

Case Study: Managing Change in Public Health Departments

Influencing, Strategic Thinking, and Leadership



Moving Ideas into Action™

Introduction:

Barnes & Conti Associates is a learning and organizational development firm established in 1985, specializing in the “difficult skills” - leadership, innovation, problem solving, and collaboration - required for success in complex organizations. Barnes & Conti supports individuals and organizations globally in developing competencies and improving processes to create world-class results. We provide research-based programs and services supported by high-quality materials, online performance support tools, and innovative learning aids.

Recent healthcare reforms require public health departments (PHDs) and community hospitals to improve the quality of care and gain efficiencies in their delivery. PHDs must streamline their organizational structures, collaborate and coordinate services across departmental branches, and integrate delivery systems. These changes are intended to improve patient safety and reduce costs. Success depends upon how well organizations embrace change and adopt innovations.

Barnes & Conti has worked extensively in the healthcare field with organizations such as the San Francisco Department of Public Health, San Francisco General Hospital, the Contra Costa County Department of Public Health, the UC Berkeley School of Public Health, Kaiser Permanente, Sutter Health, and Satellite Healthcare. Barnes & Conti also has extensive experience in the pharmaceutical, biotech, and medical device industries, helping customers develop capabilities related to managed care and hospital systems.

Business Situation:

Healthcare reform is driving change in PHDs, requiring them to restructure their operations, focus on improving performance, redesign processes to gain efficiencies, and embrace change - all while remaining true to their mission. There was a time when separate departments and community service providers focused exclusively on specific population groups delivering one service to one target population. Often, services and care were fragmented and delivered inefficiently, which led to patients feeling both underserved and overwhelmed.

Now, a more holistic approach is required. Services must be coordinated through integrated, team-based systems of delivering care. Organizations must also re-think their strategies for serving their communities, coordinate care and service delivery, and align providers' roles with the organization's vision. The result will be communities gaining access to a coherent and navigable array of services to meet their needs.

Another driver of change is accreditation. PHDs are facing new standards of compliance and improvement that they must meet in order to receive future public agency funding.

Healthcare reform is also forcing PHDs and their community hospital partners to reduce costs in the face of lower Medicare/Medicaid reimbursements. PHDs are offering more outpatient preventive care to reduce demand for critical care services delivered through hospitals. Consequently, clinicians must think strategically about how to improve efficiency and performance.

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Solution:

PHDs have to reorganize and realign themselves, and this often means reassigning roles and responsibilities. Change leaders are contending with shifts in the business, social, political, and economic environments. Planning, implementing, and managing change in an environment with many diverse stakeholders operating at many levels requires highly developed mindsets and skill-sets.

Multiple PHDs have engaged with Barnes & Conti to help plan, prepare for, and implement organizational change and address issues of transition. We facilitated change at many levels and functions including helping physicians, nurses, administrators, and other practitioners better align their practices with organizational mission, values, and culture. We worked with them to develop the key mindsets and skill-sets needed for influence, innovation, and strategic thinking in the ever-changing human health environment.

Examples of change management outcomes included:

- Leaders understand concepts and dynamics and can use skills and tools for leading, managing, supporting, and facilitating change.
- Leaders understand broad and complex system change, the decisions behind those changes, and can communicate with the organization to gain acceptance.
- Leaders have a common vocabulary, conceptual framework, and methods of decision-making to think strategically about performance improvement.
- Leaders have the influence skills to communicate, involve, influence, and guide individuals and groups through change and transition.
- Physicians and nurses collaborate and think strategically to design workflow to gain efficiencies and assure patient safety.
- Physicians, nurses, other clinicians and practitioners capture, share, and implement innovations to improve quality and safety.

Implementation:

Barnes & Conti delivered multiple customized Mastery of Change, Strategic Thinking, and Exercising Influence programs for PHDs to help transform their organizations. We partnered with premier university public health programs to understand the challenges facing the public health sector which, in turn, informed our work. We designed our programs to train staff from many disciplines and departments at multiple levels. For example, we delivered seminars for senior leaders to develop awareness of their roles in stimulating, engaging, and supporting people through change and transition. We delivered experiential workshops for directors, managers, and facilitators to teach them models, tools, and skills for leading change. We supported large group planning and implementation sessions and facilitated communication among stakeholders.

Our clinician-focused programs included case studies and strategic thinking tools and group activities. These helped physicians and nurses collaborate, identify and question key assumptions about long-range plans, and sustain organizational change. Clinicians assessed their own innovation skills and identified organizational structures and processes that enhanced or blocked improvement. This also helped practitioners address the daily challenge of trying to step back from the immediate delivery of care, and look for opportunities to innovate. Innovation is particularly challenging for PHDs as they grapple to meet with an overwhelming need for services in a financially constrained environment.

In summary, our robust intellectual property, flexible designs, and experiential learning methods - hallmarks of Barnes & Conti - helped PHDs achieve their goals.

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