processes must be well-engrained in these efforts. Milestones such as the shift from one phase of the change plan to the next should be identified to provide an ongoing sense of progress and set the stage for periodic recognition and celebration. Effective governance establishes who is responsible for oversight of the change effort as a whole and for making any modifications to the change plan as reality unfolds.

◆ Data, Measures and Related Methods

In developing a change plan or a continuous improvement project, agencies must have information and insights about their environment, their readiness to change, and the root causes for significant readiness gaps that their data and measures should provide. Once a complex change plan or continuous improvement effort has been launched, it is vital to capture progress, impact and lessons learned. Effective monitoring relies on having data that measures what the agency is trying to change and that encompasses data about agency capacity, service effectiveness and the impact of programs and services on child and family outcomes. Methods that agencies use to collect the needed data include surveys of people it serves, stakeholders and staff, quality control data from crucial points within operational processes, and statistical data related to ongoing experience such as staff turnover and recidivism.

Accessibility

The change plan should be portable, adaptable and user-friendly so that it is accessed on an on-going basis and refined as continuous improvement teams and work committees “learn by doing” things more strategically and feed back to the planners. Like all effective plans, change plans are never perfect. Rather, they serve as a touchstone for organizing resources and activities, adapting and adjusting to an unfolding reality and set of insights.

Linkage to Other Change Plans

In many agencies, the public child welfare change plan is developed in accord with a broader agency or community change plan, while in others it may set the pace for such efforts, especially with private providers working under contract for the agency. Each agency's environment presents different change management-related opportunities and challenges. The important thing is not to develop a change plan in a vacuum.

Addressing Disparity and Disproportionality

Reducing disparity by identifying and addressing its root causes is a critical priority within an agency's strategic and change plan efforts. Effective change plans address the goal of reducing disparity on two levels. First, an agency that is identifying and addressing readiness factors for change will, by definition, be identifying any gaps related to trust, leadership, management and supervision that would in turn link to most root causes of disparity. For example, an agency whose leadership team does not value including minority or marginalized perspectives into its decision-making process will experience difficulties with generating staff commitment for change, and the agency will likely also be experiencing a higher degree of disparity.

Second, the methods used for driving continuous improvement, similar to effective child and family practice, are highly participatory, transparent, include diverse perspectives and test multiple and sometimes unorthodox alternatives. Participants are “seen” not as types but as unique individuals with unique talents, norms and perspectives. Paradoxically, this way of “seeing” others and being “seen” typically enables commonalities and common ground to be discovered. This modeling of effective practice within the agency's continuous improvement efforts should both reduce disproportionality and disparity within the organization and demonstrate to caseworkers how to do the same with the children, youth and families they serve.

Key Processes

The Continuous Improvement (CI) Process

Beyond change planning, effective change management relies on having in place a formal process of continuous improvement (CI). As a result, the priorities established in the change plan lead to efforts that actually make the priorities within the plan happen. CI efforts also reinforce the agency's practice model and overall readiness for change, as they embody the principles and values of empowerment, learning by doing, innovation, and inclusion.

An effective formal CI process includes three tiers of organization: sponsor groups, continuous improvement teams, and working committees. Sponsor groups charter and authorize specific projects and initiatives and provide ongoing oversight for these efforts. Continuous improvement teams actually manage the CI process, while working committees may be formed to tackle the most complex assignments that the continuous improvement teams generate, such as designing or revamping a service, process, program or practice.

An effective CI process is systematic and includes the following general steps a continuous improvement team should follow for making improvements to areas of priority for the agency:

