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HOW TO MATCH SERVICES AND PEOPLE'S NEEDS

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What is more dehumanizing than to run the "maze" of a large complex organization—whether governmental or private sector—seeking the solution to a problem? Usually, if you are persistent, have a clear understanding of your objectives, and use a firm voice, you can eventually accomplish your purpose. But frequently it is not achieved without the frustration of being shunted from person to person and department to department.

This article will present a plan which will help governmental agencies integrate their response to the human services needs of the people. A problem has arisen as agencies set up over the years to meet one aspect of a citizen's problem have not responded to his overall situation. The condition is known to public administrators as "fragmentation," or lack of agency/program integration.

Fragmentation is a common problem facing the governmental functions—environment, education, legislation, transportation, and justice. It is especially true of the agencies providing "human services." The human services function is the largest function in all government (federal, state, and local) in terms of numbers of programs, dollars expended, and (with the possible exception of education) persons receiving direct services.

In most jurisdictions, "human services" usually includes welfare, children's services, vocational rehabilitation, health, mental health, corrections, unemployment insurance, manpower development, and a variety of related special programs—such as those for the aged or special planning functions. Although their organizational mix varies from jurisdiction to jurisdiction, these programs collectively comprise between one-half to two-thirds of most local government budgets. But the overlapping scope of the programs often poses, in turn, an overwhelming problem for the 35 to 40 million persons who receive some assistance each year from one or more human services agencies.

Imagine, for example, the plight of a disabled mother on welfare. She has a husband in a correctional facility, a brother who is unemployed and may be eligible for insurance benefits, a son having problems in school, another child who has dropped out of school and is using drugs—all this plus a health problem of her own. Moreover, this disabled mother has neither an automobile nor a telephone, and she possesses minimal formal education, lacks vocational skills, and is not very good at expressing herself verbally. What is she going to do?

The chances are she enters the maze of governmental agencies following the suggestion of a friend or a welfare caseworker, or simply out of desperation. Her first call will probably be on the agency which can best help her

with her major problem. Since she has many different problems, however, she will, no doubt, be sent to other agencies as well. At each one she will probably fill out an application and "tell her story" to the sympathetic service professionals. Frequently she will learn that she has been talking to the wrong person, and will probably be referred to another public or private agency. Then, once she is accepted by several agencies, she may discover that the service workers do not agree on what she should do. One worker may be trying to get a problem child into school, another may be recommending vocational training, and a third suggesting a concentrated drug outpatient program. Unfortunately, this unlearned woman must reconcile the opinions of all these individuals and make an overall assessment of her family's situation.

Fragmentation results when legislation is passed to meet a new or growing social problem for an identifiable segment of the population—such as the mentally retarded, the blind, the impoverished, the criminal, the unemployed, the disabled, the aged, children, or a variety of minority groups. As long as these services do not significantly overlap, there is no particular problem with this approach. However, when they do overlap, words like "program," "organization," "service delivery system," and "client type" become almost synonymous.

In other words, despite our best intentions, our human resources program becomes almost completely fragmented.

Why aren't we really integrated?

Those administering a program are frequently criticized for not listening to client perceptions. Yet the challenge inherent in integrating literally hundreds of programs into a single delivery system is extremely complex, especially in large urban centers.

What are some of the major pitfalls to avoid in attempting to integrate services? They are:

A wrong perspective—Human services workers have a sincere interest in "helping" clients, but often they see the client's needs only in terms of his eligibility for their organization's mission. Their perspective must begin with the client, not with their own program.

Too many layers of administration—When the goals of an umbrella agency are based on the activities of all its divisions, the umbrella often becomes just another administrative layer. With the staff so involved in day-to-day management matters, a broader client service perspective is lost. As a result, there is very little change in

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the service that is rendered at the point of delivery.

Inadequate change—An agency may have integrated a portion of its organization, while continuing to maintain fragmented systems. This can result in a net loss of effectiveness, poor morale, and reinforcement of the natural resistance to change.

