How VR Case Studies Influenced the Design of a Research Study: Building a Pilot Innovation on VR Program Management Strategies

Presenters:

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Institute for Community Inclusion

U Mass Boston

The Rehabilitation Technical Assistance Center (RTAC) on VR Program Management

- Charged with developing, piloting, testing, and disseminating a "VR program management model including elements of strategic planning, QA, and HR development"
- Partnering with InfoUse
- Funded by the U.S. Department of Education's NIDRR
- www.VR-RTAC.org

Why the Project Came to Be

- Very little knowledge about what constitutes effective practices in HR, QA, and strategic planning.

- How are these related to outcomes important to VR agencies, RSA, and stakeholders like clients, employers, taxpayers, legislators.

- There may be models out there from other sectors, industries that could be applied to VR

Literature Reviews and Experts

- QA, HR, and Strategic Planning literature reviews were not providing the guidance on how to build a VR Program Management Model;

- Experts had great ideas, but not sure of the applicability within VR agencies

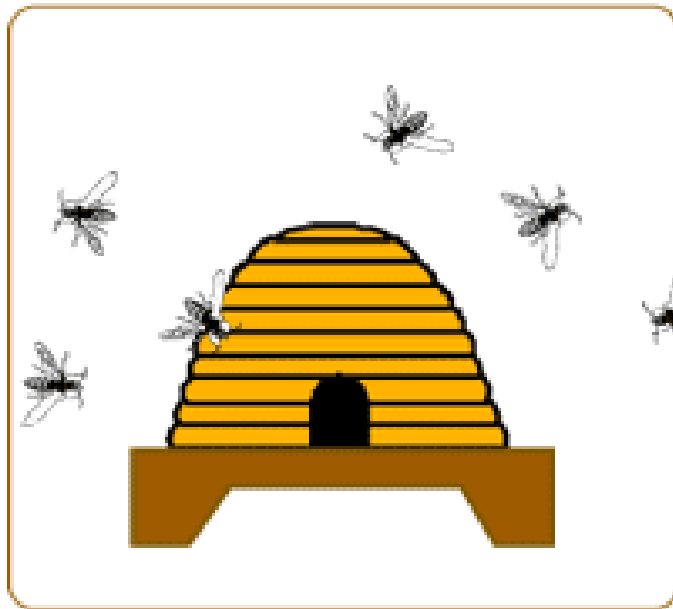- Should we use an existing model, like the Baldrige?

Case Studies

- We went to the source… what happens in VR agencies regarded as well-managed?

- Nomination process through Advisory Group (majority VR directors), RSA, TACE's.

- Some nominated because of a specific effort in QA, SP, and/or HR.

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Utah

- Executive Director, Don Uchida
- State Motto: Industry

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Texas

- Assistant Commissioner, Jim Hanophy
- Mexican Fruit Bat from the Congress Street Bridge, Austin
- State Motto: Friendship

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Texas Blind

- Assistant Commissioner, Barbara Madrigal
- The official state footwear is the cowboy boot.

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Florida

- Director: Bill Palmer (retiring)
- Director, Aleisa McKinley
- Florida Mammal is the Panther
- State Motto: In God We Trust

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Vermont

- Director: Diane Dalmasse
- Maple is the State Flavor!
- State Motto: Freedom and Unity

West Virginia

- Director, Deborah Lovely
- State Motto: Mountaineers are always free
- State Mammal is the Black Bear