- Defining improvement areas and desired future states in operational terms. For example, “culture” is often a priority area for improvement in agencies, but an operational definition might focus on communication, decision-making, delegation, and follow-through in order for the improvement effort to be concrete. Alignment to strategy and to the priorities of sponsors is a key feature of this step in continuous improvement.
- Assessing the current state sufficiently to establish a baseline for improvement and to identify observable, measurable strengths and gaps.
- Identifying the specific sources of resistance within the agency that will affect the pace of mid- and long-term change initiatives.
- Identifying the root causes of strengths, gaps and sources of resistance in order to discover actionable areas for improvement that do not merely treat symptoms, resulting in the intended impact on performance, capacity and outcomes.
- Identifying “quick win” remedies to increase credibility and capacity for the change process and to build energy, commitment and consensus for longer term remedies. Quick wins include both doing new things and eliminating things that truly need not be done.
- Identifying and planning for mid and long term remedies, taking into account:
 - How to enfranchise constructive forms of resistance—that which serves to improve the change effort by identifying blind spots and limitations within it (e.g., improving the communication regarding why a change effort is important)
 - How to minimize non-constructive forms of resistance (e.g., turfism, resistance based on agendas that are inconsistent with the agency mission and values)
 - What time will be required for complex changes where resources are limited
 - What the sponsors of change can and cannot currently control
- Implementing these remedies often involves the formation of working committees, and at times, further continuous improvement team work. Establishing detailed task plans and a concurrent communication plan to help track progress and troubleshoot obstacles.
- Monitoring plan progress, actual versus expected impact, and lessons learned for further refinement of the continuous improvement process as a whole, creating a “loop” back to

both additional CI work in the previous steps and to the sponsor group for adjustments to the overall charter and scope of the improvement effort.

The DAPIM™ Model and Root Cause Analysis

APHSA developed a model that illustrates this CI process as an ongoing cycle or “flywheel” that moves through five general stages of Defining, Assessing, Planning, Implementing and Monitoring (linking back to the previous steps). In its experience supporting agency CI efforts, APHSA finds that agencies often “jump” from identifying a gap to developing solutions, without taking the time needed to understand the root causes for why a gap exists. Effective root cause analysis typically requires “peeling the onion” of a gap one to three times before arriving at its root cause and related general remedy.

The DAPIM™ Model and Performance Improvement Plans (PIPs)

Agency PIPs typically define the CFSR-based performance standards, measure current agency performance against those standards, and list a set of actions for addressing any current gaps between these standards and measures. When using the DAPIM™ flywheel technique, agencies enhance their standard PIPs by also identifying the root causes for their gaps, developing implementation plans that are more targeted and sequenced over time, and establishing mechanisms for monitoring those plans for follow through, impact, lessons learned, and adjustments to make. This is in line with the best intentions of the CFSR and PIP process.

Data Collection and Analysis

At both the macro change plan level and within targeted continuous improvement efforts, processes must be in place that yield three types of data to support them: environmental scanning and baseline assessment; monitoring agency performance and impact on children and families; and communicating with staff and stakeholders. Characteristics of these data include:

- Data to gauge the perceptions of and gather input from children and families served, staff and stakeholders
- Data that can be manipulated and analyzed in different ways, enabling thoughtful root cause analysis
- Longitudinal data across programs that focus on progress being made by particular children, youth and families over time
- Data that supports progress toward the desired outcomes and federal measures of safety, permanency, and well-being
- Data that are not just numbers but anecdotal “stories” of children and families served and how agency support for them leads to desired outcomes.

Decision-Making

Determining the priorities for continuous improvement efforts is an ongoing role of senior-level sponsors of CI within the context of an unfolding strategic and change plan cycle. This role requires applying the CI process to the strategic and change plan efforts themselves, identifying strengths and gaps within them and establishing new or adjusted initiatives and chartering new or amended CI teams.

Communication

When the continuous improvement process is open and inclusive of all levels of the organization, stakeholders and partners, the result is more buy-in and commitment versus resistance or confusion, and more innovative and realistic tactics and initiatives. Effective

agencies use comprehensive communication mechanisms to keep those it serves, staff and stakeholders informed and build understanding, buy-in and participation.

Celebrating Progress and Taking Risks

It takes a lot of energy and passion to sustain change efforts, and teamwork and collaboration are essential to maintaining this energy and passion. And there are risks in attempts to innovate and collaborate resulting in failures, mistakes and frustrations. At times, agencies become risk averse, preferring to do things within strict compliance boundaries (e.g., placement in licensed homes) instead of taking measured risks in the best interests of children, youth and families (e.g., placement with relatives).

