

Learning, Leading, Changing

Design Teams & Learning Circles: Agency- & Unit-level Interventions for Improving Organizational Climate & Culture (Webinar, November 2012)

What are these resources?

- Design Teams (DT) & Learning Circles (LC) are solution-focused interventions to improve agency climate/culture.
- A Comprehensive Organizational Health Assessment (COHA) provides information about an organization's workforce strengths and needs, and guides areas for intervention in DTs and LCs.
- COHA is a multi-method assessment: 300-item staff survey assessing individual, unit and organizational factors; individual/group interviews with all levels of staff; interviews with clients and community partners/providers.
- DTs include staff at all levels (managers, supervisors, caseworkers, case aides, resource staff); members self-select into DT and address agency-wide issues via developing and implementing action plans.
- DT roll-out includes: agency kick-off meeting, email inviting staff to participate; information sessions; COHA results meeting/retreat; ongoing DT monthly meetings to develop/implement action plan.
- LCs are led by supervisors and composed of unit members who collaborate to pursue new ways of addressing common issues affecting their team, the agency, and practice with clients.
- LC goal: improve outcomes by improving what/how things are accomplished; change occurs from the unit level up.
- LC roll-out: agency kick-off meeting; email to participating unit supervisors; LC facilitator training with coaches; unit-level LC introduction meetings; learning circles with coaches; periodically re-convene LC facilitators.

What are the critical findings?

- DTs result in increases in: job satisfaction, intent to stay, professional sharing and support, supervision, shared vision and professional orientation, and team cohesion; and decreases in vicarious trauma.
- Staff feel they are tackling important issues and making changes happen. They are interested in the process, feel more appreciated and see DTs as positive in the agency.
- LCs result in increased job satisfaction and staff feelings of empowerment; staff recognition that change can/does happen; staff feeling listened to and recognition that their expertise is recognized as important.
- LCs show that management trusts workers by empowering units to make decisions.
- DTs and LCs increase supervisors' accountability to staff, especially when there is a feedback loop between them.
- Must plan to invest at least two years in the process.
- If unable to engage in a COHA, find other ways of gathering workforce/organizational information (e.g., SurveyMonkey).

What are the implications for our work?

- DTs are opportunity to develop leaders and bring people from various units together to share information. Provide a safe forum to express open discontent and then focus attention on solutions.
- Champions drive projects forward by staying positive, keeping an open mind and being solution-focused.
- Staff are empowered when have a voice in decisions and work together towards common unit-level goals.
- Successes become the accelerator, so start with easier to achieve goals and build from those successes.
- Consistency in meetings and good notes about action planning will help keep momentum going.
- An outside facilitator can be used to keeps unit on track until unit is ready and has fully bought into the process.
- Need to effectively communicate that DTs and LCs are not "something more" but a tool to make things better.
- Sufficient resources (technology, budget, turnover, workload) are important for success.
- Goal of better outcomes for families and using best practice research elevated practice and ownership by all.
- Important to incorporate and have meaningful involvement of community partners.

