



Montgomery County Jobs and Family Services

CULTURE OF COLLABORATION

PROGRAM EVALUATION | Dec. 2017

TABLE OF CONTENTS

- PROJECT BACKGROUND** 3
- THE FINDINGS** 4
 - └ Control Group 5
 - └ Change Ambassadors 6
 - └ Team Leads 7
 - └ Opportunity Areas 8
- APPENDIX** 9



PROJECT BACKGROUND

In 2017, the Montgomery County administration re-invested in a project aimed at developing a culture of collaboration at Montgomery County Job and Family Services (JFS). The ultimate goal of building a culture of collaboration is to change staff perspectives of their ability to affect change within the organization, enable the organization to adapt to system level challenges, and provide better service to customers. Building on the first year's work, with a diverse team of JFS leadership, managers, and front-line workers, the project grew in both depth and breadth during this second year of implementation.

Fifteen JFS professionals were selected as “team leads” and equipped with creative and inclusive approaches to problem-solving. The team leaders applied their learning as they led 60 JFS staff, called “Change Ambassadors.” Together they embarked on a four-month problem-solving process, led by Design Impact, that was aimed at building a stronger culture of collaboration.

This report represents what we have learned along the way about collaboration, innovation, and customer service at Montgomery County Job and Family Services and suggests opportunities for ongoing strategic action.



THE FINDINGS

Based on metrics that were co-created with JFS leadership, Design Impact created pre and post surveys to measure **collaboration, innovation, and customer service**. Open-ended, qualitative assessments indicated that **the deeper the engagement with the program, the deeper the impact** on the participant's mindsets and actions related to these three values.

CONTROL GROUP: Ties exist between collaboration, innovation, and customer service, however, it's difficult for non-participants to see this connection and therefore harder to take action.



CHANGE AMBASSADORS: Compared to non-participants (i.e. the “control group”), Change Ambassadors exhibited a mindset shift and could make connections among these three values.



TEAM LEADS: Team leads received additional training beyond the Change Ambassadors and therefore experienced the program in the deepest way. Beyond a change in mindsets, this deepest level of program engagement led to specific actions in line with collaboration, innovation, and customer service.



The next pages cover the details with quotes from the survey the key differences among the Control Group, Change Ambassadors, and Team Leads' qualitative assessments on the programs' three metrics.

CONTROL GROUP

The control group had a limited sense of collaboration which led to feelings of isolation, individualism, and a reactionary stance to systems challenges and improving customer service.

People know they are pieces of the puzzle but don't know where they fit or what the shared vision for the puzzle is.

Staff feel positioned in a reactionary stance when it comes to change, with limited understanding of "why".

"I feel very collaborative within my unit but don't at all feel connected to the larger whole of JFS including management."

"Most people here are out for themselves. There are too many territory issues and people do not seem to desire to actually work together for the good of the customer. I honestly wish this was something that could genuinely be identified during the hiring process."

"I believe staff feel there are a lot of good ideas that get started that are not carried through. I think that moving forward with, implementing and continuing one of the ideas from the culture of collaboration will help change the culture."

"People are territorial and dislike change because there is a lack of understanding why the change must occur. There is a mistrust and belief that "there is an ulterior motive" for the change, which further increases the challenges."

"Internally we do pretty well in updating the workers but externally we are lacking. The customers are clearly uninformed of the changes. They are not made aware of how a particular change will directly impact them."

CHANGE AMBASSADORS

Relative to the control group, Change Ambassadors expressed a stronger sense of collaboration, readiness to work collectively to change the system, and a desire to engage customers in process improvement.

Strengthened horizontal and vertical relationships across the organization leads to a sense of empowerment and readiness to make change.

Customer service increasingly becomes the driving force of the work as people see and experience the larger whole and the part they play in that whole.

“I think there is a willingness to collaborate that wasn’t there before and now leadership is in a better position to listen.”

“It is apparent that management is trying to change the current culture however this is a monumental task when the workforce is not willing to accept change due to the fact that there is a mindset that “that’s the way we have always done it” and the longevity of staff in some areas.”

“There is still work to be done but the effort is being made to address system level challenges.”

“I believe that we are capable of addressing system -level changes, but we tend to fail to include individuals whom actually need to implement the changes in the discussion, which sometimes leads to delays.”

“Cross-functional teams are invaluable collaboration and enhancement of customer service.”

“I’ve been able to get to know other people in other agencies and departments and it’s helped me to understand how all of our services might support our customers.”

“Our consumers need to be a part of this system change. We can make all kinds of changes but if it’s not what the consumer wants then we have made changes for nothing.”

TEAM LEADERS

Team Leaders demonstrated a stronger ability to drive collaboration across departments, push perceived boundaries to change the system, and meet the needs of customers.

With increased empowerment comes new forms of leadership and action from the ground-up.

The impact of collaboration extends beyond this formal program and has been applied toward customer service.

“Our team worked as a group and every member felt that they had input on the ideas and project development. Changing culture is very difficult and unless you have full support from everyone then true change cannot happen. We’re doing it.”

