

Plenary A: Organizational Change and Evidence Based Practice

General Overview

This plenary session described the process of organizational change and evidence based practices through the Kouzes and Posner¹ model. The discussion revolved around the way organizations process change and the importance of leadership. The group discussed different kinds of endings (e.g., positive, negative and neutral) and new beginnings that everyone goes through during change. Three sites (Oregon, Maricopa, AZ and Iowa) then discussed their experiences in undergoing organizational change and evidence based practice.

Major Themes

Managing Change

During the change process endings and new beginnings are inevitable. How these things are managed can make all the difference. Leaders must be mindful of the ways in which the change is processed within an organization. Different people process change differently. It is important to recognize losses before moving forward; manage those in the neutral zone; and be clear in the new beginning.

Leadership through Change as discussed by the Kouzes and Posner¹ model. Each site discussed their change process through the five steps:

- Model the way – share values and set an example through alignment (e.g., leaders are willing to do what they ask of others).
- Inspire a shared vision – envision the future and enlist others in a common vision by appealing to shared aspirations (e.g., leaders include all levels of staff).
- Challenge the process – seek innovative ways to change, grow and improve (e.g., leaders experiment and take risks by constantly generating small wins and learning from mistakes).
- Enable others to act – foster collaboration by promoting cooperative goals and building trust (e.g., leaders strengthen others by sharing power and discretion).
- Encourage the heart – recognize contributions by showing appreciation for individual excellence (e.g., leaders celebrate the values and victories by creating a spirit of community)

Relationships Matter

There must be a balance between leading and pushing change. The stronger the relationship the more likely leaders can influence and be influenced by others. It is important to listen to others and be open to feedback. Using data in a proactive way and providing supportive technical assistance can help others to improve. Structure is not as important as people. Enabling others to take risks and communicate invests them in the decision making process. Figure out what motivates people and encourage them accordingly. The process is very similar to how we assess and case manage offenders.

Messages Matter

If the messenger is not trusted then the message will not get far. There must be a clear and consistent message that is in alignment with organizational goals and values. It is important to use the language regularly; it helps to keep everyone on the same page. One site consistently sends out relevant research and information that is easily understandable and digestible to reinforce the importance of best practices. Another site recognized the value of holding mirror to its leadership and being prepared to address the image revealed. Organizational assessments can be an incredibly useful tool in understanding competencies and developmental needs. Another site discussed the necessity of giving clear direction. It's not enough to inspire a shared vision; people must understand what the vision means.

Concluding Thoughts

Change does not happen overnight. It takes open, multi directional communication built on mutual respect and understanding. Planning for change is important. However, leaders must also realize not everything can be planned. Anticipate that change will impact different people in different ways and be responsive. Be open to organizational assessments and use them as an opportunity to reflect and grow. Acknowledge endings and be clear about the new direction.

ⁱ Adapted from James M. Kouzes and Barry Z. Posner *The Leadership Challenge: How to get extraordinary things done in organizations.* John Wiley and Sons, 1990.