The problem of multiple approaches—Human services in urban areas are divided into a variety of target groups (children, aged, migrants), skills (medical, casework, psychological), or needs (poor, sick, mentally ill). The problem occurs when the persons served by the various agencies are, in fact, just one person who has been classified in a variety of ways. When viewed in total, the service is frequently piecemeal, overlapping, and uncoordinated. A paradox, however, is that when viewed from the perspective of an individual agency, the differences, descriptions, and methods used are generally justified.

Avoid over-generalization—There are common, if not identical, elements among the various service organizations, but of equal significance are the unique requirements of each, which justify a degree of specialization. The challenge is to join elements which are alike without losing the specialization.

Developing a framework for change

The foregoing summarizes the pitfalls that interfere with the integration of human services. How can the process of change be approached in a way that will avoid these problems and still effectively resolve the costs and confusion caused by existing fragmentation?

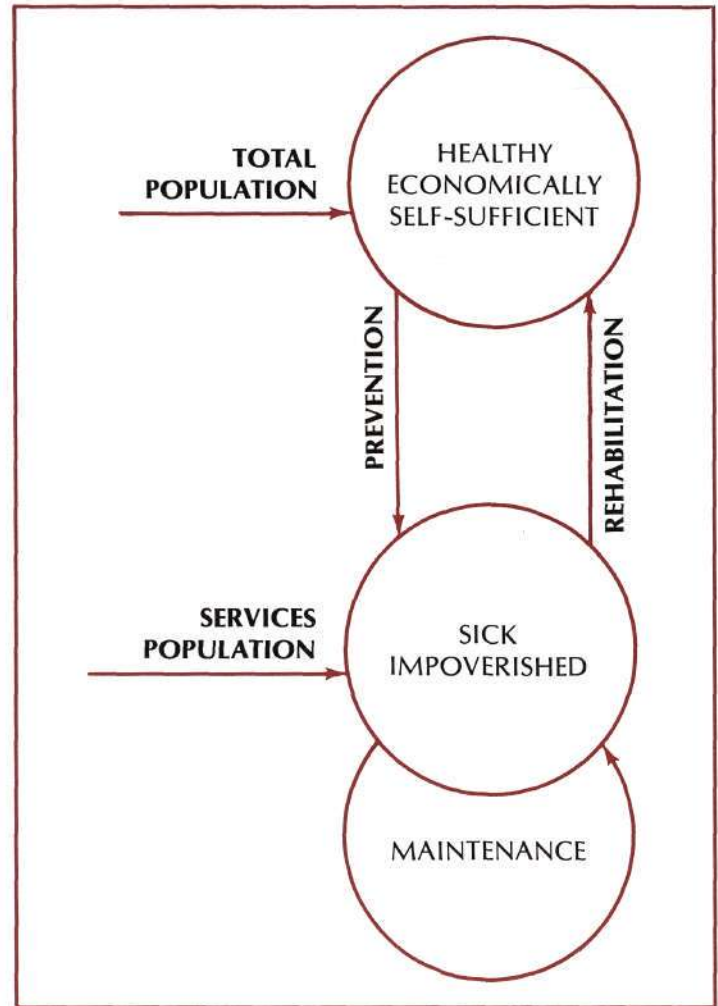
Initially, an agency must define precisely the objectives it is to accomplish through human services. Results achieved are not likely to exceed the objectives set forth. Today's human resources agencies confront three obstacles:

- Objectives may be stated in narrow, client-descriptive terms. Broader problem-oriented objectives often require new thinking.

- Society's needs are constantly changing. "Normal behavior" has never remained static.

- When delivering service, it is difficult to separate the "process" from the tangible results; the needs of an individual (money, job training, medical treatment) are often confused with the operational needs (timeliness, accessibility, allocation of resources, consistency, continuity).

