A Case Study of Organizational Change Strategies and Outcomes:

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A Case Study of Organizational Change Strategies and Outcomes: 
Initiation of a Field Services Division within the 
Vermont Agency of Human Services

A Dissertation Presented 
by 
Elizabeth Cheng Tolmie 
to 
The Faculty of the Graduate College 
of 
The University of Vermont

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements 
for the Degree of Doctor of Education 
Specializing in Educational Leadership and Policy Studies

May 2008
Accepted by the Faculty of the Graduate College, The University of Vermont, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education, specializing in Educational Leadership and Policy Studies.

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Abstract

The restructuring and reorganization of governmental organizations is a frequent occurrence in the human service sector. During the past decades, the literature has indicated that numerous states located throughout the nation have been reforming their human service delivery systems (Annie E. Casey Foundation; Frumkin, Imershein, Chackerian, & Martin, 1983; Polivka, Imershein, White & Stivers, 1981; Ragan, 2003; Ragan with Nathan, 2002; Rockefeller Institute for Government). In 2004, the Vermont Agency of Human Services (AHS) joined this trend and began a reorganization effort of its own. This dissertation examines one aspect of the larger restructuring effort: the creation of a Field Services Division (FSD) within AHS. The organization of the FSD included placement of key leadership positions, known as Field Services Directors in each of the 12 regions of Vermont. This new management structure was intended to provide AHS leadership at the local level, and assist with transformation of AHS’ human services delivery system towards a model of service integration. This study explores the perspectives of the policy executives and field directors who were charged with visioning and implementing human service reforms in Vermont.

The research employs a mixed-method, user-focused evaluative case study and survey approach (Patton, 2002; Russ-Eft & Preskill, 2001) to examine the organizational change strategies, processes, and perceived outcomes related to the FSD initiative. Findings indicate there have been successes and challenges associated with the initiation of a FSD within AHS. While field directors were designated as agents of change, data suggests that without further structural and system supports, service integration will not be easily achieved. Service coordination, consumer participation and development of community supports appear to offer the most promising practices in improving outcomes. This study also reveals that a local level of leadership offers promise in devising and implementing policy changes to improve human service delivery.

The study informs future evaluations about the opportunities, challenges and paradoxes in human service reform efforts. The project contributes to the literature regarding organizational change and human service integration and suggests areas for future research. In addition, the analysis provides a framework to assist AHS in understanding the limitations and possibilities associated with this organizational change effort. Finally, it provides descriptive research with which to support continued improvement in the delivery of human services in Vermont.

This dissertation research was supported by the Vermont Research Partnership; an endeavor which aims to study and improve the effectiveness of the collaborative, community-based initiatives of the Agency of Human Services, the Department of Education, the University of Vermont and the Vermont Association of Regional Partnerships.
Acknowledgments

There are many people who have contributed to my life’s journey and work as an adult learner. Without question, this body of research would not have been possible without the support and spirit of many key participants. These people include family members, work associates, research contributors, friends, and UVM colleagues.

First, is recognition of my family members. To my grandmother, Eudora Cleora Davis, who assisted in my raising while my mother pursued a doctorate in psychology. To my mother, Barbara Davis (Sisco) Cheng, who passed away in February 2001 - she would be proud of my efforts to obtain a doctorate of my own. My step-father, Guy Cheng, “Pop” as we called him, has been a quiet and enduring influence since his death in December 1998. His faith and love for my mother transcended his love for my family. Virginia Davis Cochran, my aunt, who passed away in February 2005 was a cheerleader and supporter until her death. To my eldest brother, Burton R. Sisco, for his encouragement to pursue a doctorate and to persevere during the years of academic rigor. To my middle brother, David B. Sisco, who cared for my dog, “A.E.”, during the first years of coursework. Similarly, to David’s then wife, Margie W. Sisco, for her part in tending to my dog every Thursday night while I was in class. Finally, a note of thanks to my youngest brother, Tod K. Sisco, for his affable attitude and unwavering confidence in my ability to complete this body of work. And last, but certainly not least, to my dear husband since September 2006, Bernard R. Tolmie, for his complete faith and unwavering support through the last two years of this process.
Second, beyond direct family relations are the state government work allies and supporters that are too numerous to mention by name. Of particular note, however, is Lawrence Crist who championed my efforts to attend graduate school. In addition, is the Commissioner of Health, Sharon Moffatt, and Deputy Commissioner, Christine Finley. This work would not have been possible without all of their support.

Recognition is also offered to all of the research contributors from the Vermont Agency of Human Services. This study about organizational change would not have been possible without the unending and complete support of the Deputy Commissioner for Field Services, Scott Johnson. Scott’s enthusiasm to reflectively evaluate this section of state government is commendable. Many Vermonters’ lives have been improved because of his role in public service. I also wish to thank Steve Gold, retired Deputy Secretary of the Agency of Human Services who was a key player in getting this project off the ground. Similarly, I am deeply appreciative of AHS Secretary, Cynthia Lasure’s confidence and consultation during the lifetime of this research. Her commitment to the improvement of human service delivery in Vermont is notable. A sincere thank you is given to all of the AHS Field Directors who welcomed my presence and interest in talking with them about their role in transforming Vermont’s human service delivery system. It has been an honor and privilege to be in the company of such dynamic leaders.

Third, acknowledgement needs to be offered to my dear friends who know who they are and where I’ve been – e.g., absent from their biking, hiking and skiing adventures for the past four years. Specific mention and thanks is given to my girlfriend, Susan Kervan, who has been a staunch advocate of the various changes in my life that have occurred during my pursuit of this degree.
Fourth, a special thank you to the family of University of Vermont colleagues and contributors who have been a godsend to me during this phase of my life. Linda and Ken Fishell, who spurred me to apply to the doctoral program. “Fishell” has been a mentor for many years – thank you. H. “Bud” Meyers, with your quick intellect and unassuming presence, I think you are amazing. Thank you for your time in helping me to make sense of this research. Katie Shepherd, is an inspiration to the adult learner. What a pleasure it has been to be associated with you and your work over the past several years. To office supporters, Laurie Eddy and Elisa Ziglar. I cannot thank you enough for keeping me on track during my tenure as a both a student and a research fellow. Zelda Zeleski, a member of my 2004 cohort, has been an inspiration and raison d’etre for the hours spent in pursuit of an advanced degree. Her friendship is truly one of the greatest gifts of this endeavor.

Last, but in no way least, my deepest gratitude goes to my advisor, Susan Brody Hasazi, who has been a light in my life and a shining star at a most opportune time. Her faith in my creative abilities and organizational skills has made the past several years richer, more meaningful and certainly, more fun. Susan’s spirit is immeasurable and her contributions vast. Thank you for allowing me the privilege to travel with you during this journey.

A special note of thanks goes to the Vermont Research Partnership (VRP) at UVM, which Dr. Hasazi manages and for which I have acted as coordinator in my role as a research fellow since the fall of 2006. The support of the VRP has allowed me to work in collaboration with many of Vermont’s most committed researchers and public servants during the past two years. For the VRP’s support of this endeavor, I am forever grateful.
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CHAPTER I. INTRODUCTION

Introduction

This dissertation is a study of the strategies, processes and outcomes associated with an organizational change effort in state government. Data included in the research has been gathered from the perspectives of the policy executives and recently created “field directors” who have been involved with formulating and implementing a change effort to reform Vermont’s human service delivery system. Creation of field director positions within Vermont’s Agency of Human Services (AHS) established local leadership in the State’s 12 regions. The new management structure was established, in part, to assist with transformation of AHS’ human service delivery system towards a model of service integration. This study reveals opportunities, challenges and paradoxes in Vermont’s human service reform efforts.

The First Chapter provides introductory information about the study. General consideration of reform efforts in the delivery of human services is discussed first; including service integration as a goal of reform initiatives. Next, the need, justification, and purpose for completing research about this change process in Vermont are offered. Organizational change in human services nationally provides a backdrop for consideration of the context for change in Vermont. Descriptive information about the initiation of a Field Services Division within AHS provides an understanding of the background and development of field director positions in AHS’ organizational structure. Furthermore, it grounds the research in providing information about the Agency goals for restructuring and what it hoped to gain from introducing a new management structure in the overall design of the organization. The research statement and guiding questions
reveals the framework which was utilized during the course of this project. Limitations of the research are considered before concluding the chapter with a discussion of the overall organization of this dissertation.

Background

The restructuring and reorganization of governmental organizations is a frequent occurrence in the human service sector (Annie E. Casey Foundation [Casey]; Rockefeller Institute for Government [Rockefeller]). During the last several decades, the literature indicates that numerous states located throughout the country have been reforming their human service delivery systems (Casey; Frumkin, Imershein, Chackerian, & Martin, 1983; Polivka, Imershein, White & Stivers, 1981; Ragan, 2003; Ragan with Nathan, 2002; Rockefeller, Government, n.d./2007, Workforce, n.d./2007). For instance, significant efforts to restructure human services have occurred in the states of Oregon, Florida, Ohio, Colorado, South Carolina and California, among others. To demonstrate the proliferation of this practice, the Annie E. Casey Foundation has recently created a specific strategic planning unit which is devoted to assisting states with the transformation of human service delivery systems. Their website states, “Casey Strategic Consulting Group combines private sector management consulting strategies with the Foundation’s system reform expertise to help improve outcomes for children and families by transforming the management and accountability structure, operations, and front-line practice of public agencies with whom we work” (Casey). Systems level reform is deemed prudent in an environment of declining resources and an antiquated “siloeed” response to the delivery of human services. One of the primary tenants of system reform
is service integration (Casey; Frumkin, 1978; Frumkin et al., 1983; Hassett & Austin, 1997; Ragan, 2003; Rockefeller, Government, n.d./2007).

According to Austin (1997), however, there is no single definition of service integration. It is a term that means different things to different people. Austin states:

For some, it means doing a better job of coordinating across human service programs and organizations. For others, it involves the physical co-location of services networked together. For still others, service integration refers to the fundamental restructuring of human service organizations to improve service delivery at the neighborhood, community, county, and regional levels.

(p. 1)

Further, Hassett and Austin (1997) argue “…..service integration cannot be defined by a particular service model or outcome, but instead should be conceived as an ongoing reform process” (p. 9). With no single operating definition with which to approach reform, one can presume that a reorganization effort in human services is a challenging process.

Need

The State of Vermont has not been immune to the challenges associated with reorganizing the delivery of human services. Nearly 30 years ago, state leaders recognized that the continual “siloing” of services created inefficiencies and did not necessarily produce improved outcomes for the population it sought to serve (C. Mitchell, personal communication, April 6, 2007). Political winds, however, did not support restructuring until the early 2000s when there was a consensus that changes in the
delivery of human services were necessary to improve the outcomes for Vermonters (Kitchel, 2003).

This dissertation outlines a research study of an initiative that was one part of the larger restructuring effort in 2004 – the initiation of a Field Services Division (FSD) within AHS. The organization of the FSD included placement of key leadership positions, known as Field Services Directors and referred to as Field Directors throughout the course of this paper, in each of the 12 regions of Vermont. This new management structure was intended to provide AHS leadership at the local level and assist with transformation of AHS’ human services delivery system towards a model of service integration. This new division was one segment, albeit a significant piece, of a larger restructuring project undertaken by the Agency to “reform” the delivery of human services in Vermont (Kitchel, 2003; AHS, 2004, January, February; Smith, 2005, January, February). Throughout this dissertation the terms reform and transformation are used interchangeably. These terms are intended to connote movement between two states: from an initial, pre-existing condition in which the delivery of human services were provided in a siloed, program-by-program manner; to a second, changed or altered state whereby services were delivered in an integrated fashion with multiple areas of AHS working together to better support and meet the needs of consumers.

Justification

With a population of just over 600,000 people (United States Census Bureau), Vermont provides an ideal context for studying a state government restructuring effort and for providing a descriptive evaluation of the role leadership has played in the endeavor. During the proposal stage of this research, few empirical studies were found
which included the perspectives of leaders who had been charged with the implementation of a transformation effort within human services. This void in the research provided justification for this study and is further supported by Burke (2002), when he states “…. [the] reason for the practice emphasis is the fact that theory and research about leading organization change is rather sparse” (p. 272).

This dissertation explores the perspectives about the AHS organizational change, or human service reform effort, from three different perspectives. The study primarily consists of the viewpoints shared by the field directors who have been charged with implementation of human service transformation at the local or regional level. Secondary consideration is offered via the policy executives who were responsible for visioning, developing and/or implementing the change process. Third, while data collected was minimal, a brief review of consumer perspectives adds important contextual information with which to understand the field directors’ roles and their work in local communities. Finally, all three perspectives included in this study inform future evaluations about the opportunities, challenges and paradoxes associated with human service reform efforts.

Purpose

The purpose of this study is four-fold: 1) to describe the organizational change process by including the perspectives of the leaders who envisioned and have been charged with implementing human service reform efforts in Vermont; 2) to inform future evaluations related to reform in the delivery of human services; 3) to assist in identifying gaps in the literature regarding organizational change and human service integration; and 4) to provide suggestions for future research about organizational change and service integration in human services. In addition, the analysis provides a framework to assist
AHS in understanding the limitations and possibilities associated with this organizational change effort. Finally, it provides descriptive research with which to support continued improvement in the delivery of human services in Vermont.

Context

National Context – Organizational Change in Human Services

Proehl (2001) articulates the need for organizational change in state bureaucracies and presents a model of organizational change tailored to human service organizations (p. xiii). Proehl refers to David Osborne’s work as co-author of *Reinventing Government* where he suggests that “public agencies must replace large, centralized, command-and-control bureaucracies with a very different model: decentralized, entrepreneurial organizations that are driven by competition and accountable to customers for the result they deliver” (p. x). The literature demonstrates that restructuring in human service organizations at the State level occurs with great frequency (Frumkin et al., 1983; Polivka et al., 1981; Sellers, 2002; Weiss, 1998). Various forms of evaluations of human service reform efforts have been conducted in Florida (Polivka et al.), Oregon (Sellers), Arizona (Connell, Kubilich, Schorr, & Weiss, 1995), Colorado (Mingus, 1999), and Ohio (Burke, 2002). In addition, many other states located throughout the nation have reported initiatives to restructure their human service systems.

Vermont Context – Organizational Change within State Government and Vermont’s Agency of Human Services

In Vermont, on May 29, 2003, the Legislature passed Act 45 calling for the restructuring of Vermont’s AHS. This legislative action authorized the Secretary of Human Services to restructure the agency based on specific goals, principles and
procedural requirements. Several of the Act’s guiding principles were relevant to this dissertation’s study of organizational change. They include:

- The agency should be designed to support a holistic approach to serving individuals and families and to ensure the coordination of services when multiple interrelated needs exist.
- Maximum communication and collaborative planning among different specific service providers should occur when more than one service is being provided.
- To the extent possible and when appropriate, individuals and families should be able to have their needs identified in a single, uniform process, and have planning occur through one service representative or within a single team.
- Accountability should be clearly defined.
- Ongoing and broad public input should be solicited to result in a system design that is most effective and responsive. (AHS, Restructuring, n.d./2007)

Following passage of the May 2003 legislation, AHS leadership engaged key stakeholders to identify changes needed in the organizational structure of the agency and to formulate a detailed plan for restructuring. Some of the strategies employed during this stage of the process included interviews with focus groups, solicitation of input from consumers and staff, and meetings with advisory groups. The findings from these stakeholder group interactions were used to develop and propose recommendations for reorganization. The inquiry resulted in two seminal reports which outlined the final plans for restructuring: a January 2004 report authored by the then Secretary of AHS (AHS,
2004, January) and a February 2004 (AHS, 2004, February) report to the Legislative
Oversight Committee.

Initiation of the AHS Field Services Division

The Agency of Human Services Reorganization January Report (AHS, 2004, January) first mentions the need for a local coordinating body. The report states:

Today there is no one person at the local level charged with the responsibility or authority to make sure the full array of possible services is coordinated and that resources and programs are managed in the most effective way. Successful integration at the local level - creating an agency in the field that mirrors the agency at the central office - achieves a number of goals: community-based prevention, respectful and accessible services, better collaboration with community partners, better coordination, creative use of resources to fill gaps in services and support transitions and greater accountability. (p. 10)

Further, the January report outlined 10 broad themes which were identified for restructuring. These include:

1. Respectful service, valuing the assets and strengths of clients
2. Access to services
3. [Focus on] prevention
4. Effective service coordination
5. Flexible funding to address gaps in services
6. Providing services before a crisis
7. Collaboration with key partners
8. People are supported through transition
9. Continuous improvement and accountability

10. Information systems – communication. (pp. 11-18)

Subsequent to January’s analysis, AHS’ February 2004 report to the Legislative Oversight Committee on Human Services Reorganization detailed specific recommendations for implementation of the plans to restructure the Agency. A key finding outlined in that report called for creation of a new organizational structure – the initiation and implementation of Field Service Directors in each of the 12 regions of the State. The structure aimed “to unify human services and to build a system focused on excellent customer service, the holistic needs of individual and families, strength-based relationships, and improving results for Vermonters” (AHS, Field, n.d./2007). The February report (AHS, 2004, February) states:

- A “Field Service Director” in each district will manage virtually all district staff, manage a consolidated district budget including flexible funds, and oversee a global district budget that includes all agency expenditures on grants and contracts. Each local services contract with a department will be co-signed by the department's commissioner and by the local Field Service Director and will spell out the division of authority. There will be clear contractual understandings about responsibilities. Establishment of this new position in each district will transform our service culture, ensuring that:
  - individuals and families are respected and their strengths are valued,
  - disputes among providers and departments are efficiently resolved,
  - effective interventions occur before crises hit,
collaboration with partners is meaningful and productive,

prevention opportunities are seized,

the district team, regional partnership and community partners are jointly accountable for driving positive social trends. (p. i)

Finally, a higher level of self-sufficiency among Vermonters was outlined as a primary reason for the urgency of this change in organizational structure (AHS, 2004, February, p. ii). The principle of change called for in the report stated, “performance evaluation and overall success of the reorganization project should be based on measurable indicators, on trends and ultimately on realization of the statutory outcomes itemized in 3 V.S.A. §3026(a)” (p. ii). AHS leadership also advocated for continued research into the outcomes associated with the restructuring project. In keeping with these objectives, this research project explored the current strategies and outcomes associated with the Field Service Director positions that are collectively known as the Field Services Division (FSD).

The FSD, originally located as a division within the Department for Children and Families, was relocated in July 2006. Since this time, the division’s role was designated as having an oversight of human service delivery system functions across all AHS departments, with a reporting relationship to the Secretary’s Office (C. LaWare, personal communication, July 2007). This change in reporting relationships was intended to confer additional authority to the Field Service Directors located in each region of the State.

The Field Services Division Today

At the time of this study, the organizational structure of the FSD included 12 field directors in 12 regions of the State, 1 assistant field director in the AHS Burlington
district office, a deputy commissioner, and several administrative and planning staff.

According to the Field Services Division website (AHS, *Field*, n.d./2007), field service directors are responsible for carrying out the following responsibilities:

AHS Field Directors serve as direct representatives of the AHS Secretary’s Office within the districts to:

- Achieve better outcomes for Vermonters by transforming the delivery of human services through dramatically changing the structure, leadership and authority of human services districts;
- Achieve key results established by the Agency Secretary, promote high profile issues identified by Commissioners, and provide leadership around outcomes identified by the District Leadership Team, Regional Partnerships and Advisory Councils;
- Hold team members and local providers accountable to address client outcomes and prevention;
- Deliver coordinated services and find creative, flexible and efficient solutions for cross agency cases and operations;
- Manage flexible funds to address unmet needs of Vermonters;
- Ensure that all individuals and families readily access needed services by creating an effective system for navigation of services;
- Ensure that all individuals and families involved with multiple programs have service coordination teams and lead service coordinators;
- Respond responsibly and effectively to inquiries, concerns and issues raised by legislators, stakeholders and other community members
regarding the needs of specific individuals and families or the human services system; and

• Ensure the overall effectiveness, identity and unified organizational culture of human services in the region, including AHS district operations and contracted services.

Research Statement and Guiding Questions

This mixed-method, but primarily qualitative research project, employed a user-focused evaluative case study and survey approach (Patton, 2002; Russ-Eft & Preskill, 2001; Weiss, 1998) to describe the recently created FSD within AHS. The evaluation examined the organizational change strategies and perceived outcomes that have been associated with the FSD initiative. In collaboration with AHS, this project intended to explore the standards that the division was committed to obtain, ascertain what outcomes were being achieved, continue with development of indicators for measuring the change efforts’ success, and address barriers to the implementation of this organizational structure (C. LaWare, S. Johnson, personal communication, April 2007). The study provided a framework to assist AHS in understanding the limitations and possibilities associated with this organizational change effort. It also provided descriptive research with which to support continued improvement in the delivery of human services in Vermont.

Outside of Vermont, the project aimed to contribute to the literature regarding organizational change and human service integration. As mentioned previously, the research supported Burke’s (2002) view that “a second reason for the practice emphasis [needed in the research] is the fact that theory and research about leading organization
change is rather sparse” (p. 272). The project used the Field Service Director positions as the primary unit of analysis to gain descriptive data about their perceptions as leaders of the AHS change effort. Burke further posits that studies about change leaders are needed to test the accuracy of his hypothesis that leaders must possess self-awareness and high emotional intelligence in order to be effective change leaders (p. 289). The data indicated that while there was a level of self-awareness in reports about the field directors’ work; emotional intelligence was not a variable which was self-identified during the course of the research. Nevertheless, descriptive information was collected about the role of leadership in adopting organizational change strategies to support human service reform and service integration. These were the questions the research set out to explore:

1. In implementing the Field Services Division, what successes and challenges have emerged?
2. In what ways has the Field Services Division contributed to service integration in Vermont?
3. How does the Field Services Division staff describe the factors (e.g., practices, outcome measures, policies, delivery systems) that contribute to effective outcomes for individuals, children and families in Vermont?
4. What have been the roles and strategies of leadership involved in the organizational change effort?
5. In what ways has the Field Services Division impacted the Agency of Human Services reorganization and vice versa?
6. What are the perspectives of consumers regarding the organizational structure and outcomes related to the advent of Field Services Directors in local communities?

Findings from the data collected and analyzed are used to answer the research questions, and are discussed in the Findings Chapter of this dissertation.

Limitations

There are several limitations associated with this research that focus on circumstance, intent, participants, length of tenure, setting and the “window of opportunity” used to collect the data. One limitation has to do with the fact that the circumstance of interviews with Field Directors coincided with Vermont Secretary of Administration announcements about pending reductions in AHS staff. While these reports indicated a reduction in force would be accomplished through attrition and retirements of existing classified positions, it is not known what effect this knowledge may have had on research participant responses. In a few instances, interview data suggested that field directors were uncertain as to whether their positions would be in jeopardy and subject to elimination. As a result, data gathered may have been influenced by recent notification about impending budgetary and staff reductions.

A second limitation concerned the intent of this study. The dissertation is a formative, not a summative evaluation. This analysis is neither an affirmation nor refutation of the need for a local management structure within Vermont’s AHS. Rather, the research provided descriptive information related to perceived opportunities, challenges and paradoxes associated with the FSD’s efforts to contribute to AHS reform
and transformation towards a model of service integration. The study captured data at a single point in time and relied on the integrity of the participants who were interviewed.

Another limitation of this dissertation is that data collected and analyzed included the perspectives of Agency local management and AHS executive leadership. Excluded were the views of AHS staff, local communities and other stakeholders who may have been impacted by the initiation of an FSD within AHS. It is not known what perspectives these various groups of participants would have offered. As such, the absence of information from these different viewpoints presents a limitation to this study.

In addition, during the data collection phase of this project, a survey invitation was sent to departmental district office management staff who worked in each of the AHS local district office locations. The survey to department district managers was intended to capture their perspectives about AHS reform efforts. Responses from this survey segment have been excluded from this dissertation because analysis of this data was outside of the dissertation’s design. Results relative to the perspectives of AHS departmental district leadership, however, will be reported at a later date. In the meantime, the void of this data posed a limitation to what was learned in this study.

Another limitation of this research concerned the relatively brief tenure of the FSD initiative. At the time of this study, the new management structure had been in existence for approximately three years. Given the timeframe associated with initiation and implementation of the field services division, it is precipitous to draw long-term conclusions from this work. The inability to illicit conclusions of a longer-term nature is a limitation of this research.
Still another limitation of this dissertation is recognition that the results of this study focused on a particular setting, the FSD’s field director regional offices and responsibilities within the AHS in Vermont. According to Patton (2002), “formative evaluations aim at forming (shaping) the thing being studied. No attempt is made in a formative evaluation to generalize findings beyond the setting in which the evaluation takes place….Findings are context specific” (p. 220). Whereas, this research may help to inform future evaluations which are conducted in relation to human service reform in other areas of the nation, the findings are not supported outside of Vermont and the particular context found operating within AHS at the time of this study.

A final limitation of this dissertation is the timeframe of consideration or “window of opportunity” associated with the research. The study began in January 2007 and concluded in March 2008. Interviews were primarily conducted during the month of November 2007. It is unclear what impact the actual timing of the interviews with field directors, policy executives and consumer groups had on the data that was collected. A limitation of this study, therefore, is that data collected represents only one, single point in time. Given this circumstance, the findings as reported, may have varied if the data had been captured at a different moment in time.

Organization of Dissertation

The organization of this dissertation includes the following chapters: 1) Introduction; 2) Literature Review; 3) Methodology; 4) Findings; 5) Summary. This Introductory Chapter, which provides background and contextual information relative to the study, is followed by a review of the literature. Several bodies of literature were considered in advance of the research including: organizational change; service
integration; and leadership and are detailed in Chapter Two. Chapter Three discusses the research methodology used to conduct the study. Findings from the three data collection segments are contained in Chapter Four. This Chapter is divided into six sections, which correspond to the six overarching research questions reviewed previously. Finally, Chapter Five summarizes the study and offers suggestions for future research and policy development. The dissertation provides descriptive research with which to support continued improvement in the delivery of human services in Vermont.
CHAPTER II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

There is a plethora of literature related to organizational change and the restructuring of government entities. However, specific empirical studies which include the perspectives of the leaders involved with implementing human service reform efforts are scant. With the exception of one study which considered the perspectives of directors of county public social service agencies who were charged with implementing changes related to welfare reform in the San Francisco Bay area, no other scientific research studies were found (Carnochan & Austin, 2001).

