

Searching for a Strategy to Improve Client Services

A Case Study of MHMRA

by Evangeline Caridas

The Situation

The Southwest Group of the Mental Health and Mental Retardation Association (MHMRA) faced a situation where older methods of managing cases were failing to meet the needs of a rapidly changing mental health care environment. The group needed to increase efficiency, communication, and flexibility to improve their performance, retain top talent, and meet MHMRA goals. MHMRA director Carole Driscoll recognized the challenge of increasing direct service time to clients, improving communication, and increasing morale.

After a series of interim directors prior to Ms. Driscoll's appointment, morale was low and people were not supporting each other or the agency. Employees were stressed by difficult workloads and were unmotivated. Ms. Driscoll needed to make quick changes and to get members of the team to recommit to the organization. She wanted to unite the group, to reduce stress, and to create an effective strategy to improve client services.



The Task

Ms. Driscoll wanted an approach where all stakeholders could win, and chose Caridas Consulting International (CCI) to provide work solutions. She valued the talents and skills of her people and wanted to bring out those strengths to build internal capability. She knew CCI specializes in improving performance and productivity through people. The task was to improve the quality of MHMRA service, manage cases more efficiently, improve communication, and increase morale.

Strategies were developed using creative tools, including "Flow" and the six criteria for productive work, to enable the group to redesign their work processes. Strategies created with these tools earned the commitment of everyone on board. The work redesign was collaborative, and the group acted quickly to implement their plan.

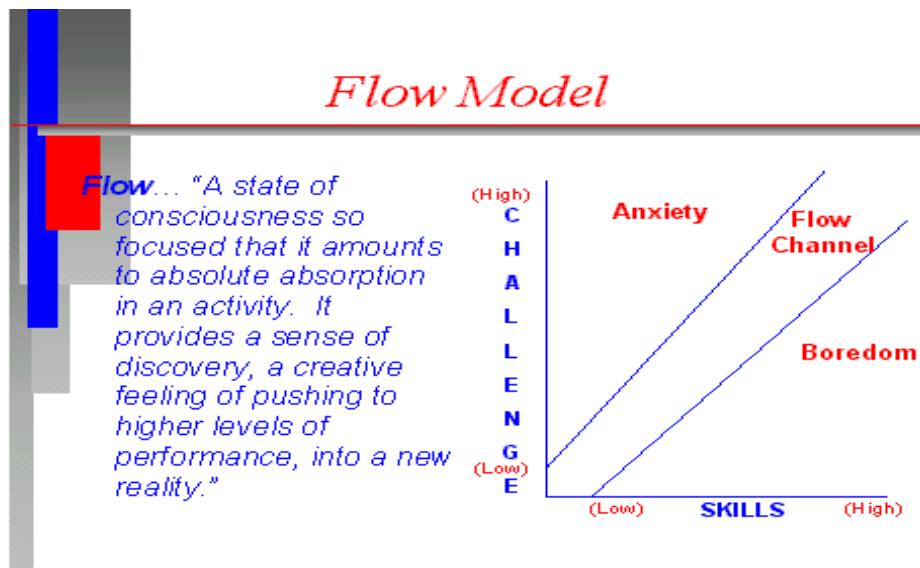
Implementation

Taking Responsibility: The group idled in a “wait-for-command” mode, and the recent instability bogged them down with inefficiency and low morale. Some bureaucratic features of the organizations were unchangeable because of state health and insurance regulations. That said, CCI helped the group to concentrate on what could be changed. The first two or three work sessions were difficult because people were uncertain there would be any real change. Then there was a breakthrough: once they saw their suggestions being integrated into the overall change, people began to improve their performance and morale increased. The group took responsibility for their work. As issues arose, they continued to create solutions that allowed them to provide outstanding service to their clients.

Redesigning the Work Process: The Work Redesign began with a planning session in which participants identified and evaluated their current state and made plans for their own work redesign, which incorporated Flow and the six criteria for productive work. People who experience Flow at work are motivated to be more productive, and leaders who create a Flow environment attract and retain top talent. Flow is a creative state in which people are immersed in and committed to their work. People describe it as knowing “their work is going exceedingly well,” and feeling their work is “spontaneous and effortless,” like being in “the zone.”

The group identified what creates Flow and how it can benefit them. Then they redesigned their work to incorporate the components of Flow, which include:

- Challenging yet attainable goals
- Clear and immediate feedback
- Work that matches skills and interests
- A sense of control over outcomes
- Increased focus and concentration
- Creativity and fun



Results of Work Redesign and Incorporating Flow

Immediate: Ms. Driscoll reports that group performance has improved dramatically. They have increased face time with clients by 33%. This driver was a direct result of improvements made related to efficiency, communication, and flexibility. Another positive result of incorporating Flow into their work is that people who enjoy working with children or with geriatric clients are able to choose that work. This choice creates a greater fit between the individuals interests and skills and the work they do. Although it may seem small, the individual's opportunity to choose greatly improves both the quality of service and overall morale.



Long-term: The MHMRA group used the output of the work redesign to create two cross-functional teams, a specialized clinical unit and a service coordination team and to institute a better process for conducting rounds. Communication is more effective and administration has been streamlined. People now take positive control over their own work and strive to problem-solve creatively and continuously. Other MHMRA locations now use the work of the Southwest group to improve their own work processes. Incorporating Flow is allowing these organizations to dramatically improve their performance.

For further information, please contact Evangeline Caridas at 713-629-5692, or visit Caridas Consulting International on the web at www.flowmanagement.net.

