
Organizational Assessment

Early Findings

Employee Focus Groups

Employees are skeptical about change stemming from organization assessments

Employees express skepticism and reluctance toward the organizational assessment process, since previous efforts and initiatives have produced few known results. Despite their skepticism, they believe in leaderships' intent to do good, they actively participate in the process and ask for greater involvement and transparency.

Success is currently enabled by commitment to service and specific practices

The quality of people and commitment to service, along with co-location of services/programs and discrete group practices, are cited by employees as what works well and will enable successful service delivery.

Process development and streamlining are necessary for improving performance

A lack of process, or burdensome processes are both considered issues that detract from service delivery and overall performance. “The behaviors required to navigate the system don’t represent people at their best.”

Collaboration is complicated by divisional silos

Silos are making collaboration across divisions more difficult with potential impacts on client service. This dynamic is partly due to structure and lack of formalized collaboration processes, and is to a certain extent mitigated by employees through personal cross-group relationships.

Employees believe they are undervalued

There is widespread perception across employees and divisions that they are undervalued, as demonstrated by lack of development opportunities, workload and involvement.

Lack of resources is a consistent performance inhibitor

Lack of resources and staffing is consistently and frequently cited as an issue that inhibits the performance of the department. While there is an understanding of constraints, employees believe more can be done with regard to adding resources.

Priorities and their underlying logic are not clear to employees

Competing and shifting priorities are common across HSS, and the underlying logic behind decisions and changes are typically not clear for employees.

Employees want more transparency and executive level communication

Communication is broadly considered to be an improvement area, primarily with regard to increasing frequency of executive communications, more effective cascading through the organization and more strategic communications planning.

Information sharing is labored but very necessary for effective service delivery

While information sharing is seen as key to servicing clients, it is also difficult given the current structure and practices in HSS.

Significant opportunities exist for better linking services and enabling collaboration

HSS while linking a range of services, has significant opportunity for better service integration and cross-divisional awareness and collaboration in order to better serve clients.

HSS culture can be strengthened and more supportive of employee efforts

HSS culture is firmly grounded in a commitment to service, in some areas however the culture may be hindering rather than enabling service and performance, particularly with regard to adherence to hierarchy, low support for innovation, some apathetic employees and pockets of contention.

Any change will face challenges from within and beyond HSS

Employee's believe any HSS change will need to address significant challenges including

- Removal of silo's when the State itself is very siloed
- Severe shortage of IT staff to address technology updates, and improve information sharing systems
- Constraints on county HR which leave employees confused on why things happen
- The size of the department makes change implementation more difficult
- Changing the way leaders think about and approach things, so employees can embrace it

When asked to design HSS for the future, employees collectively envision...

A shift toward greater integration across the department, characterized as a one stop shop

Improved resources with better access, for instance

- A better website and SharePoint access
- Better equipment for programs
- Updated technology (FaceTime, Texting, AI, Dropbox, IOS and Android staff)
- Shared electronic records with accessibility

Increased focus and value on the employee, through staff development and training opportunities

Streamlining of red tape and processes

Increased support from analysts, fiscal, contracts, administration

Greater levels of cross-program training and support

Enhanced communication and information sharing

A culture that is characterized by

- Proactive collaboration across groups
- Trust in and support for employees to perform their function (oversight and compliance)
- Accountability from the frontline to executives
- A focus on internal customer service
- Strong communication and transparency in decision making
- Placing value on feedback, rather than it being punitive
- Embracing “no bad ideas” policy
- Engaging challenges and identifying root causes
- Confronting inconsistencies and entitlement
- Execution of change

Leadership Interviews

Executive team

HSS executive teams' understanding of the department's current performance, integration and collaboration are favorable relative to those of their direct reports and line staff. While acknowledging areas for improvement, the group has somewhat divergent perspectives with regard to organization design and related factors.

— Culture

There is a sense in some areas that a culture of fear pervades, being heavily influenced by “Downtown”

— Bandwidth

Jerry's bandwidth level is a concern for the group, though not necessarily owing to a shortage of contact or access. While all agree a second assistant makes sense for the size of the organization, some also see an opportunity to release more bandwidth through greater empowerment of deputies.

— Current performance, integration and collaboration

- Leaders may look favorably on their current performance given a lack of strong criticism. They tend to view the current ad hoc collaboration and integration as sufficient, which is somewhat at odds with perception at the frontline.
- There is acknowledgement that there is a gap to bridge and that more can be done to support collaboration and ultimately bringing more services to each client

Executive team ...continued

Organization design

- Group thinking on organizational design and overall design process are not aligned.
- The sketch of organizational design makes sense to some especially when looked at through the lens of operational efficiency.
- Some are questioning the organizational design process, seeing the sketch as an already determined solution.
- While leaders tend to solve for organization performance from their perspective, they also bring a mix of approaches, on the one hand solving for bandwidth and operational efficiency, and on the other suggesting willingness to solve for client and community outcomes.
- With regard to org design, there are no strong leanings toward either the 'sketch' or a matrix. They do think that reporting lines will dictate where people focus, hence a new model of structural integration will focus staff more directly on collaboration. That said, they don't think integration is necessary to drive service delivery collaboration.