Maryland

- Assistant State Superintendent Suzanne Page
- State Motto: Manly deeds womanly words
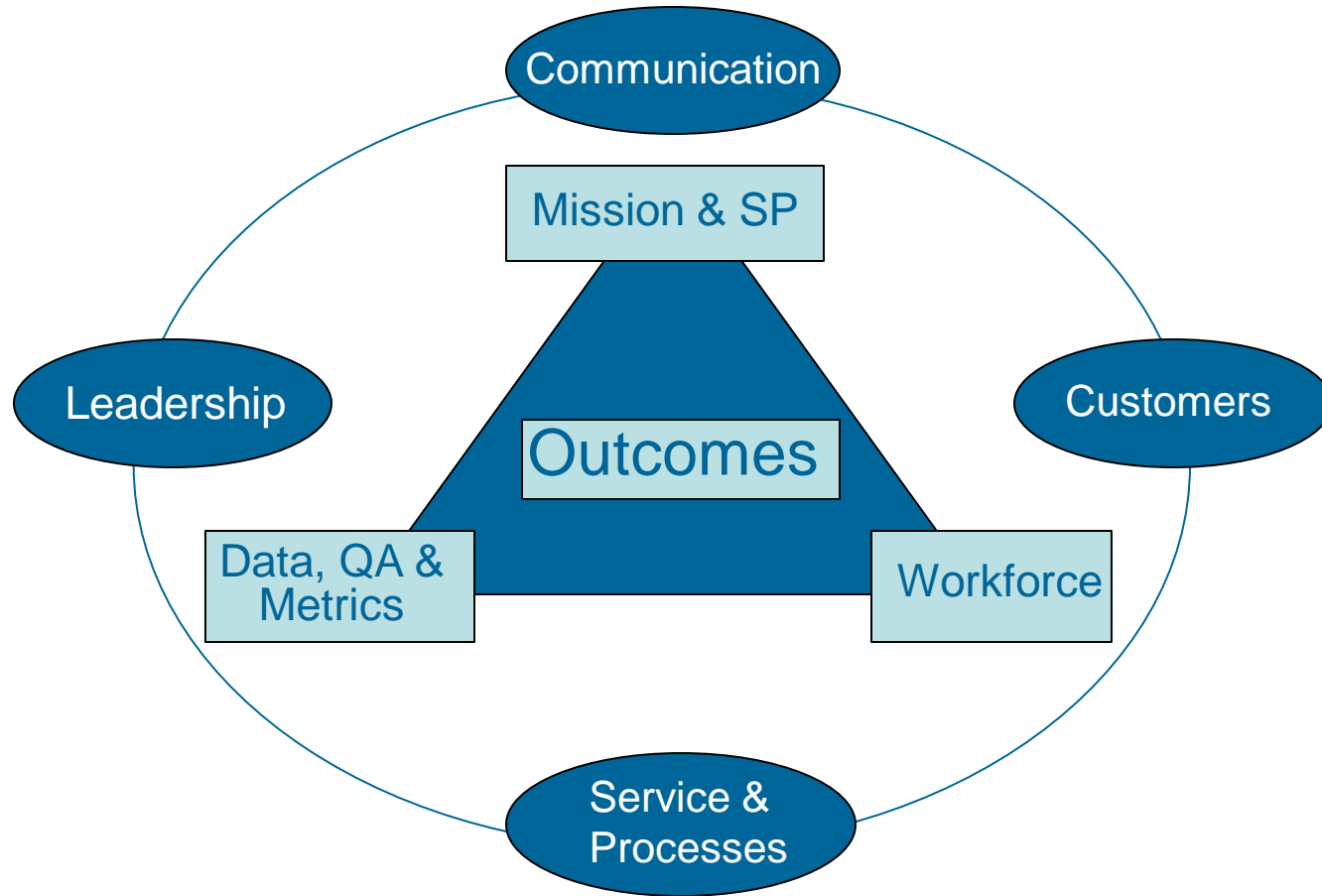- State team sport is lacrosse

Colorado

- Director, Nancy Smith
- State Motto: Nothing without the deity
- State insect is the Colorado Hairstreak Butterfly

What did we do?

- Reviewed reports and data provided
- Interviewed Senior Management and Field Services Personnel

- From June 2011 to September 2011
- Teams of 3 to 4
- At least one research staff member and at least one former VR director or senior manager on the team

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VR Performance Management Framework

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Leadership in Action

- Action orientation
- Nimble, flexible, experimenters
- Actively promoting and maintaining a good reputation with external partners and parties.
- Varying degrees of access to and interaction with legislators to influence policy and budget

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Leadership

- A theme of: Leadership being a support to implementation with a "serve and support" "inverted pyramid" "HR emphasis"

- Workforce development with a focus on leadership

- Concentration on building an effective workforce and identifying talent.

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Customers

- Clear message about the primary customer.

- A responsive customer friendly approach spread throughout.

- Management/Leadership regarded their own front line staff as its most important **internal** customer.

Mission and Strategic Planning

- Mission is central, constant, and clear.
- Strategic planning is valued if it helps agencies remain on mission, be adaptive, flexible, and able to "reboot" given the highly changeable, political nature of state government.
- Notion of "contingency" planning rather than long-range linear strategic planning.

HR and Workforce

- Strong focus on leadership at every level. All staff are leaders.
- "Inverted Pyramid" approach. Management supports direct services.
- Emphasis on staff development and building skills in problem solving
- Retention and succession planning efforts

Services and Processes

- Strong interest in making things work better. Such as invoicing, on-boarding of staff/CRPs, HR functions, IT functions.

