



Measuring The Difference: An Outcome Evaluation Resource for the Disability Sector

MODULE 6

Creating an Outcomes-Focused Organization

Prepared for

Alberta Council of Disability Services

by

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Module 6

Creating an Outcomes-Focused Organization

6.1 UNDERSTANDING ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE

Creating an outcome-focused organization requires changing the **organizational culture**. **Organizational culture** can be defined as the collection of shared values and norms in an organization that control the way people interact with each other and with external stakeholders. It influences people's beliefs and ideas about appropriate goals, practices, standards of behaviour and expectations.

A pattern of shared basic assumptions that the group learned as it solved its problems of external adaptation and internal integration, that has worked well enough to be considered valid and, therefore, to be taught to new members as the correct way you perceive, think, and feel in relation to those problems.

SOURCE: Schein, E. (2004)

Organizational culture manifests itself at three levels (Schein, 2004):

1. **In ways that can be easily seen**, felt and heard, for example, in the organization's facilities, offices, furnishings, visible awards, the way staff dress and how they visibly interact with others.
2. **In formal and informal statements**, for example, in the organization's mission statement, values, goals, slogans and beliefs that are expressed at a corporate and at the staff level.
3. **At the third and deepest level**, where tacit assumptions and unspoken rules are found. These elements are unseen and exist largely without the conscious knowledge of the organization's members; they are learned sub-consciously by new members over time.

Changing organizational culture, thus, requires making changes that can permeate all these levels. The deep, invisible nature of the third level is what makes organizational culture change difficult. Superficial changes in organizational mission and value statements, changes to a few systems and processes, and a number of top management presentations and communiqués to other staff are *not* sufficient to bring about true cultural change in the organization.

6.2 GUIDELINES TO CHANGE ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE

A number of organizational experts have written on how to create cultural change. The following guidelines are synthesized from some of the noted writers in the field, and the principles are applied here to creating an outcome-focused organization.

1. **Articulate a clear vision of the new direction, strategy and values.** Make outcome-focus and quality improvement a key part of the organization's strategic framework, making it clear that the organization is *committed* to it, *values* it and *expects* it from

- its members. These changes should be formally *endorsed* (e.g., by the organization's governors) and clearly *communicated* to the rest of the organization.
2. **Display commitment to change from the top levels of the organization.** The organization's top management team must lead the way in the change process. They must show that they *support* and *understand* the new direction and expectations. They must also change their own *behaviours* to consistently display the values and behaviours that will be expected from everyone else in the organization.
 3. **Make the organizational modifications needed to support the change.** Examine current policies, practices, programs and systems to see if they align with the new focus. If not, change them. This includes changes in service delivery, program monitoring and assessment systems, human resource practices (staff recruitment, training, performance management and reward systems), financial and resource allocation practices, annual and periodic reporting mechanisms and external and internal communications. New systems and tools may need to be developed to support the changes (e.g., an outcome-based data collection and analysis system). Change written organizational policies to reflect the changes in practices.
 4. **Involve all relevant key stakeholders in the change process.** Change can be a fearful process for many. It is important to make everyone understand the benefits of the change and to include their valuable expertise and perspectives in the change process.
 5. **Train and support staff in the new direction, job expectations, practices and tools.** New and current staff must understand how the new direction impacts on how they do their job, and they may need to develop new skills to do it. They will need training and support during the learning period. In its hiring practices, the organization may want to encourage job applicants who value continuous quality improvement (fit with the new culture).
 6. **Have a clear communication strategy and consistent messages about the organizational changes for internal and external stakeholders.** Internal stakeholders (staff, volunteers, clients) will need frequent and detailed communication (depending on the impact of the changes on their position) about the status of the change process. External stakeholders (funders, donors, sector organizations, community at large) should be informed as appropriate. Outcome-focused organizations are seen favourably by funders and donors; informing them of the changes may even motivate them to provide financial support to the process.
 7. **Develop a plan, identify and celebrate milestones.** Creating an outcome-focused organization will take time, resources and considerable effort. A well-conceptualized plan with achievable targets and timelines should be developed. Significant milestones should be announced when reached and celebrated to keep people motivated and engaged in the process.

The references provided in the Annotated Bibliography list other excellent sources of information for organizational change initiatives related to quality improvement and outcome measurement.

6.3 USEFUL ONLINE RESOURCES

Center for Civic Partnerships. (2007). *Organizational Learning*.

http://www.civicpartnerships.org/docs/tools_resources/Org%20Learning%209.07.htm.
Tips and links to information on learning organizations.

6.4 ATTACHMENTS

Macnamara, D. (2006). Becoming an Outcomes-Focused Organization. *Leadership Acumen*, 26. Banff Executive Leadership, Inc.

Plantz, M., Taylor Greenway, M., & Hendricks, M. (2006). Outcome Measurement: Showing Results in the Nonprofit Sector. United Way of America: Alexandria, VA.
http://nationalservicerresources.org/files/legacy/filemanager/download/ProgramMgmt/Outcome_Measurement_Showing_Results_Nonprofit_Sector.pdf

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- Hill, C., & Jones, G. (2008). *Strategic Management. An Integrated Approach*. Houghton Mifflin: Boston, MA.
- Kotter, J. (1996). *Leading Change*. Harvard Business School Press.
- Schein, E. (2004) *Organizational Culture and Leadership*, 3rd Ed. Jossey-Bass: San Francisco, CA.