Design Teams

Introduction

Design Teams do just that, "Design" interventions to address the issues deemed most important to an agency. Members of Design Teams include representatives from all levels of the agency from case aides to executive level staff. Typical agency hierarchical structures are broken down within a Design Team so that everyone on the team contributes to the discussion and subsequent action planning to address common issues. Further, everyone on the Design Team takes ownership to implement the solutions developed by the Design Team.

Within the Western Workforce project, Design Teams start with information from a Comprehensive Organizational Health Assessment: this assessment gathers information from surveys and focus groups to develop a picture of the organization's health. Organizational health is composed of organization, unit, and individual factors and further broken down into 16 scales. The COHA provides a full picture of the strengths and challenges facing the agency to inform the Design Team's approach. Because the Design Team is composed of representatives of the agency, reliance on the COHA helps to ensure that all voices within the agency are heard and considered when developing an Action Plan. Otherwise, and this is reality, Design Team members, could push for attention to the issues that matter most to them individually, rather than those more relevant to the broader agency environment.

Based upon COHA results, the Design Team prioritizes goals related to agency issues, chooses strategies, implements those strategies, assesses results, and revises plans as appropriate. Jointly, the Design Team works together to implement their agency-specific workforce plan. These plans are evolving in nature, using a constant plan, act, reflect, adapt loop (known for this project as the PARA approach). Specific interventions may address a wide variety of issues identified by the COHA (e.g., recruitment, worker preparation, retention issues)

The steps of building a learning culture are inherent in this process. The focus is to take the issues plaguing the agency and develop innovative solutions. Here, the seeds of a learning culture take root through constant cultivation and nurturing.

Meeting Frequency

The Design Team meets at least every month for the project duration. Design Teams may decide to meet more frequently or less depending on their personal preferences.

Design Team Membership

Membership reflects all agency levels from the agency manager or director to case aides. As appropriate for the agency, these teams may also choose to invite community stakeholders and family representatives. Design Team membership varies in size depending upon the agency. For smaller agencies, (less than 50 staff), a size of 8-12 people is sufficient. For larger agencies (200 staff), membership may consist of 25 – 40 members, typically with attendance averaging about 15 – 20 members. Membership should include any persons deemed as significant stakeholders. Potential members include:

- Caseworkers
- Supervisors
- Executive staff
- Case aides
- Business office staff
- Human Resources staff
- University partners
- Family representatives
- Legal department representatives

Essentially, any staff person who has an interest or stake in the overall functioning of the agency could be included in the Design Team membership. Be careful that the committee doesn't become too large. If the demand for inclusion is too great, consider a lottery system for participation. Better to have too many people willing to serve on the Design Team than limiting participation and dampening enthusiasm for the concept.

Design Team members commit to the team for at least a one-year term. Yearly, members are offered the opportunity to renew their participation or rotate out of membership. New members often help to rejuvenate the Design Team and keep the process fresh and invigorated.

Design Team Timeline

(Note: The timeline presumes the process for a comprehensive organizational health assessment has already occurred).

Week 1: Invite all agency staff to participate in the Design Team. See the appendix for a sample invitation.

Week 2: Agency Kick-Off meeting to introduce the concept of Design Teams. Provide basic information on the concept and commitment expected of members. Sign up Design Team members.

Week 4: Hold a one-day planning meeting. During this meeting, review the organizational health assessment results and develop a preliminary action plan. Also, develop a plan for when and where meetings will be held. See sample annotated agenda in the appendix.

Week 6: Follow-up to initial meetings. Begin regular Design Team meetings. At each meeting, review the plan, assign tasks, discuss barriers, develop strategies for overcoming barriers, and most importantly, celebrate successes. See the appendix for a sample agenda.

Week 8 – 52: Conduct regular Design Team meetings at least once monthly.

Week 53: Hold another retreat to react to new information from an organizational health assessment.

Week 55: Begin the cycle anew.

Meeting Notes

During Design Team meetings, a note taker should take comprehensive notes to record the dialogue as well as agreed-upon tasks and activities. It is recommended that the notes be de-identified so individual comments are not recorded, but rather a summary of the conversation is provided. All notes should be distributed to the meeting members, posted to a central network file, and if appropriate, distributed more widely. Note taking helps to facilitate transparency and accountability by recording dialogue and all agreed upon actions.

Design Team Principles

➢ Create organizational change through solution-focused discussions and subsequent actions using a team approach for the benefit of the entire agency.

➢ Inspire a learning organization committed to improved practices and functioning.

➢ Connect interventions to the agency's mission, values, and practice model.

➢ Employ interventions based upon careful assessment of the current situation.

➢ Empower staff from all agency levels to improve their agency for the benefit of all agency members.

➢ Share tasks and activities among the Design Team membership to achieve Action Plan goals.

➢ Use strengths-focused interventions.

➢ Embody a culturally responsive approach.

➢ Use comprehensive, incremental interventions for long-term sustainability.

➢ Expect full, open, and unbiased participation that encourages communication by the team.