BRIEFLY SPEAKING: PROCESS MAPPING INTAKE AND THE CLIENT EXPERIENCE

Warm Up Exercises:

Participants are asked to think about the current intake system and respond individually to the two questions below by writing as many responses as they could think of on sticky notes in 90 seconds and posting them on a wall,

1*) What do you like best about the intake system?*

2) What do you like least about the intake system?

Participants then "clump" similar responses

Participants are then asked to determine what success could look like by indicating

1) What would you like to see more of in the intake system?

2) What would you like to see less of in the intake system?

Participants then "clump" similar responses.

These responses are left up throughout the day as thought-starters for participants or for participants or the facilitator to refer back to during the course of discussion.

Process Mapping

A large horizontal space is needed for process mapping. Typically, banner paper is stretched horizontally across an entire wall as a working surface. Points of entry (POE), the types of ways a prospective client might enter the program from walk-in to outreach to referrals, are denoted on the far-left side of the banner. Participants are walked through each POE from walk-ins to outreach to clinics to online to telephone, in order to determine how and how many (percentages) of clients connect with each office. To date, telephone intake dominates other entry points for most programs.

The first half of the day is spent detailing and drawing on the banner the steps of intake from point of entry through case rejection or acceptance and final notification of the (prospective) client. In addition to sharing their own experiences of how the system actually works, *participants are constantly asked to empathize with how a distraught caller might feel as she was making her way step by step through the existing intake process.*

Identifying, Then Prioritizing Pinch-Points:

This activity involved participants identifying every place in the intake process they knew delays, redundancies or backups were happening--then determining the one or two most important ones to work on.

The Pareto principle (also known as the 80/20 rule) states that, for many events, roughly 80% of the effects come from 20% of the causes. One or two identified pain points are likely to be the source of the most serious logjams in the system.

During process mapping, one can also identify and act on "low hanging fruit" for the quick win. For example, one program decided to begin asking applicants requiring callbacks when and how they would like to be contacted, out of respect for those who might be at work or fearful of domestic abuse.

Determining Root Cause

Root cause analysis goes below the surface (the obvious) to identify the actual cause of a problem not just its symptoms. This phase is particularly important and is particularly hard to do.

Most of us are really good at jumping to conclusions. We think we know what the problem is and how to solve it. This often leads to an expenditure of time, effort and resources solving the wrong problem, only to find the issue recurring.

The Five Whys is a technique used to explore the cause-and-effect relationships underlying a particular problem. The primary goal of the technique is to determine the root cause of a problem by repeating the question "Why?". Each answer forms the basis of the next question. The key is to avoid assumptions and instead trace the chain of causality from the effect through any layers of abstraction.

The most often used example of 5 Whys analysis: The Washington Monument

Why #1 – Why is the Washington Monument deteriorating?

Because harsh chemicals are frequently used to clean the monument.

Why #2 – Why are harsh chemicals needed?

To clean off the large number of bird droppings on the monument.

Why #3 – Why are there a large number of bird droppings on the monument?

Because the large population of spiders in and around the Monument are a food source to the local birds

Why #4 – Why is there a large population of spiders in and around the Monument?

Because vast swarms of insects, on which the spiders feed, are drawn to the monument when its lights come on in the evening.

Why #5 – Why are such vast swarms of insects drawn to the Washington monument?

Because the Washington Monument's lights come on half an hour before other monuments and building lights surrounding it.

Solution: Synchronize the timing for the Washington monument illumination to coincide with the others.

Landing on an incompetent or insufficient staff, not enough time, or not enough funding, as the root cause of a problem is generally not the most productive place to conclude your analysis. Any of those answers may be true, but they are either symptomatic, as opposed to causal, or beyond our ability to control.

Framing the Right Question

Tina Seelig, quoted in an article in Fast Company, sums up the key importance of re-framing in enabling a true process of innovation, unencumbered by existing categories and assumptions:

> *"What is the sum of 5 plus 5?"*
>
> *What two numbers add up to 10?"*
>
> *The first question has only one right answer, and the second question has an infinite number of solutions, including negative numbers and fractions. These two problems, which rely on simple addition, differ only in the way they are framed. In fact, all questions are the frame into which the answers fall. And as you can see, by changing the frame, you dramatically change the range of possible solutions. …We create frames for what we experience, and they both inform and limit the way we think.*
>
> *Mastering the ability to reframe problems is an important tool for increasing your imagination because it unlocks a vast array of solutions. With experience it becomes quite natural."*[1]

[1] https://www.fastcompany.com/1672354/how-reframing-a-problem-unlocks-innovation The article is an adapted excerpt from Seelig's book inGenius: A Crash Course on Creativity**.** Dr. Tina Seelig is Professor of the Practice in the department of Management Science at Stanford University School of Engineering. She teaches courses on creativity, innovation, and entrepreneurship at Stanford's design school (d.school)

An example of one legal aid program's framed question:

> "How might we more quickly connect clients with the appropriate level of service, taking into account the capacity of the client, urgency or complexity of the issue and resources available."

Brainstorming Exercise

Participants are divided into small diverse groups of 5-7 members and sent to meet at opposite ends of the room. Each group had its own flip chart for brainstorming.

Once brainstorming was completed, the groups then switched flipcharts among themselves. Each group discussed another groups brainstorming ideas and voted upon the other group's solutions.

Groups reported out on their votes.

Framing the Solution

Now its time to synthesize all you have discussed by developing a solution statement for product, service or function you are going to pilot.

The solution statement need not be more than a few sentences but should include

- The problem you want to address
- Who the problem affects
- How the problem impacts them
- What a successful solution would do for them
- The scope of the product, service or function you intend to pilot
- The approach you intend to take to your pilot project.

An example of a partial solution statement might be:

To cut down on the time it takes for a client with sufficient capacity to help themselves, whose issue is neither complex nor an emergency, we will reduce the 4-10 days it currently takes for them to receive assistance of any kind by piloting X.

Wrapping Up

Before beginning to pilot the agreed-upon solution, programs generally need to determine what statistics they already have, what data they would need to collect and what quantifiable measures of success (SMART goals) they would want to track over the course of the pilot. They may also want to check ethical rules, learn from other programs what works and what doesn't work and check out the technology and systems that support the intake process:

- What data do you already collect that might be useful to you? Especially if you can compare data over different time periods and/or use data visualizations to make the data accessible to everyone for more thoughtful discussion?

- What data and statistics do you need that you aren't currently collecting? How can you collect them?
- How will you know you are succeeding? What will be your measures of success?
- How might you involve internal (staff) users and external (client) users in developing and testing your chosen advice intervention? How will you collect their feedback? What process will you have for incorporating that feedback into improving your process still further
- Review ethical rules. Can paralegals give advice if supervised by an attorney? If so, what might that look like?
- What other legal aid programs use an advice hotline model? What do you like about it? What don't you like? Ask them what works and what doesn't work and if they had it to do all over again what they would do differently?
- Look at equipment and tools such as case management and telephone systems. Do they need to be upgraded or changed or modified? Do they, or can they, track the data we would need or want to collect?
- Take "people" into account. Is everyone in the right position to make the greatest contribution given client needs, program resources and their skillsets? Do staff need additional training or cross-training?

Don't forget

Make sure you have a mechanism for memorializing the day's activities, outcomes, next steps, and deadlines. Take pictures of the flipcharts and banner for illustration and/or transcription. Once everything has been compiled make sure all the information is accessible, not only to participants but to all staff. Better yet, have an all staff meeting to share, discuss and answer questions.