To sum up, effective integration of services requires an integrated program structure which (1) is based upon desirable behavior in society, (2) is problem oriented, and (3) distinguishes between the end result of service and



how it is provided. In sequence, the goals in serving the sick or impoverished are: prevention, rehabilitation, maintenance, and efficient administration.

Obviously, there are goals which are common to all human services efforts. Each program is simply the tool employed to achieve those goals. Today, most human services planning starts with the agency defining itself in relation to the whole population. As the program is refined down to a specific activity, it is then possible to build linkages to more familiar terminology. For example, if the size of an organization justifies a five-level structure from goals to tasks, then, under a broad integrated goal such as "rehabilitate," one might find "Community Mental Health Services" at the third or fourth level. The purpose of this approach to integrating services is to reorient management's thinking so it will address planning and operations from a broader perspective. As

systems (planning, evaluation, cost accounting) and organizational structure evolve, it becomes difficult to maintain attributes and terminology that are inconsistent with integrated goals.

Change requires two things, therefore: integration at the point of delivering the services, and reorientation of employees who are serving the community.

Developing integrated systems

The integration of an organization requires that new systems eliminate redundant functions (e.g., client data collection, client needs assessment, eligibility determination), while preserving genuine specialization (e.g., psychological testing, counseling, therapy, job placement).

To assure maximum service to the individual already burdened with problems, the new system should provide:

- Common forms and procedures for all service functions which overlap.
- That information for assessing *overall* needs is required only once.
- Prompt understanding between the agency and the client of how the service will meet his or her needs.
- For exceptional situations without sacrificing comprehensive capabilities.
- For relatively independent organizational requirements. (The system should work approximately the same whether in one centralized “facility” or in many decentralized facilities.)
- For community-based situations so that referrals to and from non-agency services can be easily accommodated.
- The capability to track clients *in the system* without sacrificing an individual’s right of privacy.
- For individual employee accountability with respect to the agency’s assessment of how well it meets its needs.
- For client criticisms, if the system has failed to respond to the client’s need or if personality factors are barriers to effective service.

Obviously, there are numerous ways to design a system. The important consideration is that the above requirements be “process oriented.” The system should contain no terminology which limits the delivery of service either to certain types of individuals or from individuals with particular service skills. Of course, the design of the system will become important as eligibility criteria evolve or as manpower requirements are determined, but it should not cause major disruptions in the integration of the service.

How to develop integrated attitudes

The final element for successful integration of service is perhaps the most difficult: redirecting employee attitudes. Four basic considerations help to facilitate change.

First, there should be open communications regarding change with both one’s staff and the personnel of outside organizations. Few professionals disagree with the need to integrate services if it benefits the client; but change does not occur when job descriptions, case-loads, or behavioral patterns are threatened and are not openly discussed.

Second, there should be within the integrated agency, an executive staff function for expediting changes. The person should be a highly effective leader who believes in the program’s objectives. This individual should concentrate his work at the community level and should always have in mind the overall objective. He or she should be the agency head’s “ambassador” to the employees in the community.

Third, there should be a system of personal rewards. This might include a special title for staff people who are performing integrated functions, or a financial incentive for employees who will assume multi-service functions. Recognition might also be given through agency or community publications.

Finally, change should be neither absolute nor rapid. It will require from 12 to 36 months to fully integrate a larger organization. The staff should understand this from the outset, and management should convey its sensitivity to transitional problems. Further, the agency itself must be willing to modify its policies and systems, as genuine problems arise.

Summary

In the final analysis, an agency’s success is measured by how well it achieves its objectives. In evaluating the effort to integrate, certain questions should be answered.

Has service to the client improved as a result of integration? Can he or she enter an office of the agency and discuss the nature and extent of any problem? If a case history is required, how many times must the client “tell his story”? Does the first professional who is contacted consider the client’s range of needs and the range of services available to meet those needs?

If such questions as these are being answered positively, then administrators can consider that the objectives of integration are being achieved at the point of delivery . . . where it counts. 