“I was able to guide the team towards a workable idea without letting the JFS leaderships’ opinions stifle their creativity.”

“Leadership can be at any level, not just Management.”

“Some of their ideas I will implement in with the training program; these ideas were outside of the scope of our prototype, but still valuable.”

“I think my biggest win was watching the collaboration between teammates grow overtime. It helped them get to know each other, the different areas, and we grew together. I know where to go with questions about customers now.”

“One member I have worked with in the past, the other two I have not encountered beyond Design Impact. This interaction within itself has been significantly valuable. Design Impact as a partnership is helpful, but it also serves as a vehicle to integrate disparate departments of a county. Without this, I still would not know members of CSEA. I hope that as DI continues, more segments can be connected, as I have already used my CSEA staff resources for case resolution, and I hope to use others in the future.”

OPPORTUNITY AREAS

1

Follow through to action—implement ideas from the culture of collaboration—and be sure to communicate to the whole of JFS the work and progress of the Culture of Collaboration.



2

Institutionalize cross-functional opportunities to learn and work together, from the beginning of employment, to create a collaborative and learner mindset.



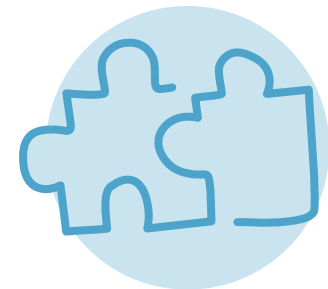
3

Continue to create and expand opportunities for team lead positions, including staff from different levels of seniority.



4

Build in opportunities for former and current customers to participate with the ultimate goal of guiding strategic action.



APPENDIX

A. Methodology:

Based on outcomes and indicators that were co-created with JFS leadership, pre and post surveys were designed and distributed to three distinct groups: a control group, those participating as change ambassadors in the project, and the team leaders. Surveys included both likert scale and open-ended questions. This approach provided insight into the impact of the different levels of engagement in the project.

B. Response Rate:

Control Group

Pre-test: 221/960 (23%)

Post-test: 144/960 (15%)

Change Ambassador group*

Pre-test: 72/75 (96%)

Post-test: 45/55 (82%)

Team Lead group

Pre-test: 12/15 (80%)

Post-test: 13/15 (86%)

*Team Leads completed the pre-test but did not complete the post-test, resulting in a drop in total numbers.



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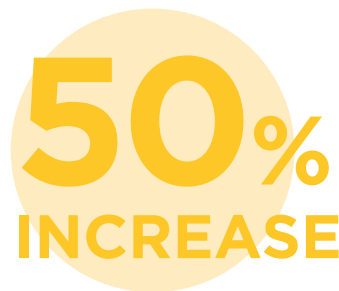
C. Quantitative findings:

After four months, there are signs that the culture of collaboration program is making a positive impact on how Jobs and Families Services and Development Services work together to serve customers.

Comparing Change Ambassadors pre- and post- survey results, they experienced a...



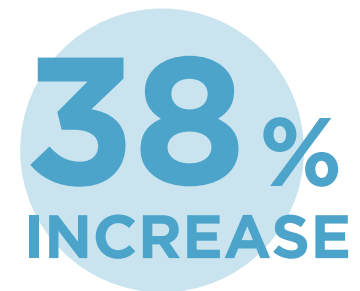
in staff feeling that **JFS equips them with tools to collaborate with others** in support of customers.



in the belief that **relationships across organizational levels are strong**—from front-line workers to senior leadership.



in the **confidence that JFS/Development Services is prepared** to collectively deal with system challenges



in the belief that **JFS/Development Services includes representation** of front-line workers and middle management in decision-making.

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D. Metrics:

Based on Design Impact's theory of change focused on change in mindsets and actions, each concept was defined using the following metrics:

Collaboration/Teamwork

- Individual: New hopes and possibilities for the work I do
- Individual: Empowered to make a difference in JFS
- Organizational: Leadership is visible and accessible to employees.
- Organizational: Relationships across organizational levels—from front-line workers to senior leadership—are strengthened.
- Organizational: Actions/solutions are frontline worker-informed & driven

Innovation

- Individual: Comfort w/ambiguity
- Individual: Increased confidence in boundary pushing and/or risk-taking
- Individual: Open-minded to different ways of thinking
- Organizational: Strengthened ability to consider multiple possibilities and perspectives before arriving at a definite answer
- Organizational: Exhibits increased ability to collectively deal with system challenges

Customer Service

- Individual: Role of empathy in solving problems
- Individual: Equipped to collaborate with others to support customers
- Organizational: Increased capacity to meet the needs of customers
- Organizational: Actions/solutions are customer-informed & driven

THANK YOU!

Thank you to the many hardworking staff at the JFS whose support of their participating peers, active participation, and leadership made this work possible. We appreciated the enthusiastic support of Tom Kelley and the coordination and creative efforts of Adam Fohlen. This work was also generously sponsored by the Montgomery County administration. And last, but not least, we were grateful for the dedication, helpfulness and talents of our amazing fifteen team leaders. Thank you all!