The focus of this chapter frames the dissertation’s literature review using a selection of several authors who address three broad areas of organizational dynamics: organizational change; service integration; and leadership. The first content area explored in the literature includes an investigation of organizational change frameworks. Next, a review of literature related to service integration yields an indication that no single, uniform definition is available. The third field of literature reviewed explores the topic of leadership and focuses on the works of several authors who consider leadership’s role in navigating organizational change.

Organizational Change

Literature related to organizational change provides contextual information with which to study the initiation of a Field Services Division (FSD) within Vermont’s Agency of Human Services (AHS). There is an immense amount of literature related to the topic of organizational change. To focus the dissertation’s analysis, several sub-topical areas of literature were considered. These include works about: theoretical
models of change; organizational change in human services; outcome measurement; learning organizations; and Carol Weiss’ theory of change. Several authors from each of these areas have been selected. By no means are these works intended to be exhaustive or all-inclusive.

*Theoretical Models of Change*

Burke (2002) in his book, *Organization Change, Theory and Practice*, provides a useful framework for understanding change within organizations. He outlines a vast array of organization change theories and models that are useful when completing analyses of organizational change projects. For purposes of this dissertation, I have used the work of Kurt Lewin as described by Burke, Hatch (1997), and Hatch with Cunliffe (2006), with additional insights added from Schein’s (2004) adaptation of Lewin’s work relative to organization culture. Subsequent lenses will be developed using the perspectives of DuFour (2004), and Senge (1990) on the learning organization. Finally, Weiss’ (1998) work in evaluation and the “theory of change” has been used to articulate a method of inquiry for the dissertation.

According to Burke (2002), there is a paradox associated with planned organizational change. He notes that while one envisions change as something that happens in a linear, step-by-step fashion, this is anything but the case. “The implementation process is messy: Things don’t proceed exactly as planned….In short, unanticipated consequences occur” (p. 2). Burke advocates that an organization change theory helps to break down the pieces of the complexity involved with change efforts.

Furthermore, Burke suggests that Lewin’s model is useful when completing analyses of change at the group, or larger-system level (p. 106). Because the subject of
change for this study was a large bureaucratic organization and involved data collection between and within different groups of staff and consumers, this perspective assisted with “unpacking” the various components of the AHS reorganization change initiative.

Lewin’s work includes viewing change from a phased perspective whereby phase one is termed “unfreezing”. Burke states, “Creating a sense of urgency about the need for change,…..that the system must be “shaken up”…..and must be “thawed” from its present way of doing things so that in a new, more malleable, perhaps even vulnerable state or condition, the system is accessible and amenable to change interventions” (pp. 106-7). Hatch (1997) refers to this phase of Lewin’s work as “unfreezing unbalances the equilibrium that sustains organizational stability…..destabilizing present behavioral patterns overcomes resistance to change” (pp. 309-10).

Phase two of Lewin’s model is “movement”. This phase supports moving the organization to a new desired state of operation. Hatch (1997) refers to this phase as one that involves influencing the direction of change in the now destabilized system. She states:

Strategies for influencing the direction of change during movement include training new behavioral patterns, altering reporting relationships and reward systems, and introducing different styles of management (e.g., replacing an authoritarian with a participative management style). (p. 310)

Lewin’s third phase of change, “refreeze”, is referred to by Hatch (1997) as one in which “movement continues until a new balance between driving and restraining forces is achieved by refreezing…. [which] occurs when new behavioral patterns are institutionalized” (p. 310). Using the stages of change in the study supported
“unpacking” the degree to which organizational change had occurred within Vermont’s AHS, FSD.

Burke (2002) posits that if the organization change research is aimed towards evaluation and if the organization’s members will be the primary users of the information, “then from the outset, these organizational members need to be involved” (p. 125). AHS policy executives and field directors were included in the formulation and design of this research. Burke also talks about the contributions of Schein (2004), who moved to expand Lewin’s three phases and calls them stages to differentiate the non-linear nature associated with organization change (pp. 151-2). Within the stages of change, Schein advocates for a need “to look at the other side of the leadership coin – [as to] how leaders create culture and how culture defines and creates leaders” (p. xi). It was interesting to discover that the extent to which a cultural change had occurred in AHS could not be discerned from the study. Yet, Schein’s framework offers much promise for recommendations related to continued organizational change within AHS and is discussed in the Literature Review and Summary Chapters of this dissertation.

Organizational Change in Human Services

Several other bodies of work assisted with understanding the change involved with the AHS restructuring and initiation of Field Service Directors in Vermont. Bargal and Schmid (1992) condense a series of studies relative to change in human services. They support evaluation as a method of assessing the effectiveness of implemented changes in human service organizations. Their work calls for changes in human services to come from the “bottom-up” rather than “top-down”: 
This approach requires more delegation of authority, responsibility, empowerment, and partnership. We support the idea that introducing and implementing changes in these organization must pass through several stages, including reeducating leaders and followers as well as changing their attitudes and behavior. A multi-stage approach fosters a climate conducive to organizational development – which, in its essence, is based on reeducation of norms and values. (p. 7)

Proehl (2001) also develops a useful framework for analyzing change in human services. Her method recognizes the contributions required of leadership to implement significant change in human service organizations. Several of her tenets assisted with completion of the evaluation of this project within Vermont. These included: using Lewin’s model as a systems approach to evaluating change; providing a distinction between leadership and management, and the key attributes associated with both of these roles; and lastly, suggesting recommendations based on study findings to support continued movement in AHS’ change initiative. Before moving to the literature about learning organizations, it is important to consider AHS’ interest in research findings which can demonstrate an improvement in the outcomes for Vermonters. The development of performance management initiatives to instill accountability in the public sector is fraught with challenges, which will be discussed in the next section about the measurement of outcomes in government.

Outcome Measurement

Vermont’s AHS has been working to develop performance and outcome measures for some time. Under AHS Secretary Cornelius Hogan’s leadership, he and David
Murphey, a Senior Planning Analyst with the Agency, worked towards developing outcome measures as a method of assessing program effectiveness. Their work is encapsulated in several publications, namely: *Vermont Communities Count – Using Results to Strengthen Services for Families and Children* (Hogan, 1999); and *Reframing Responsibility for Well-Being – Outcomes* (Hogan & Murphey, 2002). They built measures based upon Schorr’s (1997) work in advocating for a common purpose with which to drive community change. Hogan used this approach in garnering support for improving the outcomes for Vermonters. While the outcome measures are still being utilized today, the focus has shifted to an emphasis on results and a demonstration that improvements have been made to the lives of Vermonters (S. Johnson, personal communication, May 2007).

Most recent efforts to instill measures of performance within AHS have used Friedman’s (2005) work in *Results Based Accountability*. At the time of this study, AHS reported it was working internally to develop a timeline for completing measures based upon his work. In many respects, the emphasis of leadership to produce measurable outcomes parallels the total quality management (TQM) and performance management efforts of the past several decades. Literature related to this field of inquiry was thought to be of help in considering outcomes that may or may not have been revealed during the course of this study.

During the past few decades, overall indicators demonstrate there has been an increased emphasis on attempts to instill a level of accountability in government (Radin, 1998, 2006; Scott, 1998). The public is interested in knowing whether or not governmental programs are effective at the federal, state and local levels. In 1993, the
federal government enacted the Government Performance and Results Act (GPRA), a generally vague and abstract piece of legislation that intended to meet this objective (Radin). In subsequent years, states throughout the country have followed suit and moved to initiate performance based measurement systems on their own (Forsythe, 2001).

For instance, Harrison & Shirom (1999) speak to the introduction of “radical innovations” (e.g., performance management efforts) in organizations. They talk about the nature of quality improvement efforts as disruptive to organizational functioning. Many times, they argue, the TQM initiatives fail because they lack adequate cultural and structural changes in the organization (p. 60). Before leaving this body of literature, I provide a general overview of several other authors who have contributed to the subject.

Heckman, Heinrich, and Smith (1997) talk about performance management in terms of government’s attempts to institute performance measures founded upon a business model structure that assumes that government bureaucracies are inefficient. Furthermore, they note that “…performance-standards systems attempt to bring public-sector agencies the type of discipline that markets bring to firms” (p. 389). They also suggest that there is little known about the effectiveness of such systems. Given this analysis, it appears that the “jury is still out” on the actual utility of these measures.

Radin (1998) reviews the GPRA of 1993 in light of its intent to develop performance standards in the federal government. She argues that the Act assumes that data is readily available for use in assessments of performance, whereas in reality, this is not necessarily true. Radin suggests, “Even strong advocates of GPRA are concerned that this approach will turn the effort into a mechanistic assessment that does not
contribute to long-term or substantive change within agencies” (p. 554). She again brings into question the applicability and utility of such assessments.

Forsythe (2001) provides cases studies of success and failure in organizations’ attempts to use performance management systems in government. He states, “The question in the title is intended to remind the reader that the efficacy of performance management in U.S. government is a question for debate and not a settled issue” (ERIC abstract). Here again is another example where it is unclear whether or not performance management systems in government are effective.

As outlined, the literature suggests that the actual utility of outcome measures and performance management systems is not a settled issue. Radin’s (2006) most recent work confirms that there is a continued focus on development of outcome measures in organizations. While she argues this emphasis has possibilities, Radin simultaneously suggests the need for caution. She states:

While the emphasis on outcomes is appealing, it is difficult to put into operation. This is particularly true in the public sector, where the complexity of public action frequently involves a range of actors with different agendas and conflicting values operating within a fragmented decision process. And the decisions that emerge from the public sector do not always create a situation that makes it possible to determine what program outcomes are anticipated. Yet performance measurement efforts set up requirements in which programs and policies are expected to report their progress in terms of specific outcome assessments. (p. 2)
Learning Organizations

Another important consideration for this study was the influence that the literature on learning organizations had in suggesting ideas for continued development of the change project within AHS. The ability of AHS to continue movement towards an orientation of a learning organization would, I proposed, support the change effort. This stance would have also assisted with changing the organization’s culture from a discrepancy model (Stone, 2002) to a growth oriented model of operation. This study did not necessarily reveal the degree to which this type of transformation had occurred within the organization. Yet, several authors speak to the effectiveness of a learning environment within organizations (DuFour, 2004; Senge, 1990).

DuFour (2004) has written extensively on the development of professional learning communities within educational environments. He advocates that teachers focus on learning rather than teaching, work collaboratively, and be accountable for the results (p. 6). In relating this concept to AHS, improved coordination and collaboration would, in theory, assist with moving the organization from a “siloed” to a more integrated model of service delivery. A goal of service integration was one of the key objectives called for by the reorganization reports (AHS, 2004, January, February).

Senge (1990) is credited with describing the benefits of a learning organization in for-profit environments. He posits, “…the basic meaning of a ‘learning organization’ – an organization that is continually expanding its capacity to create its future…. ‘adaptive learning’ must be joined by ‘generative learning’, learning that enhances our capacity to create” (p. 14). Senge’s principles offered a useful framework for analyzing the extent to
which AHS’ FSD was effective at creating a learning environment within the local regions of the State.

Weiss’ Theory of Change

A final frame of literature that was considered during this study is that of Carol H. Weiss (1998) and her definition of a good “theory of change”. She identifies three attributes that should be agreed upon and revisited throughout the implementation and evaluation of an initiative:

• It should be *plausible*. Do evidence and common sense suggest that the activities, if implemented, will lead to desired outcomes?
• It should be *doable*. Will the economic, technical, political, institutional, and human resources be available to carry out the initiative?
• It should be *testable*. Is the theory of change specific and complete enough for an evaluator to track its progress in credible and useful ways? (p. 98)

This study intended to develop a methodology in which these questions could be considered by AHS leadership. Furthermore, the study hoped to provide a framework to assist AHS in understanding the limitations and possibilities associated with this organizational change effort. Finally, it explored the extent to which the change initiative supported transformation of AHS’ human services delivery system towards a model of service integration. A brief review of the literature on the subject of service integration will now be offered.
Service Integration

The term *service integration* seems to hold great promise in efforts to reform human services. It is interesting to note that many advocates of human service transformation refer to integrated services as the “holy grail” of human service delivery (Austin, 1997; Fong, 2003; Sellers, 2002). A key aspect of this study provided a descriptive analysis of what service integration meant to the leaders involved with implementing human service delivery changes at the local level.

Austin (1997) posits that there is no single definition of service integration. In a work by Frumkin (1978), however, there is a definition of service integration that was useful in guiding this research. It states:

*Services integration* is an interorganizational relationship mechanism that is employed as a means of coordinating both the service functions of organizations as well as the support systems needed to maintain them. Such relationships consciously employ linkages as the basis for organizational contact and may form between any number of organizations. These relationships may be voluntary or mandated. (p. 17)

Frumkin’s work also provided a framework for evaluating reorganization of human service delivery systems. The intricacies of actually using his method of analysis, however, were well beyond the scope of this project and its resources. Yet, Frumkin’s definition was helpful as point of comparison to responses from *field directors* when they were asked to describe service integration.

Recent works by the Institute for Research on Poverty (IRP) related to service integration would be helpful as AHS continues to move towards this model in its delivery
of human services. Corbett and Noyes (2007) with the IRP provide a conceptual framework for service integration which could assist AHS in its efforts to improve outcomes for consumers. In talking about systems integration, Corbett and Noyes state:

In the end, this is not about buildings or organization charts or who gets what money. The integration challenge is less about creating a static plan for change than reframing how we think about effecting change. Too often, we think of reform as an event or a transition. We pass a law, change a policy, or introduce a new program and then assume that the presenting problem is solved. The kind of integration we have been talking about is different. Developing and implementing a systems integration model is not an event, but rather a dynamic process. (p. 15)

In addition, Sandfort’s (2004) explanation as to why human service integration is difficult to achieve is confirmed by several findings discovered in this study. Specifically, she calls for completion of a structural analysis of service integration efforts and development of an understanding of the front-line culture of the staff responsible for completing the work. Sandfort states, “….managers will be able to accomplish better, more integrated service delivery only by understanding how to shape the deeper structures in human service organizations that determine or constrain action” (p. 38).

On another note, O’Looney’s work, as mentioned in Austin (1997), makes a promising distinction between “service integration” and “collaboration”.

Although in common usage there is considerable overlap in these terms, analytically speaking, collaboration refers to partnership formation that is believed to bring about change, while service integration refers to specific
changes believed to make the system more efficient, effective, and comprehensive. (p. 32)

The distinction between collaboration and service integration was an interesting consideration during the various phases of this research. A review of relevant literature about collaboration continues to highlight differences in the meaning between these two terms.

**Collaboration**

One of the potential goals of the FSD, which was outlined in the AHS January 2004 report on reorganization states: “Successful collaboration will support a system of human services that is comprehensive, integrated, client-centered, outcome-based, easy to access, and sensitive to the diverse needs of individuals and families” (p. 16). As system reform occurs in Vermont, Linden’s (2002) work provided constructive ideas for supporting collaborative models of practice between and within the Agency and its respective stakeholders in state government. The data provided information about the way in which collaboration was occurring within the new AHS structure.

Several articles which focused on *interagency* collaboration were relevant to an aspect of the FSD’s work: the engagement and encouragement of community partnerships within their respective regions. First, *Stakeholders’ Views of Factors that Impact Successful Interagency Collaboration* by Johnson, Tam, Lamontagne, and Johnson (2003) offers a review of the results from a qualitative research project involving the factors that impact interagency collaboration. The sample size included 33 workers from nine state government departments and three private non-profits in the Midwestern part of the country. The authors determined that there were seven categorical influences
that were related to successful collaboration, based upon the premise that “through interagency collaboration, the level of services provided by the service delivery systems can be maximized and operational costs can be reduced” (p. 195). The study identifies the major factors that contribute to the success as: an agencies’ willingness to work together; a presence of strong leadership; and a common vision for the work at hand (p. 198). Furthermore, the research outlines seven factors most relevant to successful interagency collaboration as: 1) commitment; 2) communication; 3) strong leadership from key decision makers; 4) understanding the culture of collaborating agencies; 5) engaging in serious preplanning; 6) providing adequate resources for collaboration; and 7) minimizing turf issues. Finally, the authors combine these seven variables and posit the following three major considerations: commitment; communication; and strong leadership (p. 201). In light of this research, it was interesting to find that several of these factors had been described in the data collected during this study.

A second article by Einbinder, Robinson, Garcia, Vuckovic, and Patti (2000) reviews the results of a study completed among county-level human service departments and related institutions. The study’s purpose was to identify “factors which promote effective collaboration [among organizational groups]” (p. 120). The authors argue that there is limited literature relative to what indicators result in successful collaboration. The article provides a good synthesis of the “interorganizational relationship” (IOR) literature and identifies several other sources for further exploration. The prerequisites to effective interorganizational collaboration that these authors review are: incentive to collaborate; willingness to collaborate; ability to collaborate; and capacity to collaborate. “The [study’s] basic premise is that a collaborative effort will be more successful to the
extent that more of these factors exist for both the organizations and the specific individuals involved in the collaboration” (p. 127). The research method employed was a case study of eight California counties. Survey and focus group interviews were conducted in each of these locales. The results indicated that indeed, all four prerequisites – incentive, willingness, ability and capacity – were relevant to successful interagency collaboration. This study provided important foundational principles with which to complete research within a state government setting.

Finally, Gajda’s (2004) and Bailey and Koney’s (2000) work about what they term “strategic alliances” in human services also supports collaboration as key to successful human services integration. Gajda’s article reviews a method for measuring the success of what this author refers to as “strategic alliances”, previously considered in the literature as interorganizational collaboratives. She presents a Strategic Alliance Formative Assessment Rubric (SAFAR) as a method which can be used to complete program evaluations of collaborative efforts. Gajda posits that “five principles provide the theoretical underpinning for the SAFAR” (p. 70). These guiding principles are: 1) collaboration is imperative; 2) collaboration is known by many names; 3) collaboration is a journey and not a destination; 4) with collaboration the personal is as important as the procedural; and 5) collaboration develops in stages. Gajda provides useful insights and a format with which to frame evaluations of collaborative efforts.

Bailey and Koney’s (2000) work, on the other hand, provides a continuum of how organizations develop and form strategic alliances. They note the importance of collaboration in the formation of such alliances. It may be posited that the advent of the FSD has been an attempt to form a strategic alliance within AHS’ existing organizational
structure. In any event, the literature on collaboration stresses the key role that strong leadership plays in developing collaborative working relationships. A brief consideration of leadership in the context of this study will be covered next.

Leadership

Literature related to the topic of leadership is extensive and prolific. Several authors were selected to provide a cursory glance of leadership and areas of possible overlap with this project. First, the work of Margaret Wheatley (1992, 1999) is reviewed. Next is a brief consideration of Lipman-Blumen’s (1996) views about connective and Heifetz’s (1994) ideas related to constructive leadership. Third, is a look at the contributions of Bolman and Deal (2001, 2003) related to the soulful and artistic elements of leadership. Finally, the literature concerning leadership is reviewed using Schein’s (2004) most recent work regarding organizational culture and leadership.

First, given the bureaucratic environment in which these leaders worked, which is often highly structured and authoritarian, Wheatley’s (1999) contributions to the literature were important to consider. For instance, to what extent were the Field Service Director positions able to move away from an authoritarian model of management? Wheatley’s article Command and Control argues that authoritative management, which attempts to control the way that organizations work, is detrimental to their success. She maintains that organizations are built from the inside out, and self-regulate by valuing workers who have a propensity to “do the right thing” (p. 158). Who were these leaders? To what degree were they able to impact organizational change within Vermont’s AHS? The study proposed to employ research methods to gain a perspective about questions such as these.
Wheatley’s (1992) prior work titled, *Leadership and the New Science: Learning about Organization from an Orderly Universe*, holds promise for viewing the complexity and disarray that is often associated with organizational change. Several points are stressed in this book which draws upon discoveries in quantum physics, chaos theory and biology to develop new understandings about leadership. She provides a view of organizations as being built from within rather than from prescribed models. This viewpoint is useful in thinking about the relational style of leadership described by research participants. Wheatley states:

First, I no longer believe that organizations can be changed by imposing a model developed elsewhere. So little transfers to, or even inspires, those trying to work at change in their own organization. Second, and much more important, the new physics cogently explains that there is no objective reality out there waiting to reveal its secrets. There are no recipes or formulae, no checklists or advice that describe “reality”. There is only what we create through our engagement with others and with events. (p. 7)

She also discusses the generative ability of organizations to construct new ideas based upon disequilibrium. Wheatley’s reference to disintegration within an organization as not being a signal of its death provides a context for understanding the reorganization effort within AHS. She says, “In most cases the system can reconfigure itself at a higher level of complexity, one better able to deal with the new environment….fluctuations are the primary source of creativity” (p. 20). There is a relational and generative view of leadership and change which Wheatley suggests.
The notion of relational leadership is further developed by Lipman-Blumen (1996) who views leaders as utilizing relational, direct and instrumental qualities and behaviors in their work as connective leaders. This author develops a connective model of leadership whereby these three qualities are thought to be instrumental in leading the complex environments found in today’s organizations. Further, Lipman-Blumen finds there are three styles within each of the relational, direct and instrumental characteristics which, in effect, indicate there are nine achieving styles involved in connective leadership (p. 24). She states, “Connective leaders, like servant leaders, serve their societies, not themselves….They focus more pragmatically on their instrumental skills to turn the connections among people, organizations, and dreams to the advantage of the larger community” (p. 18). Lipman-Blumen’s model of connective leadership aided this study by providing a multi-dimensional view of leadership which could be juxtaposed on the leaders who were charged with local transformation efforts within AHS.

Similarly, Heifetz (1994) talks about constructive leadership in Leadership Without Easy Answers. He mentions the importance of “moving through” difficult initiatives and facilitating change. Also, that the need for assisting others in changing beliefs and values is a vital aspect of constructive leadership. It was assumed and the data confirmed that the role of Field Service Directors involved aspects of constructive leadership such as that described by Heifetz.

In addition, Bolman and Deal (2001, 2003) describe leadership as having soulful and artistic elements. In the work, Leading with Soul: An Uncommon Journey of Spirit, these authors challenge leaders to utilize intuitions and a sense of soulful introspection as a means of unleashing creative energies in their roles of leadership. Bolman and Deals’
ideas are further developed in their book, *Reframing Organizations: Artistry, Choice, and Leadership*. They premise that there are several different frames with which to understand organizational life: structural, human resource, political and symbolic. In addition, they suggest opportunities for using these four frames to “reframe” one’s view of leadership within an organization. Bolman and Deal also provide a useful framework for consideration of the leader versus manager aspects of leadership. These authors suggest that managers can become leaders and artists using the following ideas as guides for how managers might think:

- They need a holistic framework that encourages inquiry into a range of significant issues: people, power, structure and symbols.
- They need a palette that offers an array of options: bargaining as well as training, celebration as well as reorganization.
- They need to develop creativity, risk taking, and playfulness in response to life’s dilemmas and paradoxes, focusing as much on finding the right question as the right answer, on finding meaning and faith amid clutter and confusion.
- Leaders need passionate, unwavering commitment to principle, combined with flexibility in understanding and responding to events. (p. 17)

Bolman and Deal’s works were useful in providing additional leadership perspectives with which to understand field director’s role in AHS’ transformation efforts.

Lastly, the work of Schein (2004) was instrumental in understanding the cultural aspects of organizations and the impact of culture on leaders’ abilities to facilitate and navigate change. He argues that the fundamental assumptions underlying any change in a
human system are derived from Lewin’s work (p. 319), which as previously discussed, includes the three phases of change: unfreezing, movement, and refreezing. Schein discusses three different processes which must be present to develop a motivation to facilitate change during the unfreezing phase:

- (1) enough *disconfirming* data to cause serious discomfort and disequilibrium; (2) the connection of the disconfirming data to important goals and ideals, causing *anxiety and/or guilt*; and (3) enough *psychological safety*, in the sense of being able to see a possibility of solving the problem and learning something new without loss of identity or integrity. (p. 320)

In Schein’s opinion, a review of the organization’s culture facilitates an opportunity to explore and introduce new ways of learning and working.

Schein (2004) suggests that the unique function of leadership that distinguishes it from management and administration is the concern for organizational culture (p. 223). His work provides a 10-step intervention for assessing the cultural dimensions of organizational change (pp. 337-365). Several of these ideas may be helpful in AHS’ future transformation efforts. He also recommends several qualities that need to be present in the selection and development of leaders: “1. perception and insight; 2. motivation; 3. emotional strength; 4. ability to change the cultural assumptions; and 5. ability to create involvement and participation” (p. 414). It is interesting to note that many of these characteristics were described in the data collected from field directors during the course of this study.
Before summarizing the literature reviewed in this dissertation, a final quote from Schein (2004) aids in highlighting the importance of leadership and learning in facilitating organizational change. He states:

Learning and change cannot be imposed on people. Their involvement and participation is needed in diagnosing what is going on, in figuring out what to do, and in actually bringing about learning and change. The more turbulent, ambiguous, and out of control the world becomes, the more the learning process must be shared by all the members of the social unit doing the learning. (p. 418)

Summary of Literature Review

Literature reviewed from the selected authors demonstrates the complexity involved with organizational change and human service integration. It also highlights the importance of leadership in successful implementation of human service delivery reform efforts. In addition, the review of literature reveals that no single body of work was available which detailed the implementation of human service reform in state government from an organizational change and leadership perspective. While many state reports about reform efforts have been written, there was only one (Carnochan & Austin, 2001) empirical study that could be located. What appeared to be missing in the literature was a body of empirically-based, contextually driven studies of organizational change in state government settings which dealt specifically with human service delivery reform. This study intended to fill a void in the literature related to change efforts in human services by using three broad areas of inquiry – organizational change, service integration and leadership – to guide the project to completion.
The study, therefore, proposed to: 1) describe the organizational change process by including the perspectives of the leaders implementing the change; 2) inform future evaluations in human service reform efforts; 3) assist in identifying gaps in the literature regarding organizational change and human service integration; and 4) suggest areas for future research. This mixed-method research project employed a user-focused evaluative case study and survey approach to describe the outcomes, processes and change strategies associated with initiation of a FSD within Vermont’s AHS. In addition, the analysis provided a framework to assist the AHS in understanding the limitations and possibilities associated with this organizational change effort. Finally, it provided descriptive research with which to support continued improvement in the delivery of human services in Vermont.
CHAPTER III. METHODOLOGY

Due to the nature of the questions asked by Vermont’s Agency of Human Services’ (AHS’) leadership and a review of the literature about organizational change, service integration, and leadership, this research aimed to contribute knowledge about a large-scale, state level systems change in human services. This research project used a mixed-method, but primarily qualitative, case study and survey approach to describe the recently created Field Services Division (FSD) within AHS and examine the organizational change strategies and outcomes that have been associated with this initiative. As already mentioned, the researcher was not able to locate a prior study of an organizational change process which specifically focused on the introduction of a new management structure as the unit of analysis in human service reform efforts. While several evaluation studies about human service reform were documented in various areas of the literature, the emphasis of these analyses was focused in one instance, on collaboration (Hansberry, 2005; Hoover, 1999; Mingus, 1999; Sandfort, 1999) and in another, on welfare reform (Carnochan & Austin, 2001; Child Welfare Partnership, 2003).

