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Improving System-level Outcomes through Shared Managerial Understanding

A Case Study of a Group Process Strategy

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ABSTRACT

In recent years, local government jurisdictions in the United States have faced economic recession combined with a loss of institutional knowledge as long-time managers and executives reach retirement age. Efforts to mitigate these challenges frequently result in changes in organizational structure and in policies that are not always well communicated throughout the organization, resulting in disconnected processes that hamper effectiveness and can cause further financial duress. This case study describes how a Public Health department used a change in revenue policy to uncover the larger system that its employees navigated individually, and how developing a shared understanding of organizational responsibilities and interdependencies improved outcomes. These discoveries resulted in the design and successful implementation of processes that would save the City millions of dollars. This case study explains the steps that were used to foster a group awareness of shared responsibilities among top- and mid-level managers, and how this awareness shaped the development of a sustainable set of “linking structures” – shared systems and processes that enhance collaboration and achievement of organizational objectives. Through this effort, the group progressed from an individually-focused worldview to a common understanding of collective roles and responsibilities, overcoming faulty assumptions about how the organization served its customers and what could be achieved collaboratively. This effort enabled the department to fundamentally change its business practices to the benefit of its employees, partners and clients, as well as its bottom line.