Well-designed methods and activities to frequently recognize and reinforce the strengths of the agency and the progress being made by both individuals and teams are essential to maintaining that energy and tolerating that risk. Recognition programs should stimulate healthy, fun competition and promote individual and team goals. These programs should at the same time emphasize that appropriate risk-taking and related failures are constructive learning experiences—indeed, the primary means for generating important new insights and making important course corrections.

Professional Development

Developing staff capacity and capabilities in alignment with change planning and continuous improvement priorities requires effective methods for professional development. Staff capacity must be built to support desired outcomes such as recognizing disparities or appropriately engaging families. Leadership and supervisory development programs should be built around change and continuous improvement efforts themselves, versus employing abstract or conceptual curricular approaches. All staff should understand, buy into, and internalize the critical thinking steps used in the agency's continuous improvement process.

Performance Management and Other HR Programs

Evaluations and individual or team development plans are most powerful when they are explicitly linked to the strategy and change plan. Processes and methods that supervisors use must be objective, consistent, constructive and collaborative with those who need to improve their performance. Hiring and promotions should be based on those positively reacting to the culture of change vs. those that resist in non-constructive ways. These same principles apply to programs, functions and individuals within the agency, as well as when establishing and managing contracts with private providers.

Operations

What does it look like when continuous improvement and innovation have been well-established and realized in the daily operation?

Continuous Improvement and Front-line Practice

At this “micro” level of change management, the DAPIM™ flywheel and related methods can be easily adapted to support direct field staff in helping the people they serve through a change management process of their own, helping them learn how to:

- Define improvement areas and a desired future for themselves in concrete terms
- Assess their current situation, including both strengths and gaps, and determine the root causes of those gaps
- Plan and implement remedies to address those root causes, leveraging their strengths as they close those gaps
- Monitor those plans and activities at each family or youth meeting

Continuous Improvement and Quality Assurance

CI as an ongoing practice within an agency is either targeted to change plan priorities, to specific “hot spot” improvement or innovation topics that arise on an ongoing basis, or to the routine operational work of quality assurance and improvement (QA). Whether focused on case management or other vital processes within the agency, effective QA processes use criteria for satisfaction and measures of quality that are directly related to agency strategy, and they examine all of the relevant, informative points in the process being evaluated. For example, a quality check at intake that monitors and troubleshoots accuracy and timeliness will not be sufficient if an agency’s strategic objectives include reducing disparity, improving service perceptions, or connecting an individual or family to a fuller range of services when needed.

Effective agencies establish roles and required skills for their QA specialists such that they are able to facilitate “micro” continuous improvement efforts with their internal clients, whether that is for a particular worker’s struggles, a pattern of problems at a particular point in the casework process, or for the CFSR and PIP efforts as a whole.

Role Clarity

The ultimate responsibility for change plans and sponsoring continuous improvement efforts rests with the executive team. Assessing and building agency readiness for change are ultimately the responsibility of department, program and function heads. Designing and refining key processes are the responsibility of middle management, and daily performance in alignment with change and continuous improvement priorities is the responsibility of supervisors and front-line staff. Multiple hats are common in smaller agencies.

Supervision

Supervisor performance is crucial for sustaining change plans and continuous improvement efforts. Supervisors support and reinforce the effective implementation of plans and projects, build and maintain staff support and either enfranchise constructive resistance or minimize non-constructive resistance, and connect operational data and perspectives back to change and CI efforts as part of effective monitoring. And effective supervisors use the same CI approach and steps when coaching their staff as are used in “mezzo” CI initiatives.

Staff Perceptions and Feelings

In effective change efforts, the typical member of the staff is engaged in the change process in a way they feel is important, feels a sense of excitement and hopefulness about the particular change effort underway, and believes the agency continuously improves itself and employs progressive and innovative programs and practices. Agency communication mechanisms (e.g., newsletters, intranet sites, town hall meetings, supervisor-led unit meetings) are shaped around key messages that reinforce this. Staff provides ongoing feedback and a front-line/direct service perspective to those sponsoring change efforts. Strengths and progress can be discerned through staff climate studies, focus groups and/or action research.