Qualitative research methods were the primary mode of inquiry as this type of organizational change, and the strategies and outcomes associated with the initiative were best evaluated by asking questions of the participants involved in the change effort. The formative evaluation (Marshall & Rossman, 1999; Maxwell, 2005; Weiss, 1998) of this user-focused (Patton, 2002) dissertation utilized several approaches, including: a) an interview segment with 12 Field Services Directors, 6 Policy Executives, and three AHS Consumer Groups. One consumer group interview took place during a regularly
scheduled statewide meeting on August 13, 2007. Two additional focus group interviews
occurred in two regions of the State during their regularly scheduled meetings in October
and November 2007; b) an online survey which was sent to 8 policy executives
requesting response by January 2008; and c) a document review of the findings from
2005 customer and staff surveys (AHS, 2005 consumer, n.d./2007, Spring 2005 staff,
n.d./2007), various legislative reports, restructuring documents obtained from focus
group interviews, stakeholder meetings, AHS reports, and internal and intra-agency
communication (e.g., e-mail, meeting minutes, reports). Detailed information about each
of the three modes of inquiry is described below.

Interview Segment

Three interview segments were utilized during the course of the study: one, with
field directors; a second, with AHS policy executives; and a third, with members of
regional advisory councils which operate as the consumer voice in the reorganization
effort. Please see the list of research questions (Appendix A) that were asked of each
participant group during the three interview segments of the study.

The first and primary interview segment with field directors yielded the most
extensive amount of data as one-on-one semi-structured interviews were held with each
of the 12 directors. A purposeful sampling method (Patton, 2002) was utilized. The
meetings were approximately 60-90 minutes in length and took place in mutually
convenient locations, primarily in Waterbury’s central office or in regional district
offices. The interviews were scheduled during normal working hours and staff was
compensated by the State for their participation in the study as though the meetings were
part of their normal work schedules. Data collected during the interviews remained
confidential and assurances from AHS leadership were made in advance of commencing
the study that descriptive findings that inadvertently identified a field director would not
to be used in personnel performance evaluations.

A second segment of interviews was conducted with current and past AHS policy
executives. Interviews with these participants lasted 45-75 minutes in length and took
place in mutually beneficial locations during regular business hours, primarily in either
Waterbury or Burlington. A purposeful sampling technique (Patton, 2002; Russ-Eft &
Preskill, 2001) was used to select which executives would be interviewed. Candidates
were determined based upon the hierarchical seniority of their position. Accordingly, the
Secretary and Deputy Secretary of AHS were interviewed as were the individuals who
held these positions during and following the reorganization effort.

Finally, focus group interviews were conducted with three groupings of Regional
Advisory Council (RAC) members who act as the consumer voices of AHS services.
Council members were generally current or past recipients, either directly or indirectly, of
services provided by AHS. Members served in a voluntary capacity and received
minimal compensation from AHS, which primarily reimbursed them for time, mileage
and transportation costs associated with their attendance at regional meetings. One large,
state-wide meeting was conducted in August 2007 at the central office complex in
Waterbury. AHS leadership requested that the statewide interview take place during an
already scheduled annual gathering of RAC members. As a result, the researcher gained
approval from the University’s Institutional Review Board (IRB) to complete the August
focus group well in advance of having sought approval for the remaining segments of the
study.
Following completion of the study’s proposal and having gained consent from the researcher’s dissertation committee, the larger project was submitted and approved by the IRB in October 2007. Interviews with Field Directors and Policy Executives, as well as with the two regional RAC groups, were conducted during the months of October and November 2007. Participation in all segments of the research was voluntary and signed consent forms were obtained from all participants (see Appendixes B and C for the two forms used to solicit consent).

Data collected during the interview segments of the study were taped and transcribed for accuracy. Again, consent forms were obtained from all participants. Additionally, Appendix D details a copy of the consent form used during the large focus group meeting with Regional Advisory Council members in August 2007. All consent documents have been stored in a locked and secure file location in the Waterman Building at the University of Vermont. Efforts were made to maintain the confidentiality of research participants during development and writing of the Findings Chapter included in this study.

Online Survey

In addition to the three interview segments, a survey was distributed to 8 AHS department and office policy executives to capture their perspectives about the Agency reorganization effort. The researcher sent an invitation by electronic messaging to this group of participants in November 2007 which requested their participation in an online survey questionnaire. Appendix E details the contents of that message and the research questions that were asked of these policy executives. Participants offered informed consent by checking a box at the start of the web-based questionnaire. The survey
software platform, Perseus Survey Solutions XP, was utilized as the data collection instrument for this portion of the study. Participation was also encouraged in advance of the researcher’s invitation via electronic messaging from AHS leadership. However, participation remained strictly voluntary. Due to time constraints several of the prospective contributors were not able to participate in the study. Results from this segment of the research remain confidential and have been stored on a secure server location at the University.

Document Review

Finally, a document review provided another lens with which to view the strategies used to facilitate the organizational change within AHS. Documents reviewed during this segment of the study included the following: reorganization reports and website materials related to AHS reform efforts; findings from customer and staff surveys that were completed by the Vermont Research Partnership at the University of Vermont in 2005; several legislative reports; multiple AHS reports; and internal and intra-agency communication such as e-mail, and meeting minutes. This practice supported triangulation of the data, which as explained by Patton (2002), advocates for the use of multiple methods of observation to support objectivity by the researcher (pp. 247-248).

The methodology utilized in this study and the research questions identified followed in the path of Patton’s (2002) recommendation that “a focus on intended use by intended users undergirds and informs every design decision in the evaluation” (p. 173). The researcher began meeting with the FSD’s Deputy Commissioner and staff in December 2006 to develop and design a research methodology. At that time, Field Services Directors were asked what they wanted to learn about their role in the change
initiative. A series of subsequent meetings were held with the Secretary and Deputy Secretary of the Agency. On-going meetings and communication about the study were held throughout the project’s tenure with the Deputy Commissioner for the Field Services. In the spirit of accountability in government and in employing evaluation as a sound method of study, the following quote from Lisabeth Schorr (1997) guided this dissertation’s design, implementation and completion:

Two forces are bringing these worlds together: The accountability world is moving from monitoring processes to monitoring results. The evaluation world is being demystified, its techniques becoming more collaborative, its applicability broadened, and its data no longer closely held as if by a hostile, foreign power. (p. 138)

Data Analysis

Data analysis was accomplished using the frameworks suggested by the authors Miles and Huberman (1994) and Patton (2002). Once all data was collected, the transcripts were reviewed to develop ideas for a possible coding scheme. The researcher built upon Miles and Hubermans’ ideas of coding data by categories and used a preliminary pass of the data to complete this task. Additional reviews of the transcripts further refined and honed the coding categories used in the analysis. Using Patton’s advice, the researcher completed a content analysis which in his words, “refer[s] to any qualitative data reduction and sense-making effort that takes a volume of qualitative material and attempts to identify core consistencies and meanings” (p. 453). After having completed the content analysis, the researcher worked with dissertation committee members to develop patterns and emergent themes which were found in a cross-section
of the interview data. Once coding of the data was completed, a matrix of emergent themes aided in assessing the results for consistency and supported development of findings from the research. Overlap between and amongst themes supported categorization of the themes that were developed.

Validation of the data was confirmed by having participants review findings from the analysis for accuracy and clarity. The researcher employed a vetting process whereby study participants were offered an opportunity to review preliminary findings and confirm that the emergent themes which were identified were consistent with the interview data. A similar framework was going to be used when analyzing the survey data. However, data collected from the survey was limited in length and written with such clarity that this step of vetting was deemed unnecessary. Researcher bias was an area of concern during the project and is discussed in the next section.

Subjective “I” and Researcher Bias

As my dissertation advisor cleverly stated, “I was both an insider and outsider” in relation to this project. I have been a Vermont State employee with the AHS’ Department of Health since 1997. My work as an operations chief with a division within the Vermont Department of Health (VDH) gave me a peripheral view of the AHS reorganization effort. My specific role at VDH was impacted minimally by the restructuring. The location of my office and the responsibilities associated with my position did not change as a result of the reorganization. I have, however, listened to district staff as they have been challenged by the introduction of changes in the organization at the regional level. The findings from this study provided an interesting
exploration into the challenges and benefits, and limitations and possibilities of this large-scale systems reform in human services.

Simultaneously, a benefit of my position as a staff member of AHS on an unpaid educational leave during this project’s data collection and analysis phases was that I had a relatively good understanding of the context in which this study took place. I was familiar with the various departments and programs operating within the Agency and the Field Service Director’s role in working to integrate services in each region of the State. The “insider’s view” may have benefited the research in that my ability to ask informed follow-up questions to those already described in the research question protocol was enhanced. Before completing the research interviews with field directors I had already had several interactions with the FSD staff. This situation supported the development of rapport with each of the study participants in advance of the project’s commencement.

The downside of having been an employee of AHS and having acted as the researcher on this project was that I did have biases about my employment with the State and the reorganization of AHS. I have attempted to minimize these biases by having reflected on the words and perspectives obtained from the participants during the interview and survey segments of the study. I wrote my biases in a journal after having completed each of the interviews and after having read each of the survey responses. This information was shared with my dissertation advisor after the findings section of this dissertation had been drafted. I also assumed an unpaid educational leave from my work with AHS before commencement of this project’s data collection phase to avoid any appearance of a conflict of interest.
Trustworthiness and Validity

As just discussed, I worked to maintain researcher objectivity by journaling my biases after the completion of each interview, and by reviewing these entries with my dissertation committee advisor. Each interview was transcribed for accuracy, which aided in keeping what I thought I had heard, and my subjectivity, to a minimum. I also hold a master’s in social work and confidentiality and professional codes of ethics were important values that I maintained throughout the project. In addition, I worked to adhere to the evaluation principles as described in Patton (2002). These were several of the other methods I used to maintain trustworthiness and validity in the research. Finally, I sent the findings and when requested, coding analysis to participants for member checking. Reports submitted to AHS underwent a vetting process with field directors and policy executives prior to being finalized. Using a combination of these measures, researcher bias was minimized and validation of the study’s findings was supported. In addition, I spent considerable time thinking about my interest in organizational change and the underlying reasons for which I pursued this topic for study.

Researcher Interest in Organizational Change

There were several reasons for the researcher’s interest in a study related to organizational change within Vermont’s AHS. First, as an employee of the Agency’s VDH, there was curiosity about the promise a field director model of service delivery offered to the State and the people that it serves. Second, as a staff member located in the middle layers of AHS, I was interested in better understanding the assumptions and history of the 2004 reorganization effort, and the resulting development of field director positions in each region of the State. I wanted to learn more about this innovative
management structure. I was also interested in analyzing the organizational change strategies employed by field directors to further my learning about large-scale change and the role of leadership in facilitating these change efforts. I ultimately hoped to contribute not only to my own understanding, but to others who could learn and possibly benefit from reviewing this piece of research.

Still another reason for my interest in this subject had to do with the fact that I am a native Vermonter. I wanted to complete a piece a work that contributed to the State in which I live. In order to complete the project, I recognized the importance of maintaining impartiality and neutrality as I proceeded. For this reason, among other personal considerations, I chose and was granted an unpaid educational leave from my work with the VDH throughout much of this project’s tenure.
CHAPTER IV. FINDINGS

Introduction

This Findings Chapter presents the analysis of the data collected about the organizational change strategies, processes and perceived outcomes related to the 2004 initiation of a Field Services Division (FSD) within Vermont’s Agency of Human Services (AHS). FSD provided the organizational structure for placement of key leadership positions, known as Field Services Directors in each of the 12 regions of the State. The introduction of the FSD was intended to accomplish two primary goals. The new management structure was intended first, to provide AHS leadership at the local level; and second, to assist with transformation of AHS’ human services delivery system towards a model of service integration (AHS, 2004, January, February).

Descriptive case study data gathered from this research paints a complex picture of a small, but significant, portion of a larger-scale restructuring effort in human services. The perspectives related to the overall restructuring of AHS, and the role of a FSD in the reorganization has been captured from three different groups of participants: field directors, policy executives and consumers. The most detailed perspectives stem from interviews with field directors, who are the agents and leaders of change at the local level. Policy executive viewpoints are captured to a lesser extent than those of field directors. Similarly, the perspectives of consumer groups are reported to an even lesser extent than those of the policy executives. The level of detail provided in the findings, therefore, varies significantly between the three different groups of participants.

The original six research questions used to outline the study, and which guided development of the semi-structured interview protocols with the three groups of
participants, provided an outline for analysis of the findings. Each question offered a framework with which to describe the findings that emerged from the data. One or two overarching themes emerged from each of the six research questions. Further, within each question’s overarching theme(s), sub-themes were identified. It should be recognized that there is considerable overlap between and among the themes and sub-themes.

The six research questions are listed below and repeated at the beginning of each section of the findings. Before a review of the findings, a description of the three participant groups that were interviewed during the course of the study is offered. Thereafter, background and hiring details related to the field directors is discussed to offer contextual information about these leaders. Finally, a detail of the research findings related to each of the research questions is presented.

Research Questions

The study sought to understand and provide descriptive data with which to answer six overarching research questions:

1. In implementing the Field Services Division, what successes and challenges have emerged?

2. In what ways has the Field Services Division contributed to service integration in Vermont?

3. How does the Field Services Division staff describe the factors (e.g., practices, outcome measures, policies, delivery systems) that contribute to effective outcomes for individuals, children and families in Vermont?
4. What have been the roles and strategies of leadership involved in the organizational change effort?

5. In what ways has the Field Services Division impacted the Agency of Human Services reorganization and vice versa?

6. What are the perspectives of consumers regarding the organizational structure and outcomes related to the advent of Field Services Directors in local communities?

The first research question was intended to illuminate the successes and challenges that have emerged from initiation and implementation of the FSD. Data suggested that there have been both accomplishments and complexities associated with this organizational change. The second question hoped to describe the ways in which the FSD had contributed to service integration in Vermont. This data yielded a series of responses about the benefits achieved, primarily from service coordination efforts, which may or may not have been directly related to service integration. Further, data suggested that there was no uniform description as to what was meant by service integration. Question number three inquired about how FSD staff described the factors that contributed to effective outcomes for consumers of AHS services. Improved outcomes were reported to require a results orientation and were best supported by building and partnering with local communities, and assuring consumer engagement in the resolution of human service delivery issues. The fourth question regarding the roles and strategies of leadership in leading the organizational change effort yielded a diversity of responses. Data most consistently noted that field directors utilized a relational, action-oriented leadership style, in which positional authority, when and where needed, was employed to help move initiatives forward. A new question emerged from the data regarding the
future work of field directors, and has been included as the second overarching theme in question number four. Question number five explored the ways in which the FSD had impacted the AHS reorganization and vice versa. The data provided by policy executives appeared to best support findings related to this question. Finally, question number six concerned consumer perspectives associated with the initiation of a FSD within AHS. Brief findings from this cursory exploration revealed that consumers valued the opportunity to have a place at the table when contemplating options for human service delivery system reform.

*Interview Participants: Perspectives of Field Directors, Policy Executives and Consumer Groups*

Data collected about the strategies and outcomes associated with AHS’ organizational change were obtained from three groups of participants: field directors; policy executives; and consumer groups. The first interview segment captured the perspectives of the 12 AHS leaders related to their role in the organizational change effort. These Field Services Directors are referred to throughout this chapter as field directors. These are the leaders who had been hired and charged with implementing the change process at the local level. Field directors’ perceptions generated the largest amount of data, and therefore, findings from these interviews are reported in the greatest detail. Their reports collectively represented a leadership perspective about the organizational change process, and their efforts to move AHS towards a model of service integration. Field director data supported answers to research questions number one, two, three, and four.
Second, were the viewpoints of five senior leaders within AHS: one interview took place with the executive who had crafted and designed the reorganization legislation, created the FSD and hired the original 12 Field Services Directors in each region of the State – this person had departed AHS in February 2005; a second discussion occurred with a retired AHS Deputy Secretary who had been in that role from February 2006 until July 2007; other interviews were completed with policy executives who held the roles of AHS Secretary, Deputy Secretary and Deputy Commissioner for FSD at the time of the study. The perspectives of these executive leaders helped provide a context for understanding the intent of AHS transformation efforts and the anticipated role that field directors would fulfill relative to the overall organizational change process. In addition, five Commissioner level policy executives responded to an online survey which aided in understanding a broader perspective of the transformation work and the role of field directors in local district offices. Policy executive perspectives yielded data with which to answer research question number five about the impacts of reorganization on the FSD, and the impacts the FSD has had on the overall AHS restructuring effort.

Third, was a cursory review of consumers’ perspectives relative to AHS transformation efforts, and the placement of field directors in each region of the State. Purposeful sampling methods were used to explore the viewpoints of consumers. This data source provided another valuable perspective with which to understand the context for human service delivery reform in Vermont. Data yielded from the three focus group interviews with consumer groups provided a brief overview of field directors’ work in their local communities and offered an answer to research question number six. Based
upon input received, which was of limited scope, additional research concerning consumer perspectives about AHS transformation efforts is recommended.

**Understanding the Background and Hiring of Field Directors**

Contextual information about field directors’ backgrounds and tenures in state government was provided during the course of the interviews and demonstrates the diversity of backgrounds and experience these leaders shared. At the time of this study, there were 12 regional or local field director positions in the State. In the Burlington AHS District, where Vermont’s largest city is located, there was also one assistant field director position. In total, 13 individuals currently occupied these roles. These positions were designated as classified state servants, which meant they were not subjected to political appointment, as were the commissioners and other policy executives who were included in this study.

Field directors were hired in two different waves with the first three directors beginning work in September 2004 in the Barre, Morrisville and Bennington district offices. The second wave of field directors was hired in November/December of 2004 covering the rest of the AHS Districts. There has been limited turnover in the field director positions since inception. At most, the elapsed time since implementation of this new management structure was approximately three years in length. As such, it was precipitous to speculate on the long-term conclusions associated with this research.

A majority (75%) of field directors had established careers of approximately 25 years of service while others (25%) ranged in tenure from zero to nine years. Their past experiences were generally in the field of human services and mental health, with most field directors having had experience in departments located within the AHS. Many
reported longstanding ties to their local communities and expressed that they had pre-existing relationships with community partners and stakeholders. Field directors talked about having assumed these roles because of their commitment to changing the delivery of human services in the State. A description of their perspectives about leadership yielded a sense that these individuals had a passion for their work and many said they were committed to serve the State in their new capacity.

1. **In Implementing the Field Services Division, What Successes and Challenges Have Emerged?**

This question explored the successes and challenges associated with the initiation and implementation of the FSD, as a new management structure, into the organizational design of AHS. The two overarching themes that developed were: 1) contributing to transformation efforts; and 2) identifying paradoxes. Sub-themes related to field director contributions to transformation efforts included: a) accomplishments: moving towards human service delivery reform; and, b) systems perspective: looking across AHS and the human service delivery system. The two sub-themes identified as paradoxes to field directors’ work in moving forward with human service delivery reform efforts at the local level included: a) systemic tensions; recognizing challenges to implementation; and, b) shifting priorities: redefining the goals and vision of the field services division.

It should be noted that the terms *reform* and *transformation* are used interchangeably in the findings. The words reform and transformation are intended to connote movement between two states: one, from a pre-existing delivery system whereby services were provided in a siloed, program-by-program manner; to a second state,
whereby services were intended to be delivered in an integrated fashion, with multiple areas of AHS working together to better support and meet the needs of consumers.

**Contributing to Transformation Efforts**

This overarching theme reviews a description of the ways in which field directors have successfully contributed to AHS’ efforts to transform the delivery of human services for Vermonters. All field directors spoke about promising practices and accomplishments made in their regions. Service coordination, resolution to housing issues, building supports through the incarcerated women’s initiative, “outposting”, and coordinating physical improvements to district offices were just a few of the most frequently noted successes they mentioned. These areas of success are included under the sub-theme titled, “*accomplishments: moving towards human service delivery reform*”.

Additionally, they talked about adding a systems perspective to the work of AHS and by virtue of their roles, in many instances, to be proactive instead of reactive. Access to limited flexible funding dollars provided for preventive measures and aided in creative problem solving for consumers. Transparency and improved communication among AHS departments appeared to support a more holistic view of the AHS’ work with consumers and families. They seemed aware that the accomplishments to date were not necessarily the consequence of their individual work, but generally resulted from collaborative efforts with staff, consumers and their communities. It was field directors’ ability to recognize, harness and line up resources which appeared to have been making a difference in supporting reform efforts. These areas of success are included in the sub-theme, “*systems perspective: looking across AHS and the human service delivery system*”.

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Accomplishments: Moving Towards Human Service Delivery Reform

Most field directors talked of service coordination as an accomplishment which had significantly improved the human service delivery system over the past several years. Service coordination was discussed as having occurred in various ways. Many noted that service coordination in their region was contracted with a community partner, which in turn supported even broader access to supports for consumers than those already offered by AHS. Examples included faith-based resources and supports, as well as access to small amounts of financial resources within the community. Further, this practice afforded improved outcomes in that services were coordinated, and a more holistic view of the individual, children and/or family was offered. A director said:

…as a Field Director, what we’ve been able to do is to look at those families who are high risk and very fragile. And I think from that perspective, the Field Director has been the lightning rod for particular [consumers] and been able to support and help them access services through the service coordinator position. The utilization of that position has been very instrumental in assisting people who do not fit all or any of the criteria of the traditional family….

Other regions had utilized field service specialists to coordinate services in those districts where these positions had been added to “go upstream and access resources for consumers” in advance of a crisis.

Service coordination seemed to differ from service integration in that coordination efforts generally extended beyond Agency staff and resources. Integrated services, however, connoted coordination efforts within agency departments and offices. It should be recognized that both coordination and integration of services often were
described interchangeably and seemed to have been dependent upon the needs of a particular consumer. Service integration as an emerging practice will be discussed in greater detail in response to research question number two, which specifically addressed service integration as a goal of AHS reform efforts.

Each field director talked about accomplishments that have been made to address specific, “topical” areas of need. These needs included such issues as housing, incarcerated women’s reentry into community living, “outposting” and physical and customer service improvements to district office locations. Field directors worked to align resources when they resolved the particular topical issue at hand.

Most reported instances where their efforts had reduced the incidence of homelessness in their region. At the time of our interview one field director thought he/she had averted approximately 35 families from being homeless. In another region of the State, a field director’s intervention reportedly prevented eviction of a significant number of AHS consumers. This field director said:

I asked people to join a housing task force….since I was looking at the whole picture, I said, wait a minute. We need to all get together and figure out how we’re going to do this together…we responded together and were able to actually do more in that [situation] because of [our collaborative efforts].

Several others talked about initiation of loan funds which assisted consumers with accessing stable housing. Field directors’ efforts in the area of housing and the prevention of homelessness were notable given the financial, physical and emotional costs for those individuals, children and/or families in the absence of having had such supports.
Another contribution which was talked about was initiation of re-entry programs for incarcerated women in various regions of the State. Before the advent of field directors there was little support for women who returned to the community following a period of incarceration. Several areas now reported that they “go upstream” to have coordinated and accessible services provided in advance of women’s re-entry back into the community.

Other field directors spoke of devising solutions which provided transportation for consumers with substance abuse issues. In one situation, clients needed access to treatment which was only available in another county. Few clients had either a vehicle or the financial resources to support this travel requirement. A creative approach was used to resolve the transportation barrier and clients were afforded continued access to treatment. Many also referred to having started efforts in their local communities to address the issue of incarceration of public inebriates. Development of “outposts”, or “outposting”, in many regions of the State was another accomplishment many field directors spoke about during the interviews.

“Outposting” was noted as a promising practice. It involved setting up and delivering an array of AHS services in locations other than district offices, which were not geographically convenient to all consumers. Consumers, who often did not have access to transportation and may have needed to travel considerable distances, were now able to receive AHS services in several key communities. Outposts were developed in places where AHS recipients lived and/or in locations where they visited to receive other State services.
Development of outposts in rural states such as Vermont was reported by field directors as a significant improvement in the delivery of services for Vermonters. In one region, a field director also noted that he/she had garnered state employee union support to make arrangements for staff to work four, ten-hour days in a particular outpost. This appeared to be advantageous for staff who had fewer miles to commute each week, and for consumers who no longer had to travel inordinate distances to access AHS services.

A number of field directors also spoke about physical improvements that have been made to district office locations as a result of input received from consumers. In many regions of the State, consumers found State Office building space unwelcoming and often difficult to locate due to poor signage. Field directors have worked with district leadership to make local office buildings more consumer-friendly. Several field directors also spoke about improvements to staff reception areas in response to input received from consumers. Physical building improvements and changes to district office space were intended to support AHS transformation efforts towards offering improved customer service.