- Increasing skill in conducting process improvement efforts.

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Data, QA, Metrics

- Quality improvement with a link between QA, use of data, and staff training
- Quite a few had very sophisticated internal program evaluators
- Data driven leadership
- Promoting high expectations both internally and externally
- Clearly articulated goals but few in number.

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Communications

- Formal efforts to create work groups to identify improvements, make suggestions and create communication beyond hierarchies and official channels
- Actively seeking formal and informal efforts to have information flow up, down, sideways, and throughout agency.
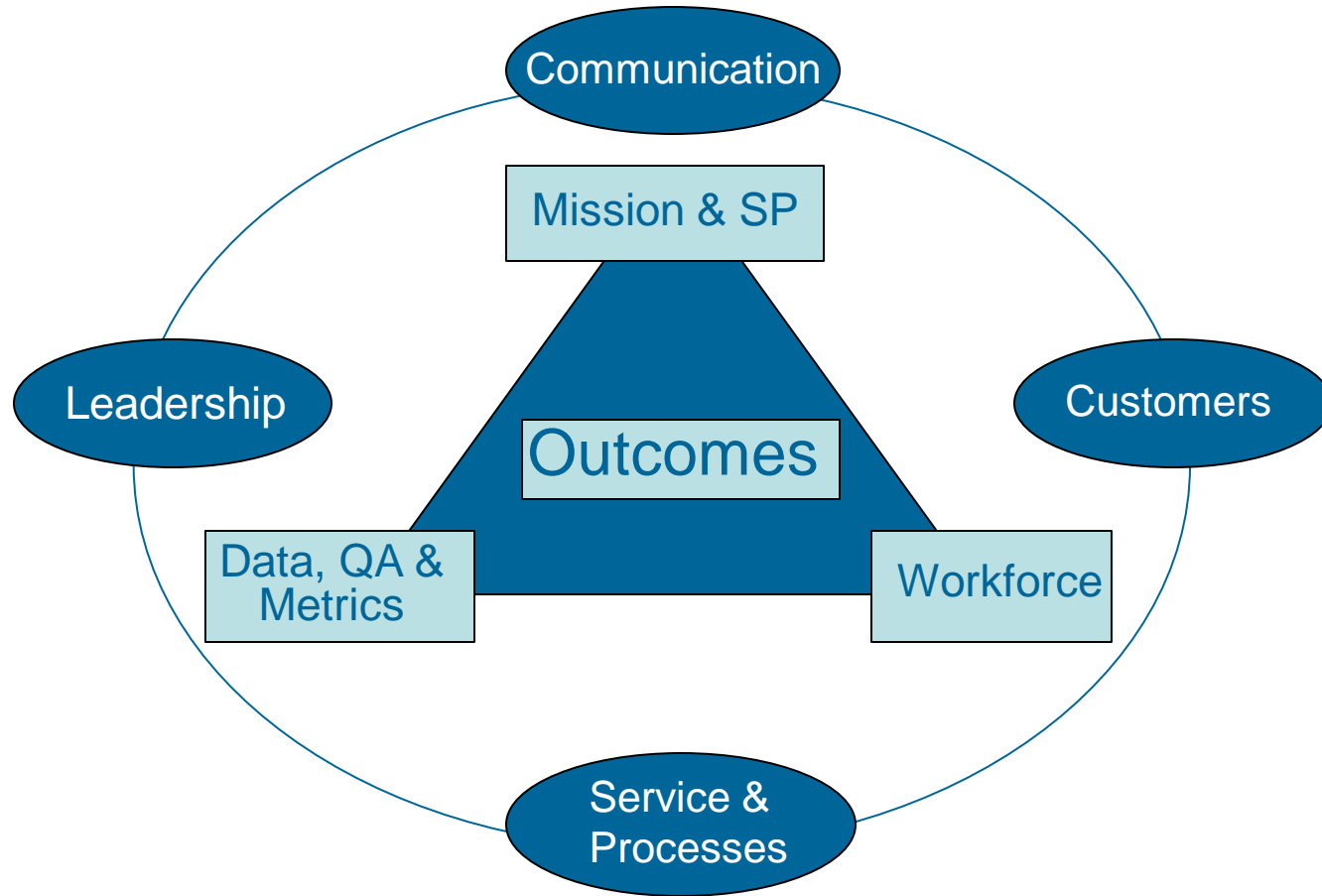
Questions?