Support Functions

A planning function well-connected to a communications function is a useful mechanism for supporting agency-wide change plan work. HR, Training, IT and Finance also play critical supportive roles in change planning as well as in many facets of continuous improvement, and must be included from the beginning and throughout such efforts.

Diversity and Inclusiveness

Agencies who are continuously improving do so in a highly participative way, bringing together points of view from a number of different levels and functions within an agency, as well as from stakeholders and those served. Innovations and novel solutions are often achieved as the result of adding minority or previously marginalized perspectives to more commonly held viewpoints. The dialogues that occur result in participants knowing and valuing each other in a more in-depth way and listening to each other sufficiently to discover common ground, as opposed to “labeling” each other from a distance as “different and threatening,” never moving on to constructive problem solving and at times, breakthrough innovation. These dialogues serve to reinforce the values within a culture that is able to identify and reduce disparity and ultimately disproportionality.

Data Collection and Analysis

“Good” data are needed for baseline assessment, root cause analysis, and ongoing monitoring of both broad change plans (e.g., environmental scanning) and targeted continuous improvement projects. Information services resources must be in place that:

- Measure progress being made by each child, youth and family over time
- Balance quantitative and qualitative factors
- Collect and analyze feedback from children and families served as well as stakeholders
- Include data about private provider and other partner services and their impact
- Are worker-friendly and accessible.

Learning Organizations

To the extent that an agency does its work systematically and collaboratively, taking the time to reflect on real-world experiences and the lessons inherent in them, effective knowledge management and a learning organization will be the result. In effective learning environments, participants feel both safe enough to be open and collaborative as well as accountable for making improvements to their performance and capacity. Learning takes place in a well-managed way at many points within effective change efforts as:

- Change plans are developed to expand upon and deepen strategic plans
- Assessment takes place within change planning and continuous improvement

- Services, programs, processes and tools are designed or revamped to address gaps
- Constructive feedback from resisters is considered and enfranchised
- Data are manipulated, analyzed and converted into knowledge and insight
- Decisions are made in a more participative, inclusive manner
- Continuous improvement teams and working committees solve problems within specified boundaries
- Quick wins, plans and new designs are implemented, experienced and monitored
- Legacy ways of doing things that cannot be demonstrated to add significant value (“sacred cows”) are discarded as part of agency capacity building
- Successes, challenges and lessons learned are shared across programs, functions and regions
- Innovative staff development efforts and rich communication initiatives are launched in alignment with change plan priorities
- Case studies are written, presentations are made and cross-departmental mentoring occurs to capitalize on successful change management experiences
- Continuous improvement methods and techniques are internalized by individuals and teams, and connections are made between those applied to organizational issues and those used with children, youth and families

Implementation

How does an agency go from “here to there” in establishing and implementing an effective approach to change management?

Participation and Input

As opposed to the “war room” or “executive retreat” method, change planning and continuous improvement efforts must bring in data and perspectives from all levels of the agency, those being served, and a range of stakeholders. Openly testing and refining assessments and plans in a highly inclusive way, and involving a broad range of staff in an ongoing “feedback loop” as changes are monitored over time generates buy-in and understanding and helps to groom leaders and future executives.

Facilitation

Change Plan development and CI efforts can be highly innovative and enriching developmental experiences in and of themselves. The facilitation of participative working sessions that result in such an experience should be highly customized and dynamic, allowing for safe, candid reflection by those involved, while still resulting in concrete work products and clear accountability. Effective facilitation skills used with agency CI teams are analogous to those used with children and families served (e.g., establishing trust and rapport, creating a sense of safety and transparency, active listening, steering vs. mandating, etc.) An agency’s planning or staff development functions should include such facilitators or contract with an outside facilitator.

Leadership Roles

Given that effective implementation of changes requires a highly inclusive approach, leadership effectiveness is critical for this approach to thrive. Executive teams develop strategic plans that include the goals and objectives that direct change initiatives. They realistically assess organizational readiness for change and provide for its sustainability (e.g., required data resources). Senior leaders clarify who has the authority for making change happen, reinforcing that authority as needed. Sponsor groups charter and set boundaries for continuous improvement teams and review their efforts and progress over time.