*Systems Perspective: Looking Across AHS and the Human Service Delivery System*

An interesting sub-theme that emerged from the data was field directors’ contributions towards “systems thinking”. Many reported a deep passion related to the premise of the reorganization which intended to change how the human service delivery system responded to consumer needs in Vermont. Their leadership positions seemed to offer an opportunity to take proactive actions to support consumers in a system that had been built silo-by-silo, and often had been unable to respond in a preventative fashion. There was a good deal of creativity they employed to address consumer needs and to
advocate for broadening others’, especially AHS staffs’, perspectives about the promises of systems change. In most examples used to explain their work, there seemed to be a sense of transparency and improved communication related to their work as representatives of AHS. Most field directors seemed adept at inviting and involving different staff from various departments in broadening support for a holistic provision of services. Given the siloed nature of AHS, delivery of services from a “systems perspective” represented a departure from the previous program-by-program thinking staff were naturally inclined to use.

A field director talked about the opportunity to give staff the permission to think differently, use common sense and act proactively when he/she said:

I invite staff to think about what is the right thing to do here – let’s start there. Then we can worry about how we’re going to [provide the needed services]…..just turning the conversations around to looking at what people need rather than only considering what they are eligible for.

Another person talked of the proactive nature of field directors’ systems perspective with regard to how he/she worked with family units and said:

The opportunities field directors have to look across the Agency not just at the individual departments, and how [the services available] touch on the people we’re serving and the systems that we’re working in. I think that [perspective] has been incredibly invaluable, that we look at not just the individual asking for help, but the whole family unit. And how within that family unit can we work with them on [resolution of the issues] that will lead them to have a more independent and better life.
Also reported were creative ways in which field directors navigated the existing system to provide for improved services to consumers. In one region, a consumer needed access to specialized food for health reasons. The field director was able to creatively access funding to meet this consumer’s need. The field director reported the cost offsets associated with the ability to have used these “better health practices” were considerable. In the absence of this intervention the costs to the State would have been significantly greater. Another example reported was a field director’s ability to access housing vouchers, which had proved to be a creative approach for keeping consumers in stable housing situations.

One field director utilized an innovative workforce development tool to encourage staff to envision a broader, systems perspective of the AHS. This person stated:

We’re orienting all new staff in a group orientation process at the local level. They see all office locations [in the region]….They begin to build a sense of sisterhood and brotherhood….and know they’re connected to a broader agency….most people get a sense that they are part of a larger organization trying to do a larger mission than their own department’s or division’s.

Transparency and improved communication among and between departments were other features discussed by field directors during the interviews. Shared information between departments seemed to facilitate a level of transparency which reportedly had not existed in the past. One field director said, “…sharing information across departments has been a huge [benefit of the AHS reorganization]”. Field directors sought to improve intra-agency communication and talked about the various ways in which they encouraged this practice as well.

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A practice employed in one region was the use of memorandums of understanding to facilitate communication, collaboration and integrated case management between and among departments. To deal with impediments related to maintaining confidentiality in case management planning, this field director devised a solution, referred to as a letter of release. The release letters were voluntarily signed by clients and allowed for several different departments to access, discuss and creatively discover resolutions intended to meet a client’s multiple needs.

In most instances, transparency and improved communication were discussed in relation to field directors’ opportunity to view the human service delivery system from a systems perspective. Looking across AHS and the human service delivery system were specifically mentioned when one field director said:

I think that reorganization has given the Field Services Division and all AHS departments an opportunity to say, we are one Agency. We need to act and perform as one agency. We all share the burden, whether it is folks who are incarcerated coming back out of jail or whether it is children not getting all the immunizations that they need; we are all part of that bigger system. I think that reorganization has given every office, every community the ability to think outside the box. Even though the rule says one thing, if common sense says, if we do X, Y and Z, it’ll lead to this outcome then we’re willing to look at X, Y and Z and challenge the rule. It doesn’t always mean that [common sense prevails, but in the past nobody would have even entertained having the] conversation because the policy said you could not do that.
Yet another field director spoke to this shift towards adoption of a systems perspective and said:

Instead of we only operate in our silo – [field directors are] looking for ways that we can pull other people in, that we can engage other people, and that we are looking at ways to, when appropriate, support wraparound services for a family, not just for a child that might be in custody, but for a family that might be really struggling. Who else can we bring to the table to make something happen? So silos, yes. Will we ever get away from those? I doubt it. Can we figure out ways to be exchanging feed between the silos, where the product that goes in doesn’t just stay and get stuck….that is where I’ve seen concrete change happen.

Finally, another field director stated, “Being able to have a broad view of the system and see what’s going on, and identify where people are running into dead ends … [I am then able to] identify the problem to central office in terms of it being a systems issue”. To summarize, the field directors’ ability to have contributed a systems perspective to human service reform helped as one field director noted, “share the story, share the problem, then we’ll share the solution”.

Field directors described accomplishments they have made in terms of moving AHS towards human service delivery reform: service coordination; an ability to address “topical” areas of need for consumers and families; “outposting”; and adoption of a systems perspective to devise and resolve human service delivery issues were most frequently noted.
Identifying Paradoxes

While many successes were reported, so too, were several challenges to reform efforts which are reported in this overarching theme: identifying paradoxes. Interview data with field directors yielded a complex picture of a large-scale organizational change in which field directors’ efforts were intended to provide a small, albeit significant, piece of the overall reorganization strategy. Yet, all field directors spoke of the difficulties they faced in light of having been hired into a highly visible role relative to the overall restructuring effort. A description of this tension, among several others of the most frequently noted challenges is captured in the sub-theme, “system tensions: recognizing challenges to implementation”. The other barriers to reform efforts described in this sub-theme included: changes in executive leadership; tensions between central office and district office operations; categorical funding; the siloed nature of AHS, and how this affected staff responses to a new local management structure; and “institutional inertia”, or a general lack of support from many levels of the organization.

The second sub-theme related to the identification of paradoxes is titled, “shifting priorities: redefining the goals and vision of the Field Services Division”. The topics addressed in this section describe challenges associated with reform efforts and included: a change in reporting relationships; introduction of a matrix model of management; and limited authority in local financial and operational matters.

Systemic Tensions: Recognizing Challenges to Implementation

Contextual information about field director roles in the overall AHS restructuring process added perspective in understanding the barriers they encountered and how these challenges impacted the implementation of reform efforts. Most field directors discussed
the conditions under which they were originally hired. Primary premises and promises of the larger reorganization effort had been systems reform. As many field directors understood, AHS’ charge had been to change the system and manner in which human services were delivered in Vermont. One field director spoke retrospectively and said:

I went into the reorganization thinking there was going to be a major system overhaul and that we were finally in a place as a State, where we were going to look at how we do business differently….there were huge promises that were made in a timeline that was not realistic….we did move people around, but we didn’t move with them the structure….and the timeline was way too short….if people thought we were going to achieve [systems reform] in a three-year timeline, they were woefully mistaken.

Another field director noted the highly visible nature of the field director’s role relative to the AHS reorganization when he/she said:

I mean clearly reorganizing half of state government is not something to just glance over. Reorganization was supposed to be about everybody and everything, even if the name of your organization didn’t change. It was supposed to be a different way of delivering human services. And what happened was because field directors were created, we became the focal point….the headline is ‘Field Services Equals Reorganization.’ Everything that’s been successful and everything that’s not been successful is about Field Services. And if that’s what we believe, then we have missed the [original premises of the Agency reorganization].
Many recognized that field director efforts were one part of a larger whole. Their sphere of influence to affect change, however, was limited. While contributions, successes and accomplishments had been numerous, their efforts did not proceed without challenge.

Several field directors also realized the difficulty associated with not having had central office staff involved with the original reorganization effort to the degree necessary to support long-term transformation of the AHS. Many viewed this oversight as having placed barriers on systems reform. A field director reflected upon this situation when he/she said:

One third of the employees of AHS are in the central office. They have not been part of the reorganization picture…they were not invited to be part of the vision. And we are still struggling with how to have staff own the [principles of reorganization] and be at the table….field directors don’t participate in conversations about how to make it any different. You know, our world is the field….not the system, we are still an anomaly in a system that hasn’t made a choice to change.

Subsequently, nearly all field directors noted that changes in AHS’ executive leadership had been difficult. The early loss of the original leader, who had crafted much of the reorganization plan, was described as a challenge. A field director noted, “It was a huge blow to lose [the original leadership] in the first six months of the reorg, because they really held [the vision of] what the reorganization meant”. Two other transitions in executive leadership were reported to have occurred during the FSD tenure. At the time of this study, the current Secretary had been in the role for approximately two years. Deputy Secretary leadership had also changed several times since the inception of the
field director positions. One field director talked about the loss of the original leaders and changes in leadership when he/she said:

We changed Secretaries several times….when you have a significant change in leadership when you’re just in the beginning stages of that kind of [large-scale] reorganization and that kind of shift in the culture, it isn’t good. It makes it that much harder….the other barrier that I saw was that people really hadn’t fleshed out [from the beginning] what the organizational structure was going to look like.

Another field director shared their perspective about the changes in leadership and stated, “Many of the people, the architects of this reorganization are not here any more and the vision may be completely different with this present leadership than was the intent of the original leadership”. The data indicated that field directors had been placed in as one field director noted, “the middle” of a large-scale change which had experienced several changes in executive leadership. Accompanying these transitions were reported shifts in priorities, which will be discussed in the next sub-theme.

Another challenge to field directors’ role in facilitating change at the local level was reported as a tension between central office and district office operations. Primary difficulties seemed to result from original reorganization expectations whereby field director positions were supposed to have had local control of budgeting, personnel and decision-making. As one field director noted, “one of the original ideas … that hasn’t come to fruition was the idea of localized authority, localized budgeting, and localized decision making”. He/she indicated that there were States where this model had been effective and explained, “Central office functions are [related to] policy and procedure….and give the parameters [for the system] and [determine] what service array
that you absolutely have to deliver….but how you [implement that] is based upon the fabric of the local community”.

Other field directors echoed this sentiment and recognized that centralized funding structures did not provide the necessary incentives to realize cost-savings in local regions. There appeared to be a lack of congruence between the original tenet of reorganization efforts to “push back” control to local communities, and the funding mechanisms and structures needed to support this goal. Most field directors also reported that central office/district office tensions were further exacerbated by federal categorical funding structures. Categorical funding was not designed to support non-categorical realities such as housing, transportation, health, and mental health needs in the local communities. Further, funding streams constrained efforts to act proactively instead of reactively. A field director stated, “There’s no money for prevention, quite frankly. It’s still the mentality … that there’s action only after a crisis”.

Another consideration was the tension created by federal funding sources which awarded and recognized the work completed in “silos”. A field director noted an example whereby he/she said:

It’s not that people don’t want to or don’t support the idea [of integrated services], but we are still locked into the individual siloed missions….if we don’t get work participation rates up to 50 percent, we’re dead in the water….[where being dead means facing a reduction in federal receipts]…we need to protect the financial resources that we already have.

A different field director stated the dilemma in this manner when he/she stated,

“Categorical funding has got to be the biggest [challenge to reform efforts] and federal
rules, federal punitive rules”. Yet another field director said, “It is trying to get the systems to work for people instead of always being constrained by the rules that everybody has to follow. The categorical programs and funding makes it difficult [to assist consumers in a holistic fashion].”

A barrier to reform efforts was also voiced when field directors talked about the continuation of silos within departments. One field director had a slightly different stance and rather than having seen silos as a barrier, chose to see them as an admissible reality. This person said, “Organizationally, the silos are still very present. It’s the reality. That’s not going to go away….but, if you ever really looked at a silo, it has holes in it so that things can get put in and so that things can come out”. The field director indicated further that marked improvements had been made in the exchange of information between the silos since the advent of field directors, and that the communication amongst silos had led to concrete changes and improvements in the outcomes for consumers.

Another field director, however, talked about the constrained, rule-bound nature of the silos. This person said, “The departments within AHS have their rules that they’re supposed to be following….these sometimes fly in the face of what’s important for somebody who is here and needing to deal with both departments. And that’s a problem”. Still another field director talked about the protective nature of AHS’ siloed work and said, “There is still a culture of people working in the silos and being very protective of their turf at the local level and the central level”. He/she noted that the ensuing narrow thinking that this protective behavior promoted diminished the systems’ ability to change, and inhibited staffs’ ability to view consumers in a holistic fashion.
Several other field directors spoke quite strongly about the siloed nature of AHS. One explained that whereas the reorganization had hoped to break down silos and promote a one agency concept, in actuality, he/she viewed that the opposite had occurred. This person said:

If anything, I think it seems like the reorganization has polarized the field, so the silos have become even stronger because of middle management’s fear that Field Directors would take over authority….we’re not going to fight you field director, but we’re not going to embrace you with open arms [either].

Finally, another field director spoke of system reform and silos when he/she noted, “We still have these gigantic silos with impermeable walls that every Field Director’s head is bloody from banging up against … it would be so nice to look at how we could do that differently”.

It appeared that field directors understood the complexity of such large-scale change and the resulting challenges this organizational change created for staff. As one field director stated:

Change is really hard for people….the other piece around the whole leadership piece….is how do we better support our staff in a way that brings out their passions and their strengths….For many staff systems reform does require them to think very differently about how they do their work. I don’t think we yet have the kind of support that people need [to completely embrace the promise of reform efforts].

Another spoke of the AHS staff responses as they were asked to think about human service delivery in a new and different manner. This field director said:
It is the business going forward as business has always gone forward at the same
time that it’s supposed to be changing. Staff that have been hired because they’re
good soldiers are being expected to think in new ways, but they weren’t hired to
think in those ways. So it’s often not a good fit…. when you’ve changed your
expectations at the uppermost levels and then you’ve changed your expectations
by putting in a tier of management like Field Directors, but then you haven’t
changed the expectations for the framework in between….you’re not doing much
that will fundamentally change the culture of your system.

Another field director used the phrase “institutional inertia” to describe the
difficulties staff have had in rallying around the change effort. He/she noted two primary
trains of thought that contributed to the institutional inertia. One had to do with staff
perceptions that “you’re reorganizing us because you think we’re doing something
wrong”. The field director worked in his/her region to reframe the reorganization effort
as an opportunity for “finding ways of delivering [human services] even better”. Despite
these attempts, he/she said staffs’ perspectives remained, “We’re doing fine the way we
are. Leave us alone. Stop meddling. While these things were never stated, it is always
there”.

In terms of “institutional inertia”, the field director also explained that in most
instances, change to staff meant that there would be more work involved. “Often what
these improvements mean is more paperwork, more reporting, more analysis, more
explaining, instead of actually serving people in a direct way”. During the
reorganization, the inability to add positions that would have provided direct services to
consumers was noted as source of resentment among staff; the field director role was
sometimes viewed as an added and unnecessary level of management within the organization. This field director noted that he/she had worked to overcome this barrier in the region. Repeated attempts to demonstrate the “value-added” benefit of having AHS leadership in the local district office was reported by this field director.

A second component of the “institutional inertia” was described by the terms skepticism and a lack of imagination. The skepticism related to, “I’m not sure if your so-called improvement is really going to make things better”. The lack of imagination was reported as having been an inherent part of the organization and of bureaucracy. He/she summarized the resistance to change and said, “That is what I mean by institutional inertia – an unwillingness [and skepticism] to consider improvements”.

It appeared that the premises under which field directors had been hired had shifted. Several changes in executive leadership, structural and systematic tensions in AHS, a “siloed” history, and an overall institutional inertia seemed to have been the primary barriers to human service delivery reform that field directors encountered.

**Shifting Priorities: Redefining the Goals and Vision of the Field Services Division**

In addition, nearly every field director mentioned the challenges that had been created as a result of a change in reporting relationships at the local level, and shifting priorities in financial and operational matters. Originally housed as a division within the Department for Children and Families (DCF), the field directors had direct supervisory responsibility for district operations within the DCF structure until July 2006. Thereafter, the division’s role was clarified as having an oversight of human service system functions across all AHS departments, with a reporting relationship to the Secretary’s Office.
A “matrix model of management” at the local district offices followed, which many field directors discussed as a barrier to reform efforts. Primary challenges related to matrix management had to do with the impending confusion this change in reporting relationships created. Also discussed was the insufficient training for field directors and other AHS staff in the benefits associated with this method of supervision. Limited authority and accountability for operational matters in the local district offices was also said to have been a challenge.

The matrix management model in the local district offices was reported to be a challenge for many field directors. One described the change as a barrier to reform efforts and said, “We’re not managing the DCF staff any more. Now we’re expected to do this double solid dotted line thing to all the departments….we lost something in the [change of reporting relationships]. I don’t think we have real authority over anybody any more. And I think that’s a barrier [to local reform efforts]”. Another field director talked about the intricacies associated with a matrix model of management and said:

It’s not about one person wanting to control. It’s really about making sure we are looking at the broader system of outcomes and results … I still see issues around examples where people are using old world thinking. And this gets you old-world results. We have many successes, but we also miss many opportunities. Working under a matrix model management structure in which most people don’t know what that is, have no experience working in that structure; and there’s been no training about what this is….What we [field directors] wanted to try and have not been able to do, it isn’t because people don’t want to or aren’t enthusiastic. There is a great set of local managers and local staff. [Yet,] it is trying to manage within
a structure that nobody really understands. Some may say the message about matrix management has been clear, but in my view, it hasn’t [been].

Several other field directors talked about the difficulties associated with shifting priorities and having had limited authority in local financial and operational matters. A field director said, “We were heading towards a district budget to deal with AHS needs. Yet, it is still siloed”.

Still another field director talked about the challenges related to limited authority in the district when he/she stated:

I have responsibility and accountability, but I have no authority. This is not a good position to be in. But at present, that’s the way it’s designed. I work on the outcomes and the integration – service delivery. And I persuade staff to work on the integration and their supervisors tell them it’s important and many show proper deference. It’s a tension, which is what I’m trying to identify. If I’m really the person in charge of the local human services district, I would like to know what the operations are because I’m going to be [held responsible] for it, right? But I don’t want so much of the operational pieces that they get in the way of [being able to see the larger systems change pieces]…. right now I’ve struck a balance.

There appeared to be a paradoxical nature associated with certain aspects of the field directors’ roles. By the same token, a few noted that too many responsibilities in operational areas would have diminished his/her ability to see the larger picture and bridge the connections which aided in human service delivery reform. At the time of the
study, the Secretary indicated work was underway to focus and qualify the accountability and authority components of field directors’ roles within AHS.

One field director accurately summarized the overarching theme concerning the identification of paradoxes associated with AHS transformation efforts. This person noted the barriers that many field directors have encountered as they described their work to reform the delivery of human services in Vermont. This field director said:

Given the fact that the original shepherds are no longer here; and field directors became the ones who, because we were imbued with that kind of passion in the beginning, to carry the reorganization forward….the Commissioners had a certain perspective about what Agency transformation was going to mean to them and their particular divisions and departments and staff….How can we figure out the matrix relationships, to have people feel that it was value added and not an additional burden or layer, to understand that Field Services could actually move the particular department and division’s mission, vision, strategic plans, all of those things forward in integral and meaningful ways … it hasn’t been quite brought to the place where it could be yet. I want to believe that the promise is still there….but how do you find the balance without anybody feeling threatened? How do we find common purpose around the things that we think are going to be most advantageous to moving the larger outcomes forward?....If we have a chance to talk about and be honest about what’s working well, what isn’t working and how we can find a solution together versus viewing everything as a problem or a burden, or we don’t have enough time [we could get to an even better place].
As is the norm with any large organizational change project, change is often unpredictable, difficult and exceedingly complex. The field directors’ appeared to have discovered these norms held true in relation to their role as agents of change in AHS’ restructuring efforts. In response to question number one, field directors revealed the successes and challenges that had resulted from initiation and implementation of a FSD within AHS. Successes mentioned were generally related to improvement in the delivery of human services to consumers at the local level. Challenges stemmed from recognition that system supports often operated in a way which did not necessarily promote a holistic view of the consumer or the Agency. It should be noted that field director descriptions did not assign blame to people, leaders or places but instead seemed to have been ascribed to the realities in which they found themselves as they moved to support AHS transformation efforts.

2. In What Ways Has the Field Services Division Contributed to Service Integration in Vermont?

Question number two aimed to describe the ways in which the FSD had contributed to service integration in Vermont. The one overarching theme that resulted from this question was: 1) emerging practices. In addition, one sub-theme developed related to field director contributions to service integration: a) systems reform: working to achieve service integration. A primary tenant of the overall AHS restructuring plan in 2004 was intended to support movement towards service integration (AHS, 2004, January, February). This dissertation’s literature review related to service integration talked about the fact that there is little uniformity in defining what is meant by the term service integration (Austin, 1997). It is often viewed as a process rather than a
destination (Corbett & Noyes, 2007; Fong, 2003; Sandfort, 2004). Interview data from this study indicated that in Vermont, the principles concerning service integration found in the literature were accurate.

**Emerging Practices**

This overarching theme, emerging practices, relates to ways in which field directors described promising approaches to the reform of the human service delivery system. While the goal of systems reform had been service integration, there appeared to be no single, uniform description of service integration voiced by field directors. In many cases service integration seemed to be described interchangeably with service coordination. From field directors’ perspectives, efforts to have provided *service coordination* for consumers seemed to have been where the most progress in reform had been made.

What all field directors uniformly described about *service integration*, however, was that they believed it was too early in the change process to have recognized significant movement in this area. Most reported that service integration had yet to be achieved. Yet, again, nearly all field directors spoke of advancements that could be recognized, particularly in the area of service coordination.

The sub-theme related to emerging practices is titled, “*systems reform: working to achieve service integration*” and includes: first, a general review of how field directors described service integration; and second, the successes associated with this goal; and third, the challenges related to transforming the delivery of human services for Vermonters. Successes were generally noted in the areas of outposting, peer navigation, team efforts and service coordination. Challenges to service integration were often
reported as having been structural and systemic in nature. Furthermore, there was a paradox involved with service integration for some staff that were already overburdened and found themselves now caught between competing priorities.

**Systems Reform: Working to Achieve Service Integration**

General descriptions of what was meant by service integration varied. One field director described his/her role relative to service integration as:

I am supposed to make sure that services were well coordinated, that they were accessible….But, again, bringing the least number of people together to try to craft a plan that has at its heart that individual or family and what they want to see happen….And are you able to help open them to other possibilities as you’re doing that work with them in a holistic sense? It’s really listening to them. As new needs arise, bringing in other supports and services as necessary and also weaning ones away that are no longer needed. Because hopefully people will graduate from our supports over time if we’re doing a good job.

Many other field directors described service integration as a continuum and a process that had not yet been realized. One field director spoke about the progress that had been made towards service integration and said, “I think it has come a long way and still has a long way to go. However, I think the onset of service coordination has been huge”. Another field director stated, “We have a long way to go. And I still believe that it gets back to getting people willing to talk to each other and working with each other, and then they start to share the services”. Discussed from another perspective, a field director shared, “In a one to nine-inning game, we’re probably in the second inning….we have a
long way to go….our systems weren’t set up to be integrated. So the systems that people work in don’t allow for a common view of the consumer”.

In spite of the reported slow progress in moving towards service integration, there simultaneously appeared to be significant improvements noted. Outposting of services, peer navigation, team efforts, and service coordination were frequently talked about as the most noticeable improvements made to date. Outposting, as already reviewed in research question number one, was described as a promising practice which aided in the delivery of better integrated services to consumers. Subsequently, peer navigation, where available, worked to assist consumers with navigating the array of available human service options. But as one field director pointed out, while clients were viewed more holistically and staff worked to get people services where needed, this was seen as “better information and referral versus [actual] service integration. We do not have service integration at this juncture”, he/she said.

Another improvement towards service coordination was suggested when a field director said, “We take the most challenging cases and meet monthly….being able to look at people and bring to the table resources in a more comprehensive way, is one of the benefits of reorganization”. Still another field director was encouraged by having built community capacity in the region to help with service coordination efforts. Again, most field directors spoke of the coordination of services as the primary means of having assured service integration.

Field directors reported significant headway had been made in the ability to have responded to complex cases, either through their own interventions or by those of service coordinators, field service specialists and/or peer navigators. All noted that the teams
which had been developed to work on integrating human service delivery systems had made vast headway in meeting the needs of consumers. Further, a lead case manager, in areas where this model was available and supported, had begun to offer services in a holistic fashion. This was reported as a departure from the previous model, which had been solely piecemealed and siloed in approach.

Simultaneously, most field directors indicated there were structural and systemic impediments which limited service integration efforts. Challenges associated with moving towards an integrated service system were most often cited as having resulted from insufficient structural and system supports. Also mentioned was the paradoxical position in which systems reform placed staff that were already experiencing heavy workloads and oftentimes appeared caught between competing priorities.

One field director spoke to the structural challenges when he/she said:

We still have a long way to go [to accomplish service integration]. The fact is that despite the reorganization, there is a bureaucratic structure in place, and all the departments have their own rules and systems, and I am not saying that is a bad thing. But this true integration that we are looking for is compromised by that fact.

Some indicated that the State played what they termed an “over-responsible” position in the provision of services which hampered efforts geared towards integration. A field director spoke of the “over-responsible” nature of state government when he/she stated:

As a system of care we’ve promoted a sense that the State’s going to fix the issue and the State’s going to provide for you. This has eroded the ability of communities to provide neighbor-to-neighbor and other “informal” supports to
help people get to where they want and need to be. Sometimes it is almost like people can not conceive of what they want for a goal because they’re so used to somebody telling them what to do.

Still others talked about the paradoxical nature of systems reform and of AHS’ inability to embrace change in light of current workloads and incentives that were not aligned with an integrated model of service delivery. The tenuous position in which the goal of service integration had placed staff was most clearly articulated when one field director said:

It is very hard for them [executive, central office and district leadership staff] to try to think, how can I have the holy grail of Human Services. How can I have integrated services embedded in my systems when the issues they are dealing with – to call them a brush fire is an understatement; the whole forest is on fire and it is coming their way….A food stamp worker today – that department’s central office bonus is based on accuracy. AHS receives a lot of money because we have such a high accuracy rate in Vermont, which is a great accomplishment. If I, as a field director, start pulling the food stamp worker away from making sure the application is accurate, to making sure people get referred to the Food Shelf or working in hunger in some other different way, or being a lead case manager because I have trained them and they have the skills to work with a complex case – it comes at the expense of something else. So these are [not easy tradeoffs]. It is hard in terms of figuring out [how to balance these competing priorities]. Right now our approach to integrated services won’t work fully and trying to assign a lead case manager, bringing people to the table around the complex case – that
will never work fully until the operating systems behind it at the central office level, are also integrated.