Rollout

Leaders strongly advocate for an effectively communicated roll out of any organization changes.

Administrators

While communicating similar concerns as division leaders, administrators tend to have a less favorable view of their service delivery, holding a perspective more closely aligned with their line staff. They frequently cite:

- **Resource and staffing constraints**
- **Difficulty in collaboration across groups, with diminishing service**
- **Asking the client to meet HSS where it's at, rather than HSS meeting the client where they are at**

They think leadership at all levels of the organization is key and should be aligned and strengthened

Communication and clarity of direction are cited as areas for improvement

Best Practices Research

Organizational Structure

Foundationally, for a Health and Human Services Super-Agency to be both an efficient and innovative enterprise, it must be organized as a matrix flexible enough to encourage collaboration while maintaining a strong through line of policies, culture and vision to guide purpose.

“If you’re planning to integrate, there is no point in staying siloed around public health, mental health, etc. At the end of the day, look at the population and the programs you run to serve them.”

- Rebecca Mellot, Yolo County

Shasta, Yolo and Placer Counties moved to systems of care organized by population while San Diego organized their care delivery by region. Both approaches have proven to be more successful by offering specific services that support each other and address the whole client.

Multiple Agency and Branch directors explained that the population/region approach was more complicated fiscally because it does not align with the state and federal funding streams (organized by program), but they believe it to be the best and most efficient service delivery approach.

Co-locating multidisciplinary teams further encourages integration and coordination, and develops better understanding of roles and responsibilities across departments.

Partnerships

Tapping the expertise of the community and joining forces with existing companies is a necessary step toward solidifying HSS's role in the county as both a resource for support and advocate for local organizations.

Placer and Shasta Counties shifted clinic oversight and management to community-based healthcare organizations who have more bandwidth for growth and can offer expanded services to the county.

San Diego relies on external organizations to oversee 70% of Mental Health Services and 100% of Substance Abuse Services.

Feedback is that by shifting programs to community partners, the agency is less isolated and more integrated in the community, and can respond to issues more proactively and efficiently.

Work Practices

Creating systems and structures to support collaborative efforts is key to best serving populations in need. It is widely understood that no issue exists in a vacuum and it is up to the HSS agency to recognize and provide the continuum necessary for the clients wellbeing.

San Diego prioritizes a democratic executive table. Executive team and their assistants established a unifying vision, expectations and linked goals, which are then driven down through common messaging.

Placer County has implemented a committee specifically focused on homelessness including representatives from all divisions plus the sheriff and probation office to coordinate a plan.

Placer, Shasta and Yolo counties expressed the importance of coordinating services for Children, Youth and Family with Children's Mental Health and working alongside Probation to act as family advocates.

Yolo County has also implemented a Linkages Program to coordinate and write case plans with financial services and eligibility at the table.

Information Sharing

Our conversations show there is no such thing as too much communication. Engaging every employee in the reorganization process and creating opportunities for buy-in at every step is fundamental to ensuring everyone feels part of the whole and necessary to its success.

Placer, San Diego, Shasta and Yolo all cite regular meetings at the program director level with additional meetings to include their deputies.

San Diego emphasized the importance of common messaging driven from the leadership down to bring staff along and reiterate a sense of unified vision.

Through a partnership with IBM, San Diego centralizes all data throughout the county and allows all staff to see the information pertinent to their work.

As one of 19 Whole Person Care Pilot sites, Placer County is also exploring a data warehousing system as their data is currently not integrated. Director, Jeff Brown, stated, “I think all counties need to be moving in the direction of a one-data system.”

Change Management

Polarization, resistance and tension are all to be expected while navigating through this process, however, with strong leadership and a commitment to a shared goal, the struggle for power will lead to a culture of acceptance.

Rebecca Mellot of Yolo County shared that through strong leadership and a clear focus on the client, it is realistic to aim to get 60-70% of the staff onboard, knowing there will always be dissenters.

Shasta County has experienced much of their growing pains in working to get their program staff to consider their budgets consistently and encouraging them to meet with finance more regularly, resulting in more fiscal efficiency and a better working relationship.

In San Diego, the breakdown of barriers was often followed by a struggle for autonomy. They have worked to combat that tension by threading communication and branding through every correspondence so everyone sees themselves as part of a whole. (Additionally, they established that planning meetings were not the time for “pity parties”.)

Her experiences in the reorganizations of Shasta, Placer and Yolo counties have informed Rebecca Mellot’s belief that employee engagement must be a high priority, citing celebration of the small wins and opportunities to focus in and connect to the work. Furthermore, while it can be exhausting to always be the cheerleader and remind staff of the ‘why’ for the work, their feedback is necessary to the process and engagement in the process always comes back to communication and messaging.