Leadership Influence

Leadership roles within a change process include communicating within and outside the organization. Leaders “build the public will” by providing a clear and concrete definition of what practice model is being advanced, what strengths are in place, what problems need to be solved, what improvements and innovations are desired, what is tangibly being done, and what is being learned along the way. They are persuasive champions of the change effort, instilling a sense of excitement about the possibilities and pragmatic resolve to actually make good things happen. Leaders also create constructive relationships with dissenters, establishing a balance between safety and accountability with them. They listen to staff and stakeholders and adapt change efforts as appropriate, modeling inclusiveness and learning, while at the same time reinforcing their resolve to core practice model principles and outcomes for children, youth and families.

Power and Politics

In order to drive successful changes in an environment with competing interests and perspectives, leaders must be politically astute and savvy. Leaders assess who can either influence or detract from the changes they are attempting to make, and then gauge the degree

of trust and agreement they share. If trust and agreement are high, leaders collaborate with these allies in influencing others to accept and champion the desired changes with them. If trust and agreement are low, politically astute leaders work to minimize or remove these adversaries from the change process or they establish coalitions of allies who are politically stronger than their adversaries. Leaders who are politically astute also work hard to enlist those who are influential but undecided while conserving their efforts to enlist those who are entirely opposed to their agenda.

Champions of Change

“Champions of change” should be identified and cultivated at all levels of the agency and within the community. Champions within the agency are viewed by staff as positive influence leaders; they articulate the work of change and provide technical assistance and support in sustaining it. They help lead the effort to take staff out of their comfort zone, modeling innovation and growth. Champions within the community also enjoy credibility and influence; they can serve as political buffers and supporters with stakeholders and the media.

Influencing the Middle

Those most likely to be influenced by “champions of change” are not the non-constructive resisters but those in between the champions and resisters. This group is typically the majority of the staff and stakeholders. Sometimes when changes are being implemented, it is the champions and chronic resisters who are given the most attention by leadership. But in a successful implementation campaign, as in a successful political campaign, this middle group is the primary focus of influence.

Chronic Resisters

Those who steadfastly maintain non-constructive resistance, especially when they are responsible for influential programs or functional areas, damage both a sense of safety and accountability within the agency’s culture generally as well as within specific improvement and innovation efforts. The middle group typically watches leadership to see how these resisters will be engaged. In effective change efforts, they are minimized and ultimately managed out of the agency, telling the rest of the staff that champions are recognized, constructive resistance is honored, and non-constructive resistance is not tolerated for long.

Safety and Accountability

Executive teams and sponsor groups have the authority and resources to build safety and accountability for change, and they must be vigilant in doing so. Leadership activities that increase a sense of safety for change include seeking out constructive forms of resistance, actively listening to and using the related feedback to improve change plans and continuous improvement efforts. Those that increase a sense of accountability for change include establishing goals and milestones within change and continuous improvement plans that are directly linked to performance evaluations, development plans and reward systems at both the individual and the program-specific level.

Management Effectiveness

Leadership and management are two interrelated but distinct areas of work, both of which are critical for implementing complex changes. Management work involves establishing the controls and structures necessary for supporting desired changes. These controls and structures include policies, key processes, programs (including HR-related programs), protocols, ground rules and methods for working together and accomplishing complex tasks and activities. Successful change most often occurs through building trust amongst those

involved. That trust is based on both a shared vision and will—the result of effective leadership—and a confidence that change efforts will proceed in a reliable and competent fashion—a result of effective management. For example, both leaders and managers work to ensure that staff members follow existing policies and procedures—leaders by reinforcing the importance of doing the right thing, and managers by reinforcing the importance of doing things the right way.

Monitoring

Commitments regarding change planning must be specific, measurable, within specific timeframes and made publicly by the responsible person, team, function or program area. Monitoring toward successful implementation of initiatives or progress toward goals must be done on a regular basis once implementation begins. Effective monitoring includes evaluating plan progress, impact, and lessons learned. Communicating to staff and stakeholders about the findings from monitoring and involving them in these efforts where practical helps to sustain ongoing support for the agency's efforts to improve. These same principles apply to agency staff, programs and functions, and private providers.