There seemed to be reconciliation that service integration required more supports in order to be fully recognized. Most talked about the improvements made to date as having been case-by-case. This sentiment was articulated well when a field director stated:

What we do now is very often case-by-case. What we need as a next step is to show people how we did things differently with that particular case. Staff was able to move out of their box. But now we need to say the system needs to change and work this way. It should not have to be that every time we run into this situation, we have to say, oh, this time let’s do it differently again.

Further discussion of service integration and future efforts to achieve this goal will be reviewed in the Summary Chapter of this paper. In the meantime, data captured in response to question number two demonstrated that service integration in an organizational structure such as AHS is a difficult goal to realize. In the absence of having a clear definition of what was meant by service integration, there were indications that field directors’ work related to service coordination offered the most promise for providing effective outcomes for consumers of AHS services. Overall, data seemed to reveal that without additional system and structural supports, the field directors’ efforts towards service integration would remain a goal which could not be easily achieved.

3. How Does the Field Services Division Staff Describe the Factors That Contribute to Effective Outcomes for Individuals, Children and Families in Vermont?
The third research question revealed how FSD staff (e.g., Field Services Directors) described the factors that contributed to effective outcomes for consumers of AHS services. Two overarching themes revealed field directors' approach to consideration of these factors: 1) results orientation; and 2) assuring community and consumer engagement. One sub-theme that demonstrated the need for a results orientation in evaluating improvements in outcomes included: a) focus on results: shifting perspective to outcome and system improvements. Three sub-themes about the factors which appeared to improve outcomes for consumers developed from field directors' work in assuring community and consumer engagement and included: a) the place of community: building bridges to local communities; b) creating partnerships with the local community; and c) consumer engagement: focusing on the consumer voice.

**Results Orientation**

This overarching theme addresses one aspect of field directors’ work which was focused on results. The measurement of system improvements which were intended to improve the outcomes for consumers of AHS services was frequently described. Some noted that a results orientation had been an underlying principle of the original reorganization effort. The one sub-theme that is described relative to a results orientation is titled, “focus on results: shifting perspective to outcome and system improvements”.

**Focus on Results: Shifting Perspective to Outcome and System Improvements**

All field directors recognized a need to demonstrate that reform efforts in human services resulted in measurable improvements to the outcomes for consumers. However, many were not clear about how this goal could best be achieved. One field director stated, “I think that’s one of the things we really need to look at [collecting data about...
consumer and systems’ improvements], because I’m not sure we’re doing a good job of that”. And another field director said, “We are slowly moving to a place where we understand we have to be more results oriented. We have to ask the question, are you better”? Yet another field director said, when asked about how he/she thought the AHS could best measure the effectiveness of practice changes, “I am not going to be able to give you a very good answer for that. I do not know. The [work that we do and the things we are able to accomplish] are so intangible”. Finally, another field director shared, “I think we need to spend the time defining what we are going to measure”. Adoption of measures which could assess outcome improvements was often reported as an area which would require further discussion and attention in the future.

A few field directors, however, were fairly clear that a reduction in incarceration and recidivism rates would provide the best indicators for practice improvements and efforts towards prevention and early intervention. Examples most frequently mentioned included reductions in the number of homeless individuals, children and families in many regions of the State, and the provision of resources to consumers which enabled them to obtain or remain in stable housing situations. Other improvements noted included a dramatic drop in the re-incarceration rates for women in a particular region. Still another was related to a dramatic reduction in the rates of children under age 18 who were on probation in a local area of the State.

One person noted results-based accountability, which was mentioned in this dissertation’s Literature Review Chapter, as a practice model which offered promise to “inform the decisions that we are making and the work that we are doing with partners
and with families”. The expectation was that a results-based approach would serve the needs of most, if not all, departments and offices located within AHS.

Finally, a number of other field directors spoke about consumer report cards as having been a potential method for collecting data relative to consumer and system improvements. Many mentioned that a statewide customer comment card effort had stalled, and in the interim, a few field directors had developed consumer feedback mechanisms of their own. Field directors reported that AHS’ quality improvement unit had currently been working to create consumer evaluation measures that could be used throughout the agency. While field directors recognized the need for a results orientation, the specific factors they described which contributed to outcome improvements is described in the next overarching theme: assuring community and consumer engagement.

**Assuring Community and Consumer Engagement**

This overarching theme describes two primary factors which emerged from the data and appeared to contribute and lead to effective outcomes for consumers: community and consumer engagement. The field directors’ work with local communities included building bridges between AHS and the 12 regional areas and is developed in the first sub-theme titled, “the place of community: building bridges to local communities”. Furthermore, field directors’ worked in a manner which seemed to partner with local communities in transforming the human service delivery system as discussed in the second sub-theme, “community engagement: creating partnerships with the local community”. Not only was there an inclusion of communities in much of the field directors’ work, but there was also practices which assured that consumer perspectives
were valued and considered. All directors spoke of the Four Key Practices and regional advisory groups, or “RACs”, as a basis for including consumer perspectives in the AHS restructuring effort. Many also talked about inclusion of consumers in service planning meetings. These factors are described and included in the third sub-theme, “consumer engagement: focusing on the consumer voice”.

The Place of Community: Building Bridges to Local Communities

In every interview with field directors there was a resounding sub-theme of community building. These leaders appeared to recognize the importance of forming strong and vital relationships with their local communities. Field directors viewed themselves as bridges who aimed to connect the delivery of human services to the needs of the people they served, where the services were rendered in the local community.

An often cited example of the benefit of local AHS leadership was provided in relation to development and implementation of service provision planning for incarcerated women prior to their re-entry back into community living. A number of field directors talked about their efforts to institute system improvements and enhancements under the incarcerated women’s initiative. A field director explained the ability to engage the local community in these changes and said:

New partners in the community that may not have come to the table before [are coming to the table now]….[There is a growing recognition that] the work that is done by the Agency [relative to women returning to the community from jail] is not just the Agency’s work. It is a community issue and it impacts economics, it impacts real estate, it impacts everything.
Another field director spoke of building bridges to the community when he/she stated:

We did not have a lot of leadership capacity at the local level, other than our regional partnership coordinator, who has a part-time position….The coordinators could convene and set the table [but could not necessarily bring community stakeholders to the table]...I can get people to come to the table to focus on an issue.

Finally, another said, “My role as a leader is about helping the community to understand the messages that are coming from the State, and interpreting those in such a way that they are meaningful for my own community”.

The bridges these leaders have been building in their local communities appeared significant. They were providing connections related to the delivery of human services between a centralized office structure and the local community. They were resolving issues in local communities with community members. There was also awareness of the contributions local community members brought to the table as field directors worked to represent one of the largest agencies in state government.

**Community Engagement: Creating Partnerships with the Local Community**

Not only did the field directors build bridges to the local communities, they also utilized partnerships with communities to improve the delivery of human services. Practices such as facilitating interagency teaming, pooling of financial resources, and engaging community members in resolving particular needs were expressed as some of the ways in which field directors actually partnered with their local communities. It
appeared that community partnerships may have aided AHS in its ability to meet the needs of its most vulnerable citizens.

Interagency teams were utilized in all regions of the State. Field directors were able to bring community non-profits and stakeholders to the table in a credible fashion. As will be discussed in question number four, these leaders appeared to utilize relationships with community members and their positional authority to engage partners in working to change the delivery of human services. Teams of community partners reportedly went to the table to develop, devise, and implement solutions to community needs. A number of field directors also talked about pooling financial resources to improve outcomes for people. For instance, a field director talked about a community model developed to support stable housing in a region when he/she said:

We have significantly decreased the use of motel rooms for people who need emergency housing. We are now able to place them in apartments and they are able to stay there for 3 months. These consumers have access to case management, and at the end of 3 months, they get a voucher so they can move to stable housing….We have probably served close to 50 families over the two years we have been running this community program….close to 90 percent of those families are now in stable housing. And they are families that were very difficult to house. [The community non-profits and community members] have implemented this program with no additional resources from the State. This is an example of a real community model…and I feel like had I not been there, the bureaucracy that folks would have had to endure to get people to agree to do what
was needed [would have derailed the effort]...we did it....and it is now a very
vibrant part of our community.

Another example of regions having had an ability to form partnerships with their local
communities was illuminated when another field director stated:

United Way has consistently contributed....We have the community action
director working very, very closely with me in terms of [pooling resources he/she
has from a variety of sources such as CVOEO monies, church contributors, other
private contributors and he/she has] my direct service dollars coming in that
door... looking at how we can best cobble things together and leverage limited
resources and not make it a band-aid solution – but pay attention and have a plan
in place and check in with the people we are helping. And also giving them
[program participants] an opportunity to pay back – that has been a big piece of
this. I find [this situation describes] a pivotal part of the work field directors are
doing right now.

Finally, another field director talked about the collaboration with community members
that resulted from recent granting opportunities in the region, when he/she said:

Grantors are now asking for more collaboration among the people who are
submitting requests for proposals. I know I have been able to pull a lot of people
together who would not normally come to the table to talk about a grant [and
work together to obtain resources for the community].

Many field directors provided other examples of how they worked to partner with
local community non-profits. Most times community pooling of financial resources
allowed for a holistic view of consumers’ needs whereby everybody who went to the
table had a hand in promoting improved outcomes for people in the local community. Field directors also talked in a way which demonstrated that there was now engagement with local communities which included partnering with them, rather than operating independent of or from them.

**Consumer Engagement: Focusing on the Consumer Voice**

Another key contribution echoed by nearly all field directors was that the Agency reorganization effort had offered the opportunity to support inclusion of consumer perspectives in the delivery of human services for Vermonters. Recognition of the consumers’ ability to bring a valuable “voice” to the delivery of services was another central tenet of the 2004 reorganization effort. Data seemed to support that field directors’ work to include consumer perspectives aided in contributing to effective outcomes.

Field directors talked about the AHS Four Key Practices (Appendix F) as having most recently guided the AHS’ transformation work and its interactions with consumers. The recent introduction of these principles was a shift from prior practice. Furthermore, field directors encouraged and supported direct contact from consumers in their local regions. All field directors talked about their work with local RACs to assure that consumer representation was present and valued. Finally, field directors worked to include consumers in developing goals and solutions to meet their individual, children and families’ needs and support client movement towards self-sufficiency.

Each field director spoke about the AHS Four Key Practices and their role of assuring these practices were modeled, supported, and included in most, if not all, aspects of their work. The Four Key Practices articulated the principles of: focusing on customer
service; providing holistic service; supporting strength-based relationships; and adopting an orientation towards results. Field directors seemed to adopt the behaviors and actions outlined in the practices and spoke of their importance many times during the course of our interviews.

In addition, it appeared that field directors believed the Four Key Practices were one of the best tools to support culture change within the AHS, although a few did express concern that the organizational climate would not actually change in the absence of additional supports. Still others mentioned a concern of not yet fully integrating the Four Key Practices with AHS staff to the extent they would have liked. All talked, however, of how the practices had positively impacted AHS’ work with consumers.

The Four Key Practices related to customer service was most frequently discussed in regard to physical improvements that have been made to district office locations, as already reviewed during question number one. As already mentioned, too, was the fact that consumer input facilitated changes to district office waiting areas which made these environments more welcoming and consumer-friendly. These actions were also intended to demonstrate a sense of value towards consumers, and send a message to staff that consumers were to be treated with respect and dignity. A number of field directors talked about having encouraged direct contact with consumers as a method for improving customer service. One field director said:

I have tried to give a strong message to staff about how consumers should be treated. When I first started working the district office, the receptionist came to me and said, there is a consumer on the phone and they want to talk to you, but you – you’re not going - you wouldn’t do that, right? Or they wouldn’t go
directly to you? And I said, of course they would….consumers can talk to anybody that they need to talk to. It does not matter what anybody’s position is. I think that I have given a strong message about encouraging consumer contact, and about doing business differently, and collaborating – less ownership and less authority and just more working together.

Furthermore, a field director noted that if a consumer had not been treated correctly they were instructed to contact her/him directly. This field director said of improved customer service, “If you [the consumer] are not getting what you think you ought to, you need to call me. And I hand them my card….I think it is a clear message about how consumers need to have accessibility to all AHS staff”.

The Key Practice concerning holistic service was also reported as a component of consumer engagement. In terms of this practice, one field director said:

That we are developing solutions from a holistic perspective; that we are doing what a person needs, as opposed to what box they fit into. Which means that staff has to get out of their boxes as well. The focus, however, is on looking at the needs of the consumers, that is where we start, and that we work with consumers in a respectful manner.

Yet another noted, “For many families who access programs through the departments, it is really about making the services more holistic. We [field directors] are looking at the entire family and at the amount of services they’re receiving”. There were a number of examples that field directors provided which further demonstrated consumer engagement that was customer service, strengths-based and holistically oriented.
It ought to be mentioned, however, that while all field directors supported implementation of the Four Key Practices, a few of them expressed concern that the practices were not developed in a manner which would significantly change the culture of AHS. For instance, one field director noted that the Four Key Practices had been a top-down approach and stated:

[An ability to accomplish true systems reform is impeded] because the Four Key Practices is telling somebody what they need to do….it is still top down. As opposed to asking people to come to you with their work and then you tell them where you want to get to in terms of goals, and ask them how in their work they can do that….Many staff were hired [into state service] not to think like that.

Yet, an additional assurance of consumer engagement was reported through establishment of RACs in each region of the State. RACs were intended to offer a “formalized” mechanism whereby the AHS could capture consumer input as the system worked to improve delivery of human services to Vermonters. All field directors supported and many talked about the vitality of these groups. Composition of the RACs was reported to vary, with representation ranging from current to past recipients of AHS services, to those who represented particular segments of human services recipients (e.g., Women, Infant and Children program) and in some instances, to groups composed of all females. Inclusion on a local RAC had been determined and facilitated primarily by the field director. Members served in a voluntary capacity and received a small stipend to participate in, generally, monthly meetings that were held with field directors.

RAC agendas were most frequently reported to focus on specific issues that needed to be addressed in the local region. Many field directors noted important policy
changes that have been implemented as a result of consumer feedback and input from local RACs. Examples included improvements such as: changes to the mailing frequency of benefit documentation; actual changes in the wording used in benefit documents so that consumers would better understand what was being asked of them; and development of “outposts”, as previously discussed, in various local communities throughout the State.

Repeatedly, many field directors spoke about including consumers in development of goals and solutions intended to support client movement towards self-sufficiency. As a field director keenly pointed out, “there is a spiritual component of the systems change aspects of the work with consumers; they are all our brothers and sisters”. While not necessarily involved with the details of care planning in those regions where service coordinators or field service specialists existed, field directors offered a number of examples where consumers had been at the table when they determined how best to meet their needs.

One field director talked of a situation where multiple service providers were conflicted about what a particular family needed and when meeting with this family openly engaged in conflictual behavior. The field director intervened, gained permission from the family to meet independently, met with the group of providers, and resolved the issues before proceeding. The providers adopted a unified front with which to move forward and then reengaged the family in as the field director noted, a “more responsible” manner.

Another field director spoke of urging AHS staff not to exclude consumers from service planning meetings. The field director recognized the difficulty staff experienced and still insisted that the consumers had to be part of the conversation. This field director
said, “If you really want consumers engaged, they have to be in the room, all the time. Not just when we want them there, not just when it’s easy or convenient, but to include them in those hard conversations as well”. The value of having included consumers’ perspectives was evident when a field director said, “You really change the tenor of the conversation when you are able to say, ‘boy, you have a perspective on this that I just don’t and can’t have’”. And another said of the importance of having included consumer points of view:

I do think that the reorganization invited consumers to the table in a different way than before….people started to understand that the difference between me and the person who receives services is not really all that different. We are all consumers of something in some way, and that as a system we have marginalized people who receive AHS services….We have created a system that keeps people in poverty and does not give people a voice. And so bringing people to the table in a different way … because they have the answers that will get us to the place we need to be as a system, in terms of the fiscal resources, etc. I worry that we have not figured out what to do now that we have consumers at the table.

In question three, field directors described factors that either contributed or held promise for contributing to effective outcomes for consumers. They talked about the continued need to adopt a results orientation in order to assist with determining how to best improve service delivery and outcomes. All spoke extensively, too, about their involvement with local communities and offered examples of how those interactions supported improved outcomes for consumers. Finally, field directors noted the importance and value of assuring that consumer perspectives were included in human
service delivery reform efforts, and in the development of service options for individual consumers.

4. What Have Been the Roles and Strategies of Leadership Involved in the Organizational Change Effort?

The fourth research question explored the roles and strategies used by field directors to promote human service delivery reform efforts in Vermont. Two overarching themes developed: 1) leading for change; and 2) envisioning the future. The theme about leading for change came about as field directors described their leadership roles and their position’s authority vis-à-vis its placement in the organizational structure. There was opportunity and possibility expressed as field directors described their work to improve the lives of Vermon ters. Four sub-themes resulted from the overarching theme related to leading for change and included: a) relational leaders: opening the doors to a one agency concept; b) action oriented leadership: promoting a new way of delivering human services; c) positional authority: moving initiatives forward; and d) field director group dynamic: supporting each other’s work.

The theme about envisioning the future talks about field directors’ suggestions regarding actions which could support continued transformation within AHS. These ideas are captured in the one sub-theme: a) moving ahead: considering suggestions for continued human service delivery reform.

Leading for Change

This overarching theme addresses the leadership roles and styles that field directors used to describe their work as leaders for change. Most field directors were hired under the original leadership of the Secretary who had crafted much of the
reorganization effort. The tenets of having added a management structure at the local level to represent the AHS in the broadest sense, among other things, was intended to promote and reinforce the restructuring of AHS and its culture (AHS, 2004, January, February). Most field directors talked about a relational style of leadership which was used to create and engage teams or groups of people to work on human service delivery issues as reported in the sub-theme titled, “relational leaders: opening the doors to a one agency concept”. There was an action orientation to their work which is discussed in the sub-theme, “action oriented leadership: promoting a new way of delivering human services”. Field directors also seemed adept at using their positional authority to advance initiatives and promote a systems perspective of AHS’ work in the sub-theme titled, “positional authority: moving initiatives forward”. Finally, many spoke of a dynamic relationship that resulted from the cohesiveness of the field services division as a unit of professionals. This data is included in the sub-theme, “field director group dynamic: supporting each other’s work”.

**Relational Leaders: Opening the Doors to a One Agency Concept**

Field directors talked about the relational nature of their roles. Words like supporter, listener, facilitator, motivator, “empowerer”, connector, and mediator were used to describe how they viewed themselves as leaders. One talked about the challenges a team encountered where they needed support to gain an understanding of how to proceed with resolving a housing issue in the region. Another field director discussed the supportive nature of the role, which was reported to have encouraged staff to think and accomplish their responsibilities in a different way. This person noted, as did others, that it was about giving people permission to think differently and empowering them to reach
creative solutions. A number of field directors also viewed their role as one of lending support to others to take on leadership roles.

Many spoke of an ability to “be a good listener” and facilitate communication, not only among consumers, but amongst community partners and staff as well. Some talked of staff’s ability to know the answers to troublesome issues faced by consumers. They actively listened to staff perspectives when devising solutions which promoted changes within practices and services. A field director spoke of the need to facilitate a group involved with developing housing alternatives in the local community and to encourage conversations to plan a process for moving the initiative forward.

Another example of a connective or relational style of leadership was provided by other regions where field directors were working to make connections between staff roles and human service issues related to, among other things, housing, transportation, reentry into community living after incarceration, and health. By having engaged local staff with what this field director referred to as a “situational style of leadership”, which focused on staffs’ strengths, this leader was able to make viable connections to improve practices across the AHS’ departments. Examples given included practice improvements such as hanging posters promoting breast-feeding in local economic service offices where consumers received benefits, and providing books in district office waiting rooms to encourage reading and literacy. A field director said, “It is about bringing people together to try to generate a positive outcome and to do it in a way where it can be exciting and fun”.

An additional relational area of leadership often discussed was that of motivator and empowerer. One field director stated:
A leader to me is someone who is able to motivate people to do something, to get things done by setting a role model, but, if necessary, setting a framework within which the work needs to be done, and being a support mechanism for the people who ultimately wind up doing the work, and being available to them. In the end, you can only lead people who are willing to follow.

A different field director talked about empowering the district’s regional advisory council to take on projects aimed at improving community living conditions. This leader helped set the stage for the group to be in a position to engage in a change effort of their own. Another field director talked again about empowering staff to think differently and use common sense in finding solutions to consumer needs.

In a few instances field directors spoke of their role as mediators. Several talked about playing key mediation roles in resolving issues faced by local community partners and stakeholders. A field director referenced a situation in the community where mediation was needed and said, “I had an issue in the community, but no one was doing anything to say, you know this is not right….we need to figure out how we are going to go forward as one group”. Having viewed the situation from a non-defensive position, the field director had been able to create a situation where the community worked together in dealing with this particular issue. Another field director spoke of his/her mediation skills and said:

I see part of my responsibility as making sure that services run smoothly in the area and that issues get sorted out quickly and dealt with and resolved…they [community partners] accept my role as more than just within state government,
but as being within the whole of the broader human services system, and this is a good thing.

The ability for these leaders to have used a relational leadership style in engaging the human service community to embrace change and keep alive the dream of the AHS restructuring was notable. Many spoke of their leadership perspective as having been about the entire AHS, rather than one department, which offered a different vantage point with which to do their work. They spoke of the benefits of having been able to engage the local community and district leadership staff as a representative of all aspects of the AHS.

**Action Oriented Leadership: Promoting a New Way of Delivering Human Services**

The field directors’ work was also described by the verbs convener, problem solver, implementer, modeler, collaborator, community builder, and by words such as protagonist and catalyst for change. They spoke about the action orientated nature of their positions, which intertwined with the relational leadership styles reviewed in the previous section. Descriptions of their work included an active engagement with consumers, staff and the local community. There was energy to their words that indicated their interest in improving the lives of Vermonters vis-à-vis promoting a new way of delivering human services in the State.

Most, if not all, talked about the need to have convened teams or groups of people to discuss and devise solutions to human service issues. There was a central focus related to group formation and development, and of “teaming” which supported resolution to local issues and problems. Additionally, they talked about having helped teams to set goals and outcomes and for having provided direction to staff across departments. They
provided ideas, values and offered direction to people. In many instances, field directors also spoke about having given people the opportunity and resources to lead themselves. These leaders appeared to act according to the solutions which resulted from group processing and the sharing of information. A field director indicated, “My role is to pull people together and to help facilitate the conversation, even the extremely difficult conversations”.

Another field director used a metaphor of weaving to describe their leadership role by stating:

It is about weaving. There is all this tremendous work that goes on in AHS, in all these little disparate pockets. And it is getting it all woven together into something that looks different than what anyone thought they were producing before then.

Essentially it could be argued that field directors appeared to implement solutions based upon the inputs received from the various teams they convened.

Some of the formalized teams they described included district leadership teams, interagency response teams for children and adults, and regional advisory councils. The description “formalized teams” as used in this study referred to the regularly scheduled nature of these groups, which were designed to approach different levels and issues within the Agency and the local community. The actual make-up and work of the formal teams in some instances did vary by region, and in other areas did not. Other “informal” teams and groups were convened, often to address particular human services issues. Examples of these groups included “ad hoc” teams which targeted such challenges as
transitioning teenaged youth from foster care, the Incarcerated Women’s Initiative, housing, and transportation.

Most field directors also talked of actively leading by having served as role models for staff. The field directors were committed to modeling a change in behavior based upon the principles associated with the AHS Four Key Practices previously mentioned in question number three. Again, these practices included a focus on customer service, holistic service, strength-based relationships, and an orientation towards results. One field director spoke about modeling as having led by example and having marshaled resources to come to the table and be a team player, but not to have tried to do it all by him/herself. Someone else referenced modeling and the need to have been very clear about expectations with staff. Another talked about the interest in having promoted a sense of hope for people. Many reported the importance of collaborative working relationships in their leadership roles. A field director said:

To be successful is to work on shared missions, whether it is with community and state partners, focused on consensus, keeping kids in families, or with individuals as the focal point. My role is….believing strongly in my work and using collaborative structures [to get things accomplished].

Simultaneously, most field directors described their roles as having been protagonists and catalysts for change. A field director said, “We are looking at the way we deliver services in a different way and by setting that stage as a catalyst of change, which is [generally a] protagonist role”. When working to advocate for changes within AHS’ system, several field directors also talked about the precarious balance the role required. They were cognizant that their actions were often uncomfortable and
threatening to staff whose departments had been built in a “siloed” fashion. One field
director seemed keenly aware of the intricacies involved with promoting a new way of
operating when he/she articulated staffs’ resistance to changing business practices:

[Staff say] we do this because this is the way we have done our work and this is
how our system is set up to do it. While you may have a good idea of how to do it
differently, we are not set up to do that. Not only are we not able to do that, but
we want you to stop talking about it, because it’s making us uncomfortable.

Furthermore, efforts by field directors to promote an environment of change
included actions to assure that service coordination occurred that promoted adoption of a
holistic view of AHS consumers. This change was often described as having redirected
individual service delivery efforts towards envisioning coordinated changes that offered
promise for improving consumer outcomes. A field director articulated the hesitancy to
adopt changes in service delivery when he/she said, “Don’t tell me what you can’t do [to
address consumer needs], tell me what you can do”!

In addition, a field director, who had been in state service for several years,
poignantly spoke about the position’s protagonist nature when he/she stated:

If you do not have a change agent like a Field Director pushing, nudging,
encouraging, being physically present, showing up, talking with people, getting
them engaged, pulling them in … I think that the bunkers stay deep. The silos
stay strong. You keep all of the doors shut and you work within those parameters.
And that is it. I did that for [many] years. I do not think [that in the absence of a
new management structure] it would have changed.
It was interesting to note that information provided by field directors did not include a level of blame related to the system’s or people’s resistance to change. Most field directors clearly empathized with the challenges the organization and some staff has had in working to accept a different way of operating.