- Findings that we presented... are these consistent with people's own experiences? Different issues?

- Does this framework work??? Is it inclusive enough and does it have enough detail??

- Other thoughts?

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VR Performance Management Framework

What do we mean by Framework?

- A framework was more about the whole and less about the parts.

- How do these components provide information to leaders and managers?

- The question is how do leaders integrate the seven components to achieve outcomes rather than how to implement any given tactic (such as case file review).

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Moving to a business case study approach

- What are the best ways to achieve management outcomes or improvements by mastering the use of these components?

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# Examples of Management Outcomes and Improvements

- Performance Management:
  - Vendor Performance
  - Capacity Building
- Workforce Development
  - Staff leadership development
  - Recruitment
  - Growing supervisors and new leaders

VR Performance Management Framework

Leadership	Customers	Mission & S.P.	HR & Workforce	Services & Processes	Data, QA, Metrics	Communications	Outcomes
High	High	High	High	High	High	High	High
Low	Low	Low	Low	Low	Low	Low	Low
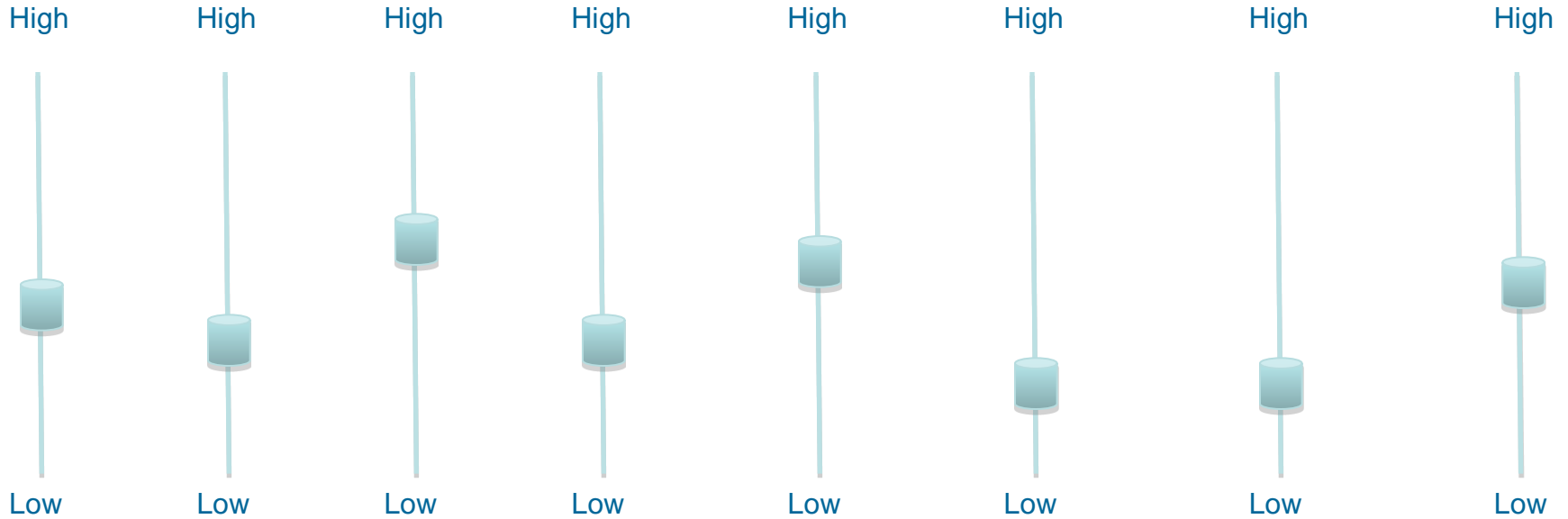
Features and Benefits

- FEATURES
  - Learning collaboratives
  - Consultation
  - Peer Process
  - Structured rigorous process
  - Self-assessment

- BENEFITS
  - Innovation
  - Solutions
  - New colleagues
  - Learning by using critical skills
  - Professional development opportunities
  - Start-up potential and opportunity to pilot an idea/effort.

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Next Phase

- RFP release in late November for a 12 month learning collaborative laboratory. 50K per VR Agency: up to 6 state VR agencies

- 4 in-person meetings per year, on-site TA, webinar, telephone and email TA.

- Wrap around research and evaluation embedded in activities.

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Thank You!!!

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