Overcoming Obstacles

Agencies should anticipate and plan in advance how they will maximize readiness factors and overcome obstacles to implementing their improvement and innovation efforts. Here are some typical obstacles and how to overcome them in general:

Shifting Policies and Regulatory Requirements, PIPs, Reform Plans and Consent Decrees

Include and adjust when needed the environmental scans within the agency's strategic and change plans. Realign strategic priorities in accord with any emerging non-negotiables. Ensure the agency's plans are sufficiently adaptable in their design, use and monitoring. Over time, evolve the agency's influence within the broader environment such that fewer unexpected and disruptive impacts occur.

Unexpected Traumas such as a Child Death or Negative News Cycle

Develop and use the agency's communication plans and risk management programs to respond (versus responding in ad hoc or reactive ways). Build effective responsiveness to such events into the agency strategic objectives and related improvement initiatives (e.g., an ongoing effort to build trust and partnership with the media). When traumatic events occur, use CI processes to analyze and improve upon the root causes for any gaps, reaffirming the agency mission and values.

Budget Shortfalls and other Unplanned Resource Cuts

Include and adjust when needed the analysis of required and available resources within the agency's strategic and change plans, at times limiting or delaying priorities. Use ongoing monitoring and root cause analysis to streamline resources where they do not have a high impact on agency goals and objectives, or where they are inefficient and redundant (e.g., due to lack of collaboration and partnership). When innovations and breakthroughs are successful, "declare victory" and limit further resource investments. Over time, evolve the agency's influence within the broader environment such that resource cuts are less frequent or less significant.

Changes to the Executive Team or other Key Participants

Use strategic and change planning methods that are highly systematic and participative so that changes in key leadership do not disrupt ongoing strategies, change initiatives and relationship networks. Provide such plans and methods to new leaders as part of their orientation so they immediately understand and support current initiatives, or seek to evolve them from within, versus leading in more disruptive and idiosyncratic ways.

Internal Politics and Interdepartmental Turf Disputes

Use the readiness assessment and continuous improvement priorities themselves to proactively and transparently address these potential obstacles, versus leaving them out of the scope of change and continuous improvement efforts. Use the power and politics guidance included in this chapter.

Lack of Effective Support from Functions like HR and IT

Include strategic support functions in both strategic and change planning to leverage their expertise and enlist their support. Make the alignment of support function capacity an explicit part of strategic priorities and related continuous improvement projects.

Operational or Project Performance Below Expectations

Use monitoring efforts to learn from these experiences, deepen the agency's root cause and remedies work, and reinforce the agency's commitment to taking measured risks. Adjust the pace of improvement efforts and priorities in line with current capacity (including staff skills and experience). And if a related root cause is lack of staff follow-through and commitment, reinforce a culture of accountability by taking corrective action in performance management, especially in regards to non-constructive resistance.

In proactively anticipating and planning for potential barriers and obstacles, agencies employ and further build their strengths in critical thinking and creative problem-solving. Many of these obstacles, as well as others such as staff resistance, cultural inertia and a crisis mentality, are addressed by the very activities suggested within this guidance.

Supporting Tools

Tools and templates for effective implementation include:

- Continuous improvement team charters from sponsor groups
- Communication plan template
- Assessment, data collection and analysis tools
- Facilitation tools and templates
- Monitoring tools and templates
- Individual and team capacity planning tools
- Project management, meeting management, and decision-making tools
- Action research, coaching and performance management tools

Support from Universities and Nonprofits

The role of academic and nonprofit institutions in supporting the change management efforts of agencies includes:

- Generating case studies of successful agency change management efforts
- Integrating the “products” of practitioner successes (models, tools, processes, techniques) with general practice theories of working with children and families and organizational development

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- Preparing students for the real world challenges of complex organizations attempting to improve and innovate within a challenging environment
 - Shifting their professional development services from a classroom-based curriculum to a more consultative continuous improvement approach.