The field director positions were created as one component of a larger restructuring effort within the AHS. Appendix G demonstrates AHS’ organizational design prior to and following implementation of the reorganization. As previously reviewed, the division was originally housed within the Department for Children and Families (DCF); the field directors had direct supervisory responsibility for district operations within the DCF structure until July 2006. Thereafter, and at the time of this study, the division’s role was designated as having an oversight of human service delivery system functions across all AHS departments, with a reporting relationship to the Secretary’s Office. Field directors talked of having been in a position to lead the charge for whatever initiative was ascribed by the Secretary. A field director said, “…I see my role as leading by example and I am hands on, leading the charge for whatever the initiative needs to get rolling and to make a stance that we as a group, as an Agency, can help move things forward”.

**Positional Authority: Moving Initiatives Forward**

Descriptions of field directors’ work also indicated there was a level of authority associated with their positions. As representatives of the AHS Secretary’s Office, field directors had an opportunity to be instrumental in changing the human service delivery system at the local level. The positional authority they reported supported field director access to AHS leadership, AHS staff and the local community. There was sometimes a
tension described between the leading and managing aspects of their work. Yet, their work often afforded them the opportunity to take risks, something generally not thought to be supported by a bureaucratic organization. Lastly, field directors talked about a reflective element that was associated with the position. Reflection often supported adoption of a holistic perspective across the human services system vis-à-vis their positions’ placement in the organization.

Many field directors talked about the position’s role as having been designed as an extension of the AHS Secretary. In fact, the original conception of the field director positions emphasized that the role would exist as the Secretary’s representative in the local regions (AHS, 2004, February). One field director discussed this perspective when he/she said, “I view my role as being directed towards the Agency of Human Services mission. I view that role as being focused on outcomes and results. And I view the role as representing the Secretary of Human Services”. Again, nearly all field directors shared a similar stance whereby they acted as a representative of the Secretary’s Office in the local community. Given their position in the organization, field directors were afforded a level of recognition and authority within the AHS and local community structures. One person noted a situation in which he/she was asked to intervene because of the perceived power of the field director’s position. This field director’s ability to have a “difficult conversation” with a staff member in this situation was described as:

What this particular person meant [by the field director being in a position of “power”] was that I would be able to have a certain discussion with someone that was going to be a difficult discussion, and one that other people could not have.
And the staff person felt that because of who I was in my position that I would be able to [successfully engage in that challenging conversation].

In addition, field directors’ abilities to bring people in their local communities to the table was a positional benefit that seemed adeptly leveraged toward positive resolution of human service delivery issues. Most field directors talked about their work with community members as having been enhanced and facilitated by their position of leadership. This benefit was often viewed as a two-way street whereby field directors were afforded the authority to bring community members to the table. Simultaneously, the field directors reported they had access and had brought issues of regional importance to executive leadership within AHS. A number of field directors spoke to this dynamic interaction.

For instance, when having talked about the ability to move AHS issues forward, such as housing, transportation and the incarcerated women’s initiative, one person stated:

Although there is a lot of interest, fury and passion about all of these issues [housing, transportation issues, etc.], no one in the community has had the time. Various groups that have met trying to make something happen have eventually collapsed because no one had the time and no one was given the mandate to follow through. These efforts flounder because the leaders of these efforts, they often don’t have [authority and] access. One of the beauties of the field director position is I do have access [to the leadership who can affect change and the authority to implement solutions at the local level].
Another field director spoke of the ability to engage the community in developing creative solutions to issues that, in the absence of having had field directors located in the local community, would not have happened. This was accomplished, some field directors noted, by broadening the view that human service issues were essentially community issues. One field director commented about adopting this perspective when developing solutions to challenging human service needs when he/she succinctly said, “Everybody [in the community needs to] contribute something”.

At the same time, field directors expressed recognition that the relationship with community organizations was delicate and needed to be carefully balanced:

I don’t control my community based organization. There is only so much authority I can exert even within the state system. It often comes back to relationships and how much resource and time and energy do I as one person actually have in terms of [working with community organizations to resolve human service delivery issues].

A number of field directors also addressed the difference between managing and leading in their work. Most viewed themselves primarily as leaders, with a need to manage in certain areas, especially in light of the existing district office organizational structures. A field director stated:

There is a lot of energy put towards helping field directors not to define themselves as managers, because the management of human services is overwhelming. We could spend all of our time managing and doing nothing else. If one of the district directors is struggling with something, he/she is going to knock on my door and say, can you help me sort this out? And is that managing?
It is. I think by default, we are managers, because we are physically located in the district offices. Initially we were managers of DCF, for the first year and a half. [Since moving to the Secretary’s Office] it has been a long road to try to redefine ourselves as not being managers.

Another shared a slightly different perspective about the managing versus leading dichotomy when he/she stated, “Managing is doing things right. Leadership is doing the right things”. Still another noted that managing was intended to maintain the status quo, while leading involved risks. Yet another, field director said:

Where you maintain the status quo, you basically follow the rules, you in some respects are resistant to change. I think in a leadership position, you have to be somebody who challenges the status quo. You have to be somebody who can say, we can not do this the way we have always done it. We need to look at a different way. We need to look at how we can make it better. The whole piece about change, I think, has to be a part of being a good leader, that you embrace it, that you can be frightened by it sometimes, because you don’t always know what is going to be behind the door when you start cracking it open.

Additionally, several field directors reported that there were “risks” associated with their work. Risks were not specifically defined by the directors but were generally discussed in relation to field director credibility and their ability to interface with AHS leadership in the central office. A number of field directors noted specific changes they had been able to facilitate in local offices that had previously stalled. For instance, one person talked about additional staff that had been added to a district office to manage exceedingly high caseloads. Another field director talked of an ability to “speak truth to
power”, whereby field directors were in a position to articulate pressing challenges in the
delivery of human services to those who had the power to make instrumental changes.

Many noted other risks that were associated with being a voice, or catalyst for change. One person spoke to this concept when he/she described the initial challenge associated with not having had an idea well received by leadership:

[In making a certain suggestion], I knew that I was taking a risk and I did get in trouble for doing that; but we have moved forward on the suggestion….and I think it is important that we, as field directors, can generate ideas that people at first might not respond very positively to. And then as we continue to talk about [these ideas we can help them to move forward], because in the beginning it is often hard to envision a different way of doing something.

There were also reflective elements that resulted from field directors’ positional authority and place in the organization which allowed them to see opportunities and possibilities. Some talked of the ability to have asked questions and created the space for conversations which aimed to improve the delivery of human services. One said:

If you can credibly talk about what has moved forward by having that kind of flexibility and experimentation that, again, brings great new ideas to the table and changes things in ways that you never would have anticipated if you were stuck in, oh, we can only do this and we can’t do that. We’re not hemmed in a lot of ways….Be credible, have a respectful conversation with somebody, but if you knew that common sense dictated and that if you did something differently and it was going to benefit somebody and you were willing to take the heat when you
did it, then that is what you should do. This work is about doing the right thing in the long run.

Yet another talked of the “balcony seat or view” the position afforded. This person stated:

In my position I am sitting in the balcony; when I go down to the floor of the theater, I am not able to do much systems thinking…..But I get to go up on the balcony. I can see things and I can connect people who ordinarily would not be able to see that because of their position.

There were reported benefits associated with field director roles and the systems changes they all worked to orchestrate. One person stated, “I am really about the Agency of Human Services, I am not about any one department. I think this distinction makes a difference. I think that every field director would be able to identify two or three things and say this happened because I was there, at the right place, at the right time”.

**Field Director Group Dynamic: Supporting Each Other’s Work**

During the course of interviews nearly all field directors, at one point or another, described the value of being part of a larger group of individuals who were equally talented and committed to the transformation of AHS. One said, “A part of the beauty of the 12 that they’d chosen at the beginning was that we were all from very different walks [of life]. But in the aggregate, there was this wealth of experience and diversity that has allowed the group as a whole to function”. Another field director talked about the group’s potential when he/she stated, “I’ve never worked with such a talented, dedicated and passionate group of people in my life. And everyone is unique and they bring something different to the table”. Still another noted, “The Field Service group – we
have been given incredible purpose and opportunity; to be doing something differently or better for consumers enables [the system] to operate from greater knowledge and perception, and that is always a healthy thing”. A different field director said, “I have been very lucky. This is a great job. My ability to move inside and outside is a positive outcome of not having a departmental structure [to work within]. There is definitely pluses and minuses [associated with this work]; and the things that we’re impacting on a daily basis are absolutely phenomenal”. Finally, another person stated, “We feel ethically driven to change things for the better, not only for the people we are servicing, but for the people doing the work”.

A few noted the benefits of having generated weekly reports among the unit, which informed them about practice changes in other regions of the State. By the same token, several recognized the additional time demands weekly reporting created for them and viewed the reports as a burden. Most spoke of the considerable challenges associated with never having enough time to get all of their work done. Field directors also mentioned that many times work could not be completed to a preferred higher standard due to time constraints and workload demands.

Most field directors acknowledged that their work was contingent upon development of personal relationships within the AHS and with local community partners, and were cognizant that in the absence of such relationships their ability to act as agents of change would have been greatly diminished. One field director described the large amount of relationship building necessary to promote culture change and said, “It should not be totally relationship driven though".
Envisioning the Future

A research question that was not considered in the original design of the study was field director perspectives about the future of their work. During data collection, most field directors’ spoke of future suggestions and promises for continued movement towards AHS human service delivery reform. This overarching theme captures the data that emerged about the future work of the FSD: envisioning the future. One sub-theme speaks to the many opportunities and possibilities field directors’ envisioned for moving forward with reform efforts. These perspectives are included in the sub-theme, “moving ahead: considering suggestions for continued human service delivery reform”.

Moving Ahead: Considering Suggestions for Continued Human Service Delivery Reform

All noted instrumental changes or improvements that they believed would contribute to continued transformation of the human service delivery system in Vermont. A majority of the field directors advocated for local budgeting and several voiced that efficiencies and systems reform would benefit from centralized management of AHS operations. Many wished for consistent and clear messaging to AHS staff which would promote “out of the box” thinking and support staff in their work. One field director said, “We continually need to have that message [to staff] about thinking outside the box and what that looks like”. Departments and staff need the permission to “wrap our hands more fully around the concept of service integration”. Another field director noted:

I think that we need to continue from all levels to give the permission and encouragement to people to do things differently. And that needs to be a strong message at all times and at all levels, and from everybody. Clear messages; clear
expectations; particularly from the middle level staff members. I think that is the change that I have not been able to get to - staff gets messages from some people, and then from other people, they get really different messages. So at this point, they are getting mixed messages.

Still other field directors viewed AHS reform efforts and systems change as needing additional inputs from affected staff. One person stated, “I think the [ability to change the system] stems from a bottom up perspective – we need to recapture that”. Another field director stated, “I think every time we engage in activities that allow people to own their work [and have an opportunity to improve outcomes], that we are helping to move the original agenda of the reorganization ahead”.

Repeated movement towards advancing a focus on prevention was another subject that many field directors discussed. One said:

The whole idea at the beginning was prevention and earlier intervention in situations before they came to points of crisis; figuring out how to manage given the fact that we are not going to have more staff; we are not going to have more money. We need to figure out how to utilize what we have more effectively.

Yet another field director spoke of the future and the need for continued concentration on preventive efforts when he/she stated:

Let us look at what works for people. Let us help people to really be healthier and not have to wait until they get to a point where they are so desperate and so in need that now they meet some criteria. We recognize that we do not have the resources to serve everyone. And again, it is that sort of old adage of you can wait and you can go to the bottom of the river and keep pulling bodies out, or you
can walk upstream and put some fences up so people don’t fall in. I tend to remain hopeful about prevention as being the way to move our system….if we can get to a place where we can say to consumers, we can help you when you just need a little bit of assistance, as opposed to waiting for you to really fall into the river and we will scoop you up at the other end.

Other field directors expressed a desire to consider the cost-offsets associated with their work. Several noted that in the future they needed to do a better job of documenting what they have accomplished. One field director talked about the opportunity missed by not having all AHS staff collocated in regional offices. Several field directors suggested that future consideration be given to the idea that all departments within AHS convene a consumer group which could suggest and affect changes in policy. Most discussed a need to finalize the consumer report card project that was mentioned previously. Finally, one field director talked about the need for processing time within the FSD. This field director said:

I think the most important thing in order to be able to gauge what you have done is to be able to stay in one place long enough to know what you are doing, so that when something changes, you see what the effects are. Since field services began, the changes within this agency have been mind boggling; not only to me but to all my coworkers….stabilization has to come to some level before we can move forward. Otherwise, we are constantly changing. And if we are changing this and we do not know what the effects of this are, then we may be compounding the negative effects of that first change. And here you want to put something else on top of it and you have not had time to assess it. So process
time….I personally do not find I have time to process what I do and the effects of what I do and where I need to go.

A field director poignantly discussed the future of the field director role and the strategies used to support change in the organization when he/she stated, “This is not about Field Services. This is about how we deliver human services”. Further, “Even though reorganization is about everybody, there is no doubt about it. Field Services is right in the middle of that. And if we did not function well, no success would have been achieved. There is no escaping that notion”.

In summarizing question number four the field directors, as the leaders who were charged with implementing local transformation efforts within Vermont’s AHS, described their leadership styles and strategies for working to improve the human service delivery system. Field directors’ relational, action-oriented styles of leadership, and positional authority contributed to their having made many notable accomplishments. Yet, without a doubt, they described challenges and paradoxes that have accompanied their three year journey. While tensions existed in the system, field directors’ overall message about their roles and work ahead remained filled with hope for continued reform in the future. Field directors also suggested ideas which held promise for continued transformation within the organization.

5. **In What Ways Has the Field Services Division Impacted the Agency of Human Services Reorganization and Vice Versa?**

   Question number five intended to assess the impact the 2004 AHS reorganization effort has had on the FSD, and it also inquired about the impact the FSD has had on the restructuring of AHS. This question was addressed using data collected from the
perspectives of the policy executives who were either charged with designing, initiating and/or implementing the FSD within AHS. As indicated earlier in this chapter, policy executive data was less extensive than that of field directors.

Impact is described as the benefits associated with initiation of the FSD. It should be noted that the findings about impact do not attempt to measure the success or failure of this innovative management structure within AHS. These findings support understanding of the limitations and possibilities associated with the FSD and its future role in AHS transformation efforts. Policy executive perspectives were gathered to investigate triangulation of the field director and document review data, and to provide further contextual information with which to understand the AHS reorganization process. Capturing the viewpoints of policy executives was helpful in conceptualizing the organizational environment in which the FSD originated. These data also provided a broader understanding of the organizational change process which intended to transform AHS’ human service delivery system towards a model of service integration.

Findings from data collected with policy executives are explained using three broad themes: 1) goals and purpose for AHS restructuring; 2) challenges associated with reform efforts; and 3) FSD’s impact on AHS transformation efforts. It should be noted that the terms reform and transformation are used interchangeably, as are the terms restructuring and reorganization as described within the three themes.

The goals and purpose for the AHS restructuring theme details contextual information about the larger, overall reorganization effort, and reviews the circumstances in which the FSD originated. The theme regarding challenges associated with reform efforts provides descriptive data about the overall reorganization and initiation and
implementation of the FSD’s abilities to impact AHS transformation. It details factors which were reported to impede reform efforts. Finally, findings related to the FSD’s impact on AHS reform efforts are described in the third theme. It should be noted that the study did not intend to discern the overall reorganization’s contributions to AHS’ transformation. This may be an area of consideration for research in the future.

Goals and Purpose for the AHS Restructuring

The theme titled, “goals and purpose for the AHS restructuring” describes the original intent of the overall AHS reorganization effort from the perspective of policy executives. First, the steps involved with the restructuring of the AHS are reviewed. Next, several of the underlying assumptions and goals associated with the overall AHS reform efforts are discussed. Attention is then given to the formation and initiation of a FSD within the AHS; included is a review of the considerations which led to the addition of this innovative management structure at the local district offices in each of the 12 regions of the State. Finally, the goals and purpose for creation of the field director positions is described.

Overall Reorganization Effort

Policy executives described the 2004 restructuring of Vermont’s AHS as a large-scale and complex organizational change project in state government. One policy executive used a metaphor to express the magnitude of change involved with redirecting the organization’s course and said, “This [transformation] process is like changing the direction of the Titanic”. Also indicated in descriptions was the slow and incremental pace with which change occurred within the AHS as it moved towards adoption of a
service model that emphasized a holistic and integrated delivery of services to Vermonters.

Several policy executives also spoke of the overall reorganization as a process that was not motivated by cost constraints, as indicated when one policy executive said, “The Agency restructuring was not about budget cutting”. Rather, the foundational assumption for the restructuring was reported as “the belief was that if we were better at the work, we would ultimately bend the cost curves in the right direction”. Furthermore, this policy executive said, “If we could define success correctly, measure it appropriately, evaluate what is working, and what is not working, the cost curves would move in the right direction”. Subsequently, original premises for restructuring were reported as having been, “There was a starting recognition, a hypothesis that said the structure of a massive organization like AHS [impedes our ability to do] the best work….and that there is a better way to organize this work for the benefit of our clients”. These underpinnings, as described by policy executives, provided the impetus for the reorganization of AHS. The assumptions were also the seeds which led towards adoption of service integration as a pathway for facilitating the future work of the AHS.

Steps to the Reorganization of AHS

Reported steps to facilitate the overall restructuring effort included: 1) legislative backing, support and oversight as the plans for reorganization unfolded; 2) outreach to staff and the public including “AHS staff, partners and clients and all interested parties around the State”; 3) outreach to community partners, especially those agencies that worked in conjunction with AHS to meet the human service delivery needs of consumers in the State; and 4) facilitation of discussions with consumers of AHS services. During
each of the steps to solicit input, three basic questions were asked to gather information about how to best reorganize the Agency: a) what is working well?; b) what can be improved?; and c) to what extent does the structure of the Agency impede or facilitate the delivery of services? Data collected in response to these three questions were distilled into the “10 themes for reorganization”. The 10 themes have already been described in the Introduction Chapter of this dissertation. To repeat, they are:

1. Respectful service, valuing the assets and strengths of clients
2. Access to services
3. [Focus on] prevention
4. Effective service coordination
5. Flexible funding to address gaps in services
6. Providing services before a crisis
7. Collaboration with key partners
8. People are supported through transition
9. Continuous improvement and accountability

**Underlying Assumptions and Goals of Reorganization**

Using the 10 broad themes for reorganization, policy executives described the work that went into restructuring AHS departments and offices. Appendix G demonstrates AHS’ organizational design prior to and following implementation of the plan for reorganization. A policy executive spoke about the restructuring of the organizational design of AHS and said:
Departments and offices worked relatively independent of each other, which meant that there was a good deal of silo behavior. The mantra became One Agency. How can we function and act like one? And how do we break down the elements of these individual identities so that for a complicated household, they could have one plan, rather than have one plan per department….and that a program in one department could know what a program in another department is doing?

What seemed to emerge from the data was a sense that a One Agency concept and integrated or coordinated services were strategies that would best support improved services for consumers. Another policy executive spoke to the cultural change involved in promoting a one agency concept and moving the organization towards service integration when he/she said:

There has to be a whole change in the culture so that all staff is taking more responsibility for understanding what the Agency is trying to accomplish in terms of service integration….[It is moving staff to] see themselves as ‘I work for the Agency of Human Services, and in some sense I am responsible for everything that the Agency does and if I can not provide a particular service, I am going to work with you [the consumer] to make sure that we find out how it can get done’.

Several policy executives also talked about improved accountability and transparency as having been two goals associated with the overall reorganization effort. Accountability was to be achieved by improving responsiveness, respecting and including the client or consumer in the delivery of services. Another aspect of accountability included a shift in staff focus from meeting the needs of funding sources
towards addressing the needs of consumers. One policy executive described this shift when he/she said:

    Program management has driven our approach. I am not saying that is a good thing or a bad thing. The transition for me is that we are here in AHS to do one primary thing, and that is to deliver services to vulnerable Vermonters. Finding a way to get AHS services to people in an effort to stabilize their situation, and then to work with them to get their legs back underneath them so they can move on to self-sufficiency. We need to be cognizant of and manage programs, but the goal is to support self-sufficiency for the people we serve.

According to the data, accountability to consumers and pathways which supported self-sufficiency were intended to be considered in the future delivery of human services to Vermonters.

    Transparency was another goal of the reform efforts and was described as a level of “openness”, where consumers were to be included as active participants in the design and provision of services. In addition, rather than remain a quagmire of services, the work of AHS was to become transparent and accessible to consumers. A policy executive said:

    When I talk about accountability and transparency, I am thinking how do we move down a continuum. The continuum being that you can treat a consumer as an object, as a recipient, or as a resource. How do we move from treating people as objects and recipients to where they are actually resources to the process, because they have strengths and they have abilities and it is their life.
Many policy executives reported that consumer input received during the reorganization process had indicated that clients wanted to be included in the reform effort. In addition, that consumers wanted to be valued and treated with respect in a system which consumers believed had previously treated them as objects. Often mentioned was the fact that given a choice, the majority of consumers would have preferred not to have been recipients of AHS services.

In summary, data provided by policy executives indicated that the overall reorganization included several key components. First, it held a perspective that the AHS’ work could best be accomplished by finding a different way of operating. This broad goal to transform the delivery of services served as a pivotal tenet for the restructuring or reform effort. As one policy executive said, “A broad brush vision was to engineer a reorganization that would improve services”. Second, the 10 themes of the reorganization provided the principles for which reform efforts would be directed. The themes explained what was to be accomplished as a result of restructuring AHS. Third, reform efforts were to include a transformation which moved towards a One Agency concept, service integration, and accountability and transparency to the consumer. In addition, the approach was to work towards moving consumers towards self-sufficiency, and the system towards recognition that self-sufficiency for consumers was the ultimate goal, rather than solely meeting the requirements of AHS’ various programs.

All combined, these strategies appeared to offer the most promising principles and approaches for achieving change in the organization. Reports indicated that in order to accomplish these objectives, a structure was needed to move reform efforts forward at the local level. It was under these circumstances that the addition of a local or district
management structure, the FSD came into existence. The division was reported to have been envisioned as the driver of change at the local level. Furthermore, it was intended to act as a unifying representative of the Agency as it moved to reform the delivery of human services in Vermont.

*Formation of the Field Services Division as an Approach to Support the 10 Themes of Reorganization*

Several policy executives talked about the experimental nature of introducing an innovative management structure at the local district office level of the organization. A similar approach had been attempted during a previous administration, but with limited authority and success, the positions had been eliminated. Using this historical knowledge, policy executives knew that an alternative tactic was needed. They also recognized that in the absence of AHS conferred positions, achievement of the 10 themes of the reorganization would not be possible.

*Goals and Purpose for Initiation of the Field Services Division*

AHS transformation efforts were, therefore, thought to be best supported by placing key leadership positions in each area of the State and conferring them with adequate authority and power to represent AHS and promote a “One Agency” concept. Broadly stated, the positions were intended as one policy executive said, to “get everybody together and moving in the right direction, in the same direction, rather than six different departments [coming up with six different plans]”. Further, it may be surmised that the field director positions which were established with the initiation of a FSD were intended to support the AHS in moving towards a model of service integration.
The leadership positions established with initiation of the FSD was further described by a policy executive when he/she said:

[We needed to] push power to the field….there are terrific professionals out there who have their hands tied in a lot of ways. Many times there is a disconnect and lack of communication between what local staff experience with a client they are serving and how the rule keepers back in central office control the programs….The notion that a Field Director can call the rule keeper and say, ‘do not just say no – tell me how I can get this done’ … I need to have you tell me how to make it work.

Additionally, the Field Service Director positions were conceived as this policy executive said, “to have a responsibility to see the whole and to make sure that the organization is functioning as a single unit whenever possible”. And with time, a policy executive said, “The expectation of field directors was that they were meant to provide staff with a broader understanding of the Agency and its work”; also that, “The concept of the Field Director is to make sure, especially in complicated situations, that the work of the Agency is unified and making sense”. Finally, another policy executive said, “The goal for Field Services Directors was in fact to lead and to manage. It was twofold and was not just to lead the change, but to manage the orientation [towards a holistic view of consumers and provision of a customer service oriented model of service delivery]”.

Policy executives indicated that initiation of regional leadership provided an approach to move reform efforts forward in the local or district offices of the State. Initiation and implementation of the FSD and the 12 leadership positions created with it were intended to provide one component, albeit a significant piece, of the larger overall
The new division aimed to act as a unifying presence, which represented all aspects of the AHS, in each of the 12 local district offices of the State. Policy executives, however, described several challenges associated with the overall restructuring process, and initiation and implementation of the FSD since the 2004 reorganization effort began.

Challenges Associated with AHS Reform Efforts

This theme describes the challenges related to the restructuring and transformation of AHS as reported by policy executives. Barriers that emerged in regard to the overall reorganization effort related to structural impediments and included: the historical formation of siloed departments and policies; individual departmental budgeting processes and data support; and references to the bureaucratic nature of AHS. Additional challenges were noted in regard to the reform efforts’ budget neutrality and limited planning in terms of the reorganization’s implementation. Finally, there were several reports that the success and failure of the overall reorganization process was perceived as being measured by the successes and failures of the FSD.

Several challenges were also reported relative to initiation and implementation of the FSD. Most frequently noted was the regret in not having placed the division, at inception, within the Secretary’s Office. The pain and difficulty related to the overall reorganization had reportedly limited the ability of the FSD to positively impact reform efforts. Also revealed was the broad mandate given to field directors and the lack of clarity that had been given to their roles. Finally, limited long-term planning as to the FSD’s placement in the overall restructuring effort and work to transform the AHS towards a model of service integration were noted as barriers to reform.
Barriers Related to the Overall Reorganization Effort

Structural barriers related to the large-scale AHS reorganization were most frequently noted as challenges to human service delivery reform efforts. Historical formation and implementation of AHS departments was dictated by legislation which placed Commissioners with budgeting authority and accountability, and direct-line responsibility for the various departments within the AHS. “Silos” resulted from the origins of departments and related services that had been constructed and implemented in a piecemeal, singular fashion to address the categorical needs of Vermonters. Policies were not always integrated to address competing priorities between the various areas of the AHS. Budgets were constructed department by department; and at the time of this study, it was reported that an AHS-wide budget did not exist. The historical and legislative foundations of the organization created little flexibility for reform efforts which called for provision of services in a holistic and non-categorical fashion, and emphasized preventive services to individuals, children and families.

Lack of data supports within AHS and the bureaucratic nature of the organization were also cited as impediments to reform. These barriers were described as having slowed the pace and rate of change within AHS. Data systems had historically been developed to meet the categorical needs of consumers and advancement towards an AHS-wide data structure was reported as not yet realized. Access to data which would support service integration and a holistic view of consumers was reported as costly and prohibitively complex to implement. Bureaucratic organizational structures were also said to limit successful integration of services. The environment and culture of the AHS was often protective and supported a continuation of work practices which did not
smooth the progress for organizational change, holistic service and promotion of a One Agency concept.

In addition, the 2004 AHS reorganization had been structured as a budget neutral transformation in human services. The limited financial resources available to meet the emerging needs associated with organizational change were not forthcoming. Further funding constraints in the years following the restructuring was reported to have placed additional limits on the scale and rate of change that could be accomplished.

Finally, another significant challenge described by policy executives was the limited amount of long-range planning that had been completed during the reorganization process. In an environment of complex change, with multiple layers of change introduced at many different levels of the organization – all at the same time – it appeared that limited consideration had been given to the longer-term ramifications of the large-scale change project. According to several policy executives, evaluation of the overall progress associated with the reorganization had been a challenge to assess. Data did not indicate that measures of success for the overall reorganization had been included in the initial restructuring legislation. A perspective which described this circumstance was offered by one policy executive, who said:

I believe that the Field Services Division has been seen as the leverage point for the reorganization effort. Whether accurate or not, this seems to have been the perception. As a single Division with this perception, it may have created a sense of the success of reorganization rising and falling with the impact and success of field services. The division was not embedded in the Secretary’s Office early
enough in the process to truly blend into the whole effort and avoid the single spotlight.

In several instances, much of the overall reorganization’s success was reported to have related to the FSD’s success. The challenges related to the overall reorganization effort appeared to result from the historical origins and design of the organization. Siloed policies, budgeting and operations limited movement towards service integration. The budget neutrality of the restructuring effort was noted as another barrier to reform. Finally, the bureaucratic nature of AHS, limited long-term planning and few, if any, measures of success relative to the reorganization were reported to impede the rate and pace of change within the organization.

**Obstacles Related to the Initiation / Implementation of the Field Services Division**

In terms of challenges associated with the initiation and implementation of the FSD, a change in the division’s reporting structures was noted most frequently as a barrier to transformation efforts. Policy executives cited the change in the division’s placement in the organization from the DCF to the Secretary’s Office in July 2006 had been a source of confusion relative to the field director’s work and overall reorganization efforts. The result of this change in reporting relationships was described as having caused uncertainty for field directors in terms of their roles and authority, and confusion for staff in understanding expectations and where the field director positions fell within the organization’s hierarchy. Several policy executives talked of the regret associated with not having placed the division within the Secretary’s Office from the beginning of the change process. Consequences from this action were reported as having sidelined momentum for reform, and for distracting the AHS from original reorganization efforts to
promote integrated, holistic, and client-centered services. In some instances, there were indications that the change in reporting relationships had caused AHS staff to transfer and place responsibility for service integration solely on the shoulders of the field directors.

It was also reported that in several areas of AHS, the restructuring process had resulted in a reallocation of staffing resources and in others, relocation for some staff. During the transition many had left their jobs with AHS; others faced increased workloads and still others remained, but were unhappy with the changes. The overall reorganization had not proceeded without pain and difficulty. Several departments within AHS were reported to have been virtually left unchanged during the reorganization, while several other departments had undergone significant changes in terms of staffing levels and staff relocations. Yet another department was reported to have been created as a result of the reorganization. These descriptions appeared to indicate that tremendous changes were occurring at the same time in which the FSD had been introduced into the organizational design.

A number of policy executives reported that the discord caused by the larger reorganization effort had been inadvertently redirected and transferred to the new management structure. It was described as though a blurring between the overall restructuring effort and the initiation of the FSD had transpired within the organization. Many policy executives reported that the wounds of the overall reorganization, in some instances, had not yet healed. And again, that the FSD had become the primary indicator of the success or failure of the AHS restructuring effort.

Several other difficulties related to the initiation and implementation of the FSD within the organization was described by policy executives. One had to do with the
shifting priorities and the original mandate given to the division. Several policy executives spoke about the need for redefining the goal and purpose of the division. One policy executive said, “Field services was given a very broad mandate”. The division’s ability to move the system towards service integration had been limited in this policy executive’s view. He/she said:

Services are run out of departments and are in the districts. If we are going to integrate services, it has to be done at a policy level. The expectations for field services were too broad and each region appears to be doing things differently. Field directors were left to their own interpretation or their own area of emphasis. Which is natural unless you tell them otherwise. So people with a background in X were focusing on X. People with a background in Y focusing on Y – well that is not service integration. They were trying to be all things to all people. They were encouraged to do a lot of different things – work with the schools, work with the designated agencies, work with the police, and then do all this consumer work and have your leadership team. And by the way, supervise these people. And no, you just can not do all of that. So the expectations were too broad, and as a result, we have been scattered. There are several priority areas that we as a State should be addressing in terms of policy and integration and improved services; the field services directors play a crucial role in making this work happen.

Data revealed that efforts were underway to refocus the work and priorities of the FSD and its field directors.

A second challenge noted related to the limited amount of *implementation* planning or development that went into the formation of the FSD, and as already
discussed, the overall reorganization process. A policy executive said, “The reorganization legislation did not lend the clarity needed for the [implementation and] development of a new division [within the Agency]”. This point was further clarified when another policy executive stated:

We did not as an Agency, as an organization, give enough thought to the three-to-five year implementation plan….we did not finish the job [of defining lines of authority and responsibility] and at the same time field directors are being told to do all of these things. It is a set-up. Not having completed a three-to-five year implementation plan put them, I think, in a very unclear spot.

Overall indicators appeared to suggest that the multiple layers of change involved with the AHS restructuring, the timing associated with introduction of an innovative management structure into the organization, and limited planning had created confusion and barriers that impeded the rate of change.

In spite of the challenges associated with the overall reorganization of AHS and initiation and implementation of the FSD, policy executives noted many contributions that had been made by the division. It should be noted that the benefits and impact associated with the larger reorganization effort were not addressed in this study. As already indicated, this may be an area for further exploration and research in the future.

Field Services Division’s Impact on AHS Transformation Efforts

The third theme described by policy executives relates to the benefits and impacts the initiation and implementation of the FSD had made relative to AHS reform efforts. AHS leadership in each region of the State was most frequently cited as an advantage for the Secretary’s Office in understanding and addressing the most complex human service
delivery issues. Policy executives spoke of work in the area of service coordination as positively impacting the outcomes for consumers. Definitions of service integration from a policy executive perspective yielded several interpretations with which to guide the future work of the FSD. Finally, discussion about leadership attributes and the work of field directors as leaders of change in the local regions of the State is described.

AHS leadership in each region of the State was frequently cited as a benefit that has resulted from initiation and implementation of the FSD. Field directors’ abilities to commandeer and harness community resources were noted as a key success of the division. One policy executive said, “The ability [of field directors] to organize people and move agendas [such as reentry programs and housing initiatives] successfully, so these projects actually start happening could not have happened prior to the Field Services Division having been created”. Also recognized were field directors’ work with RACs and the improvements that resulted from input received from these consumer groups. In addition, demonstrated improvements were noted in regard to field directors’ inclusion of consumer perspectives in the planning and delivery of services.

Several policy executives talked about the instrumental improvements that had been realized for consumers, particularly in the area of service coordination. A policy executive stated, “Field directors have helped a lot of individuals get services in more integrated and quality ways”. Most reiterated the benefits of field directors’ work in providing preventative services to consumers who had multiple and complex needs. A policy executive stated, “There have been many, many, many individuals who have been helped who may have fallen through the cracks before”.

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Descriptions of service integration varied among policy executives. One described the fact that service integration meant different things to different people. This policy executive’s perspective recognized the need for a lead case manager in situations where multiple managers were going into the same household and described the goal of integrated services when he/she said, “All the parts of the whole are well oiled, working together, connecting, having the ability to communicate information without fear of violating HIPPA”. Another policy executive stated, “The consumer should not have to worry about what division or what department offers which services – that is service integration”.

A different policy executive noted the two-tracked nature of the AHS’ work; one being “transactional” whereby consumers of services needed to receive one or more services. Transactional needs were often facilitated, determined and accessed by completion of an application to determine eligibility. The transactional side of AHS’ operations had yet to be integrated. However, this policy executive noted a second “consultancy” role in the provision of services, where assignment of a lead case manager who could develop a relationship and work with the individual, child or family towards self-sufficiency. It was the consultancy side of AHS’ work where this policy executive anticipated the most work towards service integration had been realized.

Many policy executives also spoke of the FSD’s role in facilitating the Beyond the Boxes training. Beyond the Boxes was described as a workforce development tool that aimed to facilitate culture change in the organization; and involved a transformation of AHS operations towards customer service, the holistic provision of services, respect for consumers, and recognition of consumer strengths and abilities. A policy executive
said, “Beyond the Boxes is a training program to instill viewing and treating consumers holistically, and acting as an Agency holistically”.

Finally, the role of leadership provided by field directors’ presence in local district offices was described in several instances. One policy executive shared a perspective about the position’s role when he/she described the need for leadership to move through the three levels of networking. He/she said, “At the first level there is a sharing of information; at the second, information is shared and common areas in the work is identified; and the third level is where enough trust has developed in one another that the person can see the benefit of abandoning current work practices for a different and improved method of operating that was better than the old practice”. This policy executive talked about reaching the third level of networking as being an aspiration and goal for field directors to obtain.

In another instance, a policy executive spoke to the introduction of the FSD into the organization and its aftermath. Recognition of the innovative management structure’s place in the larger change process within AHS was articulated when he/she said:

On some level it was easier for Field Services Division to ramp up, build itself, take on a new piece of work that wasn’t being done before and charge forward. But then all of a sudden, the division needed to slow down and recognize that the rest of the organization was much bigger than the Field Services Division’s part in the larger reorganization and was not able to move as quickly as had been hoped…..other aspects of the reorganization need to catch up so that there can be synergy with which we can continue to move forward.
Summary of the Reorganization’s Impact on AHS and the Field Services Division

Policy executive data suggests the complexity involved with the 2004 restructuring of Vermont’s AHS. The multiple layers and elements of change occurring simultaneously within the organization have limited the researcher’s ability to “unpack” (Burke, 2002) the change process. Significant resistance to organizational change has been reported by field directors and policy executives alike. It appears that the magnitude of change involved with the overall AHS restructuring has resulted in a blurring of the FSD’s role and purpose. Reportedly there are challenges and barriers that have been encountered. Variation in what is meant by service integration and the FSD’s work to facilitate movement towards this goal has been revealed in this study.

A definitive assessment of what the FSD has done to impact the reorganization is beyond the scope of the current study. A lack of clarity in the definition of service integration and measures of its success make it challenging to discern the level of impact. Whether the result of a broad mandate, unclear expectations or limited long-term planning given to the implementation of the FSD, it is evident that the management structure was introduced during a period of considerable disruption and change within the larger organization. It is challenging to determine what has impacted what given the magnitude and complexity of change involved with the AHS transformation.

The data, however, do suggest promise for the division in terms of moving the AHS towards service integration, especially in the area of service coordination. Impact may be described as the benefits noted by policy executives. There were clear indications of the advances the FSD has made in providing service coordination and moving AHS issues forward at the local level (e.g., Incarcerated Women’s Initiative and
housing issues). In addition, policy executive data provided insights that may assist leadership with understanding the limitations and possibilities associated with implementation of the FSD. Finally, policy executive data revealed descriptive evidence which may aid in targeting future transformation efforts. The Summary Chapter of this dissertation will address recommendations for the future direction of AHS reform efforts. Yet, first, a brief review of consumer perspectives is considered.

6. What are the Perspectives of Consumers Regarding the Organizational Structure and Outcomes Related to the Advent of Field Services Directors in Local Communities?

Question number six intended to identify the perspectives of consumers regarding the AHS reorganization and advent of field directors in the local regions of the State. This information was gleaned from three separate meetings with designated consumer groups, referred to as RACs. One interview occurred in August 2007 during the course of a regularly scheduled statewide meeting of RAC members, which was held at the State Office complex in Waterbury. Approximately 50 participants were in attendance. Two additional interviews were conducted in two different regions of the State using the same research question protocol as the one used in the August statewide meeting. Roughly 6 participants were present at each of the two subsequent regional meetings held during October and November 2007.

The data collected was not meant to assess improvements in consumer outcomes, but rather to understand consumer perspectives as they related to the initiation of a FSD within AHS. The reorganization’s effort to focus on the consumer voice and value the participation of consumers in the planning and delivery of services was previously
discussed in the findings reported by field directors and policy executives. Triangulation of those data sources with the consumer viewpoints provided here in question six added further context with which to understand the organizational change within AHS. Data collected from the consumer interviews was limited and, therefore, findings for question six are narrow in scope and depth. As such, further research into consumer perspectives and the consumer outcomes associated with this organizational change effort may be warranted in the future.

Findings from the three interviews with consumer groups are developed according to three themes: 1) having a place at the table; 2) providing input to field directors; and 3) supporting policy development and implementation. Cursory reviews of data related to these three themes follows and are delineated by the headings as stated above.

**Having a Place at the Table**

RAC members identified an appreciation for the opportunity to now have a place at the table in regard to the human service delivery system of care. They were quick to identify, however, that their perspectives were not necessarily representative of the larger consumer population or those of actual recipients of AHS services. There was caution reported as to how far reaching their viewpoints could be generalized. RAC participants’ understandings of the reasons for the AHS 2004 reorganization and its promises were varied. In several regions, the RAC group had not existed at the time of the reorganization. Given this circumstance, historical perspectives about the overall reorganization effort varied in the level of detail provided. Many explained their membership on the RAC as one of advisor to the field director in regard to changes and improvements in the human service delivery system of care. Some noted that
clarification of their role and purpose would be beneficial as they continued to support field director efforts to improve services for consumers.

Discussion at the statewide meeting revealed varied responses to the reasons for the 2004 AHS restructuring. Different RAC members noted that the effort was a cost-cutting measure that intended to provide easier access to consumers, reduce duplication, eliminate silos among the AHS departments, and better utilize existing resources. Others suggested that the AHS reorganization resulted from a need for AHS to become “person-friendly” and to adopt a “no wrong door” approach to its work. The idea of the no wrong door implied that consumers would be directed to appropriate services no matter which point of entry they used to access AHS services. It was reported that prior to the reorganization, consumers had been marginalized by the system. Further, that the system of care had been exceedingly difficult for consumers to navigate and understand. Many noted improvements had been made in these areas since the initiation of the FSD within AHS. Others talked about varied levels of involvement prior to and proceeding the reorganization. In some regions, consumers had been included in the reorganization effort, whereas in other areas, it was reported that consumer input had not been solicited until after the reorganization had occurred.

A regional group noted improvements to the physical environments of the district offices since the 2004 reorganization. It was reported that AHS district offices were now considerably more consumer-friendly and welcoming. Consumer group members talked about field directors as having provided coordination, problem-solving, crisis intervention and resolution to short-term and long-term issues for clients. In addition,
both regional groups interviewed emphasized the instrumental role their field director had played in assuring a provision of holistic services for consumers.

During the large group meeting in August, references were made to the challenges associated with providing holistic care for consumers. For instance, in the statewide meeting a field director noted his/her ability to meet with consumers and determine eligibility based upon conversations rather than relying on the strict guidelines imposed by categorical funding streams. This field director pointed out that as a system of care this method of working with consumers was not built into the design of the reorganization. Restructuring, this person argued, had not been approached holistically and that without statutory changes, depending on the FSD to promote improvements for consumers was similar to relying on a house of cards. Apparently, the underlying structural foundations needed to support the provision of holistic services were not considered in the original design of the AHS reorganization.

Others noted that a very small subset of the consumer population was reaching into the realm of assistance provided by field directors. Some expressed that initiation of the FSD was like “placing a finger in the dam”. One participant said, “The solution is not field directors, they were supposed to identify where the problems are and now their jobs have shifted and it has become their responsibility to fix the problems”. Still another participant said, “It is a matter of time to have such a huge change in a huge organization with many different paradigms; it will take time to get everyone on the same sheet of music”. Another noted the promise of restructuring and said, “Grass roots organization at the local level will eventually work up through [other levels of] the State”.

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Providing Input to Field Directors

The ideas and input provided by RAC members was an often cited benefit associated with the presence of RAC groups in each region of the State. The field directors were responsible for forming regional advisory councils in their local communities and supporting ongoing meetings and dialogue with their RAC membership. Utilization of RACs was intended to assure continued consumer participation in the transformation process. Feedback provided to field directors by RAC members was reported to facilitate improvements in service planning and outcomes for consumers.

Participants interviewed during the two regional meetings talked about their field director’s ability to bridge and facilitate improvements for consumers based upon the suggestions they had made. Both groups highlighted the field director’s capability to listen, tap into community resources, and move RAC initiatives forward as pathways to improved services for consumers. RAC members stated they had a sense of value and felt respected for being offered the opportunity to provide information which could assist with human service delivery system improvements. Several noted the minimal stipend helped to offset transportation costs and foregone compensation for his/her time to participate in RAC meetings.

Most members of the two regional RAC groups also talked about the positive nature of their relationship with the local district office field director. There was a reported appreciation for having local leadership, who as one person noted, “Could cut through the red tape and make things happen in the local community”. Further, RAC members valued their field director’s ties to the local community. It was reported that the
presence of AHS leadership who lived locally added credibility to the field director’s role. One member talked about the fact that the field director shopped at the same grocery store as he/she did and “had to deal with the same issues going on in the local community”. There was a sense of respect and reciprocity observed in the relationships between RAC group members and the two field directors. Interviews conducted in the two different regions were marked by an impression that open and honest dialogue occurred within the groups.

Brainstorming was described as another way in which input was provided to field directors. One group noted their ability to look at problems from a consumer perspective added value to the process. A RAC member said, “We have made it our mission to look at problems in a broader perspective. Instead of saying what can we do to help, we are saying what can we do to help the most people and address the most issues with this amount of money, service or idea”.

Finally, many RAC members talked about the supportive role they provided to field directors. As new ideas were developed, the RACs offered assistance to the field director in terms of ongoing momentum and advocacy for sustaining efforts to facilitate change. The RACs appeared to have become cheerleaders of the field directors and their work to act as agents of change in the local district offices. As one RAC member said, “He/she is the seed and we are the fertilizer”.

**Supporting Policy Development and Implementation**

Beyond the input and supportive role RACs provided, there were also reports of instrumental changes in policy that have resulted from regional advisory council efforts. There was a range of examples offered which described the contributions that resulted
from RAC participation in the change process. It appeared that the consumer groups supported policy development and implementation vis-à-vis the field directors.

In one area, the group noted policy improvements to the foster care system that were made as a result of their input. The RAC was able to successfully advocate for teens to obtain additional time before they “aged-out” of the human service system of care. Another example provided included reinstatement of benefit provisions for consumers prior to, rather than following, their release from incarceration. Still other descriptive evidence of policy changes related to housing options and supports developed in conjunction with the community. Finally, one other example that was discussed involved establishment of a revolving loan fund. The fund assisted consumers with paying off traffic violations so that their licenses could be reinstated. This process in turn, allowed consumers to access transportation that was needed to travel to and from work.

All three interviews with the RACs included discussion about their efforts to implement a consumer comment card within AHS. RAC members had advocated for this practice and reported frustration that the initiative had not yet been implemented. Some reported that the credibility of the change process was comprised because the project had not come to fruition. There was also concern expressed that insufficient statewide RAC interaction had occurred. Lastly, many members noted a desire to share information amongst regions as a means to facilitate improvements between one region and another.

Question six attempted to assess consumer perspectives about the initiation of a FSD within AHS. Notably, the data collected from consumers was limited in scope and depth. RAC members confirmed that the perspectives they shared represented a very
small fraction of the client population which had previously been sampled in an AHS 2005 survey report completed by the Vermont Research Partnership at the University of Vermont. This dissertation did not intend to assess improvements in the outcomes for consumers. Findings indicated, however, that consumers welcomed the opportunity to provide input into the human service delivery arena, to work directly with field directors, and to support policy development and implementation. Additional research related to consumer perspectives and outcomes appears to be warranted. This and other potential areas for future research, a synopsis of the findings, suggestions for future transformation efforts and study implications are discussed in the next Summary Chapter.
CHAPTER V. SUMMARY

Introduction

Chapter Five offers a brief summation of this descriptive case study which investigated the strategies and outcomes associated with the initiation and implementation of a Field Services Division (FSD) within Vermont’s Agency of Human Services (AHS). Six research questions guided the project. Findings in response to these questions have been discussed in the previous chapter. In this Summary Chapter, a synopsis of the findings from each research question is discussed first. Thereafter, three recommendations are made which are intended to support AHS’ future transformation efforts. These suggestions are based upon conclusions drawn from the findings. Following the recommendation section of this chapter is a summary of researcher thoughts and reflections about this study of organizational change. Potential areas for future research and thoughts about policy development are posed, which in part, are based upon feedback received from field directors. Finally, implications from this study are reviewed.

Synopsis of Findings from Each of the Six Research Questions

This section includes a synopsis of the findings from each of the research questions. Headings (question one, two, etc.) are used to identify the transition between the questions that were investigated during the course of this study.

Question One

Question one explored the successes and challenges associated with implementation of a FSD within Vermont’s AHS. Successes were noted in the following areas: service coordination for complex cases; aversion of homelessness for numerous
individuals and families; the building of supports for individuals involved with the correctional system; better access to services via practices such as outposting; implementation of physical plant improvements; and the ability to add a systems perspective to the work of AHS, whether through offering a holistic view of consumers, focusing on prevention, or collaborating with community partners. Challenges were described as being associated with: the highly visible role of the field director positions relative to the overall restructuring effort; multiple changes in executive leadership since the division’s inception; the human service delivery systems’ resistance to change whether described as institutional inertia, tensions between central and district office operations, the siloed and protective nature of the organization, or categorical funding; limited authority relative to financial and operational matters; and changes in the division’s reporting relationship within AHS’ organizational structure.

**Question Two**

Question two inquired about the ways in which the FSD has contributed to service integration in Vermont. Findings indicated that this has most clearly been accomplished through: mobilizing and collaborating with partners in areas of common purpose (e.g., Incarcerated Women’s Initiative; housing); leading *service coordination* efforts, which offered promise as a practice for improving outcomes for Vermonters; and moving the delivery system towards a One Agency culture through the Four Key Practices. Data also revealed that field directors recognized the presence of structural barriers which impeded efforts to move the system towards a model of service integration (e.g., categorical funding; competing priorities for staff; lack of existing incentives).
Question Three

Question three asked for descriptions of the factors that contributed to effective outcomes for consumers. Data indicated adoption of a results orientation in the work of field directors and development of clear measures of improvements for consumers and the human service delivery system were needed. Other factors described included an assurance of community engagement, and field directors’ abilities to build bridges through partnerships with local communities. In addition, field directors work to assure consumer engagement and participation in the planning and delivery of human services offered promise for improved outcomes for consumers.

Question Four

Question four inquired about the roles and strategies of leadership involved in the organizational change effort towards a model of service integration. As the agents responsible for leading change within AHS, field directors’ styles indicated a relational type of leadership was employed to promote a One Agency concept. The work of field directors was also action-oriented, included a “can do” attitude and often involved the use of teaming in order to accomplish objectives. Further, the authority of the field director positions gave them credibility to move initiatives forward at the local level.

Question Five

Question five explored the ways in which the FSD had impacted the AHS reorganization effort and vice versa. The data provided by policy executives revealed challenges for the researcher in “unpacking” the change process to assess impact. There seemed to be a general blurring between the changes relative to the FSD’s role versus those of the larger restructuring effort. Impact was generally described as the benefits
associated with field director efforts to: improve service coordination; move initiatives forward at the local level; and utilize Beyond the Boxes training as a workforce development tool to facilitate culture change in the larger organization. Reports from policy executives also indicated there were varying interpretations of what was meant by service integration.

**Question Six**

Question six included the perspectives of consumer groups, referred to as RACs, relative to the initiation and implementation of a FSD within AHS. Data collected during this segment of the research was limited in scope, but appeared to indicate that consumers welcomed the opportunity to have a place at the table in the development and delivery of human services. In addition, RACs were able to provide input to field directors concerning consumer and systems of care issues. Finally, these consumer groups supported policy development and implementation as field directors worked to transform human service delivery in the local district offices throughout the State.

**Recommendations**

Based upon a summary of the findings, there are three primary recommendations which are suggested in this dissertation: the first relates to the concept of service integration; the second recommends broader organizational support and involvement in the change process; and the third calls for continued consumer and community engagement as practices which can potentially leverage improved outcomes for consumers. Within each of the three recommendations, specific strategies are outlined which may support implementation efforts in the future.
The first recommendation calls for development of a clear definition of what is meant by service integration. Transformation of the AHS towards a model of service integration was a key tenant of the 2004 AHS restructuring effort. When asked to describe service integration, however, varied interpretations were reported in the field director and policy executive data. This finding suggests that a common operating definition would be helpful in guiding future transformation efforts.

In addition, data clearly indicated that service coordination offered promise for providing improved outcomes for customers. As a result, it is further suggested that a common definition of what is meant by service coordination and its counterpart, lead case management, be included in the discussion about service integration. Shared understandings of these key concepts would support work related to further development of a model for service integration. During this process, utilization of the systems integration resources provided by the Institute for Research on Poverty (Corbett & Noyes, 2005, 2007; Corbett, Dimas, Fong, & Noyes, 2005; Noyes, 2007) is advised.

A second area for consideration is to broaden involvement in the change effort within AHS as it continues to move from siloed service delivery towards a model of service integration. Data indicated that many levels of the organization were not included in the 2004 reorganization to the degree necessary to gain sufficient buy-in and acceptance for the change effort. Considerable resistance to organizational change by AHS staff was reported by field directors and policy executives. This finding is further confirmed by a spring 2005 AHS staff survey report (AHS, Spring 2005, n.d./2007) completed by the Vermont Research Partnership at the University of Vermont.
The AHS staff survey (AHS, *Spring 2005*, n.d./2007) results revealed that “facilities-based staff are least likely to understand and believe in the goals of reorganization” (p. 13). Further, the report pointed out that direct and support staff were least likely to believe in the goals of reorganization. The literature related to organizational change notes the importance of staff inclusion in the development and implementation of change processes. In addition, it suggests that this strategy best assures, but does not guarantee, the necessary buy-in and support to facilitate and sustain organizational change efforts (Bolman & Deal, 2003; Burke, 2002; Schein, 2004).

In order to facilitate broader organizational involvement, Schein’s (2004) conceptual model for managed culture change (pp. 320-325) and cultural dimensions 10-step assessment (pp. 337-364) may assist AHS leadership in thinking about ways in which to engage staff in future transformation work within the AHS. It should be noted that adequate and consistent communication throughout all levels of the organization is strongly recommended. This suggestion is supported by data from the field directors which indicated that clear messaging about their role and the larger restructuring effort towards service integration was needed.

The principles of a learning organization (DuFour, 2004; Senge, 1990) may also broaden support and facilitate further change within the organization. The ability to ask questions and make mistakes are two key concepts which embody a learning organization. In addition, the initiation of sufficient feedback loops to facilitate and elicit communication throughout all levels of the organization is meant to smooth the progress for improved discourse. Carnochan and Austins’ (2001) work about implementing
welfare reform and guiding organizational change may assist in identifying strategies to support adoption of learning organization principles within AHS.

Simultaneously, further utilization of Schein’s (2004) work in understanding organizational culture and leadership, and the need for perpetual learning would benefit AHS. Schein’s organizational change perspective suggests that staff within an organization need to unlearn current behaviors before they can be in a position to adopt new ways of working. During times of transition, Schein explains that staff need to have a place of safety in order to entertain the possibility of completing their work in a different manner. In the circumstance of AHS, staff may need what Schein refers to as a place of “psychological safety” where the rule bound nature of AHS’ work may be unlearned and replaced with operating principles which envision human service delivery in an integrated fashion. As previously described in the Literature Review Chapter, he states:

Unfreezing…is composed of three very different processes, each of which must be present to a certain degree for the system to develop any motivation to change:… (3) enough psychological safety, in the sense of being able to see a possibility of solving the problem and learning something new without loss of identify or integrity. (p. 320)

In all likelihood, staff will require significant supports to move through this process. Adept leadership will be needed to assist with these efforts.

A final recommendation suggests offering continued community and consumer engagement in the planning and delivery of human services. The addition of these stakeholders appeared to offer great promise in moving AHS towards a model of service
integration and leveraging improved results for consumers. Efforts to continue incorporation of community stakeholders and partners in collaboration and development of service options is advised. Similarly is continued support for the mechanisms and methods used to include consumers in policy development and care planning. These practices aid in assuring that, as described by one policy executive, consumers are treated as participants rather than objects or recipients in the delivery of services.

Summary of Researcher Thoughts and Reflections

This study about organizational change within human services demonstrates the complexity involved with initiating and implementing large-scale change within state government. Data indicates that efforts to move towards a model of service integration are in the early stages of development and adoption. While field directors were designated as the agents of change, data reveals that without further structural and system supports, service integration will not be easily achieved. This conclusion is understandable in light of the reported paradoxes that exist within AHS’ organizational structure. An example of a structural barrier that was cited relates to the financial incentives offered for food stamp accuracy. A focus on work accuracy, as described by a field director, did not necessarily support staff abilities to view consumers in a holistic and integrated fashion.

Whereas the original AHS restructuring was reported as a need to change the delivery of human services to improve outcomes for consumers, the resulting strategies described in this research indicate the limitations and possibilities associated with introduction of a new management structure to achieve this goal. The size of the organization, and its historical formation and statutory roots, cannot be discounted in
importance for the pace and rate of change which can be planned, initiated and
implemented. Several questions may be pondered as further consideration is given to
future transformation effort within AHS.

First is to think about the role of the FSD and the field directors’ work to employ
strategies aimed towards improvement of the service delivery system. How can the
concept of service integration be realized in an environment fraught with institutional
inertia and structural impediments that were not designed to support obtainment of this
goal? What is the distinction between service integration and service coordination? The
recommendations suggest a need to clarify a common definition for what is meant by
these concepts. Given that measures of success were not reported in the data collected,
additional consideration of this element of change may be needed. A definition for
success relative to the overall reorganization effort and the FSD’s efforts to support AHS
transformation may be required to promote and aid in future human service delivery
reforms.

Second is recognition of the realities which exist in a large bureaucratic
organization such as Vermont’s AHS. The institutional inertia indicated in this study is
supported by the literature (Burke, 2002) which argues that “organizations are created
and developed on an assumption of continuity, to continue surviving, and to last” (p. 1).
A perpetuation of AHS programs which have been built categorically and in rather
isolated fashions, it could be argued, are operating as designed. Their continued
existence may be viewed as dependent upon a climate which promotes a “business as
usual” mindset and does not easily welcome the introduction of change. Here again,
adept leadership which can continue to negotiate the complexities associated with organizational resistance to change will be required.

As mentioned previously, the literature also indicates that there needs to be a sense of “safety” for staff as they are asked to unlearn past behaviors and adopt new ones (Burke, 2002; Schein, 2004). It further suggests that successful change occurs in environments where the people affected by the change effort have been offered an opportunity to be a part of planning the proposed change. Again, findings seemed to indicate that different layers of the organization were not included to the degree necessary during the initial and ongoing phases of AHS’ large-scale change project. As broader involvement of AHS staff is promoted and the change process continues to unfold, consistent communication about the change project would be recommended at each layer of the organization. Development of a core team of early adopters and “connectors” (Gladwell, 2002) may aid in facilitating future reform efforts.

Third, in spite of the challenges and limitations reported in this descriptive case study, there appears to be a good deal of change occurring within Vermont’s AHS and the FSD. Field directors’ local connection with community partners and inclusion of consumers seems to represent a considerable shift in the organization’s operation and culture. Whereas community and consumer stakeholders were often on the outside of development and implementation of service delivery options, they now appear to be valued and respected partners in these processes. A continued reinforcement of the positive movement towards inclusion of consumer perspectives seems to offer value in future reform efforts.
However, in an environment of declining resources, impending reductions in staffing levels and given the increasing complexity of social issues, it needs to be recognized that there are no simple or easy answers with which to resolve human service delivery issues. The anxiety provoking aspects of change will require skilled leaders who can navigate complexity, chaos and uncertainty. At this point, there does not seem to be a choice to turn back the hands of time and revert to departmental silos which promote a limited view of client needs. This research demonstrates there is promise in implementing a local management structure within a large bureaucratic organization such as Vermont’s AHS. Without doubt, too, are the limitations of what one division can be expected to achieve in the context of a larger change effort. The views from more layers of the organization will need to be considered as a common purpose and direction for the future is discovered. The timing of this study may indicate that there is no better time than now to entertain a vision for how to proceed with future transformation efforts.

Potential Areas for Future Research and Policy Development

This study indicates several areas for continued investigation, research and policy development. Field directors conferred that the following three suggestions for further research would be worthwhile of ongoing exploration and consideration. They are:

1. Service integration

This study revealed that within AHS, there are varying interpretations of what is meant by service integration. Future research could assist with determining the extent to which a common definition of this key concept has been established in human service delivery service reform. As one field director noted:
Service integration is at the heart of any meaningful AHS restructure. Efforts to describe what we mean by service integration elude us because it is a process rather than a program and by its very nature must be individualized. Despite plenty of discussion about service integration, there has been very little training on how to apply the concept to specific situations. It would be interesting to examine what shape service integration takes in the various districts and how firmly this practice has taken hold.

The researcher concurs with this perspective and agrees that service integration is a research issue worthy of exploration in the future.

2. Continued assessment of AHS transformation efforts

This study has provided AHS with externally collected descriptive data of organizational change strategies at one point in time. Whatever has been learned in this research is bound by time and circumstance. Instead of thinking that this study is a one-shot examination, it is worth consideration to entertain subsequent studies in human service reform in the future. Ongoing study of organizational change and transformation within AHS will promote continued investment in the change process. It will also demonstrate the nature of change as a process rather than viewing it as an event (Burke, 2002). For instance, the extent to which service integration occurs among front-line staff, perhaps even in an informal and covert way, would be one area of possible exploration.

3. Measurement of consumer outcomes and improvements in the delivery of human services

Future research which demonstrates measurement in the improvement of outcomes for consumers of human services would be a final area of suggested research in
the future. A primary contribution of this study is that it may be helpful to engage in monitoring the relationship of organizational change to improvements in the outcomes for consumers.

Policy development related to the three suggested areas for future research: 1) service integration; 2) continued assessment of transformation efforts; and, 3) measurement of consumer outcomes and improvements, would include the introduction and/or enhancement of organizational supports that promote a holistic, prevention-oriented view of AHS clients and services. Findings seemed to indicate that field directors were adeptly able to identify cross-organizational human service delivery issues. Their positional authority reportedly enhanced the field directors’ ability to promote a One Agency concept and capture a holistic view of consumers. It is suggested that the field director position’s placement in the organizational structure would support identification of policies which could assist with continued movement towards a model of service integration. In the future, further utilization of these key leaders to collaboratively engage in policy development towards this end is advisable.

Study Implications

Several implications result from this research about organizational change strategies and outcomes associated with the initiation of a FSD within the Vermont AHS. The study informs future evaluations about the opportunities, challenges and paradoxes in human service reform efforts. The project contributes to the literature regarding organizational change and human service integration and suggests areas for future research. In addition, the analysis provides a framework to assist AHS in understanding the limitations and possibilities associated with this organizational change effort. Finally,
it provides descriptive research with which to support continued improvement in the delivery of human services in Vermont.
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   [Synopsis of paper presented at the annual meeting of Association for Public Policy Analysis and Management.]


APPENDIXES
APPENDIX A: Interview & Survey Question Protocol
Vermont Agency of Human Services (AHS) / Field Services Division Case Study
September 12, 2007

1. INTERVIEW SEGMENT QUESTIONS

A) Field Service Directors (12)

Leadership
1. How do you define your role as a leader?
2. What have been the most challenging aspects of your position?
3. What contributions have you made in your current role as a field director?

Reorganization Efforts
4. What opportunities have been created as a result of the reorganization?
5. What have been the primary barriers to AHS reform efforts?

Service Integration
6. How would you describe service integration in your region?
7. What practices within the Field Services Division have been effective to enhance the outcomes for individuals, children and families?
8. How do you believe the Agency can best measure the effect of practice changes that have been made?
9. What further changes are needed to ensure that best practices are implemented?

Outcomes
10. In your role as a Field Service Director, what actions have you taken to improve the outcomes for individuals, children and families?
11. What detracts from obtaining effective outcomes for individuals, children and families?

Consumer Engagement
12. In what ways have you supported consumer engagement in your area?
13. How would you measure the success of that engagement?
14. What changes or improvements are needed?

Other
15. Is there anything else you would like to add?

B) Policy Executives / Individuals Involved with the Design and/or Implementation of the Field Services Division (6)
Six interviews to include a purposeful sample based upon hierarchical position and prerequisite of having been involved in the design of the Field Services Division.
1. What is/was your role in the reorganization of Vermont’s Agency of Human Services?
2. What do you believe were the goals of the 2004 Agency reorganization?
3. What do you believe was the purpose for creation of the Field Services Division?
4. In your opinion, has the Division enhanced service integration to date? If so, in what ways?
5. In your opinion, has the Division detracted from service integration to date? If so, in what ways?
6. What impact do you believe the Field Services Division has had on the reorganization effort?
7. What impact do you believe the 2004 Agency reorganization has had on the Field Services Division?
8. At this juncture, what changes or improvements are needed?
9. Is there anything else you would like to add?

C) Consumer Voices (Regional Advisory Council members) of AHS Services (1 Large & 2 Small)

Agency Restructuring and Consumer Participation
1. What do you understand as the primary reasons for the Agency of Human Services restructuring in 2004?
2. At the time of restructuring, what promises were made by the Agency to consumers?
3. In your opinion, what promises have been met? What promises have not been met?
4. Can you identify some examples of how the Field Services Division has put consumer practices and structures in place to ensure consumer participation?
5. Are there barriers you can identify to the implementation of enhanced consumer participation?
6. What measures do you think indicate that consumer participation is making a difference in the outcomes for the Vermonters who are served by AHS?

Field Services Division and Outcomes
7. What do you understand as the primary role of the AHS Field Services Division in your local area?
8. Can you identify some examples of how the Field Services Division has put effective services and supports in place for consumers?
9. In your opinion, what improvements are associated with the onset of Field Service Directors in your local community?
10. In what ways have the Field Service Directors dealt with challenges that had previously not been resolved in your community? Do you have specific examples?
11. Do you have any suggestions about how Field Service Directors could better impact the outcomes for the Vermonters who are served by AHS?
12. Is there anything else you would like to add?
2. **ONLINE SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE SEGMENT QUESTIONS**

**B) Policy Executives / Individuals Involved with the Design and/or Implementation of the Field Services Division (8)**

1. What is/was your role in the reorganization of Vermont’s Agency of Human Services?
2. What do you believe were the goals of the 2004 Agency reorganization?
3. What do you believe was the purpose for creation of the Field Services Division?
4. In your opinion, has the Division enhanced service integration to date? If so, in what ways?
5. In your opinion, has the Division detracted from service integration to date? If so, in what ways?
6. What impact do you believe the Field Services Division has had on the reorganization effort?
7. What impact do you believe the 2004 Agency reorganization has had on the Field Services Division?
8. At this juncture, what changes or improvements are needed?
9. Is there anything else you would like to add?
APPENDIX C: Letter of Invitation and Informed Consent / Regional Advisory Council Member Focus Group Meeting Interview
APPENDIX D: Letter of Invitation to Participate and Informed Consent Form / Regional Advisory Council Member Meeting – August 2007

Title of Research Project: Agency of Human Services / Field Services Division – Regional Advisory Council Meeting

You are being invited to take part in this research study because you are a member of the Vermont Agency of Human Services (AHS) / Field Directors Regional Advisory Council (RAC). AHS is asking the Vermont Research Partnership (VRP) at the University of Vermont (UVM) to conduct this study to support and guide the AHS Field Services Division in the development and implementation of strategies to improve the functioning of AHS and its outcomes. We believe that the study is another way of including your “voice” in the AHS reorganization effort. Your participation in this study is voluntary and will not impact your access to AHS services.

We encourage you to ask questions and take the opportunity to discuss the study with anybody you think can help you decide whether or not to take part.

Why is This Research Study Being Conducted?

The purpose of this study is to assist AHS in furthering development and implementation of strategies to improve the functioning of the Agency and its outcomes. Agency leadership and the Field Directors are interested in knowing what improvements can be made to the outcomes associated with the Field Services Directors’ work in your local community. This information may help those who have to make decisions about the Agency to make changes to better help Vermonters.

How Many People Will Take Part In The Study?

We expect approximately fifty (50) council members will attend the RAC meeting in Waterbury on August 13, 2007.

What Is Involved In The Study?

You will be asked to take part in a 60-90 minute, face-to-face, large group interview with Beth Cheng Tolmie, MSW and H. Bud Meyers, Ph.D. (the research team from UVM). We will ask you questions about the Agency restructuring effort and the outcomes associated with the new Field Service Directors management structure. The interview will be audio-taped so responses can be transcribed at a later date.

We plan to ask the following questions of the group:

*Agency Restructuring and Consumer Participation*

1. What do you understand as the primary reasons for the Agency of Human Services restructuring in 2004?
2. At the time of restructuring, what promises were made by the Agency to consumers?
3. In your opinion, what promises have been met? What promises have not been met?
4. Can you identify some examples of how the Field Services Division has put consumer practices and structures in place to ensure consumer participation?
5. Are there barriers you can identify to the implementation of enhanced consumer participation?
6. What measures do you think indicate that consumer participation is making a difference in the outcomes for the Vermonters who are served by AHS?

Field Services Division and Outcomes
7. What do you understand as the primary role of the AHS Field Services Division in your local area?
8. Can you identify some examples of how the Field Services Division has put effective services and supports in place for consumers?
9. In your opinion, what improvements are associated with the onset of Field Services Directors in your local community?
10. In what ways have the Field Services Directors dealt with challenges that had previously not been resolved in your community? Do you have specific examples?
11. Do you have any suggestions about how Field Services Directors could better impact the outcomes for the Vermonters who are served by AHS?
12. Anything else you would like to add?

What Are The Risks and Discomforts Of The Study?

A risk of participating in this study is the possibility that while your ideas will be appreciated, there are no guarantees that your recommendations will be implemented by AHS. Another risk is that in a forum of up to fifty participants there may be a decreased opportunity for providing responses. A last risk is that participants may feel uncomfortable in expressing their opinions in a large group setting. We will attempt to channel the conversation in the most respectful and productive manner possible.

What Are The Benefits of Participating In The Study?

The Secretary of the Agency has asked us to complete this study in hopes of improving the delivery of services to Vermonters. While you may not benefit directly from participating in the study, we expect that what we learn from you will help the Agency to make changes and improvements to the future delivery of services for other Vermonters.

What Other Options Are There?

You may decide to provide answers to the questions by writing responses and sending them to: Ames Robb, Field Services Specialist, AHS Field Services Division, 5 North
Are There Any Costs?

There are no costs to you to participate in this study.

What Is the Compensation?

There is no compensation for your participation in the study, other than the compensation already agreed upon and provided to you by the Agency.

Can You Withdraw or Be Withdrawn From This Study?

Yes, you can withdraw from the interview at any time by exiting the conference room. For some reason, if a participant acts in a disrespectful or disruptive manner, he or she may be asked to leave the group.

What About Confidentiality?

In order to protect your confidentiality we ask that everyone in the group not repeat what they have heard others say in this discussion. Everything you say will be kept confidential by the researchers. We will collect your responses in a confidential manner and we will not identify you by name or region in our analysis. If the information that you give to the researcher is later used in the report, it will be used in a way as to protect your privacy.

Contact Information

You may contact Dr. Susan Hasazi, Dr. Herman “Bud” Meyers or Beth Cheng Tolmie, MSW, the Investigators in charge of this study, at 802-656-1442 for more information about this study. If you have any questions about your rights as a participant in a research project or for more information on how to proceed should you believe that you have been injured as a result of your participation in this study you should contact Nancy Stalnaker, the Director of the Research Protections Office at the University of Vermont at 802-656-5040.

Statement of Consent

You have been given and have read or have had read to you a summary of this research study. Should you have any further questions about the research, you may contact the person conducting the study at the address and telephone number given below. Your participation is voluntary and you may refuse to participate or withdraw at any time without penalty.
You agree to participate in this study and you understand that if requested, you will receive a signed copy of this form.

___________________________________________  ______________
Signature of Subject                           Date
Dear AHS Policy Executive:

You are being invited to take part in this research study because you are a Policy Executive with the Vermont Agency of Human Services (AHS). The Agency is asking the Vermont Research Partnership (VRP) at the University of Vermont (UVM) to conduct this study to support and guide AHS and the Field Services Division in furthering their work to develop and implement strategies to improve service delivery, systems and outcomes for Vermonters. The study will also serve as Beth Cheng Tolmie’s dissertation research as a candidate in UVM’s Educational Leadership and Policy Studies doctoral program. Your participation is strictly confidential and all data will be collected and stored on a UVM server. No identifying information will be used in any research reports.

We anticipate that responses to the online survey will take no longer than 10 - 15 minutes to complete. The online survey can be found on the following website: [http://www.uvm.edu….TBD]. Before completing the survey, please read the attached “Informed Consent” form, and then check the box “Informed Consent” at the beginning of the online survey, indicating your agreement to participate in the study. You may also respond to the questions in writing and send them, no later than December 15, 2007, to the UVM mailing address listed below. Follow-up phone contacts will be made to those who have not responded by that date. Please feel free to contact me with any questions you have about this research.

Informed Consent Form / AHS Policy Executive

Title of Research Project: Agency of Human Services / Field Services Division
Case Study

You are being invited to take part in this research study because you are a Policy Executive with the Vermont Agency of Human Services (AHS). The Agency is asking the Vermont Research Partnership (VRP) at the University of Vermont (UVM) to conduct this study to support and guide AHS and the Field Services Division in furthering their work to develop and implement strategies to improve service delivery, systems and outcomes for Vermonters.

Your participation in this study is voluntary. We encourage you to ask questions and take the opportunity to discuss the study with anybody you think can help you decide whether or not to take part.

Why is This Research Study Being Conducted?
The purpose of this study is to provide a descriptive evaluation of the Field Services Division within AHS. Information you provide will contribute to an examination of the strategies and outcomes associated with this organizational change. AHS is interested in knowing the challenges and opportunities this innovative management structure faces as it works to assist the Agency move towards system change, service integration, and improved outcomes. Information collected during the study is intended to help guide future improvements in the delivery of services and outcomes for Vermonter.

How Many People Will Take Part In The Study?

During this segment of the study, approximately sixty district directors and eight policy executives are being invited to participate in the online survey portion of the project.

What Is Involved In The Study?

You will be asked to take part in a 10 - 15 minute online survey. We will ask you questions about the Agency reorganization effort, your role and the outcomes associated with the Field Services Division’s work. Your responses will be collected and stored on a secure server at UVM.

The online survey will ask the following questions:

1. What is/was your role in the reorganization of Vermont’s Agency of Human Services?
2. What do you believe were the goals of the 2004 Agency reorganization?
3. What do you believe was the purpose for creation of the Field Services Division?
4. In your opinion, has the Division enhanced service integration to date? If so, in what ways?
5. In your opinion, has the Division detracted from service integration to date? If so, in what ways?
6. What impact do you believe the Field Services Division has had on the reorganization effort?
7. What impact do you believe the 2004 Agency reorganization has had on the Field Services Division?
8. At this juncture, what changes or improvements are needed?
9. Is there anything else you would like to add?

You may decide to provide answers to the questions by writing responses and sending them to: Beth Cheng Tolmie, University of Vermont, College of Education & Social Services, 499B Waterman Building, 85 So. Prospect Street, Burlington, Vermont 05405. Written responses must be received no later than December 15, 2007.

What Are The Risks and Discomforts Of The Study?
There is the possibility for a breach of confidentiality, but measures will be taken to minimize the risk as outlined in the confidentiality section of this informed consent form. A risk of participating in this study is the possibility that while your ideas will be appreciated, there are no guarantees that your recommendations will be implemented by the Agency. Another risk is that due to the number of participants in this segment of the study, your survey responses and ideas may not get included in research reports.

**What Are The Benefits of Participating In The Study?**

There may be no direct benefit to you for participating in this study. The Agency of Human Services has asked us to complete this study to better understand the organizational change strategies associated with the Field Services Division, as one aspect of the larger Agency restructuring that occurred in 2004. The major question for the study is: what are the factors that contribute to effective outcomes for individuals, children and families in Vermont? Descriptive information gleaned from this study will guide future policy implementation in the delivery of human services that aims to improve outcomes for Vermonters.

**Are There Any Costs?**

There are no costs to you to participate in this study, other than your time.

**What Is the Compensation?**

There is no compensation for your participation in the study.

**Can You Withdraw or Be Withdrawn From This Study?**

Yes, you can withdraw from the study at any point during the online survey by exiting the website link. You may decide to withdraw in the beginning, middle or end of the survey.

**What About Confidentiality?**

Your information will be kept confidential by the researcher. We will collect your responses in a confidential manner and we will not identify you by name or region in our analysis. Written responses submitted will be kept in a secure location at UVM and shredded after completion of the project.
APPENDIX F: Agency of Human Services Four Key Practices

Customer Service… *doesn’t stop at rules and regulations.*

Ø **Individuals and Families:** We look beyond program eligibility to find ways to support individuals and families. People feel listened to and understood, feel that we are responding to their needs, and receive respectful and clear answers.

Ø **Workforce:** Staff feel listened to and respected, supported in their efforts to be creative and flexible in finding solutions, and are routinely asked to provide ideas for system and service improvements.

Ø **Service System:** Human service policies and practices encourage deep listening, flexibility, creativity, and respect in all aspects of the work.

Holistic Service… *is about looking past discrete individual needs to the whole person.*

Ø **Individuals and Families:** We consider the whole context of people’s lives beyond the boundaries of a particular program.

Ø **Workforce:** Mutual respect, teamwork and cooperation are the norm. Staff get the support and resources they need to work holistically with people participating in services, and are supported during life events and transitions.

Ø **Service System:** Human service policies forge connections among programs and the natural supports in the community, and promote crisis prevention and support during transitions.

Strength-Based Relationships… *are more effective than talking about what’s wrong with someone.*

Ø **Individuals and Families:** We identify and build on the assets and strengths of individuals and families.

Ø **Workforce:** We value the skills and expertise of our staff, routinely recognize and reward positive practices, and provide opportunities to learn and grow professionally.

Ø **Service System:** Human service policies reinforce and reward AHS staff and community partners as they apply strength-based practices while working with individuals and families participating in services.

Results Oriented… *means more than how much we did and how well we did it, it’s about people’s lives being better.*

Ø **Individuals and Families:** We look for opportunities to offer prevention and early interventions that support healthy individuals and families. We commit to helping one another make gains in our lives.

Ø **Workforce:** We have a work environment that thrives on continuous improvement, encourages professional growth and the development of best practices, and acknowledges the valuable contributions of staff in improving the lives of Vermonters.
Ø **Service System:** Human service efforts are focused on results that relate to the health and well-being of communities. Policy, evaluation, and decision-making reinforce the attainment of measurable results, rather than delivering units of service.

*July, 2007*

APPENDIX G: Vermont Agency of Human Services / Before and After 2004 Reorganization

Source:
Retrieved February 13, 2008